

## University of Southampton Research Repository ePrints Soton

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given e.g.

AUTHOR (year of submission) "Full thesis title", University of Southampton, name of the University School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Management

**Managing business change projects: a social practice perspective**

by

**Tim O'Leary**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2010

# **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

## **ABSTRACT**

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
School of Management

Doctor of Philosophy

## **MANAGING BUSINESS CHANGE PROJECTS: A SOCIAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE**

by Tim O'Leary

This research responds to calls from several fields (including project management and organisational change) questioning the engineering paradigm of objective rationality, systems control and universally-applicable structured methods underpinning conventional 'best practice' approaches to managing business change projects. The call is for better understanding of the reality of business change projects as experienced by the people working on them, and for improved theory based on that. This research seeks to explore whether more effective approaches to delivering benefits from business change in organisations could be developed by taking a social practice perspective - focusing on the dynamic and complex processes of social interaction, power relations, and social construction of day-to-day reality.

To address these questions, an 18-month ethnographic, participant/observer study has been carried out within a large UK public sector organisation, observing events and behaviours on a day-to-day basis from a practitioner's perspective, using narrative to capture the complexity of the social reality of project life with all its uncertainty, politics, and emotion. This fieldwork, combining both objectively-observed and subjectively-interpreted findings, identifies some generic intersubjective 'key aspects' of business change projects. These 'key aspects' have then been interpreted using theoretical concepts from five leading theoretical frameworks (Giddens' structuration theory, Bourdieu's theory of practice, Actor-network theory (ANT), Weick's sensemaking, and Strauss's symbolic interactionist theory of action).

A multi-level theoretical model rooted in the epistemological characteristics of social reality is developed from the relationships emerging from the empirical findings and by employing some of the most relevant theoretical constructs. The model is found to be consistent with practice-based research findings from research into project success in general, and with some approaches to managing uncertainty in projects. The implications of the model for practice are explored, directing attention away from control procedures and detailed planning to a range of more productive management interventions.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH .....	1
1.2	DEFINITION OF BUSINESS CHANGE PROJECTS .....	3
1.3	RELEVANT RESEARCH LITERATURE .....	4
1.4	STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS .....	5
<b>2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	INTRODUCTION .....	8
2.2	PROJECT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH .....	9
2.3	MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE.....	37
2.4	ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION-MAKING .....	66
2.5	POLITICS AND POWER .....	71
2.6	LITERATURE REVIEW – CONCLUSIONS .....	81
<b>3</b>	<b>THE SOCIAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE.....</b>	<b>85</b>
3.1	INTRODUCTION .....	85
3.2	PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	86
3.3	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL REALITY .....	105
3.4	KEY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS .....	140
<b>4</b>	<b>RESEARCH METHOD .....</b>	<b>143</b>
4.1	INTRODUCTION .....	143
4.2	RESEARCH AIMS .....	143
4.3	RESEARCH DESIGN .....	144
4.4	EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS .....	153
4.5	THE RESEARCH SITE .....	154
4.6	RESEARCHER PRECONCEPTIONS .....	155
4.7	DATA GATHERING .....	156
4.8	PRODUCING THE ‘PRACTITIONER’S TALE’ .....	158
4.9	CONFIDENTIALITY .....	160
4.10	ANALYSIS APPROACH.....	161
4.11	THEORY DEVELOPMENT .....	163
4.12	VALIDITY AND QUALITY CRITERIA .....	163
<b>5</b>	<b>RESEARCH DESCRIPTION.....</b>	<b>170</b>
5.1	INTRODUCTION .....	170
5.2	HISTORY AND CONTEXT .....	170
5.3	PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS .....	172
5.4	RESEARCH ACTIVITY .....	176
5.5	KEY PLAYERS .....	177
5.6	THE PRACTITIONERS TALE – SUMMARY .....	179
<b>6</b>	<b>RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>201</b>
6.1	INTRODUCTION .....	201
6.2	OBJECTIVE OBSERVATION OF PROJECT FEATURES .....	202
6.3	SUBJECTIVE INTERPRETATION OF PROJECT EXPERIENCE .....	214
6.4	COMBINING OBJECTIVELY-BASED ‘FEATURES’ AND SUBJECTIVELY-BASED ‘THEMES’ .....	218
6.5	KEY ASPECTS .....	224
6.6	SUMMARY CHARACTERISATION .....	240

6.7	VALIDATION OF THE CHARACTERISATION .....	242
<b>7</b>	<b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS – FRAMING THE FINDINGS ...</b>	<b>244</b>
7.1	INTRODUCTION .....	244
7.2	GIDDENS’ STRUCTURATION THEORY .....	245
7.3	BOURDIEU – THEORY OF PRACTICE .....	257
7.4	ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY .....	269
7.5	ORGANIZATIONAL SENSEMAKING .....	281
7.6	SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM – STRAUSS’S ‘THEORY OF ACTION’ .....	294
7.7	CONCLUSIONS .....	306
<b>8</b>	<b>A THEORETICAL MODEL .....</b>	<b>311</b>
8.1	INTRODUCTION .....	311
8.2	A MULTI-LEVEL MODEL OF THE FINDINGS .....	312
8.3	FUNDAMENTAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	319
8.4	A GENERALIZED MODEL OF BUSINESS CHANGE PROJECTS .....	321
8.5	IMPLICATIONS OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL .....	324
8.6	MAPPING THE MODEL AGAINST FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE .....	329
8.7	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE .....	335
<b>9</b>	<b>RESEARCH REFLECTIONS .....</b>	<b>339</b>
9.1	INTRODUCTION .....	339
9.2	RESEARCH VALIDITY .....	339
9.3	GENERALISABILITY .....	348
9.4	REVIEW OF RESEARCH PROCESS .....	354
9.5	PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A RESEARCHER .....	359
<b>10</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>362</b>
10.1	INTRODUCTION .....	362
10.2	RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS .....	362
10.3	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE .....	364
10.4	FUTURE RESEARCH .....	365

## APPENDICES

- A. RESEARCHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES
- B. PROJECT EVENT TIMELINES
- C. SIGNIFICANT COMMUNICATIONS - LOG
- D. KEY DOCUMENTATION SOURCES
- E. ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM JOURNAL
- F. NARRATIVE THEMES – with illustrative extracts coded to these themes
- G. CONSOLIDATION OF ‘THEMES’ INTO ‘KEY ASPECTS’

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figures and tables are numbered sequentially within chapters.

### TABLES

2.1	Critical Success Factors	16
2.2	Approaches to managing complex and uncertain projects	29
2.3	Stages in a BPR programme	47
2.4	Turf game tactics	79
3.1	Bruner's two modes of thought	134
4.1	Methodological Fit – Nascent Theory	146
5.1	Key players	177
6.1	Objective Project Features	204
6.2	Presence of themes in the narrative	217
6.3	Mapping 'themes' to 'features'	222
6.4	Validation by other project participants	242
7.1	Theoretical frameworks – treatment of 'key aspects'	308
8.1	The multi-level model	315
8.2	Parameters of the project trajectory	322
8.3	'Best practice' themes and the 'negotiated action' model	330
8.4	Approaches to managing highly uncertain projects	331
9.1	Managing the threats to validity	347

### FIGURES

2.1	Hard and soft dimensions framework	24
2.2	PMBOK managerial processes	32
4.1	Research timeline	153
4.2	Overview of research stages	162
5.1	Organizational/project landscape	177
7.1	Dimensions of the duality of structure	249
8.1	Schematic of multi-level model	314
8.2	The 'negotiated action' process and the project trajectory	324
9.1	Generalisability	352

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To all my professional colleagues who so willingly gave their time to support this research: in particular to Chris for generously providing the opportunity (as well as lots of drama for the narrative); to Sarah and Victoria for being such good sounding-boards; to Ron, John, Matt, Chris and Darren for reviewing the outputs and engaging in spirited conversations based on their own experiences; and to many others who gave their views freely about what the reality of working on projects means for them.

To my supervisor, Professor Terry Williams, for his wise, challenging but always pragmatic guidance overall; for his ever-reliable, speedy and perceptive responses to many, many pages of text; for resisting ‘scope creep’ without cramping ambition; and for some pretty good project management!

To my wife Sandy, for (apart from all the usual stuff) taking it all seriously, for listening, for making many constructive suggestions – and for not a little project management of her own.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the research

### 1.1.1 *Managing business change*

Delivering successful business change in organisations has been seen as crucial for competitive success and even survival for the last 20 years or more, yet the track record of projects to deliver business change is notoriously poor (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Burnes, 2004b; Davenport, 1994; Kotter, 1996). Recent decades have seen numerous popular change-related initiatives, usually involving the introduction of new technology, new ways of working, changes in skills and management processes, and even culture. These include total quality management (TQM), business process reengineering (BPR), customer service improvement, and enterprise resource planning (ERP), and the delivery of IT-enabled business change in general (National Audit Office, 2006; Boddy, Boonstra & Kennedy, 2005). Such major change projects present compelling advantages in principle but their successful implementation is clearly problematic.

These implementation difficulties continue to be experienced despite a huge volume and range of advice and guidance, much of it offering recipes and prescriptions for success. Within this, professional project management is increasingly seen as an essential component of an effective approach to achieving successful business change. While originating in the engineering field, project management is now seen as an effective approach to a wide range of business activities from research and development to managing strategic business change, and is seen in 'best practice' guidance as an essential prerequisite for delivering successful business change projects (IntellectUK, 2000; National Audit Office, 2006; Office of Government Commerce, 2005). It has become even more significant as 'projects' (and more recently 'programmes') have been seen as a flexible and more effective means of structuring organisational activity in general to cope with a turbulent and increasingly competitive business environment (Frame, 2002). Project and programme management skills are now widely seen as a key managerial competence (Office of Public Services Reform, 2003) in facing the challenges of change.



### ***1.1.2 Research motivation***

As a practitioner with some 25 years or more experience working with perhaps 15 major business change projects, I am very familiar with ‘best practice’ project and programme management and its application, and have based a professional career on it. However, I have increasingly come to question whether what is typically described as good project and programme management is what really makes the difference in a successful business change project. Worse, these approaches can even risk becoming diversionary or wasteful. I have worked on projects that have succeeded with very little adherence to the conventional project management processes and structures, and others which have stalled completely despite the most assiduous compliance. In my practice, the ‘people issues’ seemed to dominate outcomes. But while the importance of the ‘people’ aspects of business change may be widely recognised, management approaches to such projects, and what is generally promoted as ‘best practice’, seem mostly concerned with structured process control methodologies.

In my experience, real projects never seemed to turn out like the text books said they should, and successful delivery seemed primarily to require addressing a much wider range of ‘people’ and social issues than ‘best practice’ provides for. It seemed that the apparent divergence between the real-life experience of people working on business change projects and ‘best practice’ guidance pointed to the possibility of developing richer and more relevant models that could make a real difference to successful delivery of business change.

### ***1.1.3 Focus of research***

Initial reading of academic research in this area indicates a growing recognition that ‘best practice’ approaches typically reflect an engineering paradigm of objective rationality, systems control and universally-applicable structured method. Research in a number of fields, including project management, organisational change, and information systems implementation, increasingly highlights the limitations of these assumptions underpinning ‘best practice’, and its poor fit with the reality of business change projects as experienced by the people working on them. This research seeks to explore whether more effective approaches to delivering benefits from business change in organisations could be developed through characterizing such projects as a dynamic and complex process of social interaction.

The focus for this research from the outset has therefore been:

*Could new and more effective approaches to the management of business change projects be developed by better reflecting the social dynamics and day-to-day complexity of real projects in large organisations?*

To address these questions, an 18-month ethnographic, participant/observer study has been carried out within a large public sector UK organisation, observing and recording events and behaviours on a day-to-day basis from a practitioner's perspective. This field data has then been interpreted using theoretical concepts and frameworks from the fields of social theory, social psychology and interpretive approaches to organisational studies as a basis for developing an alternative explanatory theory from a social practice perspective.

## **1.2 Definition of business change projects**

The term 'business change project' is used broadly here, and is taken to mean any intentional organizational initiative involving a substantial change in organisational processes, behaviours, and systems required to achieve a specified business aim within a specified timescale. In practice, given the nature of modern organizations, any change in business configuration is likely to affect all of the dimensions of 'people, processes and systems', something increasingly recognised by IT implementation guidance (National Audit Office, 2006; Ward & Elvin, 1999) as well as by professional and textbook guidance on managing organizational change (Evard & Gipple, 2001; Cameron & Green, 2004; Carnall, 1999). Winter *et al.* (2006a, p.699) refer to 'business projects' as a "*new class of projects (and programmes)*" reflecting a "*growing conceptual shift*" in which "*.the primary concern is no longer the capital asset, system or facility etc, but increasingly the challenge of implementing business strategy, improving organizational effectiveness, and managing the realization of stakeholder benefits*".

The scope is therefore very wide, including projects such as:

- Enterprise systems/business process re-engineering

- Customer service improvement
- New service launch
- Major re-organisation or mergers
- Efficiency programmes

### **1.3 Relevant research literature**

This research is concerned with developing alternative approaches to the management of business change projects based on a better view of the day-to-day reality of such projects, particularly reflecting the social and political aspects. A considerable body of research from numerous research disciplines is relevant here, as is a huge volume of published guidance and advice for practitioners. The ambitions of the research are to both reflect what projects are really like in practice, as well as to develop new theoretical perspectives; so a wide range of both empirical and theoretical research literature needs to be considered.

There are three main bodies of literature which have had to be covered in this research, the scale and extent of which provides a considerable challenge.

The first is the practice-oriented research fields of project management (including information systems implementation), organisational change management, and organizational decision-making. This research highlights the limitations of current prescriptions and their underlying assumptions about the nature of organizational reality. Some of the so-called ‘processual’ research in these areas, focusing on politics and power and the uncertainty and ambiguity of real business change projects, provides some pointers for alternative approaches.

The second body of literature is that of social constructionism and the character of social reality, which builds on a view of organizational reality as something achieved through social interaction and discourse (‘social practice’) rather than having a neutral observer-independent existence ‘out there’. The developments in this field have been very influential in organizational studies in the last 10-15 years, though they have so far had little impact on mainstream practice. An understanding of these intellectual developments is very important

both in shaping empirical research into the social reality of business change projects, as well as providing the foundations for exploration of some relevant theoretical frameworks.

The third body of literature includes several social theories which have been developed from a social constructionist perspective, and which seek to provide theoretical frameworks for the explanation of social action: ie how and why individuals and social groups act, and how their actions are determined by individual motivation within the constraints of social institutions and structures. A number of these theories have proved popular with researchers pursuing alternatives to mainstream approaches to business change and in organizational studies in general.

## **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

### ***Chapter 2: Literature Review***

This chapter reviews the first body of literature described in Section 1.3 above. Its primary purpose is to identify the main approaches behind ‘best practice’ approaches to managing business change, to identify their theoretical underpinnings, and to identify what previous research has identified as limitations. This section provides the baseline against which any alternative approach must be compared, and provides justification from previous research of the focus on the lived reality of projects in organizations as a means of developing more relevant and effective theory. This section draws from a range of different research perspectives to point the way to a focus on ‘social practice’.

### ***Chapter 3: A Social Practice Perspective***

This chapter introduces the main intellectual ideas behind a social practice perspective, including consideration of the post-positivist philosophical schools of phenomenology, postmodernism, pragmatism and critical realism. Some philosophical and sociological analysis of the fundamental character of social reality is discussed, and the application of the ideas of the role of language and discourse in organizational studies is reviewed. Five leading theoretical frameworks (Giddens’ Structuration Theory, Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Actor-network theory (ANT), Weick’s sensemaking, and Strauss’s symbolic interactionist theory of action) are identified. Detailed consideration of these frameworks is however postponed until Chapter 7, where they are used to interpret the findings of the empirical research.

#### ***Chapter 4: Research Method***

Here the research aims are set out, and the factors shaping the design of the empirical research are described. The methodological issues around the chosen ethnographic, ‘observing-practitioner’ approach are highlighted, and strategies for managing risks to validity are discussed. Information-gathering methods are described, together with the approach to analysis. Detailed evaluation of validity is postponed until Chapter 9, when it can be discussed with reference to the actual empirical findings. Similarly, generalisability of the theoretical model developed in Chapter 8 is discussed in Chapter 9 once the model itself, and its empirical and theoretical grounding, have been fully explained.

#### ***Chapter 5: Research Description***

The research site, the projects which were researched, and the research activities engaged in are described. The ‘Practitioner’s Tale’, a narrative of the day-to-day reality of project life, is summarised and relevant extracts included. This provides a summary picture of the 18-month fieldwork.

#### ***Chapter 6: Research Findings***

This chapter presents the main findings from the field research. This includes the mainly objective observation of the key features of the projects researched, with reference to some of the normal project parameters of ‘best practice’; and the coding analysis of the mainly subjective ‘Practitioner’s Tale’. The process of combining these two perspectives into 13 ‘key aspects’ of the social reality of business change projects is described. The ‘key aspects’ are elaborated and exemplified with reference to the research data, and the results of validation with other project participants is described.

#### ***Chapter 7: Theoretical Frameworks – Framing the Findings***

The main concepts of each of the five theoretical frameworks identified in Chapter 3 are described, together with a summary of their application in project and organizational research. The findings from the empirical research, in the form of the ‘key aspects’ are systematically interpreted through the ‘theoretical lens’ of each of the frameworks. Their respective relevance with respect to the findings is evaluated, and some important commonalities are identified. These, together with the relationships between the ‘key aspects’ identified in Chapter 6, are taken forward for development of a theoretical model.

### ***Chapter 8: A Theoretical Model***

This chapter describes a multi-level conceptual model developed from the relationships emerging from the findings and by employing some of the most productive theoretical constructs emerging from the analysis in Chapter 7. This model is then extended into a more generalized model of business change projects by combining it with the notion of ‘project trajectory’. This allows some of the implications of the model for practice to be explored. The findings from research into project success in general, and approaches to the management of projects of high uncertainty, are then interpreted and found to be consistent with the model’s predictions.

### ***Chapter 9: Research Reflections***

This section looks back over the entire research exercise and assesses both the outcomes and the process of the research. The validity of the findings is more specifically evaluated, and the limits to generalisability of the theoretical model are discussed. Possible improvements to the research process on the basis of experience are suggested, and the overall quality of the research is assessed against some broad quality criteria suggested by Silverman (2005). Some points are made reflecting on the researcher’s personal development through the process of conducting research.

### ***Chapter 10: Conclusion***

This chapter concludes the thesis by setting out the main contributions of this research, in terms of empirical findings, theoretical developments, methodology and implications for practice. The final section then discusses some avenues for further research to build on the findings from this work.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review is structured around four sections: project management; organisational change management; processual approaches to change; and organisational decision-making. The purpose of the section is to provide substantiation for the aims and focus of this research with reference to an extensive body of relevant research literature.

*Project management* research is first covered, including: the extensive research on project success factors; research which recognises the uncertainty and complexity which is a characteristic of business change projects in organisations; and recent work critiquing the mainstream project management paradigm and setting out new directions for research and theory development in the field.

Considering business change projects from the ‘business change’ rather than ‘projects’ perspective (and recognising that they take place within an organisational context) directs attention to research into *organisational change management*. This section first sets out an overview of some of the main schools within this very large field identifying the source of prescriptions that constitute what could be called ‘best practice’ in business change management. *Processual approaches* tend to be more descriptive than prescriptive, and to emphasise the central role of organisational *power and politics*. They recognise the inherent uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity in the change process, and raise questions about the validity of the more prescriptive approaches to change which dominate the field.

*Organisational decision-making* is reviewed to highlight the limitations of purely rationalist theories of management decision-making and action, and introduces power, conflict, emotion and judgement as relevant factors in determining the course of business change.

The *conclusion* section of the Literature Review draws together the main threads from the material reviewed, highlighting the limitations of the assumptions of instrumental rationality underpinning mainstream approaches as identified in the literature, and identifying some

potential alternative perspectives. The repeated calls for more processual empirical research into the ‘actuality’ of business change projects are noted, and used to shape the research questions for the empirical research.

## **2.2 Project Management Research**

### **2.2.1 Overview**

#### **2.2.1.1 History**

Project management as a distinctive set of management methods and techniques emerged after the second-world war in the defence and petrochemical industries, centred on the core planning and scheduling techniques developed as a means of coping with the complexity and organisational uncertainties of the Atlas and Polaris missile programmes in the 1950s (Morris & Hough, 1987; Thomas, 2006). Since then, it has developed rapidly as an important management discipline and profession, with the formation of several professional associations with their ‘bodies of knowledge’ of good practice in managing projects, and the introduction of standards for professional certification. While originating in the engineering field, project management has increasingly been seen as an effective approach to a wide range of business activities from research and development to managing strategic business change, and is seen in ‘best practice’ guidance as an essential prerequisite for delivering successful business change projects (IntellectUK, 2000; Office of Government Commerce, 2006). It has become even more significant as ‘projects’ have been seen as a flexible and more effective means of structuring organisational activity in a turbulent and increasingly competitive business environments (Frame, 2002). Project management skills are now widely seen as a key managerial competence (Office of Public Services Reform, 2003) and project management is increasingly a feature of management education. Enormous numbers of prescriptive texts, largely reflecting the practice-based approaches and ideas of the professional associations’ ‘bodies of knowledge’, have been produced.

#### **2.2.1.2 Project management research**

Academic research in project management has developed in parallel with the growth in professional practice over the last fifty years, though some researchers express doubts as to



the extent to which this research has actually influenced practice (Morris, 2000). *“It seems that in project management, research and practice are still wide apart and we have not yet found the bridge between learning what is new and knowing how to apply it.”* (Shenhar & Dvir, 2008, p.114).

Also, despite the growth of importance of project management in the field of management practice, project management seems to have been of relatively limited interest to management and organizational researchers (Soderlund, 2004a; Shenhar & Dvir, 2008) with a recent comprehensive review of the literature finding less than 3% of the 3000 identified project management studies published in the last four decades in the leading academic management journals (Kloppenborg & Opfer, 2002). A growing number of authors (see Section 2.2.4 below) are seeing that the *“essentially practitioner-based bias of project-based research”* (Leybourne, 2007, p.61) has held back the development of rigorous theoretical development which means that *“project management is still not recognised as an equal member among the more established disciplines of management”* (Shenhar & Dvir, 2008, p.114).

While some broader management interest has been recently observed (Soderlund, 2004a; Williams, 2005), project management research has been seen as rather narrowly focused on project management *“as ‘a method’ for solving complex organisational problems”* (Soderlund, 2004b, p.183), and absorbed with improving method and process. Some see an undue emphasis on *“middle management tools and techniques”* (Morris, 2000, p.2) as a contributory factor to a perceived failure for research to substantially influence practice (Morris, 2000; Shenhar & Dvir, 2008).

One very obvious focus in the project management research area (and in the information systems (IS) research field also) is around the causes of project success or failure. This continues to be a dominant focus of concern, recently refreshed by considerable interest in the success factors of enterprise systems implementations, within a continuing discourse of perceived project failure. Indeed, Soderlund identifies this (the *‘critical success factors school’* (Soderlund, 2004a, p.659) as one of two major streams of literature within traditional project management research: the other being the *‘optimization school’*, concerned with

developing techniques such as work breakdown, network planning and activity scheduling. Success factors research has been aimed at providing a basis for prescriptions of how to manage successful projects, largely through cross-sectional studies of large populations of projects. This body of research is examined more closely in Section 2.2.2 below.

A number of recent reviews of the project management research field (Crawford et al. 2006; Kloppenborg and Opfer 2002; Leybourne 2007; Morris 2000; Packendorff 1995) all point to an early and enduring preoccupation with tools, techniques and control processes, though with a growing interest since the 1980s in broader organisational and human resource issues such as matrix structures, project leadership and effective teams. Thomas, in her ‘genealogical analysis’ of the development of project management sees this growing importance of human factors as a consequence of the application of project management practices outside the more tightly defined engineering task environment from which they originated; and also as an attempt to explain the continued apparent failure of project management techniques (Thomas, 2006, p.95). Leybourne sees a “... *gradual move within the evolving literature from the use of projects as a toolbox of techniques and processes based on planning and control of specific tasks, to the wider behavioural and organizational aspects of managing work using project-based teams*” (Leybourne, 2007, p.63).

Shenhar and Dvir (2008) also describe an evolution from concerns with cost, control and risk management planning, to a growing focus on human resources, teams and leadership, but point also to recent developments in the 2000s that seek to recognise the diversity of project types and the need for contingent rather than universal approaches. The need for development of approaches which reflect the complexity of real-life projects has been more recently recognised (Cicmil et al., 2006; Williams, 1999), and there are growing numbers of authors challenging the universal applicability and the underlying assumptions of professional ‘best practice’ as exemplified in the professional associations’ ‘bodies of knowledge’. The need for the development of more rigorous and empirically supported project management theory has been highlighted (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006; Koskela & Howel, 2002; Pollack 2007; Williams 2005; Winter *et al.*, 2006), perhaps looking to other disciplines in management and organisational research (Leybourne, 2007; Shenhar & Dvir, 2008).

### 2.2.1.3 *Areas of focus*

In the context of the initial area of research identified in Chapter 1, three areas within the project management research field appear to be of direct relevance:

- project critical success factors – what can this research tell us about how business change can be more successfully delivered?
- Contingent approaches – what insights can be gained from research into the management of the uncertainty and complexity that is a feature of business change?
- new directions in project management theory – if current theory is inadequate, why is that and what does that suggest for future developments?

