Professional Skills and Competences for Community-Based Action in Housing Market Renewal

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Abstract: Housing Market Renewal Fund is one of the radical actions in the Sustainable Community Plan forming the key basis for tackling low housing demand and abandonment in the most acute areas across North and Midlands, England. The implications for skills and competences need to be investigated as a review of the related literatures mainly emphasises the important to practitioners of integrating professional and community-based skills in dealing with local community. These skill gaps arise as the present professional practices are more focused on the individual core occupational skills within an organisation. A main research question within a facilities management perspective will be addressed. A pilot study will be undertaken at the ELEVATE East Lancashire Pathfinder. Research objectives and strategy will be derived from both literature and pilot study findings. The research outcomes would suggest an appropriate community-based skills and competences for future enhancement programmes within pathfinder organisations.

Keywords*: Community-based Facilities Management; Housing Renewal; Professional Competences; Regeneration Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is part of the researcher's PhD work and concerned with the study of regeneration knowledge, skills and behaviour of the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) pathfinder organisations. The related concepts of sustainable development and communities and their relation to the housing market renewal scheme have been reviewed. Some areas of potential research pertaining to skills, knowledge and behaviour in regeneration profession have been identified. The main research focus emerges from the literature. It is centred on three themes: the HMR Pathfinder organisations, Professional skills and competences and Community-based Facilities Management.

2. REGENERATION AND HOUSING RENEWAL

Regeneration is defined by the Housing Corporation, (2004) as *"improving areas that are recognised as being run down, neglected or otherwise deprived, where housing organisations have a role in improving the quality of life of present and future residents"*. The definition encompasses a variety of activities including not only the physical aspects of housing development and market restructuring but also other types of communities' interests. Concern with existing communities and people and improving their quality of life fall within this definition while the housing element may be a small but essential part of the programme.

Housing market renewal is part of many objectives set out in the Communities Plan, launched by the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 February 2003. The Plan sets out a long-term programme of action for delivering sustainable communities in both urban and rural areas. One of its objectives is to tackle housing market failure especially low housing demand and abandonment where, housing conditions and markets are expected to significantly improve across all Pathfinders. However, housing is not only the element for the community sustainability. It is about rebuilding communities and creating places where people continually want to live and work for present and future generations (Prescott, 2004). The implementation of the regeneration and market renewal must ensure housing interrelates effectively with other wider social, economic and environmental initiatives. Therefore,

housing market renewal can only be addressed along with the concepts of sustainable development and sustainable communities.

2.1 Sustainable Development and Sustainable Communities

The most popular international definition of sustainable development is from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, the Brundtland definition; *"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"* (Brundtland, 1987).

Following the Brundtland report publication, the UK government sets out its own definition in its published paper of *"A Better Quality of Life: The Strategy for Sustainable Development for the UK"*. At the heart of the sustainable development there is an idea of *"ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come"*. This national strategy of sustainable development has four main aims to be achieved and they are; *Social progress that meets the needs of everyone, Effective protection of the environment, Prudent use of natural resources and Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment* (The UK Government, 1999). The UK government has accepted sustainable development as an effective way of addressing balanced and mixed social, cultural, political, health, economic and environmental needs.

Poplin (1979) defines community from a sociological perspective that refers to *"the place where people maintain their homes, earn their livings, rear their children and carry on most of their life activities"*. Long and Hutchins (2003) further supports it by defining community as *"a grouping of up to several thousand households, whose occupants share common experiences and bonds derived from living in the same locality"*. In other word, the community is described as persons or people living within the same geographical area, carrying on their social interactions and activities with one or more common ties and shared values.

The most common cited definition of sustainability is by Long and Hutchins (2003) that refers to *"people continuing to want to live in the same community, both now and in the future"*. The authors further suggest that sustainability is achievable in situations where people continue to choose to live, work and carry on activities in the same common locality and community with fully occupied housing.

