Homo Subjectivus:

Shoehorning customer-centric reform into the subjectivities

of Abu Dhabi's public administrators

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Institute of Local Government Studies

School of Government and Society

College of Social Sciences

University of Birmingham

April 2015

ABSTRACT

Public administrators are the people who not only administer public services, but who are also expected to carry out reform and to embed 'new ways of doing things' in the machinery and mentality of public sector organisations. Yet, research has shown that, in pursuing change initiatives, due attention is rarely paid to how public administrators feel, think and make meaning. As a direct consequence, public administrative reforms frequently disappoint by failing to generate the promised positive results. Hence, this thesis explores the nebulous phenomenon of subjective meaning-making in the context of Abu Dhabi Government's customer-centric reform. This is accomplished in two practical steps: Firstly, the study employs Q Methodology to identify five viewpoints that different groups of public administrators share: (1) The benefactor's epic fail, (2) Managerialism in modern Arabiya, (3) Triumph of the cherished patriarch, (4) The traditional ways of the Bedouins, and (5) The reign of formulas over culture. In the second step, a Cultural Reference Group drills down into each shared viewpoint to reveal group-specific knowledge structures, or collective schemata. The study discovers that content schemata and context schemata interact with situational influencers in producing shared viewpoints, and a socio-cognitive model is proposed to illuminate these processes. The findings contribute to an understanding

of the subjective constructions that public administrators share at group-level, and how these impact on the opportunities for meaningful reform.

This thesis is dedicated to Mama and Papa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The treacherous journey of this thesis was only possible because of the hands-on support of a range of people and the huge faith they showed in me. Many thanks go, first and foremost, to my fantastic supervisors, my 'Doktorvater' Professor John Raine and Dr. Karin Bottom, who have mentored me and looked after me intellectually and personally way above and beyond what would be expected. I am also indebted to the wonderful INLOGOV staff for their intellectual stimulation and for giving me the opportunity to earn 'a penny' during rather scarce times. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Chris Skelcher, Catherine Staite, Daniel Goodwin, Ian Briggs, Tricia Carr, Jeevan Shoker, Dee Pettifer, Sarah Smith and Rachael Pearson. My unreserved thanks also go out to my colleagues on the 10th floor, in particular Maximilian Lempriere and Cherry Miller without whom I would not have submitted a thesis of this level of quality, but also to Sam Warner, Bear and the Kings-Heath-Crew, Mattias Hjort, Eva Lemoncurry, Pobsook 'Earn' Chamchong, Saban Akca, Louis Monroy Santander, Li Jiayuan, Lamisi Mbillah, Dumisani Jantjies, Rosdi Haji Abdul Aziz, Timea Nochta and all my other PhD colleagues on the 10th floor who were the best PhD colleagues and friends anyone could wish for. My particularly heartfelt thanks are due to my non-uni friends, who offered me their homes, financial and practical support,

approaches to phenomena we do not fully grasp. Thanks go to the Almighty for blessing me with this once-in-a-lifetime experience, for making the pieces on the chessboard of life fall into place, for guiding me through all the adversities, for helping me to achieve personal, intellectual and spiritual growth, and for making sense of it all by giving me Bosco Fikisi Mulatre.

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FOREWORD

With the help of a personal, real life anecdote from the author's time as a practitioner in Abu Dhabi Government, the thesis illustrates the reality of human beings ascribing various, and sometimes even contradictory, meaning to the same concept or situation – despite living in the same context. A subsequently presented catalogue of real world cases gathered by practitioners and scholars demonstrates that the various meaning-making of government employees regularly gives rise to unhelpful behaviours, which is especially a problem when implementing public administrative reform. Based on their different sense-making, public administrators frequently fail to 'buy into', adapt and cascade much needed change, and thereby thwart the desired reform outcomes. In the UK, for example, the subjective ways in which staff in social care or nursing homes have made sense of new efficiency-seeking policies have led to some of the employees constructing particularly unhelpful 'realities' and choosing behaviours that, in some cases, have not only resulted in inadequate public service provision but even caused the death of service users. Despite such potentially far-reaching consequences, little is known about the processes and

conditions by which groups of government employees fit new concepts into their existing subjective meaning systems.

By exploring in depth the ways in which different groups of public administrators make shared meaning during a specific public sector reform process, this research project sought to gain insight into the generic processes by which employees within government organisations construct different 'realities' and choose behaviours at group-level in order to realize change. Therefore, the findings of the study should offer practical value to those seeking operational approaches to mapping the shared beliefs of government employees, and looking to identify the opportunities or constraints these belief systems present for getting staff to 'buy into' and cascade reform. For instance, the specific meaning structures that were found in this study should enable Abu Dhabi Government to grasp better the causes for bottlenecks in its reform implementation, and so design specifically tailored development and training courses for its public administrators. Accordingly, the study concludes by proposing a conceptual model that offers a feedstock for developing practical tools and templates, which government organisations could adapt to their respective local contexts and normative assumptions.

CHAPTER 1:

HOMO SUBJECTIVUS

"It all depends on how we look at things, and not how they are in themselves."

(Carl Jung)

1.1   Anecdote: The eye of the beholder

It was the year 2008. Global recession was rampant and the public sector had become a grim place in the Western hemisphere. Governments were forced drastically to downsize their public administrations, reduce services to the public, and lay off armies of public administrators. I had just been recruited into the folds of the prestigious General Secretariat of the Executive Council of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (GSEC). GSEC was the Crown Prince's organisational arm to oversee public administration in the oil-endowed Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It had its headquarters in the capital of Abu Dhabi - a gleaming, built-from-the-sand boomtown, nestled on the coast of the Persian Gulf in the United Arab Emirates. As one of the richest public administrations on earth, Abu Dhabi Government's sublime goal was to become one of the top five governments in the world. In its quest for the superlative, the progressive leadership brought in specialized public administrators, like me, from all the five

continents. Our task was to help with building the best and the brashest public administration that delivers the Rolls Royce of public services. My job was to work across government departments, and help systematically to put service users, or customers, at the heart of public administrative practices, performance measurement and outcomes. As an avid public administrator, my excitement knew no bounds.

On my first day, our director Mr. Hamed called me into his office. He was a stocky, bespectacled Emirati with an intense fire in his eyes. It was immediately obvious how passionate he was about the task of creating a customer-centric public administration. "Welcome", Mr. Hamed said while gesturing me to sit down. "We are extremely happy that you are joining us. We are looking forward to the knowledge you will transfer to our public administrators in the course of our reform process." He paused while lowering himself into an imposing black leather wingback chair. "The only thing is", Mr. Hamed emphatically continued, "we do not want a model of customer-centric public services that is rooted in self-centred individualism, controversial publicity, mudslinging harangues, and revolutionary political debates. Or in short: we do not want a model of customer-centric public administration that is anchored in the social democratic worldview of the West!"

Wait – what did he just say? I was so startled by surprise that it took me a few minutes to fully grasp what Mr. Hamed was getting at. But then it struck me: By 'self-centered individualism', he was referring to the Western belief in not having government interfere with individual rights. By 'controversial publicity', he was alluding to Western systems, which try to ensure that government is transparent and accountable to the public. By 'mudslinging harangues', he was hinting at the tactics of political campaigners and their attempts to discredit existing power holders by highlighting their shortcomings. By 'revolutionary political debates', he was referring to western democracy, which has people discussing the ills of public administration, and demanding political changes. In short, everything people believed in as meaningful, and had even fought for, where I came from was considered meaningless at best, and barbaric at worst, in the eyes of Abu Dhabi's society.

Mr. Hamed adjusted his Ghutra, the iconic white headscarf traditionally sported by Gulf Arabs and other Bedouin-Arabs. "What we want instead", he helpfully explained, "is a locally tailored model of customer-centricity that is rooted in Abu Dhabi's Bedouin culture and Islamic principles. We want a model that is based on the aspects of our culture that we treasure, such as morality, dignity, loyalty to our

leadership, negotiating compromises, guarding family honour, and the practice of patience and forgiveness. In short, we need a modern, avant-garde model of customer-centricity that is rooted in the Islamic bedoucratic[1] worldview of Abu Dhabi's society."

On that day, I left my bosses' office with a whole new appreciation of how important the eye of the beholder is - especially when it comes to knowledge transfer around new initiatives in public administration. Ultimately, it dawned on me, we do not see public administration as it is, but as we are.

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[1] Bedoucracy is a model of Arab management that mostly originates in the Bedouin tribal culture and joins traditional bureaucratic design with tribal power culture (Abdel-Khaleq 1984). Sabri (2011: 214) argues that it demonstrates 'Arab management practices as a mix of hierarchical authority, rules and regulations contingent on personality and power of individuals who make them, subordination of efficiency to personal relations and connections, uncertainty in decision making, nepotism and a generally patriarchal approach'.

1.2   Introductory definitions: Man as a subjective animal

The anecdote aptly showcased that people make meaning of the same concept or situation in different, sometimes even contradictory, ways. The real-life tale illustrated the divergent understandings of two public administrators, namely Mr Hamed and the author, who were discussing the same social 'reality'. Here, *public administrator* is used as an umbrella term that comprises the employees at the senior level of government hierarchy down to the workers and street-level bureaucrats at local government offices, partner bodies and networks, and also politicians (Needham forthcoming 2015). The discussion of the two public administrators in the anecdote revolved around *public administrative reform*, which is defined as making changes to 'organisation and management practices in collective or public settings' (Frederickson and Smith 2003: 1; cited in Needham forthcoming 2015).

Specifically, the anecdote laid bare how Mr. Hamed and the author held discrepant views with regards to customer-centric reform, which is about placing service users and end beneficiaries, hereafter referred to as *government customers*, at the centre of designing, delivering and evaluating public services, processes, programmes and policies

(Gurría 2008).[2] The anecdote unveiled how the author automatically assumed that a focus on customers in the public sector ought to reflect the priorities and values of a social democratic ideology. She attached to 'social democracy' the meaning of a political ideology that believes in the value of social and economic interventions in order to uphold social justice in a capitalist economy that nevertheless embraces welfare state provisions, wealth redistribution and a commitment to representative democracy and accountable governance. In stark contrast, Mr. Hamed viewed 'social democracy' as a rather disgraceful and narcissist circus. To him, it could not hold a candle to 'Islamic bedoucracy', and was unsuited as the foundation for a customer-centric public administration in Abu Dhabi. Indeed, the two interpretations are so far apart that, had it not been clarified that the principle under discussion was 'social democracy', it is possible that the reader might have concluded that Mr. Hamed and the author were discussing two entirely unrelated concepts.

The proposition this thesis makes

Ascribing different meaning to the same concept or situation is an inextricable part of human nature because 'man is an animal

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[2] The thesis employs the term customer as a synonym for service user when discussing customer-centric reform in general. However, when discussing the concept of the government customers in the specific context of Abu Dhabi's customer-centric reform, the concept must be understood along consumerist lines, which is explained in detail in 'Chapter 4.3 Abu Dhabi Governments' customer-centric reform, Abu Dhabi Government's conceptualization of customers' (pp. 249 – 253).

suspended in *webs of significance* he himself has spun' (Geertz 1973: 5). Interpretative sociologists (e.g. Swidler 2013), cognitive anthropologists (e.g. Kronenfeld et al. 2011), phenomenological philosophers (e.g. Overgaard and Zahavi 2009), cultural psychologists (e.g. Kitayama and Cohen 2007) and educational theorists (e.g. (Yelich Binieki 2015), all agree that these webs of significance are the composite results of a person's life experiences and learned beliefs. In a general sense, they denote the inner life of a person, the way he or she feels, responds and experiences (Luhrmann 2006). As such, a person's webs of significance encompass his or her thoughts, sentiments and sensibilities, and, in particular the individual's 'sense of self and self-world relationships' (Holland and Leander 2004: 127). They are shaped, organized and 'provoked' by cultural and social formations (Ortner 2005: 31). They enable sensemaking[3], which places new concepts or situations into frameworks and gives rise to interpreting, 'comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning' (Weick 1995: 6). In essence, webs of significance provide the 'principle(s) of unity' by which a person makes meaning, and on which he or she subsequently bases intentional behaviour (Schütz 1967: 216). Importantly, these webs are subjective, that is they are

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[3] In this thesis, sensemaking is conceptualized as a sub-category of meaning-making. This is further elaborated in Chapter 2.3.

particular to each person (the person being the 'subject') (Solomon 2005).

Hence, subjectivity is the 'view of the subject as existentially complex, a being who feels and thinks and reflects, who makes and seeks meaning' (Ortner 2005: 33). Put in philosophical terms, the subject is the existing being while subjectivity is the unique way in which the subject makes him or herself known (Solomon 2005). One cannot study human beings without considering the subjectivities by which they make meaning and take action. This is because 'the concept of what it means to be a human being is inevitably suffused with value judgements', and the actions humans take are based on the acceptance of some values and the rebuttal of others (Spicer 2014: 2). Effectively, this implies that human beings are by nature not only 'social animals', as Aristotle famously declared in 350 B.C.E. (Aristotle, Jowett and Davies 1920). Expanding Aristotle's ontology, this thesis proposes that human beings are by nature also 'subjective animals'. On this account, the study will argue for a scientific approach to the human species as inherently subjective.

To epitomize her argument, the author coined the term *homo subjectivus* in a word play on 'homo sapiens'. Translated from Latin, 'homo sapiens' means 'wise man' and constitutes the scientific name

for the human species. The author fashioned the adjective 'subjectivus', which does not exist in the Latin language, by conjugating the English word 'subjective' in the Latin singular masculine nominative to grammatically match, and thereby qualify, the noun 'homo'. Subsequently, the phrase 'homo subjectivus', or 'subjective man', was born. It aptly lends itself as the title of this thesis because it succinctly captures the essence of its argument: Like all human beings, a public administrator must be understood as a *homo subjectivus*, who acts from within his or her own universe of subjective significance (Geertz 1973). Accordingly, this research project zeros in on the various subjectivities, which bound the perceptions, motivations and actions of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, in learning to place service users, or customers, at the heart of public services and organisational practices. By gaining insight into the subjectivities of a particular administration's workforce during a specific reform process, the study seeks to find some instructive revelations regarding the generic conditions by which public administrators subjectively make meaning and realize public sector reform.

A focus on groups

The Latin grammar, with its singular masculine form of 'homo subjectivus', masks the fact that subjectivity is an inherently social

condition (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009, Jeffares and Skelcher 2008, Solomon 2005). Despite being particular and unique to every individual, subjectivity is developed, transmitted and maintained inter-subjectively, that is, in social situations and through relationships with others (Jeffares and Skelcher 2008, Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991). In the anecdote, for example, the author had forged her particular view of social democracy as a result of interacting with peers, elders, teachers, managers and other socializers who had mattered in her social democratic home country (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Similarly, Mr. Hamed's socialization in Abu Dhabi's context of tribal authoritarianism had shaped his contrasting outlook on 'social democracy' as a dishonourable and narcissist circus. Basically, the two individuals in the anecdote had cultivated their subjective views respectively through previous sustained interaction with a variety of socializers within a certain social context.

The intrinsically social mechanism, by which subjectivity operates, directed this study to focus on how public administrators make meaning at *group-level*. Although organisational life is contingent on groups of people (Fine and Hallet 2014), only few research studies have chosen groups of individuals as the level of analysis, and explored their meaning-making processes (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Gillespie and Cornish

2009). A group of people can include anything as large as a national population or a networked community, or as small as a local clique or nuclear family. With the term 'group', this thesis refers to a cluster of individuals, whose meanings are shared and overlapping in content and structure. A 'group' describes the referential communities, which individuals in an organisation form by means of their resembling awareness and shared memory (Fine and Hallett 2014). As social psychologists Fine and Hallett (2014) explain, groups are characterized by *subcultures*, which are locally shared systems of knowledge, beliefs and behaviours that create structures of interpretation and action (Fine 1979, Sato 1988; cited in Fine and Hallett 2014). Accordingly, groups of public sector employees share ingrained and compelling self-referential meanings that lead them to interpret and mould organisational activity, such as reform, in similar ways.

This point may be illustrated by going back to the anecdote. With Abu Dhabi Government's workforce hailing from more than a dozen countries spanning five continents, some of the expatriate employees were raised to believe in a democratic doctrine. Thus, they are likely to share the author's system of ideas in that respect, and probably also would expect a 'good' model of customer-centricity to be anchored in democratic principles, and its associated values. Hence, those public

administrators in the organisation, who were socialized to value democratic principles, form a referential community. Taking their cue from such shared knowledge structures, the members of this group are likely to interpret, and respond to, certain customer-service related concepts and situations in ways that resemble each other.

This principle turns groups into the 'space between individuals and the structures and power systems that institutions provide' (Fine and Hallett 2014: 2). In other words, groups reconcile the micro and the macro level at the meso level, which ends up having self-governing properties and dynamics that contour organisational practices (Fine and Hallett 2014). Consequently, subjectivities shared at group-level are not only a set of characteristics (e.g. Meyer and Jepperson 2000), but also everyday social practices that fuse structures with interactions (Fine and Hallett 2014). The anecdote pertinently illustrates this aspect. When Mr. Hamed argued that, for example, 'showing loyalty to the leadership', 'negotiating compromises' or 'practicing patience and forgiveness' ought to be integral to Abu Dhabi's customer-centric model, he essentially envisioned the workforce of Abu Dhabi Government internalizing a fusion of everyday social *practices* that groups, such as Gulf Bedouins and Arab Muslims, had invested with shared meaning and evolved into typical and habitually performed interactions with self-governing properties.

Accordingly, this thesis takes a group-level approach, which emphasizes shared local knowledge structures, and their realization as the 'practices of local actors' (Griggs and Sullivan 2012: 510). By critically appraising local practices and their 'political and affective dimensions', so public policy scholars Griggs and Sullivan (2012: 497) posit, it is possible to reveal the forces that grip collective consciousness (Griggs and Howarth 2013), and examine how these direct actors 'in supporting and/or subverting the processes and practices' of public management (Griggs and Sullivan 2012: 497).

A focus on subjectivity instead of culture

Given that this thesis is looking at groups of people, and their subcultures and local customs, why then does this study use the concept of subjectivity and not culture? Admittedly, the sum of the subjectivity of any given group, or society, is generally referred to as culture (Solomon 2005). A culture describes all the meaning systems that are shared among a specific group of people as a result of their resembling life experiences and beliefs (Strauss and Quinn 1997, Geertz 1973). Cultures are the contexts within which, as well as the building blocks from which, particular individuals construct meaning (Leung and Cohen 2011, DiMaggio 1994, Geertz 1973).

Contemporary organisational scholars have shown that, in an organisation, there is a plurality of cultures that jostle for dominance (Weber and Dacin 2011, Keller and Loewenstein 2011, Kaplan 2011, Rindova et al. 2011, Kellogg 2011). For example, people may share a culture with their particular ethnic group, their organisation's department, their social class, their religious community, or their virtual project team – the list can go on and on. In reality, of course, culture is neither bounded nor isolated, and any one person is just as much part of a particular local culture as he or she is part of a national culture or a generational culture. Therefore, a person has internalized an assemblage of different inter-subjective, or shared, fragments from a range of cultures, or meaning systems, at any one point in time (Kronenfeld et al. 2011, Leung and Cohen 2011, Weber and Dacin 2011). For instance, he or she may simultaneously work as a nurse in an A&E department, be of African ethnicity, originate from a working class background, be of Buddhist faith, and regularly advise patients around the world in an online forum on Multiple Sclerosis - thereby incorporating fragments of subcultures from all of these groups and 'frame-shifting' (Werner and Cornelissen 2014: 1450) and 'code-switching' (Kronenfeld 2011: 577) between them. These shared meanings shape internal interpretative processes (Scott 2008), and determine how a person comes to make meaning through experiences, cognition and emotion, rather than logically (Bingham and Kahl 2013,

Elsbach et al. 2005, Haidt 2001, Freire 2000, Strauss and Quinn 1997).

Consequently, this study recognizes that even though any one individual is suspended in his or her own web of subjective significance, the web's constituent parts are derived from a number of shared meaning systems, or cultures, which the individual is part of. The combination of these cultural fragments uniquely aggregates to form a system of meaning that is particular, or in our terminology subjective, to each person. Mr. Hamed's subjectivities, for instance, stem partly from the Bedouin tribal culture, partly from the work culture of 21st century government professionals, partly from the regional ethnic culture of the Arabian peninsula, partly from the global religious culture of Sunni Muslims, and partly from the organisational culture cascaded by the authoritarian leadership of Abu Dhabi Government, to name just a few.

Hence, it is this study's premise that the individual embodies the crossroad where multiple cultures meet to coalesce into a person's unique subjective system of meaning. Using the notion of subjectivity, instead of culture, provides this study with a concept that is mindful of the fact that the term 'culturally constructed' describes a complex process in which individuals combine different beliefs and

fragments of meaning from a variety of cultures (see Weber and Dacin 2011: 289, Strauss and Quinn 1997: 210). Therefore, by focussing on subjectivity instead of culture, this thesis is able to place at the analytical centre concrete and heterogeneous human beings instead of abstract and homogenous cultures.

A focus on agency

By seeking to centre the analysis around *homines subjectivi*, this study concedes that active individuals employ *a degree* of choice and strategy in using different cultural materials as opposed to being mechanically directed by, for example, taken-for-granted beliefs (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Baker and Nelson 2005, Rao et al. 2005, Swidler 1986), or fixed predispositions as suggested by Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bordieu 1980). Not only that, but modern cognitive and social-psychological theories, such as cognitive connectionism (Strauss and Quinn 1997), inhabited institutionalism (Hallet 2010), 'second wave' organisational theories (Weber and Dacin 2011) or situated cognition (Lave and Wenger 1991), emphasize the agency of local actors to construct diverse and opposing meanings through daily interaction in ways that enact the institutional environment (Everitt and Levinson 2014). In other words, depending on the situation they are in and the people they are interacting with, individuals are capable of comfortably evoking

contradictory beliefs and knowledge structures that establish local practices.

These inconsistent beliefs and knowledge structures are compartmentalized in different parts of a person's cognitive network, and selectively activated according to the social and situational context – certainly a process that may not always be fully conscious (Everitt and Levinson 2014, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Lave and Wenger 1991). In other words, social surroundings and situational particularities critically influence people in the ways, in which they construct their subjective outlooks, and select from the fragments of meaning that are available to them (Yelich Binieki 2015, Fine and Hallett 2014, Weber and Dacin 2011, Hallett 2010, Ortner 2005, Elsbach 2005). Exemplifying the impact of particular situational and social conditions on agency in meaning-making, Strauss and Quinn (1997) discuss the ways in which some modern western women demonstrate industrious independence and self-reliance in their professional occupation, yet can sometimes switch to exhibiting 'feminine' helplessness when confronted with a flat tyre or leaking tap.

A focus on public administrators

The fact that subjectivity not only determines how people make and seek meaning, but also how they subsequently act in a world that constantly acts upon them (Ortner 2005), has enormous implications for public administration reform (Hallet 2010). Typically, public administrators have not chosen or thought up the reforms, but are instructed by the leadership to implement them. Yet, being among the first key actors in a chain of actors and events, government employees play a major role in advocating and embedding a 'new way of doing things' (Andrews 2013, Griggs and Sullivan 2012, Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Béland 2009). Local subjectivities critically influence if and how public administrators internalize new initiatives and how they act upon them (Norton 2014). Their meaning-making and subsequent actions create, maintain, disrupt or prevent the establishment of novel local practices (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). Unless a government reform fits into their existing systems of meaning, public administrators are unlikely to commit to a change agenda, let alone advocate and cascade it.

Instinctively, Mr. Hamed knew that a customer-centric reform programme, which is built to reflect the values and priorities of a democratic political ideology, would lack locally relevant meaning - and thus fail to win over the minds and hearts of most of Abu Dhabi's

public administrators. Consequently, Abu Dhabi's government workforce would not be motivated to concertedly push for customer-centric reform. In all likelihood, they would make little or no genuine effort to embed 'a different way of going about things' into the mentality and machinery of Abu Dhabi's public services. This would have a ripple effect on all the subsequent groups of people and stakeholders in the public sector, who play a role in embedding reform, and are expected to change their practices.

This, by no means, is to say that the subjective views of public administrators are the only, or single most important, factors in the complex process of achieving change. Without a doubt, they need to be taken into account alongside institutional and political conditions (Béland 2009), as well as wider social and economic changes (Griggs and Sullivan 2012), all of which also impact on local meaning-making in public policy. For instance, strong institutional obstacles, a lack of political will, or new socio-economic developments may significantly affect the ways in which government employees internalize new alternatives. That notwithstanding, if institutional, political and socio-economic conditions are conducive, then ignoring the existing subjectivities of public administrators can make all the difference between a successful reform and it becoming a stagnant, tokenistic bolt-on. For that reason, this thesis sets out to explore the

subjectivities of public administrators against the background of institutional, political and socio-economic conditions without dissolving them into that background or dissolving that background into them.

The task at hand

Despite the contrasting ways in which Mr. Hamed and the author attached subjective meaning to the concept of a 'good' customer-centric reform, both considered their respective constructions to be the 'really real' templates for reform (Geertz 1973: 112). However, the author had been hired to help develop a model of customer-centricity that is rooted in Abu Dhabi's local culture. Therefore, the onus was on her, at least temporarily, to denounce her conviction of the 'really real'. Instead, she needed to put herself into the shoes of Abu Dhabi's public administrators and see the world from their subjective vantage point. Only such a perspective would provide the appropriate feedstock for designing a customer-centric reform programme, which proves meaningful to Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and thus provides an effective stimulus for change. Inevitably, such a task begs the cardinal questions, which all public sector reformers across different localities, contexts and policy areas find themselves confronted with: How do we grasp the various shared subjectivities that dominate among local public administrators? And on the basis of

that, how do we isolate the conditions for a reform programme that is most likely to prompt changed behaviour and help to secure the desired reform outcomes?

1.3   Rationale for research

In recent years, the question of people's subjective perspectives has taken on a new urgency when implementing public administrative reform.   Public servants, politicians, management consultants and scholars have begun to realize that the subjectivities of those working in government play a critical role in shaping and achieving better public administration (Awortwi and Helmsing 2014, Andrews 2013, Grindle 2011, Schedler and Proeller 2007).   Public sector reform specialists Andrews (2013) and Schedler and Proeller (2007) have gathered together a catalogue of cases, which demonstrate the importance of people's cultural meaning systems in realizing change initiatives.   Both scholars and practitioners present burgeoning evidence that public administrative reforms, which only have zeroed in on structures and processes yet overlooked people's subjective realities, have frequently failed to generate positive results (Andrews 2013, World Bank 2011, Schedler and Proeller 2007). Inadvertently, these reforms have ignored the constraints and opportunities offered by the employee's existing systems of meaning, and durably failed to

engrain change. This has resulted into disappointing outcomes for reform-eager governments - despite following best practice.

A concern for practitioners

A condemnatory 2011 World Bank evaluation of public sector reforms found that the costly change initiatives implemented in eighty countries between 2007 and 2009 had failed to increase the quality of public management in 83 percent of cases (World Bank 2011; cited in Andrews 2013: 13). Also in 2011, the Asian Development Bank reported no improvement of government effectiveness despite substantial public administrative reform that adhered to international best practice. The report lamented that the reason for Asia struggling to meet the challenge of 'implementing institutional reform' is a neglect of entrenched cultural assumptions, beliefs and values (Asian Development Bank 2011: 13; cited in Andrews 2013: 14).

International organisations, however, are not the only ones to have documented such observations. According to Andrews (2013), in Côte d'Ivoire, the national government's efforts to decentralize the health sector and embed a more western-inspired managerial approach ended up being abandoned. Existing social and organisational meaning systems in the Ivorian Ministry of Health had actively worked against motivating staff to modernize traditional systems of

health care provisions. Public administrators in the country had refused to make room for the new structures and practices brought in by the reform, and thus had resolutely thwarted any changes to the old system there.

Contrary to common belief, this is not only an issue for the international development sector with its externally sponsored reforms and notorious habit of transferring western public administration ideas to non-western contexts.[4] The subjective outlooks of public administrators equally create challenges for western governments, who at face value might be perceived as culturally very similar to the institutional creators of reform initiatives (Schedler and Proeller 2007). A telling example is the Swiss public management reform, which suffered a similar fate as the Ivorian health reform initiative. In Switzerland, the implementation of the popular bundle of governmental reform policies, known as New Public Management (NPM), proved so ineffective that most of it was eventually abandoned (Maeder 2007). The managerial logic of NPM reforms had clashed with long-standing Swiss meaning systems, specifically around the notion of solidarity. Consequently, local public

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[4]Adopting Drechsler's (2013: 320) definition, 'west' and 'western' is understood as a European model of public administration, which is 'embodied by the core EU, North America, and Australia and New Zealand, with its Greco-Christian-Enlightenment-Scientism legacy plus both production and consumer Capitalism'.

administrators had perceived the reforms as 'chicanery', and resisted its diffusion (Maeder 2007: 71).

Even though the governments in the cases reviewed by Andrews (2013) and Schedler and Proeller (2007) followed internationally acclaimed best practices (Andrews 2013, Asian Development Bank 2011, World Bank 2011), the various reform initiatives failed, thereby causing detriment to the government, the public administrators and the service users alike. The negative consequences affected everyone in different ways: Governments wasted scarce resources on ineffective reforms, public administrators ended up frustrated and alienated, and the public was left waiting for better public services that improve the quality of their lives (Tsai 2007). The evaluations clearly identify as the principal causal factor the reforms' neglect to recognize the workforces' subjective perspectives, beliefs and values to be important catalysts in the reform process (Andrews 2013, Asian Development Bank 2011, World Bank 2011).

A concern for scholars

The practitioners' findings are echoed by a growing number of scholars from across disciplines, including among others organisational theorists (e.g. Scott 2008, Weick 1993), constructivist sociologists (e.g. Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Schmidt

2010), cultural anthropologists (e.g. Bennardo 2011, Ortner 2005), public policy scholars (e.g. Griggs and Howarth 2013, Griggs and Sullivan 2012), and anti-foundational political scientists (e.g. Bevir and Rhodes 2010). In spite of hailing from diverse disciplines, these scholars present further empirical evidence to substantiate the theoretical argument for placing active and interpretative public administrators at the centre of change. The breadth of real-world observations spans from frontline staff to senior level personnel. For example, the sociologist Weick (1993) delivered a now classical account of how the disintegration of sensemaking among a small group of fire fighters led to the Mann Gulch disaster. The political scientists Bevir and Rhodes (2010: 21) undertook an ethnographic study of how British civil servants combined historic traditions with new managerial logics in order to 'reshape reforms that reshape them'. The anthropologist Bennardo (2011) explicated how the mental processes of governmental decision-makers in the Kingdom of Tonga dictated a slow pace in reforming from monarchy to democracy.

Using various cognitive-cultural approaches, a number of scholars have viewed public administrators as 'cultural entrepreneurs' or 'bricoleurs', who use and combine cultural materials (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Baker and Nelson 2005, Rao et al. 2005), consisting of schematic identities, scripts, roles, rules of the game, frames,

institutional logics, and justifications amongst others (Weber and Dacin 2011). These cultural materials form a 'cultural register' at the collective level, that 'provide interests and values to a broader domain of activity', such as a policy sector or a service area (Überbacher et al 2015: 2). Using the cultural register as a 'toolkit', employees draw from it as a resource to assemble a 'cultural repertoire' at the individual actor level (Weber and Dacin 2011: 289). While the scholars quibble over the *degree* by which public administrators are constrained in assembling cultural materials (see Bell 2011 for a discussion of the nuances among constructivist intuitionalists alone), they all agree that a government's workforce, and its subjective constructions, are instrumental in driving, or inhibiting, change (Griggs and Howarth 2013, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Schmidt 2010, Hallet 2010).

The bias of existing reform models

In their quest for culturally appropriate reform templates, emerging economies find that existing popular reform models, and their constitutive concepts, are all rooted in variants of western liberal worldviews and value systems (Chaunzwa 2012, Xintian 2002). This includes not only the obvious national conceptualizations, such as the French model (Bartoli 2008), the 'New Zealand' model (Boston 1996), the Canadian 'La Relève' (Bourgon 1998), the Belgian

'Copernicus' model (Hondeghem and Depré 2005), or the German 'slim state' (Sachverständigenrat 'Schlanker Staat' 1997), but also the broader formulations, such as the Anglo-Saxon model (Veggeland 2007), the Napoleonic model (Ongaro 2009), the Neo-Weberian State (Drechsler and Kattel 2008), the Nordic model (Veggeland 2007), the Network Model (Pollitt and Hupe 2011), New Public Governance (Osborne 2010), New Public Management and Digital Era Governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006) (cited in Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011: 18-19). All these reform models are, by default, lodged within the context of a public administration that is assumed to be founded on democratic principles or, at least, aiming for a form of democracy.

This is not to deny that the commonly popular reform models embody important lessons learned throughout the history of public administration reform. Of course, they offer valuable insight on the range of variables that shape reform, particularly those that produce strong fiscal, legal, technical and administrative structures and procedures (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011 for an overview). Moreover, all of these approaches to reform carry with them a wealth of knowledge, particularly around organisational and procedural changes.

Prominently, the reform bundle referred to as New Public Management (NPM) has enjoyed international popularity for the past three decades, and succeeded in convincing many contemporary governments across the globe of the importance of a more business-like public administration. NPM emphasized the significance of performance management, competition among public sector organisations, the provision of quality and choice to citizens, and the strengthening of government's strategic, as opposed to its operational role (see e.g. OECD 1995, cited in Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Post NPM, the network model has much knowledge to offer with regards to replacing hierarchies with formal and informal networks (Pollitt and Hupe 2011). New Public Governance (NPG), another contemporary public management model, focuses on processes and outcomes in public policymaking and public service production, and has widely applicable lessons in terms of participatory and inter-organisational forms of governance based on interdependency, collaboration, empowerment and trust (Osborne 2010). Digital Era Governance (DEG), yet another post-NPM style of public management, concentrates on the transformative role of digital technologies in achieving policy outcomes and governance arrangements, which is certainly highly pertinent in today's information age (Dunleavy et al. 2006).

Notwithstanding the valuable and hard-earned knowledge that these public administrative reform models offer, the emerging economies are highly critical of their built-in subjective bias. Newly powerful and articulate, they hold the creators of public administrative reforms to account. They demand to know why 'good practice' in public administration reform has been defined and manufactured by western nations, yet promoted as being isomorphic (Drechsler forthcoming 2015, Grindle 2011, Kayuni 2008). They argue that 'people and culture eat strategy for breakfast' (Slocum s.a) - one only has to think of the practitioners' findings presented in the beginning of this section, where the alien cultural values, normative beliefs and political ideologies that underpinned externally sponsored governmental change initiatives led to failure in achieving desired outcomes (Andrews 2013, Asia Development Bank 2011, Schedler and Proeller 2007). Without mincing their words, emerging economies question the alleged superiority of western templates over local or indigenous interpretations, and challenge the Weltanschauung, causal relationships and normative legitimacy that are weaved into the fabric of existing reform concepts (see, for example, in Afghanistan the ongoing debate on formal judicial systems versus informal judicial systems, such as councils of village elders, sharia courts and commanders' shuras).

Filling the void

Currently, a small, newly emerging group of scholars, who specialize in what they broadly call non-western public administration (NWPA), are steering a discussion about an interpretative approach to public administration that is not steeped in western liberal democratic values (Drechsler forthcoming 2015). Believing that democracy is neither required nor always appropriate for good governance (Mahbubani 2013), these scholars agree that good practice in public administrative reform only offers a 'Western-size-to-fit-all', and fails to accommodate divergent worldviews and their associated cultural-ethical differences (Raadschelders 2013, Buruma and Margalit 2004).

Suggesting an entire new programme of research, Drechsler (forthcoming 2015) proposes that there are various historical and theoretical forms of public administration. He argues that these include at the very least a Chinese and an Islamic public administration (Drechsler forthcoming 2015, Painter and Peters 2010). In his argument, Drechsler concedes that the few people looking at non-western forms of public administration contest whether there may be additional ones. Nevertheless, he reasons, the Chinese and Islamic public administration make for a good starting point because each rests on an extensive body of theory, centuries of practice, significant

pertinence to contemporary issues, a credible carrier country and a mostly original system (Drechsler forthcoming 2015).

At the point of writing this thesis, however, these propositions were only programmatic and needed to be validated and refined by a body of research and real-world evaluations. By 2014, the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) had only just formally established an expert Working Group on Islamic public administration to further examine these ideas (see NISPAcee 22nd Annual Conference 2014). While the Working Group is certainly already yielding new and interesting insights, it is questionable whether such broad conceptualizations are able to provide individual governments with conceptual models, and the necessary diagnostic tools to understand, and capitalize on, the complex local subjectivities of their public administrators when realizing reform. Moreover, certain skepticism remains as to the extent to which the heterogeneous subjective worldviews of thinking and feeling government employees in, for instance, countries as different as Turkey and Saudi Arabia can be reduced to grand and sweeping abstractions, such as an Islamic worldview.

In western studies, scholars have developed fascinating models to chart the ways in which organisational actors deploy assorted cultural

materials (Kaplan 2011, Kellogg 2011), make sense retrospectively (Weick 1995), communicate across values dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010), make meaning through perceptual frames (Taylor 2012, Elsbach et al. 2005), manipulate institutional logics (Everitt and Levinson 2014, Skelcher and Smith 2013, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Hallet 2010), sustain the cultural meanings of institutionalized practices and myths (Swidler 2013, Everitt 2013), or take a decentered approach to institutions as cultural practices (Bevir and Rhodes 2010).

Unhelpfully, most of the research focuses on organisations and sets of organisations within an industry rather than on individuals or groups within an organisation (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Gillespie and Corniche 2009). Few studies have homed in on the ideational 'cogs and wheels' by which social actors *within* organisations construct different 'realities' and choose behaviours at group-level. Even fewer studies have examined meaning-making in the particular organisational context of public administrations. Hence, public administrative reformers in the real world still have little guidance to understanding the conditions by which different factions of employees in an organisation integrate new concepts into their existing subjectivities, and enact changed behaviour.

Cognitive anthropologists are somewhat further ahead, not least as a result of daring to veer deep into psychological and neuro-scientific territory (Gillespie and Corniche 2009). Studying 'indigenous' systems of knowledge, cognitive anthropologists have gained impressive insights into cultural cognition and how the human mind stores, evaluates and utilizes knowledge (Roy 2011). Contemporary cognitive anthropologists construct cultural models that identify and examine socially shared mental knowledge structures, and their role in generating behaviour (Bennardo 2011, Ross 2004, Strauss and Quinn 1997, D'Andrade and Strauss 1992). Highly contextual, situated and specific to the respective research problem in question, cultural models have been developed in agriculture (Silvasti 2003), mining (Horowitz 2008), medicine (Garro 2000), child-rearing (Kronenfeld et al. 2011) and other applied fields (cited in Kronenfeld et al. 2011). However, the field of public administration has yet to benefit from an unbridled cross-fertilization with cognitive anthropology to generate mid-range interpretive theories with practical purchase for governments in diagnosing and navigating the subjectivities of their local public administrators.

Summary

Considering the worrisome state of affair, which this section has outlined in all its practical, theoretical, political and economic interdependency, the rationale for the research project is glaringly evident. The critical importance of studying the subjective meaning-making of groups of public administrators cannot be overemphasized. Practically speaking, governments need operational templates to effectively approach reform in culturally considered ways that put thinking, feeling and acting human beings at the centre. From a theoretical perspective, we need to learn more about the analytical processes of 'locally sensitive diagnostics' that place subjective, interpretive employees at the heart of tailored solutions to public administrative problems (Grindle 2011: 4). On a political level, effective states and society-wide prosperity depend on flexible public administrators who are pliant enough to adapt to modern requirements and fast-paced changes. From an economic point of view, new conceptual models in public administration that are based in rigorous scholarship are much needed in addressing a growing market demand and counterbalancing profiteering opportunism.

Therefore, more research is needed to help with finding relevant theoretical and practical solutions to grasping the subjective processes by which public administrators realize 'a new way of doing things'.

Unless we finally begin to capture the subjective processes happening *at the human level* during public administrative reform, opportunities for sustainably changing practices and behaviours will be hit and miss. And yes, good intentions notwithstanding, reforms that fail to consider existing local meaning-systems deserve to be criticized as manufactured by institutional imperialists, yet promoted as being isomorphic. Spurred on by the unresolved questions of the old world, and the newly pressing requirements of a 'brave new world', *the stimulus for this study was to learn more about agency and ideational processes at group-level in achieving public administrative reform outcomes*.

1.4   Research questions: The analysis of shared subjectivity

As the previous section has made explicit, the motivation for this study was the dissatisfactory state of knowledge when it comes to the processes by which groups of public administrators fit in new concepts into their existing subjectivities. In order to fill the knowledge gap, the previous section has argued, we need to observe empirical regularities and formulate new conceptual models, which can be practically applied. In doing so, this research project sought to build on the fascinating insights already gained in relevant extant scholarship, and make new discoveries based on previous discoveries (Yang and Miller 2008). The process of conceptually consolidating

empirical observations contributed to the development of mid-range theory (Boudon 1991, Merton 1968).

In an effort to break down the complexity of such an endeavour, the research questions aimed to guide the inquiry in manageable successive steps. Accordingly, the research project was framed by an overarching question, out of which two focal questions emanated to cumulatively steer the logic of inquiry:

1. If an understanding of how public administrators make meaning is critical to achieving positive reform outcomes, then how do we operationalize the analysis of subjective systems of meaning at group-level[5]?

    a. How do we best approach such an intangible and nebulous concept as 'subjective meaning-making' in rendering the shared cognitive processes of public administrators observable and assessable?

    b. How useful is an operational concept of subjective meaning-making in mapping existing systems of meaning

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[5] By 'group-level', this thesis refers to a group of individuals, whose meanings are shared and overlapping in content and structure. This is distinct to a group of individuals with disparate subjectivities, who are required to make meaning together as a group.

at group-level, and identifying the opportunities and constraints for internalizing in employees 'a new way of doing public administration'?

1.5 Research approach: Pragmatically mixed

The research task

The research task at hand was two-pronged: First, it involved developing a model to capture and examine the shared subjectivities of public administrators, and testing it out in a real-life scenario. Secondly, on the basis of the empirical findings, the study further evolved and refined the model by which the subjective meaning-making of government employees might be understood and evaluated. Therefore, the general research task can be summed up as empirically based theory building.

The fieldwork

Accordingly, this study's fieldwork was guided by its purpose to infer some general theoretical propositions, based on the observed regularities in a real-life public administration. To achieve that, the researcher empirically investigated and analysed the ways in which Abu Dhabi's public administrators made meaning of the ongoing customer-centric reform.

The research paradigm

Given that this study searched for subjective meaning, the epistemological and ontological premises of this research project were naturally rooted in the constructivist-interpretative paradigm (Mertens 2005). Consistent with the aim of this study, the goal of constructivist-interpretative research is to identify and explain social realities, and generate new discoveries about their conditions (Schütz 1967, Weber 1922). According to Yang et al. (2008), such a research paradigm is commonly used in public administrative and organisational studies (Morgan 1980, cited in Yang et al. 2008: 26).

The research design and methods

The research design guided the logic of the inquiry, informed the study's decisions around methods, and determined its approach to interpreting the findings (see Creswell and Clark 2011: 53). Specifically, the exploratory and explanatory aims of this research project necessitated a mixed methods design, which combined quantitative and qualitative techniques, in order to achieve a unified understanding of the object of study (Creswell and Clark 2011, Ramlo and Newman 2011). The selected methods facilitated the implementation of the operational model in two successive research phases: In phase one, Q Methodology rendered observable existing meanings, which groups of Abu Dhabi's public administrators shared.

In research phase two, a Cultural Reference Group unpacked these meanings for their underlying knowledge structures, or schemata. In the second phase, knowledge was coproduced with the Cultural Reference Group in order to benefit from the group members' rich, subjective knowledge, ensure that the research agenda was relevant from a practitioner and scholarly perspective, and improve the quality of the findings. The research design also employed elements of grounded theory in order to allow the design to be shaped by its production, so that unanticipated discoveries could be made. The research methods were chosen based on 'what works' as well as for their potential to control, to a certain extent, for the researcher's subjective bias.

Research validity

The project's research approach was characterized by pragmatism, ongoing collaboration and consultation with research participants, practitioners and academics, and a willingness to traverse disciplinary boundaries in learning from, and building on, extant scholarship. This contributed to ensuring the validity and integrity of the research process and its findings. In addition, it supported the author's reflexive struggle to adequately represent the other, while finding a constructive role for her own subjective self.

1.6   Aims and contributions: Generating 'pracademic' value

Above all, the goal of this research project was to present insight into the ideational processes by which groups of public administrators shoehorn tenets of reform into their subjective systems of meaning, or not. Importantly, the research project sought not to understand the meaning-making processes of government employees so that their *beliefs* might be manipulated, but rather so that public administrative *reforms* might be welded to gel with local belief systems. Learning more about subjective systems of meaning, and their processes, would enable scholars and practitioners better to assess the conditions under which reform stands a chance, or not, and what aspects of reform may need to be adapted, and how. Thereby, the thesis has striven to add to the broader literature on public administrative reform by complementing existing knowledge with new insight on the ideational forces that critically shape reform outcomes. To this end, the study has concentrated on subjective agency, without dissolving it into institutional, procedural, political or socio-economic variables.

Contributing academic and practical value

Herewith, the study sought to make two important contributions in generating 'pracademic' value, which emphasizes the benefits for practitioners facing real-world challenges as well as for academics working to advance theoretical knowledge: *Firstly*, it sought to

address existing theoretical gaps with regards to understanding more about the conditions by which social actors within government organisations construct different 'realities' and choose behaviours at group-level.

Secondly, it aimed to make a practical contribution to the governments of a 'brave new world' by offering a conceptual model to facilitate culturally considered change initiatives. The conceptual model sought to get at the 'cogs and wheels' of meaning-making, yet in ways that would be adaptable to local contexts and respective normative assumptions. It thereby might offer a practical template for reform-seeking governments of various worldviews and ideologies to investigate the subjective meaning-making of their respective workforce, assess opportunities for sustainable change, and capitalize on the role played by thinking and feeling public administrators in achieving desired reform outcomes.

1.7   Thesis structure

The slightly unorthodox way, whereby this doctoral thesis has kicked off with a personal anecdote in Chapter 1, served two purposes: Firstly, instead of 'talking at' the reader by means of an abstract, third-person exposition, the anecdote uses the 'show, don't tell' technique in order to convey from a first-person perspective how differently

public administrators make meaning of the same reform. Secondly, it reveals the author's background as a practitioner, and shares with the reader the very moment at which the idea for this study was born. Thus having set the scene, Chapter 1 outlined the research project's own subjective understandings in framing the research topic, and argued the case for conducting such a study at this point in time.

Chapter 2 discusses existing scholarly knowledge with regards to the elusive concepts of subjective and inter-subjective meaning. Drawing on social phenomenological, cognitive-cultural and 'second wave' organisational theories, the chapter arrives at a hybrid framework of meaning-making, which is socio-cognitive. Accordingly, the study understands subjective meaning-making not only as a social process, which focuses on how individuals construct meaning as a result of their social surroundings. Moreover, this thesis recognizes that subjective meaning-making is also cognitive, and thus necessitates considering the internal knowledge structures, or schemata, which people apply in various ways to make sense of situations or concepts. On the basis of its socio-cognitive theory, Chapter 2 contrives an operational model that includes a theoretical rationale and a two-step practical process. The operational model enables the breaking down of shared meaning into observable parts, and thus allows for a practical in-depth investigation.

Chapter 3 presents in detail the research strategy for applying the two-step operational model to the concrete case of Abu Dhabi's public administration. The research strategy was designed with a view to infer some general patterns beyond the specific case, and enable moderate generalizations. Accordingly, the chapter first outlines the research problem and key concerns, given the study's goal to arrive at a practical, or mid-range, theory. The chapter then proceeds to situate the project within a constructivist-interpretative paradigm, and argues for a pragmatically mixed methods design. It concludes by detailing, and justifying, the use of Q Methodology and a Cultural Reference Group to collect and analyse empirical data on shared meaning in the context of Abu Dhabi's customer-centric reform.

Chapter 4 discusses the concrete, real-life context within which the study explores the phenomena of subjective meaning-making. To that end, the chapter describes Abu Dhabi's public administrative context and its customer-centric reform. Chapter 4 draws to close by highlighting those shared aspects that are more widely found among the world's plethora of public administrations and their approaches to putting public service users at the heart of government services.

Chapter 5 tests the first step of the operational model by applying it to the real-life case of Abu Dhabi's public administrators and their meaning-making of the customer-centric reform. The chapter chronicles the model's use of Q Methodology for its first step, and presents the discovery of five subjective viewpoints, which were found to be shared among groups of public administrators at the time of research. These viewpoints were named as follows: (1) The benefactor's epic fail; (2) Managerialism in modern Arabiya; (3) Triumph of the cherished patriarch; (4) The traditional ways of the Bedouins; and (5) The reign of formulas over culture.

Chapter 6 recapitulates the work of the Cultural Reference Group in unpacking each viewpoint, and drilling down to some of their underlying schemata and their processes. It is here that the group members discovered that organisational policies, industry trends and mega events provide principal situational cues that critically influence the relevant mental knowledge structures of public administrators. These knowledge structures, in turn organize themselves into context and content schemata in order to produce shared viewpoints of the customer-centric reform. The group members extrapolated a variety of content and context schemata and examined in-depth their properties, durability and motivational processes.

Chapter 7 discusses the study's findings and their wider applicability in light of the research purpose, and reflects on the 'pracademic' value it set out to generate. The chapter concludes with highlighting the limitations of the study, and draws attention to possible future opportunities.

CHAPTER 2:

OBJECTIVELY UNDERSTANDING SUBJECTIVITY

"Anyone who values truth should stop worshipping reason. […] The human mind is a story processor, not a logic processor."

(Jonathan Haidt, 'The Righteous Mind', 2012: 104)

2.1   Introduction

The German sociologist Max Weber, who is credited with originating the interpretative approach to the social world, postulated that we can only understand people's behaviour if we first comprehend the subjective meaning that they attach to what they and others do (Weber 1922). Social scientists, unlike natural scientists, study human beings in multiple and complex social relations, while simultaneously having to take into account the individuals' personal interests, motives, self-interpretations and social realities within which their behaviours are situated (see Gurwitsch 1974: 129). Accordingly, the task of a sociological inquiry is to make explicit the meaning and significance that actions have for the acting persons themselves *within their particular social worlds* (see Schütz 1932/1967:7, Elsbach et al. 2005, Fine and Hallet 2014). This is easier said than done. Not only is meaning an elusive and intangible phenomenon, but scholars are also

divided on whether meaning ought to be conceptualized as internal, subjective and cognitive *or* external, inter-subjective and socially constructed (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Ross and Medin 2011, Elsbach et al. 2005). To complicate matters further, sociological researchers, who seek to objectively study other people's subjective behaviour, are bound by their own subjectivities as well as their surrounding social influences.

Hence, Chapter 2 is devoted to exploring the nature of subjective and inter-subjective meanings, and the best way objectively to study them within the context of organisations. To achieve clarity on these issues, the chapter first looks at a range of scholarly literature that is concerned with human thought and behaviour. Firstly, it draws inspiration from Alfred Schütz's (1932/1967) social phenomenology, which studies human awareness and the social construction of reality. Secondly, the chapter seeks to learn from 'second wave' organisational theories, including literature on sensemaking (e.g. Maitlis and Christianson 2014), hybridity (e.g. Yousfi 2013), situated cognition in organisations (e.g. Elsbach 2005) and, to a lesser extent, the notion of institutional logics (e.g. Thornton et al. 2012). The third source of inspiration comes from Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn's (1997) cognitive theory of cultural meaning, which directs the spotlight on how people's experiences are internalized. By distilling

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and amalgamating the insights from social phenomenological, cultural-cognitive, and 'second wave' organisational theories, the chapter sheds light on the elusive concept of subjective and inter-subjective meaning, and establishes where and how we might locate these nebulous phenomena within organisations.

Having thus set out the thesis' theoretical framework, the chapter concludes by laying the groundwork for the thesis' original contribution to the existing body of knowledge: it advances the practical, and operational, approach by which this thesis proposes objectively to capture and examine the shared subjectivities of *homines subjectivi* in real-life public administrations. In doing so, it directly addresses research question 1a, which inquires about an operational approach to the abstract and vaporous concept of 'subjective meaning-making', with a view to enabling the researcher to observe and assess the shared subjectivities of public administrators.

2.2   A philosophical foundation: The nature and study of subjectivity

The Austrian social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz, a relatively unknown yet highly influential contemporary of Max Weber,

considered in depth the origin and nature of subjective meaning, and how scientifically to study it. Schütz's work directed the spotlight on how common people constructed reality in their normal daily existence together with, and based on, each other (Schütz 1932/1967). He traced subjective meaning through action, located it in human consciousness, and theorized about its properties. On that basis, he put forward a philosophy for how sociological researchers are able to make sense of the consciousness of others while being bound by their own stream of consciousness (Schütz 1932/1967).

Subjective meaning is observed in action

Setting out the starting point of an interpretative social science, Weber postulated that subjective meaning is detectable in people's meaningful actions (Weber 1922). He defined meaningful action as behaviour to which the acting person attaches discernible subjective meaning (see Weber 1922: 88). Such a conceptualization focused on those actions that are meaningful, conscious and preconceived activities, for example responding to a question or writing a paper. It excluded other meaningless types of action, namely automatic action, such as bodily reflexes (e.g. an involuntary yawn), as well as subconscious action, such as noticing environmental stimuli (e.g. hearing the raindrops dripping against the window) (see Schütz 1932/1967: 215).

Even though meaningful action allows subjective meaning to surface and manifest, a researcher can only claim to truly understand another person's meaningful action if he or she is able to grasp the subjective meaning that motivated the action (Schütz 1932/1967). This, Schütz (1932/1967: 217) argued, is achieved by comprehending the 'action's own principle of unity'. For instance, in the anecdote reported at the outset of this thesis, the director, Mr Hamed, criticized social democracy for promoting self-centred individualism. In order to grasp the subjective meaning of the director's utterance, the researcher needs to understand the principles that govern the particular criticism levelled by Mr Hamed. In the logic of Mr Hamed specifically, and Abu Dhabi Government's authoritarian culture more generally, the relationship between group and individual members is inverted compared with the one advocated by social democracies: while social democracy promotes individual rights and personal expression, authoritarianism sees normative value in pursuing collective goals, social cohesion and conformities (see Duckitt 1989). Against this background, the director's meaning-making of social democracy as championing selfishness is logical and consistent with the set of principles that govern his philosophy and Abu Dhabi Government's wider political practices. Hence, we can now claim to understand Mr. Hamed's act of criticism because we have identified the subjective

meaning, which had visibly motivated the action, and we have interpreted it according to the action's 'own principle of unity' (Schütz 1932/1967: 217).

Subjective meaning is formulated in human consciousness

Having established that subjective meaning can be observed in action, such as the act of criticizing, Schütz proceeded to locate the origin of meaning in the human mind, where it is formulated in the human consciousness.   He started with the French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1913/2001) notion of flowing consciousness, or durée, which posits that human beings experience life as a continuous and immeasurable flow of experiences that are stored in the individual's consciousness as undefined phases melting into each other (see Schütz1932/1967: 45-46).   Schütz   then   applied   Austrian phenomenologist   Edmund   Husserl's   (1928)   insights   on   the consciousness of internal time. He took up Husserl's proposition that only once the consciousness singles out a particular lived experience, and focuses its attention on it through reflection, does it acquire meaning (see Schütz1932/1967: 53-57).[6]   In Schütz's own words, 'meaning is a certain way of directing one's gaze at an item of one's

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[6] Notwithstanding methodological differences, functional psychologist William James (1950) made the same argument without knowing about the work of the transcendental phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1928).

own experience', which is thus 'selected out and rendered discrete by a reflexive act' (Schütz 1932/1967: 42).

This point can be illustrated with a scenario that we are all familiar with. When reminiscing with a friend about a particular experience that we have lived through together, our friend remembers certain aspects about the experience that we struggle to recall, or 'select out' of our stream of experiences. It is only when our friend describes further details surrounding the incident, and thereby directs our mental gaze to the right point within our perpetual and boundless stream of experiences, that we are able to pinpoint the incident and remember it, thereby giving it meaning. Effectively, the consciousness is able to reflect on lived experiences after they have happened and, by doing so, lifts various lived experiences out of the undefined bundle, thus making meaning (Husserl 1928).

An important implication here is that people are only able to make sense of their experiences *after* they have occurred, which changes the stream of consciousness at every moment into a 'remembered having-just-been' (Schütz 1932/1967: 47). Therefore, formulating meaning is

the process of an individual's consciousness focusing attention retrospectively on a lived, and thereby already elapsed, experience.[7]

'Making meaning' as a combination of formulating and applying meaning

According to Schütz, the process of *directing attention* to a particular elapsed experience constitutes formulating meaning, yet *applying an experience to choose behaviour* is referred to as motive (see Schütz 1932/1967: 86-91). Motives sum up the reasons that subjective individuals have for their actions. Schütz differentiated between two motives: the 'in-order-to-motive' and the 'because-motive'. The 'in-order-to-motive' relates to the reasons and motivations for a person to plan certain actions with the intention to achieve a particular goal in the future. In contrast, the 'because-motive' is rooted in the individual's past experiences and the circumstances that make the person consider a particular course of action. The 'because motive' is also associated with habitual behaviour, whereby a person behaves a certain way because he or she has repeated a particular behaviour in

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[7] While the majority of scholars, who examine aspects of meaning-making, agree that the temporal orientation is retrospective (e.g. Weick 1995, Gioia and Thomas 1996, Rerup and Feldman 2011), there is a minority of researchers who also conceptualize it as a prospective process (e.g. Gephart, Topal, and Zhang 2010), or disagree whether meaning-making happens continuously or episodically (see Gephart 2010: 281). These issues of temporality have important epistemological and ontological implications, and offer significant potential for future inquiries (see Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 97).

the past without any problems and therefore does not consider alternatives (Etzrod 2004).

This point can be illustrated with Etzrod's (2004) example of a person who drinks a cup of coffee every morning. If the person drinks coffee on a particular morning because he or she has done so every morning for a while and it has worked for him or her in the past, then it would constitute a 'because motive'. However, if the person chooses a cup of coffee over a glass of orange juice in the hope of becoming more alert by means of the caffeine, then it would be an 'in-order-to' motive (Etzrod 2004). From the perspective of the 'in-order-to motive', a human being acts freely and is morally responsible (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009). From the perspective of the 'because motive', the behaviour of an individual is determined by his or her past, or based on structural constraints (see Overgaard and Zahavi 2009: 20). While these distinctions are helpful, in particular with a view to how much free agency is employed versus structural constraints, however, this thesis employs the umbrella term 'making meaning' to sum up the process of *formulating (or attaching)* and *applying* meaning, which therefore includes both the 'in-order-to motive' and 'because motive'.

Having located the origin of subjective meaning in a person's consciousness, and considered its role in motivating action, Schütz proceeded to deduce an approach to investigating it. He posited that an inquiry into people's subjectivities means, in practice, to formulate 'an objective context of meaning constructed out of, and referring to, subjective contexts of meaning' (Schütz 1932/1967: xxviii). Schütz explained that a subjective meaning context describes the constituting framework, within which a particular meaning stood in the mind of the person who created it (Schütz 1932/1967). As we have seen in the anecdote, for example, Mr Hamed's wider subjective belief system into an Islamic bedoucractic way of life constitutes the subjective meaning context within which he configured the particular meaning he attached to a customer-centric reforms in democratic countries. With the subjective meaning context now being apparent, how do we formulate an objective context of meaning?

In order to gain an objective understanding of people's subjective meaning contexts, both Weber (1922) and (Schütz 1932/1967) maintained that the sociological researcher ought to resort to the fundamental conceptual tool available to the social sciences: *the ideal type*. Contrary to what the name might suggest, ideal types are neither a perfect version of something nor a moral ideal, nor do they designate

statistical averages (Bruun 2007). Instead, ideal types are analytical constructs, which aggregate the characteristics and elements common to most individuals, behaviours or phenomena, but do not capture *all* the characteristics of any one person, a particular behaviour, or a single phenomenon (Schütz 1932/1967: 7).

For example, the ideal type of a police officer is designed by summarizing the traits and habits shared by many real-life police officers into one fictional police officer. While the thus created ideal type of a police officer depicts not a real, concrete individual but a fictional, abstract person, everyone would recognize the fictional policeman as typical for someone in that profession (Schütz 1932/1967). Essentially, ideal types are carefully constructed by assembling reoccurring elements of various concrete real life examples into a single, logically coherent, yet hypothetical whole.