These are therefore considered further in Section 2.2.2 – 2.2.5 below.

## 2.2.2 *Project critical success factors*

### 2.2.2.1 *What do we mean by success and failure?*

A key starting point is to understand what is meant by the notion of project success or failure<sup>1</sup>. From a practice perspective, this is typically not seen as an issue. For example, according to the Financial Times Series publication ‘The Definitive Guide to Project Management’: “*Successful project management is delivering your projects on time, to brief, and within budget*” (Nokes & Kelly, 2007), what has come to be known as the ‘iron triangle’ of quality, timescale and cost (Atkinson, 1999). The influential Standish report, which highlights the poor delivery record of IS implementations, bases its analysis on these three criteria (The Standish Group, 1995).

From a research perspective, it is generally accepted that project success and failure are problematic terms. The ‘iron triangle’ view can be traced to the origins of project

---

<sup>1</sup> In reviewing this material, findings from success and failure studies are taken as largely interchangeable. It is widely assumed in the literature that success and failure are two sides of the same coin eg prescriptive conclusions on the determinants of success are often drawn from work on IS failures (Ewusi-Mensah 1997; Keil et al 1998; Poon and Wagner 2001). “*Whatever can be said about evaluating IS success can also be used for understanding IS failure*” (Lyytinen and Hirschheim 1987). However, some authors have questioned whether the relationship between project failures and success is as straightforward as it appears (Davis et al 1992; Pinto and Mantel 1990).

management in the 1950s, and numerous authors (Jugdev and Muller (2005) provide a comprehensive recent review) have criticised this approach as too narrow, overly concerned with the limited perspective of the project team and the limited time frame of the implementation. Many authors point to the variety of measures of success and failure used in empirical studies, seen as arising partly from different purposes for the research, from the particularities of the specific projects, or from the absence of an agreed framework or definition (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; DeLone & McLean, 2003; Jugdev & Muller, 2005; Lyytinen & Hirschheim, 1987). In the IS field, DeLone and McLean’s influential paper on information systems success reviewed some 180 studies of IS success and found a great variety of different measures: “... *there are nearly as many measures as there are case studies*” (DeLone & McLean, 1992, p.61).

A distinction is often drawn between *project success* (the achievement of the goals of the project, or the intended business benefits) which may not be measurable until some time after the project has completed, and *project management success*, that is the performance of the project against specification, for which the classic quality-cost-time triangle is seen as more appropriate. (Cooke-Davies, 2002; De Wit, 1988; Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996). A key point here is that *project management success* is far more within the power of the project manager, while *project success* may be determined by many contextual factors outside the project team’s control. Morris (Morris, 2004; Morris & Hough, 1987; Morris *et al.*, 2006c) who sees success as a “*slippery concept*” (Morris, 2000, p.3) is a protagonist for focusing on business outcomes, rather than the process success. However, this implies enlarging the view of ‘project management’ to one of ‘the management of projects’ to achieve business success, and managing – or at least influencing – the project’s environment and context as well as the project processes and practices of project definition and delivery.

The time-dependent nature of assessing success is also important (Shenhar & Levy, 1997; Pinto & Prescott, 1988): how the success of a project is viewed depends on the phase it is in, and many of the business outcomes will not be assessable until beyond the execution phase (Markus & Tanis, 2000). Also, work on project turnarounds shows that projects considered to be failures can later be considered to be a success after appropriate management intervention

(Akkermans & van Helden, 2002; Fitzgerald & Russo, 2005; Keil & Robey, 1999). Morris and Hough (1987) argue that a properly terminated project can be considered a success. Orlikowski and Yates query whether the intrinsically binary nature of success and failure is a useful concept at all, and calls for a focus on workable or ‘good enough’ outcomes (Orlikowski & Yates, 2006).

Many of these different success criteria can only be assessed subjectively, and therefore different views of the success of any project are likely to be held (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Lim & Mohamed, 1999; Morris & Hough, 1987; Turner, 1997; Wateridge, 1998; Kling, 1980; Lyytinen & Hirschheim, 1987; Saarinen, 1996). From this perspective, success or failure can therefore be seen as a dynamic and contextually-defined organisational process of retaining or losing the support of organisational stakeholders (Sauer, 1993; Ward, Hemingway & Daniel, 2005; Lyytinen & Hirschheim, 1987). As Markus and Tanis (2000, p.185) say “*success can look very different when examined at different points of time, on different dimensions, or from different points of view*” : like Cooke-Davies (2002), they call for a balanced score card of measures, including the effect on business operations. Turner sees therefore the need to agree explicitly with key stakeholders their criteria in advance (Turner, 2004). Typically, however, the view is taken either implicitly or explicitly that ultimately project success is viewed predominantly from the perspective of the executive leadership (Markus *et al.*, 2000).

From a more interpretive perspective, discussed more fully in later chapters of this thesis, success and failure are seen as socially constructed notions which reflect a process of organisational sensemaking, the development of competing narratives, and the interplay between organisational power structures (Boddy and Paton 2004; Fincham 2002; Mitev 2000; Walsham 1993; Wilson and Howcroft 2002). Lyytinen and Hirschheim (1987) saw *expectation failure* as a socially constructed reality which subsumed all other characterisations of IS failure. (Fincham, 2002) described IS success and failure in terms of *narratives* of meaning and action, focusing on symbolic action, themes, plots and stories. These perspectives are picked up in later discussion in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7. However, despite the suggestion by some influential authors (Markus & Robey, 1988) that the more subjective and interpretive approaches provide better insight into project successes and

failures, the rationalist approaches, largely characterised by a search for ‘critical success factors’ have been far more numerous.

### 2.2.2.2 *Success and failure factors*

Notwithstanding the evident difficulties discussed above of defining precisely what is meant by success, considerable effort over the last 20-30 years has been devoted to identifying the factors contributing to it. Despite persistent criticism, the attraction of the factors approach seems undiminished as can be seen by some recent work (Botta-Genoulaz, Millet & Grabot, 2005; Motwani, Subramanian & Gopalakrishna, 2005; Sarkis & Sundarraj, 2003; Fortune & White, 2006). The results have been influential with, and attractive to, practitioners, given claims to generalisability and the ease with which prescriptions can be developed (Sauer, 1999). This work seems to have been done mostly through surveys of practitioners (Pinto & Slevin, 1987; Jiang & Klein, 1999; Keil *et al.*, 1998; Yeo, 2002), with detailed case study work being less common (Fitzgerald and Russo 2005; Morris and Hough 1987; Poon and Wagner 2001), and more recently through synthesis of the previous literature, tested against one or more case studies (Nah et al. 2001; Sarkis and Sundarraj 2003).

Some characteristic examples of the findings from such studies are discussed below which give a flavour of the outcomes of this work.

Pinto and colleagues (Pinto & Mantel, 1990; Pinto & Slevin, 1987; Pinto & Prescott, 1988) identified 10 critical success factors which were “*found to be generalizable to a wide variety of project types and organizations*” (Pinto & Mantel, 1990, p.270) and used them as basis for a project diagnostic called Project Implementation Profile (PIP). PIP was used in research which looked at the causes of project failure, and the variation in CSFs across the project lifecycle.

**Table 2.1: Critical Success Factors**

	<b>Success Factor</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Project Mission	Initial clearly defined goals and general directions
2	Top management support	Willingness of top management to provide the necessary resources and authorities/power for project success
3	Project schedule/plan	A detailed specification of the individual action steps for project implementation
4	Client consultation	Communication, consultation, and active listening to all impacted parties
5	Personnel	Recruitment, selection, and training of the necessary personnel for the project team
6	Technical tasks	Availability of the required technology and expertise to accomplish the specific technical action steps
7	Client acceptance	The act of “selling” the final project to its ultimate intended users
8	Monitoring and feedback	Timely provision of comprehensive control information at each stage in the implementation process
9	Communication	The provision of an appropriate network and necessary data to all key actors in the project implementation
10	Trouble-shooting	Ability to handle unexpected crises and deviations from plan

Source: Pinto and Slevin 1987

Numerous studies have developed frameworks of success factors, including more and more different factors eg Morris and Hough’s case-study-based framework for project success includes 84 factors grouped under 10 headings:

- Project definition
- Planning, design and technology management
- Politics/social factors
- Schedule duration
- Schedule urgency
- Finance
- Legal agreements
- Contracting
- Project implementation
- Human factors.

Broadly similar findings, though with a more specific IS focus, were obtained from numerous studies of IS failures (Keil *et al.*, 1998; Ewusi-Mensah, 1997).

Much of the research serves to emphasise the great variety of factors that can be seen to be significant. For example, Cooper and Zmud (1990) proposed a comprehensive model which recognises six distinct stages of IS project implementation and five major contextual factors (*user, organization, task, technology, environment*) which can differentially impact success at each of the stages. The more recent work on implementation of ERP systems has led to another wave of success factors work, with broadly similar findings, combined with considerable diversity in the specific factors and their perceived priority (Motwani *et al.* 2005; Sarkis and Sundarraj 2003; Somers and Nelson 2001; Umble *et al.* 2003).

Fortune and White (2006) report on a review of 63 published studies identifying project success factors and draw out a list of the 27 most commonly quoted factors. They observe that, despite the similarity of many of the lists of factors there is actually “*only limited agreement among authors on the factors that influence project success*” and that “*there is a lot of overlap between sets but the factors selected for inclusion in individual lists vary to a considerable extent*” (Fortune & White, 2006, p.54). The three most cited factors are: support from senior management; clear realistic objectives; and good planning. However, while 81% of the publications reviewed include one or more of these, only 17% include all three. Some



factors seen as most critical by some case studies (eg a committed project sponsor) were only cited by a small proportion (19%) of studies. Sauer produces a similar review of IS failures research, identifying some 50 factors, grouped into 12 categories, and draws similar conclusions (Sauer, 1999).

### 2.2.2.3 The limitations of the factors-based approach

The limitations of the factors-based approach have been highlighted by several authors, observing in particular that the factors are highly-interrelated in a complex and possibly varying fashion, are context-dependent, and have different significance throughout the process of a project (Larsen and Myers 1999; Markus et al. 2000; Nandhakumar 1996; Sauer 1999) – points also acknowledged by some of the early researchers adopting this approach (Pinto & Mantel, 1990; Pinto & Prescott, 1988). Sauer (1999), in his comprehensive review of the IS failures literature, provides a powerful critique of the factors approach, finding little empirical validation of the models and prescriptive frameworks on which they are based. He concludes that “*factors research has generated a number of very similar results*” but “*the lack of convincing validation, the dearth of new insights...and the continuing evidence of failures in practice..*” strongly suggest that the approach has not been successful (Sauer, 1999, p.290). Definition is one issue: factors such as “good communications” and “top management support” are not very specific, and it is not always clear what is meant by a particular factor (Fortune & White, 2006). Sarker and Lee (2003) in their case study exposed the difficulty in practice of defining exactly what was meant by ‘strong and committed leadership’, ‘open and honest communication’ and ‘a balanced and empowered implementation team’ and in observing whether they were present, and if so, to what degree. Also, judgements are made only after an implementation has been deemed successful or not, thereby limiting the predictive value of the factors approach (Sauer, 1999). Wilson and Howcroft (2002) even suggest that declaration of failure is a complex social and political process, which is followed by enumeration of a list of acceptable explanatory factors, rather than the outcome actually being determined by the factors.

Sauer (1999) points out that there is rarely any guidance on *how* to achieve the required factors, and no adequate guidelines on the extent to which any factor is required to achieve

success. For example, Morris and Hough's 84 factors are essentially pointers to areas of concern, rather than specific and clearly identifiable actions (eg "do not force clarity until appropriate", "avoid rushing", "beware of switching design authority during different phases of project", "foster good client-contractor relations" and so on (Morris & Hough, 1987, p.265).

Overall, it seems that the factors approach has "proved too simple for the complexity of the phenomenon" and that therefore the prescriptions derived from it have not been effective (Sauer, 1999, p.291). As Fincham says "Lists of the usual suspects, no matter how lengthy and inclusive, do not provide coherent explanations of why failure occurs" (Fincham, 2002, p.4).

#### 2.2.2.4 Conclusions to be drawn from factors research

Whatever the limitations of the factors approach, it is possible to draw a number of important conclusions from this research:

- The notion of 'project success' is itself problematic, involving subjective and usually retrospective interpretation, complicated by issues of timing and organisational power;
- there are very many factors which can be associated with the success or failure of projects, whatever their character;
- different studies place different priorities on these factors, depending upon the circumstances, the nature of the project and its stage of development – this suggests the importance of the specific project character, context and history;
- which of the many possible factors are most important is usually only established after the event, and research has not been able to demonstrate any predictive power of the factors approach;
- while not establishing universal and invariant cause and effect relationships, the research nonetheless highlights repeated patterns in the kinds of issues that often need to be addressed;
- those factors which are most frequently identified as important – such as top management commitment, user involvement, stakeholder management etc are

typically ‘organizational’ ie involving inter-personal processes of communication, decision-making and organisational politics;

- in-depth understanding of the causes of project outcomes requires detailed knowledge of the specific circumstances of any project and the way in which they unfold over time.

### ***2.2.3 Uncertainty, complexity and contingent approaches***

#### ***2.2.3.1 One size does not fit all***

The factors approach assumes that it is possible to identify a universal set of good practices that are applicable in any project. What are referred to here as ‘contingent approaches’ covers a body of research that starts from the position that there are many different kinds of projects which may need to be handled in different ways.

Shenhar, drawing on classical contingency theory and previous projects research, identifies two critical dimensions with respect to defining a typology of project types – *uncertainty*, and *complexity* (Shenhar, 2001) – and identifies that different types of project along these dimensions have different success factors and require different management approaches (Shenhar *et al.*, 2002). Uncertainty and complexity are consistently seen throughout the project management literature (Eisenhardt & Tabrizi, 1995; Lindkvist, Soderlund & Tell, 1998) as important distinguishing characteristics of projects.

#### ***2.2.3.2 Project uncertainty***

“*The scope for uncertainty in any project is considerable, and most project management activities are concerned with managing uncertainty from the earliest ‘Conception’ stage to the final ‘Support’ stage of the project life cycle...*” (Ward & Chapman, 2003, p.99); and the sources of uncertainty can be many (Atkinson, Crawford & Ward, 2006; McCaskey, 1988). Shenhar (2001) used a single measure of technological uncertainty; others have distinguished between uncertainty in *goals* and uncertainty in the *methods* to achieve those goals (Turner & Cochrane, 1993), or *end uncertainty* and *means uncertainty* (Laufer, Denker & Shenhar, 1996). In a study of 16 projects over a five year period, (De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002) identify four different kinds or degrees of project uncertainty: *variation*, where cost, time and performance levels vary randomly but in a predictable range; *foreseen* uncertainty, where a

few known factors will influence the project but in unpredictable ways; *unforeseen* uncertainty, where one of more major influence factors cannot be predicted; and *chaos*, where unforeseen events completely invalidate the project's target, planning and approach. Different styles of project management are identified, and project managers are urged to “*adopt roles and techniques oriented less toward planning and more toward flexibility and learning*” as the level of uncertainty intensifies (De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002, p.61). Laufer, Denker and Shenhar (1996) observe that even in the world of engineering capital projects: “*the decisive majority of capital projects suffer until far into their lives from rapidly changing goals, from perpetual changes and unexpected constraints that are constantly at loggerheads with each other and impinge on the schedule*” (Laufer, Denker & Shenhar, 1996, p.190). They see an evolution of models, from scheduling (control), through teamwork (integration), to reducing uncertainty (flexibility), and simultaneity (dynamism). Simultaneity is seen as a response to complexity, uncertainty and pace and compared with directing a three-ring circus, drawing on experience, responsiveness and adaptability.

### 2.2.3.3 *Project complexity*

Project complexity is also widely recognised as one of the critical project characteristics which “*provide a basis for determining the appropriate managerial actions required to complete a project successfully*” (Baccarini, 1996, p.201), and complex projects are seen as demanding exceptional management and extension of basic project management techniques (Baccarini 1996; Morris and Hough 1987; Williams 1999). Conventional project management responses to problems in complex projects can be ineffective or even counter-productive (Williams, 2005; Williams et al., 1995).

Like uncertainty, complexity is also a notion capable of different interpretations. Baccarini (1996) defines complexity as the degree of inter-relationship between different parts, with a suggested operationalisation based on degree of *differentiation* and *inter-dependency*. This fits well with the widely-accepted view that the more distinct components and stakeholders a project has, and the more it is influenced by its organisational context the more complex it becomes (Engwall, 2003).

Baccarini insists that complexity be clearly distinguished from uncertainty. Williams suggests an overarching measure of ‘project complexity’, combining the structural uncertainty

generated through inter-dependencies between different elements, with goal and methods uncertainty (Williams, 1999). By contrast, complexity can be seen as a component of project uncertainty (Atkinson, Crawford & Ward, 2006; De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002).

The key point here seems to be that both these concepts (and the related concept of ambiguity) undermine the key assumptions of control and predictability which underpin the conventional view of projects: which “*assumes that everyone can identify the tasks at the outset, provide contingency alternatives and keep to the same overall project vision throughout*” (De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002, p.60). Indeed, Pich, Loch and Meyer (2002) combine uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity into the concept of *adequacy of available information* about states of the world and action effects. This information-processing perspective is further extended by considering ambiguity as representing the existence of multiple and conflicting interpretations (Thiry, 2002) or values (McCaskey, 1988).

#### 2.2.3.4 Product development projects

As discussed earlier, project research has not explicitly identified business change projects as such, though software and IT enabled-change projects have been described as of high uncertainty (Shenhar, 2001; Turner & Cochrane, 1993; Ward & Elvin, 1999). However, a rich source of empirical data on projects exhibiting both uncertainty and complexity comes from the literature on innovation and product development. New product development is inherently uncertain, both in terms of ends and means (Tatikonda & Rosenthal, 2000) and complex because it typically involves multi-party cross-functional collaboration between quite different disciplines, such as marketing and engineering (Ancona and Caldwell 1992; Dougherty 1992). The growing competitive imperative of speed to market adds pace as a compounding factor to complexity and uncertainty (Williams, 1999; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997).

The influential review of the extensive product development literature by Brown and Eisenhardt (1995) identifies a number of strands of research which they consolidate into a synthesised model highlighting the importance of: the multiple players who affect outcomes, including suppliers; the concentration on the team processes and the importance of psychological commitment; organisational power and lobbying; the importance of good work organisation, including good planning; overlapping rather than sequential stages.

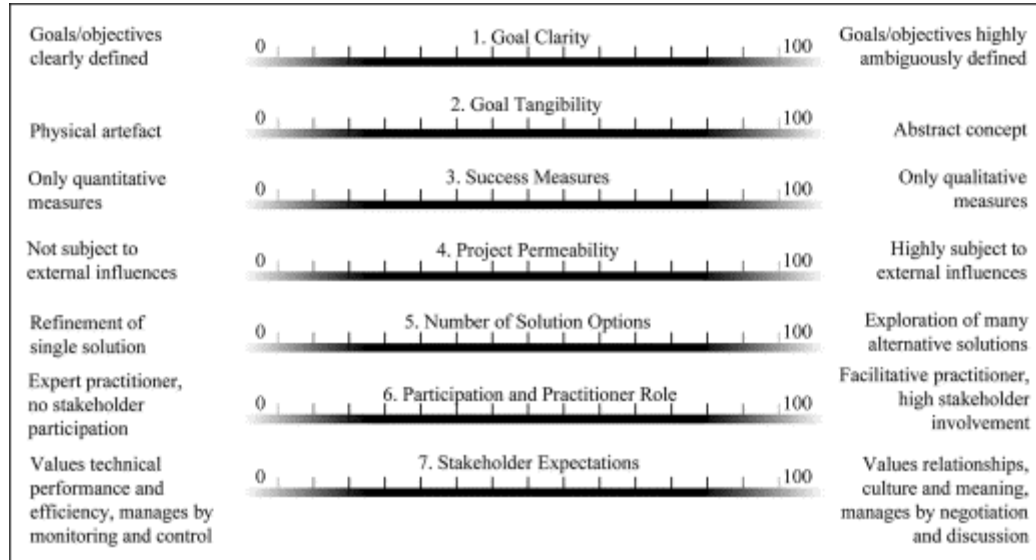
Brown and Eisenhardt make an important distinction, which later authors (Lewis *et al.*, 2002) see as a significant polarisation of the field, between a *rational* problem-solving strategy and an *experiential* or *learning* strategy (De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002). They claim that a rational approach, involving sequential development steps and extensive planning is effective in stable, well-understood (albeit complex) circumstances. Where there is more uncertainty in the process, they see more experiential tactics, such as frequent iterations, extensive testing, and frequent milestones, as more effective. “*The underlying idea is that under conditions of uncertainty it is not helpful to plan. Rather, maintaining flexibility and learning quickly through improvisation and experience yield effective process performance*” (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995, p.369). Research on fast-paced product innovation in the computer industry offers support for these conclusions (Eisenhardt & Tabrizi, 1995). However, research by Shenhar and Dvir (1996) suggested that the greater a project’s scope and uncertainty, the more a planned style enhanced performance.

Lewis *et al.* (2002) build on Brown and Eisenhardt’s work and other similar research findings to identify two distinctive styles for the management of product development projects: *emergent* and *planned*. An emergent style involves facilitating team members’ creativity, flexibility and improvisation, and a planned style provides managerial discipline and direction. It seems that both styles may be effective at different times, and the challenge is to recognise that and respond to it (Laufer, Denker & Shenhar, 1996; De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002). Lewis *et al.* (2002) call for approaches which reconcile the tensions which real projects experience, and for more focus on the dynamics of projects, based on what managers actually do over time, so as to improve “*a limited understanding of what firms actually do to manage projects and how different styles affect performance*” (Lewis *et al.*, 2002, p.548). Their finer-grained analysis supports a complex set of conclusions: an apparent “*paradox in project management-performance relationships*” (p.562) which emphasise that the same activity (eg introduction of regular milestones) can have quite different effects dependent on context and circumstance. The search for general categories which can broadly characterise this contingency appears (rather like the research in project success factors) to have become bogged down in the sheer complexity and variability of projects.

### 2.2.3.5 *Hard and soft projects*

Another way of distinguishing different types of projects, which combines a number of related factors in a single measure, and echoes the distinction between ‘emergent’ and ‘planned’ discussed above, is that of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ projects. The ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ distinction has been much used, though in a rather ‘*loose and ambiguous*’ way (Crawford & Pollack, 2004, p.645), typically to describe a number of different polarities from mechanical/social, objective/subjective, clear/fuzzy, functional/interpretive etc. Crawford and Pollack (2004) identify 7 different characteristics of projects which they use to categorise projects along a hard/soft continuum. These essentially seem to capture project-relevant specific aspects of complexity and uncertainty and ambiguity that have been discussed above. Crawford and Pollack see conventional project management as rooted in the ‘hard’ paradigm, and so see this framework as a means of helping identify when other considerations are required and “*legitimises questioning the standard application of the more readily accepted hard approaches to project management.*” (p.651).

**Fig 2.1: Hard and soft dimensions framework** (Crawford & Pollack, 2004, p.650)



On the basis of the criteria discussed above, it seems clear that business change projects as defined in Section 1.2 are typically ‘soft’ projects.

### 2.2.3.6 *Prescriptions for managing uncertainty and complexity*

What research there is into ‘soft’ projects, or those demonstrating extensive uncertainty and complexity, tends to highlight the specific nature of each project’s circumstances. Some broad prescriptive principles do seem to emerge, however: balancing control and flexibility; learning; parallel rather than sequential working; intensive communication; and the need to adapt to constantly changing circumstances (as in the ‘three-ring circus’ (Laufer, Denker & Shenhar, 1996). Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) highlighted the importance of ‘semi-structures’ that balanced order and disorder, with both highly-structured development processes and chaotic lack of structure being associated with less successful projects. A key element of desirable structure was the clear definition of roles and responsibilities, and an explicit priority-setting process. Two other features of the more successful projects were the intensity of the communication processes; and the commitment to ‘trial and error’, with low-cost initiatives and experimental products, an instance of *‘learning and selectionism’* (Pich, Loch & Meyer, 2002, p.1013). The importance of ‘semi-structures’ is also reflected in Ivory and Alderman’s case study (Ivory & Alderman, 2005), where a coherent project vision provided the necessary loose control to direct event-driven unplanned ‘interventions’. Lindkvist, Soderlund and Tell (1998) similarly saw intensive decentralised communication taking place within the constraints of global organisational goals, most markedly expressed in a very challenging and explicit deadline. They also pointed to the adoption of a ‘fountain’ rather than ‘waterfall’ model, with: simultaneous and overlapping, rather than sequential, activities; and intense and frequent feedback between activities, in public settings which encouraged and promoted communal responsibility for the end outcome. There was an emphasis on early starting, testing, on producing prototypes, and a different attitude to failure: *“the courage to fail and never give up”* (Lindkvist, Soderlund & Tell, 1998, p.938). They draw on organisational decision and learning theory (discussed in Section 2.4 below) to suggest that, in situations of the inherent complexity of most organisational change, errors are an unavoidable characteristic of project work, and an important source of learning: *“this may imply that (ex post) efforts to achieve frequent testing, fast feedback and other error handling routines should be preferred, in most cases, to (ex ante) efforts at zero errors”* (Lindkvist, Soderlund & Tell, 1998, p.943). Implicit in these analyses is individual and team motivation, and the importance of trust between the parties. Atkinson, Crawford and Ward (2006) see the



need for a balance between trust (“*The most economic method of compensating for gaps in information...*” (p.697)) and formal governance controls – themselves ultimately underpinned by trust.