The understanding of the community and sustainability has led to the definitions of sustainable communities as derived by Kearns and Turok (2003): *"Sustainable communities are settlements which meet diverse needs of all existing and future residents; contribute to a high quality of life; and offer appropriate ladders of opportunity for household advancement, either locally or through external connections. They also limit the adverse external effects on the environment, society and economy"*. And Egan (2003): *"Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to the high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economics prosperity"*.

Kearns and Turok (2003) further proposed an appropriate set of principles and values for achieving sustainable communities as illustrated in *figure 1* and are adopted from the three dimensions of sustainable development and sustainable communities as defined above.
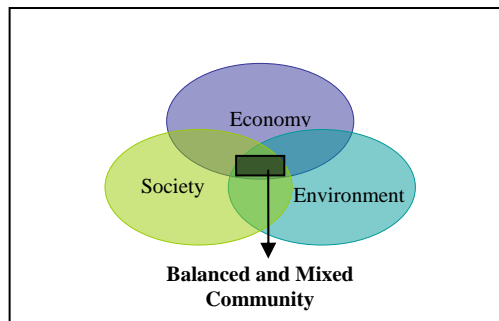
Figure 1: The three principles and values for Sustainable Communities
(source: Adopted from Kearns & Turok, 2003 and Egan, 2003)

2.2 Why is Sustainable Development/Communities Relevant to HMR?

Housing has an essential contribution to the community sustainability. But, communities are more than just housing. Investing in housing alone without interrelating with other needs of communities such as social, economic and environmental needs would waste money. Sustainable development should underpin strategies, plans and actions undertaken as part of the pathfinder programme. The strong commitment by the government towards sustainable development is stated in its Community Plan (ODPM, 2003): *The way our communities develop, economically, socially and environmentally must respect the needs of future generations as well as succeeding now. This is the key to lasting, rather than temporary, solutions; to creating communities that can stand on their own feet and adapt to the changing demands of modern life. Places where people want to live and will continue to want to live.*

The latest protest by the local residents of the affected pathfinder areas in the North England (Clover, 2004), has underpinned the need to integrate the concept of sustainable development into all pathfinder schemes. The specific interventions and radical actions which are mainly involved the compulsory purchase and demolition of a thousand unfit houses within the nine pathfinder areas have been claimed by the local residents as creating forced migration and preventing the creation of sustainable communities. The actions should be seen as inviting people to continuously live and work in the pathfinder areas and not forcing the exist of community/residents out of the area.

Similarly, the need to place sustainable development at the centre of thinking and action is one of seven *Key Actions for Successful Housing Market Renewal* produced jointly by CABE, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and the Sustainable Development Commission. This statement states that: *Sustainable regeneration is seen as combining social and environmental justice – such as access to services and a good-quality living environment with economic progress* (CABE). The authors propose that sustainability in areas of housing market failure can be addressed by a strategic, integrated, whole-life cycle development and community-based approach within social, economic and environmental contexts.

2.3 HMR Fund and Pathfinder Programmes

The Community Plan in *Sustainable communities: building for the future* (ODPM, 2003), offers a unique opportunity to tackle problems leading to low demand for housing and in some cases, abandonment. The government has already established nine Pathfinder areas in the North and Midlands of England. The aim of this £500 million HMR Pathfinder scheme is to overcome actual and potential housing market failure until March 2006. This major programme of action will, over the next 15 to 20 years seek to restore the housing market

balance through investment in public and private sectors and operate at a sub-regional level, across a number of local authority boundaries.

Housing market failure or low housing demand and abandonment spread across over 120 local authorities affects around 880,000 homes (estimated by National Housing Federation, 2002) of which, 360,000 are social housing while 520,000 are held by private owners. Out of 880,000 homes, around 720,000 homes are in the Pathfinder areas. The reason for low housing demand varies widely across the country and many of the causes not housing related. There are many 'macro' (regional/sub-region) reasons contributing to low demand, especially in the North of England. These include increasing de-industrialisation, declining economic output and population movement. The 'micro' (neighbourhood) centred factors include poor and obsolete housing, fear of crime, lack of community spirit, Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and poor quality environment that reduce the attractiveness of the older neighbourhood (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