The end product is a typical exemplar, such as an average person, or a characteristic course of behaviour, or a quintessential phenomenon. According to Fairweather and Rinne (2012: 4), the ideal type specifies how 'the necessary relationships between categories of phenomena work and focuses on patterns of behaviour made possible because of shared culture'. The ideal type is a hypothetical construction, which despite being constructed out of non-fictional elements, nevertheless

cannot be found in this form in the real world. For instance, even though everyone would recognize the ideal type of a police officer, the fact is that there exists no actual human being that fully embodies the ideal type policeman in the real world. In order to ensure that the researcher's representation of real-life people or phenomena via ideal types is scientifically rigorous and adequate, the ideal type must be recognizable by others and not contradict what else is known about the real types (Bruun 2007, Schütz 1932/1967).[8]

Critiques and reflections

As with every theory, Schütz's social phenomenological philosophy on the nature, properties and study of meaning has been subjected to compelling criticism (see Overgaard and Zahavi 2009 for a comprehensive summary). Above all, social phenomenological emphasis on the everyday human and the importance of common sense has been attacked for celebrating the 'ordinary or mediocre', and condoning existing conditions, even if they are poor or unjust (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009: 19-20). In response to the criticism made, social phenomenologists Overgaard and Zahavi (2009: 20) highlight that taking ordinary people and their everyday knowledge seriously is not the same as idealizing or glorifying them. Instead, the

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[8] The specific ways by which the researcher is able to ascertain procedural and interpretive rigor and validity are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.4.

scholars argue, offering a 'sober description' of existing social realities is far from legitimizing them, and rather offers a chance to identify opportunities for change (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009: 19-20). In backing up their point, Overgaard and Zahavi (2009: 18) refer to Cicourel's (1976) seminal social phenomenological study on the decision-making activities that produce the social problem of 'juvenile delinquency' in the United States. This study exposed the assumptions held by police officers, court officials and probation officers with regard to 'typical delinquents', and thereby provided an important impetus to reconsider practices within the criminal justice system.

Critics particularly take issue with the social phenomenological weight on subjectivity, and the risk of obscuring the multiple ways in which people are constrained by other forces, such as taken-for-granted practices, structures, systems and procedures (Crossley 1996, Habermas 1992). The concern is that an emphasis on subjectivity as active and creative encourages overlooking the many ways in which individuals are controlled by institutions or other individuals. Of course, most scholars in the social sciences would certainly agree that 'society cannot be reduced to the sum of its individual members' and that there are additional forces shaping social reality, which includes institutions, practices, systems etc. (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009: 19-

21). On the other hand, so Overgaard (2007) reminds us, it is impossible to understand a social system without a solid notion of the people that participate in it. On that basis, Overgaard and Zahavi (2009) convincingly argue that any assessment of an existing social reality ought to start with the humans who create it, and not the products of their human activity, such as systems or institutions. Notwithstanding the additional non-personal forces at work, it is ultimately human beings who create, maintain, change or disrupt the social reality in which they live (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009, Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991). After all, as Berger and Luckmann aptly put it: 'However objectivated, the social world was made by men – and, therefore, can be remade by them' (Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991: 106).

Notably, widespread present-day criticism regarding the gendered as well as western-centric bias of most sociological theories has spared Schützian social phenomenology due to its 'moral favour, which respects careful, discriminating thought and avoids self-righteous dogmatism' (Ajiboye 2012: 23). The Nigerian sociologist Ajiboye draws attention to the fact that, for example, the social reality of African societies is regularly misinterpreted (Ajiboye 2012). Yet, Ajiboye argues, applying Schützian social phenomenology to contemporary African societies offers an avenue for viewing,

describing and presenting a community in 'its correct perspective' (Ajiboye 2012: 23).

Notwithstanding some modifications, Schützian social phenomenology is not only considered a useful basis for sociological theorizing of any given society, but seen as still increasing in contemporary relevance (Orleans 2013, Ajiboye 2012, Psathas 2004). The influence of Schützian social phenomenology is discernible in nearly any scholarly and applied study that situates active, interpretive humans at the ideational centre of analysis, and requires an understanding of the diversity of human experiences and subjective insights, such as education, public management, policy-making, and organisational studies (Yelich Biniecki 2015, Orleans 2013). For that reason, it appeals to theorists of different paradigms, including postmodernists, poststructuralists, critical and neo-functional theorists (Ritzer 1996).

This is in spite of the fact that the founding text, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, though widely critiqued and applied, has not been widely read (Walsh 1967: xv). First published in 1932, and to this day only available in the English translation of the unaltered 1932 founding text, it requires the reader to bridge a historical divide, involving an appreciation of German romantic humanism, neo-

Kantianism, the philosophies of the Southwest German (or Baden) school, and the convictions of the Austrian School (Walsh 1967: xv, xxix). It is only through Schütz's influential students, the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966/1991) and the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel (1967), that social phenomenological insight into subjective meaning-making was introduced to an English-speaking audience.[9] It was widely disseminated in the sixties, and thus was exposed to further theoretical development and scholarly scrutiny. Generations of sociological researchers found value in working on the basis of Berger and Luckmann's (1966/1991) *The Social Construction of Reality* without ever having read the Schützian source, which gave rise to it.

The seminal works of Berger, Luckmann and Garfinkel certainly expanded the theoretical propositions as well as clarified certain omissions and limitations (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009). Nonetheless, the author still chose to work in detail through the founding text, and, just like Berger, Luckmann and Garfinkel five decades earlier, to apply the central tenets of social phenomenological philosophy to her particular theoretical inquiry, and combine it in new ways with the insights of 21st century scholarship.

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[9] While Berger and Luckmann had been students of Schütz, Garfinkel had learned about Schützian social phenomenology through his personal correspondence with him spanning several years (see Overgaard and Zahavi 2009: 17).

Summary

Grounded in Schützian social phenomenology, Section 2.2 set out the philosophy for how the author understands the task of identifying meaning in action, and researching the subjectivities of others while being compelled by her own subjectivities (Schütz 1932/1967). The main tenet is that an objective inquiry into a person's subjectivity reconstructs, via an abstract ideal type, the way in which a real life person gazed at a particular elapsed experience in his or her mind. Hence, a *subjective* meaning context refers to the observed framework within which a specific, real life person constructs meaning in his or her consciousness. In contrast, an *objective* meaning context is abstracted from, and independent of, a particular person in the real world, yet relates to the subjective perspective of that person (see Schütz 1932/1967: 135, Fairweather and Rinne 2014). It makes the objective construction of meaning the process by which the researcher uncouples subjective meaning from the real life consciousness that has produced it and given it meaning. Therefore, an objective re-construction of subjective meaning is the act whereby a researcher systematically identifies and catalogues all the defining characteristics of the subjective meaning, and aggregates them by means of a theoretical ideal type, which exemplifies the observed real-life meaning in a recognizable, representative and logically coherent form (see Schütz 1932/1967: 190). In other words, 'objective meaning'

denotes 'a unit of meaning considered as an ideal object' (Schütz1932/1967: 33).

Importantly, as Schütz (1932/1967) highlights, such an abstracted ideal type, or in our terminology objective meaning, is built from, and relates to, the person-specific, or in our terminology subjective meaning, which the researcher observed in the real world. While an ideal type is objective, it is determined by the interpreter's third-person point of view and therefore 'a function of the very question it seeks to answer' (Schütz 1932/1967: 190). Hence, objective meaning refers to the meaning in the mind of the interpreter, while subjective meaning relates to the meaning in the mind of the particular person who produced it (see Schütz 1932/1967: 217). Based on that logic, Schütz argues that a sociological researcher is only entitled to say that he or she understand the person being studied, if the sociological researcher begins to grasp that person's viewpoint from his or her perspective, or, in our terminology, 'only when I make the leap from the objective to the subjective context of meaning' (Schütz 1932/1967: 217).

2.3   Inter-subjectivity: The 'inter' in subjective meaning[10]

Meanings that are shared by and between members of a group, or a referential community, are termed inter-subjective. The concept of inter-subjectivity is defined in various ways (see Gillespie and Cornice 2009 for an overview of the various approaches).   They range from conceptualizing inter-subjectivity relatively narrowly as shared definitions (Mori and Hayashi 2006), or mutual understandings and their realizations (Laing, Pillipson and Lee 1966) to defining inter-subjectivity more expansively as feelings and intentionality attributed to others (Gärdenfors 2008), as implicit and automatic behavioural orientations towards others (Coehlho and Figueiredo 2003), as situated and interactional performances (Weber and Glyn 2006), and as taken-for-granted backgrounds (Scott 2003) (cited in Gillespie and Corniche 2009: 19).   In an effort to synthesize the diverse definitions into one inclusive conceptualization, Gillespie and Corniche (2009: 19-20) propose that inter-subjectivity denotes 'the variety of relations between perspectives', which can belong to 'individuals, groups, or traditions and discourses', and can 'manifest as both implicit (taken for granted) and explicit (reflected upon)'.

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[10] 'Inter' is originally a Latin prefix and translates as 'between', 'among' or 'in the midst of'.

Some scholars argue that inter-subjectivity is the product of collectively learned mental knowledge structures, or cognitive schemata, which humans apply to give shared meaning to experiences and make sense of situations (e.g. Bingham and Kahl 2013, Kronenfeld et al. 2011, Strauss and Quinn 1997). For example, in the Western world, most people have internalized a mental knowledge structure for the 14th of February, or Valentine's Day. This cognitive schema drives the majority of individuals to make shared meaning of the annual event in similar and broadly consistent ways, which involve the notions of love, romance and commercial activity, whether romantically, cynically or indifferently.

However, shared knowledge structures are not only 'individual knowledge writ large', but also the 'emergent properties' of groups (Kronenfeld 2011: 570). Hence, Valentine's Day being interpreted as representing love, romance and commercial activity is also the result of the social practices and collective discourses of Western media, markets and institutions, and thus constructed by society. As a result, the dilemma that fuels contemporary scholarly debate is whether inter-subjective meanings ought to be conceptualized as cognitive *or* social constructivist phenomena, or a combination of both (Ross and Medin 2011, Elsbach et al. 2005).

Inevitably, it is also a fundamental conundrum for this thesis, given that the ontology of inter-subjective meaning has important implications for researching it at group-level. Considering that the previous section, Section 2.2, has located the origin of subjective meaning *inside* a person's consciousness, then how do we reconcile this with the phenomenon of inter-subjective meaning, which also exists *outside* of an individual as a property of groups? In other words, given the individualistic disposition of subjectivity (Habermas 1992), how can we get at the structures of meaning that are shared by groups (see Overgaard and Zahavi 2009: 9)? How can an understanding of internal, person-specific, subjective meaning-making provide insight into how an external, inter-subjective 'community of we' is constituted, and perpetuated through space and time (Crossley 1996: 68)? These questions have been much debated across disciplines, in particular constructivist sociology (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991), social psychology (e.g. Gillespie and Cornish 2009), cognitive anthropology (e.g. Kronenfeld 2011), organisational theory (e.g. Elsbach et al. 2005) and phenomenological philosophy (e.g. Overgaard and Zahavi 2009).

The sociality of subjectivity

With man being a social animal (Aristotle, Jowett and Davies 1920), an individual's subjective meaning system reflects the social

experiences, common-sense conceptions and collective beliefs shared by a set of social actors, such as families, work colleagues, national compatriots etc. (see Husserl 1962: 344, Schütz 1932/1967). Meaning that is shared within a particular group represents a 'social distillation of the regularities' that characterize the relevant group (Kronenfeld 2011: 570). However, as the cognitive anthropologist Kronenfeld (2011: 571) highlights, while the members of a particular group are usually capable of consistently describing their shared meaning systems, each group member will also be able to explain how he or she personally deviates. In other words, individuals can pinpoint those aspects of shared meaning that they have not idiosyncratically internalized, or embedded in their psyche, and therefore don't themselves employ in their meaning-making. This begs the question of how shared socially shared meaning is and what determines its 'sharedness'?

The social distribution of subjective meaning was a major area of interest for Schütz's students, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966/1991), who were the first to translate Schütz's ideas into English and introduce them to a broad generation of sociologists. In their influential theory, namely the *Sociology of Knowledge*, Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) explicate that the subjectivities of an individual are, from the cradle to the grave, dependent on other

subjective individuals, who instill, shape and validate meaning through relationships and in social situations, or in other words, inter-subjectively. Personal contact and common patterns of socialization, such as similar cultural or social upbringing, shared historical or national heritage, or resembling life experiences ensure that each *homo subjectivus* shares fragments of meaning with different groups of people (Drechsler forthcoming 2015, Ortner 2005, Strauss and Quinn 1997). The emphasis is on 'fragments' because no individual will have internalized the entire meaning system of a single group. Instead, meaning systems are 'differentially distributed' with people having internalized 'varying mixes of overlapping and contrasting' meaning components, which are autonomous and inter-dependent to different degrees, and stem from the disparate meaning systems espoused by a range of referential communities (Kronenfeld 2011: 570).

These inter-subjective meanings are socially mediated through communication and interaction with others, and pegged by a person's position of reference (Anderson 2008). By observing and participating in what Erving Goffman (1983) called an 'interaction order', group members are embedded in ongoing social relations and develop a 'social memory', which classifies beliefs and knowledge structures, behaviours and communication in meaningful ways (Fine

and Hallett 2014: 3), and allows individuals to comprehend and organize experiences (Quinn 2005: 2). Accordingly, a person's subjective meaning structures and ways of making meaning are socially derived, and not simply the achievement of isolated individuals acting alone (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009, Anderson 2008, Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991). Hence, inter-subjectivity is about the ways, in which we share meaning with others, as well as produce meaning that lies along 'a continuum of mutual intelligibility' (Anderson 2008: 468). It is for that reason that inter-subjectivity, whether tacit or explicit, can be found in everyday talk (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Quinn 2005).

The centrality of inter-subjectivity

As a result, inter-subjectivity is ubiquitous and plays a critical role, for example, in any social, economic, cultural, contractual or political exchange, in external and internal institutional collaboration, in horizontal and vertical relationships, in conducting research, or in constructing identities, roles and typifications – to name just a few arenas in which people relate, work or communicate with each other (see Gillespie and Corniche 2009: 20-21). Inter-subjectivity is an important linchpin in all exchanges and relationships because shared meaning structures evoke similar understandings of particular situations (Weber and Dacin 2011). Such corresponding perspectives

motivate individuals to act in resembling ways, and thereby propel local practices and customs (Bevir and Rhodes 2010).   In essence, groups of people act out shared, or at least similar, subjectivities, which produce specific practices.   These practices have a particular meaning attached to them and manifest as locally customary ways of how 'to go about things' (Norton 2014: 13).

For example, the political scientists Bevir and Rhodes (2010) demonstrate how this notion of 'from-intersubjective-meaning-to-action-to-practice' generates public administrative conventions.   The scholars' ethnographic study shows how the inter-subjective meaning-making of individual British ministers and civil servants generated 'the vast array of meaningful actions', which in turn 'coalesced into contingent, shifting, and contested practices' that manifested as the Blairite Labour Government's characteristic public administration from 2001 to 2005 (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: 107, 198).

In some cases, inter-subjective meanings become institutionalized, that is they become socially entrenched to the point that they are stable social arrangements and widely recognized practices, which are 'practically taken for granted as lawful', such as marriage (Meyer et al., 1994: 10).   Institutions delineate what is considered conventional, and are accompanied by sanctions to 'maintain the social order and

avoid digression' (Overgaard and Zhavi 2009: 16). Over time, institutions come to appear inevitable and achieve an objective reality, thereby subjecting human activity to a certain degree of control (see Overgaard and Zhavi 2009: 16).

For example, in a Taiwanese Buddhist organisation, the shared meaning structures of the Buddhist members ended up institutionalizing a collective emphasis on 'belonging to one large family' and 'respecting organisational hierarchy' (Shen and Midgley 2014). This social practice was institutionalized to such an extent that it had become impossible for members to raise problems for fear of being seen as disrespecting the organisational hierarchy (see Shen and Midgley 2014: 3). The control exercised by this institution was so omnipresent that the action researchers, who had been called in to help the organisation, could not proceed with ordinary action research approaches, given that most action research methodologies require the participants to begin by identifying problematic issues (see Shen and Midgley 2014: 3). To circumvent this entrenched institution, the action researchers had to reframe the act of problem exploration as a co-operative endeavor along Buddhist concepts, such as the 'eightfold noble path' and 'cause-condition-effect', and ended up developing a Buddhist system methodology (Shen and Midgley 2014).

However, as Berger and Luckman (1966/1991: 78) have reminded us, 'the paradox that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product' distracts from the fact that at the origin of every institution, local practice and similar action lays malleable inter-subjectivity. Indeed, it makes inter-subjectivity 'the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist' (Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991: 27). It enables inter-subjectivity to give rise to local practices, taken-for-granted institutions and social realities, which transcend individual meanings, motives and actions (see Overgaard and Zhavi 2009: 9-14). Hence, 'inter-subjectivity is a core concept for the social sciences in general and understanding social behaviour in particular' (Gillespie and Corniche 2009: 19, Schütz 1932/1967).

Researching inter-subjective meaning

Having discussed the centrality of inter-subjective meanings to the social world, the question begs as to how, exactly, are they studied and assessed within the context of specific social entities, such as organisations? In this regard, the 'second wave' of cognitive-cultural strands within general management theory and neo-institutional theory is of particular interest because it is one of the principal outlets for contemporary research into shared meaning-making in organisations (see Maitlis and Christianson 2014 and Weber and Dacin 2011 for a

detailed overview of the 'second wave').[11]   The intellectual

foundation, which underpins the 'second wave', was laid in the late

80s and early 90s through the works of organisational theorists,

including amongst others Edgar Schein (1992), Karl Weick (1995),

Richard Scott (1995), Friedland and Alford (1991), Paul DiMaggio

and Walter Powell (1991), and cultural sociologist Ann Swidler

(1986).   Most of these seminal scholars were influenced by Berger

and Luckmann's (1966/1991) dissemination and elaboration of

Schütz's (1932/1967) ideas in the form of the *Sociology of Knowledge*

(see Weber and Dacin 2011, Bell 2008).

The 'second wave' has produced compelling studies into inter-

subjective meaning-making in the context of organisations (see

Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Weber and Dacin 2011). In contrast to

earlier organisational research, the 'second wave' increasingly

emphasizes active individuals and their cultural constructions based

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[11] Of course, earlier organizational research has also looked at meaning-making in organizations. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, including economics (e.g. Stiglitz 1987), business (e.g. Grant 1996), sociology (e.g. Coopey 1995) as well as consultants and practising managers (e.g. Ciborra et al. 1995) have examined the meaning-making and learning of, and within, organizations (see Weber and Dacin 2011 and Easterby-Smith et al. 1999 for historical overviews). Inevitably, the field became conceptually fragmented and inspired literatures along divergent tracks. On the one hand, it gave rise to the literature on *organizational learning*, which specialized in detached observation and analysis of the nature and processes involved in meaning-making and learning inside organizations (e.g. Argyris and Schön 1978).   On the other hand, the literature on the *learning organization* developed, which focused on developing normative models for creating new meaning and improving learning processes (e.g. Dixon 1994, Senge 1990). Irrespective of their diverse trajectories, most early organizational research emphasized rational thought (Easterby-Smith et al.1999), and viewed culture as a distinct object of study, assuming cultural persistence and coherence, as well as constraints on human thought and action (Weber and Dacin 2011).

on complex, dissonant and multiple meaning systems. In these studies, shared meaning systems are conceptualized as cultures (Strauss and Quinn 1997), with culture being theorized less as a 'tightly interlocked "web of meaning" and more as a reservoir of relatively small and independent "bits of meaning"', which include 'widely recognized identities, frames, roles, stories, scripts, justifications and moralities' (Weber and Dacin 2011: 289, Kronenfeld 2011). Individuals are seen as cultural entrepreneurs (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001) or bricoleurs (Baker and Nelson 2005, Rao et al. 2005) who draw 'bits of meaning' from the reservoir of shared meaning in order to make meaning at the individual actor level (Weber and Dacin 2011: 289). Organisations are conceptualized as social organisms that rally and propel shared meaning within a specific context (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2006). The emphasis of the 'second wave' is on understanding how people in organisations acquire and utilize various 'bits of meaning' and thereby shape practices, institutions and organisational outcomes (see Weber and Dacin 2011: 289).

Sensemaking as a form of inter-subjective meaning-making
The most influential concept that 'second wave' scholars build upon in studying inter-subjective meaning-making in organisations, is Weick's (1995) theory on sensemaking. Sensemaking is about the

processes by which people in organisations 'work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations', and thereby cause a crisis (Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 57). Essentially, when facing new, uncertain or ambiguous situations, individuals in organisations attempt to 'make sense' of what is going on by extracting and interpreting cues from their environment (Weick 1995). Sensemaking encapsulates interpretation as a sub-category, and 'involves the active authoring of events and frameworks for understanding' (Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 58). Weick's (1995: 17) theory identifies seven properties of framing new or puzzling experiences as meaningful: (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) socially constructed, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. The seven properties of sensemaking are intended to guide an inquiry into 'what sensemaking is, how it works, and where it can fail' (Weick 1995: 18). It thus makes an important contribution to better understanding the theoretical characteristics of the social psychological processes by which organizing occurs (Mills 2008).

Research on sensemaking is highly relevant to this study's inquiry into inter-subjective meaning-making because sensemaking theory is based on the premise that individuals play a part in constructing the

very situations and events they seek to understand and respond to (Sutcliffe 2013), and thereby enact the practices that constitute the environment (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005). However, the concept of inter-subjective meaning-making, as employed by this thesis, goes beyond sensemaking. The reason for that lies in the relatively narrow definition of sensemaking as 'heightened meaning-making' of surprising or confusing situations, which leads people to perceive a dissonance between their experiences and their expectations (see Weick 1993: 633). This thesis conceptualizes inter-subjective meaning-making as *incorporating* sensemaking, thus allowing for the fact that while some public administrators may be surprised or confused by change initiatives, however, others make meaning of reform by effortlessly integrating it into existing meaning systems.

Of particular interest among the empirical work on sensemaking, is research on how people make sense within organisations (e.g. Cornelissen 2012, Clark and Geppert 2011), and how sensemaking impacts on key organisational processes, such as strategic change (e.g. Rerup and Feldman 2011, Gioia and Thomas 1996), and organisational learning (e.g. Catrino and Patriotta 2013, Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe and Weick 2009) (cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 58). For these studies, the notions of *sensegiving* and

sensebreaking are fundamental. According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991: 442), *sensegiving* is defined as 'the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred re-definition of organisational reality'. The majority of studies into *sensegiving* explore how organisational leaders strategically influence the sensemaking of organisational actors by means of symbols, images and other tactics (e.g. Maitlis and Lawrence 2007, Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991). Recognizing that *sensegiving* is not exclusively a top-down process, a handful of studies look at the adaptation or resistance strategies of those receiving *sensegiving* (e.g. Kellogg 2011, Sonnenshein 2010, Labianca et al. 2000), and of those outside of organisational boundaries (e.g. Maitlis and Lawrence 2007).

The other side of the coin is *sensebreaking*, whereby established shared meaning is broken down or even destroyed (see Pratt 2000: 464, cited inMaitlis and Christianson 2014: 69). *Sensebreaking* often precedes *sensegiving*, thus creating a meaning void, which can then be filled with new meaning (Pratt 2000). In most of the studies, the phenomena of *sensegiving* and *sensebreaking* are predominantly explored from the vantage point of managers and leaders (e.g. Mantere, Schildt and Sillince 2012, Pratt 2000). Sensemaking scholars themselves highlight that there is an opportunity, if not a

need, for more research into *sensegiving* and *sensebreaking* of, and between, organisational members (see Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 69).

Sensemaking in the advent of change

There are a number of studies examining sensemaking processes based on organisational leaders committing to a new vision and implementing change initiatives accordingly (Ravasi and Schultz 2006, Dunford and Jones 2000). These studies have repeatedly found that leaders engage in *sensebreaking* by challenging the existing conditions, and subsequently employ *sensegiving* by re-shaping collective meaning structures.

For example, Balagon (2006, 2003) shows how the CEO's major reform initiative of a UK utility company uprooted existing inter-subjective understandings of middle managers, and introduced process re-design, new working practices and redundancies (cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 77). In studies such as this, the explanatory focus is on predominantly organisational meaning structures as opposed to, for example, cultural or religious meaning structures. Here, sensemaking is examined in its focus on cues from, for instance, existing industry discourses (e.g. Maitlis and Lawrence 2007), inadequate organisational performance (e.g. Sonnenshein 2010), or

disparities between the organisation's image and reputation (Corley and Gioia 2004, cited in Matils and Christianson 2014: 97). However, the fact that the social, cultural, religious, economic and political forces in the sensemaking of organisational members remain, as Maitlis and Christianson (2014: 98) put it, 'quite overlooked, or certainly underplayed', offers an opportunity for this thesis to contribute to a significant gap in the existing body of knowledge.

An additional reason, for why further research into the role and interplay of non-organisational meaning structures in the advent of change may be of value, has to do with the ongoing debate among sensemaking scholars as to whether people in organisations construct a dominant shared narrative (see Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 82). Sonnenshein's (2010) study highlights how employees use the principal management narrative only as one reservoir of meaning, in addition to other reservoirs of meaning, in order to construct meaning at the individual level that differs from the dominant management narrative. Along the same line, Kellogg's (2011) research showcases how employees make use of meaning structures from outside their organisation to dominate and resist politics within the organisation. Given these insights, scholars call for more in-depth research into the various meaning-making of individual employees, and the conditions

by which they make meaning disparately (e.g. see Sonnenshein 2010: 503).

While the sensemaking studies described above mainly focus on how organisational power-holders influence the meaning-making of others, there is also a body of work on how 'mutually co-constituted' sensemaking unfolds between individuals in making meaning of change (Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 78). These studies look at how people in organisations construct inter-subjective meaning differently from others within the same organisation (e.g. Kaplan 2011, Brown et al. 2008, Brown 2004).

At first glance, this seems highly relevant to this study's focus on the shared meaning-making of different groups. However, upon a closer look, the explanatory focus is on who gets involved in forging sensemaking (e.g. Maitlis 2005), who impacts significantly on the process (e.g. Beck and Plowman 2009), what assorted cultural materials become prominent (Kaplan 2011), and what are the resources used, including narratives, metaphors and situated practice (e.g. Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Abolafia 2010, Weber and Glynn 2006). Interestingly, these studies have found that formal authority is only one aspect among many in the power struggle of competing inter-subjective meaning structures in organisations (e.g. Kellogg 2011,

Sonnenshein 2010, Brown et al. 2008). Indeed, as Maitlis and Christianson (see 2014: 98) observe, individuals and groups with scant formal power can nevertheless make a significant impact on which inter-subjective meaning structures dominate within the organisation.

Other sensemaking studies, which examine the disparate meaning-making of organisational members when confronted with change, focus on who holds what pieces of information, and how it all comes together to form new shared meaning structures (Stigliani and Ravasi 2012, Weick et al. 2005). Examining what they call *distributed sensemaking,* these studies conclude that, in spite of having internalized different meanings, individual employees are able to jointly construct, or collectively induce (Weick et al. 2005), new meanings through collaborative engagement. In particular, a shared identity (Kendra and Wachtendorf 2006), the physical environment (Whiteman and Cooper 2011), and material artefacts (Stigliani and Ravasi 2012) are found to be important resources for storing, making and distributing sense and meaning between group members who hold disparate views (cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 103).

Sensemaking as a catalyst for change

Having examined the literature on how sensemaking in organisations is accomplished *following* organisational change, let us turn our attention to how sensemaking *generates* organisational change, such as strategic transformation (e.g. Rerup and Feldman 2011, Gioia and Thomas 1996), and organisational learning (e.g. Catrino and Patriotta 2013, Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe and Weick 2009) (cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 58). Studies on how sensemaking produces strategic transformation are based on the premise that organisational leaders have successfully convinced employees of the need for change (e.g. Corley and Gioia 2004, Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991). Through inter-subjective negotiations, organisational members draw on identity accounts and organisational meaning systems, with a particular emphasis on power structures, in order to embed new ways of thinking and acting (Helms Mills 2003). Yu et al.'s (2005) study of a senior team in a large health care provider showed that when sensemaking fails, it has the potential to inhibit the change initiative and, as a result, prevent organisational transformation (cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 90).

Studies that look at how sensemaking generates organisational learning examine the meaning-making of errors at the level of individuals (e.g. Catino and Patriotta 2013), and teams (e.g. Kayes

2004, cited in Matilis and Christianson 2014: 91). Research within this context highlights the importance of creating opportunities for sensemaking in order to acquire new knowledge and skills (e.g. Haas 2006), and achieve innovation (e.g. Ravasi and Turati 2005, cited in Matilis and Christianson 2014: 91).

Irrespective of whether the goal is strategic transformation or organisational learning, studies into how sensemaking produces any type of organisational change are highly pertinent to this thesis. They offer empirical evidence for the fact that the employees' ongoing reinterpretation of 'the way we go about things' redefines the same institutionalized practice, and may even introduce a new practice and abolish the old one (see Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 104-105). Hence, this body of work affirms the important role that sensemaking specifically, and meaning-making generally, play in driving institutional change. It thus reiterates the imperative of paying attention to how people make meaning in organisations so that change initiatives achieve the desired results.

However, while these studies recognize the critical impact of sensemaking on producing organisational change and embedding new practices, they do not explore in depth the various meaning-making of *different factions of ordinary organisational members*, and how that

contributes to the change process. Therefore, not only organisational scholars (e.g. Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Sonnenshein 2010, Elsbach et al. 2005), but also neo-institutional scholars (e.g. Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012) and social psychologists (e.g. Gillespie and Cornish 2009) have called for more research into the meaning-making at group level, and its role in embedding 'a new way of going about things'.

The degree of free will in constructing inter-subjective meaning

When discussing the ways in which people, in fact, change practices by creating new or different meaning structures, the old question resurfaces as to how much choice actors have vis-à-vis institutional constraint. Inevitably, as organisational management scholars Klaus Weber and Tina Dacin (2011: 291) point out, theories allowing for people's choice in constructing meaning bring to the foreground the 'unresolved' question: to what extent are individuals able to make their own decisions in forging meaning while at the same time being compelled by chronically repeated, formal and informal rules?

The 'paradox of embedded agency' has been the much-debated subject of the longstanding 'structure-agency' discussion (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Over the last few decades, scholars across disciplines have offered nuanced theories that combine structure and

agency as mutually constitutive, such as Gidden's (1984) influential structuration theory and Bordieu's (1977) seminal concept of 'habitus', yet attribute different degrees of free will to actors who are embedded in institutions. The balancing act is precarious: Emphasizing structure over actors prioritizes causally deterministic models wherein institutional constraints automatically frustrate agency (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, Friedland and Alford 1991, Sewell 1992). On the other hand, privileging agency over structures risks overlooking the constraints that taken-for-granted institutions exert on actors, as well as the unintended ramifications of action in reproducing institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, Friedland and Alford 1991, Sewell 1992).

Most recently, neo-institutional scholars have sought to reconcile this dilemma by producing the concept of institutional logics (e. g. Friedland and Alford 1991, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Skelcher and Smith 2013, Everitt and Levinson 2014). The basic tenet is that several alternative institutional logics are available to human actors within an organisational entity. Different logics inform varied situational norms of interaction, which give individuals a degree of choice by enabling them to change, for example, from a competitive market logic to a charitable volunteer logic as they act in different situations (see Weber and Dacin 2011: 291). Institutional

logics are abstract entities, sustaining normative frames, identities and discourses (see Skelcher and Smith 2013: 4). They, however, become visible through the ways in which actors employ and manipulate them in their social relations (see Skelcher and Smith 2013: 4).

While this theory situates human actors within particular logics, it focuses attention on the relationship between sectoral logics at macro-level, and the way they contest and accommodate each other through people's interpretation (see Skelcher and Smith 2013: 5). Consequently, the explanatory emphasis is more on how actors shape and impact on logics, as opposed to how logics impact on the subjectivities of actors, which this thesis is concerned with. The relevance of institutional logics to understanding people's inter-subjective meaning-making within organisations is further hampered by the fact that 'only a subset of the categorical elements of an institutional logic affects the cognition of actors at any moment in time and place' (Thornton et al. 2012: 89). In other words, in real life, no human being can mentally process and apply an institutional logic in its entirety at any one point in time and place.

Inter-subjective meaning is not only social but also cognitive
The above sections have reviewed the literature on sensemaking with a view to understand how inter-subjective meaning-making is

researched within the context of organisations. Yet, one aspect emerges as striking: The hitherto discussed research exclusively approaches meaning-making as a process of social construction - in spite of the cognitive origin of subjective meaning in human consciousness. The social constructivist enquiries are based on the belief that inter-subjective meaning-making happens in the discourses and interactions between people (e.g. Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Abolafia 2010, Brown et al. 2008, Cornelissen 2005, Weber and Glynn 2006), and unfolds in the 'conversational and social practices (methods) through which the members of a society socially construct a sense of shared meanings' (Gephart 1993: 1469, cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 95). Accordingly, the overriding objective of a social constructivist approach is to elucidate how shared narratives and local practices are produced. Some of the authors of these studies even go as far as to 'explicitly deny that cognition is a property of individuals', and thus *only* conceptualize it as a social process (Ross and Medin 2011: 359).

This proposition fails to resonate with modern educational theories, which are concerned with understanding the intricacies of knowledge construction. Here, of particular interest to this thesis are educational theories within the context of non-formal adult education (Taylor 2012a, Taylor and Neill 2008, Falk and Dierking 2000) and free

choice learning (Boyer and Roth 2005, Skanavis et al 2005) (cited in Yelich Binieki 2015: 1-2).[12]   Much can be learned from educationalist insights into how adult learners construct knowledge following the introduction of new, wanted and unwanted concepts, as is the case in public administrative reform (Boyer and Roth 2005, Felix 2005). The adult educator Yelich Biniecki (2015: 6) suggests that, instead of conceptualizing the social and individual in binary opposition, 'the challenge is to understand how learners perceive knowledge construction within the continuum of the individual and the social'.

Learners see new concepts through the lens of their previous experiences, and thereby relate a current learning situation to past learning experiences (Bruner 1990, Vygotsky 1978, Piaget 1972, Dewey 1938) (cited in Yelich Binieki 2015: 6-7). In this process, the individual may make meaning cognitively (Piaget 1972), or construct meaning socially with others (Vygotsky 1978), switch between or blend together the two approaches (Felix 2005), or employ them sequentially (Phillips 2005) (cited in Yelich Binieki 2015: 5). Consequently, educational theorists maintain that constructing knowledge and meaning is both a cognitive as well as a socially

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[12] Non-formal adult education and free-choice learning are particularly analogous to public administrative reform settings because they are characterized by the actor having choice and control in internalizing new concepts (Falk and Dierking 2000). In addition, just like in public administrative reform, the actor is confronted with new concepts in multidirectional and multi-sourced ways (Heimlich and Horr 2010).

constructed procedure (Yelich Binieki 2015, Taylor 2012a, Felix 2005).

In educational and learning research, conceptualizing knowledge construction as a socio-cognitive process is founded on the notion of situated cognition (Merriam and Bierema 2014). Advocates of situated cognition posit that an individual's cognitive or mental processes need to be understood in their interactions with the person's social surrounding (Merriam and Bierema 2014, Lant 2002, Lave and Wenger 1991, Cook and Brown 1999). Situated cognition places the emphasis on people socially learning together through several, intersecting communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Taylor et al. 2012b), but also recognizes that learners cognitively 'negotiate the intersections of different contexts for learning' (Flannery and Hayes 2001: 39).

The basic premise of situated cognition is that aspects of a situation conjure up certain schemata, while schemata make certain aspects of the situation salient (Merriam and Bierema 2014, Elsbach et al. 2005). Schemata are defined as simplified, relatively persistent mental knowledge structures, which identify concepts or objects and describe causal relationships (Elsbach et al. 2005, Strauss and Quinn 1997). The interaction of schemata with social context generates momentary

perceptual frames, which in turn determine a person's meaning-making and learning and, ultimately, actions (Merriam and Bierema 2014, Elsbach et al. 2005).

Educational scholars highlight that the complexities of situated cognition and socio-cognitive knowledge construction remain less studied for non-formal adult learners (Yelich Biniecki 2015, Merriam and Bierema 2014). Educational theorists particularly lament the lack of research from the participant's perspective (Taylor 2012b, Merriam and Bierema 2014, Yelich Biniecki 2015). Substantiating such concern with empirical evidence, Prins' (2011) study of Salvadoran adult learners' cultural model of education demonstrates the underexplored potential of studying the participant's perspective on knowledge construction. Her study found that the participant lenses offer insight into how learners 'reframe educational activities through their own cultural lens' in ways educators and researchers may not anticipate (Prins 2011: 1503).

Just like modern educational scholars, cognitive organisational theorists also embrace and build on the notion of situated cognition. Cognitive organisational scholars offer evidence that the interplay between schemata and organisational context is a critical factor in giving meaning to organisational life (Carson et al. 2003, Boland et al.

2001, Heracleous and Barrett 2001, Labianca et al. 2000).   Their inquiries shed light on how new schemata are formed in organisations (Bingham and Kahl 2013), how existing organisational schemata are changed (Bartunek et al. 2006, cited in Maitlis and Christianson 2014: 95), how schemata and contextual factors affect organisational decision-making (Sharma 2000, Schminke et al. 1997, Thomas and McDaniel 1990), and how cognitive processes relate to organisational performance outcomes (Boland et al. 2001, Tenbrunsel et al. 2000, Thomas et al. 1991).   These studies offer fascinating insights into the role of cognition in perceptual processes and strategic decision making (e.g. Bingham and Kahl 2013, Thomas and McDaniel 1990), and in framing organisational activities and outcomes (e.g. Madsen and Desai 2010, Baker and Nelson 2005, Thomas et al. 1991).

Notwithstanding the evidence on the interplay between cognition and organisational context, cognitive organisational scholars echo educational theorists in bemoaning a lack of research into the intricacies of such interaction (Elsbach et al. 2005).   Hence, Elsbach et al. (2005: 424) call for more research into the particularities of the interplay between schemata and organisational contexts so that it 'may help organisations and their managers to build, sustain, and manage desired situated cognitions (and avoid undesired situated cognition)'. Accordingly, in their research project, Elsbach et al. (2005) examine

empirical case studies of situated cognition in organisations spanning 15 years. On the basis of these case studies, Elsbach et al. (2005) develop an illustrative framework that shows how some forms of cognitive schemata (e.g. rule schemata, event schemata, person schemata) interact with specific contexts (e.g. physical contexts, institutional contexts, group dynamics) during sensemaking processes in order to produce momentary situated cognitions, such as a distinctive self-perception or the understanding of a problem

While cognitive organisational studies are no doubt highly productive, it is noteworthy that they are rooted in empirical case studies of western organisations, and thus based on western normative frameworks (e.g. Bingham and Kahl 2013, Elsbach et al. 2005, Sharma 2000, Boland et al 2001). Cognitive studies into meaning-making that take a more nuanced approach to western and non-western organisations can be found in the literature on hybridity, which was initiated by the seminal work of Horni Bhabha (1994). Focusing on post-colonial developments, hybridization research examines the fusion of colonial legacy and local frameworks of meaning with western management practices in shaping contemporary knowledge, identities and meaningful practices in organisations (Yousfi 2013, Amoamo 2011, Frenkel and Shenhav 2006). For example, Yousfi's (2013) study examines how the managers of the

company Poulina in Tunisia reinterpreted through their local cultural framework of meaning the newly introduced US management model while simultaneously disassociating themselves from the French colonial organisational model.

Similarly to sensemaking studies, cognitive organisational inquiries as well as hybridity studies also tend to conduct research at the level of organisations and institutions rather than at the level of groups or individuals. Hence, most of these cognitive studies base their findings on fieldwork with managers and executive teams (e.g. Bingham and Kahl 2013, Yousfi 2013, Amoamo 2011), who are conceptualized as institutional entrepreneurs with power and resources (e.g. Baker and Nelson 2005, Maguire et al. 2004). As Bingham and Eisenhardt (2011) explain, an organisation's executive team is thought to represent the majority of the organisation's membership and hold most of its collective understanding. As a result, cognitive processes at group-level within organisations, and the conditions by which various groups of employees make meaning differently, is an area that offers significant opportunities for further research.

Based on its analysis of the existing literature, social constructivist and cognitive approaches to meaning-making in organisations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be usefully joined-up. While

it is certainly understood that inter-subjective meaning 'exists between and not inside the minds of actors' (Carstensen 2011: 152), however, subjective meaning originates in a person's consciousness and 'can only be evoked in a person' (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 20). In other words, the socially shared knowledge structures that give meaning to experiences are cognitively embedded inside an individual's head (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 122). Yet shared meaning manifests, and becomes observable, outside of a person in social discourses, interaction and 'the way we do things' (Carstensen 2011). Consequently, a holistic empirical investigation into meaning-making ought to account not only for the social constructivist processes by which meaning is inter-subjectively imparted and observed, but also for the cognitive processes by which meaning is subjectively created, and motivates action (Yelich Biniecki 2015, Flannery and Hayes 2001).

A cognitive approach to inter-subjective meaning

As cognitive anthropologists (e.g. Kronenfeld et al. 2011), modern educational theorists (e.g. Yelich Binieki 2015, Taylor 2012, Prins 2011) and cognitive organisational scholars (e.g. Bingham and Kahl 2013, Elsbach et al. 2005) have established, inter-subjective meaning cannot be understood without also grasping the mental processes involved. To that end, this thesis considers of particular potency

Strauss and Quinn's (1997) cognitive theory of cultural meaning. In their theory, the cognitive anthropologists Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn (1997) explicate in detail the ways in which human beings form socially derived knowledge structures, or schemata, in their minds, and employ these to construct shared meaning of the world. By considering subjective cognition in its interplay with the inter-subjective social world, Strauss and Quinn (1997) fully embrace the concept of situated cognition. Herewith, Strauss and Quinn have, together with Roy D'Andrade (1995), Kronenfeld (2011), Bennardo (2011) and other prominent 'cultural model' thinkers, straddled the canyon between anthropology and psychology.

Schemata as networks

Adopting the notion of situated cognition, Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory posits that schemata, or knowledge structures, are held internally, and interact with the external world in order to produce meaning of a particular situation. Drawing on neural network theory, or *connectionism* (Rumelhart et al. 1986), Strauss and Quinn's (1997) propose that the structures of knowledge inside a person's head ought to be conceptualized as networks of processing units. According to Strauss and Quinn (1997), individual processing units function like neurons and 'fire off' signals to other units according to specific, learned patterns of association. The exciting or inhibiting signal that

each processing unit passes on to another one has a weight of association, which represents the intensity and number of times this particular interaction between the two processing units has been repeated, or learned (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 51-54). Due to their weights of association, certain groups of processing units are strongly interconnected and constitute a network. Depending on the stimulus received, all the units that respond to the stimulus will in turn activate all the other units in the network, to which they are strongly linked by associations learned from past experiences. The chain reaction continues in this way until the network has processed the information holistically and arrives at a response (Strauss and Quinn 1997).

Strauss and Quinn (1997) theorize that those units, which tend to activate together as a network, trigger other interlinked networks of strongly connected processing units. In *connectionism*, such whole networks of often repeated, or well-learned, associations constitute schemata. A cognitive schema denotes a learned knowledge structure, which organizes information and the relationships between them and thereupon imbues experiences with meaning. Strauss and Quinn (1997) argue that schemata are sustained and become activated under conditions relevant to each schema. The anthropologists illustrate this concept with an example of a widely shared schema, which stipulates that it is the duty of a host to offer guests a drink (see Strauss and

Quinn 1997: 52). Situation-specific characteristics, such as the arrival of a guest, activate the well-learned patterns of interaction within, and among, the networks of units, which then sets in motion the socially appropriate behavior of offering the guests a drink (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 52).

Importantly, conceptualizing schemata as whole interlinked networks of units implies that schemata are highly sensitive to the context of the external world (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 52). Depending on the details of the situation or information available, the connection weights change, and thus impact on which units within the network will be activated. To stick with Strauss and Quinn's (1997: 52) example, depending on whether we receive a child or an adult, a male or a female visitor, or whether it is a morning, afternoon or evening visit, different units within the schema's network will be activated. Therefore, the particularities of the context will determine how we act out our schema of offering drinks to our guests, and thereby lead to different possible behavioral outcomes. For example, if it is an elderly woman who visits us in the morning, we might offer a cup of tea to this particular visitor. Yet if our friends are visiting in the evening, the same schema will activate slightly different units, which might well lead to us offering this group of visitors a six-pack of beer.

Hence, the meaning of any one situation is contingent on the particular units that were activated in the network of learned associations. This point is of enormous significance because it implies that the knowledge structures, or schemata, by which we make meaning, are 'flexibly adaptive rather than rigidly repetitive' (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 53). A situation may activate different parts of a schema's network, and thus cause disparate meaning-making and subsequent behaviour, without the basic network structure changing (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 53-54).

The relative stability of schemata

In this model, new bits of knowledge do not change the entire network or completely re-route 'the pathways through which activation spreads until a particular response is evoked' (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 90). Instead, new knowledge involves changing connection weights that modify the ways by which other units will activate, which in turn will impact on the selection of units that will become operative within the network (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 53). Hence, new knowledge may mean some adjustment to the patterns and intensity of processing units within a particular network, yet it cannot wholly destroy entire networks that have been learned over time (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 90).

The implication is that schemata are relatively stable cognitive networks because they are well learned and become engraved over time, yet they are not etched in stone and the processing units within the networks can be modified to achieve slightly different responses and behavioural outcomes (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 90). Consequently, schemata are neither static and set in concrete, nor are they constantly revised, erased or forever changing (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 53-54).

Interestingly, neuro-scientists Salzman and Fusi (2010) provide biological evidence for Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory regarding the relative stability of schemata. In their study on the human nervous system, Salzman and Fusi (2010) find that cognitive knowledge structures are not exclusively stored through logic, but inextricably entangled with the networks in an emotional part of the brain - the amygdala. While more research is still needed, Salzman and Fusi (2010) confirm that these partly emotional networks are a critical feature of adaptive cognitive behavior. With the amygdala not being readily susceptible to logical analysis and rational arguments, schemata that are strongly linked with emotions are particularly lasting, even when the person is confronted with contradictory experiences (Strauss and Quinn 1997, Salzman and Fusi 2010). This

is, for example, why some people hold on to prejudices even in the absence of good reason.

The sharedness of schemata

Even though Strauss and Quinn conceptualize the cognitive processes happening inside an individual's head, as anthropologists they are ultimately interested in those knowledge structures that are shared by groups of people (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 122-134). The scholars posit that while people hold some schemata that are unique to one person alone, they also hold other schemata that are shared with many people. Personal schemata emerge from 'idiosyncratic experience', while shared schemata are the result of different kinds of common experiences and socialization, as previously explained in the section on the sociality of subjectivity (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 122).

When it comes to shared schemata, we have, at one extreme, schemata that are common to millions of people, who, for example, have grown up in the same nation state, believe in the same world religion, have been affected by comparable historical or political event, or have been subjected to similar socialization practices. At the other extreme, we can find schemata that are shared only by a small group of individuals with self-conscious subcultures, such as families, sport clubs or work teams (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 122).

Given that schemata are relatively stable networks, those people carrying a similar schema *and* living in the same context are likely to make analogous meaning of a situation. *Importantly, a shared cognitive network is not only shared in its configuration but also with regard to how it interacts with the social world, and the interpretations evoked* (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 7). In other words, producing shared meaning of a situation depends on both a similar internal schema *and* the same situational context. Hence, Strauss and Quinn (1997: 7) define shared meaning not as 'some free-floating abstract entity' but as 'regular occurrences in the humanly created world, in the schemata people share as a result of these, and in the interactions between these schemata and this world'.

Maeder's (2007) study of the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in Switzerland in the 1990s, for instance, brought to light the regularities of the interaction between a widely-held internal schema and the outside world. Maeder (2007) found that the individualistic and competitive philosophy of the managerial NPM reforms activated the Swiss public administrators' shared schema on the importance of solidarity, fellowship and having each other's back. The conflict between their internalized knowledge structure on solidarity and the inconsonant change initiative led the Swiss public

administrators concurrently to make meaning of the NPM reforms as 'chicanery' (Maeder 2007: 66). If we seek to explain this phenomenon in connectionist terms, we could conceptualize it as follows: the Swiss government employees shared similar cognitive networks of processing units, with comparable patterns and weights of associations, which were responsible for the knowledge structure on solidarity. Accordingly, the shared schema on solidarity was activated by the situational context - the NPM reform - in resembling ways. This in turn led the Swiss public administrators to react in a similar manner, and ultimately resulted in them collectively thwarting the change initiative (Maeder 2007).

Importantly, Strauss and Quinn (1997) argue, the fact that people have similar schemata is not contingent on those individuals having had the *exact* same experience. As long as the general pattern of the experience is equivalent, people will, to some degree, develop resembling cognitive networks that enable them to arrive at corresponding understandings, have comparable emotional reactions, and display similar behaviors (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 123).

For example, following the events described in the anecdote at the beginning of this thesis, the author relayed Mr Hamed's vision for a customer-centric reform model to her team, which consisted, amongst

others, of public administrators from the Philippines, the United Kingdom and Kenya. Even though the Filipino, British and Kenyan public administrators certainly have not had the same experiences in the past, they shared a schema on the value of democratic principles, in contrast to Abu Dhabi's Bedouin-Arabs. When drafting the reform plan for Abu Dhabi Government, the meaning-making of the Filipino, British and Kenyan public administrators echoed that of the author, and was marked by a similar compulsion to design the reform as if it was intended for a democratic government. Effectively, the Filipino, British and Kenyan employees have had similar *patterns* of experiences, which in one form or another led them to form knowledge structures that considered it important for public service users to hold their public service providers to account and influence political decisions behind public service provision. For that reason, the Filipino, British and Kenyan employees' meaning-making on democratic values was very similar, and gave rise to comparable attitudes, interpretations and expectations regarding a customer-centric reform. Conversely, when individuals conflictingly make meaning of the same event, Strauss and Quinn (see 1997: 123) explain, we can conclude that their knowledge structures are informed by different patterns of past experiences, which in turn leads to disparate interpretations, feelings, motivations and saliences.

The durability and motivational force of schemata

A particular strength of Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory is that it goes beyond simply seeking to document the existence of shared meaning. In addition, it also theorizes on why people effortlessly integrate certain novel understandings into their knowledge structures, when they find it impossible to instill other bits of knowledge durably – even if they have been exposed to comprehensive teaching. Following on from that, Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory also attends to the reasons for why, even when people have managed to internalize new bits of knowledge, it is not guaranteed that they are motivated to enact them. In explaining these phenomena, Strauss and Quinn (1997: 81-101) demonstrate that the activation of schemata is linked to processes that affect their durability and motivational force. Essentially, schemata are linked with particular processes, such as emotional arousal or social evaluation, which tenaciously engrain some beliefs, or not, and inhibit or stifle certain behaviours (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 89-101).

For example, as scholars Sidani and Thornberry (2009: 4) explain, Bedouin-Arabs learn from childhood that obedience to authority figures is all-important, irrespective of whether the authority is 'rationally founded' or not. Hence, Abu Dhabi's Bedouin-Arabs are instilled with abhorrent shame when critically questioning an

authority figure, while being socialized to feel sensations of honour and pride when obeying, submitting and complying to their fathers, bosses, imams, sheiks or teachers (see Sidani and Thornberry 2009: 41). The emotional arousal of shame and pride has contributed to embedding a schema of yielding to authority so durably in Abu Dhabi Government's Bedouin employees that it becomes virtually impossible to unlearn or significantly change this schema later in life. This is regardless of how much these public administrators are taught the art of respectfully debating with authority figures, let alone challenging those with authority who violate rules (see Sidani and Thornberry 2009: 41).

Despite the particular durability of the schema on authority, however, the process of social disapproval can affect the motivation of the Bedouin public administrators to enact that particular schema in public (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 94-95). For example, if an eminent Western trainer, especially one who is much respected, endorsed and heralded by Abu Dhabi's leadership, attempted to teach Bedouin-Arabic public administrators how to challenge authority, it would not have changed the employees' deeply entrenched belief in the immunity of authority. It would, however, drive those public administrators of Bedouin-Arabic upbringing to not enact this specific

schema for the duration of the training session and suppress any related behavior as much as possible.

Emotions are intrinsic to cognition

From the previous discussion, it is notable that emotions play a critical role not only in the stability of shared knowledge structures, but also in their durability and motivational force. Hence, it is important to understand how emotions are conceptualized, and how they fit into inter-subjective meaning-making.

Neuroscientists (e.g. Fusi and Stefano 2010, Damásio 1994) and social psychologists (e.g. Whetherell 2014, Haidt 2001) agree that the prefrontal cortex, which is the region in the brain that is responsible for cognition, is closely interacting with the amygdala, the region in the brain that is responsible for emotions. The reason for that is the fact that the cognitive networks stretch across both areas, thereby mediating 'emotional influences on cognitive processes such as decision-making, as well as the cognitive regulation of emotion' (Salzman and Fusi 2010: 173). The implication is that emotions are a form of information processing (Lazarus 1991), and thereby a type of cognition (Scherer et al. 2001). In other words, the often dichotomous representation of emotions versus cognition, or feelings versus reason, is false (Haidt 2001).

The Portuguese-American neuroscientist Antonio Damásio (1994) provides compelling evidence that demonstrates how cognition is intrinsically dependent on emotions in order to arrive at a socially appropriate response and inform morally acceptable behavior (cited in Haidt 2001: 824). Damásio (1994, cited in Haidt 2001: 824) studied patients with impairment to the ventromedial area of the prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), which is the area behind the bridge of the nose. Due to the damage to their VMPFCs, these patients were lacking almost any emotional capacity. This did not, however, affect their reasoning abilities, and all patients were still aware of moral rules and social conventions, and could solve 'logic problems, financial problems, and even hypothetical moral dilemmas' (Damásio 1994, cited in Haidt 2001: 824).

Damásio's (1994) observed, however, that in the absence of emotions, none of the patients were able to take decisions about their own lives anymore. Instead, they demonstrated extremely bad judgment in their choices and displayed what seemed to be irrational behavior (Damásio 1994, cited in Haidt 2001: 824). This led to the patients alienating their families, friends and co-workers, and ended in their lives falling to pieces (Damásio 1994, cited in Haidt 2001: 824). It turned out that in the absence of emotions, such as a sting of shame or a well of

affection, the patients could deliberate on, to give an extreme example, the pros and cons of murdering the annoying neighbours in the same way that they would ponder over any other mundane decision, such as which toaster or ironing board to purchase (Haidt 2012). In other words, Damásio found emotions to be such an integral part of information processing that without it the cognitive functioning of human beings collapses as they are confronted with too many viable choices. Hence, emotions are integral to cognition, and are inextricably linked with 'subjectivities, minds and meaning-making', and implicated in social relations and collective sensemaking (Whetherell 2014: 3).

Critiques and reflections

While some cognitive anthropologists argue that Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory presents 'a provisional and partial […] realignment of the field rather than a revolutionary reconfiguration' (Gardner 1999: 218), it is debatable whether a good theory is contingent on dismissing or rendering irrelevant existing theoretical frameworks. By linking shared systems of meaning with culture, sociality, situated cognition, and connectionist frameworks, Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory synthesizes relevant insights on human thought and behaviour from across sociology, anthropology, psychology, pedagogy and even biology (Grady and Aubrun 2000). However, Gardner (1999: 218)

criticizes that the medley of inter-disciplinary knowledge, which feed into Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory, fails to give a more prominent role to a psychological approach to inter-subjective meaning, and underplays in particular 'connectionism's outstanding explanatory virtues'. While admittedly there might be additional room to exploit the ability of connectionism to model cognitive processes, however, Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory has been recognized as formative in shaping cognitive anthropology's concern with 'culturally shared and variable distributed complex cognitive systems' (Kronenfeld et al. 2011: 1).

For this thesis, the combination of a cognitive-cultural approach with a social-constructivist lens seems highly productive. The forte of social constructivist studies into sensemaking, hybridity and institutional logics is their insights into the ways in which shared meaning in organisations is socially constructed and shapes practices and institutions. In particular, these studies have successfully established the critical role of inter-subjective meaning in propelling shared perspectives, local practices and institutions, and social realities in organisations, which transcend individual meanings, motives and actions (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Yousfi 2013, Thornton et al. 2012). Conversely, the forte of cultural-cognitive studies into sensemaking, non-formal adult education and situated

cognition in organisations lies in their insight into how individuals construct knowledge in similar ways, and thus produce inter-subjective meaning. Specifically, these studies have achieved fascinating insight into the role schemata and contexts play in perceptual processes that frame organisational activities and outcomes (e.g. Madsen and Desai 2010, Baker and Nelson 2005, Thomas et al. 1991). Consequently, a hybrid socio-cognitive approach to inter-subjectivity allows this thesis to fuse the cognitive-psychological of the personal with the social-institutional of the extra-personal in order to investigate shared meanings and behavior within the context of public administrative reform.

Notwithstanding the richness of the existing knowledge, there is a lack of research into the inter-subjective meaning-making of *groups* of people within organisations. Based on the review of relevant literature, most studies are focused at the level of organisations and institutions, or individuals, rather than at the level of groups (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Thornton et al. 2012, Sonnenshein 2010). In addition, extant studies point out that the intricacies of the interplay between cognition and organisational context deserves more scholarly attention (Elsbach 2005, Felix 2005). Lastly, most of the 'second wave' organisational inquiries, with the exception of hybridity studies, are rooted in empirical cases from within the western world (Yousfi

2013, Amoamo 2011). These are all underexplored areas of research, to which this thesis can make a positive contribution.

The relational ontology of an enactivist approach

Having adopted Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn's (1997) cognitive theory of cultural meaning and its associated ontological underpinnings, this study's conceptualization of inter-subjectivity points to an enactivist approach. Enactivism rejects the binary of internal cognition and external social world, just as this thesis refutes the dualism of mental knowledge structures and socially constructed knowledge.[13] Instead, enactivism views the mind and the social world as inseparably interconnected, with emotionality playing a central role (Urban 2015, Thompson 2010, De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). Enactivism argues 'that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs' (Varela et al. 1992: 9). In other words, the internal cognitive meaning-making of individuals arises from their external interactions with their social world. On that basis, enactivism conceptualizes cognition as an integral part of embodied, situated and socially constructed sensemaking (Urban 2015, Thompson 2010, De

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[13] Of course, this is not to say that the thesis proposes that the ontologies of social constructivism and neuroscience are compatible.

Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). This perfectly resonates with the thesis'
conceptualization of inter-subjectively shared meaning as both a social
and cognitive process, based on Strauss and Quinn's (1997) cognitive
theory of cultural meaning.

Enactivist studies, such as this one, are seen as being rooted in a
relational ontology (Urban 2015, Engster 2007), and a constructivist
epistemology (Mutelesi 2006). A constructivist epistemology
assumes that knowledge is constructed, and realities created, by
actively participating actors (Mutelesi 2006). A relational ontology
views the human being as embedded in a variety of relational
networks that include social, cultural, emotional and biological ones
(Urban 2015). It emphasises the 'irreducibility of the inter-relational
and interactional domain that is both generated by, and generating, the
involved agents' (Urban 2015: 219). The relational ontology's
emphasis on inter-action is not only maintained throughout the study's
research process but also forms the core of its theory-building and
subsequent socio-cognitive model. Accordingly, this model
illuminates the interplay and relations of the internal, cultural-
cognitive and the external, social constructivist forces by which
groups of public administrators make shared meaning of reform.

Summary

In light of the argument in Section 2.2 that subjective meaning is formulated *inside* a person's consciousness, Section 2.3 asked how this thesis seeks to approach inter-subjective meaning, which is shared between people and thus exists also *outside* of an individual. Consequently, Section 2.3 set out this thesis' theoretical approach to inter-subjectivity. Accordingly, inter-subjective meaning involves socially derived knowledge structures, or schemata, that are shared between people. These shared knowledge structures, or schemata, are conceptualized as resembling cognitive networks, which people have developed as a result of having had *general patterns* of experiences that were broadly comparable (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Activated by the same situational context, such shared schemata allow individuals to categorize and organize experiences in mutually intelligible ways (Anderson 2008), and enable them to arrive at similar perspectives with regard to particular situations (Weber and Dacin 2011). Schemata are relatively stable cognitive networks that depend on emotions for their proper cognitive functioning, as well as for their durability and motivational force (Haidt 2001, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Damásio 1994).

Building on the notion of situated cognition, the interplay of schemata with organisational contexts evokes meanings that can be observed implicitly and explicitly in the perspectives, social discourses, interactions, and traditions of *homines subjectivi* (Gillespie and Corniche 2009). To this end, 'second wave' organisational theories on sensemaking, hybridity, and institutional logics have offered impressive accounts of the ways in which meaning-making not only unfolds in the perspectives and interactions between people as a socially constructed phenomenon, but also shapes local practices and wider institutions (Maitlis and Christianson 2014). These studies provide insight into the many ways in which meaning-making frames organisational decision making (e.g. Baker and Nelson 2005), produces and directs organisational change, and embeds new ways of working (e.g. Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Sonnenshein 2010).