Laufer, Denker and Shenhar (1996) offer some similar guiding principles, including starting early, simple processes, planning only as far as information allows, intensive communication in multi-disciplinary teams, systematic monitoring and fast feedback, and multi-phase working wherever possible – and a project leader capable of ‘simultaneous management’ and of creating a sense of common mission. Interestingly, multi-variate statistical analysis of 127 projects found that “*the competence of the project manager is the variable that exercises the greatest influence on the outcome of high-uncertainty projects*” (Shenhar *et al.*, 2002, p.121). Collyer (2008) offers a number of approaches for managing ‘dynamic’ projects with many unknowns, which echo many of the findings discussed above: including emergent exploratory planning, controlled experimentation, a focus on outputs rather than process, flat hierarchies and frequent communications, and the right leadership style. Recent work on project management skills and education (Crawford *et al.*, 2006; Thomas & Mengel, 2008) has highlighted the need for developing a much wider range of skills for project leaders to deal with complexity and uncertainty, including the development of a culture of shared values and a powerful vision, of team development and motivation, and of political awareness and broader contextual understanding (Thomas & Mengel, 2008, p.309). These findings are reinforced by the huge amount of research on the effectiveness of project teams (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Belbin, 2004; Burke *et al.*, 2006; Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Hackman, 1987; Pinto, Pinto & Prescott, 1993; Salas, Sims & Burke, 2005; Sheard & Kakabadse, 2002; Zaccaro, Rittman & Marks, 2001), and numerous practice-based prescriptive guides (Gratton & Erickson, 2007; Hackman, 2002; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Polzer, 2004).

#### 2.2.3.7 Agile methods

The above research findings, while not producing identical lists of principles, do share a family resemblance, and offer a well-evidenced alternative to highly-structured methodologies based on detailed planning and control. They are also strikingly consistent with the practice-based prescriptions of ‘agile’ methods (Cockburn, 2002; Highsmith, 2002;

Schwaber & Beedle, 2001; Augustine *et al.*, 2005; Highsmith, 2004; Aguanno, 2005; Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008). Agile approaches have mainly been developed in response to the perceived inadequacies of traditional software development methodologies in delivering customer value in the increasingly volatile business environment; and as an extension of ‘lean’ production management principles to project management in the construction industry (Ballard & Howell, 2003). More widely, they (particularly the SCRUM method (Schwaber, 2007; Schwaber & Beedle, 2001)) have been seen as offering an approach to managing projects in general, and even presented as offering a ‘new paradigm’ for project management (Howell *et al.*, 2004; Koskela & Howell, 2002a). A number of these different practices have been brought together under the umbrella of the ‘Agile Alliance’ which has developed the ‘Agile Manifesto’, with its 12 principles – embracing change, focusing on outputs and understanding rather than documentation, working iteratively, and relying on collaboration, empowered teams and communication for control (The Agile Manifesto, 2001).

Agile practices include: *“short iterations, continuous testing, self-organizing teams, constant collaboration, and frequent re-planning based on current reality”* (Highsmith, 2002, p.4). *“Agile managers understand that demanding certainty in the face of uncertainty is dysfunctional. They set goals and constraints that provide boundaries within which creativity and innovation can flourish”* (Highsmith, 2002, p.5). They prefer extensive face-to-face interaction to documentation, and driving action from immediate priorities and what can be done, rather than from detailed plans made in advance. For example, the SCRUM method (Schwaber & Beedle, 2001) organises project activity in terms of 30-day ‘Sprints’ to deliver products with a tangible business value, with daily stand-up meetings of the entire project meeting, each reporting against the 3 questions: what have you done in the last 24 hours? What do you plan to do in the next 24 hours? What’s stopping you getting on with the work of the next 24 hours? (Schwaber & Beedle, 2001). Agile methods generally seek *“barely sufficient”* structure (Highsmith, 2002, p.5), *“light-but-sufficient”* rules of project behaviour (Cockburn, 2002, p.8) and use ‘time-boxing’ and challenging deadlines to focus and force difficult trade-off decisions.

The proponents of Agile methods point to substantial bottom-line benefits of increased productivity and improved customer satisfaction (Highsmith, 2004; Mahanti, 2004; Schwaber & Beedle, 2001) though perhaps more dispassionate observers suggest that *“... the empirical*

*evidence is still very limited*” (Abrahamsson *et al.*, 2003). Agile methods are recognised as being most effective in circumstances of frequent change and uncertainty, or exploratory projects; but also where teams can be kept small, and co-located (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008; Schwaber & Beedle, 2001) to support the intense team work and communication required. There is considerable debate about the scalability of such approaches to a corporate level (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008; Mahanti, 2004; Schwaber, 2007) and constant challenges from mainstream opponents on questions of quality and controllability - it is doubtful whether agile methods can yet be considered part of the software development mainstream (Aguanno, 2005, p.11). There are signs that, rather than providing alternative universal methodologies, agile methods are best incorporated as principles applied in a situation-appropriate way (Abrahamsson *et al.*, 2003), contributing to the development of hybrid approaches (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008, p.16). According to Cockburn (quoted in (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008, p.16): “...*agile is mostly an attitude, not a methodology or fixed set of practices*”.

The incorporation of agile methods into project management approaches more generally is “...*still in its infancy*” (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008, p.16). However, the growing experience of agile methods in practice does provide real evidence of alternatives to the traditional project control-based methodologies for managing complex and uncertain projects, which are consistent with the project management research findings discussed earlier in this section.

All of these approaches share an improvisatory character, an ability to provide an unplanned response to the unexpected. The findings are consistent with the largely theoretical work on *improvisation* in the broader organizational studies literature, which also emphasises the themes of semi-structures, the balance between flexibility and control, the need for intense communication, and an empowering style of leadership (Ciborra 1999; Crossan *et al.* 1996; Cunha *et al.* 1999; Hatch 1999; Moorman and Miner 1998; Moorman and Miner 2002; Weick 1998).

Table 2.2 below draws together some of the combined findings from this research and the agile approaches discussed above to summarise the emerging recommendations for the effective management of complex and uncertain projects such as business change projects.

The references shown are those discussed in this section, and are illustrative rather than comprehensive (numbers refer to listed references at end of table).

**Table 2.2: Approaches to managing complex and uncertain projects**

	<b>Recommended approach</b>	<b>Illustrative References</b>
	<b>SETTING DIRECTION</b>	
1	Visioning and mission	1,3,4,6,12,13,16
2	Clear goal and end-date, set top-down	2,12,13,17
3	Project initiation/charter	3,4,5,17,19
4	Continual review of objectives	9,10,12,13,19
5	Powerful project leader, with good subject knowledge	6, 14,15, 16
	<b>PLANNING</b>	
6	High-level, limited horizon	3,4,5,6,7,9,16
7	Split into small chunks	7,10,12,13,19
8	Decouple most uncertain elements	7,16
9	Frequent milestones	6,19
10	Time-boxing	3,4, 10,12,13,19
11	Frequent re-planning	1,3,4,5,12,13,19
	<b>EXECUTION</b>	
12	Take action early	5,10, 12,13,16,17,
13	Do things in parallel	5,6,7,9,12,13,19
14	Prototyping and trials	6,7,9,12,13,19
15	Iterate through lifecycle	1, 2, 3, 4 5, 7,12,13,17,19
	<b>MONITORING</b>	
16	Intense, inclusive communication	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,11,12,13,14,15, 16,17,19,20
17	Frequent reviews	1,3,4,5,9,16,17,19
18	Horizon scanning	9,16
19	Continuous testing	3,4,12,13,17,19
20	Expect errors, don't try to eliminate them	9,17,18
	<b>CONTROL</b>	

21	Focus on outcomes not process	1, 3, 5,7, 12,13,19
22	Simple procedures	1, 3, 7,12,13, 19
23	Loose controls/semi-structures	3,4,6,12,21
24	Flexibility	1,3,9,10, 12,13,19,20,21
	<b>TEAM</b>	
25	Leader with good subject knowledge	6,7,8,11,12,14,15,16,20
26	Cross-functional teams	5, 6, 11,14,15,16,21
27	Participative, empowering culture	7,11,12,13,14,15,17,20
28	Team building and motivation	1,3,4,6,8,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,19,20
29	Experienced team members	1, 8, 12,13,19, 20
30	Interpersonal ‘soft’ skills	1,2,8,11,12,13,14,15,19,20

### Reference key:

(1: Aguanno, 2005; 2: Atkinson, Crawford & Ward, 2006; 3: Augustine, 2005; 4: Augustine *et al.*, 2005; 5: Ballard & Howell, 2003; 6: Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; 7: Collyer, 2008; 8: Crawford *et al.*, 2006; 9: De Meyer, Loch & Rich, 2002; 10: Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008; 11: Hackman & Wageman, 2005; 12: Highsmith, 2002; 13: Highsmith, 2004; 14: Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; 15: Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; 16: Laufer, Denker & Shenhar, 1996; 17: Lindkvist, Soderlund & Tell, 1998; 18: Pich, Loch & Meyer, 2002; 19: Schwaber & Beedle, 2001; 20: Thomas & Mengel, 2008; 21: Ivory & Alderman, 2005)

This material is picked up again in Chapter 8 of this thesis, when the ability of the derived theoretical framework model to explain these recommendations is discussed. While there seems to be a broadening basis of support for the prescriptions summarised in Table 2.2, they have so far not been consolidated within a consistent theoretical framework. Most of the authors reviewed in this section present their findings as a broadly logical implication of complexity and uncertainty in general without attempting any theorisation. Some theoretical approaches have been suggested: notably complexity theory, complex adaptive systems and ‘the edge of chaos’ (Augustine *et al.*, 2005; Highsmith, 2002; Thomas & Mengel, 2008); organisational decision and learning theory (Lindkvist, Soderlund & Tell, 1998); and language/action perspective, and ‘management-as-organizing’ (Howell *et al.*, 2004; Koskela & Howell, 2002a). Fernandez & Fernandez (2008) though see the need for further research

aimed at producing “... *a common theory of agile project management*” (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2008, p.16). The discussion of the theoretical underpinning of project management is developed further in Section 2.2.4 below.

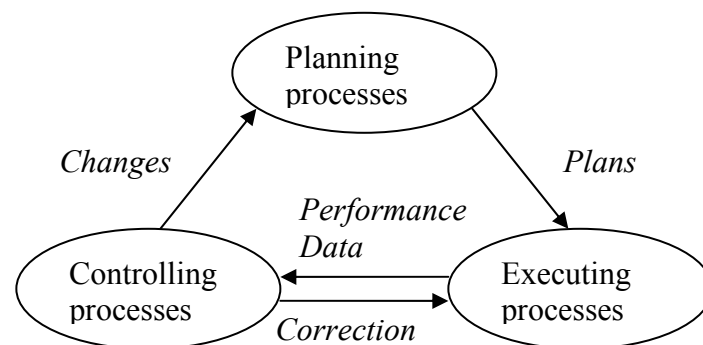
## **2.2.4 Project management theory development**

### **2.2.4.1 Current project management theory**

As described in Section 2.1, the project management field has been characterised by numerous authors as practitioner-driven, normative, focused on methods, tools and techniques, and lacking a firm theoretical basis, suffering “*from a scanty theoretical base and lack of concepts*” (Shenhar, 2001, p.394). The most explicitly articulated encapsulation of the principles and approaches of project management is usually taken to be the ‘bodies of knowledge’ – “*the most influential publications on what constitutes the knowledge base of the profession*” (Morris, Jamieson & Shepherd, 2006, p.461) - developed by the project management professional bodies (Association for Project Management, 2000; Project Management Institute, 2004) with similar prescriptions provided in central government guidance, including PRINCE and Managing Successful Programmes (Office of Government Commerce, 2005a; Office of Government Commerce, 2005b). These have largely been developed by expert practitioner committees, rather than through academic research. They are by no means identical, a point made repeatedly by Morris, who sees the APM Body of Knowledge as much broader than the PMI BOK and addressing many of its perceived weaknesses (Morris, 2004; Morris, 2006; Morris *et al.*, 2006). These ‘professional standards’ bodies of knowledge do not yet incorporate the kinds of approaches described in Section 2.2.3 and Table 2.2 above, which can at least to some degree be considered as part of an emerging consensus on ‘best practice’ from a research perspective (Atkinson, Crawford & Ward, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Thomas & Mengel, 2008; Williams, 2005; Winter *et al.*, 2006b); and to a more limited extent from the perspective of practitioner guidance also (Wysocki, 2006; Berkun, 2005; Barker & Cole, 2007). However, the sheer extent and dominance of these professional bodies of knowledge in the ‘dominant discourse’ (Williams, 2005) and their role in “... *becoming the quasi-standard of project management in many regions of the world*” (Thomas & Mengel, 2008, p.35) makes them the natural starting point for consideration of the theoretical foundations of the discipline.

A number of authors have identified some implicit theoretical assumptions underpinning the professional bodies of knowledge which share similar features, and are generally taken to characterise much of the field of project management in general. (Koskela & Howell, 2002b) summarise the model of projects underlying the PMI BOK as shown in Figure 2.2 below; in which a number of planning processes provide a plan, that is realised by the executing processes, and variances from the baseline or requests for change lead to corrections in execution or changes in further plans.

**Fig 2.2: PMBOK managerial processes** (from Koskela & Howell, 2002b)



This illustrates the three key features of an implied theory of project management:

- *management-as-planning*; in which the main focus of the management activity is the preparation of plans to achieve the required specification (they point out that 10 of the 13 processes defined in PMBOK Guide are planning processes)
- *dispatching* model; in which execution is a process of issuing orders, notifying or authorising the next activity from the plan (in this model, action is essentially ‘automatic’)

- the *thermostat* model; a feedback control model, as defined in modern control theory based on general systems theory.

They criticise this “*implicit and narrow theory*” on empirical and theoretical grounds, reflecting research showing that in practice it is impossible to maintain a completely up-to-date plan, that specifications are usually uncertain well into project, and that the theory ignores the gap between authorisation of a task and its completion, which is often in practice highly problematic.

Other authors make similar observations, identifying the foundations of project management in general systems theory, the centrality of planning, the assumption of clear and unambiguous goals, and (as discussed earlier) the assumption of the sequential project lifecycle (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Morris, 2004; Packendorff, 1995). These authors also point to the lack of good empirical confirmation that these assumptions have validity. Williams (2005) refers also to the emphasis on planning, and on the conventional systems control model, and adds also the expectation of self-contained independence from factors outside the project boundaries. He identifies three fundamental assumptions which make it difficult for the ‘dominant discourse’ of project management to accommodate the evident challenges of real-world complexity and uncertainty. The first assumption is that project management method is rational and self-evidently correct; the second is that projects engage with, and are part of an objective reality, where unequivocal ‘facts’ can be observed (a positivist epistemological and ontological stance, repeatedly identified by contributors to (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006); and that project outcomes and tasks can be hierarchically disaggregated, and that the whole can be understood as the sum of its parts. Modelling of large projects as complex systems, and the recognition of “*the socially constructed nature of ‘reality’ in a project*” (Williams, 2005, p.502) challenges all of these assumptions. Koskela and Howells cite a broader critique of management-as-planning from the operations management field: “*There is a need to found management at the operations level on a more realistic conception of the nature of purposeful activity which is currently being articulated in the fields of cognitive science and social theory*” (Johnston & Brennan, 1996, p.367).

Another underlying and associated assumption of project management is its universal validity, as evident in the use of project management methodologies. As the introduction to



the PMBOK says: “*the knowledge and practices described are applicable to most projects most of the time ... there is widespread consensus about their value and usefulness*” (Project Management Institute, 2004). As we have seen in Section 2.2.3, research shows that many projects in practice (especially those, like business change projects, with a degree of uncertainty and complexity) seem to be unique in terms of their particular circumstances, history and context. They often seem not to proceed in the orderly sequence implied by project methodologies and the widespread concern with project failures suggests that outcomes may not be as controllable as project management theory implies. According to Nandhakumar and Avison (1999), methodologies present a fiction, an ‘*illusion of control*’ (Remington & Crawford, 2004). Real projects are characterised by “*a continuous stream of intervention, bricolage, improvisation, opportunism, interruption and mutual negotiation as much as by regularity, progress milestones, planning and management control*” (Nandhakumar & Avison, 1999, p.188).

Pollack (2007) sees that the “*theoretical basis of PM is predominantly implicit*” but draws together a number of the criticisms discussed above by identifying a family of related features of project management theory and practice which he characterises as the ‘hard’ paradigm (developing the idea of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ projects referred to in Section 2.3.4). The ‘hard’ paradigm is associated with: a positivist epistemology and realist ontology; an assumption that human destiny is controllable; reductionism; a mechanistic view of organisation in terms of process and structure; a preference for centralised control and a directive approach; an assumption of achievable clarity and certainty; and clear and stable goals. From his review of the project management field he concludes that this dominant project management paradigm is widely criticised, and increasingly seen as applicable only to a very limited set of projects – in effect, ‘hard’ projects as defined in Section 2.2.3.5. According to Winter *et al.*: “*the issues facing both researchers and practitioners now seem to be well beyond the hard systems perspective so often associated with project management*” (Winter *et al.*, 2006b, p.641).

#### 2.2.4.2 Theoretical alternatives

What then are the theoretical alternatives to the ‘hard’ paradigm? The ‘soft’ paradigm by contrast is associated with an interpretive epistemological stance; a ‘becoming’ rather than

‘being’ ontology (Linehan & Kavanagh, 2004; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002); an emphasis on qualitative techniques; exploration and learning rather than detailed planning; unresolvable uncertainty and ambiguity; empowerment and participation rather than direction; and social processes rather than control procedures (Pollack, 2007). It is generally less influential but seen as growing within the field, and a possible source of new theoretical approaches.

One prominent example of theoretical development within this ‘soft’ paradigm is work by a number of Scandinavian scholars on the ‘temporary organisation’ (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Packendorff, 1995; Sahlin-Andersson & Soderholm, 2002), essentially treating projects as a particular form of organising. Their work is important in placing far greater emphasis on social and behavioural aspects in project working, and in demonstrating the value of drawing on findings from social psychology, organisational change and broader organisational studies. For example, according to Packendorff: “*action has to be understood as enactment of the subjective and inter-subjective realities of individuals and groups of individuals.....An understanding of decision-making and organizational politics in a project, for example, means creating sense-making descriptions of the project reality which it is possible for practitioners to subscribe to.*” (Packendorff, 1995, p.325). Lundin and Soderholm (1995) characterise their theory of the ‘temporary organization’ as combining traditional project management theory with developments in organization theory. They structure their theory around four basic concepts: *time*, *task*, *team*, and *transition*, and introduce notions such as rhetoric, legitimacy, action-based entrepreneurialism, and commitment-building, which are not part of the traditional project management discourse. Planning is seen as having symbolic as well as instrumental effect, and projects are viewed “*as an arena for acting out certain cultural values or organizational decisions*” (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, p.452). One of the central features of this theoretical work is its emphasis on action, rather than decision and planning, and recognition of the social and institutional forces affecting that action.

Apart from the ‘temporary organisation’, there appears so far to have been little substantive development of new theoretical approaches: as most of the researchers referred to in this section observe, “*discussion of the theoretical basis of PM is rare*” (Pollack, 2007, p.272). Koskela and Howell (2002b) suggest some possible directions for theoretical development, proposing management-as-organizing as an alternative to management-as-planning; the commitment-based language/action perspective (Ford and Ford 2003; Scherr 2005; Winograd

and Flores 1987) to enrich the ‘dispatch’ model of execution; and the use of experimentation as an alternative to the cybernetic control model. Cicmil and Marshall (2005) draw on Stacey’s complexity-based work on ‘complex responsive processes of relating’ (Stacey, 2001; Stacey, 2002) as a means of understanding the complexity of social interaction on projects. Some authors have explored Weick’s ideas about organisational sensemaking (Alderman *et al.*, 2005; Thomas, 1998); Giddens’ structuration theory (Sydow, 2006); and actor-network theory (Linde & Linderoth, 2006). Some of these developments are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. However, the project management field is still at an early stage in terms of building new theory.

Some pointers to the direction new project management theory might take is provided by the outcomes of the ‘Rethinking Project Management’ research network, established in 2003 in the UK in response to the growing critiques of project management theory and the need for new research in relation to developing practice. Reflecting much of the material reviewed in earlier sections, a key theme to emerge from the network, which involved researchers and practitioners, was “*the fact that ‘real’ projects and programmes are much more complex, unpredictable and multidimensional than the rational, deterministic model which dominate the literature*”, involving “*an evolving array of social agenda, practices, stakeholder relations, politics and power*” (Winter *et al.*, 2006b, p.644). Practitioners seemed to be poorly served by the research literature, though in practice developed the experience and intuition to perform in this complex landscape.

Five different directions were identified for future research (Winter *et al.*, 2006b, p.642):

- From the lifecycle model of projects to theories reflecting the real complexity of projects
- From projects as instrumental processes to projects as social processes
- From a focus on product creation to a focus on value creation, recognising the multiple meanings and perspectives of value within organisations
- From a narrow conceptualisation of projects to a broader conceptualisation of projects as multidisciplinary, not always predefined, but “*contestable and open to renegotiation throughout*”

- From a view of practitioners as trained technicians, following methods and techniques to practitioners as reflective practitioners, who can learn, operate and adapt effectively in complex project environments using experience, intuition and pragmatic application of theory in practice.

Many of these themes are picked up by Cicmil *et al.* (2006) in a call for research into the ‘actuality’ of projects, “*focusing on social process and how practitioners think in action*”, and building theories based on practice, underpinned by alternative philosophical assumptions to those upon which traditional project management approaches are based. This requires “... *a theoretical shift from more common normative rational approaches to individual and project performance...*” and a focus on “... *practical action, lived experience, quality of social interaction and communicative relating, operations of power in context, identity, and the relationship between agency and structure in project environments*” (Cicmil *et al.*, 2006, p.684).

Similar conclusions emerge in the organizational change management and organizational decision-making research fields, reviewed in the sections that follow.

## **2.3 Managing Organisational Change**

### **2.3.1 Overview**

#### **2.3.1.1 The breadth of the field**

The organisational change field is very wide<sup>2</sup> and diverse, and generally seen as relatively immature theoretically, a point made by most academic authors attempting to provide an overview of the field. As Burnes (2004a, p.4) says in his textbook (now in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition) on managing change: “... *what is available is a wide range of confusing and contradictory theories, approaches and recipes. Many of these are well-thought-out and grounded in both theory and practice; others, unfortunately, seem disconnected from either theory or reality.*”

Two frequently cited overviews of research in organizational change (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001) make similar points.

---

<sup>2</sup> A Google Scholar search on ‘organizational change’ 27 June 2008 produced 1,350,000 publications. Amazon supply more than 6000 books on the subject of change management (Sirkin, Keenan et al 2005).

Numerous authors highlight the problems of systematically covering the “*sheer sprawl*” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p.364) of the relevant literature, in particular the difficulty of clearly distinguishing prescriptive practice-based work from rigorous academic research. Demers, in her recent comprehensive review of organizational change theories (Demers, 2007) explicitly excludes the “*enormous prescriptive and practitioner-oriented literature*” on what she refers to as organizational development (OD), and sees as being built on theories of managerial intervention, rather than broader theories of organizational change. She acknowledges though that the distinction between prescriptive and analytical work is not always easy to maintain. Dunphy (1996) points out that the major change theories have been developed by change agents and practitioners, often “*passionate advocates of particular approaches*” who have sought to develop frameworks for understanding and directing change based on their practical experiences. This tension between rigorous analytical understanding of why and how change happens in organisations, and the urge to develop prescriptions for the successful management of change in organisations is a repeated theme throughout the field (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001, p.697) and (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

A further difficulty lies in distinguishing organizational change from the study of organizations in general. For example, Clegg and Hardy, in *The Handbook of Organizational Studies* (Clegg, Hardy & Nord, 1996, p.11) exclude separate consideration of the subject of organizational change, saying “*we cannot imagine any theory of, or chapter on, organizations that is not about change*”. Demers similarly concludes that developments in organisational theory have progressively eroded the study of change as distinct from organising in general. All this means that the study of organizational change potentially ranges from popular textbooks (such as *Making Sense of Change Management: A Complete Guide to the Models, Tools and Techniques of Organizational Change* (Cameron & Green, 2004): “*Written for academics and professionals alike, Making Sense of Change Management identifies and offers explanations of all current models of change as well as offering practical guidelines and examples showing the reasons why change can go wrong – and how to get it right.*”) to radical postmodern treatments remote from the immediate concerns of practitioners (Chia, 2002a; Heracleous & Marshak, 2004).