The exact causes of low housing demand and abandonment vary from one region to another. The Pathfinders need to learn from each other on how they face the challenges and develop their own solutions to the problems that they are facing (ODPM, 2004). And it is important that any implementation of housing market renewal programmes must integrate not only the physical improvement works but also a range of economic and social programmes (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

In response to the low housing demand problems, the pathfinders are a new partnership with local authorities and other key regional and local stakeholders. The main task of the pathfinders are developing strategic plans for the whole of their housing market, to ensure problems are tackled permanently and not just displaced or deferred. This will include radical and sustained action to replace obsolete housing with modern sustainable accommodation, through large-scale clearance (or demolition) and new building or refurbishment whilst working with stakeholders to address other essential requirements of social and economic problems (ODPM, 2003). In realising these specific interventions, the Pathfinders need to build tremendous diversity of the related regeneration skills and competencies to ensure the ideas and plans are successfully worked up and implemented.

3. SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR HMR PATHFINDER

3.1 Overview of the Existing Professional Practice

A review on the existing professional skills and competences is perceived to be essential for researcher to understand and investigate the current professional practices and how the professional bodies incorporate the potential skills (if any) with the present and future demand in regeneration programme. The researcher is also need to explore on the extent of professional practitioners are recognising the skills and competences that are more on the soft and people-based skills development.

Some differing views of competence and approaches to professional development works can be found out from: *The UK occupational standards models* (cited by Cheetham and Chivers, 1996); *The job competence model* (Mansfield and Mathews, 1985); *The reflective practitioner approach* (Schon, 1983); *Meta-competencies* (Reynolds and Snell, 1988 and Nordhaug, 1990); *Core skills* (Cheetham and Chivers, 1996) and *Ethics and values* (Eraut et al, 1994)

The most recent model of professional competences developed by Cheetham and Chivers, (1996 and 1998) is mainly influenced by the models as described above (*figure 2*). The model has four core components of professional competences, which each are made up of a number

of sub-groups or constituents. These are: *Knowledge/Cognitive competence; Functional competence; Personnel or behaviour competence;* and *Values/ethical competence.*
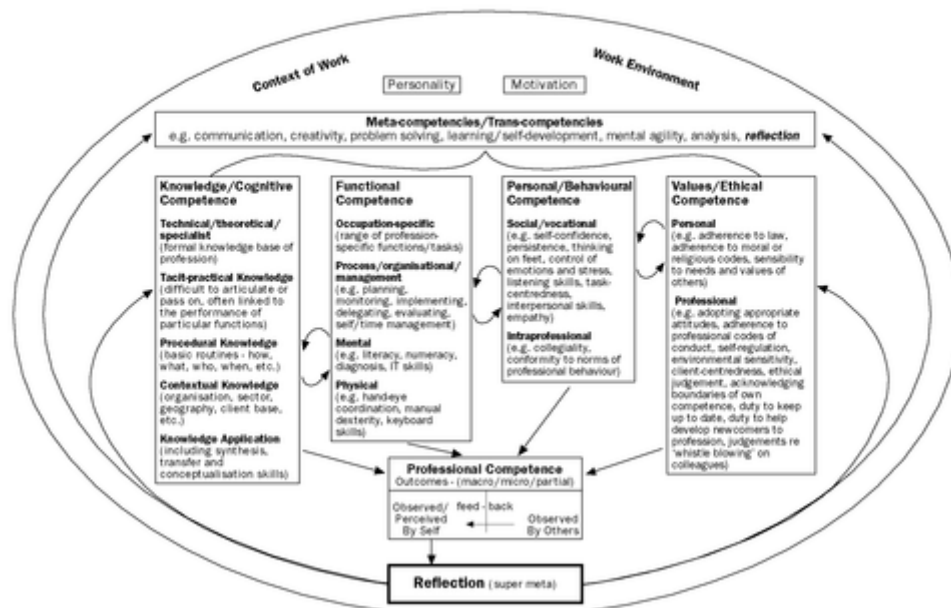

Figure 2: Model of professional competence (source: Cheetham and Chivers, 1998:275)