By complementing existing social constructivist theories of shared meaning in organisations with cultural cognitive theories, Section 2.3 has put forward a hybrid theoretical framework for inter-subjectivity in organisations. The hybrid theoretical framework draws on organisational theory, constructivist sociology, cognitive anthropology, social psychology, and cognitive pedagogy in order to prepare the ground for investigating the internal and cultural-cognitive, as well as the external and social constructivist, conditions

by which groups of public administrators make shared meaning of reform.

2.4 Operationalizing the analysis of shared subjectivity

Sections 2.2 and 2.3 were devoted to mapping out in detail the hybrid theoretical framework by which this research project conceptualizes the nebulous phenomena of subjective and inter-subjective meaning. Turning theory into practice, the thesis derived from this blended theoretical framework its proposal for a practical, or operational, approach to objectively capturing and examining how real-life public administrators inter-subjectively make meaning of reform. Accordingly, this section presents, and argues for, this thesis' suggested operational approach to analyzing the shared subjective.

It begins by setting out the thesis' theoretical rationale for its proposed operational approach to rendering observable and assessable the shared subjectivities of public administrators. Following that, the section outlines the two steps by which the operational inquiry practically proceeded in identifying and analyzing the empirical regularities of the meaning structures and schemata shared by groups of public administrators. Thereby, research question 1a is addressed, which asked how do we best operationalize the intangible concept of 'subjective meaning-making', so that we are able to practically

observe and assess the phenomenon among groups of public administrators in real life?

The theoretical rationale behind an operational approach

So far, Chapter 2 has established that shared meaning is discernible in people's perspectives (Gillespie and Corniche 2009), which in turn give rise to meaningful actions (Schütz 1932/1967), and coalesce into local practices and institutions (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Bevir and Rhodes 2010). Hence, if meaning becomes detectable in people's perspectives, so this thesis argues, then the sociological researcher's first task is to observe and capture the viewpoints of individuals with regard to a particular topic. Following that, the researcher should be able to identify those viewpoints that resemble each other, and group them together into a cluster. Resembling viewpoints lie close together along a continuum of meaning because they contain some inherently *shared* meaning. To identify exactly what it is that they have in common, the researcher ought to examine in detail each individual viewpoint for the particular meaning structures that make up its content. By isolating and cataloguing those meaning structures that are most regularly observed within a cluster of corresponding viewpoints, the researcher extracts the specific meaning that is shared.

This exercise establishes the distinct traits, or common denominators, that cause the viewpoints in a cluster to bundle together along a continuum of meaning. In doing so, the researcher formulates an objective ideal type viewpoint for each cluster (Schütz 1932/1967). Effectively, such an ideal type perspective is made up of those meaning structures that occurred most commonly and regularly in the observed meaning-making of individuals, whose viewpoints form a cluster of 'sharedness'. In other words, even though the ideal type viewpoint is an analytical construct, essentially it is composed of a list of actual meaning structures that were most regularly evoked in real life individuals when they formulated their subjective viewpoints on a topic.

Notably, when a person articulates his or her subjective point of view, then that individual is producing meaningful action (Schütz 1932/1967), which is observable 'operant behaviour' (Watts 2011: 37, 39, Brown 1980). Such behaviour, social psychologist Simon Watts elaborates, is defined as an individual's first-person perspective, which empirically displays meaning that can be interpreted (see Watts 2011: 40-41). However, Watts (2011: 40) cautions, a viewpoint 'does not exist within a person, but only in their current outlook or positioning relative to some aspect of their immediate environment'. Put differently, a viewpoint only manifests *in the very moment* a

person makes meaning of a specific issue or event. The same individual is likely to make meaning of the same issue slightly differently if asked for his or her point of view a day later, or even a couple of hours later. For example, if we ask an annoyed rail commuter during a crowded train journey into work about her opinion on the city's public transport system, the answer is going to be slightly different than as if we ask her the same question in the comfort of her home during the weekend. Of course, as Watts (2011: 41) highlights, this is not to deny that both responses would still suggest 'an overall orientation of a particular subject (the meaning-making person) in relation to a particular object (the issue or event)'. In other words, while the agitated rail commuter might express a particularly resentful view on the public transport during her crowded train journey in the morning, nevertheless it is to be expected that her point of view is still generally negative, if somewhat less bitter and despairing, in the relaxed atmosphere of her home. Therefore, a viewpoint is defined by the relationship between the subject and its object *at a given point in time* (see Watts 2011: 40). Accordingly, a viewpoint does not belong to a person in any permanent sense, and its life span is only ever momentary (see Watts 2011: 40).

The implications for an operational approach to analyzing the shared subjectivities of public administrators are noteworthy. The fact that a

viewpoint constitutes a first-person perspective on a particular meaningful relationship between subject (i.e. public administrator) and object (i.e. reform), which is empirically observable and interpretable (see Watts 2011: 40-41), makes a viewpoint the ideal canvas to render existing meaning structures visible and decipherable. Put differently, when people make sense of a particular topic or event, their viewpoints manifest meaning-making in an observable contour, which allows the sociological researcher to observe and capture the shared meanings contained. However, the temporary, external and non-mental nature of viewpoints implies that they reflect the transient, social constructivist aspects of meaning-making that happen outside of a person. Hence, while viewpoints render observable existing meaning-structures, they alone have little utility in allowing us to assess the well-learned, cognitive-psychological facets of the meaning-making that happens inside a person.

Helpfully, Strauss and Quinn (1997) have shown that schemata are of a more long-lived and stable nature than viewpoints. As explained earlier in this chapter, even though a situation can trigger different parts of a schema's network, and thereby produce various viewpoints, the important point is that the schema's underlying network structure does not change (Strauss and Quinn 1997). For that reason, irrespective of the transitory and variable nature of viewpoints, much

the same meaning structures arise in a group of individuals time and time again, as long as they live in the same social context and have similar schemata (Strauss and Quinn 1997).

Yet how do we move from viewpoint to schema in a practical analysis? Let us bear in mind that behind each ideal type perspective of a viewpoint, there is a cluster of concrete individuals, who must have made meaning in much the same ways in order to arrive at their resembling viewpoints (Straus and Quinn 1997). As previously explained in this chapter, individuals only make similar meaning because they have internalized analogous schemata, or knowledge structures that are the result of comparable cognitive networks, which in turn were formed from having had largely corresponding patterns of experiences (Strauss and Quinn 1997). These analogous schemata must have interacted in regular and uniform ways with the external world, and thereby driven uniquely different individuals to generate similar meaning structures that, due to their regularity and prominence, were picked up and catalogued by the ideal type. Hence, in theory, the researcher should be able to examine the observed meaning structures listed in the ideal type perspective for indications of underlying, mentally shared knowledge structures.

At heart, the argument put forward here is that, all things being equal, the researcher ought to work his or her way backwards from the visible, yet transient, product of meaning-making (a viewpoint) to the less visible, yet relatively stable, root cause of meaning-making (a schema). People's fleeting viewpoints allow the researcher to pin down the *regularly* shared meaning structures that become ever so temporarily apparent. These meaning structures were produced following the *regular* interactions of similar, stable and internal schemata with the outside world. The search for such regularities constitutes an inquiry into shared meaning - if we recall Strauss and Quinn's (1997: 7) definition of shared meaning as 'regular occurrences in the humanly created world, in the schemata people share as a result of these, and in the interactions between these schemata and this world'.

The two steps of an operational analysis

The thesis' theoretical rationale for how to systematically trace, via viewpoints, the regularities in the meaning structures and schemata of people has directed its socio-cognitive operational analysis of the shared subjective. Accordingly, the thesis proposes that the empirical investigation into the shared subjectivities, which dominate among groups of public administrators, ought to include two analytical steps: The first step involves asking individual public administrators to

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articulate their subjective viewpoints vis-à-vis a specific reform. This allows for regularly shared meaning structures to become visible via the analytical construct of an ideal type. The second step comprises of extrapolating the underlying schemata from the regularly occurring meaning structures, and examining their content and properties, especially around durability and motivational force. Thus, the first step facilitates insight into the social constructivist group properties of meaning-making, while the second step enables insight into the cognitive-psychological aspects of personal meaning-making.

Accordingly, the author asked Abu Dhabi Government's public administrators to articulate their viewpoints with regard to the ongoing customer-centric reform programme. This enabled the researcher to identify some of the extant, shared meaning structures, which could then be further analysed for their bottom-line, common schemata that public administrators regularly employ in order to arrive at these particular meaning structures.

Keeping in mind that schemata are cognitive networks, and therefore without hard boundaries (Strauss and Quinn 1997), this study claims not that such an operational approach would be able to account for all shared schemata in their entirety. Instead, the operational analysis focused on the most obvious schemata and their underlying networks,

or gravitational cores, which shed light on those learned principles that knot together the planetary system of a schema and elucidate some or all of those principles (O'Reilly 2007). Therefore, the analysis of the shared meaning structures sought to tease out and describe the core of those principal schemata, which seemed to have been most regularly and commonly activated in generating the particular inter-subjective meaning observed in people's meaningful actions, or viewpoints.

Section 2.4 has set out the theoretical rationale behind, and practical steps for, an operational approach to investigating the nebulous concept of 'subjective meaning-making' at group-level. In doing so, it has begun to provide an answer to research question 1a, which asked about the best approach to analyse the intangible phenomenon of shared meaning. The proposed operational model for capturing and assessing the empirical regularities of shared meaning structures and schemata held by groups of public administrators constitutes the 'nuts and bolts' of this thesis' intellectual contribution.

2.5   Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 1 called for more research that meets the needs of a 'brave new world' in understanding the subjective meaning-making by which different groups of public administrators realize 'a new way of doing

things'. Hence, Chapter 2 reviewed, and reflected in depth, on existing scholarly knowledge regarding the origin, nature and properties of subjective and inter-subjective meaning. These deliberations were guided by the imperative to understand where and how a researcher might locate these nebulous phenomena among groups of people within organisations, and further investigate them in a rigorously scientific way while being constrained by his or her own subjectivities.

In pursuing clarification, the thesis reviewed Alfred Schütz's (1932/1967) social phenomenology, and Claudia Strauss' and Naomi Quinn's (1997) cognitive theory of cultural meaning, but also built on the fascinating lessons of 'second wave' organisational studies on sensemaking, situated cognition in organisations, hybridity and, to a lesser extent, institutional logics. By amalgamating the insights from social phenomenological, cultural-cognitive and organisational theories, Chapter 2 also established a theoretical framework for how people carrying a similar schema *and* living in the same organisational context are likely to make analogous meaning of a situation, which can be empirically observed in the meaningful act, or operant behaviour, of a person's viewpoint.

Thereby, the thesis has argued for an integrated theoretical approach to shared meaning-making that is socio-cognitive: it considers the cognitive-psychological of the personal processes within *homo subjectivus* as well as the social constructivist of the extra-personal processes between *homines subjectivi.* The thus established blended theoretical framework provided the bedrock for the thesis' unique contribution to existing scholarship: A socio-cognitive operational model, complete with a theoretical rationale and a practical two-step process, with which the thesis proposes to objectively capture and examine the socially and mentally shared subjectivities of *homines subjectivi* within the context of public administrative reform.

CHAPTER 3:

EMPIRICALLY RESEARCHING SHARED MEANING

"It is not whether phenomena are empirically common that is critical in science […] but whether they can be made to reveal the enduring natural processes that underlie them. Seeing heaven in a grain of sand is not a trick only poets can accomplish."

(Clifford Geertz, 'The Interpretation of Cultures', 1973: 44)

3.1   Introduction to Chapter 3

Chapter 1 has argued that understanding how public administrators subjectively make meaning is critical to achieving positive reform outcomes. In order to gain such understanding, the thesis has asked, how do we operationalize the analysis of shared meaning at group-level? First, research question 1a sought to clarify the basics: it asked what would be the best way to conceptualize such an intangible and nebulous notion as 'subjective meaning-making' so that we can render the shared cognitive processes of public administrators visible and assessable? In response, Chapter 2 has proposed that the best approach is a two-step operational model: The first step allows the researcher to identify empirical regularities in the socially shared meaning structures of employees' viewpoints. The second step

enables the researcher to extract from these meaning structures the regularities of the underlying, cognitively shared schemata. The operational model needed to be evaluated within the context of a real-life public administration in order to answer research question 1b, which asked how productive such an operational concept is in mapping existing systems of meaning at group-level, and highlighting the opportunities and constraints for public administrators to internalize 'a new way of doing their jobs'.

Thus, the thesis applied its operational model to the case of Abu Dhabi's public administrative reform, and assessed its usefulness for, but also beyond, Abu Dhabi Government's particularities. Therefore, this chapter sets out how the two-step operational inquiry into shared subjectivities was empirically applied, with a view to extracting from the findings instructive revelations about some of the generic conditions of collective meanings. The chapter details the research purpose, paradigm, design and methods for identifying, and conceptually consolidating, the empirical regularities of how Abu Dhabi's public administrators make meaning of the ongoing customer-centric change initiative. It outlines the study's overall purpose of building theory, its research paradigm and associated implicit assumptions on the nature of social reality, its research design and rules of inference, and the choice of methods and their application

in collecting and analyzing data on inter-subjective meaning in the context of Abu Dhabi's governmental reform. Ensuring philosophical and methodological transparency in collecting and interpreting data is of particular pertinence given that in the field of public administration, within which this study is firmly located, it is an established fact that research is both interdisciplinary and applied, and thus not governed by a single theoretical or methodological approach (Yang et al. 2008).

3.2   Research purpose: Towards a practical theory

The overall purpose of the research for this thesis was to facilitate insight into the shared subjectivities of public administrators when undergoing governmental reform. The study hoped that, by applying its two-step operational model to Abu Dhabi's public administrators, it could generate an answer to research question 1b. This question had asked how effective an operational analysis of shared subjectivities is in charting existing meaning systems at group-level, and assessing the possibilities and hurdles for ingraining in employees 'a new way of doing public administration'. By empirically exploring the particularities of Abu Dhabi Government, the study sought to learn about some of the generic conditions by which the subjective meaning-making of government employees might be understood and evaluated. To this effect, the goal of the fieldwork in Abu Dhabi Government was to answer the questions of 'what are the shared

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subjectivities that exist', 'why do they exist' and 'how do they operate'. While addressing the 'what' question constitutes a 'descriptive' research enterprise, tackling the 'why' and 'how' questions are considered 'exploratory' as well as 'explanatory' research endeavours (de Vaus 2001: 1).

The research challenge of answering the 'why' and 'how' questions, which focused on understanding some of the reasons for shared subjectivities and the processes by which they operate, had important implications for framing the research purpose. In the social sciences, any research study that addresses the 'why' and 'how' questions is associated with theory (de Vaus 2001: 5). Accordingly, by pursuing the reasons for why, and how, the observed meaning structures had arisen, the study ultimately sought to arrive at a new conceptual model, or in other words a practical theory, for effectively analyzing and appraising shared subjectivities (Boudon 1991, de Vaus 2001). Put differently, it was hoped that by administering its operational approach to the specific case of Abu Dhabi's government employees, it would be possible to identify some of the generic conditions of subjective meaning-making, and so build theory from the observations. Hence, the study's overall purpose was empirically based theory building, whereby the observations made within a

particular real-life scenario would be conceptually consolidated to infer general patterns beyond the specific case (see de Vaus 2001: 6).

Building a practical theory

Susan Lynham, an American professor who has written extensively on building theory in applied fields, proposes that the general research approach to theory building in applied disciplines is of an interactive inductive-deductive nature, whereby the researcher alternates between theorizing to practice and practice to theorizing (Lynham 2002). Within such a framework, the suggested research approach consists of a 'recursive system' of five distinct phases (Lynham 2002: 229):

- Conceptual development

- Operationalization

- Application

- Confirmation or disconfirmation, and

- Continuous refinement and development (of the theory)

Lynham's (2002: 229, 237) 'duo deductive-inductive' approach as well as her 'recursive system' usefully guided this research project in first formulating a theoretical concept of shared meaning-making, then developing and applying an operational model to capture and assess

shared subjectivities in a real-life scenario, followed by assessing the findings and further evolving the theoretical concept.

However, it must be stated that this study's resulting theoretical propositions were ultimately grounded in *abductive* reasoning. This type of reasoning rests on abductive logic, whereby the researcher infers from observations made to plausible causes that *may* be the case (Brown and Robyn 2004, Fisher 2001). Blaikie (2007: 90) neatly illustrates the different layers of abductive inference in developing a theory specifically on meaning-making:

"*Everyday concepts and meanings*

provide the basis for

social action/interaction

about which

social actors can give accounts

from which

social scientific description can be made

from which

social theories can be generated

or which can be understood in terms of existing

social theories and perspectives"

(Blaikie 2007: 90, original emphasis)

While the approach to building theory is relatively unambiguous, Lynham (2000: 165) reminds us that there is no 'definitional consensus' for the concept of theory. According to her, 'theory can range from unsupported models, metaphors, perceptions, and conceptual frameworks of the real world to rigorously researched, tested, and verified scientific knowledge claims of phenomena in the real world' (Lynham 2000: 165). For the purpose of this research project, the study chose to work with Lynham's proposed definition of 'theory building', which helpfully combines Torraco's (1997) explanation of theory building with Gioia and Pitre's (1990) description of theory as follows:

> '[…] Theory building will be taken to mean the process or recurring cycle by which coherent descriptions, explanations, and representations of observed or experienced phenomena are generated, verified and refined' (Lynham 2000: 161).

The phenomena, which this study has sought to describe, explain, and conceptualize as theory, are the ways in which public administrators subjectively make shared meaning of reform. The phenomenon of interest has been empirically observed and analysed within the

particular context of Abu Dhabi Government's public administration and its customer-centric reform.

3.3   Research paradigm: searching for meaning

Naturally, the object of study, shared subjective meaning, significantly shaped the epistemological and ontological assumptions that have underpinned the research project. Consistent with the object of study, the epistemological approach of this research project has been firmly rooted in the constructivist-interpretative paradigm (Mertens 2005), and moved back and forth between deductive and inductive analysis in order to enable theory-building by means of abductive reasoning (Blaikie 2007, Lynham 2000).   The constructivist-interpretative paradigm is one of four sociological paradigms common in public administrative and organisational studies, with the other three paradigms being functionalist, radical humanist and radical structuralist (Morgan 1980, cited in Yang et al. 2008: 26).

A constructivist-interpretative paradigm entails *two* critical axioms for this thesis: *Firstly*, it implies that people forge various realities as a result of their socially and experientially developed understandings and systems of meaning (Weber 1922). This means that the diversity of human realities is underpinned by a diversity of ontologies (van Manen 2009). *Secondly*, the paradigm suggests that, in the social

sciences, researchers obtain knowledge by examining how people experience their social reality based on what is meaningful to them from their subjective point of view (Weber 1922). Such an epistemological approach highlights the importance of situation-specific understanding of meaning, which can be explained only through interpretation and not through observation alone (Geertz 1973). Importantly, it requires the researcher to steer clear of forcing the realities of public administrators into neatly pre-defined theoretical categories, which he or she imposes as meaningful (Brown 1980). Instead, the researcher needs to move away from a concern with external classifications and move towards people's self-referential categories (Brown 1980).

The purpose of interpretative sociological research is to explain some of the dynamics of social realities, which are empirically verifiable, and thus allow for new discoveries instead of testing a pre-defined hypothesis (Weber 1922). Ultimately, it is not about arriving at a single objective truth but to reveal the conditions of 'true' realities (Schütz 1967). Hence, to observe and theoretically conceptualize the meaning-making of public administrators in internalizing reform, we need not 'an experimental science in search of law' but an 'interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz 1973: 5).

3.4   Research design: Pragmatically shaped by its production

The research design sets out the 'logical structure of inquiry' (de Vaus 2001: 9) in order to guide the decisions around methods and inform the logic by which the findings are interpreted (see Creswell and Clark 2011: 53). Considering that scientific knowledge is only ever 'provisional', carefully outlining the research design helps 'to minimize the chance of drawing incorrect causal inferences from data', and allows others to evaluate the merits of the evidence and findings presented (de Vaus 2001: 9, 16).

A research design that is informed by the research problem

The American scholars Creswell and Clark (2011) urge scientists across disciplines to allow the research problem to inform the research design. The research problem, which this study sought to address, depended on a design that could meet three all-important requirements: *Firstly*, the design needed to facilitate the application of the researcher's operational concept of meaning-making to a real-life scenario. *Secondly*, the design had to enable the interpretation of shared subjectivities, and their properties, which were going to be observed, explored and explained in the research process, yet remained unknown at the outset. And *lastly*, the research design had to make possible the formulation of a practical theory based on the empirical findings.

The case for a pragmatically mixed methods design

Fittingly, Creswell and Clark (see 2011: 7-11) argue that research problems, which involve the application of an operational framework, the interpretation and explanation of results, or the generalization of the findings are all requirements for which a mixed methods design might be especially well suited. A mixed methods design produces a unified understanding of the research problem (Ramlo and Newman 2011, Hesse-Biber 2010, Creswell and Garrett 2008), and is described as the 'third movement' in the evolution of research methodology (Creswell and Garrett 2008). The central premise of a mixed methods design is 'that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone' (Creswell and Clark 2007: 5). This chimed well with the exploratory and explanatory aims of this study, which needed a design that facilitated looking at the research problem from different angles and vantage points. In a mixed methods study, quantitative and qualitative data are merged, build on each other, or are embedded within each other (see Creswell and Clark 2011: 16).

Proponents highlight that a mixed methods design is 'both practical and intuitive' (Creswell and Clarke 2011: 17), and has the potential to enhance the rigour of the research process, the scope of its

discoveries, and the credibility of its findings (Yang et al. 2008). It is particularly well suited for explanatory and exploratory research purposes, for interdisciplinary studies, and for research projects that employ multiple philosophical perspectives (Creswell and Clarke 2011: 17). These are all defining characteristics of this study. Sceptics, on the other hand, point out that such an approach is infrequently applied, and that there is little guidance regarding the practicalities of combining both qualitative and quantitative data in a study (Creswell and Garrett 2008). In addition, a mixed methods research design is time-consuming, resource-intensive, and requires skills along with 'an openness to using multiple perspectives in research' (Creswell and Clarke 2011: 17). While these are all important considerations to heed, they hardly constituted insurmountable obstacles to this study.

Typically, constructivist-interpretative paradigms are associated with qualitative research design (Ramlo and Newman 2011, Tashakkori and Teddlie 2009, Yang et al. 2008). In contrast, quantitative research designs are usually affiliated with positivist paradigms, which are rooted in different epistemological and ontological assumptions than those of this thesis (Ramlo and Newman 2011, Yang et al. 2008). However, as Newman and Ramlo (2010: 506) perceptively argue, employing quantitative techniques to complement qualitative

measures is not 'inconsistent with the ontology of universal laws based on an objective reality'. The scholars point out that a quantitative philosophy rests on making statements about relationships and their probabilities (Newman and Ramlo 2010). These statements allow for errors, may be specific to particular groups or depend on certain conditions, and are not absolute truths. This, Newman and Ramlo (2010: 206) suggest, 'is not inconsistent with the qualitative philosophy that different relationships may exist for different situations, reflecting multiple realities'.

This study not only follows the line of Newman and Ramlo (2010) but extends the notion of compatibility still further. Accordingly, the study rejects not only the binaries of quantitative versus qualitative, and social science versus natural science, but also those of actors versus institutions, knowledge versus emotions, inductive versus deductive, or choice versus institutional constraint. Instead, it believes that these allegedly opposing concepts give rise to each other, or in other words, they are dependent and conditional upon each other. For example, actors' choices are continuously influenced by institutional structures, while institutional structures constantly require actors to re-iterate or modify them so that they can exist (Giddens 1984, Sewell 1992).

Within the mixed methods research debate, this study's particular approach could be distinguished by its philosophical underpinning of pragmatism (Creswell and Tashakkori 2007). A pragmatic mixed methods design sees methods as incidental to the inquiry and instead makes philosophical considerations the critical focus (Creswell and Garrett 2008). Methodological pragmatism, which is particularly strong in Commonwealth countries (Giddings 2006), believes that the end dictates the means, and thus emphasises a plurality of research methods based on 'what works' (Creswell and Garrett 2008, Newman et al. 2003).

Offering a clear-cut example of a pragmatic mixed methods study, this project's means were dictated by its pragmatic ends: the thesis was keen to employ a research design that was able to address the complex and interdisciplinary research questions and wider research purpose, while safeguarding as much as possible against any researcher bias. Accordingly, the study made use of a plurality of methods and a plurality of theories, which were selected for their suitability in satisfying the requirements of the different stages of the inquiry, while keeping with the ontological and epistemological direction established.

Overview of the study's particular mixed methods design

The overall purpose of the study's research design was to facilitate the empirical investigation of shared meaning. It directed step 1 and step 2 of the operational approach, as shown below in Figure 3.1.1   In line with the two-step process of the operational model, the fieldwork was split into two phases: The first research phase sought to identify and examine shared meaning structures that are socially shared. Informed by, and building on, the findings from the first phase, the second research phase drilled deep into the shared meaning structures to explore them for their underlying schemata, which are cognitively shared.

For research phase one, the study employed Q Methodology, which facilitates the scientific study of subjectivity (Watts and Stenner 2005, Brown 1980, Stephenson 1953).   The Q Methodological inquiry involved qualitative in-depth interviews, quantitative factor analysis and multivariate data reduction, as well as qualitative thematic analysis of the factors obtained (Ramlo and Newman 2011).

For research phase two, the study worked with an adapted version of a Cultural Reference Group, whose six expert members all worked or taught in Abu Dhabi's public administration and were intimately familiar with locally existing schemata (Berends and Johnston 2005,

White 2002). The six members of the Cultural Reference Group hermeneutically employed textual and ethnographic methods to tease out schemata, and their contents, properties and processes.[14] *Both Q Methodology and the Cultural Reference Group are explained and their choice justified in detail in the section concerned with methods at the end of this chapter.*

The data collection process was framed and informed by theoretical pillars, which are depicted in Figure 3.1.1 as both the input and outcome of the empirical work. These pillars blended the insights from social phenomenological, cultural-cognitive and 'second wave' organisational theories as developed in Chapter 2. In addition, the data collection was pragmatically underpinned by elements of a case study and grounded theory, which is the reason for Figure 3.1.1 showing them at the bottom. The rationale behind using these elements was to complement the study's principal methods and theories in its pursuit of empirically grounded, moderately generalizable and valid findings. The details of, and justifications for, the elements used from underpinning methods are explained in the following sections within the context of the purpose they pragmatically served. While complex, this mixed methods design allowed for observing and analysing empirical phenomena, and

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[14] The group's hermeneutic approach is defined and further detailed within the context of the discussion on methods at the end of this chapter.

employing abductive reasoning in order to develop coherent conceptual explanations, which showed 'how it all fits together' (see Lynham, 2000: 172-173).

Figure 3.1.1: Research design - Empirically researching shared meaning
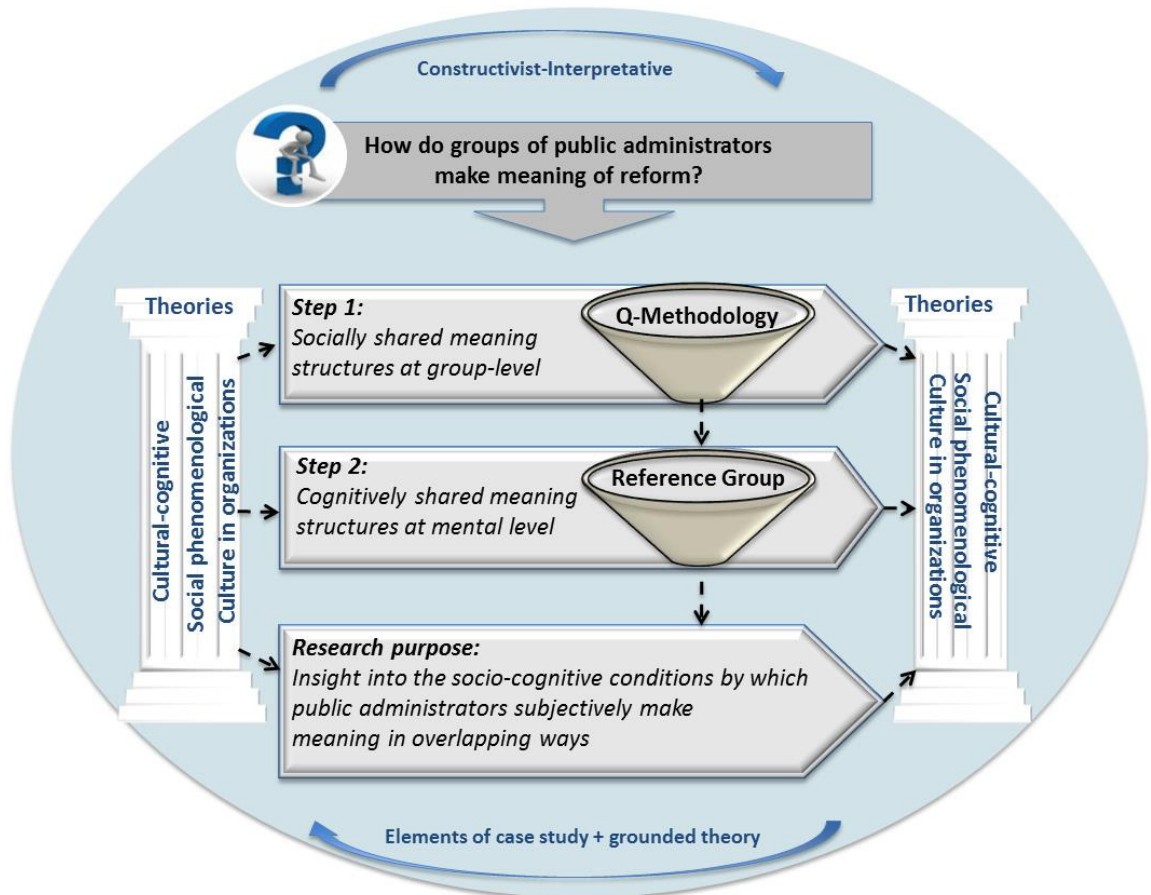
Elements of a case study design

Given that the research design had to facilitate the application of the operational concept of meaning-making to a real-life scenario, it was essential for this study to access an empirical context. The thesis

could only theorize about some of the general conditions of collective subjectivities by looking at the empirical regularities of real-life public administrators and their meaning-making of particular governmental change initiatives. Hence, the study selected for its empirical work the specific case of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and the ways in which they made meaning of their government's ongoing customer-centric reform.

The two reasons for choosing Abu Dhabi's public administration as the empirical context were modelled along the selection criteria of a case study design: Firstly, it provided an inherently interesting *key case* by virtue of having an Islamic public administration, but supported by a large number of expatriate staff members with different socio-cultural upbringings and experiences, and therefore various meaning systems (Thomas 2011: 77). Moreover, Abu Dhabi Government is one of the purest, yet most successful, autocracies in the modern world (Davidson 2006). It is decidedly assertive of its governance philosophy, and has been an advocate for modern public management models, which are not rooted in the normative worldviews of liberal democratic western societies (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010, Gulfnews 2009). Thus, Abu Dhabi Government constitutes an apt example of a newly

emerging global power in search of novel public administrative reform models that can be grounded in local meaning systems.

Secondly, Abu Dhabi's public administration also constitutes a *local knowledge case* because the author had spent three years as an employee in Abu Dhabi's public administration (Thomas 2011: 76). On the one hand, this implied that the research would benefit from the author's intimate familiarity with the case, including her social networks, her awareness of local issues, and her access to public administrators without having to negotiate gatekeepers. The personal connection proved to be particularly important in recruiting research participants in Abu Dhabi's authoritarian public administration, where the culture was such that people who disagree with leadership decisions can find themselves dismissed from their posts. Given the ongoing redundancies at the time, Abu Dhabi's public administrators were especially cautious and could only be persuaded to share their personal views about the customer-centric reform because of their familiarity with, and trust in, the researcher.

On the other hand, however, the personal connection also posed a risk in terms of the researcher imposing her subjective bias in spite of best intentions. Accordingly, it was important to take extra care in the selection of methods for data collection and interpretation that would

provide a check and balance system against the researcher's own meaning structures and subjective views.

A case study is considered an especially effective approach to designing a research project due to its high levels of flexibility and adaptability to the research question (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, Hyett et al. 2014). A case study design is defined as 'an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study' (Stake 1995, cited in Hyett at al. 2014: 2). This chimed well with the thesis' objective of gaining insight into some of the complex intricacies of shared subjectivities. Moreover, a case study design combines 'naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic research methods in a palette of methods' (Stake 1995: xi, xii, cited in Hyett et al. 2014: 2), which fitted with the thesis' pragmatic mixed methods philosophy. Typically, case study designs are either framed within a social constructivist paradigm (Merriam 2009) or a post-positivist worldview (Yin 2012, cited in Hyett et al. 2014: 1). However, the versatility and pliability of the case study approach has not only fuelled a broad diversity of such projects, but also a debate as to what constitutes a methodologically rigorous case study design (see Hyett et al. 2014 for an overview).

Against the background of this discussion, it is important to clarify to what extent this thesis embraced the methodological construction of a case study design. While the research project sought to use the particularities of Abu Dhabi's public administration and its customer-centric reform as building blocks for its theory, it would be methodologically dishonest to describe it as a rigorous case study design (Hyett et al. 2014, Creswell 2013, Yin 2009). The study's focus on the empirical regularities in Abu Dhabi's specific case certainly resonates with elements of a case study design, such as the exploration of 'a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case)' and the reporting of 'a case description and case themes' (Creswell 2013: 97). Unlike a traditional methodologically rigorous case study, however, this research project focused on the *phenomena* instead of the case itself, and never attempted to study the case in its entirety (Hyett et al. 2014). Hence, this study's design has only employed aspects of the case study design, and its associated methodology, without consistently following the entire traditional methodological constructions.

Generalizability

The issue of generalizability was a key concern for this thesis considering its aim to infer some general principles from the particular subjectivities observed within the context of Abu Dhabi's public

administrative reform. Traditionally, interpretative sociologists believed that qualitative research is unable to make any claims beyond the specificities of the cases that were researched (see Payne and Williams 2005 for a critical overview). In contrast, natural scientists are able to generalize to wider populations, or even universal laws, based on calculating statistical probabilities (Hacking 2001, cited in Payne and Williams 2005: 296). Unlike the invariant laws of, for example physics, human beings vary in the meaning they attach to the same action or situation, or conversely, behave differently despite consistent meaning structures (Payne and Williams 2005). On that basis, some scholars maintain that any research design that involves qualitative and subjective elements automatically prohibits generalizations (e.g. Hammersley 1992, Seale 1999).

However, others put forward a convincing argument for when, and how, generalizations are possible in the social world (e.g. Fairweather and Rinne 2012, Payne and Williams 2005, Gobo 2009). Here, Williams' (2000) influential notion of *moderatum generalization* has laid the groundwork by maintaining that interpretative sociological research allows investigators to make moderate claims regarding cultural consistencies in the social world. Especially addressing interpretative sociology, but also wider scholarship, Williams (2000) posits that moderatum generalizations are formal, scientific variations

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of everyday generalizations people make. For one, they are moderate in scope because they are not seeking to make sweeping sociological generalizations across time and place. Second, they are moderate in character because they are hypothetical, modest and open to change and alternative reasoning. However, Payne and Williams (2005) argue, this is neither to say that moderatum generalizations are automatically produced, nor are they a 'soft option' that are inferior to statistically grounded generalizations. Payne and Williams (2005: 297) insist that every serious sociological researcher ought to anticipate and consciously produce 'externally valid and unambiguous generalizations, even when these take a moderated form'. Externally valid generalizations are defined as consistent, credible and internally valid claims, and enable judging the conditions under which the insights gained are transferable and applicable to other settings (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

A good research design, Payne and Williams (see 2005: 305) propose, considers at the outset the circumstances that would be conducive to generating the moderate generalizations a study hopes to make. This thesis believes with scholars like Payne and Williams (2005: 307) that moderate generalizations are possible for social phenomena beyond a specific context. Accordingly, the thesis pondered as part of its research design the criteria for making wider claims - and generating

at the very least testable theoretical statements about *the conditions* of shared subjective meaning-making within the context of public administrative change.

The cornerstone of such deliberations, according to Payne and Williams (2005), involves determining the range, or moderation, of the generalizations sought. In order to decide on the range of generalizations attempted, it is important to be clear about the 'constraining features' of the object of study and the research site - and how their features differ or compare to other contexts, to which the study attempts some sort of moderate wider claims (Payne and Williams 2005: 306).

The object of study, which is the shared subjective, is an inherently human condition. Therefore, it is a universal phenomenon that, nevertheless, is as various in its content as it is in its expression (Kronenfeld et al 2011, Geertz 1973). The empirical research context, which is constituted by Abu Dhabi's public administration and its customer-centric reform programme, certainly is in many ways unique, and arguably even uncommon: Abu Dhabi's public administrators are a hotchpotch of citizens and non-citizens of diverse nationalities, who work in the context of an autocracy. Customer-centric reform is not only one of many change initiatives that

governments across the world have adopted, but it is also being modified quite differently across, and even within, public administrations.

Yet, Abu Dhabi's public administrators share with other public administrators worldwide some basic features: they all form part of an organisational hierarchy, and are tasked with public management in the pursuit of some public value. Similarly, customer-centric reform shares with other public administrative reforms the basic intention to make 'changes to public sector organisations in order to get them in some sense to run better' (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011: 2). Hence, Abu Dhabi's public administrators, as well as the customer-centric reform, are both part of wider universes without representing them directly (Mason 1996, cited in Payne and Williams 2005: 306).

As indicated, the study selected Abu Dhabi's public administration as the empirical context because it allowed observing, in a non-western context, subjectivities in significant variety due to the high levels of expatriate public administrators. They hailed from different social, cultural and experiential backgrounds, and thus came with a wide range of meaning structures and underlying schemata. The author rationalized that, if shared meaning could be identified and analysed in such challenging, heterogeneous conditions, it would provide a

solid basis for the study's reasoning and enhance its validity. The customer-centric reform served as the specific case of an ongoing change initiative because it was an internationally relatively well established concept that resonated not only with the normative worldviews of western liberal democracies but also with those of non-western authoritarian and hybrid systems (Committee of Experts on Public Administration 2007).

This, however, is not to say that the study could not have selected other empirical sites, which were likely to have equally well facilitated observing and analysing the *conditions* of shared subjective meaning-making within the context of public administrative change. As Payne and Williams (2005: 308) highlight, social phenomena that are widely distributed, such as shared meaning, 'offer greater choice of where they may be investigated'. For example, another compelling empirical site for this study's research purpose would have been police officers and their shared meaning-making of reforms on community policing. In theory, community policing is an international change initiative that seeks to instil a policing strategy whereby the police build ties and collaborate closely with members of local communities, thereby enhancing public trust and accountability (Raine and Dunstan 2007). In practice, police officers across Europe make various inter-subjective meanings of the strategic reform. This

has significantly affected the reform's success (Cassan 2012). Some police officers, for example, perceive it as counter-intuitive to their perceived role as paramilitary crime-fighters in a hostile community (Cassan 2012). In contrast, other European police officers interpret community policing based on meaning structures that stress empathy for victims, communication, and using force as the last resort (Cassan 2012, Raine and Dunstan 2007). While this empirical research site, along with others, is equally conducive to the study's purpose, there would have been significant challenges around access to research settings and data, physical and social locations, and practical logistics.

Having carefully deliberated on both the constraining, as well as the shared, features of the research site and phenomenon, the author was able to decide how to make moderate generalizations about the *conditions of subjective meaning-making at group-level within the context of public administrative change*. The study anticipated to moderate its generalizations by limiting its wider claims to the basic tendencies of shared characteristics and patterns. Of course, such claims would be dependent on the social processes within which these basic tendencies are situated. The limits of these dependencies were going to determine the range, or moderation, of generalizations, that were anticipated being made in this study (see Payne and Williams 2005: 306). In this way, the ambition to generalize was moderated in

the study in one of the five principal ways that Payne and Williams (see 2005: 306) suggest.

Validity as quality and theoretical rigour

At heart, validity is about whether a research study does what it says it does and can be considered well-founded, trustworthy and demonstrating scientific integrity (Flick 2009). While quantitative research has at its disposal a variety of statistical tests and measurements to assert validity, the best way in which to assess the validity of qualitative research is still contested (Flick 2009, Thomas 2011, Payne and Williams 2005). Typically, the existing criteria for demonstrating validity of a qualitative study include 'plausibility, relevance, credibility, comprehensiveness, significance, confirmability, positionality, canons of evidence, generalizability, fittingness and auditability' (Whittemore et al. 2001, cited in Thomas 2011: 64), which are also often reformulated as 'consistency', 'dependency' and 'transferability' (Lincoln and Guba 1985). These criteria confirm whether the methods were appropriately selected and rigorously applied, whether the findings were relevant, worthy of acceptance and rooted in empirical evidence, and whether the proceedings were sufficiently reflexive (see Flick 2009: 15).

Some scholars maintain that the existing 'panoply of criteria' for assessing whether a qualitative research project is valid, or not, fails to be meaningful for interpretative studies (Thomas 2011: 64). This is because such research does not know at the outset what it is looking for, and is not based on a probability sample (see Thomas 2011: 62-64). Gary Thomas (2011), a British professor who has written extensively on interpretative research design and methods, argues that, with the exception of 'generalizability', the standard criteria for validity in interpretative research are 'tools of an audit society, not of good research' (Thomas 2011: 65).

According to Thomas (2011), criteria such as 'plausibility', 'credibility', 'relevance' and 'significance' depend on the worldviews that are in fashion and shaping the thought of mainstream scholarship at the time. 'Comprehensiveness', Thomas (2011: 65) continues, defeats logic given that any piece of research looks at a particular matter of interest, which is 'one thing: space-time'. He considers 'fittingness' and 'canons of evidence' of little relevance to what makes a research project valid, while 'auditability' is often impossible, and 'confirmability' might happen in a piecemeal fashion that takes the scientific community a few decades following the publication of a study (Thomas 2011: 64-65). He illustrates his point by reminding us how Einstein's seminal research design on the theory

of relativity employed thought experiments and case studies, and would have failed hook, line and sinker to meet any of the criteria for validity listed above. The only exception would have been the criteria of 'generalizability', which however depended on the scientific community to verify that Einstein's theory was indeed correct (Thomas 2011: 64-65).

Instead, as Thomas (see 2011: 71) in agreements with Hammersley (2005) and Payne and Williams (2005) suggests, it is the quality and theoretical rigour of the interpretative study that counts. This includes the choices made with regards to data collection, the justifications in terms of how analysis has been undertaken, and the explanations of interpretations, which have also considered rival or alternative storylines (Thomas 2011, Payne and Williams 2005).

Given the thesis' ultimate objective of producing moderate yet valid generalizations, it was considered important in this study to explain and justify the means by which quality and theoretical rigour would be ensured. In carefully putting together a high-quality and theoretically rigorous research design for gathering and analyzing data on shared subjectivities, care was taken not to conceptualize difference 'in ways that effectively colonize and reformulate otherness' (Hutcheon 1989, cited in Pillay 2005: 547). The study had already taken a first step to

that effect by choosing a mixed methods design that allowed generating quantitative data and conducting statistical analysis, yet which also enabled the researcher to harvest the richness of qualitative data and undertake thematic analysis.

Importantly, the researcher kept an open mind from the outset and was willing to follow the data's trail like a detective in the custom of grounded theory, as developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory is an inductive research methodology that is marked by the absence of preconceived theories, and instead involves the researcher systematically generating theory based on the empirical data collected (Glaser and Strauss 1967). While the study certainly is not claiming to have rigorously employed grounded theory, it did usefully adopt in its approach central tenets, such as active thought experimentation, theoretical sampling, and progressive interpretation (Oliver 2011).

Accordingly, the initial stage of the data collection was not based on a preconceived theoretical framework but only on some 'sensitizing concepts', which served as a foundation (Flick 2009: 12). These included, for example, concepts such as 'subjective meaning', 'objectivity', 'institutionalization', and 'governance system'. The refusal to fixate on a theory at the start ensured that the researcher

would not be blind towards unexpected findings in the empirical regularities, and the possible theoretical discoveries to be made.

Within the context of this study, the prowess of such an approach in allowing unexpected discoveries was epitomized, for example, by the way in which the central empirical and theoretical importance of 'shared cognitive schemata' crystallized as the research progressed. At the outset, the study had not even considered mental knowledge structures, and thus not included it in its array of 'sensitizing concepts'. However, after having observed shared meaning, and some of their empirical regularities, the researcher sought to explore the opportunities and constraints for further analysis, and consequently consulted relevant existing theories. This directed the researcher to the concept of 'shared cognitive schemata', which in turn informed the successive empirical design, and subsequent theoretical anchors.

Conversely, some of the 'sensitizing concepts', which the researcher initially thought to be central, such as 'autocracy', 'government customers', or even 'religion' proved of lesser relevance than expected, and ended up playing different or subordinate roles in the final operational model and the theory within which it was embedded. Hence, adopting some of the tenets of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) facilitated an inductive-deductive approach (Lynham

2000), and empowered the data to point towards relevant theoretical frameworks, which in turn informed the details of subsequent sampling, data collection and interpretation.

In its pursuit of quality and theoretical rigour, the validity of the interpretations was another key area of concern for this study. The study needed to verify, as much as possible and in a scientifically rigorous manner, that the subjective meanings, which the interpretative process brought to light, were valid. This was especially pertinent given the study's aim to achieve an explanatory understanding, which required 'comprehending action in terms of its subjectively determined meaning' (Coldwell 2007: 1).

To this effect, Schütz (1967) maintains that subjective interpretations can only claim scientific rigour if they test positively for causal adequacy and adequacy on the level of meaning (Schütz 1967). According to Schütz (1967), a subjective construct is considered causally adequate when it is coherent with what has been frequently experienced in the past, and thus able to predict what happens. However, Coldwell (2007) contests the very possibility of causally explaining social phenomena, let alone assessing the certainty of any causal inferences within such contexts. He argues that causal explanations for social phenomena are inappropriate and unrealistic

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because humans are governed by volition, emotion and motive, and not by invariable laws (Coldwell 2007).

Schütz's (1967) notion of adequacy on the level of meaning refers to being able to attribute a particular subjective meaning to an actor without contradicting what else we know about him or her. While admitting that this is, at least, theoretically possible, Coldwell posits that, in practice, adequacy at the level of meaning requires interpretative skills that border on intuition and 'having a nose for something' (Monk 2005, cited in Coldwell 2007: 4). Inevitably, intuition resulting from personal experience often generates flawed decisions and is pregnant with the author's prejudice (Pfeffer and Sutton 2006). Even if some expert researchers may have attained such skills, Coldwell (2007: 4) argues, it is still difficult to present it as a 'verifiable body of knowledge'.

Even though Coldwell (2007) asserts that neither causal, nor meaning adequacy, are realistically achievable, he concedes that it is nevertheless possible to approximate them. To do that, Olsen (2004) advocates a triangulated dialectical methodology, which aspires to causal adequacy and adequacy on the level of meaning, and is based on the principle that science is capable of studying a reality that is independent of our subjectivities (critical realism). In essence, Olson

(2004) explains, triangulation is about combining a mix of approaches, which include qualitative and quantitative methods, to generate several viewpoints or angles from which to look upon the object of study. The different angles bring to light the commonalities and differences of the various interpretations, and thus generate a dialectic of learning. Rooting triangulation in the principles of critical realism, Olsen (2004) highlights, requires a pluralism of method to walk hand-in-hand with a pluralism of theory.

Given this study's mixed methods approach, the first phase of the empirical work included in-depth semi-structured interviews, factor analysis and multivariate data reduction, and thematic analysis - all of which formed part of a Q Methodological inquiry into surfacing shared structures of meaning. While the Q Methodology research phase is explained in detail in Chapter 5, the important point here is that its medley of quantitative and qualitative instruments ensured that the interpretations of subjective meanings were as adequate and valid as possible.

For the second phase of the empirical work, the study only employed qualitative methods. However, it achieved triangulation by having a six-head-strong Cultural Reference Group undertake the analysis for its second phase, which included identifying the schemata that

underlie the meaning structures. The six members individually interpreted the results of the Q Methodological inquiry from their six different points of view. As a result, the six different vantage points of the group members brought to light the convergent and divergent aspects of the interpretations. Here, the researcher was keen to avoid influencing the interpretative process with her subjective bias, or even worse, affecting the group members' deliberation with any implicit power dynamics as the author of the study. Consequently, the researcher limited herself to only playing a moderating role, and refrained from actively participating in this part of the analysis.

Interestingly, both Olsen (2004) and Flick (2009) posit that, in some research projects, triangulation not only contributes to validating the interpretations but also facilitates the innovation of conceptual frameworks. Unexpectedly, the researcher found Olsen's (2004) and Flick's (2009) assertion to be true for this study. The researcher had only asked the members of the Cultural Reference Group whether they thought that the meaning structures were symptomatic of any underlying, cognitive schemata, and if so how would they describe these schemata. When contemplating the schema properties, however, the group members noted that there were two types of schemata. Their finding ended up forming an innovative and critical part of the resulting conceptual model.

At each stage of the data collection, the results were also presented to practitioners and scholars for scrutiny and validation, intellectual deliberation and further thought experimentation. For one, the author used traditional formal contexts to invite criticism, suggestions and thoughts throughout each research phase. This included presenting at five conferences held in Oxford, Cardiff, Amsterdam, Budapest and Rotterdam, two research poster conferences in Birmingham and Coventry respectively, three PhD showcases at the University of Birmingham, as well as submitting articles to three established journals for double-blind peer reviews.

In order to ensure that those conference or PhD showcase attendees, who felt too shy or intimidated to query, or contribute to the research project in a public setting would also be able to make an input, the author distributed 4x6 index cards wherever possible. She asked attendees to each jot down one comment, suggestion, tip or criticism. At the end of her presentation, the author collected all the index cards from the conference or PhD showcase attendees, and sifted through them. In addition, she also actively created informal opportunities, for example, over dinner with research participants, government advisors, and regional and cultural experts in Abu Dhabi, or asked for comments from former work colleagues, the university's departmental

staff, and even departmental associates, who had expressed interest in, or knowledge of, the subject.

While circulating and presenting work-in-progress in such a manner had required a certain amount of courage and willingness to embarrass herself, as well as often tested the author's emotional resilience, it enabled a highly productive process of identifying inconsistencies and overlooked theories, and formulating the appropriate next step in the inquiry. For example, initially the expectation had been to use Q Methodology to surface shared meaning structures, and further examine the results from this analysis by means of Realist Evaluation. However, following the revelations of the Q Methodology research phase, iterative discussions with academics and practitioners led to the conclusion that an adapted method of a Reference Group would probably prove a much better suited tool for the next step of the inquiry.

The nature of the linear reporting of a research project and its 'post-hoc organisation' into chapters and themes might, to a certain extent, mask this study's pursuit of the unfolding insights in the fashion of a detective (Geertz 1973: vi). In doing so, the study deferred to the emerging data and looming theories, its use of a triangulated dialectical methodology, as well as its continual exposure to the

scrutiny of practitioners and academics. Yet, by insisting on a research process that was by nature 'exploratory, self-questioning and shaped by the occasion of its production' (Geertz 1973: vi), this research sought to ensure quality and theoretical rigour, and cement the validity and integrity of the methods used, the interpretations made, and the operational model developed.

Crossing disciplinary boundaries

Given its bottom-up, exploratory and pragmatically mixed design, this study not only employed a pluralism of method but also a pluralism of theory. The thesis' leitmotif of a pragmatic design saw it transcending interdisciplinary boundaries with regard to the intellectual sources on which it drew. In designing the operational approach and theorizing about research questions 1a and 1b, the study fused knowledge from sociology, anthropology, psychology and biology, and based its own theory-building on the insights of multiple theories from across those four disciplines (Cairney 2013).

Here, the research project glissaded across a range of domains that were all concerned with human thought, emotions and behaviour, yet approached these from quite different angles. The palette of theories from within the four disciplines, informing this thesis, included *social phenomenology* (e.g. Ajiboye 2012, Schütz 1967), *cognitive*

anthropology (e.g. Kronenfeld et al. 2011, Strauss and Quinn 1997), *cultural analysis in organisations* (e.g. Weber and Dacin 2011, Elsbach et al. 2005), *constructivist* or *inhabited institutionalism* (e.g. Bell 2011, Everitt and Levinson 2014), *social psychology* (e.g. Fine and Hallett 2014, Haidt et al. 2003), the *sociology of emotions* (e.g. Tiedens and Leach 2004), and *cognitive neuroscience* (e.g. Salzman and Fusi 2010) .

Social phenomenology, which was founded by the Alfred Schütz, synthesizes Weber's (1922) sociology of understanding with Husserl's (1928) phenomenology, which is the study of human consciousness and the achievement of subjectivity (Schütz 1967). As such, social phenomenology bridges sociological and phenomenological traditions by focussing on the role of human awareness in situational structuring and the construction of social realities. It is particularly useful for getting at the diversity of human experiences and subjective understandings in a politically and normatively neutral way, and that avoids arrogant dogmatism (Ajiboye 2012).

Cognitive anthropology makes for a natural bedfellow with this public administrative study considering its focus on explaining patterns of shared meaning systems by building on the methods and theories of the cognitive sciences. Cognitive anthropological researchers

examine the implicit knowledge and beliefs held by people from different groups, and how these impact on the way people perceive and relate to the world around them (Kronenfeld et al. 2011, Bennardo 2011).

Cultural analysis in organisations has perhaps the most obvious relevance to this research, given its fascinating insights into how people in organisations adapt through the use of meaning systems, and how organisational researchers develop analytical tools for reading and understanding cultural practices (Weber and Dacin 2011). Specifically, the study drew on 'second wave' cognitive-cultural strands within general management theory and neo-institutional theory (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Weber and Dacin 2011). The thesis particularly followed social constructivist approaches to meaning-making in organisations (e.g. Maitlis and Christianson 2014) and situated cognition in organisations (e.g. Elsbach et al. 2005).

Constructive or inhabited institutionalism is another palpable intellectual stimulus for this study. Constructive or inhabited institutionalism is a newer branch of the sociological theory of new institutionalism, and offers compelling insights into the dynamic role of ideas in institutional change (Hay 2006). Its value to this research project lies especially in its explanations of how people 'inhabit', or

populate, socially established practices with local meaning and significance (Hallett and Ventresca 2006).

Social psychology is perhaps less self-evident as an intellectual area of relevance to this study. Unlike the research design of this thesis, social psychology often features laboratory-based research and a post-positivist orientation (e.g. Haider and Skowronski 2007, Damasio 1994). Irrespectively, theorists within social psychology have generated thought-provoking insights on how mental states interact with social situations in order to produce human behaviour (Haidt et al. 2003).

In this context, one of the newer fields in social psychology, namely the sociology of emotions, deserves particular mention. Recognizing that emotions are, in fact, a form of cognition, scholars within this field have garnered exceptional insights into the ways in which emotions are manipulated by, as well as actively manipulating social institutions and discourses (Tiedens and Leach 2004).

While biology may at first glimpse hardly seem pertinent to this research project, its neuroscientific body of knowledge offers some relevant supporting insights. Specifically, cognitive neuroscientists have made fascinating discoveries in their studies of the biological

substrata underlying cognition and mental processes (Fusi and Salzmann 2010). Approaching the issue of change to thought processes from a completely different angle than, for example constructive or inhabited institutionalism, cognitive neuroscience looks at changes in neural circuitry and their impact on cognition (Gazzaniga et al. 2002).

Reflexivity

The fundamental proposition of this thesis is that human beings are inherently subjective, and therefore attach meaning to concepts or situations based on their personal 'webs of significance' (Geertz 1973: 5). Of course, this too includes the author of this study, who is a *homo subjectivus* like everybody else. Consequently, this section accounts for how the researcher's subjective self has influenced the research process and the production of knowledge within the context of this study.

The author conceptualized reflexivity as a recognition of 'the historicity, contingency and power of the self' (Pillay 2005: 540). Along with Pillay (2005: 539-540), the author believes that a research *strategy* can be designed to minimize the researcher's voice and influence, yet the *interpretations and narratives* 'cannot be separated from the self'. As Pillay (2005: 543) aptly points out, 'reflexivity

takes on varying levels of consciousness through the writing process, but it does not leave you'. Put differently, the subjective self cannot be discarded in the writing up of a research project. This notion is different from other approaches to reflexivity, such as theoretical, textual and deconstructive types (see Foley 2002 for an overview of the various types of reflexivity). These other conceptualizations of reflexivity require the author, for example, to be disengaged and 'omniscient' (Pillay 2005: 541), to know 'thyself' (Pillow 2003: 181), or to decentre the self (Crasnow 2006).

Conversely, the author 'got personal' and became subjectively engaged with the research participants specifically in order to access their personal and intimate understandings of people. She also believes that to study human beings and their perceptions, feelings and fears, it would be necessary to 'put herself in someone else's shoes' so that her representations of the other would do justice to how that person understands the world. Hence, to the author, reflexivity was about having strategies in place to diagnose deficiencies in her representations of the other (Pillay 2005). Her main concern was not to distort and misrepresent the otherness of the other as a result of her inescapable subjectivity. Accordingly, the next few paragraphs explain more fully the means by which the author sought to minimize

any distortion of the research accounts, and ensure the authenticity of the insights gained (see Hertz 1997, cited in Pillow 2003: 178).

Given the study's premise that subjectivity is inescapable, the researcher has not only observed and questioned her own subjectivities, but systematically planned them into the research process. This has meant different things at the various stages of the research project. At the outset, for example, the author was keen to shield the research process from as much of her subjectivity as possible. Her goal was to enable unanticipated insights, and to prevent her own conscious or subconscious assumptions from setting the direction of the study. For that reason, she held back from choosing a particular theoretical framework at the start, and made sure that the first research phase included both quantitative and qualitative instruments to generate data. Admittedly, even though the study kicked off the empirical research with quantitative factor analysis, the statistical technique of factor rotation presented the researcher with choices and opportunities for some, if limited, subjective judgement (Watts and Stenner 2005).

At other points of the inquiry, however, the researcher strategically embraced her subjectivity, and purposefully employed it. For example, given the context of an authoritarian state system and the

potential fear factor of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, the researcher made use of her personal familiarity with local realities in order to collect data sensitively and thoughtfully. Moreover, the author naturally relied on her subjectivity in writing up interpretations and shared meanings. However, as indicated, she had also designed the study in such a way that she herself did not partake in the formative interpretative exercises. Both research phase one and two were participatory processes, in which the research participants took the lead and arrived at interpretations, which the author subsequently summarized and fine-tuned. In other words, throughout the project, the author's interpretative task involved undertaking second-level analyses, whereby she drew together the interpretations developed by the research participants.

The implication was that the researcher conducted research *with* participants as opposed to *on* them. This not only enabled the participants' self-referential categories to inform the study's architecture and direction, but it also shifted power away from the researcher in terms of shaping the study's content (Pillow 2003). The author mitigated the effects of inevitable power dynamics between participants by asking participants individually to interpret and reflect on meaning structures or schemata before discussing them in a group

environment. This approach particularly characterized the second research phase.

Following each effort to summarize interpretations, the author presented back her representations to the research participants as well as to others, who had *not* been part of the interpretative process yet worked and lived in the context within which the interpretations had been made. Based on their recognitions, corrections and validations, the researcher adjusted and tweaked the various interpretative outputs. Once the research participants and other employees had confirmed the authenticity of an interpretative account, the researcher was able to proceed by circulating these as the basis for further thought experimentation, theoretical sampling, and progressive interpretation (Oliver 2011).

This system of 'checks and balances' was especially useful, given that the researcher attempted to understand the subjectivities of others within a cultural context that was not her own. The one upshot of conducting the study in a non-native context was that the researcher was not tempted to try to make sense of the findings by means of her own cultural background. Therefore, it was relatively easy not to mistake the search for meaning, and its principles of unity (Schütz

1932/1967), with finding commonalities with the public administrators, who participated in the study (Pillow 2003).

Last but not least, the researcher kept a journal for reflexive notes for herself, which helped with monitoring emerging thoughts, emotional responses and shifting subjectivities. While it did little to *transcend* her personal subjectivities and cultural context, it helped critically to *reflect* on them, and expose contradictions, tensions and pitfalls throughout the research process. For example, having lost her job in Abu Dhabi's public administration due to the government's indigenization drive, the researcher could identify subsequently from her journal entries that she was still harbouring some resentment. Hence, it was recognized that particular diligence was called for in checking with the research participants the authenticity of her summaries of their representations.