### 2.3.1.2 *Structuring the organizational change field*

Many authors (Burnes, 2004b; Perrow, 1979; Reed, 1996) structure the field by taking a historical perspective on the development of different schools with different underlying assumptions about the essential nature of organisations. The origins of the organisation studies field are seen in the rationalist ‘Classical’ school, (rooted in the work of Taylor on scientific management, Weber on bureaucracy and Fayol on the principles of organisation); and the parallel ‘Human Relations’ movement, (based on the work of Hawthorne, Mayo and Maslow), with its emphasis on the emotional needs of the individual seen as a reaction to the overly-mechanistic view of the Classical approach. Developments in organizational theory eg around culture, open systems, institutionalism, top-down change, organizational learning can all be seen as rooted in these two different traditions.

These early dual origins of the field seem to have persisted, at least in terms of the influences on mainstream organisational change management. For example, Collins divides the mainstream field into two, following Clegg’s lead (Clegg, 1990; Collins, 1998). The first body of approaches based in rationalism and the Classical school (which Collins labels as ‘n-step guides’) are seen as ‘under-socialised’, neglecting consideration of human interaction. The other body of approaches based on the Human Relations and Culture movements are seen as ‘over-socialised’, over-estimating managerial ability to achieve organizational change through changing people’s values and behaviours.

The influence of postmodernist thinking has also had a profound effect in organization studies, leading to considerable fragmentation into different positions over the last ten years, a reflection of the post-modernist attack on the fundamental assumptions of rationalism and modernism behind previous work on organisational theory (Demers, 2007; Reed, 1996). Demers identifies one major stream of research in organizational change as ‘social dynamics’, including radical and post-modern approaches, discourse and narrative approaches, and a focus on the detail of social practice. However, these developments have had little impact to date on the development of prescriptive guidance (Demers, 2007; Burnes, 2004b). Broadly speaking, there is a constant tension between two poles: the ‘objective-functionalist’ view,

from which prescriptions are most readily developed; and ‘subjective-interpretive’ perspectives (Demers, 2007).

### *2.3.1.3 Relevant topics for this review*

The approach adopted here is to focus on those approaches which can be seen as contributing to a view of ‘best practice’ in the implementation of organizational change. This includes those areas which have attracted the attention of the academic community (relying here mainly on Burnes (2004b) and Demers (2007)) but can be seen from a review of a number of popular management books and student textbooks on change as influencing current practice in managing change within organizations (Beer and Nohria 2000; Burke 1992a; Burnes 2004a; Cameron and Green 2004; Carnall 1999; Cummings and Worley 2004; Evard and Gipple 2001; Hayes 2006; Kanter et al. 1992). On this basis, the following areas have been selected for more detailed discussion below:

- (a) organizational development
- (b) the transformational change programme
- (c) culture change
- (d) organisational learning
- (e) change leadership
- (f) processual and political approaches to change.

This last can be seen as at the limits of the mainstream, serving mainly to direct attention to critiques of the mainstream, and pointing a direction to some of the more recent work which is explored in Chapters 3 and 7 as offering alternative theoretical resources for looking at business change projects.

## **2.3.2 Organizational Development**

### *2.3.2.1 Overview*

OD originated in the USA in the 1950s, concerned with making interventions, based on behavioural science, in the working of individuals and groups in organisations in order to increase organisational effectiveness. Most authors on OD trace its origins to the work of Kurt Lewin in the 40s, and his work is seen as having strong affinities with the Human Relations school also (Burke 1992a; Burnes 2004a; Burnes 2004b; Cummings and Worley 2004;

French and Bell 1973). In the USA, OD has become a profession, with its own recognised qualifications, and a code of practice, and the definition of its scope has changed over time as the profession has responded to developments in the field and the needs of its clients (Cummings & Worley, 2004). Starting with a concern with individual and team change, OD has increasingly seen its concern at the organizational level (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Demers, 2007; Bradford & Burke, 2005) and has come to incorporate many of the developments, such as culture change and the learning organisation, that are discussed in later sections.

Different definitions abound within the sources quoted above, and as indicated, the boundaries of the area have evolved over time, but the key elements of OD appear to be: planned interventions based on (a) the application of behavioural sciences, with their roots in psychology and sociology (b) seeing organisations as highly interdependent multi-level open systems (c) the application of humanist values of co-operation and participation, openness and honesty (d) commitment to learning, personal development and fulfilment, and a balanced concern for the good of the individual as well as the organization.

Interventions are typically initiated by a facilitative change agent, in what is described by Schein as ‘process consulting’ (Schein, 1991). These interventions include individual coaching and training, leadership development, team building, surfacing and resolving organizational conflict, and so on (Cummings & Worley, 2004).

Over time the scope has widened to include aspects of organisation-wide change. As many of the group-level traditional tools and techniques of OD have become mainstream management practices in many organizations, and management interest has moved to organizational-level transformation, the profession has sought to maintain relevance by focusing at the wider organisational level (Burnes, 2004b, p.278). Cummings and Worley identify a number of organization-wide interventions which they consider as within the scope of OD in addition to group-level (what they call ‘Human Process’) interventions. These include: ‘techno-structural’ interventions, including BPR, TQM, downsizing, and work design; HRM, including performance appraisal and reward, and ‘strategic change’, including culture change,



and organizational learning (Cummings & Worley, 2004). Bradford and Burke in their recent re-appraisal of the field see the scope of OD as being the whole organization: its mission and purpose, strategy, leadership, management behaviour, and culture change in support of mission and strategy (Bradford & Burke, 2005). From this perspective, OD can be seen as evolving not so much through theoretical developments but by incorporating the more prominent and popular management movements, thereby representing the evolution in the mainstream view of ‘best practice’ in the management of change. Indeed Cummings and Worley (2008) claims to represent practitioner-based, but theoretically informed, ‘best practice’.

### 2.3.2.2 *Key figures and theoretical themes*

A sense of the ‘foundational’ theoretical themes running through the rather fluid definition of OD can be gained by considering the work of three key figures whose work has had a major influence on the development of the field, and the field of organizational change more broadly: Lewin, Argyris, and Schein.

**Kurt Lewin** is a hugely influential figure, credited with the introduction of the very notion of ‘planned change’ (Burke 1992a; Burnes 2004a; Burnes 2004b). At the heart of his approach is the recognition that: (a) change, whether at the individual or group level, is a deep psychological process; (b) changes in individual behaviour can only be sustained by achieving changes in behaviour of the group as a whole. Lewin saw behaviour as a function of individual personality and motivation, subject to the ‘field’ of forces (including social norms, group perceptions and interaction, power relations) acting upon them. Forces can be seen as *imposed* or induced forces, or *own* forces, reflecting the person’s needs (Burke, 1992a, p.42); generally, own forces are seen as a much more effective means of sustained changes in behaviour (driven from what Lewin refers to as a *‘felt-need’* for change (Burnes, 2004b, p.273). Change can be fostered by increasing the intensity of induced driving forces, or diminishing restraining forces, destabilising the balance so that old behaviours can be discarded and new behaviours adopted.

These ideas introduced the notions of ‘resistance to change’ and ‘ownership’ which have become common-place in change management; and to Lewin’s famous 3-Step model of “unfreeze-move-refreeze” which is arguably the fundamental theoretical idea underpinning most mainstream approaches to organizational change management (Burnes 2004a; Burnes 2004b; Hendry 1996; Weick and Quinn 1999).

*Chris Argyris* is seen as a key figure in the development of OD (Burke, 1992a; Pettigrew, 1985) and later in organizational learning (Section 2.3.5) with his work very much focused on the way in which organizational effectiveness can be improved by improving interpersonal competence. His ideas are based on the theories or mental models that govern action in practice. These mental models, or ‘theories in use’, are developed early in life as a means of dealing with emotional or threatening issues, and are used to design our own actions and interpret the actions of others. We may be unaware of them, and each of us has what might be a quite different ‘espoused theory’ of action, based on our social and intellectual background and commitments. Argyris sees effective communication as blocked by individuals’ lack of awareness of their ‘theories in use’, which typically encourage ‘defensive routines’ that may render some subjects ‘undiscussable’, limit learning and impede effective action (Argyris, 1994). Effectiveness is seen as establishing congruence between the theory-in-use and espoused theory, helped by a process of reflection which surfaces discrepancies from actual behaviour (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Another key element of Argyris’s approach to change is the distinction between ‘single’ and ‘double-loop’ learning. Single-loop learning takes goals, values, frameworks and available responses for granted, and can be considered as a ‘routine’ response to problems and issues in achieving organizational goals. Lasting organizational change requires ‘double-loop learning’, challenging basic taken-for-granted assumptions in a way that is seen as vital in rapidly changing and uncertain contexts. Defensive reasoning processes employed by individuals in organisations, particularly in stressful situations, inhibit the open communications necessary for double-loop learning, which Argyris sees as very rare (Argyris, 1994).

Overall, Argyris's work is rooted in the original OD perspective on people, bringing into focus a reality of organizational life that is deeply rooted in the personalities and psychological make-up of individuals, and which gets in the way of effective interpersonal communication and the identification and resolution of issues.

**Edgar Schein**, like Lewin and Argyris, focuses on individual and group psychological and cognitive processes taking place in organizational change, as individuals interact with each other and cope with what is taking place around them. For Schein, effective organizational change requires a profound understanding of norms and values and an awareness of the anxiety that is generated when change happens.

Schein adapted Lewin's ideas, elaborating the 3-step model of change in psychological terms. For example, he sees 'unfreezing' as being achieved through: firstly, '*disconfirmation*', the production of data to cause disequilibrium; then, the connection of the disconfirming data with important goals and beliefs to induce *guilt or anxiety*; and then creating enough *psychological safety* to explore problem solutions without loss of identity or integrity. Leaders have a key role to play in this process (Schein, 2004). Schein also introduced the notion of 'process consulting', a rather 'arms-length' facilitation which aims to improve the basic group processes by which organizations run meetings, address problems, and make decisions. These ideas have evidently become part of the mainstream assumptions about organizational change, and are particularly evident in the literature and practice around building effective teams (eg (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Hackman, 2002).

### 2.3.2.3 Conclusions

This brief summary of three key figures in organizational development highlights some common 'people-centred' themes that can be considered as part of mainstream thinking on organizational change. These are: recognition of the centrality of the individual's psychological response to change; cognitive 'frameworks' and the impact these have on the performance of groups and organizations generally; the need to understand individual and group dynamics in order to understand what kinds of action will lead to effective and sustained change; and the need for group interventions, facilitated by a 'change agent', which

create the right conditions and process for change, and which can change counterproductive beliefs and behaviours in a managed way. These approaches, though people-centred, are nonetheless rationalistic and scientific, and place considerable confidence in top-down managerial agency.

### ***2.3.3 The transformational change programme***

#### *2.3.3.1 Overview*

While the roots of the OD movement have been largely at the group level, a prominent aspect of both the analytical and prescriptive change management literature has been the development of the transformational change programme – a planned, top-down intervention, comprising multiple activities aimed at achieving a significant business change. The design and management of such programmes has become a staple of the consulting industry, initially through the TQM movement and then through the business process re-engineering movement (BPR).

The transformational change programme implies some clear assumptions about organizational change: change is ‘episodic’, and a response to the organization’s failure to adapt to a changing environment, seeking to restore equilibrium to a suitable and stable end-state. Such approaches to change are therefore usually placed in the context of the ‘change imperative’ from global competition, the pace of change, and so on. The organization’s inertia, in part resulting from a “*deep structure of inter-related parts*” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p.366), needs to be overcome through top-down efforts, leading the organisation through a transitional stage towards a desired goal.

#### *2.3.3.2 Step-wise approaches*

One of the key features of such programmes is that they involve a sequence of steps, which can be seen as an elaboration of Lewin’s 3-Step model, and his ideas about resistance to change and the need to create a ‘felt-need’ which were discussed earlier. The 3-Step model has generated a whole family of staged processes for change over the last 50 years (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999), leading both Weick and Quinn and Burnes to quote Hendry’s “*Scratch any account of creating and managing change and the idea that change is a three-*

*stage process which necessarily begins with a process of unfreezing will not be far below the surface” (Hendry, 1996).*

For example, Kotter, set out eight stages, stressing the importance of achieving the outcomes of each stage before moving on to the next (Kotter, 1995; Kotter, 1998), and clearly echoing Lewin’s ideas.

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Create a coalition
3. Develop a clear vision
4. Share the vision
5. Empower people to clear obstacles
6. Secure short-term wins
7. Consolidate and keep moving
8. Anchor.

Various modifications of this model are available (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Burke & Litwin, 1992b; Cummings & Worley, 2008), including the introduction of a learning cycle of repeated staging through the stages (Cameron & Green, 2004, p.102, p.161). The notion of sequential steps typically remains, however.

Other important influences apart from Lewin on the staged model are theories of the ways in which organizational members interpret events eg Isabella’s four stages of *denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment* (Isabella, 1990). Pettigrew (1985, p.16) sees also the influence of some OD models of the change agent client engagement process, and also of the staged innovation diffusion models which have also been incorporated in IS development and project lifecycles. A similar point is made in Burke’s comparison of four OD models of change (Burke & Litwin, 1992b, p.64). Cameron and Green (2004) refer to the Kubler-Ross ‘grieving’ model, an idea also reflected by Bridges and Bridges (2000) in their transitional model.

Armenakis and Bedeian review six stage models, which appear to have drawn on all of the above influences, and consolidate them in their own stage framework, concluding that “*two basic lessons underscored by all six*” are: (a) *the change process typically occurs in multiple steps that take a considerable amount of time to unfold and efforts to bypass steps seldom yield a satisfactory result, and (b) mistakes in any step can slow implementation, as well as negate hard-won progress.*” (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p.303).

**Table 2.3: Stages in a BPR programme**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Sequential Activities</b>
Envision	Establish management commitment and vision Discover re-engineering opportunities Identify IT levers Select process
Initiate	Inform stakeholders Organize reengineering teams Conduct project planning Determine external process customer requirements Set performance goals
Diagnose	Document existing process Analyze existing processes
Redesign	Define and analyze new process concepts Prototype and detailed design of a new process Design human resource structure Analyze and design IS
Reconstruct	Reorganize Implement IS Train users Process cut-over
Evaluate	Evaluate process performance Link to continuous improvement programme

*Adapted from (Kettinger, Teng & Guha, 1997, p.61)*

The staged approach fits naturally with the project lifecycle, which given the one-off nature of a transformational change programme is also a feature of the prescriptive approaches to large-scale change programmes. This is particularly emphasised in consultancy methodologies for TQM and BPR, which are markedly more rigid and structured in their stages than (say) Kotter's model. Table 2.3 summarises a review of 25 BPR methodologies (Kettinger, Teng & Guha, 1997) which found that 19 of these could map onto the authors' Stage-Activity framework of "*a prototypical BPR effort*".

### 2.3.3.3 Criticisms of transformational change programmes

What Collins refers to as these '*n-step guides*' (Collins, 1998) have been criticised on a number of grounds, in many respects similar to those directed at the mainstream models of project management discussed in Section 2. Collins objects to the prescriptive tone of these approaches, which implies that these approaches are tried and tested (rarely the case) and that their authors have, through superior wisdom and experience, 'found the answer' to the problems of change management (Collins, 1998, p.86). This does not sit well with the fact that the success rate of managed change programmes is reported as no more than 30% at best (Beer et al. 1990; Beer and Nohria 2000; Kotter 1995) - as Burnes says "*On the one hand, there is now more advice on how to manage change than ever before. On the other hand, the failure rate of change initiatives is astronomical.*" (Burnes, 2004b, p.4). BPR has come in for particular criticism for being an ill-conceived management fad or 'myth' (Davenport, 1994).

The attraction of these approaches perhaps lies in the emphasis on rationality, predictability and the implication that change can be successfully achieved largely by good planning and management. A major objection, however, is that change is a much more complex and messy process than implied by the staged model, and cannot be seen as a sequence of discrete and logical steps. Kotter (Kotter, 1995) does see change as a messy and unpredictable process, but proposes that this disorder is best managed by adoption of the structured staged approach, a prescription followed even more intensively in consultancy methodologies for planned change. However, for critics of this approach, this is not a valid prescription because it is too generic and such a poor fit to reality. In particular, it tends to ignore politics, power, and the impact of history and context (Dawson 1994; Dawson 2003; Pettigrew 1985; Pettigrew et al.

2001) and many of the social aspects that are part of the lived experience of change in organizations. Others highlight the fluidity, complexity and continuous presence of change in modern organizations, and point out that the ‘Lewinian’ staged linearity underlying these approaches can no longer be seen as appropriate (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992). Burnes points out that these approaches, particularly those that have become part of prescriptive methodologies, have in fact lost the people-centred, psychological, and dynamic complexity of Lewin’s original ideas (Burnes, 2004a)

### **2.3.4 Culture change**

#### **2.3.4.1 Overview**

The notion of culture first became an important topic in organizational studies in the 1980s (Smircich, 1983). According to Demers, part of the appeal of the concept of culture is that everyone intuitively knows what culture is: “*the way we do things around here*” (Demers, 2007, p.76). But the concept is actually highly problematic, and definitions of culture have been many and various (Meek, 1988; Smircich, 1983). This is broadly reflected in two different approaches to organisational culture: a ‘functionalist’ perspective; and an ‘interpretivist’ perspective (Burnes, 2004b; Demers, 2007). While academic interest seems to have focused more since the 1990s on the interpretive perspective, the functionalist perspective is the one that continues to dominate mainstream management thinking, with culture seen as a managerial lever for achieving organisational outcomes.

Brown offers, after a comprehensive survey of numerous definitions, that culture can be defined as “*the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience...*” (Brown, 1998, p.34). Culture can be seen as both supportive and constraining, legitimising certain forms of action and proscribing others: both a source of stability and resistance, and an opportunity for fundamental change. (Schein, 2004) provides one of the best-known categorisations of culture into three levels: *basic assumptions*; *beliefs, values and attitudes*; and *artefacts*. Basic assumptions are the deepest level, and (in Schein’s model) unconscious; these relate to fundamental views of the nature of reality and human nature. *Beliefs, values and attitudes* are specific expressions of the basic assumptions which directly influence behaviour; and *artefacts* are the most superficial manifestation of culture, in terms of



language, myths and stories, symbols, rituals and ceremonies. A deep and lasting cultural change requires impact below the superficial level of artefacts.

The importance of organizational culture in organizational change was identified early on by the OD movement, with its interest in influencing individual and group behaviour - “*the only viable way to change organizations is to change their ‘culture’*” (Bennis (1969) quoted in (Demers, 2007)). The growth of interest in culture in the management mainstream though is seen by most (Brown, 1998; Burnes, 2005) as being fuelled by an interest in Japanese management approaches, and popularized by a number of key authors, notably Peters and Waterman, Kanter, Handy, and Deal & Kennedy. The latter two authors, like several others, categorised different organisational culture types (eg the power culture, task culture, role culture, person culture (Handy, 1995)). Peters and Waterman offered what were in effect cultural prescriptions for the characteristics of a successful company, stressing the importance of particular norms and values which for high-performing organizations become taken-for-granted assumptions.

#### 2.3.4.2 Changing organizational culture

Many authors have developed approaches to changing culture, which Brown (1998, p.164) sees as boiling down to four steps:

- Where do we need to be going strategically as an organisation?
- Where are we now as a culture?
- What are the gaps between where we are as a culture and where we should be?
- What is our plan of action to close those gaps?

All of these approaches assume that it is possible for management to decide upon and impose a culture. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Cummings and Worley (2004) offer six steps which give more indication of the kinds of actions that can be taken to achieve planned culture change:

*Formulate a clear strategic vision* – and define the shared values and behaviours to make it work

*Display top management commitment* – cultural change must be managed from the top of the organisation

*Model culture change at the highest level* – senior executives need to demonstrate the values and behaviours sought

*Modify the organisation to support organisational changes* – use the management control processes and systems (eg recruitment, performance management) to reinforce the preferred culture

*Select and socialise newcomers and terminate deviants* – one of the most effective methods for changing culture is to change organisational membership

*Develop ethical and legal sensitivity* – so that management actions in achieving the desired culture are in fact consistent with the expressed cultural values.

This account reflects a number of themes that run through prescriptive accounts of cultural change: the need for a *vision*, to give purpose and direction to the cultural change; the importance of *leadership* in acting out the required culture; the need to take a *holistic* (‘open systems’) approach which emphasises the need to align the ‘soft’ cultural aspects with the ‘hard’ processes; the inevitability of *resistance*, and the need to be ruthless in eliminating it. It is notable also that this kind of step-wise approach fits well with the ‘n-step guide’ approach to planned change programmes discussed in the previous section, and many prescriptions incorporate at least some aspect of the ‘culture change’ elements in their staged lifecycle approaches eg (Cameron & Green, 2004).

#### 2.3.4.3 Criticisms of the culture approach

There are many criticisms of the culture approach, particularly managerial prescriptions for top-down culture change. A major criticism is the assumption of ‘one culture’, given that organisations may have many sub-cultures. Some authors also point to the ethical issues involved in manipulating employees values and feelings (Burnes, 2004b, p.180-183). Some claim, given that culture is historically generated and is deeply rooted, that “*culture as a whole cannot be manipulated, turned on or off...*” (Meek, 1988). Collins sees this, in contrast with the under-socialised’ n-step guides, as ‘over-socialized’ and indeed arrogant: “*The notion that managers ... could re-write history, impress their influence upon groups, and at the end*

*of the day, change the beliefs and attitudes which people hold about their lives, and life-styles, simply beggars belief”* (Collins, 1998, p.126). Schein himself expressed reservations about both the feasibility and advisability of culture change (Burnes, 2004b, p.180). Barney, in looking at the studies into culture and organizational performance, concludes that, while there is good evidence that culture is a significant factor in organizational success, there is little evidence to suggest that attempts to change culture lead to improved performance (Barney, 1986).

Whatever the academic reservations, the notion of culture change as a vital component of major business change is now well established in management prescription and seen *“to exert a powerful influence on managerial attitudes and behaviours over the past two decades”* (Burnes, 2004b, p.139). Demers, who describes the cultural approach to organizational change as *‘the success story of the 80s’* sees its appeal coming from its focus on the symbolic, emotional, and expressive facets of organizational change, which are easily recognized as an important part of day-to-day organisational life, rather than the rational and technical ones (Demers, 2007, p.91). As Smircich says, *“The idea of culture focuses attention on the expressive, non-rational qualities of the experience of organization. It legitimates attention to the subjective, interpretive aspects of organizational life”* (Smircich, 1983, p.355). However, in the application of the idea in prescriptive guidance, it has nonetheless acquired a strong flavour of mainstream ‘technical-rationality’.

### **2.3.5 Organisational learning**

#### **2.3.5.1 Overview**

The idea of the importance of organizational learning became prominent in the 90s, as a critical capability organizations need in order to respond to the increasingly uncertain and competitive environment – to become a ‘learning organization’. According to Demers, *“Organizational learning is without doubt the success story of the 1990s. It replaces organizational culture as the approach to change that stimulates practitioners and scholars alike.”* (Demers, 2007, p.122).

While the notion of organizational learning had been of interest to academics for some time (March & Simon, 1958; Cyert & March, 1963/1992), it was the practitioner-oriented work of Senge, Argyris and Schein that accelerated interest, and “*it was some years before the academic literature caught up and started to apply a more critical perspective*” (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2004, p.374). Popularised by Senge’s management bestseller “The Fifth Discipline”, which introduced the ‘learning organization’ as an ideal organizational form, ‘organizational learning’ has been popular for academics also, generating an exponential increase in published papers through the 1990s (Bapuji & Crossan, 2004). The focus is on how organizations can change appropriately in response to external changes, and so learning becomes almost synonymous with organizational change. As Weick and Westley say, “*..organizational theorists ...are never sure whether learning is something new or simply warmed-over organizational change*” (Weick & Westley, 1996, p.440).

The field exhibits a distinct separation between the analytical and prescriptive writings perhaps even more marked than that which characterises the organizational change field generally. Tsang describes a ‘*dichotomy*’ between the practice-oriented prescriptive literature of ‘the learning organization’ which is closely associated with consultancy, and the more scholarly literature of ‘organizational learning’ (Tsang, 1997). Miner and Mezias point to numerous fragmentations within the field, and remark that there is “*only a thin bridge between consultants and managers who advocate ‘organizational learning’ and many learning theorists.*” (Miner & Mezias, 1996, p.97). Easterby-Smith sees this split as one of several “*diverging communities of practice*” within the organizational learning field, and like Tsang, contrasts the rigour of the analytical, largely academic approach with the approach behind the prescriptive literature, which he sees as “*derivative*” and reliant on “*a few selected notions drawn from the organizational learning literature..*” (Easterby-Smith, Snell & Gherardi, 1998, p.262).

#### 2.3.5.2 The learning organization

The most prominent example of the prescriptive approach to organizational learning is Senge (1993), who essentially combined the system dynamics modelling approach of Forrester, with the OD/action science approaches of Argyris and Schein described earlier (Easterby-Smith,

Snell & Gherardi, 1998; Roth & Senge, 1996). He described ‘learning organizations’ – extraordinary workplaces that are both high-performing and richly rewarding for the people who work in them - as requiring the adoption of five interrelated disciplines:

1. *Personal mastery* – seeking individual growth and learning
2. *Mental models* – understanding the deeply-ingrained assumptions and ‘theories in use’ that drive behaviour
3. *Shared visions* – the development of a common and inspiring view of the organization’s future
4. *Team learning* – shifting from individual to collective learning
5. *Systems thinking* – the ‘Fifth Discipline’, which links the others together.