Kennie and Green (2001) have also developed the model of professional competence framework for RICS (*Figure 3*) based on four components descriptors of professional competence which combine: *Knowledge Competence; Cognitive/Problem Solving Competence; Business Competence* and *Ethical/Personal Behavioural* (which is core to the previous three areas) *Competence.*
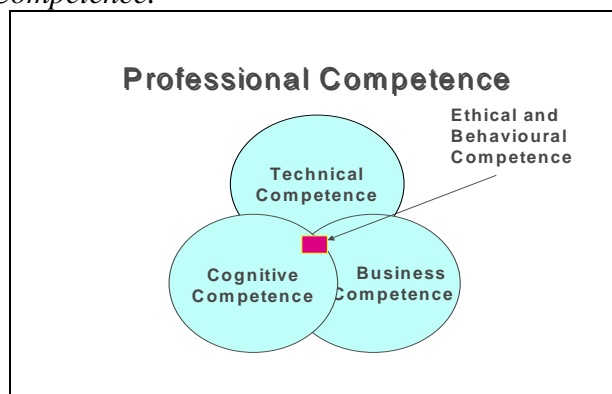

Figure 3: The Components of professional competence (Source: Kennie and Green, 2001)

A review of the facilities management professional practitioners shows that the skills and competences required for applicants are still focusing on the core skills, which are more technical-based skills with less attention given to the soft or generic skills. Although the professional practitioners have recognised the skills that they called as soft skills or people-based skills to support community sustainability, in practice, they are still unable or unwilling to integrate them into their daily practice (Turner and Townsend Group, 2004).

The BIFM Professional Qualification has required its applicants to choose from three routes of entry; a professional competence route, a direct examination route and higher education route. Each route requires managers to demonstrate both knowledge and experience across a range of the 23 core competencies (British Institute of Facilities

Management, c1999) These competences are arranged under six key management areas: *Understanding Business Organisation; Managing People; Managing Premises; Managing Services; Managing the Working Environment and Managing Resources.*

The RICS has introduced a guide to the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) and Assessment of Technical Competence (ATC) for its members to qualify as a chartered or technical member of RICS (RICS Practice Qualifications, 2002). These competencies are not only the skills or ability to perform a task or function but are also based upon attitudes and behaviours. There are also three levels of competency: Mandatory competencies; Core competencies and Optional competencies, which are mainly a generic skills (RICS Practice Qualification (2002), APC/ATC Requirements and Competencies).

3.2 Professional Practices and Sustainable Development

Increasingly, skills and competencies for community engagement or people-based skills development have been recognised as one of the crucial development core skills need and be a centre for sustainable development. Recent study by Hartley (2002) for the local authorities' officers has proven that a culture shift is needed to move from being a professionally driven, paternalistic organisation towards one, which aims to empower individuals, groups and communities and build their capabilities. A number of key skills were seen as important are; *Putting people at their ease; Learning to think about services from a user's perspective; Listening to interests as well as voices; Recognising the different pace and processes of community groups and individuals; Capacity building; Managing conflict and difference; Managing expectations; Influencing skills; Detailed local knowledge; Professional skills; Maintaining a strategic focus and Working constructively with councillors.*

Egan (2004) highlighted that the successful delivery of sustainable communities is depending on the skills/competencies necessary to support delivery process. The author further concluded and recommended of the growing focus on skills and knowledge in regeneration as a perceived barrier to the delivery of sustainable communities. Studies by the Turner and Townsend Group (2004), underpin the concern of those related skills needs in regeneration that can be summarised as: Society has not necessarily been well served by the existing professions operating in the built environment. They are either unwilling or unable to *engage with communities*; Knowledge about '*what works*' is, inconsistent and difficult to access as they easily rest with '*traditional*' professions; The skills and knowledge relating to strategic planning, project management, urban design, *community engagement* and partnership working necessary for the development of successful sustainable communities is absent. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and ODPM (2002, p33-34) have also recognised skills for working with the community as part of professional and practitioners core skills development in its three key different audiences of residents, professionals and civil servants and policy makers of the regeneration-learning framework for neighbourhood regeneration.