In summary, considerable efforts were made consciously to plan, anticipate, and regulate the inevitable role the subjective self could play in conducting the research, and in generating insights. Hence, the research was undertaken as bottom-up and democratically as possible, and required participants repeatedly to confirm that the interpretative accounts were indeed reflective, authentic and undistorted. That said, it would be dishonest to deny the agency of the author, and the

contingency, positionality and partiality of her subjective self (Pillay 2005). Consequently, the author's reflexive commitment was founded on seeking to recognize not only the essence of the subjective other but also the essence of her subjective self as it related to the research project. Given that nobody can escape who they are, in essence, the reflexive struggle of this study was targeted at bringing to light these inevitabilities and using them constructively.

3.5 Research Methods: Q Methodology & Cultural Reference Group

As indicated, the study employed Q Methodology as the principal method for the first step of its operational model. This was to surface the regularities of the shared meaning structures expressed by Abu Dhabi's public administrators vis-à-vis the ongoing customer-centric reform. In light of the findings of the Q Methodological research phase, iterative discussions with research participants, scholars and other practitioners were held with regard to the best-suited research method for the second phase of the project. As a result, the study settled, as described earlier, on an adapted version of a Cultural Reference Group to implement the second step of the operational model. This was particularly to highlight the regularities of the schemata underlying the observed meaning structures. Both methods, and their respective justifications, are explained in detail below.

Q Methodology

Q Methodology was invented by the British physicist and psychologist William Stephenson in 1935 (Stephenson 1935). It is a respondent-driven research technique for the scientific study of subjectivity, which focuses on people rather than variables (Watts and Stenner 2012). It allows participants themselves to define the relevant discourses and meaningful categories based on their own beliefs and values (Watts and Stenner 2012, van Exel and de Graaf 2005). It has been described as a 'qualiquantological' research technique with an associated set of theoretical and methodological concepts (Watts and Stenner 2012).

As a theory, Q Methodology sets out the concept of operant subjectivity and the scientific study of such a concept (Watts and Stenner 2012). As a method, it uncovers the key viewpoints, which exist among a group of participants, and facilitates a holistic understanding of those viewpoints with a high level of qualitative detail (Watts and Stenner 2012). Essentially, in Q Methodology, the constructivist process of capturing self-referential personal viewpoints generates quantitative data for statistical factor analysis (Ramlo and Newman 2011). The quantitative factor analysis produces 'psychologically meaningful factors', which in turn are qualitatively

interpreted to reveal the context-rich views they represent (Ramlo and Newman 2011: 179-180).

Methodologically of dual nature, Q Methodology allows researchers to generate numeric data, conduct statistical analysis and confirm theory (quantitative), but it also enables researchers to generate narrative data, conduct thematic analysis and develop theory (qualitative) (see Tashakkori and Teddlie 2009 for an in-depth discussion of the characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research). The use of statistical methods in Q Methodology implies not that there is only a single indication of the meaning patterns found (Fairweather and Rinne 2012). The statistical analysis provides the researcher with a variety of factor algorithms, and therefore invites the researcher to make a subjective judgment. This indeterminacy, however, is consistent with the notion that 'for an ideal type, there is no one way in which the one-sided accentuation occurs' (Fairweather and Rinne 2012: 9).

Justifying the use of Q Methodology as a method

A certain amount of scholarly discussion has focused on the types of mixed methods, which are particularly well suited for interpretative studies that seek to infer some general principles (Williams 2002, Payne and Williams 2005, Gobo 2009, Fairweather and Rinne 2012).

Fairweather and Rinne (2012), for example, suggest that a mixed methods approach ought to include two steps – if the aim is to facilitate an interpretative inquiry with moderate generalizations: The first step would involve using mostly quantitative instruments to establish shared culture. Then, the second step, they argue, would employ largely qualitative mechanisms to enable an in-depth understanding.

Fittingly, the proposed operational model for this study of the subjectivities of Abu Dhabi's public administrators followed the exact same logic as suggested by Fairweather and Rinne (2012): In doing so, it first seeks to render visible the employees' regularly shared meaning structures via the analytical construct of an ideal type. This would be analogous to Fairweather's and Rinne's (2012) proposition of first establishing shared culture. Secondly, the study's operational model aimed to delve deeper and explore those schemata, which underlie the regularly occurring meaning structures. This would correspond with Fairweather's and Rinne's (2012) suggestion subsequently to seek an in-depth understanding. Hence, given that this study's operational model concurs with Fairweather's and Rinne's (2012) thoughts on methods, the researcher was able to benefit from their discussion on the particular types of methods for enquiries such as this one.

Fairweather and Rinne (2012) also posit that Q Methodology (Brown 1980, Stephenson 1953) is especially conducive to providing a basis for those interpretative studies that aim for moderatum generalization. The reason for that is Q Methodology's explicit focus on shared meaning systems and its 'qualiquantological' approach, which as well as establishing shared cultures also pursues a more fine-grained understanding of them (Watts and Stenner 2005).

Seeking scientifically to investigate human subjectivity, Q Methodology first employs a quantitative approach to establish the *existence* of shared culture. It identifies consistencies and regularities in the pattern of responses across *people*, not variables as is typical of other quantitative studies (Watts and Stenner 2005, Brown 1980). Subsequently, Q Methodology makes use of a qualitative approach that facilitates an in-depth understanding of the *content* of these shared cultures. By interpreting the similarities that groups of participants demonstrate in their views on a particular topic, the Q Methodologist creates an archetype of those people who have responded in a similar way (Watts and Stenner 2005, Brown 1980). While this archetypical viewpoint represents the views of a particular group of participants, it is distinct from any one individual's response (Watts and Stenner 2005, Brown 1980). Thereby, Fairweather and Rinne (2012: 7) argue,

Q Methodology provides an 'idealized' summary of the meanings shared by a group of participants. Again, this fits with this study's operational model, which proposes to use the analytical strategy of the ideal type (Schütz 1932/1967) in order to isolate and catalogue those meaning structures that are most regularly observed in the clusters of viewpoints held by Abu Dhabi's public administrators.

According to Fairweather and Rinne (2012), once a method establishes culture as shared, and outlines that which is shared as ideal types, there is a basis for making moderate generalizations to a wider population. In other words, once a method has identified cultural consistencies, it enables the ideal-typical patterns of meaning to have relevance in other settings. Of course, Q Methodology is not the only method that can achieve this. Fairweather and Rinne (2012) suggest some other productive methods, which include the combination of Cultural Consensus Analysis (Romney et al 1986) with Cultural Modelling (D'Andrade 1984), decision tree modelling (Gladwin 1989), qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin 2008), and causal mapping (Bryson at al., 2004; Fairweather and Hunt 2011) (cited in Fairweather and Rinne 2012: 9-10).

For this thesis, the combination of Cultural Consensus Analysis (Romney et al 1986) with Cultural Modelling (D'Andrade 1984)

represented a particularly viable alternative to Q Methodology. Cultural Consensus Analysis also employs factor-analytic methods for computing whether there is enough sharing in the participants' responses to structured questions in order to infer that respondents share a single cultural model (Romney et al 1986). If a consensual cultural model could be inferred, the researcher might then use discourse analysis to construct a cultural model outlining the representations, practices and knowledge structures through which meaning is produced (Gregory 2000).

Fairweather and Rinne (2012) conclude that, just like Q Methodology, the fusion of Cultural Consensus Analysis with Cultural Modelling, identifies patterns of shared belief by quantitative and qualitative means. The scholars point out that both methods employ small, non-random samples and analyse people as opposed to variables. Both methods enable the interpretation of several patterns in the data, and both also weight their analysis towards those participants, who emerge as most reflective of general patterns (Fairweather and Rinne 2012). However, unlike Q Methodology, the combination of Cultural Consensus Analysis with Cultural Modelling fails to emphasize the *distinctions* between the patterns of belief (Fairweather and Rinne 2012). This made the use of Cultural Consensus Analysis with Cultural Modelling less attractive for the present study, considering its

explicit focus on the shared subjectivities of *distinct groups* of public administrators.

The other methods suggested by Fairweather and Rinne (2012) are qualitative methods. Despite not being mixed methods, they are also conducive to generating moderatum generalizations because they identify ideal-typical structures of meaning in social life. However, none of these methods appeared to fit well with the study's focus on shared meaning at group-level within the context of public administrative reform. Decision tree modelling (Gladwin 1989), which maps how a person arrives at a particular decision, also failed to chime with the realities of an ambiguous reform process. The study did not require participants to reach a decision on the reform, but instead to articulate a multi-dimensional view that could be attributed to a group of public administrators. Qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin 2008) involves participants specifying the conditions under which a particular outcome occurs. Again, this method had little obvious relevance to the context of a reform programme because the change initiative was ongoing and with no clear outcome having necessarily been achieved. With causal mapping (Bryson at al., 2004; Fairweather and Hunt 2011) participants draw up causal maps exhibiting the factors considered to be important in a particular setting and the relationships between them. Based on the multiple linkages

between factors, an account is then created that identifies the core elements of the system under study. Here, the perceived disadvantage was of the study becoming bogged down with the particularities of Abu Dhabi's public administration, and losing sight of the main purpose to reveal the underlying conditions of meaning-making, and not of a specific public administration.

Thus having carefully considered possible alternatives, the researcher settled on employing Q Methodology for its first research phase – this having been seen as the best-suited tool to empirically for collecting data and surfacing the shared meaning structures of Abu Dhabi's public administrators at group-level. It was also concluded that Q Methodology would most likely serve well the study's ultimate goal of inferring general principles from those particular empirical findings.

Cultural Reference Group

Building on the results of the Q Methodology, as already indicated, the study subsequently adapted for its purpose the method of a Reference Group. Traditionally, Reference Groups are most commonly used in the evaluation of service provision. In this context, they involve a group of people to which service providers refer in order to identify as accurately as possible what the service users'

needs are and what are the best ways to meet those needs (Wadsworth 1991, cited in Lammers and Happell 2004: 263).

White (2002) argues for involving Reference Groups in other research contexts to enhance the accountability of researchers and to improve outcomes. Berends and Johnston (2005) further highlight the practicalities involved, and draw attention to the challenges of adding lay people with different knowledge and experiences to the research team. Irrespectively, scholars agree that the particular value of a Reference Group is its unique local knowledge and 'insider' experience with regards to the object of study (Lammers and Happell 2004, White 2002, Ife 1997).

In this current project, the researcher was especially keen to work with people who were intimately familiar with existing local knowledge structures, or even have internalized them themselves. Thus, the study adapted the concept of a Reference Group to its research purpose: In doing so, key informant sampling was employed to organize a six-head-strong Cultural Reference Group, consisting of three professionals, who train, teach and cognitively develop Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and three participants who had each loaded on to a different viewpoint emerging from the Q Methodological enquiry. This Cultural Reference Group was then asked to scrutinize the

findings from the Q Methodology analysis, and to identify some of the underlying knowledge structures, or schemata, from the apparent structures of meaning.

Justifying the use of a Cultural Reference Group as a method

Throughout the Q Methodological inquiry, the study had constantly sought to link theory and data in order to winnow the further direction of the project. As a result, an understanding was arrived at that meaning-making was not only social; i.e. referring to how a person constructs meaning within a social and cultural context, but also cognitive; i.e. relating to the internal knowledge structures, or schemata, that a person applies to make meaning (see Chapter 2). Hence, in light of these findings, the study needed to determine the best-suited method for extracting underlying schemata from the meaning structures found. With the emergence of group schemata as the critical object of study, the earlier thoughts about using Realist Evaluation had ceased to bear sufficient relevance to the aims of the second phase of the fieldwork.

Accordingly, based on a wider review of methods in the social science, the researcher focused on a number of studies that, like the current project, centred on a conceptualization of meaning-making as a socio-cognitive process at the actor level. Clearly, the question of

the suitability of different methods for this type of enquiry is still a subject of scholarly debate (see Weber 2005 for a critical overview), and not least because of the relative paucity of such research. However, the literature does at least contain plenty of calls for more such studies on the grounds that 'the intricacy of the individual and social construction of knowledge is less studied, particularly from the participant's perspective' (Yelich Biniecki 2015: 6, Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Taylor 2012, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, Gillespie and Cornish 2009).

Existing discussions about productive methods for analysing socio-cognitive meaning-making distinguish between the analysis of cultural toolkits, i.e. the cultural resources available to individuals; and the analysis of cultural systems, which focuses on the deep logical structure of culture (see Weber 2005 for an in-depth discussion). Scholars conducting empirical work within these fields advocate textual and semiotic methods, such as content analysis, semantic analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis (Rindova et al 2011, Weber 2005). Other cultural analysts have effectively employed ethnographic techniques, such as personal discourse, field notes and participant observation (Kaplan 2011, Kronenfeld et al 2011).

Content analysis categorizes textual elements according to the concepts they signify (Krippendorff 2004). Semantic analysis combines content analysis with a consideration of the grammatical relationships between textual elements, as a proxy to indicate associations between concepts (Roberts 2000). Narrative analysis is concerned with the ways in which the details of a story are weaved together (Boje 2001), and discourse analysis focuses on the social and ideological underpinnings of meaning-making (Blommaer 2005, Foucault 1972). Given the current study's aim to distillate schemata from the viewpoints emerging from the Q Methodology, semantic analysis was the only method that offered least pertinence because of its emphasis on grammar. In contrast, content analysis seemed highly relevant as a straightforward approach to identifying schemata. Similarly, narrative analysis offered much promise, particularly considering the ways in which people construct stories to interpret the world, and the kinds of information this might reveal about their underlying schemata. Of course, the wider discursive context, within which a viewpoint stands, would provide further significant clues as to the schemata at the root.

Equally, ethnographic techniques seemed to have much to offer in this second phase of the fieldwork, given their emphasis on the 'insider's point of view' (Orcher 2005). Ethnographic methods complement

textual and semiotic techniques in that they also usually take account of non-verbal language, such as tone or body language (see Whitehead 2005 for a critical overview of classical ethnographic research methods). Traditionally in such studies, cultural meanings and representations are uncovered following the researcher's immersion in the field, which is referred to as participant observation (Orcher 2005, Whitehead 2005). This is usually accompanied by field notes and personal discourses with research participants (Whitehead 2005). In order to tease out underlying schemata from shared viewpoints, an immersion into the realities of some of those who might reflect the different shared viewpoints, as well as the reference to personal discourses and the use of field notes, was considered potentially productive.

Indeed, following deliberations with a number of public administrative scholars and practitioners, an initial consensus emerged in favour of employing textual and ethnographic methods for the second research phase. But this was then tempered by concerns on the part of the researcher about sufficiency of knowledge, experiential background and detailed appreciation of the situational realities of those whose structures of meaning would form the basis of the analysis. So, in light of further discussions with practitioners and scholars, it was finally decided best to recruit a set of people with the

necessary 'insider' knowledge. This was the Cultural Reference Group already referred to, and of which the author formed no part. Members of the group were asked individually to identify the underlying knowledge structures, or schemata, from the observed structures of meaning found, and then discuss them as a group. The process for selecting and inviting people to form part of the Cultural Reference Group, as well as more information about the group members, is detailed in Chapter 6.

In their endeavour, members of the Group themselves variously applied aspects not only of content analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis, but also ethnographic elements, such as personal discourse, field notes and participant observation. They employed these methods hermeneutically, thus focussing on revealing the mediated processes of human understanding and interpretation (Larking et al. 2011, Kinsella 2006). Hermeneutics has been applied to the human sciences since the work of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1910) (cited in Kinsella 2006, paragraph 4), and here the goal is to spell out the interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place. To this end, the approach typically focuses on the subjectivities and prejudices that individuals bring to the interpretive process (Gadamer 1996). As such, a hermeneutical approach is able to accommodate ambiguity and can allow for the

human complexities and contradictions of the interpretive endeavour (Kearney 2003). It emphasizes self-critical thinking and the need to go beyond the insights of the present context (Larking et al. 2011, Kinsella 2006).

The researcher's role in coproducing with the Cultural Reference Group

While coproducing the second part of the thesis' fieldwork with a Cultural Reference Group promised access to the necessary 'insider' knowledge, such an approach also blurs the conventional roles of 'the researched' and 'the researcher', and brings to the forefront a number of methodological issues (Orr and Bennett 2012, Van de Ven and Johnson 2006, Reason and Bradbury 2001). The concept of coproduction has increasingly gained prominence as an approach in the field of public administration, and is applied to a range of reciprocal partnerships. Perhaps most frequently, the term coproduction is used to describe new types of collaborative public service delivery with public sector organisations entering into partnerships with civic communities and service users (Boyle and Harris 2009, Bovaird 2007). For example, in the UK, this forms the bedrock of new approaches to adult social care (Needham and Carr 2009), or informs the rethinking of welfare provision at a time when

resources are scarce while the expectations of the public are rising (Boyle and Harris 2009).

In applying the concept of coproduction to research collaborations between academics and public administrators, Orr and Bennett (2012: 488) define it as 'the accomplishment of research by academics and practitioners working together at each stage of the process, including conceptualization, design, fieldwork, analysis, and presentation of the work'. Similarly, Reason (1999: 208) defines coproduced research as 'an inquiry strategy in which all those involved in the research endeavour are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision-making contributes to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience; and also co-subjects, participating in the activity which is being researched'. Orr and Bennett (2012: 488) make it clear that coproduction goes above and beyond institutional collaborations, such as joint research projects or research partnerships, because it emphasises 'joint knowledge creation' and captures 'the personal interests and relationships that animate cooperative endeavours'. Accordingly, for the second part of the fieldwork, the role of the researcher in this study was limited to facilitating the knowledge created by the members of the Cultural Reference Group, who took over as co-researchers.

Scholars and practitioners agree that the conceptualisation of coproduction is rooted in the original 'pracademic' tradition of public administration as a field of study in which most of the founding scholars were both practitioners and academics (Posner 2009, Shield 2008, Ospina and Dodge 2005), who considered research 'a way to synthesize what they had experienced as practitioners' (Bolton and Stolcis 2003: 627). The researcher found herself in a similar position, as she previously had been working as a public administrator in the very setting that she then sought to examine through the lens of academic research.

The separation between academics and practitioners in public administration is 'a relatively recent phenomenon', as Bolton and Stolcis (2003: 627) point out. A range of scholars have argued that this is the result of an 'identity crisis' that has befallen the field of public administration, leaving it torn as to whether it should be seen as a cumulative science based on robust models (e.g. Mainzer 1994, Houston and Delevan 1990, Waldo 1968) or a normative, multi-theoretical research discipline that seeks professionally to support government practitioners and solve organisational challenges (e.g. Frederickson 1980, Marini 1971; cited in Orr and Bennett 2012). Of course, these different conceptualisations have important implications for the ways in which academics and practitioners relate to each other

and who generates what type of knowledge for whose benefit, as well as what are considered productive modes and methods of research.

This cleavage in the field of public administration has given rise to a renewed concern for ensuring connectivity between academics and practitioners in order to allow for scientific insights that are not only a function of the theoretical purposes they serve but also advance the practice of the public administrative field (Higher Education Funding Council England 2009, British Academy 2008, Van de Ven and Johnson 2006). Orr and Bennett (2012: 491) suggest that there is a growing consensus, at least in the UK, that coproduction between scholars and public administrators has 'the potential to produce more relevant agendas, better-quality research, and higher impact on practice'. Indeed, staff at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), who are responsible for distributing UK government funds to support research on social and economic topics, stress the 'crucial role of coproduction in achieving impact', and even go as far as affirming that 'there is no automatic constraint, and in many cases, co-produced research can be transformational' (Armstrong and Alsop 2010: 210).

Moreover, Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) argue that, by coproducing research, the pitfalls of generating self-reinforcing, insular and partial knowledge can be avoided. In addition, Reason

(1999) and Heron (1996) highlight the value of 'critical subjectivity' in coproduced research, whereby existing subjective knowledge is not dismissed in search of detached objectivity but rather built upon and further developed. The authors also emphasise that coproduced research allows for increased democracy and participation instead of the usual authority exerted by self-interested researchers (Reason 1999, Heron 1996). Last but not least, coproduced research offers practical advantages, such as access to elite groups, increased trust among the research team, and better insights into experiences and practices (Orr and Bennett 2012).

While coproduced research may offer many advantages, generating knowledge in such a way involves overcoming multiple hurdles. Orr and Bennett (2012: 487) highlight that the dynamics in coproducing public administrative knowledge are complex, and involve the challenge of managing 'ambiguous loyalties, reconciling different interests, and negotiating competing goals' (Orr and Bennett 2012: 487). The authors caution that coproduced public administrative research happens in a politicised setting and is shaped by wider agendas and influences that impact on the interactions between scholars and practitioners, who are driven by different 'personal, professional, and instrumental motivations' (Orr and Bennett 2012: 492). In other words, the different norms and priorities of academia

and government, which are also apparent in performance management systems and career trajectories, shape the research contexts, interests and imperatives of scholars and public administrators respectively, and frame how they view and negotiate the research process. Here, Orr and Bennett (2012) warn of the discrepancy between the rhetoric of coproduced research, which emphasises close collaboration, and the reality, which is marked by a clash of cultures that results from the different values, norms and embedded assumptions. Inevitably, as Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) point out, this gives rise to conflict among different co-researchers who have pluralistic perspectives on a given reality.

Mindful of these challenges, researchers have found several methodologies to be effective in coproducing knowledge between academics and practitioners. These methodologies not only enable the research team critically to take account of contextual diversity but also to produce more widely applicable findings that resonate with both scholars and practitioners. The methodologies include cooperative inquiry (Reason 1999, Heron 1996), engaged scholarship, (Van de Ven and Johnson 2006), and action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001, cited in Orr and Bennett 2012: 488).

In a cooperative inquiry, as advocated by Reason (1999) and Heron (1996), the group members developed general knowledge by systematically going through various cycles of examining and reflecting on their own experiences and actions in collaboration with others who had similar experiences, interests and concerns. To ensure the quality and robustness of the findings, Reason (1999) and Heron (1996) put forward a list of theoretical and practical recommendations, such as ensuring a balance between theory and action, allowing for intuitive discovery, being willing to deal with distress, developing critical attention, and clearly setting out roles and ground rules.

Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) advocate the method of engaged scholarship as a mode of inquiry that effectively facilitates the coproduction of knowledge, and is capable of meeting the twin goal of theoretical knowledge as well as applied use. The authors define engaged scholarship as 'a collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to coproduce knowledge about a complex problem or phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world' (Van de Ven and Johnson 2006: 803). Van de Ven and Johnson (2006: 803) consider engaged scholarship to be a pluralist methodology that is consistent with 'an evolutionary realist philosophy of science'. As such, engaged scholarship is a dialectic

method that enables triangulating issues through an arbitrage strategy that takes account of different perspectives and experiences (Van de Ven and Johnson 2006). The central pillar of arbitrage in engaged scholarship is creative conflict management that instigates 'task-oriented conflict' to exploit the differing views of scholars and practitioners but manages 'inter-personal conflict' (Van de Ven and Johnson 2006: 810). Van de Ven and Johnson (2006: 814) propose that there are four steps to the method of engaged scholarship, which include (1) set up the research project as a collaborative community of learning that is made up of scholars and practitioners, (2) identify questions and inconsistencies existing in the real-world, (3) systematically examine both alternative theories and different practical formulations, (4) design research to generate findings that are relevant to academic disciplines and realms of practice.

Action research, which arguably has evolved from cooperative inquiry and engaged scholarship and other methods, represents a third approach to coproducing knowledge. Reason and Bradbury (2001: 1) define action research as seeking 'to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and, more generally, the flourishing of individual persons and their communities'.

Action research emphasises social construction and its underpinning moral order, political engagement and democratic practice, and dismisses the idea of objective and neutral knowledge that is produced by aloof and detached researchers who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the social fabric that is being explored (Reason and Bradbury 2001). Indeed, action researchers believe in the value of people's existing subjective knowledge and their ability to contribute to a research project as equals, although from different vantage points. In order to ensure that a collaborative action research study is methodologically sound, Park (2001) proposes that it ought to produce three different forms of knowledge: representational, relational and reflective knowledge. Representational knowledge is two-pronged and has a functional sub-form, which involves general propositions of logically structured theories. It also has an interpretive sub-form, which involves hermeneutically acquired explanations of meanings (Park 2001). Relational knowledge can only be generated if co-researchers have developed empathy for one another, and as a result, know one another 'affectively as well as cognitively' (Park 2001: 83). Reflective knowledge is based on recognising the significance of action and experience, which enables an instinctive understanding of abstract concepts found in social realities.

In line with the literature on coproducing research, the thesis had much to gain from the unique advantages of a collaborative inquiry. Accordingly, the researcher opted to conceptualise, design, research, and analyse the second part of her fieldwork in partnership with the members of the Cultural Reference Group. By employing elements of cooperative inquiry, engaged scholarship and action research, the researcher sought to address some of the methodological challenges that coproducing research brings with it.

3.6   Summary of Chapter 3

This chapter (chapter 3) has set out the ontological, epistemological and methodological armour with which this study applied its two-step operational model to the concrete case of Abu Dhabi's public administrative reform.   The empirical implementation of the operational model particularly sought to answer research question 1b, which asked how useful such model might be in diagnosing the shared subjective, and evaluating employees' responsiveness to reform?   By exploring the particularities of Abu Dhabi Government, the study also sought to make observations within a particular real-life scenario that could be conceptually consolidated to infer general patterns beyond the specific case. Thus, the project's wider research purpose would be to develop moderate generalizations through abductive reasoning.

Guided by the research purpose, the study chose to adopt a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, which implied particular epistemological and ontological assumptions. The research purpose also critically determined the project's design and choice of methods. Accordingly, the study selected a mixed methods design, which employed Q Methodology to collect data on shared meaning in research phase one, and a Cultural Reference Group to gather data on schemata in research phase two. Q Methodology is a respondent-driven, qualiquantological research technique for the scientific study of subjectivity. The Cultural Reference Group, which consisted of six members with 'insider' knowledge on locally existing schemata, hermeneutically employed textual, semiotic and ethnographic techniques in order to coproduce knowledge during the second part of the study.

The data collection would be pragmatically underpinned by elements of a case study and grounded theory, while the project's particular mixed methods approach would be characterized by pragmatism and care to shield the investigation against the researcher's subjective bias. Where necessary, the approach would willingly traverse disciplinary boundaries in learning from, and building on, extant scholarship. The study would insist on being shaped by its production, and would therefore defer to the emerging data and theories as well as to the on-

going critiques of both the practitioners and academics with whom the researcher engaged. This contributed to the study's quest to ensure validity and integrity in the methods deployed, in the interpretations made, and in the operational model to be developed. It also formed the crux of the author's reflexive struggle adequately to represent the essence of the other, while at the same time factoring in her own subjective self.

CHAPTER 4: A Case in Point

"Service delivery is the public face of government. [...] Government is

unlikely to earn the public's respect and trust if it is not seen

attempting to satisfy customer needs with respect and efficiency."

(The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series, 'From

Customer Satisfaction Measurement to Customer-Centricity: Lessons

from Abu Dhabi', 2013: 2)

4.1　Introduction to Chapter 4

Chapter 1 has called for new conceptual models in public

administration, which put subjective and interpretative human beings

at the centre. The caveat is, so Chapter 1 has highlighted, that these

novel conceptual models must not be rooted in western normative

worldviews and instead allow for indigenous legitimacy. In preparing

the theoretical ground for such a model, Chapter 2 has sought better to

understand the phenomenon of subjectivity, with a particular focus on

the 'inter' in inter-subjectivity. Following an extensive review of

various bodies of literature on meaning-making and human thought,

Chapter 2 has laid out a socio-cognitive conceptualization of shared

subjectivity. On this basis, Chapter 2 has proposed a socio-cognitive

operational model empirically to investigate subjectivities that are

shared by groups of public administrators. In doing so, Chapter 2 has addressed research question 1a, which asked how to practically observe and analyse the phenomenon of shared meaning-making.

Armed with the operational model, the next step of this project was to address research question 1b, and apply the operational model to a real-life public administration. Research question 1b had asked about the utility of such a model, but also about its capacity for revealing the 'enduring natural processes that underlie' the empirically observed regularities (Geertz 1973: 44) – or in other words, its ability to uncover some of the general conditions of meaning-making. Hence, Chapter 3 has proposed applying the operational model to the specific case of Abu Dhabi's public administrators and their shared meaning-making of the ongoing customer-centric reform initiative. Even though using Abu Dhabi's public administration as the empirical research context involved elements of a case study design, Chapter 3 has cautioned that the study's focus was on the phenomena of meaning-making, and not on Abu Dhabi's public administration. Hence, Abu Dhabi's particular government and its customer-centric reform only provided the real-life context, within which the object of study, which is subjective meaning-making, would be empirically investigated.

That said, it is still necessary to portray Abu Dhabi's administrators, the customer-centric reform, and their particular administrative and social context, even if it is not in the exhaustive fashion of a typical case study. The purpose is twofold: First, the subjectivities found among groups of Abu Dhabi's public administrators would be rendered meaningful only by contextualizing them within the social realities in which they are embedded. Secondly, bearing in mind the study's goal of making moderate generalizations, outlining the context of Abu Dhabi's public administration allows for identifying shared characteristics and patterns, and thus demarcates the limits for wider claims (Payne and Williams 2005). Consequently, this chapter describes Abu Dhabi's public administration and its customer-centric reform, and concludes by reflecting on those aspects that are more widely found in a world that features a myriad of public administrations.

However, in constructing this chapter's narrative of Abu Dhabi Government's reform process, there were a few challenges, some of which may be typical for research within the context of an emerging economy, while others may be attributed to the realities of an authoritarian regime. For one, in Abu Dhabi, robust, reliable and comprehensive statistical data is notoriously hard to come by, bearing in mind that the main official body for research and statistics, the

Statistic Centre Abu Dhabi, was only established in 2008 and only conducted its second official census in 2013. Despite the need for a scholarly debate on issues of Abu Dhabi's public management, the existing body of research focuses only on the Emirate's history (e.g. Davidson 2011, Heard-Bey 2005, Al Fahim 1995), the conditions and socio-economic impacts of being a non-democratic oil state (e.g. Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2012, Davidson 2011, Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011, Herb 2009, Elbers 2008), and its rapid transformation in terms of development (e.g. Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014, Al Khouri 2010, Elsheshtawy 2008). Furthermore, Abu Dhabi's local media, which constitutes an important source of public debate on public management issues, is censored and thus avoids critical inquiry, while the international media reports from a strikingly one-dimensional perspective (Herb 2005).

Government evaluations, independent studies and professional reports on customer-centric public services in Abu Dhabi were few in number and mostly remain unpublished. Only a couple of reports were found to be publicly available, which the government itself had carefully prepared (e.g. The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series 2013, Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010). At the time of the field-work, the government had just begun gathering baseline data to build a knowledge warehouse on its public

services, and generate psychographic insight into Abu Dhabi's service users and society as a whole.

However, in her position as the Customer Satisfaction Adviser to the Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council, it had been a central tenet of the author's post to develop an evidence-based understanding of the particular issues confronting customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi Government. Hence, as part of her position, she had systematically interviewed government departments and service users to assess the challenges they faced; she had reviewed customer-centric initiatives and strategic plans; she had closely collaborated with Abu Dhabi's government departments in developing a focus on government customers in strategy, policy-making and performance assessment of government services; and she had also personally experienced the reform implementation as a service user.

Of course, the nature of her job implied that the author was additionally able to access some of the internal reports and grey literature on Abu Dhabi Government's customer-centric reform process. Nonetheless, the majority of the grey literature was composed by consultants and could not be taken entirely at face value. At the time of the research, it was part of the culture in Abu Dhabi Government to massage report results in order to present positive

political messages to the autocratic leadership, and to guarantee future lucrative contracts for the respective consultancy – in return for co-operation in this respect.

Under these circumstances, best efforts have been made in this chapter to piece together a narrative that maximizes the value of existing published and unpublished literature, while at the same time drawing on the author's three years on-the-ground experience and professional insight into the realities of Abu Dhabi Government's customer-centric reform process.

4.2   Abu Dhabi Government

A modern autocracy

As an absolute monarchy with no democratically elected institutions or political parties, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (herein after referred to as Abu Dhabi) 'represents one of the purest autocracies in the modern world' (Davidson 2006: 42, Freedom House 2015). It is one of seven states, or Emirates, which together make up the federation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (UAEinteract 2015).[15]   Abu Dhabi borders on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Gulf. It is the largest, richest and most influential Emirate

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[15] The UAE, a constitutional monarchy, was created in 1971 after British departure. It has a permanent Constitution since 1996 that vests power in the UAE President as head of state, and the 'Supreme Federal Council', which is made up of the rulers of each of the other 6 Emirates. At the federal level, there are some elected institutions (Davidson 2006).

in the UAE due to its overwhelming share of hydrocarbon reserves, which are refined to produce oil and gas, and are globally exported (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014, Business Monitor International 2015). With Abu Dhabi holding the majority of the federation's oil and gas reserves, the Emirate's government allocates funds to provide for the entire federal budget (see Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010: 216). While the federal government has some control, for example over military and foreign policy, each individual Emirate maintains exclusive power over its natural resource revenues, taxation, police powers and other critical governmental and administrative authority (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014, Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010). This implies significant autonomy for each Emirate, and ensures Abu Dhabi Government's administrative and regulatory sovereignty.

The unelected, hereditary monarchic ruler of Abu Dhabi is currently His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nayhan.[16] He hails from a long line of Al-Nahyan rulers, spanning more than three centuries to when their parent clan, the Al-Bu Falah, first took leadership of the greater Bani-Yas tribe (Davidson 2006, 2011). His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nayhan presides over what Herb (1999: 4) coined a 'dynastic monarchy'. In a 'dynastic monarchy', the ruler

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[16] Every five years, the ruler of Abu Dhabi is also customarily re-elected as the UAE President (Heard-Bey 2005).

typically installs members of his royal family in ministerial posts and other high, prestigious positions in the government administration, thereby concentrating power and ensuring the continuation of the royal family as a ruling institution (Herb 1999). Presently, Abu Dhabi's public administrative affairs are overseen by the ruler's half-brother, His Highness Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, who is also the Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010).

The German political scientist Elbers (2008) has argued that Abu Dhabi's political system can be classified as a distinct sub-category of modern autocracy. In his comparative study of eight autocratically governed dynastic monarchies in the Middle East[17], Elbers (2008) noted that the established characteristics of a modern autocracy are all applicable to his sample of eight countries (see Brooker 2000 and Linz 2000 for a typology of modern autocracy). These characteristics include limited freedom for the population; near unrestricted powers for the ruler and ruling family; lack of government accountability; no process for succession planning; arbitrary execution of power, which may include violence; limited political pluralism; a mentality of rule in lieu of a political ideology; restricted or no political mobilization;

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[17] Elbers' (2008) comparative study looks at Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

and a ruler or ruling family who exercise their powers within parameters that, though not formally defined, are nevertheless very predictable (see Elbers 2008: 15-16). While the dynastic monarchies in Elbers' (2008) sample satisfy all these characteristics of modern autocracies, he has highlighted that none of the regimes in his sample pursue totalitarian ideologies or mobilize the masses. Instead, so Elbers (see 2008: 28) has stressed, their rule is underpinned by Islamic religion and power is essentially cemented by ensuring their subjects' contentment and happiness.

Even though the regimes in Elbers' (2008) sample fulfill the criteria of what constitutes a modern autocracy, they are not easily classified as such because the political science literature excludes monarchies from that definition (see e.g. Brooker 2000, Linz 2000). Thus turning to the writings of Aristoteles (1971), Seiler (1996), Al Azmeh (2005) and others, Elbers (see 2008: 20) found that the following elements not only characterized democratic but also absolute monarchies: a 'political variant' or trans-cultural political phenomenon, which has developed independently in a given culture and is not the result of political import; the permanent rule of an individual; a crowned head of state; a dynastic succession by a heir within the family; a symbolic representation of the nation, which occur in different combinations and through various expressions depending on the location and time

period. As with the characteristics of autocracies, the elements of monarchies are all applicable to, and shared by, the political systems of Elbers' (2008) country sample. Therefore, he concluded that the institutional design of the dynastic monarchies in his study, which included Abu Dhabi, should be classified as a sub-category of autocracy that is defined by a total of 16 specific attributes summarized below in Figure 4.2.1.

Figure 4.2.1: Typical characteristics of a dynastic monarchy (Elbers 2008)

Regime type: Autocracy

Sub-Category: Dynastic Monarchy

Typical Characteristics:

- ✓ Limited freedom for the population;
- ✓ Near unrestricted powers for the ruler and ruling family;
- ✓ Lack of government accountability;
- ✓ No process for succession planning;
- ✓ Arbitrary execution of power, which may include violence;
- ✓ Limited political pluralism;
- ✓ Mentality of rule in lieu of a political ideology;
- ✓ Restricted or no political mobilization;
- ✓ A ruler or ruling family who exercise their powers within parameters that, though not formally defined, are nevertheless very predictable
- ✓ No totalitarian ideology or mass mobilization
- ✓ Nature of a 'political variant';
- ✓ Permanent rule of an individual;
- ✓ A crowned head of state;
- ✓ Dynastic succession by a heir within the family;
- ✓ Symbolic representation of the nation

Government structure

As is implicit from the characteristics that define an autocratically governed monarchy, Abu Dhabi's political system is heavily centralized. The Abu Dhabi Government structure chart in Figure 4.2.2 below shows that the ruler of Abu Dhabi, H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is supported by the Emirate's governing body, the Executive Council. The governing body is chaired by the crown prince, H.H. General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who effectively is the prime minister of Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014, Davidson 2011).

The Executive Council is made up of selected chairmen of Abu Dhabi's government departments and authorities, as well as other members appointed by the ruler (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014). The Executive Council is by far the most important government body in Abu Dhabi, which is the reason it prominently features in the center of Figure 4.2.2 (Davidson 2011, Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014). Hence, being included, or excluded, from the Executive Council's membership is 'an accurate barometer of prestige and influence' for Abu Dhabi's chairmen and appointees (Davidson 2011: 124).

To the left of the Executive Council, Figure 4.2.2 shows three government bodies immediately sitting below the royal courts, to which these bodies directly report. They include Abu Dhabi's Judicial Department, the Accountability Authority and the National Consultative Council. The Judicial Department manages the jurisdiction of Abu Dhabi's court systems, which offer three stages of adjudication (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014). The Abu Dhabi Accountability Authority is mandated to oversee transparency and accountability across government departments, and directly reports back to the leadership. The National Consultative Council discusses and advises on draft laws, and also receives and deliberates on citizens' complaints and petitions. It consists of 60 members, who are carefully selected from among Abu Dhabi's families and main tribes.

As the main catalyst for Abu Dhabi's development (Davidson 2011), the Executive Council meets regularly to allocate funding and determine the policy agenda and government priorities (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014). It also monitors public services, governmental performance, and the progress of government-sponsored projects, which are managed by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014, Davidson 2011). With the help of its General Secretariat, the Executive Council

oversees the government departments, locally referred to as government entities, which are equivalent to ministries and each have specific mandates. As Figure 4.2.2 shows, the government departments are responsible for a wide range of government activities ranging from economic development to employment, pensions, family cohesion, environment, transport, health, food control, education, culture and heritage, and others (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014, Davidson 2011).

The Emirate of Abu Dhabi is divided into three administrative regions: Abu Dhabi City, the Eastern Region with Al Ain as its largest city and the Western Region with Madinat Zayed as the largest city (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014). The regions are headed by the Ruler's Representatives and are administered by the respective municipalities: Municipality of Abu Dhabi City (ADM), Al Ain City Municipality (AACM) and Western Region Municipality (WRM). The Department of Municipal Affairs (DMA) is the regulatory body, which supervises the three regional municipal councils and municipal administrations. However, the three municipalities are directly accountable to the General Secretariat of the Executive Council with regards to achieving strategic performance outcomes (Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014).

Figure 4.2.2: Abu Dhabi Government structure chart
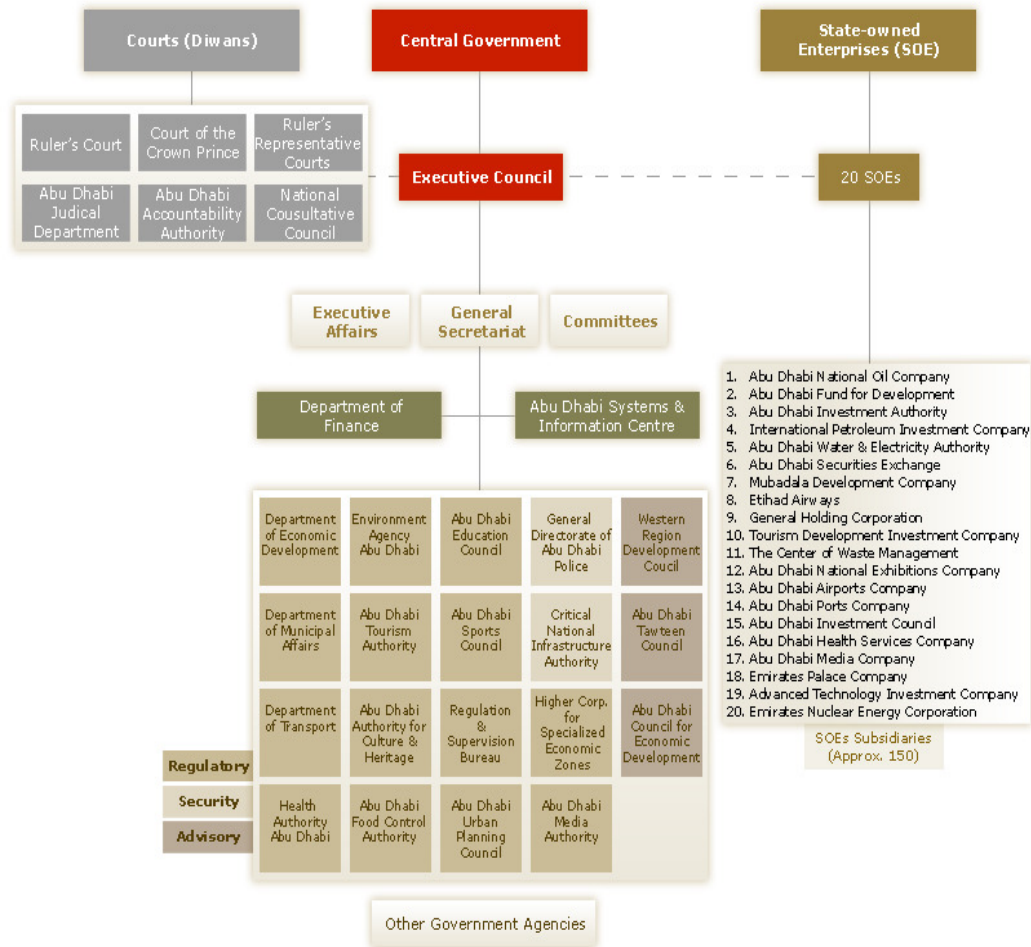
Source: Abu Dhabi eGovernment Gateway 2014

Political participation

Having defined Abu Dhabi's political regime as an autocratically governed dynastic monarchy with a centralized government system, the realities of political participation deserve a closer look. Even though there is only very limited formal political participation in Abu Dhabi (i.e. through the National Consultative Council), there are traditional cultural institutions, which give citizens a voice and some

opportunity to shape public policies. For example, Abu Dhabi Government takes especially serious the age-old cultural practice of *shura*, which encourages Muslims to decide their affairs in consultation with those who will be affected by that decision (UAEinteract 2015, Al-Omari 2008).

Accordingly, Abu Dhabi's leadership regularly holds open *Majlis*, which are special gatherings at which the Sheikhs personally receive citizens to hear their complaints and petitions, and debate important topics concerning the community (Al-Omari 2008). The opinions expressed in the Majlis are often mirrored in the decisions taken by the Sheikh. According to Al-Omari (2008: 129), a management consultant who trains western executives in Arab affairs and cross-cultural issues, the Majlis adds to the 'state's ability to feel the pulse of its population' and is the 'most basic expression of Arab or Bedouin democracy, or Bedoucracy as it is sometimes called' (Al-Omari 2008: 129). An important caveat is that the Majlis is reserved only for the citizens and not expatriates. This is based on the reality that the expatriate workers are only allowed to reside in Abu Dhabi for as long as they are sponsored by an Abu Dhabi employer through the Kafala system[18], that they are not eligible for government benefits,

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[18] The sponsorship, or Kafala system, stipulates that foreigners must be sponsored by a local citizen sponsor, a Kafeel, in order to reside and work in Abu Dhabi. The Kafeel is responsible for all aspects of the foreigner's stay. If the Kafeel withdraws sponsorship, the foreigner has no legal right to stay in the country (see

and that they generally are not permitted to obtain citizenship (Davidson 2011). Nevertheless, Abu Dhabi's Sheikhs have a reputation for listening to the local radio stations in order to hear the complaints and opinions that the Arabic-speaking residents have with regard to public services and other issues of public interest.

In addition, so scholars argue, the government's allocative employment model, which seeks to fill all public administrative posts with citizens from Abu Dhabi's original families and clans, even if their experience and expertise is below par, also constitutes a form of political participation (Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011, Heard-Bey 2005). Recruiting the indigenous population into government jobs, so the Abu Dhabi Policy Agenda 2030 observes, ensures that 'Abu Dhabi's citizens actively participate in leading and steering the Emirate in a way that will sustain the character of the state and ensure the majority of citizens enjoy the fruits of economic development and prosperity' (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010: 137).

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https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3740). In some cases, most prolifically in the building of the New York University Abu Dhabi campus, the Guggenheim and the Louvre on Saadiyat Island, disputes over unpaid wages, overcrowded accommodations, exploitative working conditions or other work-related issues have resulted in the Kafeel holding to ransom especially low-skilled workers from developing countries (Ross 2015).

Irrespective of all this, the Freedom House Report (2015) warns that in recent years, Abu Dhabi has seen a downturn in democratic institutions and a surge in repressive policies. The government has shown an increasing propensity to arrest activists, lawyers and judges demanding political reform; it has passed a highly restrictive internet law that cracks down on online activism and free speech; and it has closed down think-tanks and deported academics who were critical of government policies (Freedom House 2015, Kasolowski 2012, Salama 2012, Ulrichsen 2012).

Despite such actions, scholars continue to question whether in Abu Dhabi's case a western-style democracy with public naming and shaming and aggressive advocacy could work (e.g. Grey 2011, Heard-Bey 2005, Al Suwaidi 1995, Al Fahim 1995). Both, Abu Dhabi's indigenous scholars (e.g. Al Suwaidi 1995, Al Fahim 1995) and foreign intellectuals (e.g. Grey 2011, Heard-Bey 2005) have stressed in various contexts, that the Abu Dhabi Bedouin culture of 'saving face', seeking compromise, mediating by means of patience and forgiveness, and protecting tribal traditions and family honour is not easily reconcilable with the reform-seeking debates, controversial publicity, and mudslinging circus that typify western-style democracies. Certainly, those political scientists, who have examined the issue of democracy in the Gulf States, disagree with regards to the

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key variables that ensure the survival of autocracy in the region (Gray 2011, Herb 2009, Ulfelder 2007, Heard-Bey 2005, Weiffen 2004). They do, however agree that an authoritarian regime with all the characteristics of Abu Dhabi Government is relatively anchored and unlikely to evolve into a democracy in the near future- a proposition that held true even following the events of the 'Arab Spring' (Gray 2011, Herb 2009, Ulfelder 2007, Heard-Bey 2005, Weiffen 2004).

Unwelcome international intervention with Abu Dhabi's authoritarian regime, which according to Chinese scholar Majie (2002), western powers often cloak in concerns over democracy and human-rights violations, are not a concern for Abu Dhabi due to the pressures of *Realpolitik*. The reason is not only Abu Dhabi's critical role in meeting an inevitable economic imperative for many foreign oil-dependent governments (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014, Grey 2011). In addition to its commercial significance, Abu Dhabi is also strategically and politically vital, given that it constitutes a stable, pro-western regime in a volatile region (Marshall and Cole 2014), and a Sunni Arab ally in the fight against Islamic extremism (Black 2015). This is not to mention Abu Dhabi's position as the largest donor of foreign aid and development assistance (Valerio 2015). As a result, for western powers, the conundrum of pursuing national interests versus democratic values in Abu Dhabi's case is heavily biased

towards the former, ensuring the western powers' continued support for Abu Dhabi's authoritarian leadership (Ulrichsen 2012, Ulfelder 2007).

An oil-led economy

Economically, Abu Dhabi's oil and resource wealth has cemented its status as a 'rentier state' – a term first coined by Mahdavy (1970) in the context of Iran. A rentier state is a state that derives all or a substantial portion of its revenue from external rents for its natural resources, such as oil or gas (Gray 2011, Herb 2009). Foreign actors pay rents for these natural resources, which accrue directly to the state without engaging much of the population (Gray 2011, Herb 2009). Even by the standards of a 'rentier state', Abu Dhabi stands out as especially resource-rich: it is one of the world's leading energy hubs, owning more than 100 billion barrels of crude oil reserves and supplying three per cent of current global production (Khalid 2013). Abu Dhabi is also the world's fifth largest exporter of natural gas, behind Russia, Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Abu Dhabi Statistics Centre 2014, Khalid 2013). Even though oil and gas is still the most important economic sector in Abu Dhabi, the government has made significant progress in diversifying its economy, with non-oil exports amounting to 49.7% of the Emirate's total exports in 2013 (Abu Dhabi Statistics Centre 2014).

According to the Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi (2014), Abu Dhabi's 2013 GDP is estimated at Dh 953,239 million, which amounted to an annual per capita gross domestic product of Dh 388.6 thousand, or GBP 69,480, making Abu Dhabi's citizens one of the world's wealthiest people despite the global financial crisis (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014). This was the result of an annual growth rate of 4.8% in 2013, which confirms the strength and resilience of the Emirate's economy despite the impacts of the recent decline in oil prices (McKenzie 2015, Abu Dhabi Statistics Centre 2014).

Abu Dhabi's many state-owned enterprises (SOEs), such as the government's investment vehicle Mubadala Development Company, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) or Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority (Adwea), represent 60 per cent of the Emirate's economy, thereby contributing significantly to its economic output, GDP, and employment (Hashem 2013). With Abu Dhabi's projects ever increasing in number and scope, and therefore vying for capital, the government expects its state-owned enterprises to be sustainable, efficient, and able to raise money without, or only partially, resorting to the state (Hashem 2013). Adnoc, Abu Dhabi's state-owned oil enterprise, is a shining example, having emerged as one of the world's

best managed and most technically sophisticated companies (Khalid 2013).

Despite its emphasis on efficiency and profitability, Abu Dhabi Government also demonstrates foresight in its investment activities and a concern for social returns, renewable energy and sustainability in the longer term (Hashem 2013). The hallmark of the government's commitment to long-term sustainability is Masdar City, an 'arcology' project that blends architecture and ecology with the goal to create a self-sufficient habitat that minimizes human environmental impact (Quick 2011, Soleri 1973). Coined by the architect Soleri (1973), arcology projects have not yet been completed in real-life, and thus far only appear in science fiction (Quick 2011). Masdar City is built by a subsidiary of Abu Dhabi Government's state-owned enterprise Mubadala Development Company, and strives to be the most environmentally sustainable city in the world. It combines higher education, research and development, and finance, with the development of large-scale renewable energy projects and sustainable communities. While Masdar City is currently neither financially sustainable, nor economically attractive to private companies, the Abu Dhabi Government views the funding of this initiative, and other similar projects, as critical to ensuring the Emirate's longevity beyond oil (Pantsios 2015, Hashem 2013).

A modern Islamic judicial system

In Abu Dhabi, conservative Islamic elements certainly play a very important role despite the modern secular aspects of the government. With Islam being the official religion, Abu Dhabi Government employs all Sunni imams, funds or subsidizes the majority of Sunni mosques, and monitors all Islamic sermons for political content (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2007). The religious influence is especially evident in Abu Dhabi's judicial system that sees Sharia or Islamic courts work alongside the civil and criminal courts, and cover not only family matters but also serious crime, employment and other commercial litigation matters (Gulf Law 2014). In the absence of any particular provision in the UAE codified law, the Islamic principles of Sharia are applied as found in the Islamic Sharia textbooks, and codified into the Emirate's criminal code and family law (Gulf Law 2014).

It provides the basis for legal punishments, which not only include fines and imprisonment but also flogging and stoning (Roberts 2014). These punishments are also handed out for 'moral' offences, such as 'criticizing the ruler', 'disseminating false information', 'harming national unity', 'undermining public morality' (Sakr 2003: 36), 'slandering' the Emirati employer (Sedensky 2015), or 'beautifying the sin', which is when two unrelated members of the opposite sex are

alone in a closed place where they cannot be seen by others (Dajani 2015). Current law allows the death penalty for murder, treason, aggravated robbery, kidnapping, terrorism and drug trafficking, but also for *hudud* crimes, which are crimes against God and include abandoning Islam, committing adultery or being homosexual (Leaman 2014). Having said this, the implementation of sentences of capital punishment is rare in Abu Dhabi, and usually such impositions are commuted to life sentences (Arab News 2014, Spencer 2014). It is argued that the local belief system stipulates that in Sharia it is better to falsely pardon than to falsely convict (Dajani 2015).

The government's strict policies and harsh penalties have ensured that Abu Dhabi City is the safest city in the Middle East and Africa, and the 25th safest in the world, according to The Economist Intelligence Unit's Safe Cities Index 2015 (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2015). Most of the crimes that are reported are petty cases amongst the citizens, in addition to occasional incidents of assault and murder within the expatriate community from the Asian and South East Asian subcontinent (Samoglou 2015).

Free zones and onshore companies operate under different legislation to attract international business (Barnard 2015). For example, Abu Dhabi's new free zone, the financial district 'Global Market Square'

on Al Maryah Island, is based directly on English common law, and influenced by the legal systems that apply in Singapore and Hong Kong, spanning company law, insolvency practice, employment and property legislation (Barnard 2015).

The social contract between Abu Dhabi's ruler and the people

Abu Dhabi Government is 'a fusion of patrimonial political tradition and Islamic religious doctrine' (Weiffen 2004: 356), and rests on 'the hybrid foundations of traditional and tribal politics' (Davidson 2011: 122). Abu Dhabi's people submit to a patrimonial ruler, who is affectionately viewed as father figure, and legitimized by a God-given mandate (Heard-Bey 2005, Al Fahim 1995). According to mutual unwritten loyalty agreements, which Abu Dhabi's citizens and their families or clans have had with the ruling family for generations, the ruler is expected to protect, and look after the community, and ensure prosperity and happiness for all citizens in exchange for their trust, loyalty and deference (Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011, Heard-Bey 2005, Al Fahim 1995). If this 'social contract' is violated by the ruler, and his performance as a leader put into question, traditional tribal custom would allow the citizens of Abu Dhabi to withdraw the authority conferred upon him (Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011, Heard-Bey 2005, Al Fahim 1995). Conversely, Abu Dhabi's constitution allows for the revocation of citizenship from anyone who

has given reason to believe that he or she does not deserve it, such as by being linked to terrorist organisations (Salah 2012, Davidson 2011).

Hence, unlike other 'rentier' state administrations, such as the Nigerian government, which hoards the rent revenues of its significant oil and natural resource wealth, while over half of its population lives on less than $1.25 a day, Abu Dhabi's leadership makes sure that the revenues from oil receipts and other government revenues benefit all citizens.[19] Accordingly, the government provides generous social benefits and citizen stipends, such as free health care and education, and housing assistance for all citizens (Gray 2011, Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011). Until recently, even the expatriate residents were able to benefit from the government's subsidies for the general public, such as heavily reduced utility bills and fuel pump prices (Bouyamourn 2015).[20] The high public sector employment rate of citizens, which is often not commensurate with experience or subject expertise, is coupled with inflated pay cheques and should be understood as an important component of the social contract - almost

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[19] The UN Millennium Development Goal global monitoring country data base shows that 68% of the Nigerian population lives on less than $1.25 a day. The statistical data is measured at 2010 international prices and adjusted for purchasing power parity (http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx, website accessed on 11/02/2015).
[20] In 2011, Abu Dhabi Government subsidized 86% of each citizen's water and electricity bill and 50% of each expatriate's water and electricity bills (http://topnews.ae/content/25075-abu-dhabi-get-new-electricity-bills, website accessed on 18/01/2011).

like a 'monthly disbursement from the national trust fund' (Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011: 38). Other components of Abu Dhabi's 'social contract' include the government's ample public spending, its modern and forward-looking investments in social and economic development, infrastructure, environmental sustainability and institutional capability-building, and an almost tax-free environment (Barnard 2015, Gray 2011, Davidson 2011, Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010).

This fosters widespread support for the monarchy especially among citizens but also among expatriate residents (Davidson 2011). It also further compounds the reduced appetite for political representation and the limited demands for government accountability among Abu Dhabi's population - even in the face of occasional government acts of unpopular repression and obvious human rights violations (Ulrichsen 2012).[21] As a result, Abu Dhabi seems 'almost uncannily peaceful' (Davidson 2006: 42), and has been ranked the top Arab country in well-being and life satisfaction by the London-based Legatum Prosperity Index 2014, which measures the levels of prosperity

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[21] An example of the relative apathy with which Abu Dhabi's public reacts to the government's human rights violations was the public's acceptance of the 2011 acquittal of Abu Dhabi's royal prince Sheikh Issa bin Zayed Al Nayhan of torture and rape charges in spite of a graphic videotape of Issa abusing an Afghan merchant. The videotape had been aired on Al Jazeera and other news channels. (http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/01/abu-dhabi-royal-sheikh-issa-bin-zayed-al-nahyan-torture-case-acquittal-met-with-outrage-by-arabs.html, website accessed on 26/01/2011).

governments offer to their citizens based on income and well-being (Legatum Institute 2014).

A population dominated by expatriate workers

Since the 1960s, Abu Dhabi Government has operated a liberal immigration policy in order to advance its ambitious economic and social development plans – and to avoid being held back by shortages in the skills and numbers of the local workforce (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014, Davidson 2011). To that effect, Abu Dhabi Government adopted the 'guest worker' or 'contract worker' model, which enables local organisations to employ large numbers of foreign workers on temporary contracts (Abdalla et al. 2010, cited in Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014: 168). The foreign workforce is instrumental in filling expert skills gaps resulting from a lack of local knowledge, staffing the Emirate's extensive infrastructure, supplying low-cost labour and a vast servant class, and filling those jobs, which are unattractive to citizens for a variety of reasons (Ross 2015, Abdalla et al. 2010). As Abu Dhabi's economy has continued to grow and diversify away from oil, the proportion of expatriates working in the service industry, construction, real estate, mining and other economic sectors has soared to staggering numbers (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014, Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014, The International Organisation for Knowledge Economyand Enterprise

Development 2010). For example, domestic staff members alone, such as housemaids, drivers and cooks, now make up 6 per cent of the population in Abu Dhabi, with 23 per cent of Emirati families employing more domestic staff than there are family members (The National Staff 2015). The expatriate population hails from almost every country in the world and is highly mixed in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, education, skills and social class. However, the majority are low-skilled workers originating from the Indian subcontinent and south-east Asia (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014, The International Organisation for Knowledge Economy and Enterprise Development 2010).

As a result of its reliance on foreign labour, Abu Dhabi is struggling with a demographic imbalance (Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2011), whereby citizens constitute less than 20 per cent of the population and expatriates make up more than 80 per cent (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014, Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014, Forstenlechner et al 2012). In 2013, the resident population of Abu Dhabi Emirate was estimated at 2.45 million with about 1.5 million people living in Abu Dhabi city, 650,000 in Al Ain and 300,000 in Al Gharbia, the Western Region of the Emirate (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014). Of those, only 495,368 were Emirati and 1,957,728 expatriates (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi 2014).

This not only means Abu Dhabi's citizens are a minority in their own Emirate, but it also brings them together despite tribal rivalries and family hierarchies, 'to form a completely undisputed class of the privileged few' (Heard-Bey 2005: 361, Davidson 2011). The contrast between the citizen minority, which enjoys political rights and entitlement to the generous government transfers, and the expatriate majority, which lacks political rights and is excluded from social benefits, is the reason that Elbers (2008) has compared Abu Dhabi with a de facto city state, not unlike the city states in ancient Greece or the Roman Republic with their two-tier system of patricians and plebeians.

Emiratisation

Abu Dhabi's heavy reliance on expatriates has created a labour market, in which citizens find it increasingly difficult to compete against foreigners for jobs, and thus are unable to secure employment (Sabry and Zaman 2013, cited in Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014, Forstenlechner et al. 2012).   Given that the public sector is already saturated with citizen employees, this is an especially significant issue within Abu Dhabi's private sector, which predominantly employs expatriate workers (Sabry and Zaman 2013, cited in Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014).