Systems thinking is seen by Senge as essential in understanding the dynamic complexity of organizations, so that cause and effect can be properly understood – “*seeing patterns where others see only events and forces to react to*” (Senge, 1993, p.73). Achieving the ideal status of a ‘learning organization’ requires advanced skills, and Senge and colleagues worked closely with organizations to develop interventions to help build the capability to manage behavioural and dynamic complexity and to remove blocks to learning. Senge founded and led the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT, collaborating with Argyris and Schein to design and implement intervention research with participating companies (Edmondson, 1996). Key intervention tools are the use of ‘learning histories’ to encourage reflection and better understanding of behavioural and dynamic complexity; and the development of ‘management practice fields’ and ‘learning laboratories’, where decision-makers can experiment, test new behaviours, make the mistakes that are an essential part of learning in a safe environment, and accelerate learning (Roth & Senge, 1996, p.100). Similar ideas, emphasising the development of organizational learning through radical cognitive and behavioural change, have been adopted into numerous change management prescriptions (eg see (Cummings & Worley, 2004)) though the challenges in practice of achieving the radical change proposed has been noted (Cameron & Green, 2004, p.115). The ‘learning organization’ can be seen in effect as a combination of OD ideas about personal development,

teams, personal motivation and commitment; and classical rationalist views of organizations as systems.

### 2.3.5.3 *The academic perspective*

The ‘learning organization’ has come under fire from numerous academics. Huczynski and Buchanan, while acknowledging the conceptual attractions and its focus on some key aspects of organizational life, see the ‘learning organization’ as “*an attempt to use dated concepts from change management and learning theory, repackaged as a management consulting project*” and as a “*complex and difficult set of practices, difficult to implement systematically*” (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001, p.135). Several authors point to a scarcity of empirical research (Miner and Mezias 1996; Tsang 1997), and to the reliance on ‘self-promoting’ case studies produced by individuals who were contributors to the alleged success (Easterby-Smith, Snell & Gherardi, 1998; Tsang, 1997). Nevertheless, Senge’s work is generally acknowledged as a major contribution in the field of organizational learning (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999). In a recent retrospective of the field, Easterby-Smith and others credit Argyris and Senge with three of the seven key contributions they identify over the last 40 years (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2004, p.375).

It is generally accepted though, that the academic perspective on organizational learning is still rather immature: the growth in interest in organizational learning “*does not seem to have created the clarity one might have wished for*” (Burnes, 2004b, p.132). The field is fragmented and fraught with difficulties of defining its scope. Burnes, while seeing organizational learning as the only organizational theory expressly directed to enabling organizations to cope with and promote change, points to the great diversity of opinion about what it is and how to achieve it, saying that “*its proponents are vague and inconsistent*” (p.139) and that it is a “*more difficult concept to apply than many of its supporters acknowledge*” (Burnes, 2004b, p.302). There is a “*... lack of convergence among organizational learning frameworks*” (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999, p.522) and the theoretical debate of the last 25 years has covered a lot of ground but has not crystallised on any dominant position (Bapuji & Crossan, 2004, p.400).

Furthermore, the application and testing of theories into practice has been limited (Miner and Mezias 1996; Tsang 1997). Interestingly, where scholars have pointed to the management implications of their theoretical work, their prescriptions share many similarities with the prescriptions of the ‘learning organization’ and OD interventions generally (Hayes & Allinson, 1998; Snyder & Cummings, 1998) – leading to questions as to its distinctive contribution to achieving organisational change (Collins, 1998).

### **2.3.6 Change leadership**

#### **2.3.6.1 Overview**

In each of the areas of organizational change discussed above leadership is seen as a crucial and determining factor (Bridges and Bridges 2000; Kanter 1999; Kotter 1995; Kotter 1998; Schein 2004; Senge 1993). Peters and Waterman maintained that almost all of the highly successful companies they studied had been influenced by a transforming leader at some stage of their development (Peters & Waterman, 1984). According to Yukl, for some theorists, leading change is “*the essence of leadership and everything else is secondary*” (Yukl, 2002, p.273). We can therefore look to much of the general organizational leadership literature as relevant to leading organisational change (Eisenbach, Watson & Pillai, 1999).

#### **2.3.6.2 Transformational v transactional leadership**

*Transformational* leadership was first distinguished from *transactional* leadership in studies of political leadership, and then picked up in an organizational context by Bass and associates (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transactional leadership comprises an exchange between leader and follower in which the leader offers rewards (eg prestige, money) for compliance with his or her wishes, but is not likely to generate enthusiasm and commitment to task objectives. The transformational leader, by contrast, seeks to go beyond an implicit or explicit contract to appeal to their moral values and to bind their followers’ aspirations in with their own in the development of a shared vision. Followers feel trust, admiration, respect and loyalty, and are motivated to perform more effectively. According to Bass, transformational leadership involves making followers more aware of the importance of the task; inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization or team; and engaging their ‘higher order’ needs.

### 2.3.6.3 *What transformational leaders do*

Findings from different types of research provide the basis of “*some tentative guidelines*” for transformational leadership (Yukl, 2002, p.263):

- Articulate a clear and appealing vision
- Explain how the vision can be maintained
- Act confidently and optimistically
- Express confidence in followers
- Use dramatic, symbolic actions to emphasize key values
- Lead by example
- Empower people to achieve the vision.

The leader’s role in creating and communicating a compelling vision is a dominant theme. Exactly what a vision is unclear and “*there is widespread confusion about it*” (Yukl, 2002, p.283). However, some broad characteristics are: the emotional and inspirational character of an effective vision; the need for flexibility and the room for interpretation; the need for the leader to in some way act out belief in the vision; and the need for simplicity and effective communication (capable of being communicated clearly “*in five minutes or less*” (Yukl, 2002, p.283). According to Kotter “*Defining a vision of the future does not happen according to a timetable or a flowchart. It is more emotional than rational. It demands a tolerance for messiness, ambiguity and setbacks...*” (Kotter, 1998). Bridges also emphasises the emotional and psychological aspects in considering how a change leader can help people through ‘the neutral zone’ of transition, whereby they can let go of the past and embrace the future (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). Another leading change guru, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, talks of tapping deep convictions in people, and connecting those feelings to the purpose of the organization – “*showing the meaning of people’s everyday work to that larger purpose*”. She prefers to talk of creating a “*compelling aspiration*”, which “*is not just a picture of what could be; its an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more.*” (Kanter, 1999).

A rather grittier aspect of leading change which features strongly in the prescriptive change management literature is the need for leaders to build political coalitions, to enlist those with strong position power and supportive ideas, and to work the internal organizational politics to win support for the actions necessary to achieve the vision. Kotter sees building coalitions as



one of the three most important roles of the change leader (Kotter, 1998). Cummings and Worley (2008), in their synthesis of change management frameworks, identify ‘developing political support’ as one of the five key stages, and a critical change leadership task. Yukl summarises the available “theory, research findings, and practitioner insights” in some guidelines for effective political actions (Yukl, 2002, p.289):

- Determine who can oppose or facilitate change
- Build a broad coalition to support the change
- Fill key positions with competent change agents
- Use task forces to guide implementation
- Make dramatic, symbolic changes that affect the work
- If necessary, implement change initially on a small scale
- Change relevant aspects of the organization structure
- Monitor the progress of change

#### 2.3.6.4 *Project Leadership*

Much of the material discussed above refers to leadership of large-scale organizational change, often taking the perspective of the CEO or most senior leader. However, many business change programmes (eg BPR or enterprise systems programmes) do have organization-wide change impact, and one might therefore expect that the findings from the change leadership literature may have been recognised in the project management field.

However, it appears that project leadership skills have received relatively limited attention (Briner, Hastings & Geddes, 1996; Turner & Muller, 2005) in the project management literature. While ‘top management support’ and the role of the project sponsor have frequently come out at the top of lists of CSFs, leadership, at least in the sense discussed in the organizational change field, is less frequently cited (Fortune & White, 2006; Somers & Nelson, 2001). Briner, Hastings and Geddes (1996) are distinctive in introducing the term ‘project leadership’, positioning the role within the context of leadership theory, and providing prescriptive practitioner-based advice on handling key ‘people’ issues such as stakeholder management, securing multi-party agreement, and managing conflict. In a recent paper, Muller and Turner remark that, in contrast to the influence of thinking on leadership

styles in general management, “*the project management literature has studiously ignored the contribution of the project manager*” in this area (Muller & Turner, 2007). Some studies have looked at the impact of transformational leadership on project outcomes (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2004; Wang, Chou & Jiang, 2005; Thite, 1999) with mixed results, and an open participative project leadership style has been seen to contribute to faster new product development (McDonough & Barczak, 1991) . However, the general emphasis appears to be more on the ‘transactional’ aspects of leadership, rather than on shared vision, inspiration, and emotional engagement which as we have seen are a feature of transformational change leadership. The UK Office of Government Commerce (OGC) guidance on ‘Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2’ makes no reference to leadership at all, even in the Executive sponsor role (Office of Government Commerce, 2005b). However, ‘Managing Successful Programmes’ (which recognises the importance of business change in the specification of the Business Change Manager role) does specify that the programme manager should have “*effective leadership, interpersonal and communication skills*” , though devotes most of its guidance to management control processes and structures.

It may be that the change leadership role corresponds most closely to the project sponsor role in ‘best practice’ project and programme management. Interestingly, Muller and Turner’s study found that emotional competence of the project manager was almost always a significant factor in success, but that strategic perspective and vision were negatively correlated , especially on organizational and business projects (Muller & Turner, 2007). They attribute this to the fact that the project manager’s role is to focus on the management of tasks, while the strategic vision was predominantly the role of the project sponsor.

While the sponsor role is seen in the PMBoK and PRINCE2 guidance as essentially the provider of resources for the project, the importance of the leadership role of the project sponsor is highlighted in the limited amount of research that has been carried out into the sponsor role (Cooke-Davies, 2005; Crawford & Brett, 2000). Cooke-Davies contributes a flavour of transformational leadership (particularly emotional engagement with the vision, and building political coalitions) in his summary of the main roles of the sponsor.

The leadership role of the sponsor is reflected, albeit briefly and without elaboration, in the OGC guidance on programme management, where one of the responsibilities of the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) is seen as “*owning the vision for the programme and being its champion, providing clear leadership and direction throughout its life*” (Office of Government Commerce, 2005a, p.19). The primary consideration though is that the SRO “*must have the seniority for the responsibilities and accountabilities the role involves*” with presumably the assumption that the required leadership skills will thereby follow. As mentioned earlier, however, the overwhelming priority of the guidance is on structure and process, and (by contrast with (Briner, Hastings & Geddes, 1996) there is little guidance on the nature and character of the leadership role, what it involves and how it should be played.

### **2.3.7 Processual approaches to change**

#### **2.3.7.1 Overview**

Processual approaches to change are based on a conception of organisational change as “*a complex and untidy cocktail*” (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001) of rational and irrational decision processes, individual perceptions, and political struggles – with power and politics (discussed later in Section 2.5) playing a central role in shaping outcomes (Pettigrew, 1997; Dawson, 1994). The processual approach begins to depart from the dominant perspective of the mainstream approaches that have so far been most influential in terms of prescriptive approaches to managing change, reflecting some of the concerns seen in the project management research: eg “*Trajectories of change are especially probabilistic and uncertain because of change contexts and the resultant complexities and ambiguities of human action*” (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001, p.700). Here change is seen as a defining characteristic of organisations rather than some kind of distinctive event within organisations; from this perspective, an understanding of the impact of business change projects can only be gained by understanding “*how things come about*” in organisations over time, and in a specific social and historical context.

Representative of the processual approach in organizational change are Pettigrew’s longitudinal, in-depth participant-observer studies tracing the unfolding of organisational change and change initiatives on a day-to-day basis over long periods of time (Pettigrew,

1973; Pettigrew, 1985; Pettigrew, 1997); and similar work on organisational change programmes such as TQM conducted by Dawson (Dawson, 1994; Dawson, 1997; Dawson, 2003). The ambition is “*to capture the dynamic quality of human conduct in organisational settings*”; the analytical focus is on ‘process’; defined by Pettigrew (1997, p.338) as “*a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context*”. Part of that context is continuity as well as change: Pettigrew objects to attempts to artificially abstract change from the structures and contexts which give it meaning – “*Change and continuity, process and structure, are inextricably linked*” (Pettigrew, 1985). Furthermore, the processual approach, while accepting the central role of power and politics in shaping outcomes, seeks to understand how the political processes that are seen as such a prominent feature of organisational activity are actually played out. Pettigrew (1973) criticises Cyert and March’s “*sparse presentation of the processual aspects*” of the political and coalition-building and what he describes as the “*strategic behaviour*” used in mobilizing support.

#### 2.3.7.2 *Processualist prescriptions?*

The central theme of the processual approach is a suspicion of prescriptive, generalised recipes for successful change such as BPR and TQM, and a recognition of the difficulties of unambiguously establishing causes and effects: “*one of the main lessons that can be drawn from a processual analysis of these eight longitudinal studies is that there is no single best way to manage change*” (Dawson, 2003, p.159).

Processualists do recognise the importance of planning for change, and appear to believe that managers do have scope for choice and opportunity for action, albeit limited eg Pettigrew (1985) sees the change agent as a skilful political operator, and offers some suggestions for managing transformational change. However, they believe that a more sophisticated analysis of the complexities of the change situation and the range of available options is required than is implied by most prescriptions for successful change. The elaborateness of this analysis is demonstrated by Pettigrew’s description of five principles of a processualist analysis (Pettigrew, 1997) :

- *Embeddedness, studying processes across a number of levels of analysis;*

- *Temporal interconnectedness, studying processes in past, present, and future time*
- *A role in explanation for context and action;*
- *A search for holistic rather than linear explanations of process; and*
- *A need to link process analysis to the location and explanation of outcomes.*

However, the sheer complexity of the processual analysis, and the emphasis on the uniquely situated nature of change, raises difficulties when it comes to practical advice and practitioner relevance. *“The social and interpersonal dynamics of the processes Pettigrew addresses are not explored in a manner that facilitates the easy identification of practical advice”* (Buchanan & Boddy, 1992, p.62). Dawson (1994) attempts to address this by accepting the basic tenets of the processual approach in his analysis of change projects, while seeking some simplification and some pointers of practical use. However, Collins (1998), reviewing Dawson’s 15 learning points for practitioners concludes that the *“willingness to translate and to codify these notions for practitioners does little to communicate the complexity inherent in these matters”*. With some justification, he observes that *“it is not at all clear that Dawson’s advice...extends much beyond the generalities and truisms offered by Kanter and Peters or any others among a whole host of gurus”* (Collins, 1998, p.75). *“There is the suspicion, therefore, that conceptual sophistication of the processual approach and the readily digestible practitioner advice which managers demand cannot be served together”*.

Work in the IS research field which focuses on information systems development as *“an intensely political”* process (Keen, 1981, p.24), where different groups bargain and negotiate to maintain control and access to resources and infrastructure (Kling, 1987; Kling & Scacchi, 1982), reaches similar conclusions. According to Markus and Robey (1988), process approaches provide better *“empirical fidelity”* in admitting greater complexity to the issue of cause and effect and challenging the deterministic nature of variance approaches (such as factors analysis) but necessarily thereby offer restricted opportunities for generalisation and prediction, with the focus on specific context serving to obviate attempts at general frameworks and theories. In evaluating the application of his complex, processual ‘exchange-dependency’ model of IS development Sauer (1993) observes that given the real-world complexity of projects as described in the model, that necessarily leads to complex

explanations of the causes of success and failure. *“Application of the model to actual cases therefore serves to highlight the fact that there are no simple answers”* (Sauer, 1993, p.315).

### 2.3.7.3 Conclusions

The processual approaches to organisational change have so far made little significant contribution to prescriptions for organizational change. However, they provide a strong challenge to such prescriptions, essentially undermining the simplistic, linear, top-down step-wise approaches to managing change. Like some of the work reviewed in the project management and organisational research fields, they begin to cast considerable doubts on the validity of models based on instrumental rationality, of universal applicability regardless of specific context and history, and indeed on the predictability of the outcomes of business change projects in general. *“Trajectories of change are essentially probabilistic and uncertain because of changing contexts and the resultant complexities and ambiguities of human action”* (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001, p.700). On this basis, the influential review of organisational change research by Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron challenged researchers *“to attempt to catch reality in flight”* and to focus on the detailed ‘how’ of the unfolding of organisational events, over time and in context. They called for *“a more sophisticated and demanding engagement with practice”* and greater sensitivity towards the practical day-to-day complexity of organisational life (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001).

### 2.3.8 ***‘Best practice’ in managing organizational change***

Many of the (‘non-processual’) ideas discussed in Sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.6 can be recognised in mainstream guidance on the management of organizational change - what could broadly be referred to as ‘best practice’ ie in the sense of a recognised and widely-accepted set of beliefs and practice among managers and educationalists. As the discussions in Section 2.2.1 and 2.3.1 highlight, the relationship between theory and practice in this field, as in project management generally, is unclear and it is a moot point the extent to which academic research is influential in shaping the ‘best practice’ discourse compared with more anecdotal, experience-based practitioner guidance. While this is not a precise or well-defined category, and within it there is a wide diversity of views, review of a number of different sources of prescriptive advice does reveal some consistent themes. Key references used to inform this

discussion include: the leading text of the Organizational Development school, perhaps the nearest one can get to a professional change management handbook (Cummings & Worley, 2008); advice from government (National Audit Office 2006; Office of Government Commerce 2005a; Office of Public Services Reform 2003); a leading consultancy's approach (Williams & Parr, 2006); and some popular management guides eg (Cameron & Green, 2004). Common themes emerging are:

- an emphasis on the importance of leadership, and senior management commitment
- the importance of developing and communicating a clear and compelling vision of change
- the need for a holistic view combining people, process and systems
- the psychological and emotional response to change, and the need to overcome resistance
- the need for effective stakeholder management
- the need for effective communications
- the value of ownership of change, and involvement and participation
- the importance of a step-wise approach
- the need for clear objectives, good planning and project management
- the need to develop 'change skills' and change agents to facilitate the process of change.

While these prescriptions seem widely accepted, it is at the same time recognised that project success rates are low. What these prescriptions exclude is recognition of the findings from the processual research school, which as discussed in Section 2.3.7 point to the highly-situated nature of organizational change, the importance of context and history, the central role of power relations (discussed further in Section 2.5), and the difficulty in principle of establishing universally-applicable prescriptions.

At the same time, as discussed in Section 2.3.1, they have also been criticised for being 'under-theorised', in the sense of the absence of a consistent, coherent conceptual framework which can explain why these factors are important, and how their effects work in any particular circumstance. There are in fact very many different and partial theoretical perspectives on organizational change (as demonstrated by the eclectic collection in Cameron

& Green, 2004); perhaps the most pervasive and influential are the psychologically-based perspectives of the early ‘human relations’ school of organizational studies, Lewin and Organizational Development in general; combined with a view of organizations as open systems.

All of these prescriptions share the assumptions that underpin the transformational change programmes discussed in Section 2.3.3, and they are similar in many respects to the kinds of organizational ‘success factors’ emerging from project management research, particularly recent work on enterprise resource systems (Somers & Nelson, 2001). They share with project management ‘best practice’ a long-standing view of organisations in systems terms, which can be predictably controlled and directed top-down. Where they differ most from project management prescriptions is in the emphasis placed on the impact of ‘human relations’ factors in achieving successful change, and as discussed in Section 2.2.3, these kinds of factors are becoming increasingly seen in the project management field as a contributor to the effective management of complex and uncertain projects. Developments in the OD field, on leadership, motivation, resistance, group dynamics, process consulting and team development, have had an enduring impact. However, even in this area the approach can most often be seen as fundamentally one of instrumental rationality, where human factors (eg culture, values, meaning and commitment) are treated as variables that can be managed through communication and motivation techniques to achieve the desired corporate goal.

Implicit in these prescriptions are a number of core assumptions: that actions are taken rationally by reference to an agreed set of organisational objectives; that objectives can (and should) be clearly identified and unambiguously defined at the outset; that the impact of actions taken is largely predictable; that there exists a single organizational reality that can be objectively determined; that there is a ‘correct’ course of managerial action that can be objectively determined in advance. These assumptions share a basis in instrumental rationality and a broadly positivist view of the nature of organisational reality. While cultural and political factors, which tend to admit a more interpretive view of social reality, are increasingly recognised, they have mainly been incorporated in the mainstream discourse on



organizational change as factors that can be objectively determined and made subject to instrumental rationality and top-down managerial control.

These practice-based prescriptions are returned to in Chapter 8 of this thesis, where they are interpreted in the light of the theoretical framework developed from this research that relies on a quite different set of assumptions about the nature of organizational reality.

The following two sections of this literature review explore research in organizational studies which has built up findings challenging assumptions of rational goal-seeking behaviour as the determinant of the outcomes in organizational change: organizational decision-making; and politics and power.

## **2.4 Organizational Decision-Making**

### ***2.4.1 The rational choice model***

Theories of decision-making are rooted firmly in the neo-classical tradition of rational economic man (Zey, 1992; Bryman, 1984). “*They portray decision-making as intentional, consequential, and optimizing*” (March, 1988b, p.1): decisions are based on preferences (eg wants, needs, values, goals, interests, subjective utilities) and expectations about outcomes associated with different alternative actions; and the best possible alternative is selected after evaluation of the outcomes against the preferences. Decision-making is seen as a sequential process – according to Simon (Simon, 1997/1945), with three distinct phases of *intelligence-design-choice*. March points to the roots of the rational model in the utilitarianist philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (March, 1996) and to its fundamental appeal in management science and the social sciences generally: “*it celebrates a view of human capacities that reinforces and extends dominant Western ideologies glorifying the role of reason in human affairs*” (March, 1988b, p.2).

Empirical research, however, whether cognitive psychology laboratory experiments or in-depth studies of the way in which real decisions are made within organisations, has cast doubts on the applicability of this model in its pure form in anything other than the narrowest

of circumstances (Brunsson 1982; March 1988c; Vickers 1965; Zey 1992). In 1984, a review of 15 years research was highlighting “*..a widespread feeling that the model is largely redundant.*” (Bryman, 1984, p.391).

#### ***2.4.2 Extending and challenging the rational choice model***

The organisational decision-making research field is dominated by this tension between the normative attractions of the rational model and its apparent limitations in providing good explanations of observed behaviour (Bryman, 1984; Langley *et al.*, 1995; Miller, Hickson & Wilson, 1999).

Two major figures in the field are Simon and March, who collaborated in initial work aimed at expanding the purely rational choice decision model through the notion of ‘bounded rationality’. Bounded rationality recognises the information-processing limitations of human decision-makers in real world organisations, leading to ‘satisficing’ rather than ‘optimising’ choices (March and Simon 1958; March 1988a; Simon 1992; Simon 1997/1945): “*..for the alternatives are too many and the time is too short*” (Vickers, 1965, p.91).

Simon’s work has been very influential in providing an essentially rational framework for analysis of the decision-making process, seen as ‘intendedly rational’ albeit cognitively constrained; by contrast, March has increasingly focused on the apparently ‘non-rational’ aspects of decision-making in organisations. While the non-rational has been an enduring theme in the literature, empirical researchers have mainly adopted some variant of the more rational model (Langley *et al.*, 1995). Some (Mintzberg *et al.* 1976; Nutt 1984; Nutt 1993) have dealt with the evident complexity and richness of real-world decision processes by elaboration within the basic view of decision-making as a boundedly rational process which converges through a sequence of stages from problem solving to final authorisation. Mintzberg, for example, developed a complex model of seven routines subject to numerous external dynamic factors delaying or interrupting progress through the routines (Mintzberg, Raisinghani & Theoret, 1976). While highly-contingent and iterative this model remains within a basically rational framework – what Langley *et al.* (1995) refer to as “*cerebrally rational*”.

Subsequent to his collaboration with Simon, however, March's work with a number of other colleagues has increasingly highlighted how constraining the bounds of bounded rationality actually are in practice, at the extreme serving to essentially invalidate the whole idea of structured rational choice: "...theories of choice might subordinate the idea of rationality altogether to less intentional conceptions of the causal determinants of action" (March, 1988a). "Human action is often less a matter of choice than a matter of imitating the actions of others, learning from experience, and matching rules and situations on the basis of appropriateness" (March & Sevón, 1988, p.432).

Work on the 'behavioural theory of the firm' (Cyert & March, 1963/1992), while providing evidence for the 'boundedly rational' and 'satisficing' approach to decision-making, also emphasised the importance both of organisational routines (where action is driven by rules rather than decisions) and the social aspects of decision-making, with multiple parties with different goals seeking *coalition* in support of functional interests. This was further extended by other researchers developing political models where decision outcomes were seen less as a result of analysis and evaluation of potential solutions against agreed objectives than as a political process of negotiating functional and personal interests (Brunsson 1989; Crozier and Friedberg 1980; Eisenhardt and Bourgeois 1988; Pettigrew 1973), where the ability to control resources is a crucial factor, and where outcomes may be at odds with rational choice theory. This political approach to decision-making sees organisational power as the prime driver of organisational outcome, albeit perhaps 'hidden' behind an apparently rational decision process (Buchanan & Badham, 1999a; Dawson & Buchanan, 2005; Pettigrew, 1973). The political dimension proved a significant factor in the so-called Bradford Studies (Hickson *et al.*, 1986) where 150 strategic decisions were observed to follow a number of different processes (sporadic, fluid, constricted) according to the degree of '*politicality*' and '*complexity*' inherent in the matter for decision (Miller, Hickson & Wilson, 1999).