The need for the skills and competencies for sustainability delivery is unquestionable and the key to develop those required skills are through learning. Professional bodies are beginning to recognise that sustainable development is a key issue for professional practice and their role in society (Martin & Hall, 2002). The Professional Practice for Sustainable Development (PP4SD) initiative, which came into being in 1999, has set up work in partnership with fourteen professional institutions to create a common curriculum framework for sustainable development. In response to PP4SD, the sustainable education framework has also been developed that recognises local community or people-based skills as part of the curriculum (Sterling, 2001).

3.3 HMR and the Professions

The achievement of HMR Pathfinder in its delivery process is depending on a range of professionals integrating sustainable development into their daily professional practices. Sustainable development is the challenge to the professional practitioners. As stated by Estes (1993), sustainable development practice consists of development-focused interventions that seek to promote and enhance the social, political and economic well being of people within an ecological sustainability context. And the real challenge for HMR practitioners now is how to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development thinking into practices so that they can continue to act not only professionally but sustainably as well. The professionals in all sorts of roles must demonstrate their competency throughout their professional lives in complying with a growing and complex set of environmental, economic, social and ethical issues. They do realise and need help in understanding how to put these three dimensions of sustainability into practice.

4. THE COMMUNITY-BASED FACILITIES MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Facilities management is usually defined as the process that requires a multi-skills approach that supports the core business of the organisation by interfacing the physical workplace and people (Barrett, 1994). It is also defined as *the process by which an organisation delivers and sustains a quality working environment and delivers quality support services to meet the organisation's objectives at best cost* (CFM, 1992). The cross and integrated disciplinary skills required for sustainability where people are a focus of the programme could address the role of facilities managers in the sustainable organisations.

An agenda 21, the '*Earth Action Plan'* that resulted from the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 recognised that local people were at the core of the sustainability for the earth and its people. Any sustainability practice that failed to embrace local people and aspirations, fears and needs for the future was doomed to failure (Fagan, 1996).
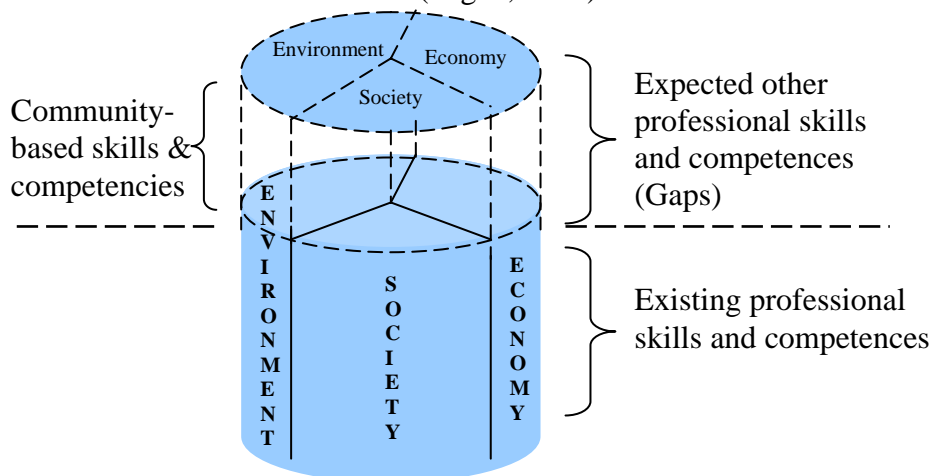

Figure 4: Mapping the Community-based facilities management for professional skills and competences in Housing Market Renewal

A sense of community-based approach at the heart of any sustainability action would be a top priority for those involve in the housing renewal programme. How do people engage? How can they be supported? What appropriate professional skills and competences need to engage with local community, which is a central to the principles of Agenda 21? How do professional practitioners deal with these local people at their utmost existing level of professional skills and competences?