The citizens' difficulties in finding jobs in the private sector are the result of a number of factors: a sense of entitlement among Emiratis, which de-incentivizes citizens and gives rise to unrealistic expectations regarding salaries and working conditions (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2012); a notion shared by citizens, expatriates and employers alike that Emiratis typically demonstrate poor work ethics, skills and competencies (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2010, 2012); a culturally-rooted view that citizens should shun jobs with low social status including internships and manual work (Mellahi 2007); an incompatibility of cultural norms, e.g. avoiding conflict, with the commercial and industrial norms of western management practices, e.g. confronting the issue at hand (Jones 2008); the leverage employers have in controlling expatriate workers as a result of issuing work permits, which is not the case for citizens (Mellahi 2007); and the cultural barriers citizens face in socially integrating in the multicultural work environments of Abu Dhabi's private sector companies (Mellahi 2007) (cited in Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014). All these barriers have rendered Abu Dhabi's citizens the lesser preferred option, compared with expatriate workers, in the eyes of profit-oriented, multicultural private sector companies (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2012).

Given the rising unemployment figures of Abu Dhabi's citizens (Sabry and Zaman 2013), the Abu Dhabi Government, just like other Gulf states, has since the 1990s pursued a policy of workforce nationalization, called Emiratization (Rizvi 2015, Al Ali 2008). Aiming to achieve full employment rates for citizens, the Emiratization policy has involved setting quotas for Emirati employees, restricting the number of work visas for foreign employees, and imposing fines on companies that do not meet Emiratization targets (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2014). These ongoing policy initiatives were bolstered by ad-hoc governmental decrees, such as the 2006 governmental order, which required all private sector companies to axe expatriate secretaries and HR managers, and replace them with citizens within 18 months, notwithstanding the lack of qualified citizens to fill these positions (Salama 2006). The initiatives and decrees were further complemented by wider educational reforms and significant government investments into the professional development of its citizens (Bains 2009, Noland and Pack 2008, cited in Forstenlechner et al. 2012).

A recent study by Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2014) found that citizens as well as employers rate the government's Emiratization efforts so far as relatively ineffective. According to Al-Waqfi and

Forstenlechner (2014), the catalogue of reasons include a fragmented approach to the problem, deficiencies in the educational systems and professional development, ineffective regulatory tools and monitoring mechanisms, an inability to shift from 'entitlement to accountability mentality', and a wage system that fails to link rewards with performance. Hence, Abu Dhabi Government's key priority remains, to this day, achieving its Emiratization goals, without having to sacrifice its fostering of an internationally competitive 'knowledge based economy' (Rizvi 2015, Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010).

Social tension

While the large expatriate workforce has certainly contributed to the unprecedented growth of Abu Dhabi, the other side of the coin is that the foreign majority, and the businesses that cater for foreign needs, have had all-pervasive economic, social and cultural impacts (Davidson 2011, Dubai School of Government 2011a, Al Khouri 2010, Shaham 2008, Mohammed 2008). The citizens' concerns about the adverse impacts of the colossal expatriate workforce constitute the main topic of public debate because it relates to all areas of people's lives, including not only the employment sector, but also education, family and social structures, crime levels, local culture and values, Emirati heritage, language, national identity, and religious and cultural

norms (Davidson 2011, Al Khouri 2010, Shaham 2008, Mohammed 2008). Al Khouri (2010: 7), an Emirati scholar and the Director General of Emirates Identity Authority, has explained that with Abu Dhabi's citizens being a minority in their own Emirate, there is a growing 'fear of cultural assimilation and insecurity about the future of their identity'.

For example, early-years education for Emirati children is generally provided by low-cost, live-in Asian housemaids until the age of four (Dubai School of Government 2011a). After that, education is provided by English-speaking expatriate staff in private kindergardens, which were originally designed to serve the expatriate community (Dubai School of Government 2011a). This, as the Dubai School of Government (2011a) has warned, fails to promote Emirati children's Arabic language acquisition, their sense of national identity and their understanding of what constitutes culturally appropriate behaviour. Kapiszewski (2006) has observed that the threat to local culture and identity is further compounded by western material civilization, consumption patterns and social media, though this is not as prominently and frequently highlighted as the role of expatriate workers (also see Dubai School of Government 2011b).

These social tensions have created an expectation on Abu Dhabi Government urgently to address the challenges, and play an active role in shaping the collective identity of its society (Al Khouri 2010, Shaham 2008, Mohammed 2008). Hence, the government has required all government departments to give permanent priority to the promotion of Abu Dhabi's citizens, their socio-economic well-being, and the preservation of the local culture and Emirati heritage, and to deliver a range of strategic initiatives and projects to that effect (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010). Highlighting the necessity for a sustained long-term approach that balances tradition and modernity, H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan declared that 'more initiatives must be put forward to mobilize the national capacities of our people […] and immune them against the current cultural invasions' (Gulf News 2009).

Of course, Abu Dhabi's efforts to 'establish a cohesive national identity strategy', so Al Khouri (2010: 7) has argued, rely on 'the right mix of various approaches'. Above all, Al Khouri (2010) suggests, this includes an identity management system that delivers robust demographic data and enables planning, developing and regulating identity strategies as well as identity-dependent service models for government customers.

While cultural assimilation is not a concern for the expatriate majority, they too are critical of Abu Dhabi's social landscape. Foreign residents bemoan the lack of equality and respect for diversity, the questionable labour conditions, the sponsorship or Kafala system that leaves expatriate workers powerless regardless of how they are treated, the human rights violations, the limited opportunities for property and land ownership, and the almost non-existent possibilities for naturalization or permanent residency even for those foreigners who were born in the country and have never known their parents' home countries (Ross 2015, Davidson 2011, Herb 2009, Kapiszewski 2006, Shaham, 2008).   Herb (2009: 392) has argued that the competing interests of the two groups, citizens and expatriate residents, work to the advantage of the ruling family in preserving the autocratic regime:

> 'In the end, the most obvious beneficiaries of this dilemma are the ruling families, who provide each group with their second preference. The ruling families protect citizens from a democracy of the noncitizen majority and protect noncitizens from a democracy of the citizen minority. On this basis is built a durable authoritarianism.'

4.3   Abu Dhabi Governments' customer-centric reform

Abu Dhabi Government's vision for reform

The CEO-like approach of Abu Dhabi's autocratic monarch is marked by a commitment to exerting his absolute power to positive and constructive ends, aiming for what Foucault (1994) has described as 'the perfection, maximization, or intensification of the processes it [a government] directs' (cited in Curtis 2002: 522).   Abu Dhabi Government's aspiration to achieve 'perfection' in its public services could not be better epitomized than through its vision statement: 'To facilitate Abu Dhabi to be regarded as one of the best five governments in the world' (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010: 203).   In explaining what this vision means for the provision of public services, Abu Dhabi's Policy Agenda 2030 states that:

> 'The Abu Dhabi Government aspires to provide the highest levels of efficient, effective, quality and accessible services for its people. This includes transparent, accountable and open administrative practices; customer-centric government services; world-class technology platforms for accessing government; and financial and fiscal management to deliver the best possible public services at the best possible price'

(Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010: 204).

Abu Dhabi Government's reform initiatives

Abu Dhabi Government first adopted the public management rhetoric of customer-centric public services when it commenced its whole-of-government restructuring programme in 2005 (ADSIC 2010, Abu Dhabi Customer Satisfaction Unit 2010). Accordingly, the Abu Dhabi Policy Agenda 2030 clearly spells out the government's commitment to 'truly user-centric government services' in a bid to 'embed a culture of customer-service excellence' for service users, beneficiaries and society alike (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010: 205).

Having to negotiate stronger customer-centricity within the context of a centralized autocracy, public welfare, professional standards and wider policy objectives, Abu Dhabi's whole-of-government reforms are focused on better engaging with its customers, understanding their needs and views, designing policy and services around them, improving government performance, and managing strategic and operational decision-making against robust customer insight information (The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series

Thought Leadership Series 2013, Abu Dhabi Customer Satisfaction Unit 2010).

To that end, Abu Dhabi Government's customer-centric reform bundle has comprised four overarching key initiatives to re-organize for the benefit of the customer instead of the convenience of the government. First, in 2005, Abu Dhabi's leadership initiated a large-scale, sector-wide e-government transformation programme with the goal of turning Abu Dhabi's public administration into a 'High Performance Government Delivering World-Class Services to the Benefit of All Its Customers' (ADSIC, 2010: 7). The e-government initiative sought to improve public service delivery and communication between government and service users across the whole of government through use of information and communications technology (ICT). Importantly, the e-government initiative was not about technology alone but also about changing organizational cultures in government and societal information handling. Specifically, the sector-wide e-government initiative was supposed to institutionalise an evolved approach to service delivery and communication with the public that transforms the relationship between Abu Dhabi's service users and the government (The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series Thought Leadership Series 2013, ADSIC 2010). The technology itself was considered merely a tool to 'develop a world class customer experience for

government service users and to drive government modernisation by positioning the Abu Dhabi Government as a customer-focused service provider' (ADSIC 2010: 14).

Accordingly, the Abu Dhabi Government created Abu Dhabi Systems & Information Centre (ADSIC) with the mandate of masterminding the portfolio of e-government initiatives across all of Abu Dhabi Government's departments and public authorities, and providing implementation support to individual government departments. By the end of 2010, ADSIC had launched a whole-of-government (WoG) programme that consisted of 43 e-government projects. These initiatives educated government departments and increased their IT literacy as well as leveraging intelligent and sophisticated technology to customize back office administration and make front office services available to customers (The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series Thought Leadership Series 2013, Abu Dhabi Customer Satisfaction Unit 2010). Perhaps the most visible outcome of the e-government reform for service users is the Abu Dhabi Government Contact Centre, which offers a single point of contact for government customers, and channels, resolves and tracks customer queries. The following table lists the 43 e-government projects and the extent to which they had progressed at the end of 2010.

Figure 4.3.1: E-government projects in Abu Dhabi

e-Government Projects	Project Execution Lifecycle			
	Strategy	Design	Implementation	Operation
ICT STRATEGY FOR ABU DHABI				
Providing Greater Access to Government Services				
e-Government Portal - (www.abudhabi.ae)				
Kiosk Service Delivery				
Telecentre Service Delivery				
Mobile Services (In-Services)				
Counter Area Design (CAD)				
Accessibility for People with Special Needs				
Deliver More Efficient and Effective Government Services				
Business Centre Enablement				
Electronic Land Management System (eLMS)				
Jobs Abu Dhabi (JAD)				
Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) Student Information Systems (eSIS)				
Services Transformation Toolkit				
Health Services				
Tourism Services				
Driving & Private Transportation Services				
Environment Protection Services				
Cultural Services				
Visa & Residency Services				
Building Permits Services				
Zakat Funds Services				
Harnessing the Potential of Shared Infrastructure				
Policy and Standards Governance Framework				
e-Government Interoperability Framework (eGIF)				
IT Architecture and Standards (IT A&S)				
Abu Dhabi Information Security Programme				
Abu Dhabi Spatial Data Infrastructure (AD-SDI)				
Abu Dhabi Government Continuity Management Plan				
e-Laws				
IT Planning & Management Toolkits				
Website Kit				
Abu Dhabi Network (ADNET)				
Shared Government Data Center (SGDC) and Central Government Data Centre (CDC)				
Public Key Infrastructure (PKI)				
e-Payment Platform				
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and e-Procurement				
Enterprise Content Management (ECM)				
Customer Relationship Management (CRM)				
ADGE's IT Strategy Development				
Abu Dhabi Operations e-Lab/Workspace				
Web Statistics Systems for the Abu Dhabi e-Government Portal				
Executive Information System				
Green IT Strategy				
Entity Engagement Pack				
Building Awareness and the ICT Knowledge Base				
e-Government Programme Awareness				
e-Maturity Assessment				
e-Literacy				
Awards				

Source: Abu Dhabi Systems & Information Centre Annual Report 2010

As is typical for Abu Dhabi Government, there are only few evaluations of the now 10-year-old e-government transformation programme in the public domain. The success of this reform programme is evidenced through awards and league tables that internationally compare similar programmes. For instance, five years into this particular reform, Abu Dhabi Government received two awards that recognised the programme as successful: at the *2010 Map Middle East Conference – World Leadership Geospatial Award*, and at the *Making a Difference Award in the ESRI International User Conference* in San Diego, United States (ADSIC 2010). In addition, the United Nations E-Government Survey 2012 ranked the United Arab Emirates eighth out of 25 emerging leaders in e-government development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2012: 20), while the same survey undertaken in 2014 ranked the United Arab Emirates seventh out of 20 regional governments in Asia (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2014: 27).

The 2012 survey concluded that Abu Dhabi Government and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were among a group of emerging leaders that had 'found ways to leapfrog traditional development cycles' by expanding their 'infrastructure and human skills' and by reorienting 'their public sector governance systems towards user-centric approaches' (United Nations Department of Economic and

Social Affairs 2012: 20). While the UAE was considered the top regional performer, both UN surveys cautioned that the UAE must still bridge a gap to reach the 20 best-practice countries. In its self-nomination for the United Nations E-Government Survey, Abu Dhabi Government reported that the particular challenges of reform implementation included the limited IT capacity of its government departments; the public's limited awareness and usage of ICT; the transient structure of many of the government departments, which resulted in frequent changes to their mandates and assigned responsibilities; a limited supply of IT specialists in the Middle East; and a shortage of IT vendors, which resulted in having to employ foreign alternatives, such as Estarta from Jordan for portal development.[22]

The second whole-of-government (WoG) reform programme that commenced in 2005 involved the development and implementation of a performance management framework that incorporates customer-focused targets and wider outcomes for society. Abu Dhabi Government recognised that in order to achieve its vision, it needed to link operational performance measures with its wider strategic objectives. By adapting Kaplan and Norton's (1996) Balanced Scorecard approach, the General Secretariat of the Executive Council

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[22] *See* http://unpan3.un.org/unpsa/Public_NominationProfile2013.aspx?id=542

set out to develop a whole-of-government performance management framework (PMF). Based on the overall vision, the resulting PMF articulated 17 WoG goals, and their associated outcomes, across five performance dimensions: Social Development, Environmental Sustainability, Economic Development, Infrastructure and Government Excellence. Although quite a few of the 17 WoG goals contribute to developing customer-centricity in Abu Dhabi's public services, the one that most explicitly drives the customer-centric aspects of the reform is 'Goal 16, World class government administration and services'. Goal 16 sets out at least six customer-focused outcomes at a WoG level, including most prominently 'Outcome G16/O1, User-oriented government, including online delivery of the whole service portfolio of Abu Dhabi Government in a user-centric manner' and 'Outcome G16/O2, The highest standards of integrity, accountability, openness and transparency in public sector' (Abu Dhabi Performance Management Division 2010).

The individual government departments, which in Figure 4.3.2 are referred to as 'Entities', were asked to align their respective strategies and initiatives to these WoG outcomes, and thus systematically contribute to achieving the WoG goals. Accordingly, Abu Dhabi's PMF requires Entities to develop a 5-year Strategic Plan and Performance Contract that sets out each government department's priorities, initiatives and key performance indicators across three

dimensions: service delivery, process & technology priorities, and people development. Through these, all of Abu Dhabi's government departments are expected to be committed to customer-focused service delivery and are held accountable with the help of common and Entity-specific performance indicators.

Figure 4.3.2: Abu Dhabi Performance Management Framework
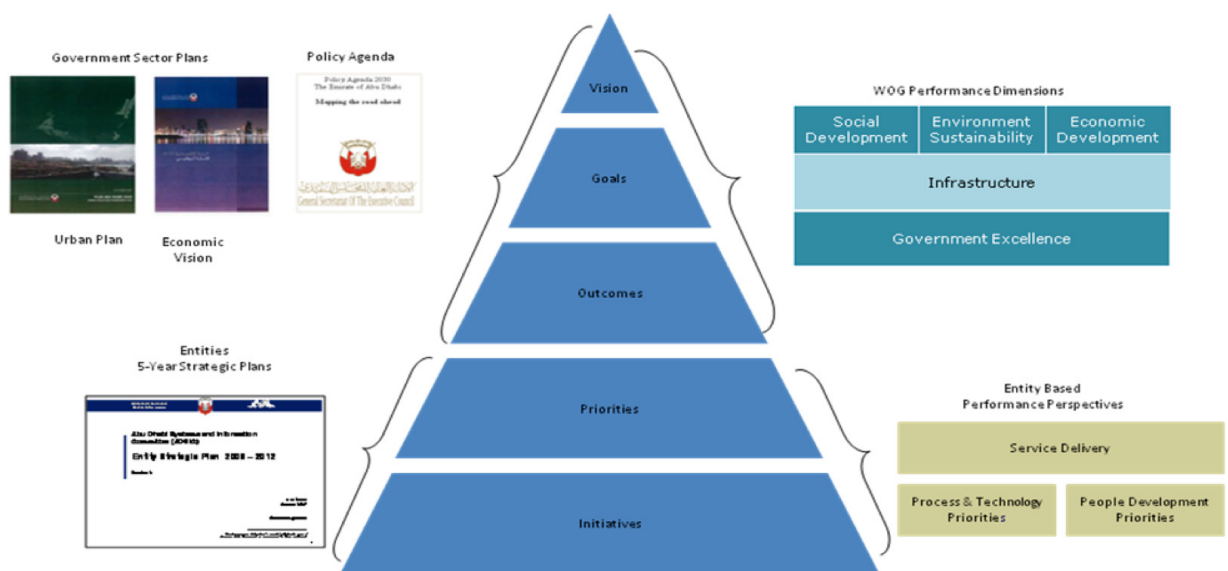
Source: Abu Dhabi Performance Management Division 2010

Again, as is the norm in Abu Dhabi Government, there has been only few official evaluations of the PMF to assess the results it is achieving and the particular challenges it has encountered so far. Abu Dhabi Government's PMF received an award from the Balanced Scorecard Institute, which however had played a pivotal role in the development of the PMF and previously provided consulting, training, and

professional Balanced Scorecard certification services to Abu Dhabi's government departments.

At the time of my departure from the Abu Dhabi Government, it had been recognized that the significant potential of the PMF to drive a customer focus could not be fully harnessed (Dadze-Arthur and Al Ali 2010). The reason was that the customer data that the government departments used for their performance indicators and reported against, was neither valid nor reliable. In the absence of central guidance, Abu Dhabi's government departments were unsure of what data to collect and how. They had been left to design and conduct their own customer insight methodologies despite struggling with a lack of customer records and very little knowledge about customer insight tools. At best, Entities used basic segmentation models and measured drivers of satisfaction that could not be compared with those of other government departments. At worst, Entities produce skewed customer data of questionable credibility (Dadze-Arthur and Al Ali 2010). There was no shared understanding, no common measurement methodology, no established standard or protocol and no customer profiling.

The lack of robust customer insight data to feed into the PMF meant that it was impossible to extract good performance information on customer-centricity. This in turn was an obstacle to improving

systematically the delivery of customer-focused services and for developing government policies that would focus on achieving results for public service users (Al Safi 2010).

The need to remedy the lack of robust, independent and reliable customer insight gave rise to the third whole-of-government reform initiative that Abu Dhabi Government began in 2010. This large-scale cross-departmental project involved interviewing 18,400 government customers in order to gather baseline data on customer segments, service types (e.g. transactional, life time events, wicked issues), customer journeys and drivers of satisfaction. The enormous project sought to establish the experience of Abu Dhabi government customers with fifty government departments that provided important public services. The initiative generated the desired customer insight by combining data that was collected through (1) mystery shopping, (2) customer focus groups and the (3) customer relationship management (CRM) database from the Abu Dhabi Government Contact Centre (Abu Dhabi Customer Satisfaction Unit 2010).

The project was intended as a precursor to setting-up a permanent in-house, but independent, team to gather data on service users' perspectives for the fifty government departments on a regular basis. By engaging the customers directly, the initiative sought to give increased priority to the customer voice. The data collection had just

begun when my role as the project lead on this initiative was terminated as a result of the Arab Spring. Once again, no evaluation report has since been made publicly available.

The fourth whole-of-government reform initiative to institutionalise customer-centricity began in 2010 and ran in parallel with the other three programmes. It was considered one of the cornerstones of the strategic vision of Abu Dhabi's President H.H Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan to achieve world-class government performance. The central tenet of this programme was the introduction of a customer-focused assessment model, which a special arm of the leadership, the Abu Dhabi Award for Excellence in Government Performance (ADAEP), would employ to evaluate the performance of individual government departments every two years and provide them with specific recommendations. Developed by ADAEP by combining the EFQM Excellence Model and the Fundamental Concepts of Excellence, the assessment model includes a framework criterion for 'Customer Results' as well as a sub-criterion for 'Adding value for customers', which cross-examines a total of five framework criteria, including the criteria on 'Customer Results' (see Figure 4.3.3). Through this process, the Abu Dhabi Award for Excellence in Government Performance recognizes and promotes success around customer-service excellence, but also provides individual, non-prescriptive guidance to those seeking to achieve it.

Figure 4.3.3: Integrated Model for Abu Dhabi Assessment for Excellence in Government Performance

Criterion	1 Leadership					2 Strategy				3 People					4 Partnerships & Resources					5 Processes, Products and Services					6 Customer Results		7 People Results		8 Society Results		9 Key Results	
Sub-Criterion	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Adding Value for Customers			X				X														X	X	X	X	X	X		X				

Source: Abu Dhabi Award for Excellence in Government Performance (ADAEP) 2010.

Again no official evaluation has yet been publishedof the integrated assessment model in the public domain and there is no robust evidence regarding the outcomes that this initiative has yielded. An internal report, which the Abu Dhabi's Customer Satisfaction Unit produced in 2010, cautioned that, while the ADAEP is highly valuable in driving a customer focus, it alone cannot address the government departments' vast support needs (Dadze-Arthur and Al Ali 2010). In 2010, many Abu Dhabi Entities had just begun to make their services more customer-focused. They arguably needed more than good practice examples and non-prescriptive guidance every two years, given that they were facing a long list of challenges, which were the results of gaps in knowledge, lacking capabilities, missing alignment, and an absence of central, integrated guidance (Dadze-Arthur and Al Ali 2010).

As the four whole-of-government programmes described above clearly demonstrate, the efforts of Abu Dhabi Government are aimed at increasing the quality of services, improving the experience of customer groups, and contributing to the country's specific social and economic outcomes (The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series Thought Leadership Series 2013, Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010). In doing so, the government wants to engage the public in the reform process, not only because, traditionally, the Sheikhs have always sat down and listened to their people, but also because they are keen to understand their people's personal experiences of policies and services, and to maximize the power of the public for service improvement (Davidson 2011, Heard-Bey 2005, Al Fahim 1995).

However, contrary to western customer-centric change initiatives, Abu Dhabi's reforms do not intend to achieve egalitarian objectives, tackle a democratic deficit or fully enhance governmental accountability (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive Council 2010). In line with its ideology and traditions, the Abu Dhabi Government neither wants to engage the public for collective discussions of political questions behind the policies and services, nor to enhance social inclusion, equity or equality beyond certain groups of the population (Abu Dhabi General Secretariat of the Executive

Council 2010). Consequently, the government is embedding customer-centricity in its authoritarian mentality and machinery without taking on some of the trimmings that social democracies would naturally associate with user-focused reforms (The Government Summit Thought Leadership Series Thought Leadership Series 2013).

Abu Dhabi Government's conceptualization of customers

Based on Abu Dhabi Government's particular approach to user-centric reform, its understanding of the concept 'customer' can be attributed to 'consumerism' (Jones and Needham 2008). Needham (2003: 5), a British scholar who has written extensively on consumerism in public services, highlights that viewing public service users as consumers builds on the influence of market values and the trend to define the government-service user relationship 'along consumerist lines', which emulates patterns found in the private sector. The general idea is that a consumerist approach requires service users to influence the choices available to them (Skelcher 1992), so that the diversity of people's needs and aspirations are the principal driver, which must be served by responsive, flexible and accessible government provision (Clarke 2007), resulting in improved, personalized services (Leadbeater 2004).

The discourse, according to Needham (2003) and McGreary (2004), suggests that the raison d'être behind consumerist models in public

services is social and cultural change. Elsheshtawy (2008: 265), an Egyptian professor at the UAE University, has suggested that Abu Dhabi has undergone significant social and cultural changes in the period from 2004 until the present, which he has labelled the 'fifth phase' of modernization. Ushered in by the death of Sheikh Zayed in 2004, Abu Dhabi's fifth phase has been marked by Zayed's son Khalifa taking office and bringing with him young western-educated Emiratis who he has placed in key ministerial positions. Skeikh Khalifa, Elsheshtawy (2008: 276) has argued, caused a 'paradigmatic shift' by accelerating the Emirate's measured modernization to a kind of mega-modernization that seeks to transform Abu Dhabi into a global player. This process encompasses not only higher living standards and increased consumption, like it did in the west, but is of a superlative variant that Elsheshtawy (2008) describes as a mega consumer age through which citizens define and project their identities (Moussly 2011a, Moussly 2011b). Hence, similar to western and other countries, these new consumption patterns require new consumerist models of public services.

However, unlike the Euro-American experience, the social and cultural changes have not reduced in importance to Abu Dhabi's citizens, what Clarke et al. (2007: 10) have called 'cultural formations of deference'. Put differently, Abu Dhabi's society continues to

uphold large and centralized structures, established tribal powers, class divisions and historical hierarchies, and the traditional privileges of Abu Dhabi's original families. As a result, the society's conception of more demanding, consumerist citizens is an 'economic construct' within the capitalist arena (Clarke et al. 2007: 2). As such, the government customer exercises control through choice (Elster 1997), and voice and exit (Hirschman 1970), with the caveat that this control remains of an indirect nature (Needham 2003).

Of course, there are difficulties with importing neo-liberal principles into public sector realities, which Needham (2003: 29) has poignantly summed up as follows:

> 'Models of delivery, payment and choice in the public sector are more complex than their private sector equivalents. Citizens may use services they do not pay for and pay for services they do not use; they may be unwilling or involuntary users, or may not know what kind of service they need; they may demand a service but be denied it due to rationing or ineligibility. The limits to competition in the public sector make it difficult for the citizen to exit when faced with an unsatisfactory service.'

While these challenges are certainly relevant to Abu Dhabi's public sector, other arguments regarding the difficulties of an economic construct of public service users are rooted in the normative subjectivities of a democratic worldview, and as such carry completely different connotations within the context of an autocracy. For example, 'tension with egalitarian objectives and democratic engagement' (Needham 2003: 21) and 'depoliticized choices' (Clarke 2004: 3), are exactly the aspects that have rendered the neo-liberal concept of 'government customer' attractive to Abu Dhabi's non-democratic government in generating positive outcomes for its people without modifying the society's underlying beliefs and value system.

In the same vein, social democracies would criticize the 'downward and bilateral accountability of providers through competition and complaints procedures' for a deficit of participatory features (Needham 2003: 14). Yet, within the authoritarian context of Abu Dhabi, being able to complain allows public service users to communicate preferences and experiences. Thus, it marks an increase of voice and power for local people, the majority of whom do not even hold citizenship status and have little or no opportunity to participate in shaping government activities. Indeed, while in a democratic polity an economic construct may *reduce* citizens to consumers (Needham 2003), it can be argued that in Abu Dhabi's autocratic polity, it

elevates those service users, who hitherto have been subjects, to consumers.

A universal requirement yet no universal recipe

With customer-centricity being a public management concept that does not necessarily require a deeper restructuring of political ideologies and cultural values, it has been promoted internationally as a key strategic priority for all types of governments. At its sixth session, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (2007: 12) affirmed the basic principle that 'for the public service, new tools are also needed to consult people as "consumers" and service recipients as "clients" […]'. The Committee (2007: 13) continued highlighting that 'citizens have an important role to play in pushing the performance of governments to higher levels', resulting in improved 'public goods and services'. The Committee's (2007: 13) conviction that this is a universally applicable principle is evident in its claim that 'the need to institutionalize and innovate participatory structures and processes applies to all countries'.

Yet, while the need for better, customer-focused government services may be universal, the practices and principles to address such need are clearly not 'technical and universal but politically constructed and

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contingent on a variety of circumstances' (Boyne 2003: 224). Indeed, the concept of public services that are built around the needs of service users is an excellent example of a public management initiative that has been found to depend on existing cultures for successful implementation. Evaluations of governments trying to embed customer-centric public services against the backdrop of an authoritarian governmental culture have consistently highlighted the pivotal role of local meaning systems (e.g. Ra and Joo 2005, Lemos and Oliveira 2004, Almer and Koontz 2004). Assessments in places as varied as South Africa, Korea, Brazil and Eastern Europe, all arrived at one finding in particular: in previously authoritarian regimes, elements of a prevailing authoritarian culture have stymied the transformation to a more customer-centered public administration (Ra and Joo 2005, Lemos and Oliveira 2004, Almer and Koontz 2004). Perplexingly, at the same time, culture is the principal reason, which other regimes with authoritarian heritage have relied on for a successful transformation to more customer-centered public services. Hong Kong and Singapore, for example, point to local cultures and strongly embedded 'Asian values' (in addition to neo-liberal rationales) in explaining their authoritarian governments' successes at customer-centric reforms (O'Hara 2009).

Looking at these mixed evaluation outcomes for customer-centric reform in the context of authoritarian culture, it is clear that, despite a universal need, the effective adaptation of the public management concept of customer-centricity hinges on the constraints and opportunities offered by local meaning systems and people's subjectivities (Grindle 2011). There is no single universal recipe for effectively mobilizing subjective systems of meaning so that public administrators internalize customer-centricity into their mentalities and activities.

4.4   Concluding reflections

First, this chapter set out the context within which Abu Dhabi's public administrators were internalizing a new way of 'doing public management' at the time of research. Second, it sought to enable identification of key characteristics and patterns that are, or are not, shared more widely with other public administrations and customer-centric reform agendas. Of course, Abu Dhabi's public administration, just like others around the world, is unique in certain respects, not least because no two governments are identical. In the same vein, while many public administrations pursue customer-centric reform agendas, their underpinning initiatives are designed and focused differently.

But then, various facets to Abu Dhabi Government and its reform process do have commonalities with many other public administrations, their approaches to governance and society, their challenges and change agendas, and their goals for customer-centric reform. Hence, in this concluding section to the chapter, some of those commonalities are highlighted. The purpose is to enable *moderatum generalizations* (see Chapter 3) by demarcating the range for generalizing the warranted assertions, or testable theoretical statements that this study eventually arrived at following the analysis of its empirical findings (Payne and Williams 2005).

Economically, Abu Dhabi Government shares some characteristics with a much wider group of public administrations in this world than may be obvious at first glance. The reason is that, as a rentier state, Abu Dhabi economically bears commonalities not only with oil states in the Middle East and Africa, but also with other states that receive substantial amounts of external economic rent, such as those that subsist on being military bases for foreign powers, or those that have assets of international importance, such as the Suez or Panama canals (Goldberg et al. 2008).

In terms of its political regime, the chapter demonstrated that Abu Dhabi Government belongs to the population of present-day

autocracies (Elbers 2008). Considering that the Freedom House Report (2015) ranked 51 out of 195 countries as autocratic, and a further 55 as partly autocratic, key aspects of Abu Dhabi's autocratic regime currently overlap with 106 public administrations in the world. Moreover, Abu Dhabi's political regime also bears the characteristics of a monarchy, and thus shares some features with existing absolute and constitutional, elective and hereditary monarchies (Davidson 2011, Elbers 2008). Given that there are 26 monarchies in the world that rule 43 countries (Dewey and Fisher 2013), Abu Dhabi Government has commonalities with yet another significant group of public administrations.

The chapter also established that, despite its authoritarian ideology, Abu Dhabi's leadership honours its social contract with its citizens (Forstenlecher and Rutledge 2011, Al Khouri 2010). Accordingly, those in power are committed to public service excellence and public value creation, and recognize the importance of harnessing the knowledge of service users for innovation and public service improvement. This approach, its associated goals and underpinning reform initiatives, have much in common with the public management ethos and activities pursued by most liberal democratic governments in the world.

In that vein, Abu Dhabi has endeavoured to change to new consumerist models of public services - just like other western and non-western governments have done in recent decades, or are currently working towards (O'Hara 2009, McGreary 2004). Admittedly, the preoccupation of resource-poor western governments with service users as customers has moved on somewhat to a focus on co-production and active citizen engagement in the design, delivery and scrutiny of public services (Bovaird 2007). Despite different historical trajectories, however constructing service users as customers has been initiated and inspired everywhere by social and cultural changes that have involved new consumption patterns and more demanding societies (Elsheshtawy 2008, McGreary 2004). In seeking to institutionalize reform, Abu Dhabi Government has been negotiating social issues that are also of concern to other public administrations: While indigenization, economic diversification, skill shortages, institutional capability-building and the maintenance of cultural heritage have posed challenges particularly well-known to many emerging states besides Abu Dhabi, a lot of developed nations have found themselves increasingly preoccupied with issues like the management of immigration, structural unemployment, the potential and limits of digitalized government, and sustainable energy for the future.

In summary then, and by way of conclusion to this chapter, it should be appreciated that there are a number of characteristics and patterns, which the empirical research site of this study has in common with other public administrative contexts and customer-centric change initiatives. Therefore, it is argued, the focus on Abu Dhabi's particular government and its customer-centric reforms as a case in point allows for at least some modest and selective generalizations to be made within the parameters outlined above, albeit bearing in mind that they should be neither sweeping nor set in stone (Payne and Williams 2005).

As such, the findings of this study should be of interest to other public administrations that share some of the associated characteristics, or seek to reassemble particular aspects of Abu Dhabi's customer-centric reforms based on similar contexts and driven by an equivalent authoritarian political centre. The wider applicability of the insights gained in this study becomes especially relevant if one takes a more pragmatic stance on the world's public administrations, and allows for the possibility that democratic governance, and its underpinning norms and values, may not be the supreme model for leading economies in the next decades.

CHAPTER 5: OBSERVING SHARED SUBJECTIVITY

"There have been far fewer attempts to examine the world from the internal standpoint of the individual being studied, i.e., by taking a position on the frontier of behaviour, stripped of rating scales which carry their own meaning, and, shivering in the cold of uncertainty, trying to understand the political ramblings of the average citizen."

(Steven Brown, 'Political Subjectivity – Applications of Q Methodology in Political Science', 1980: 1)

5.1   Introduction to Chapter 5

Chapter 1 argued for the imperative of public management reforms to be rooted in local, subjective meaning-systems. On that basis, research question 1a challenged this study to develop an operational approach to observing and assessing the shared subjectivities of public administrators. In response, Chapter 2 proposed a two-step operational model, which sought to bring to light, and better understand, the views commonly held by groups of government employees vis-à-vis a particular reform. In order to test whether the proposed model would meet its objectives, Chapter 3 suggested applying the model to the real-life public administrators of Abu Dhabi

Government, and their shared meaning-making of the ongoing customer-centric public management reform. This, Chapter 2 and 3 highlighted, would enable the study to answer research question 1b, which asked how effective the proposed model is in identifying and evaluating the shared subjectivities of real people, but also in revealing some of the general conditions of meaning-making.

In preparing the ground for the model's real-life application, Chapter 4 provided insight into Abu Dhabi Government and its commonalities with other public administrative settings and their approaches to customer-centric reform. This paved the road for putting the first step of the operational model to the test, which sought to surface the existing, momentary viewpoints that Abu Dhabi's public administrators share with regard to the customer-centric reform.

The model's first step employed Q Methodology, which is a research technique for the scientific study of subjectivity (Watts and Stenner 2012, Wolf et al. 2011). It takes a *snapshot* of the breadth and depths of inter-subjectively shared viewpoints on a specific topic. Generally, a Q Methodology study involves the following six phases (Brown et al. 2008): The researcher first establishes the entire spread of opinions that are being expressed on the topic in question (the concourse). Second, a representative sample of statements is shortlisted from the

concourse that aims to capture the concourse's diversity (the Q set). Third, those people, who are most likely to have different views on the topic, are purposely selected as research participants to ensure that the full range of opinions and positions are represented (the P set). Fourth, every individual in the P set is asked to rank-order the statements in the Q set based on their personal and subjective views (the Q sorting). Fifth, the Q sorts that individual participants have produced are then statistically analysed through correlation and factor analysis (and factor rotation of the correlation matrix). These processes enable the researcher to identify clusters of similarly sorted sets of statements, which indicate shared underlying belief systems, or viewpoints (the Q factors). In the sixth and final phase, the weighted average sort that defines a Q factor, or shared viewpoint, is examined and compared with the weighted average sorts of the other factors. The sixth phase sees the researcher employing abductive logic in order to establish and describe 'the structure of thought that exists for each factor' (Brown et al. 2008: 724), and gain insight into how the shared viewpoints resemble each other, or not (the factor interpretation). Hence, this chapter chronicles the researcher's journey through the six phases of applying Q Methodology to the meaning-making of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and concludes with the insights gained into their shared subjectivities.

5.2   Designing the concourse

As is standard for any Q study, the researcher began by gathering the project's raw material: the entire range of opinions, reactions, assertions and arguments surrounding the topic in question, also called the 'universe of statements' (Stephenson 1986: 44).   This process is referred to as designing the *concourse* (Brown 1980, Stephenson 1953). The concourse constitutes the overall population of statements and perspectives from which the representative Q set of statements is drawn, which later on is to be presented to the research participants, whose subjectivities are being studied.   In this sense, as Watts and Stenner (2012: 34) poignantly highlight, the 'concourse is to a Q set what the population is to a person sample'.

Consistent with Watts and Stenner's (2012: 66, 68) definition, which conceptualises a statement as a 'condensation of information' that expresses 'a particular preconceived meaning', this study considered as a statement any sentence or set of sentences that expressed an opinion, idea, evaluation or attitude on Abu Dhabi's customer-centric reform.   Emulating Dryzek and Holmes' (2002: 25) 'reconstructive commitment', the statements were not edited other than correcting the grammar or replacing the word 'it' with a noun for greater clarity. The implication, just as in Dryzek and Holmes' (2002) study, was that some of the statements can be seen as ambiguous and expressing more

than one opinion. This was not considered problematic, however, considering that the meaning that the participants ascribed to the statements would become clear by how they sorted them.

Q Methodology researchers frequently assemble the concourse by gathering statements relating to the topic of interest from secondary data sources, such as blogs, newspapers, magazines, reports, articles, books, and relevant research studies (e.g. Gaynor 2013, Twijnstra and De Graaf 2013, Jeffares and Skelcher 2008). However, to ensure that the 'universe of statements' surrounding customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi's public administration was firmly rooted in, and reflective of, the normative dimensions of the local context, the researcher constructed the concourse for this study from primary as well as secondary data sources (Dryzek and Holmes 2002, Stephenson 1986).

Primary data source for the concourse: Interviews

In starting the fieldwork, semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who were likely to be engaged in communicating about Abu Dhabi's customer-centric reform (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008). These interviews provided the primary source of data for identifying the population of statements on the topic, and assembling the concourse.

In doing so, the study emulated an approach taken by Dryzek and Holmes (2002) in their Q Methodological research on democracy discourses in post-communist states. In spite of the significant extra time and effort needed to build a concourse from primary data, Dryzek and Holmes (2002: 23) maintained that only such an approach would enable the researcher to reconstruct the 'capabilities and dispositions of the individuals being investigated', and pick up on local peculiarities and nuances.

In order for the interviews to be as naturalistic as possible, the researcher visited the participants in their homes or at work, so that they would be in familiar surroundings and behave as they customarily do when engaged in their everyday activities (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004). Lasting anything between 40 minutes and 130 minutes, the interviews were semi-structured with a view to keeping the researcher's interference to a minimum, yet stimulating the subjective deliberations of interviewees. Accordingly, participants were prompted with the following three open-ended questions (see Appendix A):

1. In your opinion, what does customer-centric reform mean in the context of Abu Dhabi?

2. In your opinion, which government initiatives are particularly successful in driving customer-centric reform, and which ones are not?

3. What are the factors that are making the customer-centric reform successful, and what are those that are making it difficult?

Recruiting and interviewing participants

Both Abu Dhabi government employees *and* customers were asked about their understandings of, and opinions on, the customer-centric reform. The reason why the interview participants also included government customers, despite the fact that ultimately this study was interested only in the subjectivities of public administrators, was to make sure that the concourse would be as broad, inclusive and saturated as possible (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008).

For the purpose of this study, a government customer was defined in the widest sense, encompassing anyone who was a service user or end beneficiary of Abu Dhabi Government's services. This included not only Abu Dhabi's citizens and expatriate residents, but also businesses, civil society organisations, governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations. A public administrator was defined as an employee of Abu Dhabi's public administration, and

thus included directors, managers and staff members of government departments, policy-makers, and frontline personnel at local government offices.

Importantly, the interview participants did not need to hold specific characteristics but had to be as diverse as possible in order to capture as broad a range of subjective statements as possible (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008). As a result, those people who were asked to participate in the interviews, were significantly disparate in terms of their nationality, socio-economic demographics, culture, education, skills, and political power, with government employees also differing in terms of the policy sector they worked in, their types of job and their positions in Abu Dhabi Government's hierarchy (Watts and Stenner 2012, Dryzek and Holmes 2002, Stephenson 1986).

In recruiting interview participants, use was made of the researcher's personal connections and local knowledge. Nevertheless, care was taken to follow the University of Birmingham's ethical guidelines[23] - and the data collection plan and instruments were assessed and approved by the university's ethical review committee before

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[23] *See* https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/documents/public/AERguidance.pdf

commencement of the fieldwork. Interviewees were provided with information sheets, which introduced the research project, and explained the purpose of the interviews (see Appendix A). Potential interviewees were not only given the opportunity to ask questions about the project, but they were also assured that participation is voluntary.

In addition, the information sheet disclosed the researcher's intention to audio record the interviews, and clarified the process of anonymizing and securely storing the interview data (see Appendix A). Participants were guaranteed that confidentiality and the protection of their identities would be paramount for the researcher, and that they could withdraw from their interviews even after having completed them, as long as they informed the researcher before the analysis stage commenced (see Appendix A). In compliance with the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Research[24] as well as the Data Protection Act 1998[25], the interviews were personally transcribed, and digitally stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's personal computer. The interviewees' names were erased, and instead each interview was assigned a numerical code to enable its easy retrieval despite its anonymity. All interview codes began with the acronym 'RP1' to designate 'Research Phase 1', then

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[24] *See* http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf
[25] *See* http://www.legalservices.bham.ac.uk/dpa/

the letter 'C' for 'concourse' and next a sequential set of numbers to designate each particular interview. In line with the guidance from the UK Research Councils[26] on data retention, the audio recordings and the interview transcripts have been retained so that they can be accessible in confidence to other authorised researchers for verification purposes over the next ten years.

Those who agreed to participate in the interviews were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix A). Given that several interviewees expressed their concerns about being found out and punished by Abu Dhabi's authoritarian government for sharing their personal, subjective opinions, a number of participants declined to sign their consent forms, and instead gave verbal consent. The 'fear factor' also implied that most participants insisted on sharing as little demographic information as possible. This posed a recurring problem throughout the research project. Fortunately, none of the participants prohibited the researcher from audio recording their interviews.

Following the completion of the interviews, participants were asked about the extent to which they would like to be involved in any follow-up activities, including reading and verifying their respective

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[26] *See* http://tools.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/downloads/bcs-rrs/managing-research-records.pdf

interviews, participating in the sorting of Q statements later on (if they were employed in Abu Dhabi Government), corroborating summaries of upcoming interpretative accounts, and receiving copies of the final research report. Notably, the majority of participants were satisfied to verify their interviews but only a handful showed interest in participating in further parts of the study, or in receiving a copy of the final report. Many did not want to be contacted by the researcher following their interviews, again for fear of being associated with the study via telephone records or emails. This was highly understandable, given Abu Dhabi Government's record of finding, and striking back at, those levying criticism against it (Dwyer 2015).

In line with Q Methodological guidelines (see Watts and Stenner 2012), interviews continued to be conducted until the point of saturation was reached, and they were no longer generating new statements. Such a point of saturation was reached after 23 interviews, which constitutes quite a large number of participants for a typical Q Methodology study (Watts and Stenner 2012). Similar to other methods that focus on exploring meaning (Willig and Stainton Rogers 2008), Q Methodology is not concerned with large participant numbers and 'taking head counts' (Watts and Stenner 2012: 72). This is because the method establishes the *existence and content* of subjective viewpoints, and is unaffected by the population that subscribes to a particular view.

Even though demographic information is of limited relevance in Q Methodology, Table 5.2.1 below offers information about the interview participants in order to demonstrate their diversity. The 23 interviewees to inform the concourse were randomly selected and included four Abu Dhabi citizens and 19 expatriate residents, out of which eight were public administrators and 15 were government customers. The participants hailed from 16 different countries and counted 16 men and seven women between the ages of 19 and 58, extending across a spectrum of jobs, skill levels and price sensitivities. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participants to sum up in a 'headline statement' of one or two words how they would describe the customer-government relationship as a result of the reform. This is captured in the last column, and offers not only a headline summary of the interviewees' subjective outlook, but also illustrates the broad diversity of views and their different nuances in emphasis.

Table 5.2.1: Interview participants in designing the concourse

ID	Country of origin	Participant Type	Job Role	Skill Level	Gender	Age	Price Sensitivity	Relationship with Government	
RP1/C1		Public Administrator	Policy Performance Manager	High	Male	34	Medium	Customer in suspense (you never know whether you unexpectedly may receive a good service)	
RP1/C2		Government Customer	Structural Engineer	High	Male	32	Low	Educated Customer	
RP1/C3		Public Administrator	Urban planner	High	Male	31	Low	Appreciative Customer	
RP1/C4		Government Customer	IT Auditor	High	Male	28	Medium	Non-Arabic-speaking Customer	
RP1/C5		Government Customer	Univeristy staff	Medium	Male	43	Medium	Grateful Customer	
RP1/C6		Public Administrator	Senior Economist	High	Male	40	Medium	Visible Customer	
RP1/C7		Government Customer	Cleaner	Medium	Female	48	High	Happy Customer	
RP1/C8		Government Customer	Cleaner	Medium	Female	21	High	Happy Customer	
RP1/C9		Government Customer	HR Advisor	High	Male	43	Medium	Observant Customer	
RP1/C10		Government Customer	Supervisor	High	Male	24	Medium	Faithful Customer	
RP1/C11		Government Customer	Student	Medium	Male	23	High	Appreciative Customer	
RP1/C12		Government Customer	Housekeeper	Low	Male		High	Passive Customer	
RP1/C13		Government Customer	Housemaid	Low	Female	23	High	New Customer	
RP1/C14		Government Customer	Concierge	High	Male	31	Medium	Well treated customer	
RP1/C15		Government Customer	Truck driver	Low	Male	49	High	Happy Customer	
RP1/C16		Public Administrator	Parking ticket attendant	Medium	Male	19	Low	Grateful Customer	
RP1/C17		Government Customer	Receptionist	Medium	Female	28	Medium	Observant Customer	
RP1/C18		Government Customer	Supervisor	Medium	Male	26	High	Grateful Customer	
RP1/C19		Government Customer	Stewardess	Medium	Female	31	Medium	Government Bitch	
RP1/C20		Government Customer	Business CEO	High	Male	58	Low	Impressed Customer	
RP1/C21		Public Administrator	Manager	High	Male	25	Low	Happy Customer	
RP1/C22		Public Administrator	Head of Communications	High	Female	41	Medium	Forgiving Customer	
RP1/C23		Public Administrator	Manager	High	Female	32	Low	Challenging Customer	

Secondary data source for the concourse: Focus group report

In addition to consulting the interview participants, one particular secondary data source was called upon to complete the list of statements for the concourse (Jeffares and Skelcher 2008). This secondary data source was of critical importance because it ensured that the concourse also included those perspectives that, despite their

prevalence, were unlikely to be articulated by public administrators, not least because of the political pressure to self-censor. While not an issue for the service users who participated in the interviews, the public administrators needed to make pragmatic choices when discussing their employer's customer-centric initiatives within the context of a study that had not been approved, or officially recommended, by the leadership. Thus, they would have felt disinclined to state out loud any difficult or controversial perspectives about Abu Dhabi Government's customer-centric reform, however significant in their minds.

Aware of the gap in the emerging concourse, the researcher gathered additional statements from a report that had been produced following a series of focus groups with Abu Dhabi's government departments (Dadze-Arthur and Al Ali 2010). The focus group report had been compiled while the researcher was in employment with Abu Dhabi's General Secretariat of the Executive Council. The objective of the focus groups had been to learn about the customer-centric activities of Abu Dhabi's government departments and the challenges involved in implementing reform. To that effect, the focus groups had required conducting in-depth interviews with relevant staff members in nine government departments providing key public services, including

health, police, pensions, transport, environmental services, municipal services, utilities and tourism.

Prior to the focus groups, these government departments had been contacted by Abu Dhabi's leadership with an official request warmly to receive the researchers who would conduct the focus groups, and to collaborate by sharing with them the lessons learned so far. Therefore, within the context of the focus groups, the teams responsible for implementing and cascading the government's customer-centric reforms in those nine government departments had openly talked about their experiences, concerns and questions with the researcher knowing that the information would be passed on to Abu Dhabi's leadership to inform future governmental support measures. Indeed, the findings from these focus groups had been written up in a final report (Dadze-Arthur and Al Ali 2010), which included anonymous quotes that the researcher usefully extracted to complete the concourse for this study.

By combining statements from the primary and one secondary source of data, it was possible ultimately to isolate a total of 273 statements on the topic of customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi Government (see Appendix B). Further browsing of other secondary sources, such as reports and research studies on Abu Dhabi's public management,

local newspapers and magazines, as well as local radio talk shows, failed to yield any new statements. This was taken as confirmation that the concourse was saturated and probably provided as comprehensive coverage of 'the flow of communicability' surrounding Abu Dhabi's customer-centric reform as could reasonably be expected (Van Exel, J. and de Graaf, G. 2005).

5.3   Sampling the Q set

The main goal in designing the Q set is to produce a list of 30 to 60 statements (see Brown et al. 2008: 725), which are broadly representative of the diversity and complexity of the 'full gamut of possible opinions and perspectives' contained within the concourse (Watts and Stenner 2012: 58). The Q set is supposed to cover the 'relevant conceptual space' of the debate that surrounds the research question, and to avoid gaps and overlaps (Watts and Stenner 2012: 58). Even though each individual statement must express a particular judgement, the overall Q set should be balanced in terms of containing an equal amount of statements that are pro and anti the issue in question, and avoid perpetuating unstated bias towards one general viewpoint in particular (Watts and Stenner 2012). It is for that reason that the task of rigorously sampling a Q set is not only a 'difficult and time-consuming process' (Curt 1994: 128-129), but also to be thought of as 'more an art than a science' (Brown 1980: 186), which requires

persistence and significant skills (cited in Watts and Stenner 2012: 58).

Theoretical categories for sampling Q statements

Yet, as Watts and Stenner (2012: 57) highlight, 'there is no single or correct way to generate a Q set'. While, of course, it is imperative for it to be tailored to satisfy the particular research question that it is supposed to address, it 'may be designed purely on theoretical grounds, or from naturally-occurring conditions, or as required for experimental purposes' (Stephenson 1952: 223). Usually, Brown et al. (2008) posit, a Q methodologist commences the sampling process by identifying a series of theoretical categories or component themes that define the subject under investigation. This process can be either based on a preconceived theory, or grounded in the observations made in establishing the concourse (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008). Theoretical categories enable the researcher to devise a framework that models the important elements of the topic to be examined (Brown et al. 2008). Normally, such a theoretical framework guides the Q methodologist in choosing statements that represent a variety of themes or categories, and thus informs the heuristic selection of a balanced spread of widely differing kinds of statements to constitute the Q set (Dryzek and Holmes 2002). Regardless of the theoretical categories used, studies (e.g. Thomas and

Baas 1992) have shown that 'different sets of statements structured in different ways can nevertheless be expected to converge on the same conclusions' (van Excel and de Graaf 2005: 5).

Given this study's commitment to follow the trail of the data in the fashion of grounded theory (Oliver 2011), the researcher examined the concourse for naturally emerging themes. When investigating the 273 statements for main themes, the researcher found seven themes, or spheres, on customer-centric reform, which were distinct from each other due to their fundamental qualities and essential characters. They included cultural, social, administrative, political, economic, legal and technological spheres.

The *cultural* sphere that emerged from the concourse pertained to those perspectives that expressed shared ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions and knowledge, characterizing and informing the ongoing reform. The perspective articulated in statement 169 in the concourse offers an example: 'I think it's the local culture and values that are behind the good government services. Here, they have a very traditional culture that comes from the past, from their Bedouin culture' (Appendix B).

The concourse's *social* sphere included views on the interactions and social relations of persons forming groups or social entities, their collective co-existence, and the characteristics of their experiences and behaviours when relating to other social groups in realizing reform. The opinion at the heart of statement 4 constitutes an example: 'Here, the quality of your experience as a government customer depends on how well connected you are. Getting good services is down to whom you know and who you are' (Appendix B).

The concourse's *administrative* sphere manifested itself in form of perspectives that revolved around the government's bureaucrats and how they implement and execute the rules, laws, ideas, and functions of public service provision. The view expressed in statement 12 epitomizes the administrative theme: 'When it comes to government services that require the initiative of individual government staff or agencies then services here don't work so well'.

The *political* sphere that crystallized from the concourse was concerned with those opinions that related to leadership, the art and science of strategically governing the state, and exercising power in the governmental or public affairs of the state. Statement 102 in the concourse illustrates the political theme: 'An autocratic government is definitely better at delivering reform because the democratic

government concerns itself with everyone's opinions - so the decisions take longer. What takes one hour in an autocratic government maybe takes a year in a democratic one'.

The concourse's *economic* sphere summed up those statements, which pertained to the utilitarian, value-driven production, distribution and use of material and financial resources, wealth and commodities in implementing reform. The perspective contained in statement 15 is an obvious example: 'Government services here are good because the government has a lot of money'.

The concourse's *legal* sphere became apparent from those statements that were concerned with the law as enforced by the judicial system. The view expressed in statement 9 is testament to the legal theme contained in the concourse: 'Government services here work really well because they are mandated. There is legislation – this means they have to be provided'.

Last but not least, the *technological* sphere included all the statements that highlighted the knowledge, usage, application, and role of tools, machinery and processes. The perspective articulated in statement 16 exemplifies the concourse's technological theme: 'They use a lot of modern, state-of-the-art technology for their government services -

from Salik via mobile phone, or renewing your license through the internet. It makes you feel like a 21st century version of a government customer not the 20th century version'.

The population of 273 statements were sorted into the seven spheres. The statements in each sphere were then further examined to remove all those that are similar or overlapping in meaning. Following several rounds of scrutiny, a practical Q set of 58 statements was sampled from the concourse, which conceptually represented the seven spheres, or themes. These statements were broadly representative of the overall population of 273 statements and their distribution across the seven spheres, i.e. the majority of statements in the concourse related to the cultural and political sphere while only a few belonged to the legal and technological sphere. The resulting Q Set statements reflected in a condensed manner the volume of the debate on customer-oriented reform in Abu Dhabi Government.

Table 5.3.1: Sampling grid

Sphere or themes	Q Set Statements
Cultural	14, 25, 28, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 41, 46, 47, 48, 51, 52, 54, 58
Social	1, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 57
Administrative	2, 3, 13, 23, 26, 27, 30, 37, 42, 43, 56

Political	4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 39, 40, 45, 49, 50, 53
Economic	8, 10, 29, 44
Legal	5, 55
Technological	9, 34

Piloting the Q set

Given the importance of a theoretically rigorous, comprehensive, meaningfully adequate and valid Q set, piloting was undertaken with five of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, who included three expatriate and two Emirati employees. This pilot served its purpose of refining the statements, clarifying the wording and phraseology, identifying duplication or missing views, and ensuring satisfactory coverage of the spectrum of existing opinions (Watts and Stenner 2012). It also identified missing nuances, and resulted in a refined Q set (see Table 5.7.1). While the final Q set ended up retaining all 58 statements, it ensured more succinct and simply worded statements, which the pilot participants considered to be sufficiently unbiased, balanced and covering the breadth of debate on customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi Government.

In addition, the pilot study yielded two important insights that went beyond a rigorously sampled Q set: First, it turned out that translating the Q set into Arabic would not be necessary. Not only did the government employees speak good English, but they *preferred* the Q set to be in English. According to the pilot study's participants, they had learned the public management-specific discourses and jargon in English without ever being taught the Arabic counterpart.[27]

The second lesson learned from the pilot study reaffirmed the problem of the 'fear factor' specific to an autocratic context. In Abu Dhabi Government, the absence of laws granting civil and political rights, combined with the absence of an independent judiciary and effective lines of accountability, typically resulted in an informal, arbitrary and unregulated exercise of power by department heads and executive decision-makers. The pilot participants each related recent anecdotes as to how the management had dismissed employees under a pretext, but in reality for not sufficiently agreeing with, or conforming to, managerial or political decisions. In the post-pilot discussions, the participants stressed that the study needed to be designed around the 'fear factor' because otherwise Abu Dhabi's public administrators would most likely refuse to be associated with a study like this, which

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[27] Abu Dhabi Government's language policy changed shortly after the researcher completed her fieldwork in 2012, making Arabic the official language in its government organizations instead of English. As a result, the new generation of public administrators is now learning the public management discourse in Arabic.

asked for their *personal* viewpoints on their employer's service user-oriented reform.

The implication was that the pilot participants were scared off by any questions that might have offered a clue to their identities, including simple queries about their age, gender, nationality and other rather basic demographic information. Even the study's introductory question, asking participants about their professional role in the broadest sense, i.e. 'senior-level role in strategy' or 'mid-level managerial role in quality management', was only answered by one person in the pilot study.

5.4   Recruiting the P set

In a Q Methodology study, the careful, considered and strategic recruitment of the P set, which comprises the participants who sort the statements contained in the final Q set, is of utmost importance (Brown et al. 2008). This is primarily the case because Q Methodology is an inversion of standard statistical techniques, which Stephenson (1953) generically referred to as *R Methodology*. A typical statistical, or R Methodological, study tests a hypothesis by measuring traits, abilities or characteristics as variables across a sample of people, and subsequently reveals associations and distinctions *between variables* mapped at the population level (Watts

and Stenner 2012). This is the reason why standard statistical studies, or R Methodologies, are also referred to as *by-variable* analyses (Brown et al. 2008).

In contrast, Q Methodology reverses the standard approach and treats the statements in the Q set as the sample, while each participant in such study constitutes a variable (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008). This enables a factor analysis that reveals the resemblances and differences *between persons* with respect to their viewpoints on a particular topic (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown 1980). Hence, Q Methodologies, unlike R Methodologies, are also referred to as *by-person* analyses (Brown et al. 2008).

Irrespective of whether a research project takes a Q Methodological or R Methodological approach, no study would want a random set of variables. With the participants constituting variables in a Q study, the imperative strategically to select the 'right' people is obvious. The implication is that a 'good' P set is the result of a highly strategic approach to recruiting participants, and therefore 'theoretical or dimensional' in nature as opposed to 'random or accidental' (Brown 1980: 192).

Selection criteria for the P set

Usually, in a Q study, the P set will be made up of participants whose viewpoints matter vis-à-vis the subject under investigation (Watts and Stenner 2012). Given that this study was interested in the ways in which Abu Dhabi's public administrators made meaning of the government's customer-centric reform, the P set exclusively comprised public administrators who not only worked in Abu Dhabi Government at the time of research, but who were also involved, in one way or another, in cascading and implementing the specific reform.

Furthermore, typically the people in a robust P set hold well-defined viewpoints on the topic of interest and represent a variety of opinions to avoid 'unduly homogenous' responses (Watts and Stenner 2012: 71). To this end, the researcher's personal knowledge of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, of their roles in implementing the reform and of their general attitudes towards the reform process, proved particularly useful. It enabled a strategic approach to potential participants who held strong, distinct and divergent views on the reform as a result of their disparate roles, experiences and vantage points. Accordingly, the employees who were purposely selected included those who executed customer-centricity at the frontline and on the ground as well as those at the policy-making and decision-taking levels; those who delivered

customer-oriented reform initiatives as well as those who designed and evaluated them; those who were employed by different government departments as well as those who worked in various policy sectors; those who personally believed in the merit of the reform as well as those who were sceptical or cynical about it or who just mechanically followed orders. As always, the participants' variety was further cemented by ensuring a range of ages and socio-economic backgrounds, and different nationalities and positions in the pecking order.

The highly selective approach to recruiting relevant people for the P set was helped by the fact that a good Q Methodology study requires working with small numbers of participants (Watts and Stenner 2012). Bearing in mind that, in Q Methodology, participants constitute the variables, the number of variables explored in a single study is inevitably limited (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008, Brown 1980, Stephenson 1935).