Organisational decision-making is typically a group process, and research into the way that groups make decisions further reinforces the importance of 'non-rational' factors in determining decision outcomes. For example, decisions can be influenced by 'group think'

(Janis, 1982); by management fad or industry practice (Swanson & Ramiller, 1997; Davenport, 1994); by the way in which issues are packaged and ‘sold’ (Dutton et al., 2001); by a desire to be consistent with previous decisions (Staw, 1981); by psychodynamics and emotions (Gabriel, 1998; Kets de Vries, 2004; Vince, 2001); and by group diversity and different types of conflict (Amason, 1996; Edmondson & Smith, 2006; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

This multiplicity of different influences on decision outcomes leads in the extreme to Cohen, March and Olsen’s famous ‘garbage can’ theory of decision-making, in which decision-making is presented as an anarchic process where problems and solutions get linked in an opportunistic and apparently random fashion. In this model, decision-making is viewed as: “... *collections of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work*” (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972, p.1).

Despite the rationalist foundations to decision-making theory, therefore, there is considerable research from several different perspectives which challenges these foundations.

### ***2.4.3 Alternative approaches***

What then are the alternatives to rational decision theory and its variants? March sees 50 years of research into organisational decision-making (March, 1988a) as requiring recognition of a number of “*alternative rationalities*” to help explain as intelligent responses what otherwise appear as disorderly and irrational outcomes in the terms of rational choice theory. *Limited rationality*, a form of bounded rationality, is used to explain such evident behaviours as incrementalism and ‘muddling through’ (Lindblom, 1959), uncertainty avoidance and short-termism, and rules of thumb. *Contextual rationality* recognises the importance of simultaneity and chance in bringing problems and solutions together. *Process rationality* introduces the idea that the process itself may have value and meaning for participants beyond the outcome itself. All these rationalities are still based on the idea that action is consequential on knowledge of personal goals and projected future outcomes, but in effect they serve to extend the range of possible goals, and the criteria for evaluation. Bryman (1984) makes a

similar point, calling for a ‘softer’ view of rationality based on Weber’s value-based substantive rationality rather than instrumental rationality. *Posterior rationality* turns the notion of a decision as a prior commitment to action on its head by emphasising experience-based learning and the “*discovery of intentions as an interpretation of action rather than as a prior position*”, drawing on Weick’s ideas of ‘enactment’ and ‘loose coupling’ (Weick, 1979) – identified by Mintzberg and Waters (1990) as one of the few organisational scholars who has seen that “*the relationship between decision and action can be far more tenuous than almost all the literature of organization theory suggests*”.

Brunsson (1982) also identifies that actions often precede decisions, rather than the other way around. He goes further to claim that the rational decision making model actually “*affords a bad basis for action*”, as it ignores the motivational, commitment and social links from decisions to actions. Brunsson calls for a focus on action rather than decision, as an action perspective directs attention to the fact that action takes place for a number of reasons (or ‘rationalities’ in March’s terms), of which explicit decision is only one. For example, agreement and coordination can arise without decision making, because the actors perceive situations similarly and share general expectations and values (Brunsson, 1982, p.32).

Mintzberg and colleagues (Langley *et al.*, 1995; Mintzberg & Waters, 1990) also conclude that action may be a more productive focus than decision: “*It made more sense for us to study streams of actions, and then go back and investigate the role of decision, if any, in determining these actions*” (Mintzberg & Waters, 1990) emphasis in original). Their own research demonstrates what a difficult concept decision actually is in large organisations: “*...not only are ‘decisions’ difficult to pin down in practice, but ... the attempt to do so may distort our perceptions of how action really occurs in organizations*” (Langley *et al.*, 1995, p.270). They see research in this area as requiring a phenomenological perspective, with in-depth longitudinal studies, tracking ‘issue streams’ forward, rather than ‘decisions’ backwards, focusing on people and personalities, and seeking to explore the rich and complex relationship between intention, commitment, and action.

## 2.5 Politics and Power

### 2.5.1 Introduction

The importance of organizational politics is evident in the numerous challenges to the assumptions of instrumental rationality that have featured in the research areas discussed earlier. This section explores research in the areas of organizational politics and power.

Serious academic research of politics, and the associated concept of power in organisations, began in the 1960s (Gandz & Murray, 1980), and several authors eg (Burnes, 2004b) point to the seminal work of Lindblom (1959) and Cyert and March (1963/1992) as laying the basis for what Burnes refers to as “*an explosion of interest in power and politics*” in the 1980s, especially associated with the work of Pfeffer (Pfeffer, 1992b). Lindblom (1959), writing from the viewpoint of public sector organisations demonstrated that the need to accommodate the interests and positions of different groups dictated the shape of the policy-making process, rather than the system of option evaluation and rational choice. Cyert and March (1963/1992) showed that private sector firms were also political entities, composed of competing and shifting coalitions of multiple and conflicting interests, imperfectly resolving differences in demands and objectives through a process of negotiation and influencing. In the ‘behavioural theory of the firm’, rationality is bounded by uncertainty both about goals and how best to achieve them.

This view of the political nature of organisations is rooted in the functional specialisation of the modern organisation, and in the different perspectives that functional groups take in the face of uncertainty about ends and means. Pettigrew saw political behaviour as being caused by (among other factors) a combination of ‘structural differentiation’ (between different organisational or professional specialisms), and the complexity and uncertainty of the collective task, where there was lack of clarity about requirements and where long time spans between decision and an outcome made causal relationships hard to discern (Pettigrew, 1973). In these circumstances “*Reasonable people can be expected to disagree on major, uncertain and ambiguously defined issues, and to argue strongly for their personal convictions*” (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b, p.21). Competing perspectives may arise because different

people ‘frame’ or make sense of problems and issues in different ways, using different mental models (Edmondson 2003; Gioia and Thomas 1996; Von Meier 1999; Weick 1995); and their attachment to a particular interpretation may even become an issue of personal identity (Knights & Murray, 1992).

A second key perspective introduces the notion of personal agendas, with power and politics seen “*in terms of an actor's subjectively realized intention of engaging in self-serving behaviours at the expense of others in the organization*” (Gandz & Murray, 1980, p.237), what practicing managers most frequently associate with organisational politics (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b). This combined picture of individuals and groups, pursuing different functional and personal objectives and interests, and engaged in a constant process of trying to shape decisions in their favour has led a number of authors to characterise organisations as essentially ‘political systems’ (Buchanan and Badham 1999a; Buchanan and Badham 1999b; Dawson 2003; Mintzberg 1989; Morgan 1986; Pettigrew 1973; Pettigrew 1985; Pfeffer 1992b). And because organisational change disturbs the status quo, and provides both opportunities and threats in new disposals of power “*Power, politics, and change are inextricably linked*” (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b, p.11).

### ***2.5.2 Ambivalent attitudes to organisational politics***

Studies and empirical field studies demonstrate that politics is a taken-for-granted feature of organisational life (Buchanan & Badham, 1999a; Buchanan & Badham, 1999b; Burnes, 2004b). In the survey of 428 managers carried out by Gandz and Murray (1980), 89% thought that successful executives had to be good politicians, a finding reinforced by other case studies (Knights & Murray, 1992; Buchanan & Badham, 1999a). 67% of respondents in a survey in the latter’s research agreed with the statement that “the change agent who is not politically skilled will eventually fail”. But while politics is an accepted part of organisational life, it is not often viewed positively. 50% of Gandz and Murray’s respondents thought that organisations would be happier places without politics, and a similar proportion felt that politics was detrimental to organisational efficiency. In support of this view, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) found politics within top management teams was associated with poor firm performance, as it restricted information flow and was time-consuming and distracting.

Similarly, political behaviour has typically been viewed negatively in the literature (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Hardy, 1996). For Mintzberg “*organizational politics can be viewed as a form of illness*” (Mintzberg, 1989), referring to behaviour that is typically divisive and illegitimate, in the sense of outside formal lines of authority: “...*divisive, illegitimate, devious, cunning, underhand, and unsanctioned – anti-social*” (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b, p.58). A major characteristic of such behaviour is the attempt to conceal its true motive, as those involved believe that such tactics would be judged by others as unacceptable or illegitimate. According to Burnes (2004b), drawing on a number of authors including Pfeffer, “*those indulging in even a low level of political behaviour rarely openly declare their own personal interest in the outcome*”.

Some authors take a more positive view. Power and politics is a prominent feature of the practitioner-oriented prescriptive literature on managing change discussed in Section 5 - though more often expressed in terms of ‘stakeholder management’, ‘forming coalitions’ ‘communicating the vision’, and ‘building the case for change’ (Kanter, 1999; Kanter *et al.* 1992; Kotter, 1990; Kotter, 1995). Hardy (1996) sees power as a form of organisational energy, with politics (as “*power in action*”) as an essential mechanism with which to make change happen. The actions that are crucial to the realisation of strategic goals do not just ‘happen’; power is needed to orchestrate and direct them, and the exercise of that power requires political skills. Similarly, Pfeffer, while noting the prevalence of a widespread ambivalent attitude to organisational politics – that it is necessary and inevitable, but deploring its use – highlights the need to understand “*the necessity of power in mobilizing the political support and resources to get things done in any organisation*” (Pfeffer, 1992b).

Many of the authors referred to above – eg Hardy and Clegg (1996) in their paper “Some Dare Call it Power” - make the point that concerns about the ethics and legitimacy of political tactics, and the difficulty of empirical research into practices which are often considered as of doubtful acceptability, has hampered research and theoretical development.



### **2.5.3 Definitions**

As will be clear from the above discussion, politics and power are seen as closely related topics. There appears to be widespread agreement that power represents some kind of capability, most usually through the possession of position or more generally some resource such as control over funds or information; and that politics is the exercise of that power. Burnes (2004b) quotes Pfeffer's "*widely accepted definition*" of organisational politics as involving: "*those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcome in a situation where there is uncertainty or decensus about choices*" (Pfeffer, 1981).

However, some authors point out that power is a concept that only makes sense when it can be seen to be deployed in political activity, and that the two concepts are not in practice so easily distinguished (Burnes, 2004b, p.185). Hardy and Clegg (1996), taking a more critical perspective, maintain that "*researchers have long noted the confusion that exists concerning the definition of power*", and whether it is an independent variable or a dependent outcome. Astley and Sachdeva (1984) referred to the "*controversial and problematic status of the concept of power*", and refer to March's concerns that analysis using the concept of power was often empty and tautological.

Buchanan and Badham (1999b) take both definitions together:

- *Power concerns the capacity of individuals to exert their will over others*
- *Political behaviour is the practical domain of power in action, worked out through the use of techniques of influence and other (more or less extreme) tactics*

For the sake of clarity, power and politics are discussed further in the separate sections below, recognising however that they are very closely related.

### **2.5.4 Perspectives on Power**

#### **2.5.4.1 The resource-dependency view**

The resource-dependency view of power has developed from a hierarchically-based view of authority or status to one which focuses on the individual's capacity to influence decisions in

a variety of different ways. The sources of power are identified by Pfeffer as: control over information; formal authority to act; and control over resources – with the latter being the most significant. “*The person with the gold makes the rules*” (Pfeffer, 1992a, p.83). This ‘resource-dependency’ view of power is dominant in what Hardy and Clegg (1996) refer to as the mainstream functionalist management perspective, and as a development of the ‘strategic contingencies’ view based on control of uncertainty as a source of power. For example, Pettigrew (1973) found information and communication, and the role of ‘gatekeeper’ as a crucial source of power in a competitive process of making claims “*against the resource-sharing system of the organisation*”. French and Raven’s much-cited work on the ‘social bases of power’ (French & Raven, 1959/2001) identified five power bases: *reward*; *coercive*; *referent* (eg use of charisma); *legitimate*; and *expert* – with the later addition of ‘*information*’ (Raven, 1992). Hardy and Clegg (1996) identify numerous ‘resources’ as a base for power – expertise, credibility, stature and prestige, access to higher echelons, control of rewards and sanctions, and so on – concluding that “*since different phenomena become resources in different contexts... They might be anything, under the appropriate circumstances*” (Hardy & Clegg, 1996, p.626). Also, because many of these bases depend upon the perceptions of others, power cannot be seen as an objective property to be acquired and accumulated by individuals; it has a socially constructed and relational character.

#### 2.5.4.2 Control over meaning

The resource-dependency view of power has been extended in a number of ways. One is to recognise that power is exercised as a means of creating legitimacy for actions, thereby avoiding the necessity for more coercive and visible forms of power. Bachrach and Morton (1962) discuss the ‘two faces of power’, with the ‘hidden’ face of power essentially determining what it is that comes to be legitimately part of the organisational decision-making process – the ‘non-decisions’. An important part of this process is the management of meaning. “*Power is mobilized not only to achieve physical outcomes, but also to give those outcomes meanings*” (Hardy & Clegg, 1996, p.630) – and Hardy and Clegg observe that the functionally-oriented management literature has largely ignored this issue. One notable exception is Pettigrew, who saw the use of power as “*the creation of legitimacy for certain ideas, values, and demands... The management of meaning refers to a process of symbol*

*construction and value use designed both to create legitimacy for one's own demands and to 'de-legitimize' the demands of others"* (Pettigrew, 1977). In this way, power is used to influence behaviour indirectly, introducing elements of more culturally-oriented views of organisations. This drive to manage meaning is evident in the practitioner-oriented writing about transformational change and organizational culture, albeit largely as a process of gaining acceptance of managerial agendas.

### **2.5.5 Foucault and power**

The resource-dependency view, and even the extension of the concept of power in terms of determining meaning, retains an element of individuals and groups possessing the capability to actively influence others to do something that they would otherwise not do. The view of power as a more embedded, systemic network of relations of taken-for-granted assumptions is a significant departure from this. This view of power can be seen as a feature of 'institutionalist' approaches in organisational studies (Scott, 1987; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), and in the work of Bourdieu (Section 7.3) but is most often attributed to Foucault.

Three key insights from Foucault's writings, though aimed at modern social life in general, provide a quite different perspective on organisational power. The first is that 'power relations' are a feature of all social interactions – power is not a quality that can be assigned to particular individuals and not to others. The second insight is identification of the mutually-constitutive relationship between power and knowledge, in which 'regimes of truth' are established through social discourse, where the 'dominant discourse' reflects the power relations among members of that community, and is at the same time an expression of the enactment of power, constraining both interpretations of the nature of reality, and available courses of action. (The notion of 'discourse' is covered more fully in Chapter 3 which follows). The third insight is the way in which 'surveillance' and 'disciplinary practices' replace the direct enactment of power, where the constraints of cultural practices and the 'regime of truth' are embedded in the routine and 'micro-practices' of daily life, and where individuals exercise 'self-discipline' through accepting social rules and assumptions about what is taken to be true. Foucault uses Bentham's Panopticon to illustrate the force of this unseen observation which "*automatizes and deindividualizes power. Power has its principle*

*not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up*” (Foucault, 1991/1975, p.202).

The Foucauldian perspective on power relations is not easily accommodated within mainstream management thinking, not least as it ascribes a very limited role to managerial agency. Hardy and Clegg describe the fundamental character of this challenge to functionalist and modernist views of power: *“Power was no longer a convenient, manipulable, deterministic resource. Instead all actors operated within an existing structure of dominancy – a prevailing web of power relations – from which the prospects of escape were limited for dominant and subordinate groups alike”* (Hardy & Clegg, 1996, p.632). This perspective is also very much a feature of Bourdieu’s theory of social practice which is discussed in detail in Chapter 7. This kind of perspective on power directs attention to an understanding of the role of power relations in determining behaviour in organisations rather than identifying who has more or less of which sort of power and how they deploy it.

Hardy (1996) attempts to broaden what she describes as the *“overly narrow conceptualization of power”* as expressed in the resource-dependency perspective. Building on the work of Lukes, she identified four categories of power:

- *The power of resources* – where power is exercised through control and deployment of key resources on which others depend
- *The power of processes* – where the more powerful actors determine outcomes from ‘behind the scenes’ through control of business procedures and participation
- *The power of meaning* – where power is used to shape perceptions, cognitions and preferences to legitimise certain interests over others
- *The power of the system* – power embedded in the *“unconscious acceptance of the values, traditions, cultures and structures of a given institution and it captures all organizational members in its web”* (Hardy, 1996, p.58).

Each of these categories of power can (and positively should, according to Hardy) be mobilized in achieving successful change in organizations – with the exception of the last category of power (closest to the Foucauldian view), which she views more as a backdrop to the other forms of power. This leads to an analysis of the different implications for action, awareness and values, and a collection of prescriptions for managers for mobilisation of the power of resources, process and meaning, many of which are clearly recognisable from the prescriptive literature on managing change. Arguably though, this simply sidesteps the challenge presented by the Foucault perspective on power, and offers a more sophisticated version of the resource-dependency view to include aspects of legitimacy and meaning that are familiar from organisational culture and institutional theory. Buchanan and Badham (1999b) similarly struggle to accommodate “*some depressing conclusions*” of Foucault’s view. Though seeing value for practitioners in recognising the invisible controlling forces underlying apparently neutral institutional practices, they conclude: “*If you are a manager trying to drive a change initiative then Foucault’s views may sound like an esoteric distraction. An episodic concept of power and power relations, therefore, still has considerable relevance and value to those engaged in day-to-day social interaction and interpersonal influence*” (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b, p.221).

### **2.5.6 Political tactics**

As mentioned earlier, power becomes observable when it is expressed in behaviours such as political tactics. “*The successful use of power is a matter of technical skill rather than merely of possession*” (Pettigrew, 1973).

Observers of organisational politics often refer to them as ‘games’, with the implications of rules, competence, and winning and losing (Pfeffer, 1981; Mintzberg, 1989). This metaphorical use is also echoed by Bourdieu (see Section 7.3). Mintzberg identifies 13 political games common in organisations, the key ones being games to resist authority, to counter resistance, to build power bases, to defeat rivals, and to change the organisation. Buchanan and Badham and Burnes both cite the work of Kipnis and others on social influencing tactics, including: *assertiveness; ingratiation; rational appeal; threat of sanctions; exchange of favours; upward appeal; blocking and withholding collaboration;*

*forming coalitions*. Of these, the most popular tactic is the selective use of reason, with arguments and data deployed to present the preferred outcome in a more favourable light than the alternatives: “*though reason may be deployed, it is not done so in an unbiased or neutral fashion; it is used as a screen to disguise the real objective of the exercise*” (Burnes, 2004b, p.187).

**Table 2.4: Turf Game tactics** (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b)

<b>Ploy</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Image building	Appropriate dress; support for the ‘right’ causes; adherence to group norms; air of self-confidence
Selective information	Withhold unfavourable information from superiors; keep useful information from your competition; offer only favourable interpretations; overwhelm others with complex technical data
Scapegoating	Make sure someone else is blamed; avoid personal blame; take credit for successes
Formal alliances	Agree actions with key people; create a coalition strong enough to enforce its will
Networking	Make lots of friends in influential positions
Compromise	Give in on unimportant issues to create allies for subsequent, more important issues
Rule manipulation	Refuse requests on the grounds of ‘against company policy’, but grant identical requests from allies on grounds of ‘special circumstances’

Buchanan and Badham (1999b) surveyed a number of managers in different countries to gain their view of the most popular and effective tactics in what they call the ‘turf game’, grouping them under 7 categories which were also supported in the literature (see Table 2.4 above). They also identified that there was an additional and substantial eighth category which included “*more covert and ruthless tactics*”.

### 2.5.7 *Political tactics as social practice*

There are clearly a very wide range of different kinds of tactics, and considerable skill is required in choosing appropriate tactics in context (Pettigrew, 1973). This context can include many factors, including the history of the personal relationships of the parties involved, the personal circumstances of the players, the prevailing organisational values, and so on – there are no general rules. Appropriateness requires not just consideration of effectiveness, but critically, of acceptability or legitimacy. These judgements of appropriateness are made tacitly, requiring considerable practice-based improvisatory skills in context and are part of what Buchanan and Badham (1999b, p.17) refer to as “*the taken-for-granted ‘recipe knowledge’ of most managers*”. Part of politics in Pettigrew’s view (Pettigrew, 1977) is in establishing legitimacy for one’s actions within the terms of an accepted value framework. Pfeffer (1992a) talks of ‘framing’, the need to appear reasonable in context: “*what looks reasonable, or ridiculous, depends on the context – on how it is framed in terms of what has preceded it and the language that is used to present it*”. Political behaviours are therefore closely tied up with ideas of the social construction of reality, of ‘language games’: of labelling actions as political, challenging such classifications (most usually within the terms of rationality), and providing plausible accounts as justification. Inextricably combined with the influence tactics described above, are skilful use of conversation controls and impression management (Buchanan & Badham, 1999b, p.71). These ideas are central concerns of a ‘social practice’ perspective, discussed in Chapter 3.

These ‘micro-practice’ considerations, taken together with the Foucault perspective on pervasive power relations, begin to move the focus of discussion of power and politics to understanding the drivers of social interaction in general. As Mangham (1979, p.xi) says in his consideration of organisational politics: “*I consider nearly all behaviour to be fundamentally political in the sense that when one individual interacts with another, more often than not he is motivated so to do because the encounter provides him with some sort of benefit...*”. Astley and Sachdeva (1984) note that power is at risk of being meaningless “*apart from the ideas of social interaction and organization*”.

All of this suggests that, while power and politics may be useful concepts in directing attention to the apparently ‘non-rational’ outcomes of organisational action, a deeper understanding of action and outcomes in organisational change projects may be gained by focusing on the social exchanges which are the fabric of day-to-day life in organisations. In the concluding section of his case study of organisational decision-making as a predominantly political process, Pettigrew emphasises that the focus of his study is “*social process*”. He cites the work of Blumer, the author of symbolic interactionism (see Section 3 2.4), in setting out his emphasis on “*man operating the variability and ambiguity in the social arena of his action; on man constrained but purposeful; on man shaped by situational constraints, prior expectations, and historical experiences of past interaction, but also differentially interpreting those forces often in self-interested terms*” (Pettigrew, 1973, p.271). He describes this perspective as “*a strategic conception of behaviour*”. Sociologists Crozier and Friedberg (1980) use a similar concept in their theory of collective action of organisations, with “*strategic actors*” interacting within a “*field of action*” constrained by the “*rules of the game*”, echoing also the work of social theorists with an interest in social practice, such as Bourdieu and Giddens, discussed in later sections. It seems that empirically-based concerns about narrowly rational models of action in organizations lead one to consideration of politics and power; and that, followed to its logical conclusions, directs attention to the fundamental social process of interaction which are the focus of social theory.

## **2.6 Literature Review – Conclusions**

We have seen that the fields of project management and organisational change management, most relevant to the management of business change projects, are dominated by ‘under-theorised’ prescriptions, which can be seen to constitute a body of accepted ‘best practice’ in the management of business change projects as evident in professional guidance, popular managerial publications, consultancy approaches, and industry and government guidelines. There is agreement that, based on research into the success of business change and projects in general, these prescriptions despite their widespread acceptance are of limited effectiveness (albeit the best we have).



Implicit in these prescriptions are a number of core related assumptions: that actions are taken rationally by reference to an agreed set of organisational objectives; that objectives can be clearly identified and unambiguously defined; that the impact of actions taken is largely predictable; that there is a ‘correct’ course of managerial action that can be objectively determined in advance, and which is universally applicable irrespective of context and history. These assumptions are challenged by research into **organizational decision-making**, where a large body of research into the way that organizational action takes place in practice casts considerable doubt on the underlying assumptions of ‘rational choice’. It is clear also from the research into politics and power that politics, rather than goal rationality, is an endemic driver of organizational action, determined by respective power positions of organizational actors.

Research in the **project management** field has repeatedly highlighted the inadequacies of the search for static and universal ‘success factors’; and the uncertainty and complexity of real projects, particularly those such as business change projects, is seen to demand new approaches to conventional views of project management ‘best practice’. Such approaches as there are to complex and uncertain projects recognise the empirically-observed limits to planning, the unpredictability of outcomes, the emergent nature of project goals, and the importance of the specific context in undermining generic methodologies. Some approaches seek to extend the basic mainstream project management model; and the political character of the organizational context for projects is recognised to a degree in practice-based prescriptions for ‘stakeholder management’ and ‘top management commitment’, and the need for experience-based skills in project managers. Increasingly, however, researchers are challenging the fundamental positivist assumptions of instrumental rationality and cybernetic system control that underlie the mainstream approaches. There are calls for better understanding of how action takes place in projects and how outcomes are achieved within this complex social milieu; and for improved theory based on this understanding. The research required should focus on “*practical action, lived experience, quality of social interaction and communicative relating, operations of power in context, identity, and the relationship between agency and structure in project environments*” (Cicmil et al., 2006).

Like project management, the *organizational change management* field is seen as immature theoretically. In addition to a structured, staged and planned project management approach, organizational change prescriptions have gone further than project management in emphasizing some important organisational and social aspects of business change, such as vision and leadership, and the psychological and behavioural aspects of change that, while common-place in general management theory, have not yet been emphasised to any great extent in professional project management prescriptions.