The main focus of community-based skills and competences is engagement with the local people. Understanding the reality of their locality, an assessment of what is truly happening in their home environment, economy and society as well as helps them to demand change and take action (*Figure 4*). These are the potential skills and competences needed for the Agenda 21. The challenges for the facilities managers are to experience and understand the needs for a *strategic, integrated, whole-life cycle development and customer/end user* approach in the implementation of Housing Market Renewal.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous sections have provided the theoretical background to this research project. This section describes the research methodology for exploring community-based skills and competencies within Pathfinder organisations. The research process is designed into four main phases of research and is illustrates below;
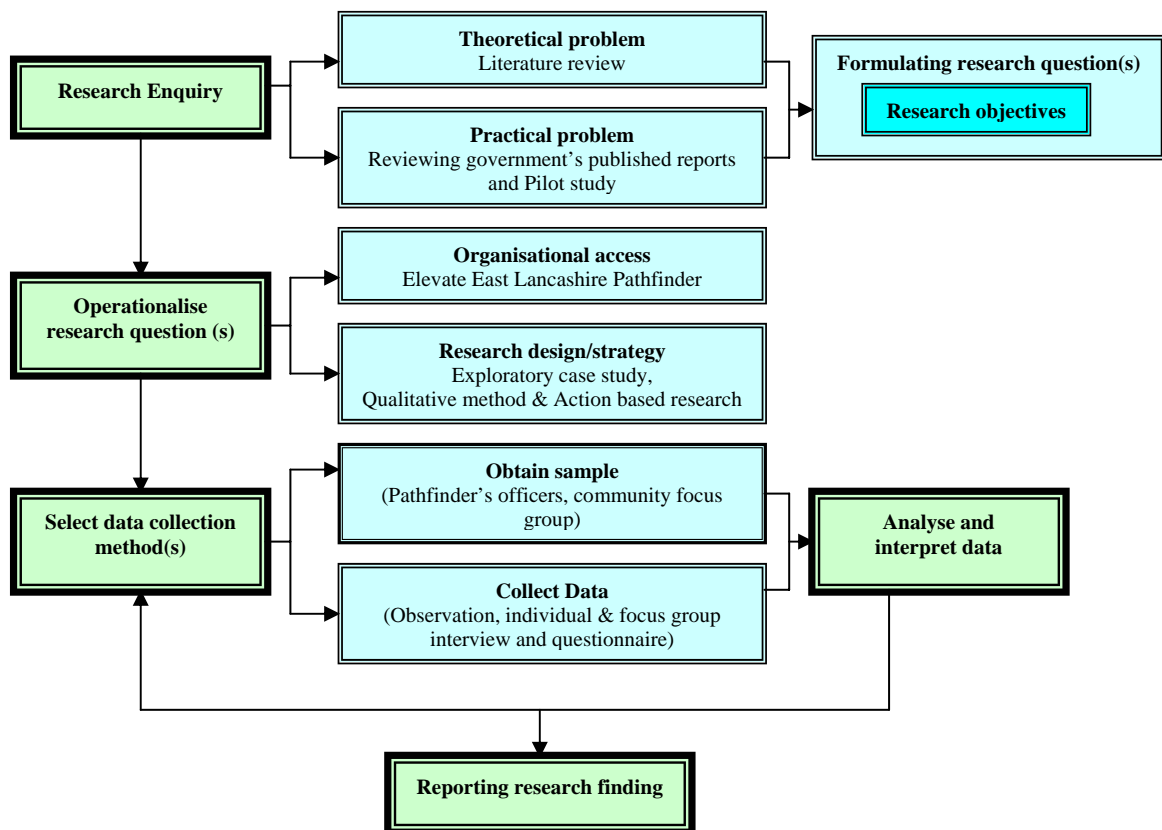
5.1 Research Enquiry