As mentioned earlier, the aim of a Q Methodology study is *not* to generalize to a population of people, but to explore persons as variables in order to identify the existence of shared viewpoints, and thereafter to understand, explicate and compare the viewpoints' structures of meaning. On this basis, Q Methodology scholars

maintain that a 'good' P sample must not exceed half the number of statements in the Q set (e.g. Watts and Stenner 2012, Kline 1994). The Q set for this study was composed of 58 statements, which divided by two amounted to 29. Subsequently, the number of participants for this study should not exceed 29 participants to ensure optimum conditions for a 'good' P set.

Enlisting participants for the P set

In heeding the lessons learned from the pilot study with regard to the 'fear factor', the selected public administrators were asked to take part in an *online* Q Methodology study. By offering selected participants the opportunity to sort the statements online and in the privacy of their homes, it was possible to bolster their sense of anonymity and alleviate the 'fear factor'.

Next, to enable participants to sort the Q set online, PoetQ (a web-based resource run by the University of Birmingham) was employed. Jeffares and Skelcher (2008) have reported positive experiences with this resource and found that a web-enabled Q sort resembles an on-line 'game of solitaire', proving 'most intuitive and easy to use' (Jeffares and Skelcher 2008: 11). Furthermore, a study conducted by Reber et al. (2000) has compared web-based Q sorting with paper-

based Q sorting, and found no difference in the reliability and validity between the two methods.

As it turned out within the context of this project, an online Q Methodology study not only successfully alleviated the 'fear factor' for local public administrators, but the process' similarity with a game of solitaire also greatly appealed to Abu Dhabi's tech-savvy culture. In the end, despite the sensitivities of the autocratic context, 26 participants were recruited for the P set; including two public administrators who had played a part in designing the concourse and in the pilot study.

Echoing the procedure followed in recruiting interviewees for the concourse, the University's ethical guidelines[28] and Code of Practice for Research[29] were followed when enlisting the P set. Each member of the P set was presented with an information sheet that introduced the online Q study, explained its purpose and process, and what would happen with the data (see Appendix C). Furthermore, as before, everyone was given the opportunity to ask questions. Above all, the information sheet highlighted that no one could know who took part in the online study because, PoetQ automatically assigns numerical

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[28] *See* https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/documents/public/AERguidance.pdf
[29] *See* http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf

codes to each Q sort, and not even the researcher would be able to identify which individual produced which Q sort. The information sheet concluded by offering participants the possibility of staying involved in the project and verifying the resulting interpretative accounts or even taking part in the second phase of the fieldwork. Following the advice of the pilot group, no consent forms were handed out this time, and the participants were asked instead verbally to give their consent.

5.5   Administering the Q sorting

Having developed a final Q set containing 58 statements as well as having recruited 26 of Abu Dhabi's public administrators for the P set, each participant was emailed the URL for the online Q sort. Upon clicking on the link as Q sorters, they were greeted with an introduction that aimed to put them at ease and prepare them mentally (see Appendix D). On a more practical note, the introduction also explained in detail what to expect from the online sorting process, including instructions on how to obtain help, or pause the survey if they wanted to finish at a later point.

Before embarking on the Q sorting, PoetQ's stage 1 asked the Q sorters to describe in general terms their professional role (rather than their job title) offering examples such as 'a customer-facing role on

the ground' or 'a senior-level role in strategy' (again see Appendix D). This followed from the results of the pilot study, and a decision to forgo collecting demographic data in favour of prioritizing the more pertinent information about each the respondent's role in relation to the government's reform. Nevertheless, the researcher had set up PoetQ in such a way that replying to this question was optional, and those participants who chose to leave the respective field blank were still able to proceed with the survey. This approach turned out to be more successful than in the pilot, with two thirds of the Q sorters providing some details about their professional involvement in the customer-centric reform process.

Subsequently, in stage 2, PoetQ asked the respondents to agree or disagree with each statement on a scale from +4 to -4. This resulted in participants rank-ordering the 58 statements along a nine-point continuum from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree) and with 0 as the midpoint. PoetQ's guidelines for stage 2 reiterated that there was no right or wrong way to sort the statements, and that only the person's subjective judgement was of interest (Brown 1980). It allowed participants themselves to define what was meaningful, and apply their own subjective frames of reference (Watts and Stenner 2012). Once a participant had finished rank-ordering the set of statements, he or she had produced a Q sort.

In stage 3 of the online Q sorting, respondents were able to view their Q sorts as a whole. Here, they were given the opportunity to swap around any statements if they wished, and to make sure that they were happy with their final Q sorts.

In stage 4, participants were shown the statements, which they had ranked as most agreeable and most disagreeable, and asked to explain the reasons for their choices. Keeping in mind that every person's relationship to a statement is different (Wittgenstein 1971), stage 4 enabled the Q sorters to shed light on the specific subjective meaning and significance each statement had for them (Brown 1980).

As is good practice, the online Q sort ended by thanking the Q sorters, and reminding them of the researcher's contact details in case they had further comments or wanted to discuss aspects of the Q sorting.

5.6   Analyzing the Q sorts for Q factors

With all 26 Q sorts completed, the analysis began with correlation to establish an initial simple measure of association between all the Q sorts in the data set (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown 1980, Stephenson 1935). The correlation matrix was then used for factor analysis (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown 1980, Stephenson 1935).

Bearing in mind that, as previously indicated, in a Q Methodological statistical analysis, the Q sorters are the variables (or independent variables in R Methodological terms) and the statements provide the sample (or dependent variables in R Methodological terms), the resulting factors would represent the clusters of Abu Dhabi's public administrators who had ranked the statements in a similar way, and could thus be said to hold a shared viewpoint on the customer-centric reform (Brown et al. 2008). In this way, the study would be able empirically to establish the existence of shared, or inter-subjective, meaning structures.

Accordingly, the researcher employed a statistical programme that is customized to the requirements of Q Methodology, called PQMethod (Schmolck 2002), and applied centroid analysis procedures to explore the Q sorts. The Q sorts were rotated by means of varimax rotation in order to create the best conditions for understanding what each cluster of factor loadings had in common (Watts and Stenner 2012). The procedure was designed to ensure that each Q sort would closely approximate one of the factors' viewpoints, and that the factor solution 'maximizes the amount of data variance explained' (Watts and Stenner 2012: 125). This allowed the analysis to identify a factor array that explained as much as possible of the total variance in the

inter-correlation of each Q sort with every other sort, which constitutes a key goal of every Q study (Brown 1980).

Given that this study was based on 58 statements in the Q set, a rotated factor loading needed to be 0.33 or greater in order to be significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. The first Q sort in Table 5.6.2, for example, has a factor loading of 0.79 for Factor 1, which implies that it is significantly correlated with this particular viewpoint. On this basis, all the non-confounded[30] Q sorts with a loading of 0.33 and above were manually flagged as most closely exemplifying a factor's viewpoint, and thus being worthy of analysis. This procedure enabled the analysis to identify which factors to retain, given that a principal decision-making criterion for keeping factors in a Q Methodology study is that they each should have at least two significant Q sorts loading on to it following extraction (Watts and Stenner 2012).

Armed with these criteria, a range of solutions was examined. In doing so, the data was subjected to factor-analysis in four different ways respectively, extracting three factors, four factors, five factors and six factors. Each of the four solutions was examined for its explanatory power and Eigenvalue, the number of significant Q sorts that loaded on to the factors, the amount of Q sorts not loading on any

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[30] Non-confounded Q sorts are those that had a factor loading of above 0.33 for only a single factor.

factor, the number of Q sorts confounded across more than one factor, and the correlation between factors (Watts and Stenner 2005).

Having examined the various alternatives in this way, a decision was taken to settle on the five-factor solution as optimal for summarizing the data. There were several reasons for this. For one, the five-factor solution explained a sound 42% (18% + 9% + 5% + 4% + 6%) of the overall variance. This is apparent in Table 5.6.1 below, which shows the participants' Q sorts loading by factor.

Table 5.6.1: Unrotated five-factor matrix

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Unrotated Factor Matrix

Factors           1        2        3        4        5

SORTS
 1 WKISDUQY     0.8215   0.1631  -0.2050  -0.0636   0.1184
 2 GOBKH15K     0.0255   0.3148  -0.2691  -0.1538  -0.0641
 3 1LSYEQ20    -0.1121   0.1751  -0.1455   0.3313   0.3394
 4 QCR8LCFY    -0.4875   0.3185   0.3090   0.0472  -0.0546
 5 AYMH5YO1     0.0471   0.2145   0.2932  -0.2846   0.4577
 6 G3V6HRBF     0.4590  -0.2457  -0.1637   0.1904  -0.1543
 7 UVSQYBC2     0.1249   0.1631  -0.0012   0.2864   0.3628
 8 XHG94NDB     0.8810  -0.0492   0.1913   0.0473   0.1182
 9 FJGRX7YC     0.7951  -0.1102   0.0895   0.1174  -0.0978
10 DIVMQ1G6     0.2741   0.3855  -0.0845  -0.3385  -0.0675
11 CA8DQVL7    -0.0977   0.6471  -0.3161   0.1449  -0.0856
12 VMZSCAHI     0.2291   0.1176   0.0255   0.2790   0.2259
13 PE90JSLZ     0.5847  -0.0410   0.0909  -0.2867   0.0774
14 KHFNZSTC    -0.4032  -0.1441  -0.2133   0.1593   0.3819
15 XVEPM5SR    -0.0414   0.4075   0.3682   0.1605   0.2827
16 AIREKSPC     0.7099  -0.1761   0.2311   0.0903  -0.0413
17 WC6ZWPPS     0.7499   0.2669  -0.3482  -0.0821  -0.0283
18 NY756TCG    -0.3165   0.3081  -0.1367  -0.0943  -0.1264
19 VLXO0PWS     0.0523   0.3515   0.2092  -0.1457   0.2734
20 NA4QDUPJ    -0.2261   0.0809   0.1987  -0.0023  -0.4582
21 FQW91DBH    -0.2783   0.4689   0.4561  -0.0984  -0.0491
22 E4ASQFKH     0.4527   0.2937   0.1457   0.1019  -0.2114
23 OEJ6XT1L     0.1278   0.4292  -0.0426   0.2216  -0.5631
24 4OHEFQYB     0.1758   0.2699   0.2254   0.2336  -0.2507
25 8JAI7BC0     0.1488   0.2668  -0.1781  -0.0268   0.0730
26 SUQVDQGL    -0.1418   0.3987  -0.2454  -0.2976   0.0467