However, even recognition of cultural and political factors in organizational change, which tend to admit a more interpretive view of social reality, have mainly been incorporated as factors that can be objectively determined and made subject to instrumental rationality and top-down managerial control. As we have seen, research critiques of mainstream organisational change management approaches as either narrowly ‘technical-theoretical’ (Dawson, 2003), as either ‘under-socialised’ or ‘over-socialised’ (Collins, 1998), advance challenges to their fundamental positivist assumptions of instrumental rationality, systems control, and context-independence; and call similarly for more ‘processual’ research focused on the dynamic day-to-day reality of change.

The *processual and political* approaches discussed in Sections 2.3.7 and 2.5 point the way both to the type of research required – essentially, longitudinal research close to the intricacies of practice, aiming “*to catch reality in flight*” (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001) - and some alternative theoretical perspectives. Extending the political and processual perspective to change naturally leads to an increased focus on the ‘social dynamics’ of organisational interaction, not so much treating projects as systems subject to cybernetic control, but as groups of people engaged in collective action within the institutional constraints of both organisational and ordinary social life. This so-called ‘practice turn’ (Demers, 2007) is a direction indicated by scholars in several fields, including project management and organizational studies generally. It draws on work by social theorists and sociologists, and is typically based on an entirely different set of philosophical assumptions than those which underpin what has been described as the mainstream approaches to business change.

The following chapter explores some of the work in this field, first identifying some of the different fundamental concepts which characterise it. A range of theoretical resources are then introduced which may be productive when seeking to capture the social reality of business change projects in organisations and embodying that in alternative and potentially more effective theory.

### **3 THE SOCIAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As we have seen in Section 2.5, the processual and political approaches to change naturally direct research attention towards a focus on social interaction generally. This focus is clearly supportive of the call for more research into the ‘actuality’ of projects, the social reality as experienced by those engaged in project work in large organizations, that we have seen consistently repeated throughout recent work in several fields reviewed in the previous chapter. This indicates the need for a shift in perspective on business change projects as collective social endeavours, rather than as organisational systems controlled top-down by management of success factors and application of process methodologies.

There are of course other emerging bodies of research (eg what Demers (2007) refers to as the ‘natural evolution’ perspective) which seek to extend mainstream approaches to understanding organisational change – notably the growth in interest in complexity and chaos theories – but these tend to retain a systems and rationalist perspective on social complexity, and also to retain foundations in a positivist epistemology. By contrast, the social practice approaches tend to reject the ‘technical-theoretical’ perspective (Dawson, 2003) shared by the mainstream approaches reviewed in Chapter 2, and have their philosophical foundations in phenomenology, social constructionism and post-modernist intellectual developments generally. This section explores these approaches with the intent of (a) shaping the approach to the research question and the conduct of the empirical research (b) identifying some theoretical resources which could be explored in developing an alternative to mainstream theory.

Firstly, the philosophical foundations are examined; then the important idea of the ‘socially constructed’ nature of social reality is introduced and discussed, together with some of the major bodies of thought (including ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, discourse and narrative) that emerge from that and which have been applied in an organizational context. Finally, a number of leading social theories are introduced which are later used to interpret the empirical research findings, and to provide some theoretical resources for the

development of a theoretical model of the findings and for business change projects in general.

The purpose of this section is to draw out the main concepts and ‘theoretical lenses’ that are available to look at the management of business change projects in organisations in a quite different way from the current mainstream. This involves some unfamiliar and apparently esoteric areas of philosophy and social theory, which are challenging, often complex and obscure, and typically themselves subject to considerable debate. The intention in this section is not to provide an authoritative, in-depth review - for which this researcher is in any case not qualified – but to identify and communicate the distinctive concepts at a high level, to identify their provenance and demonstrate that they are substantive and taken seriously within the relevant academic community, and to seek to interpret them in a way in which their relevance to the implementation of business change projects can then be considered. It is inevitable that in the process some simplification will be necessary, and that the full complexity, refinement and sophistication of these ideas will be compromised to some degree. However, they collectively represent such a significant departure from the fundamental assumptions that have been identified as underpinning mainstream approaches that even a rough-and-ready representation can serve to provide a valuable alternative way of looking at projects.

## **3.2 Philosophical Considerations**

### ***3.2.1 Introduction***

This section may appear to depart considerably from the concrete reality of managing business change which is later described in the empirical research. However, its relevance is in clarifying what is meant by the objections to the fundamental positivist assumptions implicit in mainstream approaches that have been identified in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2; and to demonstrate what alternatives exist, and their relevance to consideration of social reality. This is important both to understanding the method of enquiry for the empirical research discussed in Chapter 4, but also in understanding the basic assumptions about the nature of knowledge and scientific enquiry that underpin some of the theoretical frameworks which are introduced, and are later used to frame the empirical findings.

This section first examines what is meant by positivism, and what have been seen as its limitations; and introduces other philosophical perspectives that have been influential in conducting social research over the last 30-40 years, namely phenomenology and postmodernism. The philosophical ideas of pragmatism and critical realism are introduced as a potential response to some of the challenges of postmodernism; and the epistemological ideas of Habermas are briefly introduced, as being of particular relevance in contrasting social inquiry from natural science inquiry.

### 3.2.2 *Positivism*

Positivism was the invention of Auguste Comte in 1853, who based his approach to the scientific development of society on the assumption that “*there can be no real knowledge but that which is based on observed facts*” (quoted in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002). Comte’s positivism is seen as an extension of the eighteenth-century philosophy of the Enlightenment, which emphasised the power of reason over metaphysical speculation and superstition, and as an integral component of ‘modernism’: “*with its belief in the essential capacity of humanity to perfect itself through the power of rational thought*” (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). As a philosophy, positivism is essentially empiricist, holding that the only authentic knowledge is that based on actual sense experience, and that universal truths can be induced from the particularities of experience. This empiricist tendency is combined with rationalism, in which particulars can be explained in terms of universal and idealised categories. “*Knowledge is thus created either by extrapolating from concrete experience or derived from the logical verification of immutable laws and principles*” (Chia, 2002b, p.6). Although empirical observation is given a key role, it is rational analysis that rules, according to Chia: positivism “*subsumes the empirical under the imperative of the rational*” (p.8).

Philosophically, the early forms of positivism may have been largely discredited – according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Comte’s positivism “*sank into an almost complete oblivion*” in the twentieth century. However, this combination of logic and rationality with empirical observation has been the most widely-held epistemological position, not only in the natural sciences, where its success seems to have been convincingly demonstrated, but in the social sciences also, where its suitability has been more often

challenged (Chia, 2002b; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002). Positivism “*in a variety of guises remains the dominant epistemological orientation of the management disciplines despite it having recently been under increasing attack from a variety of rival orientations*” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000) and according to Johnson and Duberley, many aspects of positivism are so deeply embedded in Western cultures that they are “*virtually an aspect of our common sense*”. As we have seen from earlier sections, numerous researchers have highlighted the dominance of positivist approaches in organisational studies eg (Astley, 1985; Wicks & Freeman, 1998) and information systems research (Chen and Hirschheim 2004; Goles and Hirschheim 2000). Johnson and Duberley (2000) maintain that this dominance is not always evident, since researchers now tend not to describe their work as positivist – “*Indeed the term ‘positivist’ is more commonly used as an epithet for someone else’s work*” (p.12). They observe, however, that much of what is described as interpretive research and critical of positivism actually itself exhibits many of the characteristics of positivism.

So what exactly is positivism? Positivism as a label is associated with a number of other significant aspects, which collectively characterise it. Different authors highlight different aspects, though these differ according to the purposes of the author and their own interpretation, and similar ideas are expressed differently.

Most obviously, positivist epistemology can be seen to assume a realist ontology, in which there is a fixed world external to and independent of human beings, which has order and structure which can be objectively determined through observation, and where universal laws and causal relationships can be established which allow prediction and control. Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.27) identify what they call a “*web of mutually supportive epistemological commitments*” that characterise positivism. These can be summarised as:

1. Dependence for knowledge on neutral, value-free and objective observation – implying a subject-object dualism in which the objects of observation are independent of the process of observing.
2. A correspondence theory of truth, rooted in a Cartesian view of truth as correctly representing in the mind what exists as external reality; and of a view of language as

gaining its meaning from its direct correspondence with the objects of external reality (a ‘neutral observational language’).

3. Inductive verification and deductive falsification of theory. Implied by the above commitments is the need to validate theory by its ability to correspond to observation – all theoretical statements must be both capable of, and subject to, empirical testing. Any statement about the world is only meaningful if it can be shown to be true or false through observation.
4. The natural sciences, particularly physics, provide the model for all the sciences including the social sciences – the term science is only applicable to methodology that is consistent with that model.
5. The task of science is to enable the prediction and control of social and natural events. As such, it is a requirement of science to produce instrumentally useful knowledge.

These epistemological commitments, taken with the realist ontology, can be seen as making up positivism. Positivism is often associated with a number of other characteristics, which can be seen as a consequence of these commitments, or with other characteristics of what is seen as ‘modernism’ (discussed more fully later). For example, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) include reductionism as a key characteristic – the belief that problems are better understood if broken down into their simplest components.

Taken as a whole, the commitments have a number of very familiar implications for the conduct of management research, even though the commitments themselves are seldom explicitly acknowledged. “*The dominance of this perspective is such that it is ingrained into common-sense assumptions about how to do research*” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.11) – and, arguably, into the taken-for-granted assumptions about management science and rational approaches to management in general. A positivist epistemology drives a number of preoccupations in attempting to understand organisational behaviour; the attempt to identify causal explanations and universal laws that explain regularities in human behaviour; observational rigour to eliminate any bias introduced by the subjectivity of the researcher; cross-sectional studies and study of sufficient cases to generate reliable generalisation;



operationalization of concepts into forms that can be measured and subjected to quantitative analysis; and so on.

The challenges to positivism come on a number of fronts. The idea of subject-object duality and the neutral independent observer does not recognise that observation of the external world is only possible through some pre-existing framework of categories or theory, and therefore observation cannot be independent of the observer. This has implications for the natural sciences, highlighted by Kuhn's famous work on scientific 'paradigms' (Kuhn, 1962), and by radical authors such as Feyerabend (1993), but is even more pronounced in the context of the social sciences, where the observer is most obviously part of what is being observed. In principle, it can be argued that the consciousness of the observed 'object' (human beings in the social world), and the consequent reflexive nature of social and human action in general (Giddens, 1984) makes any attempt at observer-independence impossible. Furthermore, language has increasingly been recognised as more than a 'mirror' of an external real world – it has a much more active role in structuring and shaping our perceptions of reality (Chia, 2002b). In addition, the realist ontology and the search for theories and causal relationships assumes a stability of the real world (a 'being' ontology (Chia, 1995)) that does not appear to be a feature of the constantly changing social world. Students of the social world in general, and organisations in particular, have therefore increasingly sought alternative fundamental perspectives on which to base their science.

### **3.2.3 Phenomenology**

The historical movement of phenomenology is the philosophical tradition launched in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Husserl and Heidegger in Germany and Merleau-Ponty and Sartres in France. Phenomenology as a discipline has been central to the tradition of continental European philosophy throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith, 2008). It is seen as a precursor of postmodernism, discussed in the section which follows, and also as the driving intellectual force behind the development of interpretive approaches to organizational studies and social science in general (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998; Sandberg, 2005).

Phenomenology departs from the idea of subject-object dualism, and the positivist notion of a detached subject creating objective abstractions or representations of an independently observed external reality; it looks to study conscious experience as experienced in its ‘raw’ form from the subjective or first-person point of view (Smith, 2008; Chia, 2002b). In this pristine state of experience, any ‘knowing’ is prior to the creation of a subject/object distinction: “*there is no separation of knower and known*” (Chia, 2002b, p.9). This idea clearly resonates with concerns of the impact of the observer on the observed that have troubled critics of positivist approaches to social studies.

It is important to understand, however, that this does not abandon the notion of objectivity but “*aims to describe in all its complexity the manifold layers of the experience of objectivity as it emerges at the heart of subjectivity*” – what Husserl refers to as “*the paradox or mystery of subjectivity – as the site of appearance of objectivity*” (Ch 1, Moran & Mooney, 2002). Husserl referred to the “*life-world*”, the subject’s lived experience of reality, which is at the same time a world shared with others, and therefore transcending the subject – while its qualities are not qualities within the subject, it is nonetheless inseparable from the subject (Sandberg, 2005, p.47).

As we will see in later sections, this interplay between subjectivity and objectivity (as a form of inter-subjectivity in a social context) is a crucial feature picked up in Schutz’s social phenomenology of everyday life, on which Berger and Luckmann’s presentation of the social construction of reality was based (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz & Natanson, 1962).

An important concept within phenomenology is that of “*intentionality*” – “*the directedness of experience toward things in the world*” (Smith, 2008), a focusing of consciousness (Chia, 2002b) in which consciousness is always seen as consciousness *of* something. In these terms, it is meaningless to talk of an independent object existing prior to our consciousness of it – subject and object are inseparable. While Husserl’s initial intentions were that phenomenology would avoid the theoretical presuppositions of science and philosophy by apprehension of the pre-reflexive, pre-judgemental intuitive grasp of pure experience, it became clear that the experience of the “*life-world*” was itself filtered in some way. It is not

obvious that “*many things are not disclosed*” but the conditions of the natural-cultural-historical milieu of the life-world structure our experiences into a ‘natural attitude’. *The very ‘naturalness’ of the natural world acts to conceal the manner in which this ‘normal’ world is constituted by the activities of the conscious subjects who inhabit that world* (Moran & Mooney, 2002). Broadly speaking, this idea was reflected in Schutz’s notion of the ‘stock of knowledge’ that is shared across social interactions in day-to-day reality (Schutz & Natanson, 1962); and in Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ (described later); is generally apparent in interpretive approaches to organisation studies, eg ethnomethodology (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998; Garfinkel, 1986); and is implicit in Weick’s concept of ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995).

There are a number of other themes within the phenomenological perspective which have been taken up by interpretive approaches to organisational studies. These relate to the role of intuitive knowing, which is part of the experience of knowing prior to abstract rationalisation, seen by Husserl as a more valid or legitimate source of knowing than empirical observation. Such intuition or insight is not just with respect to basic experiences – Husserl maintained that it was possible to speak of the intuition of complex situations (eg of unity, synthesis, categorisation). According to Husserl, traditional empiricism that underlies positivism is too narrow in dictating that all judgements be legitimised by experience, as many different forms of intuition underlie our judgement and our reasoning processes (Moran & Mooney, 2002). These ideas are evident in the interest in the organisational studies field in tacit knowledge, improvisation, and phronesis and in ‘practice-oriented’ social theories discussed in Chapter 7 eg the idea of an intuitive ‘*practical consciousness*’ that forms a key element in Giddens’ structuration theory.

Also, phenomenology seeks to understand the structuring of various types of subjective experience, ranging from perception, desire and volition, embodied action and social activity, including language, and so has resonance for researchers seeking to move beyond a purely rationalist view of human and social behaviour. Its focus on the ‘lived experience’ is a natural source of inspiration for views of the ‘micro-practice’ of social life, and in the physical embodiment of social practice; its influence can therefore be seen in the work of social theorists such as Giddens, Bourdieu and Foucault, in social anthropology and

ethnomethodology as well as in interpretive studies generally. It has also been explicitly used as a platform for an alternative view to the prevailing positivist mainstream in information systems research (Introna, 1997; Walsham, 1993; Winograd & Flores, 1987).

There are parallels between phenomenology and the intellectual foundations of symbolic interactionism (discussed further in Section 3.3.4), developed by Blumer based on the work of philosopher Mead (Burr, 2003). While coming from a different philosophical heritage from that of European phenomenology, Mead's ideas about mind and subjective identity emerging out of social behaviour and interaction, led in a similar direction. Symbolic interactionism has subsequently proved to be a very influential development in interpretive approaches to sociology and some areas of organisational studies. In their basically phenomenological approach to the construction of social reality, Berger & Luckmann (1966) acknowledge the influence of both Mead and symbolic interactionism.

In summary, phenomenology can clearly be seen to offer a radically different epistemology to positivism, which is influential and, at least in terms of a 'subjectivist epistemology', widely, (though not of course, universally) accepted (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). This is particularly so in the study of 'social objects' such as in organisational studies. For positivists it raises issues about relativism, and the difficulties of establishing reliable truth claims, which are further discussed in Section 2.3 Postmodernism. More generally, phenomenology is criticised for its inadequate treatment of the ontological status of reality, and its apparent hostility to the evidently powerful ideas of natural science which can be seen in its emphasis on the 'first person' approach, as opposed to the 'third person' approach of natural science (Chia, 2002b). It appears to have subsequently been extended in two broad directions: by incorporating its epistemological perspective on to a realist ontology to form critical realism (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Mingers, 2004); and by intensification of the focus on subjectivity to contribute to postmodernism, discussed further below.

### 3.2.4 Post-modernism

#### 3.2.4.1 *Definitions*

The term postmodernism is used to apply to a wide variety of approaches and concepts, and the difficulties of definition are widely acknowledged – though not necessarily seen as a problem by its protagonists. “*It is impossible to choose a core theory, or a typical set of ideas, to exemplify postmodernism – the incredible variety of ideals labeled postmodern defies summarization, and the postmodern value for diversity contradicts the very idea of unifying these different understandings into a single, all-encompassing explanation*” (Hatch, 1997). Originating as a school in literature and the arts, it is also used to refer to views of wider social change driven by globalization and changes in technology (‘the postmodern organisation’), and to denote a set of philosophical approaches which have emerged from the work of Foucault and Derrida (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996) and others. Postmodernism can therefore be seen as both a broad social historical trend, (or ‘*social mood*’ (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996)) and as an epistemology (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.91) which can in some respects be seen as part of, and consistent with, the social trend.

As the label suggests, postmodernism is most obviously defined by its opposition to modernism, though that can take many different forms depending upon which aspects of modernism are objected to. (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Burnes, 2004a; Calas and Smircich, 1999; Chia 1995; Chia, 2002; Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Gergen, 1992; Johnson and Duberley, 2000) all supply different and overlapping characteristics and themes of postmodernism. As discussed earlier, modernism is a term used to describe the values, rationale and institutions that have dominated Western societies since the eighteenth-century Age of the Enlightenment, with “*its belief in the essential capacity of humanity to perfect itself through the power of rational thought*” (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). For most, and since Weber, modernism is associated with ‘instrumental rationality’ - the use of scientific-technical knowledge, secured through positivist approaches and the development of abstract and universal theories, to achieve predictable outcomes and greater economic ‘performativity’ through rational problem-solving. Even the concerns of the Human Relations school about quality of working life, and the focus on organisational culture and values, have been

converted into rationalized methods of top-down control. In these terms, we can see that the mainstream approaches to project management and organisational change very much reflect a modernist perspective. According to Cooper & Burrell (1988), modernism reflects a ‘control model’ of organisation, seeing organisations as an orderly expression of human rationality; postmodernism sees an ‘autonomy’ model which operates ‘automatically’ and beyond external human control. In a similar vein, Chia (1995) sees two contrasting yet interdependent “*styles of thinking*” with their own sets of ontological commitments, intellectual priorities and theoretical preoccupations, with the “*elevation of rationality, intentionality and choice in the modernist explanatory schema*” contrasted with the postmodern emphasis on the “*heterogeneous, multiple and alinear character of real-world happenings*” where “*surprise, chance and the unexpected are the real order of things*” (Chia, 2002b, p.16).

#### 3.2.4.2 Epistemological considerations and the ‘linguistic turn’

From an epistemological perspective, postmodernism involves a thorough-going rejection of the epistemological commitments of positivism described in Section 3.2.2 leading to “*an anti-empiricist position which argues that all knowledge is indeterminate*” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.95). Postmodernism extends the phenomenological idea of the inter-subjective life-world, and not only rejects the notion of subject-object dualism and the independence of the observer from some external reality, but adopts a subjectivist ontology, with language playing the determining role in structuring and even in creating what it is that we apprehend as objective reality. Language is not a representation of something ‘out there’ – our linguistic representations are seen to create reality. Any observed stability, categories or laws, postmodernists argue, are a feature of the structured nature of language imposed on the formless, fluid and indistinct character of lived reality (Chia, 2002b) - even in the natural sciences, and particularly in the social sciences, empirical findings are seen as reflecting pre-existing intellectual categories (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.101). Studies of organisations, for example, already assume the reality of the essentially stable entity ‘organisation’, and a myriad of other ‘social facts’ such as ‘stakeholder groups’ or ‘staff’, the existence of which depends on language and social practice, and a complex web of relationships constituting a particular discursive or textual human understanding of the world (Knights, 1992). These ‘social facts’ are themselves only explainable in terms of other ‘social facts’, many of which

are themselves open to interpretation, not least because the meanings of language are fluid, and depend on social and historical context at a particular time and place.

### 3.2.4.3 Derrida, difference and deconstruction

From the postmodern perspective, therefore, reality is a ‘social construction’ developed through language and social practice which condition our ways of relating to and acting upon our experiences. This focus on language which emerged from the French poststructuralists (particularly Derrida and Foucault) is often referred to as the ‘linguistic turn’. While by no means the only source for development of ideas which can be summarised as ‘social constructionism’ (discussed further in Section 3.3 below) the postmodern linguistic turn can be seen as perhaps the most influential (Burr, 2003).

Derrida’s work was central in highlighting the “*constant deferral of meaning from one linguistic symbol to another*” suggesting that there is “*no foundation, no grounding, and no stable structure on which meaning can rest*” (Calas & Smircich, 1999, p.653). According to Derrida, meaning includes both identity (what something is) and difference (what something is not); rather than a set of independent labels for objects in the world, language and meaning is a system of differences. Derrida’s concept of ‘difference’ combines this relationship of difference with deferral in time (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.96). The meaning of a word is a process of deferral to other words, the meanings of which are themselves deferred, in what Derrida sees as an unending process. External reality is a discursive conception open to constant negotiation in a process of collective sensemaking (Gergen, 1999; Parker, 1992).

To illustrate these ideas, Alvesson & Deetz (1996, p.207) use the example of ‘worker’: “*A ‘worker’ is an object (as well as a subject) in the world, but neither God nor nature made a ‘worker’*”. To have a worker already implies a division of labour, and requires a language and set of practices which makes possible unities and divisions among people and something to which such unities and divisions can be applied. The social object ‘worker’ already carries within it its relationship to ‘management’, the ‘firm’ and so on. “*The meaning of worker is not evident and present (contained there) but deferred to the sets of oppositions and junctures, the relations that make it like and unlike other things*” (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p.208).

Associated with Derrida’s ideas of ‘differance’ is the notion of ‘deconstruction’.

Deconstruction is a process of exposing the way in which the meaning of a particular text and its truth claims have been constructed, by identification of the ‘absent’ alternatives whose articulation produces an alternative rendition (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). According to Derrida, any text includes deferred meanings within itself, some of which have been suppressed and marginalized; its meaning can never be stabilized. Deconstruction analysis “attends to the language in the text and to those areas where language betrays itself” (Calas & Smircich, 1999, p.656). The analysis identifies which terms have been ‘privileged’ as central to the argument, draws out the marginal and suppressed meanings – being careful not to seek to privilege an alternative reading, but to highlight the undecidability of either. The role here is not to produce knowledge in the conventional sense but to highlight indeterminacy surrounding such an attempt – “to open debate to complexities and issues that have been ignored or suppressed” (Kilduff, 1993) – an alternative to the limitations of the “positive knowledge” of modernism (Knights, 1992).

#### 3.2.4.4 Foucault and discourse

Other central ideas in postmodernism and the linguistic turn are more associated with Foucault, namely *discourse*, and the closely-related *knowledge /power connection*. The latter was summarised in Section 2.5.5 earlier, describing Foucault’s perspective on the relationship between power and knowledge. Discourse as seen by Foucault is a central element in the construction of social reality, and even in personal identity. It is a broad term, which goes beyond language to include conduct and practice (Hall, 2001) – discourses are “*practices which form the objects of which they speak*” (Foucault, quoted in Burr, 2003, p.64) – and Foucault himself uses the term in a variety of different ways (Mills, 2003b). According to Hall (2001): “*Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in*



*relation to the topic, or constructing knowledge about it.”* (Hall, 2001, p.72). The notion of exclusion is an important one: *“we could potentially utter an infinite variety of sentences, but what is surprising is that, in fact, we choose to speak within very narrowly confined limits”* (Mills, 2003b, p.57). Johnson & Duberley (2000, p.102) see a similarity with Kuhn’s paradigms in that discourses structure knowledge and practice by rules that *“delimit what can be articulated”*.

As we have seen, Foucault’s concept of discourse is fundamentally tied to power relations, with ‘regimes of truth’ established through the ‘dominant discourse’ reflecting the power relations among members of that community: *“...a complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power”* (Foucault, quoted in Mills, 2003b, p.54) – discourse can be a source of oppression but also of resistance. Discourse shapes the individual, who *“is born into ongoing discourses that have a material and continuing presence... As a person learns to speak these discourses, they more properly speak to him or her in that available discourses position the person in the world in a particular way prior to the individual having any sense of choice.....providing him/her with a particular social identity and way of being in the world”* (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p.205).

Discourse in postmodern thought has a central role in the construction of social reality, has become an increasingly influential concept in organisation studies, and has begun to be adopted in the project field also (Hodgson, 2002; Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Thomas 2006). The role of discourse in social construction, and the ways in which it has been applied in an organisational context are discussed further in Section 3.3.6 below.