Research Question Formulation: In defining a research question, the research enquiry will be carried out. Investigating the research problem can be motivated by a practical problem that could be realised through real world research inquiry (Booth, et al, 2003). The real world research inquiry is applied in this research work as the nature of the research to be carried out is some kind of investigation involving people in 'real life' situations and to draw attention on issues and complexities involved (Robson, 2002). Defining a research problem and formulating the research question could solve the practical problem (*Figure 5*). The formulation of the research question is evolving into two stages by: defining theoretical problem through reviewing the related literatures and defining practical problem through

studying the government's published documents and conducting a Pilot study at the Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder.
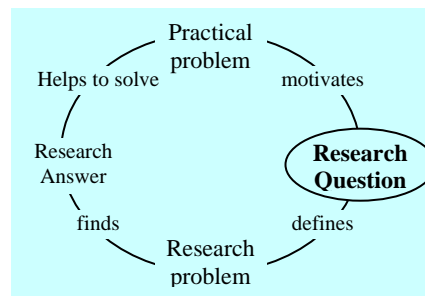

Figure 5: The relationship between practical and research problems (Source: adopted from Booth, et al. 2003:58)

Research questions: The specific research question consists of one main research question representing the knowledge gap, which has to be filled and solved the research problem and achieve the research objective. The main research question is: *What are the additional professional skills and competences that need to be acquired by the employees of Pathfinder organisations necessary to deliver Housing Market Renewal programme?* This will lead to further sub-questions: *How do professional skills and competences influence the delivery process of housing market renewal? Why does housing market renewal programme need the additional professional skills and competences for engaging local community? And How significant is community-based skills and competences contributing towards an effective implementation of housing market renewal?*

Research Objectives: In answering this question, basically two objectives will be pursued: A framework with mapping tools for the description of community-based skills and competences for the purpose of understanding the link between professional skills and competences and its operational effectiveness and strategically flexibility for housing renewal delivery process and Application of the framework and mapping tools to the various levels of pathfinder organisational management to fulfilling different critical community-based skills and competencies functions in term of operational effectiveness and strategic flexibility.

By fulfilling these objectives, the resulting framework and mapping tools could be formed as a benchmark tool as well as a process-based model of community-based skills and competences in future regeneration programme. This will lead to the following overall approach: *Build a framework for describing community-based skills and competences theory model; Operationalise and apply the framework as a set of mapping tools* and *Evaluate in terms of functionality, usefulness and usability*

The operationalisation of this research question will then lead to the development of the project's design and will arm the researcher with enough information to seek out and secure organisational access in the second phase of the research process.

5.2 Operationalised Research Questions

Linking Research Question to Research Strategy: Operationalising the research question requires that it be translated into a testable and measurable form (Brewerton, 2001). Yin (2003) emphasises that the choice of research strategy is depending on three conditions; the type of research question being asked; the control an investigator has over actual behaviour events and the focus on contemporary as apposed to historical phenomena (*Table 1*). The main arguments for choosing case studies for this research strategy are the descriptive nature

of the research that not requiring control of behavioural events but rather documenting them and the dominance of *how, why* and exploratory *what* questions (Yin, 2003).

Table 1: Relevant situations for different research strategies (Source: Yin, 2003, pp.5)

Strategy	Form of research question	Requires control of behavioural events?	Focuses on contemporary events
Experiment	How, why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who, **what**, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
Archival analysis	Who, **what,** where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
History	How, why?	No	No
Case study	How, why?	No	Yes

Note: **What** questions, when asked as part of an exploratory study, pertain to all five strategies

Exploratory case study: Case study is used in this research as *how* and *why* questions are being posed and when the investigator has little control over events and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within the real context. The researcher needs to explore on how and why skills and competencies are significant and important to an effective housing market renewal service delivery. And to complement with the type of main question of this research, the researcher needs to investigate and explore what are these skills and competences gap that are most needed or prioritised. Back to Yin (2003), applying the *exploratory* phase of investigation is considered appropriate in this research. Supported by Robson (2002) and Cresswell (1998), the nature of this research is mainly involved an in-depth analysis of the case studies (which is interpreted widely to include the study of an individual person, a group of community, a setting and organisations). This qualitative approach and flexible design strategy requires multiple methods of data collection (*Table 2*).