Eigenvalues    4.7981   2.2956   1.3357   0.9598   1.5573

% expl.Var.        18        9        5        4        6
```

Furthermore, a total of 20 out of the rotated 26 Q sorts loaded significantly on to one or another of the five factors (see Table 5.6.2). In addition, each of the factors in the five-factor solution had at least three significant loadings. Table 5.6.2 below shows those Q sorts highlighted in yellow, which had a loading of 0.33 and above and were non-confounded, and thus most closely defined and epitomized a respective factor's viewpoint.

Table 5.6.2: Factor matrix with defining Q sorts

Factor Matrix with an X Indicating a Defining Sort

Loadings

QSORT	1	2	3	4	5
1 WKISDUQY	0.7908X	0.3252	-0.0349	0.1707	-0.0032
2 GOBKH15K	-0.0142	0.4448X	-0.0096	-0.0233	0.0353
3 1LSYEQ20	-0.1554	0.0688	0.0211	0.5062X	-0.0616
4 QCR8LCFY	-0.5030	-0.0276	0.3453X	-0.0100	0.2581
5 AYMH5YO1	0.0992	0.0471	0.5985X	0.0724	-0.2218
6 G3V6HRBF	0.4386X	-0.0891	-0.3877	0.0526	0.0675
7 UVSQYBC2	0.0949	0.0048	0.1257	0.4800X	-0.0247
8 XHG94NDB	0.8866X	-0.1030	0.0909	0.1362	0.0886
9 FJGRX7YC	0.7821X	-0.1028	-0.1214	0.0534	0.1894
10 DIVMQ1G6	0.2544	0.4643X	0.1984	-0.1530	0.0833
11 CA8DQVL7	-0.2088	0.5888X	0.0053	0.2669	0.3082
12 VMZSCAHI	0.1970	-0.0254	0.0590	0.3859X	0.0635
13 PE90JSLZ	0.6214X	0.0608	0.1449	-0.1408	-0.0966
14 KHFNZSTC	-0.3899	-0.0745	-0.0776	0.3092	-0.3753
15 XVEPM5SR	-0.0628	-0.0226	0.5092X	0.3257	0.1980
16 AIREKSPC	0.7210X	-0.2370	-0.0171	0.0189	0.1472
17 WC6ZWPPS	0.6931	0.4939	-0.1369	0.1144	0.0782
18 NY756TCG	-0.3514	0.3112	0.0479	-0.0699	0.1051
19 VLXO0PWS	0.0579	0.1543	0.4751X	0.1148	-0.0008
20 NA4QDUPJ	-0.2448	-0.0638	-0.0152	-0.3067	0.3858X
21 FQW91DBH	-0.2881	0.0529	0.5575	-0.0822	0.3377
22 E4ASQFKH	0.3993	0.1234	0.0808	0.0391	0.4298
23 OEJ6XT1L	0.0190	0.2825	-0.1616	-0.0435	0.6786X
24 4OHEFQYB	0.1181	-0.0102	0.0754	0.0694	0.4974X
25 8JAI7BC0	0.1125	0.3135	0.0374	0.1351	0.0225
26 SUQVDQGL	-0.1646	0.5194X	0.1552	-0.0602	-0.0736

By comparison, the three-factor solution accounted for only 32% of total variance, while the four-factor solution explained 36% in total. Although the six-factor solution explained the highest amount of the total variance (44%), only a single Q sort loaded on to the sixth factor. In addition, each of those three other factor solutions had less than 20 Q sorts loading significantly on to the respective factors.

When inspecting the five-factor solution's Eigenvalues (also called the Kaiser-Guttman criterion), indicating the statistical strength and explanatory power of each factor, only Factor 1, Factor 2, Factor 3 and Factor 5 proffered Eigenvalues above 1.00 (see Table 5.6.1). The Eigenvalue for Factor 4 was 0.96, thereby falling just below the 'cut-off point' for extracting and retaining factors as suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012: 105).

On this basis, Factor 4 was not to be considered significant enough to be retained, although it had more than two Q sorts significantly loading on to it as well as accounting for four per cent of the total variance. In such situations, which are not uncommon in Q Methodology studies, Brown (1980: 223) argues that 'insignificant factors frequently contain small amounts of systematic variance that can help in improving the loadings on a major factor'. Moreover, considering that in Q Methodology, statistics are only indicative

(Brown 1980), a decision to abandon Factor 4 because it fell 0.04 short of a statistical 'cut-off point' was felt to risk 'overlooking a viewpoint of theoretical interest' (Watts and Stenner 2012: 110-111).

Further reassurance as to the value of the five factor option derived from the statistical insignificance of the correlation between the set (from as little as -0.16 to no more than 0.25 - see Table 5.6.3). From a statistical perspective, the implication here was that each factor was sufficiently distinct from the others, and so promised 'to provide the best possible estimate of a key viewpoint' (Watts & Stenner 2012: 141).

Table 5.6.3: Correlations between factor scores

Correlations Between Factor Scores					
	1	2	3	4	5
1	1.0000	-0.1599	-0.0602	0.0869	0.0795
2	-0.1599	1.0000	0.1309	0.1659	0.2494
3	-0.0602	0.1309	1.0000	0.2220	0.0053
4	0.0869	0.1659	0.2220	1.0000	-0.0033
5	0.0795	0.2494	0.0053	-0.0033	1.0000

Accordingly, the decision was made to opt for a five-factor solution, retaining Factor 4 despite its Eigenvalue and the small amount of

variance for which it accounted. As the next section will explain in more detail, the merit in this choice was subsequently underlined by the fact that Factor 4 proved to be of significant theoretical interest in so far as it represented a distinct viewpoint rooted in the Bedouin belief system.

Each of the five Q factors represented a specific view on customer-centric reform which was shared by distinct groups of Abu Dhabi's public administrators at the time of research. The co-existence of five shared viewpoints in the same place and at the same time itself provided an intriguing insight on the multiple, and competing, ways in which Abu Dhabi's public administrators connect relevant themes, and make sense of the process of embedding customer-centric public services in their local context.

5.7   Factor interpretation

In the final phase, the quantitative factor analysis was followed by qualitative factor interpretation. This involved explaining each factor, or viewpoint, and building insight into its structure of meaning. Factor interpretation is achieved by examining a Q factor's weighted average Q sort. This constitutes the ideal type Q sort that epitomizes the particular viewpoint. It can be compared with the weighted average sorts of the other Q factors. The focus of this process

involved examining the statement scores of each average, or idealized, Q sort and contrasting them with the statement scores of the idealized Q sorts defining the other factors (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008, Stephenson 1935). As Brown (1980: 263) poignantly highlights, this process 'is frequently full of surprises in the sense that the investigator might never have dreamed that a person would actually perform a Q sort in this particular way'.

Importantly, interpreting each factor, and crystallizing the viewpoint it harbours, is a Gestalt (German for 'shape') procedure, whereby the qualities of the whole cannot be understood merely as the sum of its parts but must be looked at holistically and within the context of each other (Watts and Stenner 2012). Accordingly, not only the highest ranking and the lowest ranking statements were identified for each factor, but also those statements that ranked highest or lowest *in comparison* to the other factors.   In other words, not only did the statements scoring +/-4 and +/-3 matter, but also those ranked highest or lowest relative to the other factors (Watts and Stenner 2012, Brown et al. 2008, Stephenson 1935). For example, Factor 2 scored statement number 42 as 0 (42: 0). Ordinarily, and taken out of context, a ranking at 0 (which is the mid-point of the continuum from -4 strongly disagree to +4 strongly agree), would hardly be considered of significance. However, compared with all the other Q sorts under

investigation, Factor 2 had scored statement 42 lower than any other factor, thus indicating the most disagreement with this opinion.

Given the richness of this type of information, Q Methodologists class the idealized statement scores for each factor as the most important and informative data in a Q study (Jeffares and Skelcher 2008). Table 5.7.1 below shows the statement scores for each of the five factors in this study.

Table 5.7.1: Factor Q sort values for each statement

	Statements	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**	**Factor 5**
1	Here, the quality of your experience as a government customer depends on how well connected you are. Getting good services is down to whom you know and who you are.	1	-1	2	2	3
2	I think it is mainly about transaction of services. The government does not see me as a customer but more as an input-output, or a social revenue.	1	0	-2	0	1
3	Here, being a government customer means being in a business-type relationship with government. I feel like a customer in a private company.	-2	-1	2	-2	0
4	I would say that being a government customer in this context means being in an unequal, top-down relationship with government – a relationship that relies on the generosity of the government rather than the rights of the people.	3	-1	0	-2	2
5	Government services here work really well because they are mandated. There is legislation – this means they have to be provided.	-3	0	-1	-1	3
6	The government services are good because there is almost universal coverage. The government ensures that everyone gets certain services automatically, like health care.	-2	1	1	-1	0
7	Abu Dhabi Government's success is down to processes and systems – not the people. Services are very good as long as it's about rubber-stamping paperwork. But when you need individual staff members to show initiative, you can forget it!	3	0	-2	-1	1
8	It's all about financial resources. Government services here are good because the government has a lot of money.	-3	0	0	-3	4
9	Abu Dhabi Government uses a lot of modern, state-of-the-art technology to deliver government services. It makes you feel like a	-1		0	0	0

	21st century version of a government customer, not the 20th century version.					
10	The government is good at spending money to buy and implement tools. But in terms of providing a service that makes the most of the tools, that is where it gets tricky.	2	2	-1	1	3
11	As an expatriate, you don't have a right to say anything! Therefore you don't identify yourself with this place and therefore you kind of feel not responsible for the city – you are more like a guest.	4	-2	-2	-1	1
12	Here, they put badly trained Emiratis into government jobs just because they are Emiratis. This reminds me of South Africa after independence -all the black people got jobs just because they were black. It was like an empowerment kind of thing - to promote nationalism and get all the black people excited about the country's future.	4	0	-1	2	0
13	The government brought in some very good foreigners from all over the world to work in government here. These foreigners have a track record of creating state-of-the-art government services in their area of expertise.	-1	-3	0	3	1
14	In many Entities, the old generation with their traditional mind-set dominates the organisational culture. The young, forward-thinking staff members cannot initiate change or implement any progress – they are not empowered.	1	0	-3	0	-2
15	The reason why government services here are so good is because of the attitude at the top. We have great leaders here. And it's all about leadership!	-4	3	0	1	4
16	The government here puts the right people in the management positions you have good managers in government, they will get the best out of the team.	-3	-3	0	-2	-2
17	It's the psychological side of it. The government here has great vision and does not limit it's thinking – and that drives them to do so well.	-1	1	0	-1	1
18	Here in Abu Dhabi, government services are really good because there is no corruption. The government has the same rules for everyone.	-2	1	0	0	-2
19	Education for man and women is the biggest reason behind Abu Dhabi government's success. The government is investing so much into the education of its citizens.	-2	1	0	0	-2
20	Your experience as a service user depends on whether the frontline staff happens to be in a good mood on that day, or whether or not you are interrupting their coffee break, or their BBM chat.	0	0	-4	2	1
21	There is definitely some sort of stratification among different customer groups. Customers are not all equal. It is common practice here to treat customers in a 'biased' way.	3	0	4	3	-1
22	The lady customers are like jewels, like diamonds. That's why service providers serve women and families first –no matter whether they are at the back of the line.	0	-1	0	-3	-1
23	At the end of the day, being a government customer here means going through a lot of bureaucracy, which is made worse by a lack of information, direction and clarity.	1	-1	4	-1	-3
24	Language is a problem here. Think of the police or traffic wardens. If you are a non-Arabic speaker, you often cannot get a good service from the government.	0	-3	-1	4	-1
25	The culture here can seem rude because men don't talk to women, and women don't talk to men. So the frontline staff doesn't bother with pleasantries or politeness.	-1	-3	0	-4	-4

26	The Abu Dhabi government talks about treating citizens and residents as customers and providing a good customer experience - but you don't see it on the ground.	2	-1	-1	0	-4
27	Even with all the money, resources, and technology, it isn't working. Government services are not focused on customers.	2	-2	-2	-4	-1
28	For most people working in government here, it is about having a prestigious job, short working hours, and a good salary. For them it is not about building up the mechanisms of good governance and customer service.	2	1	0	1	2
29	Given the money and resources that Abu Dhabi Government throws at government services, they should provide a much better customer experience.	2	4	2	-3	3
30	Abu Dhabi government seems to be very professional in delivering public services to all. It is like the government wants to make sure that everyone is happy.	-3	1	0	0	-2
31	Our religion drives our governmental culture. For example, in Islam, the fundamental tenet is obedience to God and authority. Islam also encourages people to do their best. That is why we strive for quality services.	-2	-4	1	-1	-1
32	In Abu Dhabi, maintaining our traditions and customs and the way we do things, is helping us to be good at government services.	-4	3	1	1	-3
33	In Singapore, they have the best government services in the world because they are disciplined - it is part of their culture. Here in Abu Dhabi, the Locals don't have discipline – it is not part of their culture.	1	-2	0	-2	0
34	In Abu Dhabi Government, the workforce is not intellectually advanced. They may have all the gadgets but I don't think that intellectually they can be compared to countries like Singapore.	2	-1	1	0	1
35	We are Arab people. We have our traditions. We have to be kind and hospitable to guests – that's why government services are good for everyone. But still it is our home so we have to feel more comfortable than the guest – that is why government services are a little bit better for citizens.	-1	-1	3	2	2
36	It is the local Bedouin culture and values that are behind the good government services. The Bedouin culture promotes family values, friendship, hospitality etc.	-2	0	-1	4	-3
37	We don't really have much choice when it comes to service providers because there is no competition.	0	2	-1	1	0
38	Do people here express their opinions through local and cultural institutions? Yes they do! In fact, we have many ways of consultation, such as Majlis, or we can go directly to the Sheikh during Ramadan, or we can call into one of the Arabic radio talk shows.	0	3	1	1	-1
39	Abu Dhabi government had the political will to push through reforms for customer-centric services. It was a business decision to help attract investment and tourism etc.	-1	1	3	2	0
40	Many of Abu Dhabi government leaders are heavily influenced by the experiences they had travelling, living, working and studying abroad. And for someone who is exposed to the world, it liberates the person's thinking and it leads to everything else.	-1	0	1	-1	2
41	There is nothing in Abu Dhabi's local culture that gives them the incentive to want to serve people. On the contrary, they are used to being served, not providing good services.	1	-2	-1	-1	0
42	Here, government staff only attends a course if they get a glossy certificate from Harvard or Oxford in their name – to learn new skills is secondary. This affects the culture of training and skill development that the government promotes.	3	0	2	2	2

43	It's 'customer service schizophrenia'. Part of the system believes in customer-centric government services and throws so much money at it, but at the same time the system is often working against you in implementing good customer service.	1	0	1	-3	0
44	Remember, the government here is not based on taxation. The country's money is in the hands of a few royals. That's why, especially in light of the Arab Spring, the government feels responsible to give back, and deliver good public services to Locals.	0	-2	1	1	-3
45	When you have an authoritarian or military-type top-down approach, you can get a lot done in terms of implementation. This is why Abu Dhabi Government achieved all these service improvements so quickly	-1	0	-2	-2	-2
46	The collective culture here is different. People here will go places to get services instead of just picking up the phone. They love to interact with people – it puts this richness into their lives. To them, de-humanized, cardboard efficiency is not a motivating factor. This is only appreciated in western cultures.	0	1	-2	1	0
47	We have a culture here in which people don't appreciate the value of services. They don't maximize the benefits they get from all the free services on offer. Some families will say it is ok for their kids to drop out of school because education is free anyway!	0	-2	-4	-2	1
48	Confronting Entities and holding them accountable is not easy in Arabic culture. Criticizing or blaming or asking for justification takes a lot of courage and is not something easy to do for us.	1	0	3	3	0
49	In our tradition, the Sheikh is not Sheikh because of the wealth of his family but because he is wise, and listens to people, and ensures their wellbeing. The Sheikh loves his people, and the people love the Sheikh.	-1	2	2	0	1
50	The Heads of Entities, who are below the Sheikhs, don't want the Sheikhs to find out if services are not so good because they would fall from grace. We have a culture here whereby government Entities are under a lot of pressure 'to look good' in front of the leadership.	1	1	-3	0	0
51	Here, it is more about conforming. And if you try to be creative, then people will make fun of you, even criticize you because you are not following what everyone is following.	0	-1	0	0	0
52	They tend to use religion as a justification for everything because it's convenient. But in reality, it is our culture that you see in our government, not our religion.	0	3	-1	0	0
53	An important aspect is the role model effect of leaders – like the leadership showing the people new ways and introducing new practices. Sheikh Zayed, for example, always used to take his daughters to official events. So it became more accepted for women to be active in the public sphere, and to mingle with men.	0	2	2	0	2
54	Sometimes, it is the Arabic pride that is behind the way frontline staff serves customers. Some people really don't want to serve others and if they have to, then at least they want to make you know that you are not better than them.	0	0	-3	0	-2
55	Government Entities here are very confused about the definition of 'government customers'. Is a customer someone who pays for services or someone who conducts transactions with the government, or is it the same as a stakeholder?	0	2	-3	0	0
56	We don't even look at the complaints we receive from our service users – they go straight to the Abu Dhabi Government Contact Centre. The Contact Centre will then forward the complaint to the relevant department in our organisation.	0	0	0	0	-1

57	We Locals don't complete one million but there are eight million foreigners. But it is my country. So, for example, when I am the only Local waiting with 200 Indians, then the staff will call me to the front because there is only one of me, so the 200 Indians can wait.	0	-4	0	1	-1
58	The issue of voice has a two-track reality. There is the official, formal track - the 0800 555 number. And then there is the traditional, informal track of the Majlis or seeing the Sheikh on Ramadan. Upholding the traditional, informal system is important because it lets the Locals maintain their culture.	0	1	1	3	0

5.8 Findings: Five inter-subjective viewpoints

Following a careful reading of the statement scores for each factor and the participants' explanations of their rankings, five interpretations of inter-subjective viewpoints on customer-centric reform were derived among Abu Dhabi's public administrators. In light of discussion and verification of the interpretative accounts with the P set, the viewpoints were labelled as follows: (1) The benefactor's epic fail, (2) Managerialism in modern Arabiya, (3) Triumph of the cherished patriarch, (4) The traditional ways of the Bedouins, and (5) The reign of formulas over culture.

Factor 1 – The benefactor's epic fail

This viewpoint was distinct from the others in that it was the only one that believed that the customer-centric reform initiatives had, in fact, achieved no positive results at all (15: -4; 32: -4; 30: -3, 5: -3). The perception was that the government pays lip service to the idea of treating citizens and residents as customers, and providing a good customer experience to everyone - but it is not necessarily realized on

the ground (26: +2, 6: -2). To this viewpoint, being a government customer thus means being in an unequal, top-down relationship with government – a relationship that relies on the generosity of the government rather than the rights of service users (4: +3). Testament to this is, not least, the impunity with which well-connected government departments ignore aspects of their mandated responsibility to focus on service users (5: -3). It also might explain why, in reality, public administrators tend not even to look at the complaints that they receive from service users, and instead simply forward any customer feedback straight on to the Abu Dhabi Government Contact Centre, which in turn would forward them to the relevant administrative department (56: 0).

Despite the large amounts of money, resources and technology being directed at customer-centric service initiatives, the viewpoint suggests that the reform is not generating value for money and continues to fail service users (27: +2, 9: -1). Moreover, as this viewpoint sees it, the reason for unsuccessful reform is not to be found in the processes or technologies, which are considered to be state-of-the-art, but in the people within the organisation. Above all, this viewpoint firmly locates the responsibility for the failed adaption of customer-centricity with Abu Dhabi Government's human resources (7: +3), most particularly the leadership (15: -4) but also the workforce (12: +4).

The impression of this viewpoint is that the leadership sets the tone by maintaining those traditions and customs, which are preventing customer-centric reforms from taking hold and flourishing (32: -4). In further explaining this perception, Q sorters AIREKSPC and G3V6HRBF argued in their post-sorting comments that government employees work in a milieu that declines to overhaul unhelpful traditions or to 'make the most of conducive social, cultural and knowledge resources'. Displaying little hope for transformation in the near future, this viewpoint regards forward-thinking staff members as insufficiently empowered to initiate change because it is the 'traditionalists' who get promoted into the key decision-making and gate-keeping roles, thus imposing their traditional mindset on the organisational culture and working practices (14: +1). Attempts to show initiative or creativity will tend to be penalized, while conformity is rewarded (7: +3, 51: 0).

The viewpoint reflects an understanding that, in addition to the problematic leadership culture, the government's political practice of positive discrimination, referred to as Emiratization, is another key reason behind the limited impact of reforms around service users. This viewpoint tends to regard Abu Dhabi Government as prioritising the provision of jobs for Emiratis over the reform itself (12: +4). According to the Q sorters WKISDUQY, FJGRX7YC and

G3V6HRBF, the best-qualified Emiratis are not necessarily guaranteed the government jobs either. Instead, so Q sorters WKISDUQY, FJGRX7YC and G3V6HRBF continued to explain, by using a cultural system of selection, the understanding is of the Abu Dhabi Government appointing employees based less on the merit of applicants and more on their family connections, moral reputation and social visibility. Accordingly, as the Q sorter FJGRX7YC described it in the post-sorting comments, the viewpoint suggests that the government is sacrificing efficiency, expertise and operational competence in order to provide its 'upper-class' citizens with prestigious and well-compensated employment opportunities.

Even though it is common practice to hire large numbers of internationally-regarded knowledge workers for their specialist expertise, the culture, according to this viewpoint, is such that expatriate government employees are not afforded the same weight and respect as Emirati employees, and are considered to be only temporary guests (11: +4; 15: +4). As the Q sorter XHG94NDB put it: 'Any advice from expatriate experts that disagrees with leadership decisions is discarded along with the bothersome advisor'. As a result, so Q sorter XHG94NDB concluded, leaders and decision-makers in Abu Dhabi Government are 'surrounded by armies of impotent professionals and opportunistic 'yes-men', who have little or

no incentive to deliver sound policy judgment'. As this viewpoint sees it, the result is a governmental workforce that is neither intellectually advanced nor disciplined as, for example, the workforce in Singapore (34: +2; 33: +1). In further clarifying this perception, Q sorters PE90JSLZ and AIREKSPC explained that the staff body as a whole is 'not used to thinking innovatively and critically', and is most comfortable operating within 'an excessively bureaucratic system that is over-regulated and micro-managed'.

The detrimental effects of the government's positive discrimination strategy are further aggravated by the prevalent organisational culture around training and learning (19: -2). Under this viewpoint, Abu Dhabi Government is seen as promoting a learning culture that tends to incentivise the accumulation of formal certificates among government staff rather than necessarily acquiring new skills and applying what they have learned in their everyday roles (42: +3). As the Q sorter WKISDUQY suggested, this aspect of the organisational culture tends to be driven by the local culture, which 'places high value on prestige and appearance'.

Factor 2 – Managerialism in modern Arabiya
Conversely, this viewpoint finds Abu Dhabi Government's various reform initiatives around service users to be generally improving the

customer experience (9: +4). The government is viewed as being professional in its service delivery, and keen to ensure that all service users are able to receive a good customer experience (30: +1), including those who might not speak the local language (24: -3). The existing governmental laws are welcomed and appreciated because they seek to ensure the avoidance of corruption and that everyone is subject to the same rules (1: -1; 18: +1).

From this viewpoint, the most important catalyst in achieving the positive reform results is the government's state-of-the-art technology, which offers a modern and streamlined 21st century customer experience to service users (9: +4). As pragmatic managerialists with an eye for technical efficiencies, however, this viewpoint regards the government as not necessarily maximizing value for money or return on investment (29: +4). In the post-sorting comments, the Q sorter DIVMQ1G6O further shed light on this perception by calling attention to the government's strong focus on 'hard' skills, such as mechanical implementation and technical know-how. In order to make the most of the tools and technology, Q sorter DIVMQ1G6O argued, the development of 'soft' skills is equally necessary to equip staff with the 'right' culture and attitude effectively to underpin, and further drive, the fast-paced and high-tech evolution. Another manifestation of this viewpoint's preoccupation with modern

managerial government and neoliberal principles is the conviction that a more diverse provider market would encourage healthy competition among potential suppliers, and consequently provide customers with more choice (37: +3).

For this viewpoint, faith in the benefits of high-tech managerialism amalgamates with solid belief in the superiority of the modern Arabic culture. The idea that expatriate knowledge workers might be central to the success of Abu Dhabi Government's reform is strongly refuted (13: -3). Instead, the viewpoint expresses support for the pivotal role that Arabic culture plays in the success of the government's customer-centric reforms, as both Q sorters SUQVDQGL and CA8DQVL7 highlighted in their post-sorting comments.

The government's insistence on maintaining established traditions and customary ways of doing things is considered in this viewpoint as an important factor in accomplishing the positive reform outcomes (32: +3). The perception is, as the Q sorters SUQVDQGL and CA8DQVL7 explained in more detail, that aspects of the Arabic culture positively contribute to a customer service ethos and to good public management (41: -2). For example, cultural institutions, such as consultations with the Sheikh during Ramadan, offer important informal avenues to complement the formal institutions that the

government adopted as part of its reform package (38: +3). Another effective aspect of the Arabic culture highlighted in this viewpoint is the emphasis placed on centralized decision-making, which gives rise to the government's top-down approach and enables the swift implementation of the reform (45: 0). As the Q sorter SUQVDQGL affirmed in the post-sorting comments, modern Arabic culture hybridizes with the organisation's performance-oriented high-tech culture, and thus generates a governmental culture that is best described as 'a modern Arabic style of managerialism'.

Interestingly, the viewpoint particularly constructs its notion of the Arabic culture as 'modern', thereby alluding to an evolved system of meaning that has left behind selective 'bits of meaning', and incorporated other more convincing, contemporary 'bits' from divergent meaning systems. As became apparent from the post-sorting comments made by the Q sorter CA8DQVL7, the viewpoint celebrates certain aspects of the Arabic culture as 'indispensable' to achieving positive reform outcomes, while dismissing other aspects of the culture as 'outdated' and 'hindering the modernization process'. A case in point is the traditional cultural institution of 'Wasta', which is about belonging to the 'right family or tribe' and using one's connections in getting ahead in life, not unlike 'the old-boy-network'

in the West (Al-Omari 2008).[31] Notably, this viewpoint credits the government with successfully abolishing 'Wasta', and instead institutionalizing 'equal access' to ensure that all government customers can obtain quality services (1: -1).

Making a clear distinction between religion and culture, this viewpoint emphasizes that it is not the religion but the Arabic culture that can be found in government, and which is responsible for the success of the reform process (31: -4, 52: +3). As the Q sorter GOBKH15K emphasized in the post-sorting comments, this is not, however, to suggest that the viewpoint trivializes the value of religious Islamic principles.[32] Indeed, so Q sorter GOBKH15K insisted, they are seen effectively to underpin normative architecture of the local culture and shape staff's work ethic by promoting values such as commitment to excellence, hard work, respect, leading by example, equality and many more.

Nevertheless, despite the viewpoint attributing high importance to Islamic religion, it sees culture as dominating, even when it should not. Here, the Q sorter GOBKH15K offered the example of the unfairly preferential treatment of citizens (over expatriates and other

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[31] Even though 'Wasta' overlaps in meaning to a certain degree with western notions of nepotism or cronyism, it is not exactly the same.
[32] All the participants who loaded on to this factor were practicing Muslims.

visitors), which includes the cultural practice first to serve citizens, no matter whether they are at the back of the queue. The Q sorter GOBKH15K shed light on the viewpoint's strong disapproval of this practice (57: -4) by explaining that it goes directly against Islamic principles of equality. Clearly, without diminishing the value and importance of religion, ultimately this viewpoint compartmentalizes religion as one of the key ingredients of the Arabic culture.

Notably, this viewpoint reserves respect and appreciation for the government workforce. Indeed, government staff are seen as intellectually advanced (34: -1), creative, and innovative (51: -1). Moreover, even though this viewpoint concedes that government departments are yet to comprehend fully the notion of a government customer and the meaning of excellence in customer journeys (55: +2), the belief is that staff is keen to learn the mechanisms of customer-centric public management (42: 0).

Factor 3 – Triumph of the cherished patriarch

The distinct feature of this viewpoint is its focus on the power of good leadership. Here, success of the reforms is attributed to a leadership that is effectively instilling the principles of customer-focused services. The viewpoint holds in high regard the leadership's political will to push through customer-centric reforms (39: +3). Those at the

helm of government are felt to deserve credit for investing a lot of money and resources into public services, and equipping the citizens with the 'right' skills and education (19: +3). The visionary leadership's approach is viewed as performance-oriented while at the same time upholding traditional values and customs (14: -3). The perception of this viewpoint is that, by both managerial and traditional standards, the leaders appoint the right people as senior managers (16: 0), who are not afraid to highlight problematic services or unsuccessful reform initiatives (50: -3). Under this viewpoint it is believed that service users are deeply appreciative of the government's public service subsidies, in particular the various citizen stipends, such as free education and health care (47: -4). Thus, as the Q sorter XVEPM5SR reaffirmed in the post-sorting comments, citizens and expatriates tend to hold their leaders in high esteem, indeed revere them; feeling pride for the government and for the country in which they live.

In further clarifying this viewpoint's affection and admiration for the leadership, the Q sorter AYMH5YO1 alluded to the local patriarchal value system, which believes in 'father figures' as providing supreme authority for the family, clan, tribe or any other social unit. As this viewpoint sees it, so the Q sorter AYMH5YO1 continued to explain, service users are situated within a traditional social hierarchy, in

which some service users are naturally more important than others. On the basis of this viewpoint it is considered commonplace that service providers should treat different customer groups differentially (21: +4). Citizens are constructed as filial beneficiaries, and so are expected to receive a better service than everyone else because they are 'at home' and should therefore be prioritised over guests (35: +3).

The perception of this viewpoint is that the leadership effectively sets the tone. Governmental bodies are felt to understand the value and importance of customer-centric services (55: -3), and only recruit well-trained Emiratis into government jobs (12: -1). Frontline staff are perceived as professional and making the most of the state-of-the-art systems and processes to deliver a good customer experience (20: -4, 7: -2). Furthermore, service users are seen to be in a business-like relationship with service providers, and are likely to appreciate the improved choice, efficiency and convenience of Abu Dhabi's public services (46: -2. 37: -1). People are treated as valued customers (2: -2), and generally experience a level of services that is comparable to the best quality offered by private companies (3: +2). However, under this viewpoint, a key challenge that is seen to remain is for the ongoing reform to tackle the unwieldy bureaucracy, which is made worse by weaknesses in the clarity and direction of information provision and communication (23: -4).

In contrast to viewpoint 2, this viewpoint attributes the successful implementation of customer-centric reform less to the local culture, and more to the Islamic religion, which encourages commitment to excellence, hard work, respect etc. (31: +1, 52: -1). In the same vein, so the Q sorter VLXO0PWS emphasized, any dearth of pleasantries or reserved manner among front-line staff in dealing with service users is rationalized not as a customer-service issue but as being appropriate to the religious principles and the associated expectations of conduct (54: -3, 25: 0).

Factor 4 – The traditional ways of the Bedouins

While this viewpoint concurs with viewpoints 2 and 3 in that the customer-centric reforms are significantly improving public services for users (27: -4), here the perception is that success is anchored neither in modern Arabic culture nor in the Islamic religion, but in the region's particular tribal Bedouin culture. In shedding light on this viewpoint's distinct perception, the Q sorters 1LSYEQ20 and UVSQYBC2 stressed in their post-sorting comments that Arabs are a highly heterogeneous group with different racial and ancestral origins, religious backgrounds and historic identities. To this viewpoint then, the success of the customer-centric reforms is deeply rooted in the cultural institutions and value systems of the Bani Yas Bedouins, who

are renowned for their loyalty, toughness, independence, family values, generosity, friendship, chivalry and hospitality (36: +4).

The Q sorters 1LSYEQ20 and UVSQYBC2 underlined that upholding traditional Bedouin institutions, such as the Sheikh listening to his people's problems, enables him not only to gather customer feedback first hand, but also to continue with his social duties and tribal rites, which are part of a long-standing social contract (58: +3). This viewpoint's cultural lens is particularly apparent in its conviction that the relationship between the government and service users is equal, and has little to do with the generosity of authoritarian leaders (4: -2). Instead, this is a viewpoint that refers directly to Bedouin custom, whereby tribes used to forge a consensus on who might be best suited to be the leader or Sheikh. As the Q sorter VMZSCAHI elucidated, traditionally, Sheikhs were selected based not on their wealth but on their wisdom, which is why the title Sheikh means 'one who bears the marks of old age'. A Sheik's term would last as long as the tribe was satisfied that he fulfilled his responsibilities towards the tribe, and was indeed serving the interests of the community.

In the same vein, this viewpoint rationalizes aspects of the service provider culture by rooting it in the normative values of the local Bedouin culture. The Q sorter VMZSCAHI clarified that it is the

Bedouin moral code of fiercely guarding the family honour, maintaining modesty, and submitting only to one's own leader, which the viewpoint sees as explaining why frontline staff behave in a formal manner (not indulging in pleasantries) when dealing with customer groups who are strangers (25: -4). Similarly, the Bedouin cultural code also regulates how service providers should relate to their customers, and why a local Emirati, who is waiting with 200 Asian service users, should be invited to the front of the queue in order to be served first (57: +1). Shedding further light on this perception in the post-sorting comments, the Q sorter VMZSCAHI cited one of the oldest and most famous Bedouin proverbs that poignantly spells out the cultural law regarding the hierarchy of allegiance: 'I against my brother, my brothers and I against my cousins, then my cousins and I against strangers'.

What further sets this viewpoint apart from all the others is the implicit conviction that the government has managed successfully to marry up the values and traditions of the Bedouin culture with modern knowledge and ways of working. Fusing the traditional way-of-doing things with modern international best-practice, this is a viewpoint under which foreign expertise, which the government brought in, is believed to be complementary to the Bedouin culture in the reform process (13: +3). The result is improved public services that

maximize the value of the money and resources, which the government invested (29: -3, 43: -3).

However, from this vantage point, the reform is also seen as still having some way to go, in particular with regards to cascading down a customer focus to frontline staff, as the Q sorter 1LSYEQ20 remarked. Under this viewpoint there is recognition that non-Arabic speakers will often fail to experience good customer service from frontline personnel (24: -4). Going even further, it is a viewpoint in which the belief is that, at times, good customer service depends on whether the frontline staff happen to be in a good mood on the day in question, or whether or not the customer happens to be interrupting the staff member's coffee break, or BBM[33] chat (20: +2).

Factor 5 – The reign of formulas over culture

In contrast with all the other viewpoints, this one is rather formulaic, markedly unconcerned about cultural considerations, and views the local meaning systems neither as a hindrance nor as a catalyst in driving the customer-centric reform process (36: -3). As the Q sorter OEJ6XT1L pragmatically explained in the post-sorting comments, the fact that the government customer experience may sometimes vary depending on 'who you are' and 'whom you know', is rationalised not

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[33] BBM is widely used to refer to Blackberry Messaging.

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as the cultural manifestation of 'Wasta', but as a normal reality of service provision in public administrations anywhere in the world (1: +3). Further testament to this viewpoint's indifference to cultural practices is the belief that local cultural institutions, such as Majlis, do not play a critical role in offering complementary ways of achieving the desired reform outcomes (38: -1).

Espousing a pragmatic focus, so the Q sorter OEJ6XT1L highlighted, this viewpoint reasons that government services work well because they are mandated, which means legislation exists to guarantee public service provision (5: +3). The information, direction and clarity of public services is regarded as improving significantly, and facilitating a better customer experience for service users (23: -3). Under this viewpoint, the government's great strides in achieving positive reform outcomes are understood to be down to a combination of effective leadership and significant financial resources (8: -4, 15: +4).

The leadership is viewed as motivated not by pragmatic concerns or political expedience, but by genuine keenness to improve public services for all users (44: -3). As the Q sorters NA4QDUPJ and 4OHEFQYB emphasized, this viewpoint's practical rationale is that Abu Dhabi's leaders have travelled abroad extensively for their studies, in doing so, encountering a variety of global best practices.

As a result, they are felt to be well-placed to cultivate and implement their grand vision for public services at home, just like any other human being, whose horizons have been expanded in such a manner (40: +2). Under this viewpoint, the results are clearly visible on the ground (26: -4). Frontline staff are seen as beginning to deliver better services (25: -4), and are generally treating all service users equally as valued customers (21: -1). The viewpoint also discerns a growing understanding of the importance for service providers to harness customer feedback and complaints are seen as valuable in informing service improvements (56: -1).

In addition, the viewpoint anchors the successful reform process in the government's ample financial resources that support investment in cutting-edge technology, the incentivization of employees, and the hiring of well-qualified manpower (8: -4). However, given the resources available, the viewpoint also concedes that the government ought to be able to provide a much better customer experience (29: +3). It is this viewpoint's conviction that while much money is spent on tools and up-skilling, service providers are not yet able to make the most of it (10: +3). In the same vein, service users are felt not to be maximizing fully the value of public services, many of which are available to them free of charge (47: +1).

5.9   Comparative analysis of viewpoints

Although Abu Dhabi's public administrators work side-by-side in the same organisational context, their perceptions differ significantly as to Abu Dhabi Government's efforts to create government services that are built around the needs of government customers/service users (see Table 5.9.1 below). While viewpoint one perceives the customer-centric reforms as a total failure, viewpoints two, three, four and five consider them generally a success in improving the service user experience. Viewpoint one is also the only one to believe that the reforms have done nothing to give service users any rights.   In contrast, all the other viewpoints agree that service users enjoy more rights following the implementation of the customer-centric reforms, with viewpoints two, four and five even emphasising the increased equality and equity that now characterises public service provision.

While under viewpoint one the local culture and traditions are seen as the principal cause for much of the reforms' failure, conversely viewpoint two, three and four stress the pivotal role of the traditional culture in driving the success of the reforms. That being said, these three viewpoints disagree with regard to which aspects of the traditional culture has proven to be an effective catalyst for reform: viewpoint two points to the wider Arabic culture, while viewpoints three and four emphasise the particular cultural institutions and value

systems of the Bani Yas Bedouins. In addition, viewpoints two, three and five perceive the government's culture of performance management to be a critical factor in the success of the reforms. Moreover, there is notable consensus among viewpoint two, three, four and five that the leadership and its top-down implementation of the reforms have been immensely effective in realising the desired change so promptly and widely. The only perception that all five viewpoints equally share relates to the government's commendable investment into state-of-the-art technology and skills development programmes, although they differ on the impact these investments have achieved so far.

Table 5.9.1: Shared viewpoints in comparison

Viewpoint 1	Viewpoint 2	Viewpoint 3	Viewpoint 4	Viewpoint 5
Customer-centric reforms have been wholly unsuccessful and continue to fail service users.	Customer-centric reforms are successful and are improving the experience of service users.	Customer-centric reforms are successfully providing a service level that is comparable to the best quality offered by private companies.	Customer-centric reforms are significantly improving public services for users.	Customer-centric reforms are achieving many positive outcomes, which are clearly visible on the ground.
Service users have no rights	Service users have equal	Service users are seen to be	Service users are in an	All service users are

and depend on the generosity of the government.	rights and enjoy fair and equitable service provision.	in a business-like relationship with service providers.	equal relationship with the government, which according to Bedouin customs must serve the interests of the indigenous community.	equally treated as valued customers, although it is felt that they are not fully maximizing the value of public services.
The leadership, its workforce and the local culture and traditions are the main reasons for the failed reforms.	The combination of modern Arabic managerialism with the government's top-down, performance-oriented high-tech culture is the catalyst for the successful reforms.	The success of the reforms is attributed to the visionary leadership, which is performance-oriented while at the same time upholding traditional values and customs.	The success of the reforms is anchored in the cultural institutions and value systems of the Bani Yas Bedouins.	The positive reform outcomes are understood to be down to a combination of effective leadership and significant financial resources.

5.10   Concluding reflections

This chapter has applied the first step of the proposed operational model to the real-life case of Abu Dhabi's public administrators and their shared subjectivities on the customer-centric reform. With the help of Q Methodology, the model has not only been able to ascertain the co-existence of five inter-subjective viewpoints among employees,

but also been able to illustrate and describe in detail their specific contents.

This was achieved by asking 26 public administrators to share their personal, subjective views, and rank order 58 statements contained in a carefully sampled Q set, reflecting the volume of the debate on the customer-centric reform. The resulting 26 Q sorts were statistically analysed by correlation and factor analysis to yield at least five distinct, inter-subjective viewpoints. Subsequent qualitative factor interpretation have established the particular ideal type composition of each of the five viewpoints, the content of which has been summarized in five labels: (1) The benefactor's epic fail, (2) Managerialism in modern Arabiya, (3) Triumph of the cherished patriarch, (4) The traditional ways of the Bedouins, and (5) The reign of formulas over culture. Within the context of this research project, Rhoads and Sun's (1994) advocacy of Q Methodology as a useful technique for studies of authoritarianism has proven to be as pertinent today as it was twenty years ago.

By capturing five shared viewpoints that existed momentarily, the study has been able to establish shared meaning, and render visible and decipher their structures. Thus the chapter has addressed the first part of research question 1b, which asked whether the study's

proposed operational model would be effective in determining *and* evaluating shared subjectivities in a real-life scenario: With regard to *determining* empirically the socially shared subjectivities, this chapter's findings confirm that the model is indeed effective. The analysis has successfully pinned down the inter-subjectivities that unfolded in making meaning of change (see Maitlis and Christianson 2014).

Notwithstanding the model's prowess as a diagnostic tool, it remains to be seen whether it is also able to *evaluate* inter-subjectivity - as the latter part of research question 1b enquires. The evaluation of shared subjectivities, as Chapter 2 established in detail, requires further investigation of the cognitive processes by which individuals evoke shared meaning (Yelich Biniecki 2015, Flannery and Hayes 2001). The central argument in this thesis is that people's similar meaning structures are the product of well-learned, analogous schemata (Strauss and Quinn 1997), and this is what the model seeks to examine in its second stage. In doing so, the aim is to be able to not just diagnose, but also to evaluate and appraise shared subjectivities, and the opportunities they present for change.

CHAPTER 6: DRILLING DOWN TO SCHEMATA

"Meanings, as we have been saying […] are in people – not in things or in some nebulous space between them. It is time to heed those who argue that culture is both public and private, both in the world and in people's minds."

(Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, 'A cognitive theory of cultural meaning', 1997: 253, 256)

6.1   Introduction to Chapter 6

Chapter 1 established that positive reform outcomes are contingent on taking into account how public administrators subjectively make meaning in shared and overlapping ways. Such an endeavour, as Chapter 2 asserted, requires recognition of the reality that meaning unfolds between people *as well as* inside the minds of individuals. Hence, in response to research question 1a, which concerned the best approach to such a nebulous concept as 'meaning-making', Chapter 2 argued that the shared subjective ought to be conceptualized as both a social and cognitive phenomenon. In other words, meaning-making is not only a social process, whereby people construct meaning within a social and cultural context, but also a cognitive process, by which people apply internally-held knowledge structures, or schemata to

make meaning. Based on this dual notion, Chapter 2 developed a two-step operational model to map shared meaning systems among groups of public administrators, and to assess possibilities for internalizing within them 'a new way of going about things'.

Chapter 5 summarised the application of the first step of the model to the case of Abu Dhabi's public administrators and their meaning-making of the customer-centric reform. The findings here indicated that groups of public administrators made sense of the reform in considerably different ways - and five distinct viewpoints were highlighted. Although fleeting in nature, these five viewpoints proved a sufficient canvas to enable the observation and extraction of the idealized shared meaning structures contained within each perspective. Hence, by having approached the shared subjective as a social phenomenon that happens outside of people, the study was able to answer research question 1b positively insofar as it had asked whether the model is effective in mapping meaning that is socially shared.

However, the observation of shared meaning structures alone had little utility in responding to research question 1b with regard to the model's ability to assess the possibilities for internalizing change in the administrative workforce. In order to be able to answer research

question 1b in that respect, the study needed to apply the second step of the model. Its purpose was to extrapolate the common schemata that had become active in the minds of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and had subsequently converged and coalesced to generate each of the five inter-subjective viewpoints on the customer-centric reform. Accordingly, this chapter describes the application of the second part of the model, designed to shed light on the cognitive-psychological facets of the subjective meaning-making that happened inside Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and to evaluate their impact on facilitating or resisting change.

In the second part to the fieldwork, therefore, each inter-subjective viewpoint was used as the basis for reflexive discussions with a strategically selected Cultural Reference Group. As already explained in Chapter 3, it had been decided to employ the method of a Reference Group involving a group of experts with exclusive knowledge and 'insider' experience of local meaning-making. It is to these experts to whom the study referred in order to identify the cognitive origins of the five viewpoints.

6.2   Organizing the Cultural Reference Group

The purpose of the Cultural Reference Group was to bring together an eclectic mix of knowledge about local meaning systems *and*

experience in modifying behaviour through practice and learning within the particular context of Abu Dhabi Government. At the very least, the group's members needed to be intimately familiar with existing local knowledge structures, having learned them first-hand, in order to recognize them and winnow their cognitive, emotional and motivational conditions.

Accordingly, the researcher approached some of the public administrators who it was thought had loaded on to one or other of the shared viewpoints. In addition, contact was made with a number of other stakeholders who through the nature of their professions were likely to possess relevant 'insider' knowledge. Strategically making use of the researcher's local networks, the other stakeholders were carefully selected by employing key informant sampling. Classed as a variation of chain-referral sampling, key informant sampling selects 'particularly knowledgeable respondents', often professionals, who are qualified to provide information about other people's behaviours and who could be relied upon to do so with relative candour (Heckathorn 1997: 175).

Similar to the recruitment procedure of participants for the first phase of the fieldwork, the researcher followed the University's ethical

guidelines[34] and Code of Practice for Research[35] when screening a total of sixteen potential candidates to form part of the Cultural Reference Group, and in this way to advise the research project on cognition in Abu Dhabi's public administrators. These sixteen potential candidates were each presented with an information sheet that introduced the study, explained the concept of schemata, requested their participation as cultural advisers to an academic research project, detailed the process of participation, and assured anonymity (see Appendix E).

Eventually, ten out of the sixteen candidates who had been approached declined, while six agreed to participate in the Cultural Reference Group. The six members together provided a suitably diverse range of relevant expertise and perspective. They included three public administrators, who had loaded on to viewpoints 1, 2 and 4 during the Q Methodological enquiry.[36] The remaining three members were made up of a professor in Emirati culture who also worked as an adviser to the UAE Government, an educational expert who designed and delivered learning and development programmes for Abu Dhabi's public administrators, and a local occupational psychologist with expertise in both cognitive behaviourism as well as

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[34] *See* https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/documents/public/AERguidance.pdf
[35] *See* http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf
[36] Viewpoint 1 was termed 'The benefactor's epic fail', Viewpoint 2 was called 'Managerialism in modern Arabiya', and Viewpoint 4 was titled 'The traditional ways of the Bedouins'.

psychodynamics to help extrapolate conscious and semi-conscious forces underlying the shared subjective. Two of the members of the Cultural Reference Group were of Emirati nationality; one hailed from the Southeast Asian continent; one held a passport from a non-Gulf Arab country; one originated from the southern African continent; and one came from a western country. Each group member had lived and worked in Abu Dhabi for at least six years and had been professionally involved with Abu Dhabi Government in one way or another. Counting two women and four men, the group members were all in their thirties and forties, and held relatively senior positions in their respective professions.

6.3   Facilitating the Cultural Reference Group

Each member of the Cultural Reference Group individually was presented with the five viewpoints. They were asked to take one week to scrutinize and unpack each viewpoint, and think about some of the learned beliefs, or schemata that they might recognize. Subsequently, the researcher individually met each member for reflexive discussions. While these one-to-one sessions generated some valuable information, they turned out to be less productive in terms of the study's primary objective. Instead, they proved of critical importance in establishing good personal rapport and building trust and mutual respect, as well as garnering support and buy-in for the research project. The sessions

also fulfilled each member's interest to discuss the study from their respective professional angles and to identify links that were especially meaningful to them. Later on, following completion of the fieldwork, several of them confided to the researcher that their one-to-one sessions had played a decisive role in convincing them wholeheartedly to commit to their role as advisers, and to giving the Cultural Reference Group their full attention.

Having completed six one-to-one sessions, the members of the group were then invited to attend a meeting. The purpose of bringing all six together was to present back to them the initial thinking that had emerged from the one-to-one sessions, and to stimulate further debate and analysis. The ensuing collective discussion was highly productive and generated a wealth of information.

After endorsing the meaning structures contained within the viewpoints as being very 'typical', the group members began their deliberations by commenting on some of the schemata that had emerged from the one-to-one sessions, and sharing anecdotes from their own experiences of working with Abu Dhabi's public administrators. After such introductory exchanges, group members soon turned to challenging one another by pointing out each other's

underlying beliefs and schemata that had become apparent in the discussion so far.

This highlighted the fact that, although everyone holds a schema on, for example, service users, it would be likely to differ not only in terms of content, but also with regard to emotional association, social and historical origin, and the level of 'ingrainedness'. Such awareness fruitfully directed the debate to criteria by which to analyse the structure and processes of individual schemata within the context of public administrative reform. In the course of these deliberations, members highlighted the fact that the underlying schemata of each viewpoint fulfilled at least two different functions, one relating to the *context* of the customer-centric reform, and the other to reform-specific *content*. In addition, members identified as an imperative the need to consider the external non-cognitive conditions that might be expected to impact on schemata, and influence their salience.

To progress this analysis further in the session, the group decided to divide down into three pairs, with one pair focussing on content schemata, another on context schemata, and the third on situational, non-cognitive forces. The teams developed sub-criteria for analysing content schemata and context schemata respectively, and came up with three different categories of non-cognitive external forces.

The sub-criteria were termed *analytical units*. The purpose of these analytical units was to lay open the workings of each schema, as well as allow in-depth comparison across the five viewpoints. With the help of these analytical units, the group members were able to put each schemata under the magnifying glass and unravel the schematic properties and processes that were thought to be of relevance to making meaning of the customer-centric reform. In the last forty minutes before the meeting concluded, each team fed back their propositions to the rest of the group, answered questions that arose, and made linkages between the teams' three discrete outputs.

Keen to influence the discussions as little as possible, the researcher meanwhile had focussed on capturing the abundance of information, insights and propositions that the group was generating, by taking notes and seeking clarification where necessary.[37] Following the conclusion of the meeting, the enormously rich output was summarized and refined by the researcher. A major part of this second-order summary and refinement involved matching, wherever possible, each analytical unit that the Cultural Reference Group had empirically developed with the relevant theoretical concept(s) from the existing literature. The purpose of this was to build on extant

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[37] The Cultural Reference Group had asked for their discussion not to be audio-recorded.

knowledge, instead of 're-inventing the wheel'. By matching each analytical unit with its theoretical counterpart in the literature, it became apparent that the unique contribution of the group had been to extrapolate how known theoretical concepts empirically manifest, how they function and interrelate when operative, and to what effect. The process of theoretically grounding the analytical units particularly drew on Strauss and Quinn's (1997) cognitive theory of cultural meaning, as well as neo-institutional theory, sense-making and the broader organisational studies literature (e.g. Scott 2008, Weick 1995, Friedland and Alford 1991), and social psychological theory (e.g. Tiedens and Leach 2004).

All the members of the group were then sent copies of the refined output for verification and invited to make further comments. Once the group was satisfied that the output authentically summarized and reflected their work, it was circulated to other academics and practitioners for peer review to ensure quality and credibility. These other academics included scholars from the University of Birmingham as well as from other universities in the UK, the Netherlands, Estonia, Austria, Georgia and Copenhagen, who had expressed an interest in providing feedback after hearing the researcher present at various conferences. The other practitioners, who were consulted, included former work colleagues of the researcher, who were employed in

public administrative organisations in London, Abu Dhabi, Paris and Philadelphia.

The final cluster of findings is presented in the following section. Given the limited time available for the Cultural Reference Group, the focus in generating findings was less on identifying an exhaustive list of learned beliefs for each viewpoint, and more on gaining explanatory insight into the logic of an existing schema, its durability and motivational force, in a heuristic and expository fashion.

6.4   The cluster of findings

6.4.1   Schemata on the same concept are constructed very differently

When unpacking each subjective viewpoint, the Cultural Reference Group had little difficulty in identifying a handful of core schemata that had been prominently active. For example, the group members found that each shared viewpoint contained an obvious schema about Abu Dhabi Government's service users, service provision, frontline staff, the leadership, the governance system, Abu Dhabi society, and the employees' capacity to act (agency), to name just a few. The group juxtaposed some such schemata across the five viewpoints, which effectively brought to light the enormous subjective differences in how groups of public administrators constructed one and the same concept.

As is shown in Table 6.4.1 below, Viewpoint 1, for example, revealed a schema on service users, which saw them as 'powerless subjects of an absolute monarch'. In stark contrast, Viewpoint 3's schema on service users constructed them as 'beloved filial beneficiaries of a father-like ruler'. Another example was the schema on the governance system. Viewpoint 2's schema on the governance system perceived it as 'a professional, centralized bureaucracy that is bound by rules'. In stark comparison, Viewpoint 4 believed 'the governance system to be consensual and akin to the Bedouin tribal system with top-down and bottom-up lines of accountability'. In order to give a flavour of the considerable disparity with which Abu Dhabi's public administrators constructed their social reality, despite living and working in the same place, the table below exemplifies the schemata on service users and the governance system for all five viewpoints.

Table 6.4.1: Subjective differences in the construction of schemata on the same concepts

Schema on:	Viewpoint 1	Viewpoint 2	Viewpoint 3	Viewpoint 4	Viewpoint 5
	The benefactor's epic fail	Managerialism in modern Arabiya	Triumph of the cherished patriarch	The traditional ways of the Bedouin	The reign of formulas over culture
Service users	Powerless subjects of an absolute monarch	21st century clients of modern Arabiya	Beloved filial beneficiaries of a paternal ruler	Historical patrons of the sage	Atomistic competitors for resources
Governance system	Benevolent, command-and-control dictatorship	Professional, centralized, rule-bound bureaucracy	Visionary patriarchy with in-group obligations	Consensual, bedoucratic tribal system with two-way lines of accountability	Fit-for-purpose governance system with effective mechanisms for implementation

6.4.2 The two different functions of schemata: context & content

In the course of the Cultural Reference Group's discussion of some of the schemata that had been identified, an interesting discovery was made. Irrespective of how the schemata were constructed across viewpoints, they fulfilled two broadly different functions in order to generate a holistic viewpoint: Some schemata served the purpose of setting out the contextual institutional frame within which meaning-making must be negotiated, while other schemata directly informed meaning-making in relation to the topic in question.

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On that basis, the group concluded that two types of schemata were salient: context schemata and content schemata. The *content schemata* were felt to mediate the material for making meaning of the customer-centric reform. For instance, the schemata about service users, frontline staff or service provision directly informed the roles, scripts, stereotypes and emotions for making meaning of the customer-centric change initiative. In contrast, the *context schemata* were seen as relating to the world of Abu Dhabi's public administration. For example, the schemata about the governance system, leadership, society, or the employees' capacity to act related to the institutional context within which public administrators undertake their daily work, and make meaning of the specific customer-centric reform, but also of issues beyond the particular change initiative.

It is suggested that this principle, by which salient schemata dynamically take on either a contextual role or a content-filling role in generating a holistic viewpoint, is contingent on the topic in question. In this case, the topic of customer-centric reform was the organizing principle, which resulted in, for example, the schemata on service users fulfilling a content-related function, while the schemata on the governance system framed the context.

However, had the focus of the topic been slightly different, for example, had the study asked the employees what they thought about the leadership's role in reforming public services, the same schemata may well have organized themselves in different ways, perhaps with some of them even switching functions. In such a scenario, for example, people's schemata on the leadership and the governance system may have self-organized to contribute to the content. Accordingly, the schemata on the leadership and governance system would have helped to make meaning of the leadership's approach to the reform by shedding light on the perceived processes of governing, interaction and decision-making. Conversely, the schemata on service users or frontline staff may have contributed to setting out the context by establishing the perceived landscape of stakeholders against which the government's approach to reform was being negotiated.

This principle has much in common with Figure-Ground-Organisation, a type of perceptual grouping in *Gestalt* psychology (Peterson 1994). According to Gestalt psychology, the human mind (a perceptual system) acquires meaningful perceptions in a chaotic world by forming a whole percept, or Gestalt, which has a reality of its own that is independent of its constitutive parts (Koffka 1935). On that basis, Gestalt psychologists developed a set of principles to

explain perceptual organisation, and how the mind groups smaller objects to form larger ones (Peterson 1994, Koffka 1935).

One of these principles is Figure-Ground-Organisation. Here, the brain organizes incoming visual stimuli as a meaningful whole by switching the figure (or content) of the image with the background (or context) of the image. Arguably, the most famous example of Figure-Ground-Organisation is Rubin's (1915) 'faces-vase' image: Depending on the eye's focus (which would be analogous to the specific focus of a topic), we can discern a white vase on black background, or two black silhouette faces against a white background.

Figure 6.4.2: Figure-Ground-Organisation by Edgar Rubin (1915)
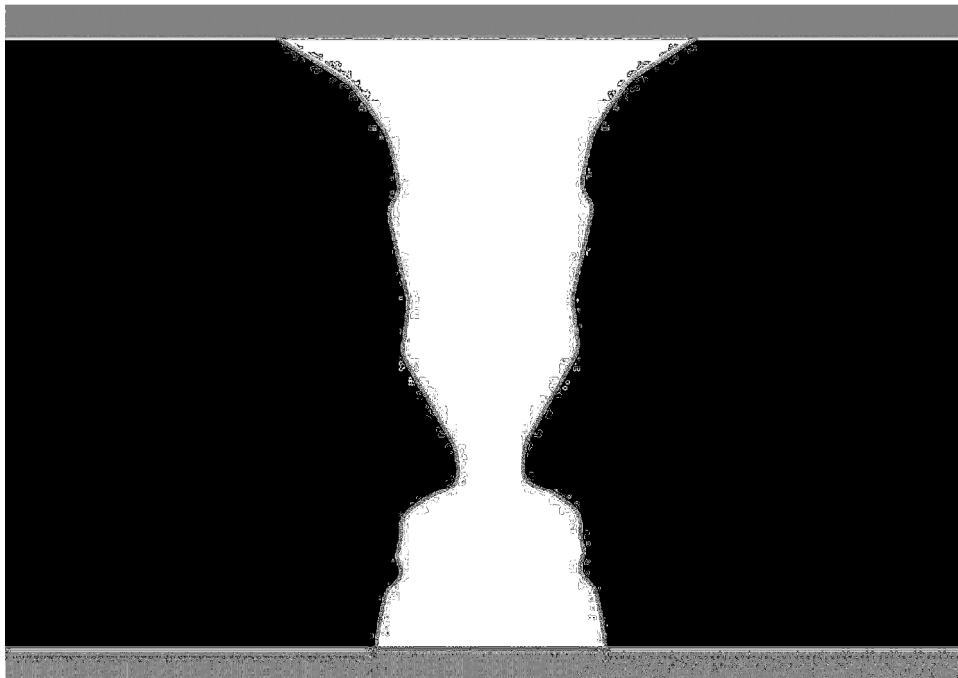
6.4.3   *Content schemata*

As already explained, content schemata were found to be those core beliefs that become active in making sense of the customer-centric reform per se. It is suggested that they constitute the learned beliefs that ought to be considered first and foremost in evaluating opportunities for change, and designing effective approaches to reform. The group concluded that each content schema needs to be looked at in terms of both its properties and processes. Hence, the members proposed the following analytical units as productive criteria for examining and assessing the inner mechanics of a principally active content schema:

Table 6.4.3: Analytical units for content schemata

Analytical Units for Content Schemata		View point 1	View point 2	View point 3	View point 4	View point 5
Schema on: [e.g. service users, frontline staff, services]						
Properties	Time frame					
	Actors + scripts					
	Institutional logics					
Process affecting personal durability	Emotional arousal					
Processes affecting motivational force	Social desirability					
	Conflicting schemata					
Process affecting historical durability	Re-enactment					

Time frame: a property of content schemata

This analytical unit is based on recognition that the frequently overlooked concept of time plays a critical role in the constitution of a schema. Given that time has no objective reality that is separate from human actors (Bergadaà 2007), it is 'a constitutive part of meaning and of the molecular dimension of the social world' (Muzzetto 2006: 5). The Cultural Reference Group reaffirmed this proposition by concluding that an essential characteristic of the schemata held by Abu Dhabi's public administrators was their time frame.

As a result of being constructed differently, each subjective schema spans a distinct time frame. The group members found that Viewpoint 2's construction of service users as being in a business-like customer-client relationship with the government implied a temporal framework that was linear and relational. In contrast, for instance, Viewpoint 4's perception of service users as historical patrons pointed to a cyclical frame of time that spanned four or five generations. Moreover, examining schemata for their temporal properties also brought to light their finer variations. For instance, Viewpoint 1's schema of service users as subjects implied a temporal frame that was transactional and incidental. Similarly, Viewpoint 5's schema of service users as competitors for resources hinted at a time frame that was also transactional, yet unlike Viewpoint 1, it was not incidental but perpetual in nature.

Hence it is suggested that a schema's time frame is a critical property to be aware of in public administrators because it has implications for adjusting or expanding learned beliefs. Studies conducted by organisational theorists support this claim by providing evidence that temporal structures significantly impact on socially shared meaning-making (e.g. Bergadaà 2007, Muzzetto 2006), and that a better understanding of time frames may facilitate learning, knowledge

sharing and future schematic constructions in organisations (e.g. Fahy et al. 2013, Schultz and Hernes 2012).

Actors + scripts: a property of content schemata

This analytical unit looked at the ways in which a particular schema represents the actors that are central to it and typifies their respective conduct. According to the Cultural Reference Group, this unit is the most critical to an understanding of the idiosyncrasies of a schema's properties. It seeks to get at the mental representations of others, with whom those who hold a particular schema routinely interact as part of the social system. Thus it spells out a schema's construction of people habituated as typical actors, and their actions habituated as typified scripts. The Cultural Reference Group established that Viewpoint 2's schema of service users, for example, represents them as consumers of goods and services who act in an informed manner, demanding high quality provision. In contrast, Viewpoint 3's schema typifies service users as filial protégés with different status and obligations, who generally behave obediently and respectfully.

The group members' conclusion that the typifications of actors and their scripts are imperative to understanding the properties of a schema is also compatible with other findings in the published literature. The concept of actor and script is theoretically well

grounded both in sociology and psychology (see Barley and Tolbert 1997, DiMaggio and Powell 1991, Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991, Vygotsky 1978, Goffman 1974, James 1950), and has been firmly established as a central tenet in neo-institutional theory (e.g. Hardy and Maguire 2008, Zilber 2007, Greenwood and Suddaby 2006), sensemaking studies (e.g. Czarniawska 2008, Weber and Glynn 2006), organisational research (e.g. Zadoroznyj 2009, Beyer and Hanna 2002) and social psychological studies (e.g. Han 2011, Carr and Steele 2009).

Discerning the typified actors and their scripts provided fresh insight into how collective identities are constructed, how they relate to each other, and what behaviour might be expected in the 'theatre' of Abu Dhabi's public administration. Importantly, it also enabled insight into how socialization processes are driven in the organisation (Zadoroznyj 2009, Shinyashiki et al. 2006, Beyer and Hanna 2002), thus providing critical intelligence in appraising and designing effective change initiatives.

Institutional logics: a property of content schemata

The group concluded that a schema exists not in a vacuum but forms a subset of wider associative networks of interpenetrating cognitive schemata, which ought to be considered as part of a schema's

properties. These wider cognitive networks represent shared meaning systems that 'may operate as sub-cultures' in an organisational setting, thereby making them akin to the concept of institutional logics (Hinings 2012: 99).

Institutional logics provide taken-for-granted rules of appropriateness, inform norms of interaction, and structure situations and relationships between organisational actors (Skelcher and Rathgeb 2013, Thornton et al. 2012, Hinings 2012). Given that human actors fulfil a variety of roles, they tend to draw in piecemeal fashion on multiple constellations of logics, some of which may be conflicting while others are complimentary (Glaser et al 2013, Skelcher and Rathgeb 2013, Thornton et al. 2012). Viewpoint 3's schema on service users as filial beneficiaries, for example, was seen to be embedded in a wider family logic as well as in a community logic. According to Thornton et al. (2012: 73), the broader family logic sees the family as a prototype for all social organisations, thus increasing the salience of beliefs such as 'unconditional loyalty' and 'patriarchal domination'. The community logic, so Thornton et al. (2012: 73) posit, gives prominence to understandings around 'common boundaries', 'in-groups' and a 'commitment to community values'.

In contrast, Viewpoint 5's schema on service users as atomistic competitors for resources was seen as being drawn from both a market logic and a corporate logic. While Thornton et al (2012: 73) define market logic as the wider network that renders salient notions around 'transaction', 'efficiency' and 'self-interest', a corporate logic links together the ideas of 'corporate hierarchies' and 'managerial capitalism' among others.

Despite human beings lacking the cognitive ability to invoke and apply an entire institutional logic to a single situation (see Thornton et al. 2012: 89), the Cultural Reference Group considered it to be an important aspect of a schema's properties. Group members maintained that an insight into a schema's wider associative networks is pertinent to reform efforts because certain institutional logics become more cognitively salient in specific situations and thus influence alternative schematization and the building of new cognitive templates. Organisational studies have supported this finding (e.g. Werner and Cornelissen 2014), and underlined that institutional logics reflect the setting where organisational culture evolves in an ongoing process (e.g. Thornton et al. 2012, Friedland and Alford 1991).

Emotional arousal: a process affecting the personal durability of content schemata

This analytical unit examines if converging emotions were aroused in the particular construction of a schema. The Cultural Reference Group suggested that these emotions provide clues as to the durability and persistence of learned beliefs. Scholars, who explore the ways in which emotions regulate social life and vice versa (e.g. Van Kleef 2009, Tiedens and Leach 2004, Sartre 1948), agree that, as a result of people sharing similar values and norms, emotions are not only generated at the individual level but also at group-level, indicating a shared understanding of the world. The group was able to reconstruct some of the socially shared emotions, which seemed to have arisen with a specific schema. By considering the nature and strength of the emotional arousal, the group members speculated about the ease with which the learned beliefs might be adjusted.

Viewpoint 1's schema on service users as the dictator's subjects, for instance, was seen as tinged in strong feelings of resentment and powerlessness, thus rendering it relatively durable. On the positive end of the emotional spectrum, Viewpoint 4's schema on service users as patrons of the Sheikh came wrapped in sentiments of pride and love, which are also strong emotions and therefore likely to make the schema relatively persistent. In contrast, Viewpoint 5's schema on

service users as co-rivals for resources was seen to be hued in pragmatism, and therefore rated as less emotionally charged and easier to adjust.

Studies conducted by neuroscientists, social psychologists and cognitive anthropologists (e.g. Van Kleef 2009, Hatfield and Rapson 2004, Anderson and Keltner 2004, Tiedens and Leach 2004, Strauss and Quinn 1997, LeDoux 1996) confirm that when people experience strong emotional arousal during situations in which a particular schema is active, the neuro-chemical environment in the human brain changes and existing neural connections are further strengthened. This renders the existing schema to become more pronounced and durable, and therefore more likely to be activated in the future, sacrificing alternative understandings (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 92-93). Hence, this analytical unit treats socially shared emotions as data with practical purchase for a governmental reform strategy, that actively plans for the level of cognitive resistance, or elasticity, to be encountered when introducing change to public administrators.

Social desirability: a process affecting the motivational force of content schemata

This analytical unit drills down to the psychodynamic roots of schemata by looking at how they are underpinned by deeply

embedded beliefs about what is socially desirable and undesirable. In line with Strauss and Quinn (1997), the group members proposed that emotionally ingrained notions of social desirability attach a motivational force to a schema, which drives public administrators to enact certain thoughts and behaviours while suppressing others.

Like all human beings, public administrators have undergone a socialization process during their early years, in which they were implicitly and explicitly taught important norms, values and behaviours by being rewarded with social approval (e.g. praise) or punished with social disapproval (e.g. shame). Cognitive scientists (e.g. Pessoa 2009, Vuilleumier 2005, LeVine and Norman 1994) explain that when social evaluations are meted out in combination with emotions, they become so deeply ingrained that they inform the future thinking and behaviour of human beings and ensure their conformity - even if, later on, people find themselves in alternative cultural contexts where new or different ways of thinking and acting may be expected from them.

For example, the group reasoned that early socializers must have etched into the minds of the public administrators under Viewpoint 1 that egalitarianism, meritocracy and individualism are socially highly desirable, perhaps even the only 'legitimate' ways of life. It was

concluded that the employees' significant emotional and social conditioning with regard to these concepts is at the root of their negative schema on service users as powerless subjects.

The Cultural Reference Group demonstrated that such a pessimistic conceptualization of service users was to a certain extent irrational and deprived of reason. The group members explained that the public administrators under Viewpoint 1 were fully aware that Abu Dhabi's society was collectivist, and not individualist, thus stressing the importance of group goals over individual ones. Moreover, the group members argued, anyone who believes in egalitarianism ought to accept that there are different ways of life, which are all equally legitimate if chosen by the people. Paradoxically, the public administrators under Viewpoint 1 were seen to be committed to egalitarianism on the one hand, while on the other hand believing that only a democratic system is legitimate and able to produce service users. By thinking about social desirability and the psychodynamic roots of Viewpoint 1's particular schematic construction, the group members were able to explain the reason for the obvious contradiction, and provided an explanatory background to the negative emotional arousal of resentment that accompanied the schema.

On a more practical note, this analytical unit offers opportunities for identifying and mobilizing deeply embedded social evaluations in order to motivate public administrators to embrace new thinking and enact desired behaviours. According to the group, the possibilities for that are particularly evident when considering the public administrators under Viewpoints 2, 3 and 4. Their schemata on service users revealed a socialization process that had conditioned them to see collectivism and in-group loyalty, among other key concepts, as socially highly desirable. Having internalized the social desirability of prioritizing 'the common good' over individual concerns, an effective approach to reform could mobilize such an existing understanding to motivate the public administrators, for example, to adapt a customer-centric mentality in their work, or enact collaborative and joined-up working practices in delivering to service users.

Supporting the conclusions of the Cultural Reference Group with scholarly evidence, Strauss and Quinn (see 1997: 94, 105) demonstrate that those social evaluations, which early socializers have imparted together with strong feelings, such as pride and satisfaction or shame and guilt, account for much of people's conformity to thinking and acting in socially desirable ways. As Strauss and Quinn (1997) further explain, the powerful impact of emotionally laden

social evaluations is linked to the idea of being a 'good' or 'bad' person. Typically, we learn what makes one a 'good' or 'bad' person as a result of early socializers approving and disapproving certain behaviours that we and others display. Striving to be 'good' and avoiding being 'bad' guides social life everywhere, irrespective of the particular cultural shape that these understandings take (or whether they are cast in terms of what is moral, normal or natural) (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 94). More recent research found that these internalized, 'moralizing' notions of what is socially desirable can be effectively used to facilitate the learning of new social norms and behaviours (Tiedens and Leach 2004: 216).

This analytical unit is significant because even though some schemata prove to be durably learned, it does not automatically mean that people are motivated to enact what they have learned to do (Strauss and Quinn 1997). As D'Andrade and Strauss (1992) argue in their seminal work on cultural models, it explains much of the behavioural variability that people display, even if they share similar schemas. Hence, by gaining an understanding of people's emotionally ingrained beliefs of social desirability, this analytical unit allows gauging a schema's motivational force in enacting, or suppressing, certain thinking and behaviours.

Conflicting schemata: a process affecting the motivational force of content schemata

This analytical unit takes account of the presence of conflicting beliefs, which also may have an impact on the motivational force of content schemata. It is proposed that identifying principal conflicting schemata can help to understand the rigidity, or variability, of enacted behaviour, and inform innovative approaches to reform initiatives.

The conflicting schema in relation to Viewpoint 1's negative construction of service users as no more than powerless subjects of a dictator had already become obvious when the group reflected on social desirability. As previously mentioned, the group pointed out that paradoxically this viewpoint's belief in egalitarianism failed to extend to the equality of different worldviews, government systems and societies. Similarly, Viewpoint 4's exclusionist schema on service users as only rightfully encompassing members of the local tribes clashed with two prominent local belief systems. One locally shared idea system highlights the importance of hospitality (diyafa), which requires tribal members to provide even enemies with shelter and food, irrespective of their own economic situation. The second local belief system, which the group flagged as conflicting, stemmed from the Islamic doctrine that all humans are equal.

Turning to the literature, it becomes obvious just how complex the issue of conflicting idea systems is, not least because they are often unconsciously internalized as schemata (Athanasios 2010, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Yurchak 1997). Scholarly research (e.g. Athanasios 2010, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Yurchak 1997) demonstrates that, in some cases, individuals may unconsciously integrate incompatible ideas into a single schema, while in other cases people may internalize conflicting beliefs into 'separate but dynamically linked schemata so that acting on one creates some anxiety or need to compensate by later acting on the other' (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 41). Of course, competing schemata may also be completely unconnected in a person's neural network, and remain lodged in different compartments. These compartmentalized schemata, Strauss and Quinn (1997) elucidate, become active in different contexts, and therefore cause no conscious or unconscious awareness of any clashes. However, compartmentalization can be horizontal, whereby the conflicting schemata are equally accessible to consciousness, but it can also be vertical, whereby one schema is more readily available and applied than the other (see Strauss and Quinn 1997: 41, 104).

Despite the difficulty of determining how exactly conflicting beliefs interact with reform-specific content schemata, the Cultural Reference Group maintained that identifying competing knowledge structures

may, at the very least, shed light on why some schemata are enacted in some situations but not in others, or why they are not enacted at all. Thereby, an awareness of existing conflicting beliefs can potentially contribute to informing strategies to address strangely variable, or seemingly immutable, behaviour.

Re-enactment: a process affecting the historical durability of content schemata

This analytical unit examines the extent to which a schema is part of historical beliefs and social contracts that are intentionally handed down from generation to generation. These are deemed so important that they are deliberately and publicly reproduced for example through the media, oral narratives, books, drama, music, etc. (Strauss and Quinn 1997). The Cultural Reference Group maintained that a schema's association with historically treasured, and therefore purposefully re-enacted, beliefs and practices provides critical clues as to how deeply ingrained a particular schema is.

According to the group, the schematic constructions of Viewpoints 3 and 4 with regard to service users are perhaps the most obvious examples. Viewpoint 3's schema on service users as filial protégées and Viewpoint 4's schema on service users as tribal patrons of the sage were both linked to re-enactments of cherished, century-old,

Bedouin honour codes that predate Islam (with the all-important ethical concept of *Aṣabīya* denoting tribal solidarity and balance). As a member of the Cultural Reference Group explained, every Bedouin is required to look out for their tribal members, and to defend them with courage and bravery, which is another pivotal ethical concept referred to as *Hamas*. Bedouins who fail to adhere to these codes risk losing their personal honour, their integrity as a Bedouin, and their virtue as a human being. The ethics of these cultural codes continues to be taught in every Bedouin family, and is still to this day a central force in directing laws and customs. As a result, so the group pointed out, any public management reform within Abu Dhabi's context which, for example, conceptualizes favouritism as nepotism, and seeks to abolish it, would have little effect on the associated schemata held by the public administrators under Viewpoints 3 and 4.

Supporting the findings of the group members, Strauss and Quinn (see 1997: 112-115) explicate in their cognitive theory of cultural meaning that the reproduction of historical schemata, from which the next generation forms its cultural beliefs, are generally focussed on the most motivation-laden cultural understandings, and thus play an

important role in engendering a historical durability for existing schemata.[38]

6.4.4 Context schemata

As already explained, context schemata were the explicit focus of the second working pair of the Cultural Reference Group. Context schemata were found to be those core beliefs that set out the interpretation of frames and parameters, within which public administrators negotiate the meaning-making of the customer-centric reform. In other words, they constitute the subjectively perceived context for reform-specific meaning-making, and thereby filter the actors' cognitive processes and lend motivational force to content schemata. Examples are the schemata on the governance system, society, or the employees' capacity to act (agency), all of which assumed a distinctly different role in the employees' meaning-making process from the reform-specific content schemata, for instance, on service users or frontline staff. It is suggested that these context schemata constitute a group of learned beliefs that may not form the explicit target of a public management reform yet serve as a catalyst in cognitively motivating, or constraining, the cluster of reform-specific content schemata shared among public administrators.

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[38] For the purpose of the research project, this unit focuses exclusively on deliberate re-enactment.

Given that context schemata are the subjective products of mental processing, the Group argued that they too ought to be analysed in order to determine the possibilities and hurdles they present in contextualizing and circumscribing reform-specific content schemata. However, a productive and purpose-built analysis needs to take into consideration the different role that context schemata play in mentally processing reform-specific meaning-making. Accordingly, the Group proposed the following set of analytical units, which help to assess context schemata and their distinct role in providing an enabling, or stifling, breeding ground to the content schemata:

Table 6.4.4: Analytical units for context schemata

Analytical Units for Context Schemata	View point 1	View point 2	View point 3	View point 4	View point 5
Schema on [e.g. governance system, society, agency]					
Psychological contract					
Professional identity					

Psychological contract

This analytical unit takes account of the invisible shared psychological contracts that public administrators perceive to exist in the organisation, both explicitly and implicitly. As Rousseau (see 1995:

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46-47) posits, a group of people *share* a psychological contract when they hold similar interpretations of what is being exchanged between the organisation and its employees. Moreover, so Rousseau (1995) explains, once a group of people share a psychological contract, it tends to be reaffirmed, which makes it even stronger. Hence, this unit pins down what is perceived as being exchanged within the parameters of a particular context schema, such as the governance system or the employees' capacity to act.

For example, the group members concluded that Viewpoint 1's schema on the governance system as a dictatorship was accompanied by a perceived psychological contract whereby efficiency, expertise and operational competence are sacrificed for personal grandeur. In contrast, the group discovered that Viewpoint 5's schema on the governance system as a machine that is fit-for-purpose seemed to come with a psychological contract whereby expertise and operational excellence is encouraged and financially rewarded.

Given that this analytical unit was generically applied to all context schemata, it is appropriate also to consider the schema on agency in order to illustrate the powerful insights achieved by analysing not individual people, but shared mental knowledge structures, for their associated psychological contracts. The Cultural Reference Group

had established that Viewpoint 1's schematic construction of the employees' capacity to act could be summed up as structurally constrained agency. Viewpoint 2 seemed to have constructed its schema on the employees' capacity to act as bounded agency. When examining Viewpoint 1's particular schema on agency for its associated shared psychological contract, the public administrators under this viewpoint were found to believe that calculated risk taking is exchanged for opportunities to act. In contrast, the group concluded that Viewpoint 2's specific schema on agency was accompanied by a psychological contract that requires employees to be deferential bureaucrats in exchange for the ability to act.

While the idea of identifying shared psychological contracts in an organisation is not new, it has rarely been applied to different groups of employees within organisations, and it is certainly not a concept that has been employed to gain insight into inter-subjective schemata (Chen and Kao 2012, Aggarwal and Bhargava 2009, Rousseau 2001, 1995). Yet, by examining context schemata for their associated psychological contracts, the Cultural Reference Group was able to extract highly nuanced, in-depth, insight into the perceived parameters within which meaning-making of the reform had been negotiated. It is concluded that this analytical unit has significant practical purchase for designing effective reform strategies because psychological

contracts shape the employees' approaches to situations. They thereby reveal the existing understandings of expected and obligatory conduct, and enable anticipating future meaning-making and behaviour.

In searching the literature for a theoretical basis to support this unusual application of the concept of psychological contracts, Rousseau's (see 1995: 46-47) work is highly relevant because it conceptualizes psychological contracts as the subjective products of people making meaning from social cues and organisationally consistent messages. On this basis, organisational research (e.g. Chen and Kao 2012, Aggarwal and Bhargava 2009, Rousseau 2001, 1995) has found that employees refer not only behaviourally and emotionally to psychological contracts, but also cognitively. Hence, there exists a solid scholarly basis for the group's finding that the perceived realities of existing psychological contracts play an important role in understanding better the principal context schemata, and in appraising the cognitive motivation and constraints exerted on reform-specific schemata.

Professional identity

The concept of professional identity is a complex one and has been much explored across disciplines such as philosophy, sociology,

political theory, organisational theory and psychology (see Baxter 2011 for an excellent review of the literature on professional identity specifically in the public sector). The Cultural Reference Group argued that professional identity is important to look at in regard to context schemata because it is the most prominent 'concept of self' that public administrators activate to frame their meaning-making of the reform process. While not denying certain aspirational undertones, the group understood professional identity not as the role prescribed to passive individuals by the industry or profession, but as the actual identities public administrators formed themselves through collective cognition and internalized institutions. Therefore, this analytical unit is about the public administrators' shared professional identity as cognitively and socially constructed within the specific historical and institutional sites of the environment within which they operate.

For example, public administrators under Viewpoint 1 were found to identify themselves as 'stifled value-creators' within the specific context of a governance system that they perceived as a dictatorship. In contrast, public administrators under Viewpoint 5 seemed to identify themselves as 'expert veterans' in a governance system that they constructed as fit-for-purpose. Applying the same analytical unit to the observed schemata on Abu Dhabi's society, the group found

that the employees under Viewpoint 1 had constructed their professional identity as universalist service providers, while the public administrators under Viewpoints 3 and 4 were seen to identify themselves clearly as particularist service providers.[39]

Similarly to the analytical unit of psychological contracts, professional identity is usually not considered within the context of a particular schema. That notwithstanding, the literature provides a sound basis for applying this concept in such a manner. Scholars, who examine the many ways in which professional identities are evolving (e.g. Baxter 2011, Churchman and King 2009, Bessant 2004), argue that it is not a stable concept. Instead, their research has shown that professional identity is a dynamic concept that is constantly in flux. It manipulates and integrates personal identities, previous professional identities, relevant communities of practice, ethical norms, and public discourses (see Baxter 2011: 52), as well as other understandings arising from people's social and economic interests (Bessant 2004). As such, professional identity is like any other social identity that consists of sub identities, and can be understood to emphasize different aspects of its dynamic meld - depending on the situation or,

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[39] The terms 'universalist' and 'particularist' were adapted from Hofstede et al. (2010), who define 'universalism' as a belief in applying the same rules to everyone, and 'particularism' as the conviction that rules depend on the particular people and situations they are applied to.

as in this study, the knowledge structure under investigation (see Baxter 2011: 41-42).

Despite being fluid in nature, salient professional identities are important to look at because they are a variation of the 'concept of self', and thus emotionally invested (Baxter 2011, Churchman and King 2009, Bessant 2004). This lends the concept of professional identity a critical motivational force in adjusting reform-specific schemata and behaviours, and thus offers practical benefits in informing the design of professional learning and development.

6.4.5 Situational influencers: Defining the point in time

As already mentioned, the Cultural Reference Group had worked for part of its time together in three pairs: one on content schemata, one on context schemata, and the third on situational, non-cognitive forces. Driven by their historicist and relativist perspectives, the group had created the third working team in recognition of the role that wider situational cues and the general atmosphere in Abu Dhabi's public administration was playing at the time of research. Cues are a 'point of reference', which provide the conditions for directing people's sense-making (Weick 1995: 50-51). Members of the group advocated the importance of accounting for the situational cues and non-cognitive context, in which the public administrators made

meaning and produced the five inter-subjective viewpoints. On this basis, the group conceptualized a third phenomenon to take account of in addition to context and content schemata, which was termed 'situational influencers'.

These situational influencers were considered to be the same for all five viewpoints because they catalogued the then prominent situational cues in their not-yet-interpreted form as exogenous variables. In other words, situational influencers identify the situational cues that influenced all of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, in one way or another, at the particular point in time during which they generated their viewpoints for this study. Thus the group instinctively recognized the momentary, or operant, nature of subjectivity (see Chapter 2), and the need to illuminate the particularities of the 'point in time', at which the shared viewpoints that this study observed were formed.

The literature once again offers rich relevant evidence, in this case with regard to the significance of situations in shaping cognition and behaviour. As Hong et al. (2003: 454) explain, a schema 'does not continuously guide our information processing simply because it is somewhere in our minds'. It requires a situation or another external stimulus to bring the schema to the forefront of a person's

consciousness and make it operative (Hong et al. 2003). Dynamic constructivist scholars, ranging from cultural and social psychologists (e.g. Hong and Mallorie 2004, Lehman et al. 2004, Haidt 2001) to institutional and organisational theorists (e.g. Tilcscik and Marquis 2013, Weber and Glynn 2006, Weick 1995), present evidence that situational characteristics provide external cues that, following their interpretation, render schemata more or less accessible and applicable in people's meaning-making processes.

The group identified the following three categories of prominent situational influencers, which uniquely characterized the time of research, and stimulated in various ways the schematic saliency in Abu Dhabi's public administrators: a) organisational policies; b) industry trends; and c) mega events.

a) Organisational policies

The Cultural Reference Group found that organisational policies constitute a principal category of situational influencers in a public administration. In line with Rousseau's (1995) theory, organisational policies were understood to span both written and unwritten communications of the government's intent, and eclipsed all other policies at the time when the public administrators formulated their viewpoints. At the time of research, the organisational policy found

most prominently to provide situational cues and shape the climate, within which Abu Dhabi's public administrators made meaning, included the government's intention to create a one hundred percent Emirati workforce in its public sector.

The literature confirms that organisational messages are powerful situational influencers because they significantly affect the saliency of employees' ideational processes (e.g. Givel 2012, Garud et al. 2011, Weick 1995). According to Rousseau (see 1995: 34), organisational messages may be communicated through the government's official agents, such as managers or human resource personnel, by highlighting specific policies and procedures (e.g. emails from the personnel department explaining the latest Emirati employment targets) or making overt statements (e.g. speeches about Emiratization by the departmental director). Organisational messages may also be conveyed through non-official agents, such as co-workers or associates, by means of social cues (e.g. stories told by co-workers) or by observations of the ways in which colleagues from comparable backgrounds, job functions and demographic characteristics are being treated (e.g. a lot of non-Emirati staff members were being made redundant) (see Rousseau 1995: 34).

b) Industry trends

The Cultural Reference Group argued for industry trends to form the second principal category of situational influencers. Industry trends were conceptualized as steering perceived standards of what is desirable for professionals in the field of public administration, and what guides and legitimizes specific public management practices. When reflecting on the particular industry trends that shaped the situational context of Abu Dhabi's public administrators at the time of research, the group highlighted the then recent event of Singapore's semi-authoritarian government winning the prestigious UN Public Service Award for its customer-centric reform. This had prompted Abu Dhabi Government to celebrate Singapore as a role model for non-western and non-democratic governments, and to plan several study tours to the island country as well as secondments of some of its Emirati managers.

The literature resolutely corroborates the group's insistence on taking account of industry trends within the context of public administrative reform. Public policy scholars and organisational theorists have pointed to industry cues as important situational influencers, with significant repercussions for instilling new practices (Rushton and Williams 2012, Rindova et al. 2011, Weber 2005). Rindova et al. (see 2011: 427) argue that the impact of industry cues on reform is only

partly due to their role in informing the organisation's strategy. Moreover, so Rindova et al (2011) posit, it is their effect on re-defining professional identity, which in turn is an important mechanism in motivating new or reformed behaviours. This significantly chimed with the propositions that the group had made earlier in regard to professional identity constituting an analytical unit, by which to learn more about the workings of context schemata.

c) Mega events

Lastly, the Cultural Reference Group concluded on the relevance of a third category of situational influencers, which was termed mega events. Mega events denote major natural or human-made events, which might, for example, include large-scale cultural, political, sporting, commercial, or social events, such as the Olympics, but also climatic or geological events, such as natural disasters or fires (Tilcscik and Marquis 2013, Givel 2010, Weick 1995). Mega-events are typically surrounded by media attention and represent an important stimulus for heightened meaning-making and subsequent change (Tilcscik and Marquis 2013, Weick 1995).

Here, the Cultural Reference Group drew attention to the 'Arab Spring', the wave of popular uprisings and revolutions in the Arab world between 2010 and 2012, as well as the global economic

downturn. Both of these mega events prominently defined the situational context of Abu Dhabi's public administration at the time of research, and carried with them important cues for how public administrators made meaning of the customer-centric reform process.

In the literature, also conceptualized as 'jolts' (Meyer 1982), 'shocks' (Fligstein 1990), or 'cosmology episodes' (Weick 1993), mega events punctuate longstanding institutions and ordinary meaning-making, and in doing so, influence cognitive processes to shift attention towards a particular issue for a period of time (Tilcsik and Marquis 2013, Givel 2010). As a result, mega events impact on geographical communities (Tilcsik and Marquis 2013), but also non-geographical areas, such as markets, technology, or religious, political or legal communities (Greenwood and Suddaby 2005), leading over time to changes in policies, beliefs and behaviour (Princen 2013, Boushey 2012).

6.5   Summary of the findings: A socio-cognitive model

This far, the chapter has chronicled the study's quest to gain insight into the cognitive-psychological aspects of the subjective meaning-making that happened in the minds Abu Dhabi's public administrators. Working on the basis of idealized meaning structures contained within five socially shared viewpoints, a highly competent and perceptive Cultural Reference Group worked at drilling down into

cognitively shared knowledge structures. In doing so, the group members were able to identify two functional types of shared schemata that had become operative in the minds of Abu Dhabi's public administrators: context and content schemata. By developing specific analytical units for each of the two types of schemata, the group was able to unravel the mechanics of schematic constructions and reveal their considerably different contents, architectures, properties and processes. It also enabled the group to examine and analyse the shared schemata for their role in facilitating or resisting change.

Consequently, the study not only gained insight into the particular cognitive workings of Abu Dhabi Government employees vis-à-vis the customer-centric reform, but also produced wider theoretical propositions about *the conditions and processes* of shared subjective meaning-making within the context of public administrative change. These findings are summarized in the graphical model below (Figure 6.5.2). This is described as 'socio-cognitive' in recognition of its approach to subjectivity as both a social process, whereby people construct meaning within a social and cultural context, but also as a cognitive process, whereby people activate internally held knowledge structures, or schemata, to make meaning.

The socio-cognitive model depicts the concept of the shared viewpoint, which renders observable, if ever so momentarily, the subjective ways in which groups of public administrators make meaning of customer-centric reform in socially shared and overlapping ways. Below the viewpoint, the model features two types of internally held schemata, which interact with each other as well as with the outside world to generate the viewpoint. Importantly, viewpoints that are shared at group level equally have an impact on collective schemata because they reinforce existing ones by providing them with a certain social reality and validity (see Tiedens and Leach 2004: 5-7). For that reason, the model shows the arrows pointing back from the viewpoint to the schemata.

While the context schemata bound meaning-making by perceived institutional parameters, the content schemata deliver the material for reform-specific meaning-making. Looking at content schemata as a distinct type of schemata enabled the Cultural Reference Group to break down reform-specific knowledge structures into their properties and processes, assess their durability and motivational force, and to explore the granular details of cognition at the base of the processes that institutionalize. The group members' discovery that context schemata take on a different function in making meaning of the reform prompted them to treat these knowledge structures as

belonging to a different type of schemata, which illuminate subjective interpretations of macro-level institutions. In doing so, the group was able to put under a magnifying glass people's subjective perceptions of macro-level forces, and assess their role in contextualizing, framing, organizing, filtering and motivating the meaning-making of the reform.

In the graphical model, the shared viewpoint and the two types of schemata are hemmed in by the Yin-and-Yang symbol (Figure 6.5.1), which is an Asian symbol for the principle of dynamic forces constantly fluctuating in order to form the percept, or *Gestalt,* of a unified whole – as illustrated earlier in this chapter by Rubin's (1915) 'faces-vase' image. Hence, the Yin-and-Yang image symbolizes the study's finding with regard to the ways in which schemata self-organize depending on the focus of the question; how they switch function in some cases; and how they ultimately give rise to each other as they interrelate to form a dynamic, momentary viewpoint, where the whole is greater than, and independent of, the sum of its parts.

Figure 6.5.1: Yin-and-Yang Symbol
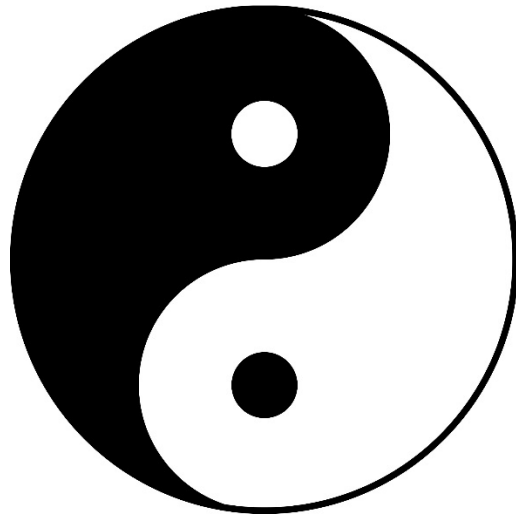
Last but not least, the socio-cognitive model represents the three categories of situational influencers: organisational policies, industry trends and mega events. They define the given point in time at which public administrators are making meaning, and provide social cues and a point of reference. In the model, the situational influencers are depicted as feeding into the meaning-making process in their not-yet-interpreted form as exogenous variables, which is why they are outside of the Yin-and-Yang symbol.

Figure 6.5.2: A socio-cognitive model

A socio-cognitive model:
How public administrators subjectively make meaning of reform at a given point in time
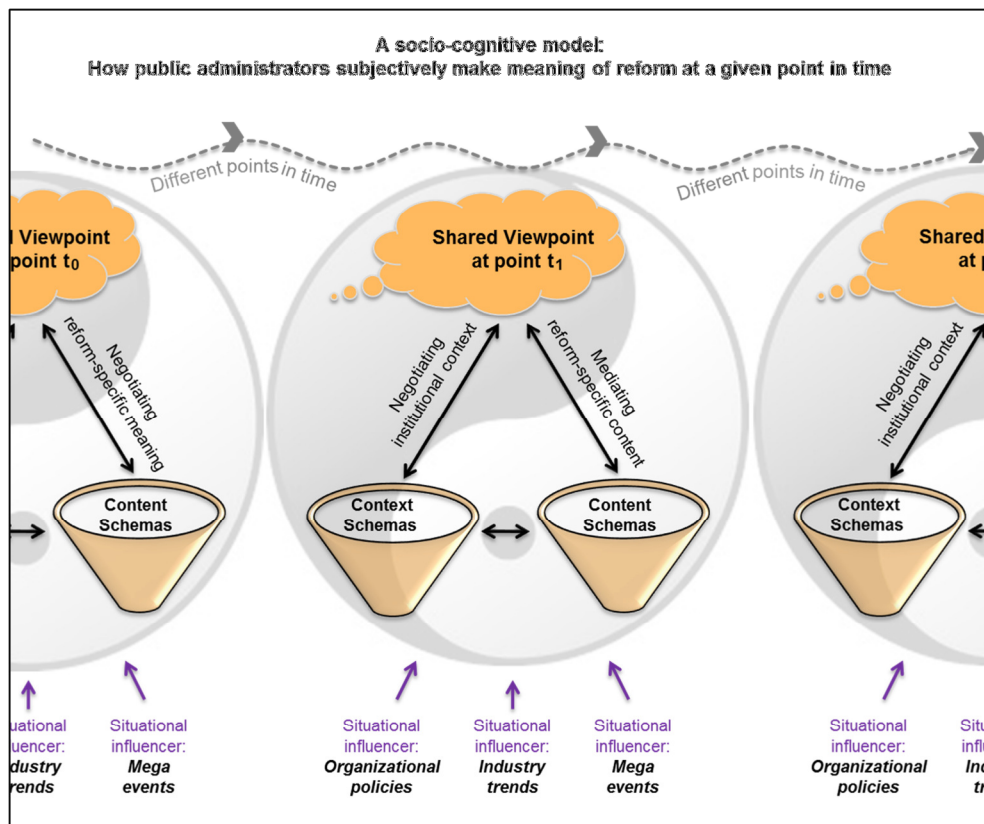
By having employed a two-step operational approach, which involved Q Methodology and a Cultural Reference Group respectively, the study has captured, diagnosed and analysed the shared subjectivities of Abu Dhabi's public administrators with regard to customer-centric reform. On this basis, the thesis is able to respond positively to research question 1b, and to conclude that the proposed socio-cognitive operational model is not only effective in mapping existing systems of meaning at group-level, but also in revealing their

underlying mental structures, and thereby identifying opportunities

and constraints for internalizing change in public administrators.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

"Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse."

(African Proverb)

7.1   Summary of the thesis

The raison d'être for this research project has been the phenomenon of failing public administrative reforms, which surprisingly also include those that have followed good practice and were fuelled by the best political intentions. Evidence by scholars and practitioners suggests that a principal reason is the tendency of reforms to overlook the intricacies of local cultures and existing systems of meaning. This oversight causes reform initiatives to be blind to what makes life meaningful to local public administrators, who are expected to embed 'a new way of doing things' into the mentality and machinery of public management. Ultimately, so this study established, public administrators are *homo subjectivi*, who subjectively interpret reform paradigms, and filter them through the 'eyes of the beholder', in ways that are meaningful to them. Hence, this thesis proposed that only by appreciating public administrators as *homines subjectivi*, who make meaning within a particular historical, social, cultural, economic, religious, political, organisational and emotional context, may we be

able to design appropriate reforms that effectively shoehorn new ways of thinking and behaving into prevailing systems of meaning.

Therefore, if we want to design public administrative reforms that more successfully engrain and motivate durable behaviour change, we need to diagnose the constraints and opportunities offered by local employees' existing subjective systems of meaning. In an effort to learn more about such 'locally sensitive diagnostics' (Grindle 2011: 4), this thesis placed subjective, interpretive humans at its analytical centre, and set out to examine how public administrators make meaning of reform in shared and overlapping ways. To that end, the thesis has examined how public administrators make meaning and also how to take account of the impact it has on achieving positive reform outcomes. In doing so, it has particularly considered how the analysis of subjective systems of meaning at group-level might be operationalised.

In seeking a response to the overarching research question, the project began by consulting prevailing knowledge on human thought and behaviour from across the disciplines of interpretive sociology, cognitive anthropology, social psychology, cognitive pedagogy and even neuro-scientific biology. Informed by the existing rich literature, the thesis argued that any endeavour to capture and gain insight into

the messy, elusive and intangible meaning-making of *homines subjectivi* starts with the recognition that shared meaning is constructed in two ways: socially between people, as well as mentally inside the minds of individuals. In other words, meaning-making is both a social process, whereby public administrators construct meaning within a social and cultural context, and also a cognitive process, whereby public administrators apply internally held knowledge structures, or schemata, to make shared meaning. By putting forward this dual socio-cognitive notion, the thesis answered research question 1a. This had asked about the best approach to such an intangible and nebulous concept as 'subjective meaning-making' in rendering the shared cognitive processes of public administrators observable and assessable.

Having worked out its theoretical approach, the study continued by developing an operational model to get at the 'cogs and wheels' of meaning-making among public administrators. The operational model included two adjacent steps to map shared meaning systems among groups of public administrators, and to assess possibilities for embedding change durably. The first step focused on the socially constructed aspects of meaning-making, and employed Q Methodology to identify shared viewpoints and decipher commonly held meaning structures. The second step sought to drill deeper into

the underlying mental processes, and employed a Cultural Reference Group to tease out the cognitive schemata that had become active in producing the shared viewpoints observed in the first step of the model. In order to test the operational model in real-life, it was empirically applied to the specific case of Abu Dhabi's public administrators and their meaning-making of customer-centric reform.

For the first step, Q Methodology proved a fitting tool and facilitated the discovery of five subjective viewpoints on customer-centric reform that were socially shared between Abu Dhabi's public administrators. These viewpoints were named as follows: (1) The benefactor's epic fail, (2) Managerialism in modern Arabiya, (3) Triumph of the cherished patriarch, (4) The traditional ways of the Bedouins, and (5) The reign of formulas over culture. For the second step, the Cultural Reference Group proved a well-suited tool not only for drilling down to the specific cognitive schemata that generated the viewpoints of Abu Dhabi's public administrators, but also for revealing some of the general conditions of meaning-making.

The Cultural Reference Group found that the schemata had arranged themselves into two functional types: context schemata and content schemata. The group members also discovered the significant subjective differences in the construction of schemata on the same

concept, and were able to appraise their durability and motivational force with the help of analytical units. The resulting insights shed light on the opportunities and constraints offered by existing meaning systems in internalizing change. Finally, the group members identified three categories of prominent situational influencers that were seen as stimulating schematic saliency in Abu Dhabi's public administrators at the time of the research: organisational policies, industry trends, and mega events. In this way, the research was able to provide a positive answer to research question 1b. This question had asked about the effectiveness of the operational model in mapping existing systems of meaning at group-level, and identifying the opportunities and constraints for internalizing in employees 'a new way of doing public administration'.

7.2   Wider applicability

The specific viewpoints and schemata on customer-centric reform that this research project revealed as being shared by groups of Abu Dhabi's public administrators are, of course, case-specific and unlikely to be applicable in other contexts. However, as Chapter 1 established, subjective meaning-making is a human condition and a universal phenomenon and, as such, ought to embody a number of mechanisms that are ubiquitous.

With that in mind, the study had opted to employ only elements of a case study methodology, and already at its outset contemplated the more widely shared features of Abu Dhabi Government and its customer-centric reform. The purpose of this strategy had been to leave open the possibility of arriving at some moderate generalizations or warranted assertions about the more commonplace, enduring processes of subjective meaning-making (Payne and Williams 2005).

Accordingly, Chapter 4 established that all public administrators, whether in Abu Dhabi or elsewhere, form part of an organisational hierarchy, with the task of undertaking public management in the pursuit of public value. Similarly, all public administrative reforms have in common the basic intention to implement changes that make government organisations operate better in one way or another (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Based on these more widely shared features of the empirical research site within which the universal phenomenon of subjective meaning-making was explored, the study's findings do indeed lend themselves to moderate generalizations. The thesis' claim of wider applicability to other settings focuses on the insights gained regarding the *conditions and processes* of subjective meaning-making at group-level within the context of public administrative change.

Specifically, the thesis concludes that, in most public administrations, it is likely that organisational policies, industry trends and mega events provide principal cues that critically influence the employees' relevant mental knowledge structures, which in turn organize themselves into context and content schemata in order to make meaning of a particular reform. Subsequently they generate several distinct shared viewpoints that are socially constructed and visible, thus offering the entry point for a practical analysis of meaning-making at the cognitive level of groups.

Admittedly, the particular analytical units identified under the content and context schemata in Abu Dhabi's case, such as time frame, social desirability or re-enactment, may turn out to be slightly different in other public administrative contexts. The reason for this is that the specific analytical units are likely to depend on the criteria that any local Cultural Reference Group might identify as most relevant in extrapolating a schema's properties and processes affecting its motivation and durability. Yet, whichever analytical units emerge as most pertinent in other public administrative settings, they would still need to provide insight into schematic properties and motivational processes in order to enable an appraisal of prevailing subjectivities and their potential for change. Rather than seeing this as a flaw, it

corresponds to the dynamic, interrelated and multidirectional realities of human subjectivity.

On this basis, the thesis posits that its socio-cognitive model is locally adaptable and may be practically applied by any government to take account of its employees' extant systems of meaning, and to assess opportunities for embedding reform. In this way, while not seeking to make sweeping sociological generalizations, the socio-cognitive model puts forward, at the very least, a testable and transferable middle-range theory that invites further research, scrutiny, deliberation and critique by scholars and practitioners.

7.3 'Pracademic' contribution

Practical contribution

In today's world, in which most government organisations map their strategies, activities, services, outcomes, systems, processes, personnel, stakeholder groups and customer segments, the idea of charting human meaning systems is still negligible. Paradoxically, contemporary public administrations happily embrace complex strategic management tools like the Balanced Scorecard, that require organisations to map hundreds of strategic initiatives and subsequently identify, in some cases, thousands of performance metrics in order to turn vision into action (Kaplan and Norton 1996).

Yet, public administrations hitherto have overlooked the equally crucial imperative to identify what in most cases would amount to no more than a dozen shared meanings and knowledge structures in order to turn reform into lasting change.

Instead, parsimonious and essentialist conceptualizations of simplified and homogenous employees ignore their various social realities, their entrenched knowledge structures, their multiple identities, their shifting psychological contracts, and their conflicting emotions. Such an approach neglects that 'contemporary patterns of subjectivity may be more complex and socially engaged' than implied by prevailing accounts of culture and learning in organisations (McLean 2015: 1). Importantly, it restricts the agency of public administrators, and their ability to make choices and changes, even though ironically government employees constitute the linchpin of reforming old institutions and imbuing them with new or different meaning.

Admittedly, this may, in no insignificant part, be due to the intangible, elusive and messy nature of subjective meaning-making, which doubtlessly poses significant challenges. That notwithstanding, it is important not to shy away from seeking ways to operationalize the analysis of subjectivities, if we want to make effective changes to the 'way things are done' in a public administration.

Hence, the findings of this research project should be of practical value to those seeking operational approaches to the complexities of employees' subjectivities in buying into, adapting and cascading public administrative reform. For example, Abu Dhabi Government ought, on the basis of the particular meaning structures and schemata that emerged from this study, to be able to understand better the reasons for bottlenecks in its reform implementation, and to develop specifically tailored training and development programmes for its public administrators.

The discovery of content and context schemata, and their interplay with situational influencers in producing socially shared viewpoints, also offers a productive template for other public administrations - even if the model's analytical units under context and content schemata may vary slightly in other cultural constellations. Consequently, public administrations in emerging economies as well as in western societies could adapt the socio-cognitive model to their local contexts in order to prepare for particularly challenging, alien or counter-intuitive reforms, and to inform the design of change initiatives that are increasingly effective, economical and in harmony with locally precious meaning systems.

And lastly, although the socio-cognitive model may not lay the foundation for a neat and tidy management tool that allows perfunctorily box ticking, it does offer a fruitful starting point for inspiring instruments that strategically mobilize existing subjectivities in realizing reform. As such, the model may also serve as a critical feedstock for developing practical tools for the day-to-day business of those public administrations that are seeking to pursue a culturally considered approach to reform. Thus, the socio-cognitive model has the practical potential to transform current reform and management practices in public administration in ways that private sector organisations are already pioneering (Nathan 2015).

Theoretical contribution

The socio-cognitive model, which this study developed in collaboration with the research participants, enables the integration of institutions and culture from the perspectives of different groups of public administrators within organisations. Here, the thesis makes three crucial theoretical contributions, of relevance not only to the scholarship of public administration but also to organisational studies as well as to theory on non-formal adult learning.

First, by offering a socio-cognitive model that is grounded in empirical regularities, the study contributes to the on-going debate on

whether inter-subjective meaning-making ought to be conceived as a cognitive or social constructivist phenomenon, or a combination of both (Yelich Binieki 2015, Taylor 2012a, Ross and Medin 2011, Elsbach et al. 2005). Specifically, this research project demonstrated that a combined socio-cognitive conceptualization might start with people's external, socially constructed, inter-subjective structures of meaning. This would act as an analytical entry point for eliciting internal, mental knowledge structures that groups of individuals have in common. In doing so, the research shows that a combined socio-cognitive conceptualization is indeed fruitful. Moreover, the thesis proposes a particular way of employing the socio-cognitive lens to investigate how public administrators, in their dual role as organisational employees and non-formal adult learners, construct knowledge and meaning within the continuum of the individual and the social.

Second, the study contributes by filling a gap perpetuated by studies that predominantly espouse an explanatory focus on organisational meaning structures (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Sonnenshein 2010, Maitlis and Lawrence 2007). By employing the concept of subjectivity, and seeing public administrators as embodying the crossroad where multiple meaning systems meet, the research naturally accounted for social, cultural, religious, economic, political,

historical, organisational and emotional forces in the meaning-making of organisational members. As a result, this thesis joins the minority of studies that do not 'overlook' or 'underplay' non-organisational meaning systems within the context of organisational analysis, as Maitlis and Christianson (2014: 98) have lamented.

Last but by no means least, the study contributes to addressing a need for more research into meaning-making at group level, which organisational theorists (e.g. Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Sonnenshein 2010, Elsbach et al. 2005), neo-institutional scholars (e.g. Thornton et al. 2012) and social psychologists (e.g. Gillespie and Cornish 2009) all have called for. By exploring in depth the ways in which various factions of public administrators make shared meaning, this thesis is one of the few studies that has conducted research not at the level of organisations, institutions or executive teams, but at the level of groups made up of ordinary organisational members.

7.4   Limitations

The key, and most obvious, limitation of this research investigation is, of course, directly associated with its very object of enquiry, which is subjectivity. While the project painstakingly took care to ensure methodological transparency throughout, ultimately it relied heavily on the subjectivity of its research participants and collaborators, both

for its Q Methodology and in the Cultural Reference Group. Given that a tool is only ever as good as the person who wields it, the looming question is whether a different P set and/or Cultural Reference Group would have arrived at disparate findings as a result of their dissimilar subjectivities and meaning systems.

In the case of Q Methodology, the issue of replicability and reliability deserves little scepticism; as long as the concourse and the Q set comprehensively cover the breadth of existing opinions. As Brown (1980) demonstrated, the test-retest reliability of Q sorts has been shown to range from 0.80 upward. Over the years, test-retest case studies conducted by Nicholas (2011), Amin (2000), Thomas and Bass (1992) and others confirmed the reliability of Q Methodology, with Nicholas (see 2011: 3) finding a 0.94 correlation score between his original study and the control version. The reason for this is that only a limited number of distinct viewpoints exist on any subject, which is why a comprehensive concourse and Q set, and not the research participants, are critical to achieving reliable and replicable results (Nicholas 2011, Brown 1980).

With regard to the Cultural Reference Group, the study's key informant sampling method doubtlessly resulted in an analytically attuned and highly astute collective of experts who worked with each

other efficiently and productively. Nevertheless, the research pioneered its particular adaptation of an expert group which implies that there are hitherto no test-retest studies to support claims of reliability and replicability for this specific method within the public administrative context of meaning-making.

However, in the field of health and biomedicine, Vankipuram et al. (2014) have evaluated how reliably independent persons classify trauma schemata from a pool of 30 trauma cases. Though being no trauma experts, the research participants in that particular study did have prior experience in clinical environments, which was considered an important sampling criterion due to the contextual nature of the task (see Vankipuram et al. 2014: 174). Employing Kappa statistics[40], Vankipuram et al. (2014) found that the scores were relatively high, thus indicating that classifying schemata is replicable. Furthermore, Vankipuram et al.'s study found that the research participants' immersion into cognitive processes brought to light additional nuances of information about the trauma cases that were absent from the written reports (see Vankipuram et al. 2014: 175-176).

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[40] Cohen's kappa coefficient measures inter-rater agreement for qualitative (categorical) items. It is generally seen as a more robust measure than simple percent agreement calculation, given that κ takes into account the agreement occurring by chance (Carletta 1996).

While these findings are reassuring, Vankipuram et al.'s (2014) study is, of course, not directly comparable to this thesis, and more research would be needed to test the level of reliability and replicability of the adapted Cultural Reference Group. That being said, one ought not to lose sight of the fact that a failure of replication in abductive studies may not imply invalid results or a lack of credibility, but could simply be the consequence of contextual factors and their saliency.

7.5   Future opportunities

The future opportunities for taking this research project further, deeper, and into other interesting directions are manifold, not least because novel knowledge, or warranted assertions, are only ever provisional, and invariably raise more new questions than have been answered. In that vein, additional research is needed to test and re-test the socio-cognitive model in different public administrative contexts; to compare a variety of research participants and assess their influences on generating specific findings; to experiment with different levels of granularity in terms of meaning structures and schemata; and to isolate further the conditions under which new concepts motivate durable behaviour change in public administrators. A cross-disciplinary research team would lend itself perfectly to undertake such studies considering that the socio-cognitive model has

built on the knowledge of a range of disciplines across anthropology, sociology, pedagogy and biology.

Returning to the anecdote at the very beginning of this study, the thesis was inspired by the realities of reform in public administration. In the context of the UK, applied fields to test the usefulness of such a model might include those public service sectors that have neglected understanding in depth and, to detrimental effects, the employees who deliver essential services, such as in social care, teaching, or nursing. Hence, a compelling future research programme would be to investigate to what extent an application of the socio-cognitive model would improve the strategic planning of public administrative change, identify harmful side effects, promote the process of knowledge transfer and knowledge brokering within and across institutional boundaries, and more efficiently achieve desired outcomes.

Such a research programme in applied fields could perhaps examine whether employing the socio-cognitive model at the outset of a reform programme might also have an impact on what counts as outcomes, and for what purpose. Or, it could explore whether the model may shape the politics, language, rights and responsibilities employed in knowledge mobilization and knowledge brokering. It may also help to appreciate better the intrinsic motivation of people in doing a public

sector job, especially considering that, in times of financial austerity, the public sector struggles to present itself as a competitive employer. Yet another angle, from which to conduct further research on the socio-cognitive model may be to gain insight into cultural entrepreneurship in public administrative settings, and to learn more about how to develop cultural competences and purposefully use cultural resources in organisations.

Given that evidence-based decision-making has become the norm in all areas of public service, it is perplexing that it is so markedly absent from the ways in which public administrations approach the *homo subjectivi* who realize public services. While subjective meaning-making is certainly messy, complex and multidirectional, we must dare to look for scientific approaches to it. If we do not learn to identify the 'stuff life is made of' for those who are expected to improve the lives of the public, we will keep failing to achieve public administrative reform goals. Hence, this thesis is only one of many offerings in a quest that must continue to seek understanding of what is important, sacred and real in the minds of our public administrators. After all, as Siddhārtha Buddha put it in his Dvedhavitakka Sutta, 'whatever we keep pursuing with our thinking and pondering, that becomes the inclination of our awareness'.

Appendix A – Concourse information sheet and consent form

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Information Sheet

"What is the range of opinions surrounding customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi?"

I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. This Information Sheet explains what this study is about and how I would like you to participate.

The purpose of my study is to gather the entire spread of opinions that people have on customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi. My study defines 'government customer' in the broadest sense, as anyone who receives or benefits from Abu Dhabi government services. Therefore, a government customer may be a Local, an expatriate, a visiting tourist, a business, a charity organisation, a government organisation or a civil society group.

In order to understand your opinions, I would like to have an open discussion with you. We will talk about your personal opinions and ideas about customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi. This will take approximately 20 minutes. Our discussion will be guided by the following top-level questions:

1. In your opinion, what does customer-centric reform mean in the context of Abu Dhabi?

2. In your opinion, which government initiatives are particularly successful in driving customer-centric reform, and which ones are not?

3. What are the factors that are making the customer-centric reform successful, and what are those that are making it difficult?

Everything you say will remain confidential. Your interview will be anonymized and assigned a numerical code, and all data will be stored securely on a personal computer. No identifiable personal data will be published. If you agree, I will audio record our discussions. This will enable me to go back to the interview and analyse it without missing any details you say.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. If you want to, you will get a copy of your interview, as well as a copy of the final research report. If you like, there is also an opportunity for you

to stay involved with this research project, and contribute your valuable opinion to the data collection and analysis.

If you have any questions about the study at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Abena Dadze-Arthur, Doctoral researcher

Consent Form

"What is the range of opinions surrounding customer-centric reform in

Abu Dhabi?"

- I have read and understood the Information Sheet.

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study

- I understand that taking part in the study is voluntary.

- I understand that confidentiality will be ensured and my identity

   will be protected in the analysis and further reports.

- I understand that I can withdraw my data even after having

   completed my interview (as long as it is before the analysis stage)

   by contacting: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to take part in this study.
Please sign and date below to indicate your consent.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B – The concourse on customer-centric reform in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi

No	Statements
1	I think there are two types of customers here. There are Locals and Expats.
2	I would say that the Locals are 'full customers', whereas the expatriates are 'recipient customers'.
3	In terms of business customers, they fall into two groups: well-connected businesses and less well connected businesses.
4	Here, the quality of your experience as a government customer depends on how well connected you are. Getting good services is down to whom you know and who you are.
5	Government service users here can be best described as 'consuming customers'. This is because here in Abu Dhabi it is mainly about transactions of services.
6	For the expatriates, being a government customer means being in a business-type relationship with government.
7	For the Locals, being a government customer means being in an unequal, top-down relationship with government – a relationship that relies on the generosity of the government rather than the rights of the people.
8	Government here only exists as a service provider. It is only a public administration.
9	Government services here work really well because they are mandated. There is legislation – this means they have to be provided.
10	The government services are good because there is near universal coverage. The government ensures that everyone gets certain services automatically, like for example health care.
11	Government services here work excellent as long as they are routine services with a focus on processes and rubberstamping paperwork. The processes here are pretty damn good, considering that the turnover of people is so high. I mean when you compare it to the reports of how badly UK border ports work, over here the Abu Dhabi ports and systems work majorly well. They are handling larger number of people more efficiently, and you cannot get in without all your paperwork.
12	When it comes to government services that require the initiative of individual government staff or agencies then services here don't work so well. Like helping a socially dysfunctional family, for example, where different local government agencies

	from the social service sector, housing sector and maybe health and education sector would all have to work together in order to provide a personalized service. That would be a problem here.
13	Government services here are better because they are less subject to party politics. Immigration, for example, isn't a political football here.
14	And I guess the other fundamental thing here is that the government service provision is less welfare-based. Government does not take money from one group of people and gives it to another – like in European countries for example, where the taxes of low-income people pay for the social services provided for other groups of disadvantaged people.
15	Government services here are good because the government has a lot of money.
16	They use a lot of modern, state-of-the-art technology for their government services - from Salik via mobile phone, or renewing your license through the internet. It makes you feel like a 21st century version of a government customer not the 20th century version.
17	I think there is an element here of not thinking about me as a customer but more as an input-output.
18	Being a customer here is being part of a money-making machine. Let's say something like getting your driving license. You will spend something like AED 4000 to 6000 for that entire process. It really shouldn't cost that much. So you are looking at it like maybe they are trying to make money of it because it is a tax-free environment here.
19	Government services here are convenient but not customer-oriented. For example, you can pay your parking via a text message but if you have a problem and you need to speak to someone to get a service done, it is a battle. That is where the problem is.
20	The government is good at spending money to implement a tool. But in terms of providing a service that makes most of the tool as part of a personal relationship, then that is where it gets tricky. And a tool is only ever as good as the person who handles the tool.
21	Old-fashioned service providers, like the post office, that were founded 30 or 40 years ago are struggling to reform. This is why they don't deliver the same quality of services that the new government organisations provide, like for example the Urban Planning Council.
22	We are not government customers here – we are social revenues.
23	As an expatriate, you don't have a right to say anything, therefore you don't identify yourself with this place and therefore you kind of feel not responsible for the city. It

	makes the expatriates consumers only.
24	I think the government is run like a company. It needs to create demand and revenue for its products. And the products in this case are the government services …the visa services, parking and all that stuff. The best way government can generate demand and revenue is to create a situation where you need to fork out money to continue to be in the system. For the government to continue to make a profit margin, they need to continue to provide that service. For people to want to continue to come here, they have to offer good public services.
25	Government services here are still a lot more subsidized than anywhere else in the world.
26	The government makes sure that everyone is happy. The Emiratis get their houses for free and well-paid jobs in the government and they get good education with international universities. And the expatriates get Yas Island and all the shopping malls.
27	All the services and facilities that the government provides should be built based on the demands and needs of the customers. Abu Dhabi government is on the way in some areas, and in some others not.
28	In fact, you know sometimes the situation here where they put badly trained Emiratis into all the government jobs just because they are Emiratis really reminds me of Zimbabwe after independence where all the black people started getting jobs just because they were black. I mean the white people were still there, you know, but the black power was there. And amongst the black people there was this reassurance that this is our ship. It was like an empowerment kind of thing. And I think this country feels like that a lot too. But in Zimbabwe it didn't create a meritocracy…I mean it started off well but then it took a turn for the worst at some point. But that was the idea…to promote nationalism and get all the black people excited about the new things that were happening at the time.
29	The government brought in some very good people from Western countries to work in government here. These people are government experts and have a track record of creating state-of-the-art government services in their area of expertise.
30	The problem is that in many departments, the government's organisational culture is dominated by the old, traditional mindset, and by the older generation. The young, forward-thinking Locals and expatriates, who work in these Entities and want to initiate change, are unable to actually implement any progress because there is too much red tape put up by the old bureaucracy...too much politics. So it's about people and the authority they get.
31	The reason why government services here are so good is because of the attitude at the top. We have very good leaders here. And it's all about leadership!

32	Abu Dhabi government is willing to learn – and that also includes the bad lessons. That is why government services are of good quality here.
33	If you look at the government services from 1988 until today, you can see how much they have improved. Before, there was a lot of paperwork and it would take a very long time to get everything back. Now with the technology, you can do everything online and everything is easy. It is not complicated like it was before.
34	Other countries can definitely learn from Abu Dhabi government. Everything here is done electronically. The technology is very good.
35	The government here puts the right people in the management positions. Unlike before, the new people now are all educated. That is why they give you more and better services.
36	The government here has great vision and does not limit it's thinking. They even have a plan for 2030 now.
37	Abu Dhabi government has the same rules for everyone. Let's say I go to the immigration with a request. The person behind the counter says 'no, you are not entitled to this because we have some rules'. I can move to the second person and to the third person all the way until the end of the counter - but they will all say the same that the first one said: these are the rules and you have to follow them.
38	We don't have corruption in Abu Dhabi.
39	Education is the biggest reason behind Abu Dhabi government's success in providing services around customers.
40	If you complete all forms and applications according to the government's requirements, then you can just submit them and get the approval the next day - guaranteed.
41	When you see what the Sheikh does for his people…the people are more than happy. The Sheikh loves his people.
42	Here, the government provides the same services for everybody, whether you are Local or non-Local. They treat everyone equally.
43	The leaders in the government are already thinking about what needs to be improved. The people don't need to worry about that.
44	So for me, there are active and passive customers. Active is about services you proactively have to go to, i.e. marriage or business licensing or visas or passport services. The passive service users are those who just benefit from the existing services without having to ask for it or even without paying much attention to it, i.e. roads, electricity, taxi etc.

45	For business customers, the government services here can sometimes be a little bit problematic. For example, for factories, the road may exist but there is no water, no electricity, no sewage, the licensing may take a while. There are ways in which those things sometimes are not provided in good or reasonable time, and it negatively affects business.
46	Oftentimes, Abu Dhabi government's information website or 800 555 number might give you a fair idea of what some of the requirements are to get a service but there is a discrepancy between the information provided and what you encounter when you actually go for the service.
47	Often times you encounter frontline staff that are not so much focused on making your experience positive. It s like you are disturbing them. No direction, no information, no interaction. Your experience as a service user depends on whether the frontline staff happens to be in a good mood on that day, or whether or not you are you interrupting their coffee break, or their BBM chat.
48	I mean they have avenues of redress through the 800 555 website but who uses that? I wouldn't! There is no point in complaining here.
49	If you are not a Local or at least an Arab, then you are seen more as a nuisance than anything else. You just have different levels of nuisance. So the nuisance I pose to the government, as a black person, is a bit further down the pecking order than maybe the nuisance of a white European.
50	My observation is that there is definitely some sort of stratification among different customer groups. We are not all equal and that shows itself in terms of how you are perceived and how you are received when getting services.
51	Actually, in term of government services, gender matters fundamentally here. Service providers are a bit more patient and a bit more helpful towards female service users. Look at when you take a bus – women and families go first…no matter whether they are at the back of the line. All the men have to wait. If you are a man standing with a woman beside you, great. If you are a man with a woman and a kid, even better. Single men get served last. This is definitely the culture here.
52	When it comes to service user groups, what we have here is kind of an ethnic kind of breakdown mixed with a skills-based breakdown. Depending on what group or sub-group you belong to, you will have a different service user experience. At the bottom, you have the working class expatriates - the labourers, the teaboys, the housemaids from the sub-continent. And then in the next category above the labourers, you have the medium-skilled Fillipinos, Ethiopians, Sudanese etc. Above the medium-skilled group is the professional expat group. At the bottom of this professional pile here now, you have the highly skilled black people and Asians. Then it goes up with Westerners like the Australians and white South Africans, and above that the Europeans and Canadians, and then at the top Americans. Other Arabs go all across the upper middle. When you

	come up to the very top, you have the group of Locals. At the bottom of that group, you have the poor Locals and those that were naturalized when it was still possible. Then you have the dominant tribes and the Sheikhs. Some Locals can go to a hospital and get VIP and VVIP treatment – but some other Locals have to just wait…those who don't have the money or the connections.
53	I mean money definitely makes a difference. When you go for a service, you can wait or you can pay extra money and get it much quicker.
53	If you are connected and you know who is working today, you send your company's Public Relations Officer - and he returns it within one day. So when I want a visa for my son, I give everything to my company's PRO and he brings it back in the evening. If you are not connected in this way, you will get your service but not as quickly and efficiently.
55	At the end of the day, being a government customer here means going through a lot of bureaucracy, which is made worse by a lack of information, direction and clarity.
56	My employer, the Abu Dhabi government, gives me prestige and that has an impact on my status as a customer. I am treated better as a service user because of my employer.
57	But what I would say, in countries where frontline staff knows that customers can report them or complain about them and they might get sacked, there is a tendency to be more helpful, grin it and bear it, and to reduce the opportunity of being called 'biased'. Whereas here, frontline staff can be almost rude because treating customers in a 'biased' way is normal.
58	This is a multi-cultural and multi-national society. We should at least appear to be addressing all the service users.
59	Oftentimes, you feel almost like a nuisance because you are a non-Arabic speaker trying to engage with a service provider where the frontline staff doesn't have a strong command of English. Then you become a nuisance to that person, in as much as you find that person to be a nuisance to you. So the language is definitely a big part of it.
60	The culture here can seem rude too because men don't talk to women, and women don't talk to men. And therefore, there is no need for pleasantries. But why would a woman not be congenial to any customer who comes in, regardless of the customer's gender?!
61	There is a distinction here between what the government writes, and what it says, and what it does. In government policy it is written that we want to be one of the top customer-centric governments in the world. Government officials talk about treating citizens and residents as customers and providing a good customer experience - but you don't see it. Government policy and strategy do not translate into actual delivery on the ground. There is certainly a disconnect.

62	'Government customer' and 'excellence in public services' exist as concepts in this country but they are not being translated from the hierarchy of policy into the realm of strategy, and from there into actionable goals for the government entities so that they deliver.
63	There is a weakness with turning the concept of customer-centric services from strategy to delivery because people working in government are not being held accountable for delivering on this.
64	Here, frontline staff is not held to account for good customer service. No one is going to throw out a Local lady working at the counter of the Traffic Authority for bad customer service skills, are they?
65	Customer-centric government can only come from change and progress.
66	Accountability is key in making government services better and more customer-oriented. The greatest accountability mechanism here is the Excellence Award Programme - and that is a paper exercise every two years. On a routine day-to-day basis, how are we ensuring that the people who interact with the public and the processes that the people must follow are the most effective and most efficient one, and reflect government's vision of customer-centricity?
67	Even with all the money, resources, and technology, it isn't working. Government services are not focused on customers.
68	For most people working in government and public places here, it is about having a job, getting paid, getting up in the morning and signing in, and then leave as quickly as possible. They know they will all be promoted or they will keep their jobs – no change. For them it is not about learning and growth, it is about the prestige and salary. It is not about building up the mechanisms of governance and customer service in the government, and good service delivery….its not about that. How are you going to be a good health care provider with an attitude like this? And the few good people, they get picked after three or six months and then they are gone to assist some Sheikh.
69	Everyone says that Abu Dhabi government provides good services because of the money and the resources they have. But look at how much resources and technology they are pouring into government services? And how much value do they get out of it? If you compare it dollar for dollar, you will find that other countries have done less with more. Given the money that they throw at government services, they should provide a much better customer experience. What you get out of it is not commensurate with the investments.
70	This government treats everyone the same – it doesn't matter what country you come from.

71	Government services here are excellent. They explain everything to the customers, and they hurry to help you with your query. They don't like to disappoint customers.
72	Language is a problem here…the police, traffic wardens, CID and hospital staff don't know English, only Arabic.
73	Here, the government's first priority is God. There are also Christians and Buddhists and Hindus who come to use services but Muslim women get served quicker and better than non-Muslim women.
74	The government makes sure that it is very safe here. No need to be afraid.
75	The government hotline works well here. One time, we waited for the bus. The driver didn't care – he didn't stop to pick us up. We called 800 555 to complain. They asked about the number and route of the bus, what is your name, and then they said 'ok, we will call to this man and take action'. In our country, if you are going to the police, they will tell you 'tomorrow, tomorrow'. They don't take action.
76	Here government services are really good because there is no corruption.
77	Government services are good because there is no argument here – what the King says, everyone will do.
78	Some laws are being enforced and others are not. For example, when it comes to employment law for cleaners or other small workers. The government has laws, but the companies do what they want because the government is not checking up on them. They know the government doesn't care – we are only cleaners after all.
79	I don't think that the government sees us as customers. They only see as workers because they only care about our work.
80	What you mean…'government customer'? Expatriates, we are driving the economy here but we don't have any rights!
81	Abu Dhabi government seems to be comfortable and very professional in delivering public services. This is probably not least due to the sheer volume of transactions.
82	I think the government's success is down to processes and systems – it's not the people.
83	As a business, my opinion is that the cost of doing business here is really exorbitant. It is very high and unreasonable. It becomes a business in itself, rather than a service. It is almost like the government is taking advantage of us.
84	I think that the government is taking advantage of the paying public - and their levy is very high. If you want to get a driving license….oh my God!
85	The government is very good at enforcing the law.

86	I think the government is very conscious about treating everyone equally as government customers.
87	Government customers here are obedient. I think that, to some extent, the religion also influences this kind of obedience. Look at Islam – the fundamental tenet is obedience to God…and of course obedience to authority.
88	The government takes care of its citizens (Locals) economically. Even though it is a monarch that rules, the government also takes care of its people politically to some extent because there is some resemblance of representation. I mean there is no consultation on how to improve services but there are avenues for complaints.
89	In Abu Dhabi, maintaining the status quo, I believe, is helping them to be good at government services.
90	Like most companies here, we always force everything through with the help of our Public Relations Officer, whose job it is exclusively to deal physically with the government.
91	Democracy and participation is nothing – you cannot eat it. Again, I go back to the issue of economy. The reason why public services are of such high quality here is down to the question of equalizing the economic opportunities given to the people.
92	In Singapore, they have the best government services in the world because they are disciplined. And it is not a blind obedience…it is like everybody is aligned and pulls together. It's not because they are forced to do it, but out of necessity to survive. It became a national consciousness; it became part of their culture. Here in Abu Dhabi, the Locals don't have discipline – that is not part of their culture.
93	In Abu Dhabi government, the workforce is not intellectually advanced. They may have all the gadgets but I don't think that intellectually they can be compared to countries like Singapore.
	In Abu Dhabi, and I am not letting out a state secret here, the ease of doing business is ranked poorly. And government services are an important reason behind that. The ease of doing business is often related to the number of days it takes to register your business and go through all the other required steps. In Abu Dhabi, there are more steps than elsewhere, and these steps take longer and are more expensive.
94	The government here is committed to growing and learning. They have limited human resources here in this country so that's why they bring in people from outside – to grow.
95	But the government communicates with the foreign service users in a good way. You have your right here and everyone gets the same good services.
96	To be honest with you, sometimes the foreign service users are standing in one queue. The others, the Locals have a separate queue. But I feel this one is better because this is

	their country, so they have to be special compared to the foreigners.
97	Of course, all government customers are welcome. We are Arab people. We have our traditions. We have to be kind and hospitable to guests. You get my point? But still it is our home so we have to feel more comfortable than the guest.
98	The lady customers are like a jewel…like a diamond. If you have a diamond, you can't leave it in the open because maybe someone can steal it. So we have to treat every lady like a diamond. We have to protect her. So the services here respect the ladies… not only the wife but also the daughters, sisters, cousins.
99	The government is doing so well because of the psychological side of the Locals. They have their own dream and they have money. When you get money, you need to have purpose. Here they have the money and their ambitions and dreams give them the purpose.
100	The services are so good because the government has skills that come from the foreigners.
101	The government is constantly improving because here, they don't have limits.
102	An autocratic government is definitely better at delivering reform because the democratic government concerns itself with everyone's opinions - so the decisions take longer. What takes one hour in an autocratic government maybe takes a year in a democratic one.
103	My feeling is that government services here are not very efficient even though they have a lot of money in this country. I believe with the amount of resources that they have, government services should be a lot better than it is right now.
104	The government does use its full resources. With the parking, for example, they used a good system and they put the unemployed Emiratis to work as parking officers. That is making use of both technical resources and human capital. I mean most of the parking officers don't speak English but at least they got their people into work, which was more the government's aim than anything else.
105	Today I was in a police station and it was just typical. There was a lot of resources available. Today there were three working computers but only one was being used. There were approximately twenty people waiting in line - and they were being served by only one guy who didn't seem in any hurry to help the customers.
106	If a Local walks into a government office and then an expat walks into a government office, you will definitely see a difference in the treatment they are getting. The Local person will get the first priority. Even with the timing, it s just a lot different. The expatriate waits lets say for an hour, while the Local person walks in after the expatriate but will get served within five minutes.

107	I don't feel that there is anything that I could say that would change the way services are delivered. In fact, if I do say anything I m sure it would backfire and put me in a really difficult situation. So I rather just keep my opinion to myself.
108	I have been living here all my life and I have seen a lot of things with the government…things that I don't really want to mention. Throughout my time here, I have learned not to give my voice. It became a habit to me not to voice my opinion about these issues. Now I am so used to not raising my voice that I don't really want to talk about it.
109	I mean there have been a lot of changes with the government services throughout the last ten, eleven years but I think they haven't really advanced. For example, today at the police station, everyone had to stand in line and give their details to be taken. But the government has all this information about us already. I mean it's a traffic department – they have our license, our registration, all this is already in the system, they know everything about us. How about taking our license number, and then pulling up all the information about us, and that way we would just spend 5 minutes in that place instead of hours.
110	With the technology and money that is available, you would expect services to be a lot better.
111	So they have the technology and they have the money, but they don't have good, innovative people that are trained to get the most out of the equipment.
112	It's almost like the need to create jobs for Locals means that government services are not as good as they could be.
113	I mean, fine I understand the need to give government jobs to Emiratis – it's their country. But if they are going to get the jobs, then they should be trained to work well with the equipment, think for themselves, know how to handle customers and do the process faster.
114	But I m scared if I do say something it would make a lot of problems for me. And me being an expat, I am here for education, I m here for working…and saying something like this might just end all this. If you talk about the government not doing things well, I think the worst thing that could happen is maybe prison time or getting deported. I wish I could say it…
115	I don't feel like a valued person. I don't have many rights here.
116	If there were at least a professional to which people would be able to go and voice their opinion. Then the professional would explain our opinions go to the government. Of course, the professional would have to be a person that the government respects rather than just anybody. I think that way, we might be able to improve services.

117	If the expatriates could voice their opinion, then there would be more pressure on service improvement.
118	I think the only reason why this model works is because service users here can afford those services. If the Sheikh says 'everyone needs to get an Emirates ID and pay 100 Dirhams', we will do it because somehow everyone has money to afford this. But in countries where people don't have enough money in their pockets to purchase government services, you would then have an Arab-spring-type of perspective. So as long as there is sufficient money going around, people will be happy.
119	The government wants to keep the people happy here, and that includes good public services. Even the expatriates get certain benefits that they would never get in their home countries.
120	The government here goes well with our Islamic culture. In our belief we don't really have a say and whatever God says, will happen. And also our prophet, whatever he said and did is what we say and do…and it is what is right.
121	I mean when an Emirati serves another Emirati, they are very diplomatic. Incentive-wise, when an Emirati serves an Emirati then there is a respect since the person is one of their own, has the same culture, they know each other's family. There might actually be repercussions for not serving them well…at the very least it would be socially unacceptable.
122	Nothing needs to be improved here. Here, we have the best government services in the world.
123	The government wants government offices to be staffed by Emiratis. And most of the Emiratis don't really have the intellectual ability or the mindset or the motivation to do it well. I mean, if someone has been given money since childhood, then money won't really be a motivator for them, right?.
124	I am a grateful customer because the government services here offer some security that we cannot get in my home country.
125	Government services here are good compared to our home countries. For example, in my home country, if you call the police, they will come but you have to pay backsheesh.
126	The government here does not really take care of us.
127	Generally, I think that it is better to have the power to change the ruling government if you don't like what they are doing. And that makes a difference for the services.
128	Here, the government looks after its citizens. And for us foreign workers, it is our employer and the human resources who look after us – not the government.

129	The services here are good. But they have this thing…skin-colour-wise. When I have to use government services, I don't feel that respect. The government will give you a list: these five hospitals are for Indians and Sri Lankans, these five hospitals are for Europeans and these five hospitals are for Arabs. In a way, they are trying to differentiate between people.
130	Once I was very drunk and I came out of the club. The police stopped and asked where am I going. I told them I m going to my accommodation. They said 'ok – get in the care and we ll drop you'. And they drove me to my accommodation and said 'go to your room'. That was very nice!
131	Here, the government has the power to do everything. The Sheikh will say 'no, I m not giving you that, but I'm gonna give you this'. And you have to be okay with it.
132	Here, with this government, you don't get to disagree. They will tell you what to do, and you have to do it. This is the essence of dictatorship. In other places, I can give them the middle finger and say 'no'. Here, I cannot fight back.
133	But here, as I said, the system and the government services are working really well….better than in democratic countries! I think this is because politicians think about their pocket a lot. A dictator thinks about his life a lot. The Sheikh and his family will be so nice and friendly to the people, so that the people don't want to kill him. Whereas the politicians, because they constantly need funding, they will be helpful and friendly only to those with money, thinking 'okay, maybe this bugger will fund my campaign and my political plans'.
134	It's definitely not the religion that makes the services good here. They say they are Muslims. But they say one thing, and they do another thing. They do all kind of things that they shouldn't do if they followed the religion…but they can't say it out loud.
135	As I said, I don't get to choose. If you come and look at it on the surface, you might think 'wow - everything is laid out for service users…left and right, north and south…it's all in black and white'. But if you check it, I don't get to choose my hospital or my bank. It says 'free healthcare' but only in the hospital that they give you, the bank that they tell you to go to…you know why? Because they say so!
136	For some people, living and working in Abu Dhabi means everything to them…their whole families in India or Bangladesh depend on it. So whatever the shit that the government does to them, they just hold it in and keep it to themselves. Your heart says its wrong, but your mind says its right.
137	Here, it's very hierarchical. If a person is in a tight situation, they will only listen to the top person with power. They won't even do a proper investigation. They will kick you out just because the person higher on the hierarchy ladder says 'I want him out'.

138	In Abu Dhabi, the rulers have their fingers in everything. For example, the ruler is the owner of our Hotel building. The hotel is an international chain. Our hotel manager said, look I want my staff accommodation to be comfortable because we are a reputed company. The ruler said 'no, you do as I say because this is my building'. This is because they have power, this is dictatorship. Im Sheikh – I don't care who you are, you will do it. In other countries, you rent a place and you decide what you do with it.
139	I would say for all expatriates, nobody is at liberty to say something. Whatever the heck goes on, they will say 'I will keep my mouth shut because of the finances'. And true in a way because you have to think of your families.
140	The government says 'we care about you, this is the government service number 800 555, call us!' You call them and complain against a person, maybe a rude frontline staff, then that person will learn about it and come to you and give you bamboo. That's why a lot of people don't bother.
141	The systems are good here. I mean, they are not perfect but they have been blinged out to look perfect.
142	Here they have lots of facilities and staff - not like in our country. For every 100 doctors in Pakistan, there are a 1000 people waiting. Here, there are 1000 doctors and 100 people waiting.
143	Here everything is good. Here I have room and money but no family. In Pakistan, I have family but family is staying in one back room.
144	Life is very nice here for everyone. It is comfortable for everyone. Nothing needs to improve.
145	The laws here in this country makes everything very simple for Local people. You have to go to school for only nine years and then you can get very good job with your school paper – especially in the army and police here. They will accept you.
146	Every government department has a special number to call. The other day, some con-artists cheated my mother out of 5800 Dirhams. So I called police. The police said call 800 2666. When I called that number, they told me to go to the special crime fighting department that deals with internet and telephone fraud…in Muroor. So my dad and I went there and told them about our problem. But until now we haven't heard back from them.
147	Our employer provides everything for us – they are like our personal government.
148	I mean I haven't encountered anything to complain about but I would voice my opinion. I know not everyone will complain but maybe somebody complained before me, so when I complain then there is more people complaining and eventually they will take action then.

149	The major thing is the technology. They have BMW, they have the fastest cars, the latest technology.
150	They are very fast and efficient. If you have any problem on the road or in your house, you call them and they will be in front of you in 5 minutes.
151	Here they are really fast. As long as you have the proper documentation, they will deliver your service on the spot.
152	But here you cannot say anything against the king. Here, they maybe only discuss how to do services but not what to do – because the king will tell them.
153	Here, the services are so good because they have the right people in place. The government itself is very capable plus they have hired many intelligent and experienced people from outside.
154	I wouldn't complain here because the government is very busy with more important things than my issue.
155	'Government customer' sounds very interesting coz I know I am a customer as far as spending and consuming goods and services goes…but I would see myself more as…'government bitch' here.
156	It's the availability that makes the services good here.
157	Government services here are very affordable. It's cheaper than in most places in New York.
158	They are making a lot of money here, for example by issuing parking tickets. Even if you get a parking permit that you pay money for, but then you still can't find a parking space. So then you pay even more coz you have to pay for a parking ticket as well as your parking permit, which is supposed to enable you to park wherever but you can only park in a certain place on a certain day, at a certain time.
159	Back home, it's more of a customer relationship coz there I know that my money is going towards improving the service…the government will use the money to pay for better roads, better parking, better services. Whereas here, where is the money going? There is no accountability here.
160	Here, there is not really an opportunity to feedback what would be more efficient for us or what our concerns are. I don't know whether this is just down to information and communication because the main language here is Arabic. So maybe all the information is communicated to people who speak Arabic but as far as other people who speak English …we don't know what's going on or what department to voice our concerns to.
161	I mean it's always an obstacle getting anything done here. Even something as simple as when they wanted everyone to get an Emirates ID. That was like impossible coz you

	didn't know the office hours, which documents to bring in, where to go. And even when you came in, they were like 'we can only process this part of the application, you need to come back in a week or two and then we will take fingerprints and a photo, and then we will issue an ID a month later, and then you need to come and pick it up somewhere else'. Here, we don't have like a one-stop-service.
162	The people who provide the service are not very well informed, I think. The government just hires some people who are like 'ok, this is my job'. But if you have any questions, they won't know anything. This is very different in the US. The staff will be very knowledgeable. You can talk to someone who walks you through the entire process.
163	Here there is favoritism…someone in a dish dash or abaya or if they are female, then they can jump the line and go straight to the front. In my culture, we have fairness and equality – no person is better than the other person, and no one should be treated differently because of their color, gender, nationality etc.
164	Part of living here means that I have to adapt to what is being enforced by the Sheikh. But at home, I am used to everyone having their say and giving feedback whereas here you have to do what they say.
165	I have been frustrated but I never complained. I feel like my complaint would be overlooked and it is not worth the run-around they give everyone. You know the whole 'go here, come there, bring this, come back again'…I m sure its gonna be the same with the complaint process.
166	I mean here we have mostly responsibilities, not rights.
167	Here, I am an uninformed customer. I never know what's going on. And when I do get the information it's weeks after it has already been enforced. Whereas in the States, I pretty much know a policy that is about to come into formation. We have the right to participate or not. We have the right to speak our mind. Here I m lost…small fish in a big pond.
168	The government services here are very organized and impressive. I always admire the order and proper ways in which everything is done here.
169	I think it 's the local culture and values that are behind the good government services. Here, they have a very traditional culture that comes from the past, from their Bedouin culture. The Bedouin culture has good values that they still try to apply to today world – and it shows in the public service. These are things such as family values, the friendship values, hospitality etc.
170	The religion definitely has something to do with the good services because it has at its centre these values…friendship, brotherhood, family values.

171	Here the government is better because they have less bureaucracy. If they need something and have their requirements, then they think about the solution and just do it. In Europe, we have a lot of laws and procedures and different organisational agendas crossing each other.
172	The reason why government services are so good here is because of the training and education. You know, the UAE has a lot of people from other countries who come here with their different knowledge. So I think it's the training that is behind it. Good training.
173	Here it is not like in other countries where you have to pay baksheesh. Here we don't have corruption. That makes a massive difference for the government services.
174	Our government is keeping the country safe…state security.
175	We don't really have much choice because there is no competition. If there were more companies that would be better for the customer so that we have choice.
176	I will tell you something. Locals here, we don't complete one million but there is eight million foreigners. But its my country. So when for example I need something from immigration, there are 200 Indians and me the only Local. Then the staff will call me to the front because there is only one of me, so the 200 can wait.
177	But now more often Locals also have to take a number and get in line. New system. It would be better if the government makes special services for Locals and then another service for the others. Because it is my country. The foreigners come maybe for two years to fill their stomach and then they go. But I don't go anywhere because this is my country.
178	I have travelled to many countries. But we have the best government services in the world here in Abu Dhabi. Here when I go to the hospital, it will take 2 minutes, 3 minutes, maybe ten minutes for the doctor to see me. In London, we went and they asked us to wait for 2 hours. No really, here is the best. Maybe I say that because I'm Local.
179	We have many ways of consultation processes. But its different because we don't have a democratic government here. We have the Majlis. That is where a selected representative speaks to the Sheikh and tells him what we the people need. But then also, I can go directly to the Sheikh during special times like Ramadan. Also there is this Abu Dhabi radio show in Arabic that we have. It's a programme where anyone can call in and say what problem they have, what they don't like and maybe the government can help or explain why they do certain things.
180	We are so happy here. But some people, you know, they just make problems even though they don't have any problems. They want to vote and have more rights. Our government give them house, job, car, salary…they have everything. But they make

	new problems. We have so many rights, why ask for even more rights?
181	Here, I feel like a customer in a private company. There is a free number I can call, and they try to take care of me. Lot's of services are free for Locals, like insurance and electricity. And they send us text messages if I have an appointment. Also after I get services, they will call me and ask whether I liked the service. If I have to go in, it won't be more than five minutes and I will be finished.
182	My general sense about the government here is that it is progressive. Is it up to the standards of Singapore or maybe the US…no, definitely not! But I do think that they have done a pretty good job relatively speaking.
183	They have done a pretty good job in terms of government services. I think that is because the Abu Dhabi government had the resources and the political will to push through reforms. Their success factor was that they had the money and the political will to hire a lot of consultants and to put a lot of systems into place very quickly that other countries would not have been able to do.
184	There is another additional factor for the government's success in service provision. I don't think it is talked about a lot. A lot of the government leaders, many of them have gone to school and have had experiences outside of this country. I think that they are heavily influenced by the experiences they had living and working and studying in the UK, US and Australia. I think once a human gets used to that, you see the light.
185	The local Emirati culture is important to look at. Although the Locals are the minority, their culture is the dominant one, the one that influences the decision-making here and what the money is spent on. Especially from a government customer perspective, the culture is Abu Dhabi. So the local Emirati culture affects all of us.
186	Here, it is not part of their culture that they want to serve people. I mean this is what happens when you have kind of an absentee parenting philosophy at the household and kids being raised by nannies and being given anything they want. Because if you are raised like that, your idea of service is totally different. Like in our culture, here I speak as an American, we have this cowboy mentality, we have this 'raising yourself up by your bootstraps' mentality: if you work hard, you will succeed. That's why we have a system where our waitresses legally make less of a salary because of the tips. They make tips based on the service they provide. There is nothing like this here in the local culture that gives them the incentive to want to serve people. It is not bred into them. They are used to being served, not providing good services.
187	Abu Dhabi government's political will is not about a culture or an inherent drive to serve. It is more of a business decision. They do it because they see that they have to in order to gain what they want, which is investment and tourism, they want to be sustainable and so forth.

188	There are inconsistencies between the religion and how it is played out here in terms of public services. Islam is very much social-service-oriented, do good, you are supposed to do charity work, you are supposed to give back. But what that turned into here is people throwing money into a box at Lulus. That s why people struggle here to build volunteerism – same issue. On the rare occasions on which people volunteer, they don't want to do service work. They only want to do the glamour work. That goes back to how a culture defines services and giving back. I don't think the culture here is consistent with what Islam says about service. I think how it is interpreted here is 'you get money'.
189	But maybe it is not even about wanting or not wanting to serve but there is just a complete lack of understanding on the part of the leadership on what it takes to train someone so that they can provide good services.
190	The government is kind of like 'yes I want everyone to experience good services but it is not gonna be me doing it. Its going to be the Filipinos or the Indians etc. and the only thing we are gonna do is pay for it and manage it'.
191	I mean the Abu Dhabi government hires the world's best advisors, which kind of absolves them from doing any of the work, and more importantly, any of the thinking. So what you have is a government with a business culture that is paying people to come and think for them. Do they even read the documents that the hired thinkers produce? Often not! Instead, the managers in government will ask you to just tell them the gist of it.
192	There is a larger issue here: they don't learn and put in the time in order to achieve results. This affects the culture of training and skill development that the government promotes. Here, there is a learning culture whereby it is just about getting a certificate. What you can gain in skills is secondary. I mean they do want it but it's not as important as a certificate in their name.
193	Let me give you an example. The other day, the Head of Training in a government entity said to the Head of Department: 'Look, you are bringing all these new Emirati staff into government as part of the Emiratisation drive. So you have this influx of people who are sitting there but we don't have no budget to train them. So why don't I, for free and just as part of my job, develop like a 'lunch-and-learn' training program? It would be non-mandatory and open to anyone who shows up'. And the Head of the Department said no because there would not be a certificate at the end of it and it wasn't affiliated with some big-name university. This is a perfect example. If it is not glossy and shiny and has Harvard or Oxford attached to it, then it doesn't have value.
194	I am calling it 'customer service schizophrenia'. I mean schizophrenia is kind of a dramatic term but this is the same I would say here. Part of the system believes in it and throws so much money at it, but at the same time you have a system that is often working against you in implementing your customer service.

195	To whom do those of us working in government have a responsibility to deliver good customer-centric services? I do think that there is a responsibility but only back to the community of local Emiratis. Remember, here you have a government that is not based on taxation, and you have money in the hands of certain royals. They know and everybody else knows that they have a responsibility to distribute it back. They are not doing it to be nice. I think there is a heavy recognition now in the light of the Arab Spring of the responsibility to give back and serve locals.
196	In my opinion, the government does feel a certain responsibility to certain groups of people other than the Locals, like other Gulf Arabs, other Arabs or highly skilled Western expats. But other people are not worth it. The expandable people, once they are done building the buildings, they can go home. If you ask an Emirati and they really admitted the truth: does an Indian laborer have the same rights to get quick good service as your Booze Allen consultant whom you are spending lots of money on? Whether they admit it or not, the answer is no. And that gets us into the really big issues of inter-Arab racism, general racism, classism…I think it becomes really complicated.
197	Do people often serve others differently? Of course! But here it is just accepted as normal.
198	Now, alternatively, rather than providing basic human rights, minimum wages or basic labor conditions, the government here is not worried about keeping those low-skilled expatriate labourers happy – they are just going to different countries to get their labor. Because in their mind, anybody can build a building. So when a few years ago the Indian labors started to protest and throw rocks, they were sent to jail. The government will send them home and get cheaper labor from Indonesia or Thailand. At the moment China and Myanmar are big ones.
199	By the way, this doesn't exist for other countries but the Filipinos have a minimum wage here. I have a Filipino maid and when I signed her contract, it actually has to be countersigned by the Filipino embassy here. This is outside of the government system here. I have to commit to paying her the minimum wage.
200	I see the value of the benevolent ruler model. Okay it's not a democracy. But do people, through the culture and local institutions such as the Majilis, do they get their opinions expressed and do they exert pressure on the ruler? Yes they do.
201	I think the governance model has worked well here just in the same sense that the US Military has worked well. When you have an authoritarian or military-type town-down approach, you can get a lot done in terms of implementation. If Abu Dhabi government didn't have that system, there is no way that they would have implemented this change and all these service improvements this quickly.
202	The issue of voice is really interesting here because there is a two-track reality. There is the reality that we know about, which is the official channel. We are trying to build a transparent government, we put in place the 0800 555 number for people to call - that is

	one track. And then there is the informal system where people with Wasta and connections are trying to influence the system, or people going to the Majilis or seeing the Sheikh on Ramadan.
203	So what is really interesting here is if you shut down the informal system for voice here (Majilis etc.), the formal system would take root and solidify and ultimately provide services quicker. But in this culture that is not acceptable. You still have people picking up the phone and exercising informal channels to get services quicker, cheaper, and better.
204	I am not saying that having an informal and informal system for service user voice is bad but it does have an impact on slowing down the way you want to build your formal system to accommodate your new system. I am not saying it is bad because I think it is one way the people here have been able to stomach all of this fast-paced change– by keeping that informal track. It letting them maintain their culture.
205	In some ways, the informal track for service user voice (e.g. Majilis) privileges local voices whereas the formal track (e.g. 800 555) is for everyone to have their voice heard. It is not just two ways to accommodate but its two systems build for two kinds of people – your locals and your non-locals.
206	But I do think there is a sense of forcing some locals to try and use those formal mechanisms, such as service centers and 800 555. But then again this is where it comes down to class systems because the poorer Emiratis who are not from any of the big families are the ones to stand in line at the service centers and use the formal mechanisms – not the other Emiratis.
207	The informal mechanisms are not just about how things are done. You would be removing a huge element of their culture. People don't just go to Majilis to get things done…this is also where they do their socializing! So if you take away both – the way things are done and the mechanisms for communicating and socializing, then what do you have left? Only a cardboard, boring 800 555 Western type of de-humanized interaction.
208	What drives everything here, in my opinion, is that people find satisfaction in the process, not just the end result. Here, just to get a service, people will go places that they don't have to go - when they could just pick up the phone and call. Because it puts this rhythm into their lives and this richness. It s about a desire to interact with people. I mean it's the collectivist culture thing. Where do people go to get their energy and what makes life worth living for them? For us in the States, its love, efficiency and money. Here, efficiency is not a motivating factor.
209	Some of the service improvements are seen as good or bad depending on your cultural lens. Let me give you an example. The government brought an American hospital in to help them manage their hospitals. Before, the hospital usually had four nurses on the ward but now they cut it down to two. When I was calling for a nurse, nobody came

	because one of them was on break and the other one was helping another woman. And when I demanded to talk to someone who is in charge, she said
	'this is what happens with American efficiency: they made us cut people and we haven't been able to give the right kind of service to people'. So interestingly there is some benefits but some of these benefits are culturally relevant and depend on the eye of the beholder.
210	Ultimately, I have gotten good public services here because of who I am and how demanding I am but not because the system is working that well.
211	Here citizens think that the government is obliged to provide excellent services. They see it more as the duty of the government but they don't know what their responsibility back is. It's a one-way street.
212	But there is such a strong focus on satisfying the citizens that they don't know the value of the services anymore. There is little appreciation of the services provided.
213	No matter what they want, it is gonna be provided. So they know their rights but they don't know their duties.
214	So they are highly demanding here. So we have this culture – the more you give, the more they want.
215	For the government to be on that level…because in this country they were not really planning for most of these services. It kind of happened and they adopted services while they went along, and then they had to adopt more to please the customers.
216	It is only the responsibility of us working in the government to maintain what s happening and come up with new services and please these demanding customers.
217	They are really good at complaining about government services but then they use these services and don't see a responsibility to help maintaining them or improve them. That is why you always see a lot of complaints but no thank-you and not many ideas or suggestions for improvement.
218	But we have a culture here where even if a child fails his studies or decides to quit school, it is okay for some families cause it's a free education. So that is taken for granted. They are not even utilizing the government services to the maximum that they can.
219	Is it possible that these people have no ideas on how to improve a process? They are the ones who are using the service! If you take a look at the citizen's input, its only about providing more services but not how. I know that most of the Locals, our citizens, travel abroad extensively and see many different practices but no ideas are being brought back. For them its all about being served but not about participating actively.

220	So the current service user generation were pampered and spoiled because they grew up in a period where everything was given to build the country. It was given to them at that time because the leadership wanted to develop the people and gave them free houses, roads, free education etc. And now they take it for granted. And the new, coming generation inherited that and is even more spoiled than the existing one and therefore even more demanding.
221	And especially the Western expats they have seen more, they have seen the services in their countries, so they have high expectations. With the Asian expats…because they were poor and when they come here, they see civilization, so they don't have as much of an expectation as the others.
222	So yes our citizens are used to being served but I think that the citizens should also add ideas and influence what's happening. If you are living the actual life, then you have to have a part in actually trying to improve things through feeding back what changes need to be made, and how that change should take place, or what other services should be added. No matter how hard the government works, it can't work solo.
223	So it is education that matters. In our case, the government is investing so much into the education of our citizens. There are so many free resources for education here – this even includes paid opportunities for the Locals to be educated abroad.
224	Well if you switch on the radio, you will hear people complain about government services all the time. People do have a voice and they exercise it through social media and other channels that are provided.
225	Service users here always complain…it's all complaints about processes and attitudes. They always bring out the problems but they never suggest any solutions.
226	We don't have the culture for it here. Who is gonna confront those Entities? Who is gonna do that? Because each Entity works in cooperation with other Entities. Whose fault is what? Each Entity is run by certain people who are looked at as VIP. So if I m running an Entity and tell another VIP 'well I evaluated this service and this is what is going wrong and this is my Entity's faults and this is your Entity's faults'. Chances are they are gonna take it in a bad way, so nobody wants to go through that confrontation of whose fault is it, who is accountable for it. Confrontation and being accountable is not easy in this culture. This is the nature of Arab culture. With confrontations we are really bad. To blame someone for something or ask for justification or look at something critically takes a lot of courage and is not something easy to do for us.
227	Sheikhs have to look after the people. That is also our culture – the Sheikhs have to listen to the people. That is why the Sheikh is the head of the tribe – and the head of government. In our tradition, the Sheikh is not Sheikh because of the wealth of his family but because of his wisdom and for listening to people and contributing to their wellbeing.

228	The Heads of Entities, who are below the Sheikhs, don't want the Sheikhs to find out if services are not so good because they would be held responsible and then they loose their power. But now with the whole social media, it is kind of threatening because people talk. I mean did you hear about the incident with the Health Minister being fired? One mistake that the Sheikh got to hear about through the radio, and the Health Minster got fired for not listening to people.
229	Even if I m not happy about the service, for me as a woman it would be difficult to talk face-to-face to a guy who is managing a government service. I wouldn't feel that comfortable to address it in public.
230	Maybe online channels…but if you have a complaint and you are angry, the service providers will forget about it.
231	Our people in customer service are not well educated. Most of the time, the front line people don't even have a high school diploma. Their supervisor would be a high school person. They do their routine work, they do it everyday and they don't see outside of the box.
232	The service providers expect the leadership to come up with solutions for improvement as well as make the changes. Everything relies on the leadership and everyone else just executes.
233	It is extremely rare that you find an employee come up with an idea. I know this for a fact. Even the communication channels that exist, also for employees, no one is using it.
234	Even the communication channels that exist, both for customers and employees, no one is using it. You have to actually push people to use it. If you look at the number of people who use these channels vis-à-vis the many channels that are available…it is very, very low.
235	The culture of coming up with ideas and suggestions, of pushing people to think…it is not there. There is no creativity. People don't participate with ideas. Most people here were never exposed to those requirements. Your feedback will be taken – like is it good, is it bad – but to think creatively, to come up with a new idea…not for customers, not for government employees…there is no culture for that.
236	I think that the foundation for creative and participatory service users is laid in schools, in education. If you, as a student, are pushed to be creative, then you will be used to it and encourage that sort of culture with your own kids and in your job. But here in school, they are never asked to be creative.
237	Here, it is more about recycling and reproducing. And if you try to be creative, then people will make fun of you, even criticize you because you are not following what everyone is following.

238	Our religion motivates government staff to strive for quality in government services. Islam encourages people to do their best and enhance each other and look after each other. It is the community first, and then the individual. It is not about just following your own person.
239	Here, we respect the authority. It is not about obeying everyone. To respect authority is to not demolish their prestige - or sort of looking at them in a small way and make them look bad. Respecting is not to obey.
240	In this culture, they tend to use religion for everything. They use part of the Koran; usually it is the beginning of a line, and they take the first four words and overuse it to support their argument. And most of them don't actually follow religion that much but then when it's convenient, then it's always because of the religion. It's easier.
241	The current leadership is still from the old generation, they still have that mentality of being really laid back. If you bring in new, young leadership and inject it into this government more often, you would see the difference.
242	The culture here is taking its time to catch up with Abu Dhabi government's rapid progress. Within less than forty years, the government transformed itself from a point where they had almost no services to such an advanced public service model.
243	If the late Sheikh Zayed and the current leadership didn't believe in this country the way they did, we would have fallen behind. Like so many other leaders in the Arabic world, they could have been greedy and take everything for themselves. If our leadership hadn't pushed, we wouldn't be the country we are today.
244	The combination of education with technology was key to our successful transformation. I remember when I joined university in 1997, every student received her own laptop from the government. Can you imagine? No one in my house knew how to use a computer and I had brothers who are engineers. To have women own laptops and access the internet at that time? The education that comes with technology. It was scandalous! And it was not easy to make people go through it. It changed everything.
245	There is also something about the role model effect of leaders – like the leadership showing the people new ways and introducing new practices. I remember, every time Sheikh Zayed was filmed at an event, he had women taking him around. He even used to take his daughters in front of the camera and to official events. So it became more accepted for women to be active in the public sphere, and to mingle with men. People were like 'well if the Sheikh's daughters can do it, then my daughters can do it'.
246	And it was women education that was a key factor in the government's success. In the 80s, Sheikh Zayed came up with this law that every girl should study at least until sixth grade. And the he opened the female-only Zayed University, where women could go during the day in a culturally appropriate environment. And to introduce women to

	education made a huge difference. Some families were against it. But if women had not had education and if women had not come to interfere in public life, then it would have been a totally different country.
247	It's the infrastructure, its having everything in place.
248	Well the government shows its priorities by the Ministries it creates. So for example having a Ministry of Media, because media was not a sector that was considered culturally important, enabled the government to be closer to the people.
249	Also introducing English opened up a lot of doors too. You get to see more expats, you gradually get to travel, get exposure, learn about so many things in the world. We have that luxury of exposure. And for someone who is exposed to the world, it liberates the person's thinking and it leads to everything else.
250	It is more about the culture and not the religion. And most people confuse that: they take what is the culture as religion – and that is not the case. But really, it is our culture that you see in our government, not our religion.
251	So I wanted to say that the majority of the people who are well-educated now, are women. But if you look around the government, then you see that most of the managers or directors of leading government entities or above – they are men! While most of the people who do the hard work, are actually women. So that culture is still there. That culture of women not being equal and men are still superior.
252	And I told you already, it's the leadership. If you have good leadership in government, they get the best out of the people or they can break the whole team. So it doesn't matter what other initiatives you have to make services customer-centric, if the leaders don't see the value of these initiatives, nothing will go nowhere.
253	Especially in this culture, you need that leadership. People will do it more if the leader wants it. They want the leadership to be happy, for them it's a sign of loyalty. They like the Sheikh – he does so many things for them.
254	Even the small place all over the Emirate, people will come out and say to the Sheikh 'this is not working, we lack this, we need this'. But this is for the Sheikhs – the top leadership. Usually it's the Sheikhs that people open up to, that the want to talk to. They relate to them because the Sheikhs built the country.
255	It is definitely the culture that is the main difference between Western governments and Abu Dhabi government in terms of building customer-centric services. In the West, they have a culture of responsibility. Here, people are like celebrities.
256	I think people should really do better in customer relationships. The customer is always right – it doesn't matter if I'm saying crap but if I'm the customer then I'm always right.

257	If the person providing the service is a Local, and I'm a Local; and if she is a woman and I m a woman, then it is more difficult to get a good service. With people from the same culture, it is more challenging. They have attitude towards me. The Local woman who provides the service will probably think 'you are not better than me, why am I serving you?'
258	It could also be the Arabic pride that is behind the way frontline staff serve customers. Some people will take it in a nice way like they want to serve others. Others really don't want to serve others and if they have to then at least they want to make you know that you are not better than them.
259	Government entities here are very confused about the definition of 'government customers'. Some think that customers are those who pay for services, others will say that customers are those who conduct transactions with the government entities, and yet others will say everyone is a customer including stakeholders.
260	We think it is very important to have a central customer unit in a government entity. This central unit is then responsible for driving a customer-centric approach.
261	Customer-centric services are not really part of standard business yet. It is more a change management project.
262	A focus on customer-centricity is not really part of standard business yet. It is more a change management project.
263	We want to use other methods than just customer surveys. We are thinking about holding town hall meetings with our service users.
264	We don't really need to conduct too many surveys because we know what our customers need.
265	We don't even look at the complaints we receive from our service users – they go straight to the Abu Dhabi Government Contact Centre. The Contact Centre will then forward the complaint to the relevant department in our organisation. It's less headache this way.
266	Contracting survey companies and other organisations to help us with our customer satisfaction work requires a lot of babysitting.
267	Today's customer delight is tomorrow's customer expectation!
268	We are facing so many challenges in becoming a customer-centric government entity. We wish there would be more support available to us.
269	The biggest challenge is to make that cultural shift! How do we put customers at the heart of everything we do?

270	There should be a customer focal person in each Entity who works with a central customer-centric unit that the central government runs to help us.
271	We often get high customer satisfaction scores here. But this is the result of positively skewed data and not a reflection of how good government services are.
272	We have a culture here whereby government entities measure to satisfy the leadership – not to really get insight into government customers. Entities are under a lot of pressure 'to look good' in front of the leadership.
273	This sounds a bit like a paradox, but here in Abu Dhabi Government it is not about understanding the customer experience so that services can be improved. Service improvement is somehow not the real purpose.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Information Sheet

"What is YOUR personal viewpoint on the customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi?"

I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. I would like to invite you to participate in my *online* research study. This Information Sheet explains what this study is about and how I would like you to participate.

The purpose of my study is to gather a variety of viewpoints that people have on customer-centric reform in Abu Dhabi in order to identify shared meaning structures. I want to know what you think about Abu Dhabi Government's efforts to create government services that are built around the needs of government customers/service users. I am interested in your PERSONAL VIEWPOINT, not facts! This study is anonymous, which means that the computer will not ask for your name but automatically assign you a numerical code. Nobody will know who took part!

All you have to do is take part in an online survey, which is similar to a game of Solitaire – only that you sort statements instead of cards. It is easy to do, and there are instructions throughout in order to support you.

There is no right or wrong way to sort the statements. And don't think about each statement for too long – just sort it quickly and intuitively. Later on, if you feel that you sorted a statement in a way that does not really reflect your view, you will have an opportunity at the end to double-check your selection – and make any changes you want to. At the end, there is also an opportunity for you to explain in a few words why you chose the two statements you most/least agree with.

This study will probably take you 30-40 minutes. If you need to leave the survey at any point then simply make sure that you have completed that section of the survey and pressed the NEXT button in the bottom right hand corner. When you come back to it, you will return to the last place you saved data from

I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. If you want to, you will get a copy of the final research report. If you like, there is also an opportunity for you to stay involved with this research project, and contribute your valuable opinion to verifying the findings,

as well as take part in the second phase of the fieldwork. If you have any questions about the study at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Abena Dadze-Arthur, Doctoral researcher

Appendix D – PoetQ text for guiding the P sample through the

online statement sorting process

Introduction

Welcome to POETQ and thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. We want to know what you think about Abu Dhabi Government's efforts to create government services that are built around the needs of government customers/service users. There is much to learn for other non-Western countries. We are interested in your PERSONAL VIEWPOINT, not facts! This study is anonymous and nobody will know who took part in it.

This online survey is similar to a game of Solitaire – only that you sort statements instead of cards. It is easy to do, and there are instructions throughout in order to support you. If you are stuck at any point then click the HELP button in the top right hand corner. A window with guidance will pop up to assist you.

There is no right or wrong way to sort the statements. And don't think about each statement for too long – just sort it quickly and intuitively. Later on, if you feel that you sorted a statement in a way that does not

really reflect your view, you will have an opportunity at the end to double-check your selection – and make any changes you want to. At the end, there is also an opportunity for you to explain in a few words why you chose the two statements you most/least agree with.

This study will probably take you 40-50 minutes. If you need to leave the survey at any point then simply make sure that you have completed that section of the survey and pressed the NEXT button in the bottom right hand corner. When you come back to it, you will return to the last place you saved data from.

Stage 1 - Your professional role in general

This section focuses on the professional role that you have in your government job. You do not need to tell us your job title or the Government Entity you work for. But please tell us, for example, whether your role is 'a mid-level managerial role in quality management', or 'a senior-level role in strategy', or maybe 'a customer-facing role on the ground'?

Stage 2 - What is your personal viewpoint on customer-centric government in Abu Dhabi?

There are many viewpoints on customer-centric government in Abu

Dhabi. In this stage we will present you with 58 statements to sort into

three piles: some statements you might agree with, others you might

not agree with. There may be some statements that leave you cold.

That's fine – there's a neutral pile for you too.

Stage 3 - Your preferences in a pyramid

Your sorting has produced the following pyramid. We will compare

your unique combination with others completing this survey. If you

want to swap any statements you can do so now. It is not too late.

Once you are happy, click next.

Stage 4 - Why?

This is the final stage of the survey. You chose the following

statement as most agreeable, and the following statement as least

agreeable. Please can you take a couple of minutes to tell us why.

Thank you for your participation

Many thanks for taking part in the study. We look forward to sharing

our results with you in due course. In the meantime if you wish to add

any further comments, discuss aspects of the survey or report bugs in

the software, please email us at

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Information Sheet

Becoming an adviser to The Cultural Reference Group on:

"Collective cognition among Abu Dhabi's public administrators"

I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. This Information Sheet explains what this study is about and how I would like you to participate.

The purpose of my study is to understand how public administrators in Abu Dhabi Government cognitively make meaning of the customer-centric reform. Cognitive meaning-making is the result of certain learned beliefs, also called schemata, that become active and allow human beings to make sense of a certain situation, and respond to it accordingly. For example, in Abu Dhabi, most people have internalized a learned belief about the importance of fasting for Muslim brothers and sisters during the holy month of Ramadan. As a

result, most of us would not eat or drink in public before sunset during Ramadan. This behaviour is a result of our shared schema about the importance of fasting.

You have been selected as an expert with relevant knowledge of learned beliefs and resulting behaviour in the context of Abu Dhabi. Therefore, you are invited to become an adviser to this research project and share your valuable expertise. So far, my research has identified five shared viewpoints on the customer-centric reform, which groups of public administrators collectively hold. I want to present you with these five viewpoints and hear your analysis of the underlying learned beliefs, or schemata, which people here may have commonly learned in their social and cultural upbringing. There is no right or wrong way to respond because I am interested in your personal 'insider' knowledge of the local culture! This study is anonymous, which means that there will be no record of your name and personal details, and nobody will know who took part!

Thinking about the schemata that may have played a part in producing the five viewpoints will probably take you no more than an hour. You can choose whether you prefer sharing your thoughts about underlying schemata with me in a personal meeting or in an email. Once all the participants in this study have provided me with a list of possible

schemata, I will organize a group session to present back the findings as a whole, and discuss them with the group. If you do not want to take part in the group discussion, or if change your mind at any point in time and decide you do not want to take part at all any more, just let me know and we will heed your request.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. If you want to, you will get a copy of the final research report. If you have any questions about the study at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Abena Dadze-Arthur, Doctoral researcher

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