Table 2: Comparing research traditions in qualitative research (Source: Abridged from Cresswell, 1998, p.65)

	Grounded theory	Ethnography	**Case study**
Focus	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group	Developing an in-depth analysis of single case or multiple cases
Discipline origin	Sociology	Cultural anthropology, sociology	Political science, sociology, evaluation, urban studies, many other social sciences
Data collection	Typically interviews with 20-30 individuals to 'saturate' categories and detail a theory	Primarily observation and interviews during extended time in the field	Multiple sources – documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artefacts
Data analysis	Open coding, axial coding, selective coding, conditional matrix	Description, analysis, interpretation	Description, themes, assertions
Narrative form	Theory or theoretical model	Description of the cultural behaviour of the group	In-depth study of a 'case' or 'cases'

The Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder is chosen as a case study for this research project.

5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Three methods of data collection have been chosen by research to proceed with the research and they are summarised as below.

Semi-structured interview: This type of interview is chosen as it allow respondents or the person interviewed much more flexibility of response. In other occasions is the *depth interview* (Miller and Crabtree, 1999), where the respondent is free to say whatever they like

on the broad topic of the interview with minimal guiding from the researcher. In exploring the key skills needs within the pathfinder organisation, this type of approach is essential as researcher could indirectly encourage the respondents to disclose other hidden issues that might relate to the subject area. Other advantages of using semi-structured interview are question wordings can be changed or modified and particular questions, which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee, can be omitted or additional ones included (Robson, 2002, p. 270). For this research project, the interviews will be conducted at the Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder and the managers at top, middle and operational management level will be chosen as the respondents.

Non-participant observation: The approach is chosen as the nature of the observation is directed at an interaction process from the organisational settings to the community dimension and the researcher stands back from the situation and observes from the distance (Brewerton, 2001, p. 96). The aim is to observe and record in all target events and occurrences by using an interaction process analysis, introduced by Bales (1950, 1999 cited by Brewerton, 2001, p.97) required for the achievement of the research question(s) and objectives. Observation is commonly used in an exploratory phase (Robson, 2002, p. 331) and can be used as a supportive or supplementary to collect data that may complement to other data obtained by other means.

Questionnaires: Questionnaire measure is probably common and the most widely used research tools. There is criticism of the approach that not well suited to carry out exploratory research work (Robson, 2002, p232*).* However, for the purpose of this research work, questionnaire is used as a basis to underpin the basic information that might not be ascertained otherwise by other approaches stated above. This will be done by distributing the questionnaires to the staff at the operational level of the Pathfinder organisation.

Throughout the process of data generation and collection, it may be necessary to revisit earlier stages in order to collect additional supplementary information if the findings are inconclusive or stimulate further questions. The research findings will be documented in the final phase of the research process.

6. CONCLUSION

Sustainable development dimension encompasses environment, economy and society. Therefore, the professional practitioners of Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder need basis knowledge from the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities to understand the principles of sustainable development, how they can be implemented, the values involves and the ramifications of their implementation.

The challenge for the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder in the implementation of housing renewal programme is the key skills and competencies to support community sustainability. A wider discussion is needed of the key skills required for pathfinder teams at different stages of their programmes. The potential skills in community engagement will be needed to deal with public anxieties about the early and potentially disruptive stages of housing renewal intervention actions. Even though professionals have a limited view of the regeneration skills and competences but they in practice recognise these potential skills and competences required for the successful of Housing Market Renewal programme. These shortcoming professional skills and competences for housing market renewal are more on the 'soft', people-based skills development. The facilities management professional bodies (RICS and BIFM) have adapted and continue to adapt to the changing demands of regeneration. They have put in place new mechanisms and reviews to explore the changing needs of professionals and the professions to continue to meet the needs of sustainable development agenda.

These key issues on sustainable development practices have been highlighted forming the basis of knowledge gap in the professional practices. This will lead to the development of Professional Skills and Competences for Community-based Action Model in Housing Market Renewal. This would contribute to the body of knowledge by understanding the significance of regeneration practitioners to recognise the skills and competencies that are required for community engagement, identify other issues concerning the delivery of housing market renewal and generate ideas and hypotheses for future research within the facilities management perspective.

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