#### 3.2.4.5 Summary – the postmodern challenge

We can see, therefore, that postmodernism and the linguistic turn forms the basis for two fundamental challenges to modernism (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). Firstly, the constructionist view involves a denial of certainty and of objectivist, foundational truth claims – from this perspective there can only be narratives based on particular points of view. *“Postmodernism therefore decentres the human agent from its self-elevated position of narcissistic ‘rationality’ and shows it to be essentially an observer-community which constructs interpretations of the*

*world, these interpretations having no absolute or universal status*” (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p.94). This need not necessarily imply a completely relativist position (though this is a frequent criticism of postmodernism (see 2.3.6 below)). Quoting Rorty, Johnson & Duberley (2000, p.97) say that *“whatever counts as truth, or reality, is a changeable socio-linguistic artifact where justification lies in the consensus arising out of the culturally specific language games of the relevant community”*. Even this though, leads to an inevitable *“plurality of localized understandings”*, and the loss of a single fixed and universal view of truth and reality; and thereby to a scepticism of general theories and ‘grand narratives’ which privilege any particular group’s truth-claims.

Secondly, postmodernism also challenges the modernist (humanist) view of the autonomous subject pursuing independently chosen rational aims, by suggesting that the individual is constituted by social interaction and discourse: *“The person...is always social first and only mistakenly claims the personal self as the origin of experience”* (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p.205). This is an uncomfortable notion: *“The idea that we are controlled by forces that lie beyond us is fundamentally repugnant to modern rational thought which has constructed, over the centuries, a discourse more or less deliberately aimed at denying this possibility”* (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p.99).

#### 3.2.4.6 Criticisms of postmodernism

Criticisms of postmodernism seem to fall into three broad categories: epistemological objections to the subjectivist ontology and relativism; accusations of nihilism, and a failure to provide any hope of the advancement of knowledge that has some practical application; and a deterministic fatalism which undermines any intervention to effect change. According to Johnson & Duberley (2000): *“Postmodernist epistemology has devastating implications for how we understand management and management practices”* through the challenge to management’s positivist orthodoxy, and the view of ‘management knowledge’ as a power-related discourse rather than a progressively better understanding of the nature of reality. *“Quite profoundly these ideas subvert all possibility of constituting legitimate knowledge in the modern (paradigmatic) sense”* (Calas & Smircich, 1999, p.653). Perhaps for this reason, while many aspects typically associated with postmodernism (including social

constructionism, Foucault and discourse, and the linguistic turn) have become increasingly influential in management and organization studies, postmodern studies as such (especially those concerned with deconstruction, such as Townley (1993) “*even though they provoke strong reactions, remain relatively marginal in the literature on organizational change. Until recently, they had largely been ignored by the mainstream...*” (Demers, 2007, p.187). Work in this area tends to be theoretical, and critical of existing empirical work, as sceptical postmodernists in any case deny the legitimacy of an empirically-based social science (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). They also are caught in a relativistic bind of denying the validity of any truth claim, including their own. Postmodernist ideas in the management and organizational research field are most often positioned as encouraging self-reflexivity in research, increasing sensitivity to epistemological issues in researching language-constructed social entities, and to power relations within organizations (Hatch, 1997; Burnes, 2004b; Demers, 2007). While Calas & Smircich (1999, p.649) see postmodernism as a significant and positive contribution to transforming organizational theorizing, they refer to “*the importance for contemporary theorizing of having gone through these intellectual currents*” (emphasis in original).

### **3.2.5 Habermas, pragmatism and critical realism**

The most prominent and comprehensive critic of philosophical postmodernism is Habermas (Aylesworth, 2008), who accuses postmodernists of committing a ‘performative contradiction’ in their critiques of modernism by employing concepts and methods that only modern reason can provide – a logical inconsistency similar to ‘all statements are false’. Habermas, while rejecting positivism’s commitment to a theory-neutral observational language and a correspondence theory of truth, accepts the existence of a reality independent of human subjectivity (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.117). However, knowledge of this reality is ‘constituted’ through human cognition which is structured by socio-cultural factors and our human history – what constitutes knowledge is tied to the imperatives of human life. In his theory of ‘knowledge-constitutive interests’ Habermas identified several knowledge domains, or object-constituting epistemological categories, where the criteria for establishing what is taken to be reality and how claims to validity are evaluated, are different, and derived from different human interests that have naturally developed during human evolution. There

are three knowledge-constitutive interests, each tied to a particular conception of science and social science. The ‘*technical interest*’ is the “*deep-seated anthropological interest we have in the prediction and control of the natural environment*” (Bohman & Rehg, 2008). This is the domain of empirical-analytical science, where the need for prediction and control leads to a positivist epistemology and to its procedures for the generation of warranted knowledge. The equally deep-seated ‘*practical interest*’ arises out of the need for inter-personal communication with other speaking, thinking and acting humans who have to be understood symbolically; this leads to the “historical-hermeneutical” sciences (Johnson & Duberley, 2000), or “*the interpretive modes of inquiry*” (Bohman & Rehg, 2008) which are structured so as to facilitate the apprehension of the meanings of social action and communication in the conduct of life. The third interest is the “*emancipatory interest*” concerned with overcoming dogmatism, compulsion, and domination, which leads to the critical sciences, essentially aimed at seeking to free people from overt and covert forms of domination. The last is the central concern of critical theory, where Habermas is a central figure.

Habermas later developed his interest-oriented approach into his own “*distinctive definition of rationality, one that is epistemic, practical, and intersubjective*” (Bohman & Rehg, 2008). This was similarly pragmatic in emphasising the practical knowledge necessary for being a knowledgeable social actor among other knowledgeable social actors. Habermas saw the development of “*communicative rationality*”, or a consensus theory of truth (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.121), by which different (inevitably interest-laden) accounts of reality could be tested through “*communicative action*” involving “*discourse*” – “*processes of argumentation and dialogue in which the claims implicit in the speech act are tested for their rational justifiability as true, correct or authentic*” (Bohman & Rehg, 2008). However, Habermas recognises that power distorts communication, and that validity claims are maintained through the operation of power and domination, rather than through communicative rationality. Only in the “*ideal speech situation*”, where dialogue is free of constraints and distorting influences, can rationality and truth – as constituted by the “*emancipatory interest*” - be approached. While the recognition of power effects is similar to Foucault, we can see that discourse is used in a rather different way by Habermas; as an active

tool for change through conscious agency, rather than a constraining and deterministic framework.

Habermas's work has been hugely influential, though in the organizational studies field and in information systems research, its impact is most often seen in critical approaches which are not normally focused on improving the effectiveness of the management of business change projects (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996), and which have therefore not been discussed here. For the purposes of this section, there are two primary points of epistemological interest in the discussion of Habermas's work above:

- The distinction between “*sciences that take nature as their object, and interpretive modes of inquiry that depend on communicative access to domains of human life*” (Bohman & Rehg, 2008)
- The pragmatic emphasis on the connection between the construction of knowledge and the purposes for which that knowledge is required, in the context of human social existence.

On the first point, the distinction between the appropriateness of a positivist or interpretivist epistemology according to the domain of enquiry offers the prospect of acknowledging the strengths of a positivist approach in the natural sciences, while accepting that interpretive approaches to social phenomena are appropriate without thereby abandoning the notion of external reality. A similar idea is expressed by Ruben (1989) on ‘Realism in the Social Sciences’ (one of the contributors to a conference on ‘Dismantling truth: reality in the post-modern world’ (Lawson & Appignanesi, 1989)): “*one can be a realist about one of the three realms (the physical, mental and the social) and not be a realist about another. One isn't necessarily a realist tout court, but rather a realist about this realm or that*” (p.67).

Critical realism, which essentially combines a subjectivist epistemology with an objectivist ontology, has developed from this position, with the work of Bhaskar and others (Sayer, 1992). This is an attractive position from the perspective of management and organizational

research (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Mingers, 2004) not least as the notion of some kind of external reality and objectivity is a taken-for-granted assumption of management life, as for daily life in general. It is certainly difficult to maintain the view in the context of business change projects that project outcomes are not in some sense ‘real’, notwithstanding the evident aspects of social construction around, for example, the idea of ‘success and failure’ that have already been discussed in Section 2.2. Critical realism (as is the case with pragmatism also, touched on below) raises huge questions and significant debate which cannot be considered here. The intention though is not to present it as ‘the answer’ but to identify it as a recognised position which seeks to build on the issues identified with both positivist and postmodern approaches.

On the second bullet point above, an appeal to pragmatism appears to many to offer a potential route out of the ‘epistemological wars’, an approach which Johnson & Duberley (2000) see as associating powerfully with critical realist approaches. Philosophical pragmatism developed from the work of James and Dewey (Hookway, 2008), and has been taken up by a number of contemporary philosophers, notably Rorty. James first presented pragmatism as a “*method for settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable*” by reference to the “*practical difference*” arising from the dispute (James, quoted in Hookway, 2008). According to James, human reason is tuned in the service of action and practice: “*My thinking is first and last and always for the sake of my doing*” (Fiske, 1992). Justifications for knowledge rest on how it aids humans in their practical endeavours. Pragmatism acknowledges that knowledge is a social construction, but takes its fallibility as given, and is not concerned with absolute certainty, and how we can be sure of truth. For Rorty (1982), “*‘truth’ is just the name of a property which all true statements share*”: there is not much that can be said about the common and general features of such statements, any more than there is much to say about the common features of a range of acts we might judge as good ones to perform, under the circumstances. According to philosophical pragmatists (Rorty, 1982), socially constructed knowledge is justified and considered as valid if it is supported by pragmatic consensus, if a community finds it useful. What is useful requires an understanding of purposes and context, is broader than individually based utilitarianism, and introduces questions of ethics (Wicks & Freeman, 1998). Theories that allow people to

interact satisfactorily (in a broad sense) with their social or natural environments are supported, those that are less reliable are likely to change.

Pragmatism is a very broad tradition and embraces a range of epistemological positions, but the pragmatic principle is clearly sympathetic to a critical realist position (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Habermas's epistemological and ontological position seems to combine elements of this pragmatic view with forms of realism, with the practical usefulness of knowledge being seen as fundamentally grounded in the physical, biological, and even enduringly social, necessities of human existence. Our social constructions can be many but they are bounded by the tolerance of an external reality which places limits on their viability – *“not just any conventions will do: they must be usable in practice”* (Sayer, 1992, p.69) – and what is usable in practice is very much shaped by our *“anthropologically deep-seated interest”* in Habermas's terms. ‘Practical interests’ *“determine the aspects under which reality is objectified and can thus be made accessible to experience to begin with. They are conditions which are necessary in order that subjects capable of speech and action may have experience which can lay claim to objectivity”* (Habermas (1974) quoted in Johnson & Duberley, 2000). These practical interests direct philosophical attention to the nature of social practice, to goals and values, and to the complex ways in which knowledge is constructed and shared through the symbolic medium of language. In Bernstein's terms (Bernstein, 1983, p.149), the promising route ‘Beyond Objectivism and Relativism’ is *“praxis, practical discourse, and judgement”*.

### **3.2.6 Philosophical considerations – conclusions**

This section has ranged a long way from the management of business change projects but this has been an important foundation for later discussion, both to provide background for the next section, and to inform the empirical research methodology. Its purpose has been to:

- clarify some of the fundamental limitations of positivist (or, in the terms of the above discussion, ‘modernist’) approaches to understanding organisations which have been identified by numerous authors as deeply-rooted assumptions underpinning the mainstream approaches to projects and business change reviewed in Chapter 2;

- demonstrate that alternative fundamental assumptions about the nature of knowledge and scientific enquiry are not only possible but part of what could be called the philosophical mainstream; in particular, concerning the socially constructed nature of social reality;
- outline some of the major epistemological issues in exploring and understanding social reality (referred to later when discussing the empirical research methodology); and the ways in which philosophers have attempted to avoid the perennial problems of both ‘objectivism’ and subjective ‘relativism’ through appeals to pragmatism and ‘practical interest’;
- make the point that criticisms of these approaches must recognise the epistemological assumptions which underpin them; if we are to depart from the positivist assumptions underpinning mainstream approaches, those same assumptions are unlikely to provide appropriate criteria for assessing those alternatives.

### **3.3 Social Construction and Social Reality**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

Following the discussion in the previous section on the philosophical alternatives to positivism, this section outlines the key concepts of social construction and the nature of social reality, which draw to varying degrees on those alternative epistemological and ontological foundations. Taking an epistemological rather than ontological position on the ‘social construction of reality’, attention is then drawn to the distinct epistemological character of the social world, reflecting Habermas’s knowledge-constitutive ‘practical interest’, and highlighting the phenomenological analysis by Schutz of the intersubjectivity of the ‘common-sense world’. The findings from the major schools of ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism into the nature of social reality are introduced; and the critical role of language, discourse and narrative in shaping and maintaining social reality discussed.



### 3.3.2 Social construction

#### 3.3.2.1 *Definition*

Social “construction,” “constructionism” and “constructivism” are terms in wide use in the humanities and social sciences. They have been applied to a diverse range of topics including gender, race, sex, mental illness, technology, facts, reality, and truth (Mallon, 2008; Hacking, 1999) – as well as organizations (Czarniawska, 2008) and organizational research (Astley, 1985), where social constructionism is a well-established, but very broad theoretical counterpoint to positivism (Westwood & Clegg, 2003). It is not a term so far widely used in the project research field, though some of the organizational theories which can be seen as within the social constructionist tradition (such as Actor-network Theory, Weick’s sensemaking, and Giddens’ structuration theory) are beginning to be applied in research into project settings (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2000). However, rather like ‘postmodernism’, where as discussed earlier, the notion of the social construction of reality is a central theme, the terms are used differently by different protagonists and mark a wide range of different positions. Burr (2003) talks though of a ‘family resemblance’ between social constructionists, identifying a number a key features of the social constructionist position, including:

- A questioning of realism, and suspicion of realist claims – “*as a culture or society we construct our own versions of reality between us*” (Burr, 2003, p.6);
- The historical and cultural specificity of knowledge;
- Language as a pre-condition of thought – “*we are born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in our culture already exist*”, (p.7) and these are reproduced every day in everyday social interaction;
- Language as a form of social action – “*When people talk to each other, the world gets constructed*” (p.8)
- A focus on interaction and social practices – whereby social constructions are generated and maintained
- A focus on processes rather than structures and essences – seeking to understand how certain phenomena or forms of knowledge are achieved by people in interaction.

According to Mallon (2008): “*If there is any core idea of social constructionism, it is that some object or objects are caused or controlled by social or cultural factors rather than natural factors, and if there is any core motivation of such research, it is the aim of showing that such objects are or were under our control: they could be, or might have been, otherwise*”. A classic example of such would be Foucault’s ‘archaeologies’ and ‘genealogies’ of mental illness and sexuality (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005; Mills, 2003b; Foucault, 1969/2002). Taken into an organisational context, the character of accounting rules (Hopwood, 1987) or management approaches such as human resources management (Townley, 1993) or project management methodologies (Hodgson, 2002) can all be highlighted as contingent upon particular social constructions. These ideas may extend from ‘things need not have been what they are’ to ‘things are not what they seem’; that ‘social constructions’ are in a sense ‘false’. Social constructionists can then be accused of inconsistency in attempting to privilege their own position as ‘more truthful’ interpreters (Donaldson, 2003). Positive application of social constructionist thinking therefore tends to be problematic for its protagonists (see for example (Czarniawska, 2001) – ‘Is it Possible to be a Constructionist Consultant?’) and use of a social construction perspective does tend to be critical and ‘deconstructive’ in nature. Because of the focus on demonstrating that some taken-for-granted ‘objects’ are not actually inevitable or that their form is not simply determined by the nature of things, social construction work tends to be critical of the status quo. “...most people who use the social construction idea enthusiastically want to criticize, change, or destroy some X that they dislike in the established order of things” (Hacking, 1999, p.7). Hacking sees a range of degrees of commitment – ranging from ‘historical’ and ‘ironic’ to ‘rebellious’ and ‘revolutionary’ - to the social constructionist thesis, arising from increasingly strong reactions to the successive positions of: ‘X is not inevitable; X is a bad thing; and the world would be a better place without X’ (Hacking, 1999, p.17).

### 3.3.2.2 Social constructionism and realism

The most extreme form of social constructionism leads to a controversial radical anti-realism about the findings of science and common-sense views of reality in general, which have already been introduced in the previous section on postmodernism. But there is much in the concept of social constructionism that need not inspire controversy (Edley, 2001). While it is

widely accepted that interpretations of data, even in the natural sciences, are to some degree at least dependent on pre-existing background theories or categorisations (eg (Kuhn, 1962)), there is a continuum of views ranging from a belief in the social construction of our *theories* of reality, to a conviction that the objects themselves to which the theories refer are socially constructed. This latter view, however, is by no means shared by all social constructionists (Burr, 2003). This ontological position is, according to Czarniawska (2008), a matter of belief that is not amenable to analysis and debate. Some of the philosophical responses to this anti-realist view, including pragmatism and critical realism, have been discussed earlier, and are able to embrace social constructionism as an epistemological rather than ontological perspective.

A number of authors point to the tendency for critics of social constructionism to concentrate on the global constructionist thesis that all facts are a social construction - perhaps understandable when social constructionists like Burr say “*we construct our own versions of reality between us*” (Burr, 2003). However, it seems that most constructionist claims are more ‘local’, relating only to certain kinds of facts and certain aspects of reality (Mallon, 2008; Edley, 2001). A particularly significant class of such facts are ‘social facts’ or what Searle (1995) refers to as ‘*institutional facts*’ – such as money, marriages and dog licences – which only exist through social agreement. Organizational life abounds in such social and institutional facts, including ‘organization’ itself, as well as ‘project’, ‘budget’, ‘corporate strategy’, and so on. Such facts are self-evidently socially constructed. It is therefore still possible to be interested in the concept and processes of social construction without claiming that ‘*brute facts*’ (Searle, 1995) eg of the physical world do not exist independently of our representation of them.

Further opportunities for confusion about the realist-relativist debate around social constructionism arise from the rather slippery concept of ‘reality’, which is used loosely and in different senses. Burr (2003, p.101) identifies three: reality as truth versus falsehood; reality as materiality versus illusion; and reality as essence versus construction. These are often used interchangeably, with “*a tendency to talk of things being either real or ‘merely constructed’*” – as if constructed things could not be real – and to parody the notion of social construction as indicating that the world is a figment of our imaginations and has no materiality. According to Burr (2003), this “*was never constructionism’s claim*”. Mallon

(2008) suggests that it is possible to “*accommodate and appropriate the interesting and important cultural phenomena documented by constructionist authors while attempting to avoid more radical anti-scientific and anti-realist theses widely associated with social constructionism.*”

In the organisational studies field, one of the most prominent authors espousing a social constructionist position, Barbara Czarniawska, deliberately eschews a non-realist ontology, claiming that constructionism is “*promising only as an epistemological program, a way to study organizing*” (Czarniawska, 2008, p.6). The main question then becomes ‘How is a given version of the world constructed’, and the focus turns to an interest in the processes by which organizational actors construct organizational reality through their actions and through their interpretations of what they themselves and others are doing. This naturally leads to an interest in language, discourse and narrative, and in social practice, as discussed later in this section; and can be further extended by the postmodern interest in the role that power relations play in determining what constructions are sustained.

As the sections which follow seek to demonstrate, the most profitable means of developing these ideas for the purposes of this research seems to be through a focus on the phenomenological experience of the reality of the social world, and the knowledge-based practices in which social actors engage to achieve their projects.

### ***3.3.3 The character of social reality and how it gets constructed***

#### ***3.3.3.1 Introduction***

This section looks generally at the character of social reality, what it means, and at the processes by which social reality is considered to be constructed, as background to discussion in the sections that follow of the construction of the social reality in organisations. This section draws on a number of different treatments of social reality, which nonetheless share some important features, drawing on several seminal and widely cited works in this area: ‘The Construction of Social Reality’ (Searle, 1995); ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) – “*still, and rightly so, the main manual of the constructionists-to-be*” (Czarniawska, 2003b, p.128); ‘Studies in Ethnomethodology’ (Garfinkel, 1967/1984), and related commentaries); and Blumer’s ‘Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method’

(Blumer, 1969/1986). All these works deal with aspects of social life that we treat as real, but which can be said to exist only by mutual agreement and interaction between human beings.

### 3.3.3.2 *A philosophical realist perspective on social reality*

Searle's analysis (Searle, 1995) is interesting from a number of perspectives. Firstly, he is a thoroughgoing realist who spends three chapters defending the idea of an observer-independent reality, and his version of a correspondence theory of truth. His observations on social construction (or "*the metaphysics of ordinary social relations*" (p.3)) are therefore presumably immune from the usual criticisms of relativism already discussed in Section 3.2. Secondly, his systematic analysis of the logical structure of social reality as he defines it exposes the peculiarity, the contingency, and the sheer complexity of the social reality that we take for granted, which is, as he says, as natural to us as stones and trees. As we see later, ethnomethodologists make a similar observation from a sociological rather than philosophical perspective.

Searle starts from a position that says that much of our contemporary world view depends on the concept of objectivity and the contrast between the objective and the subjective, observing that "*Famously, the distinction is a matter of degree*" (p.7). He also distinguishes a number of senses in which the terms objective and subjective are used, and sees a crucial distinction between an epistemological and ontological sense of the objective-subjective distinction, concluding that it is possible to make epistemologically objective statements about entities that are ontologically subjective ie entities whose mode of existence depends on being felt or thought by subjects. This is similar to the arguments of the phenomenologists discussed in Section 3.2.3 earlier, and, as discussed below, Berger and Luckmann make a similar point implicitly when they describe the process of 'objectivation'. Searle goes on to discuss objective 'social facts', defined as any fact involving some kind of what he calls "*collective intentionality*" (which he sees as a "*biologically primitive phenomenon*" that cannot be seen as a collection of individual intentions). A special sub-class of 'social facts' are '*institutional facts*', facts involving human institutions – he uses the example of money to illustrate the argument throughout. His theory of how institutional facts are created involves three key elements: the *assignment of function* to entities that do not have that function prior to its imposition (eg value to a metal coin); *collective intentionality*, leading to the imposition of a

collectively recognised status of possessing that function (legal tender); and notion of “*constitutive rules*”, whereby specific institutional facts are created through the application of specific rules, the following of which is constitutive of the institutional fact (the rules by which a coin becomes legal tender).

Using this analytical framework, he identifies some particular characteristics of institutional facts, one being that their continued existence depends on whether they are thought to exist. “*If everybody always thinks that this sort of thing is money, and they use it as money and treat it as money, then it is money. If nobody ever thinks this sort of thing is money, then it is not money. And what goes for money goes for elections, private property, wars, voting, promises, marriages, buying and selling, political offices, and so on*” (p.32) – and arguably, as we have seen earlier, ‘project success’ and many other aspects of the organisational environment.

Unlike physical facts or “*brute facts*”, social facts generally have the characteristic that “*the attitude we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon*” – “*part of being a cocktail party is being thought to be a cocktail party; part of being a war is being thought to be a war.*” (p.34). Institutional facts are also inevitably part of a complex net of interlocking institutional realities which reflect the complexity of our social arrangements; they cannot exist in isolation but only in a set of systematic relations to other facts eg money requires a system of exchanging goods and services for money, property ownership, contractual relations, an understanding of promises, rights and obligations, and so on.

According to Searle, language is essential in the creation of institutional facts, and not merely to represent such facts to ourselves: “*the linguistic forms in question are partly constitutive of the facts*”. A particular case in point is the use of “*performative utterances*” or “*declarations*” – eg ‘the meeting is adjourned’ or ‘I appoint you chairman’ – whereby institutional facts can be created through the successful performance of the speech act. The role of language in creating organisational reality, and as constituting action is explored further in Section 3.3.6 below.

Searle recognises that his analytical framework only goes some way to understanding the process by which social reality is constructed, and that the ‘collective imposition of function’ is not typically a deliberate act or set of actions, it is “*a matter of natural evolution*” (p.127). How that process of evolution takes place is not clear, and Searle does not address the

situation of a dispute over the nature of social reality, or consider the role of differential power relations. Also, while social reality can be seen as a structure of constitutive rules, Searle believes that people are typically not conscious of the rules - “*I just know what to do. I know what the appropriate behaviour is, without reference to the rules.*” (p.137) - and rejects the idea that rules can somehow be followed unconsciously. These concerns (which are shared by some of the social practice theorists discussed in Chapter 7 later) lead him to the development of what he calls “*the Background*”, a set of embodied “*non-intentional or pre-intentional capacities*” that enables linguistic interpretation to take place, structures perception and consciousness, gives narrative shape to extended sequences of experiences, facilitates certain kinds of readiness in any context, and includes our particular and individual “*motivational dispositions*” and behaviours. This seems to share the ideas behind the phenomenologists’ ‘natural attitude’, Schutz’s ‘stock of knowledge at hand’ (discussed below) and Searle himself points to similarities with Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ (see Section 7.3). This development, and Searle’s central role for language in the construction of social reality, demonstrates a continuity of thinking that runs as a common thread through the different perspectives on social reality that are considered in this section.

### 3.3.3.3 *A sociological and phenomenological perspective*

Berger and Luckmann set out with the assertion that “*reality is socially constructed*” and that their aim is to analyse the process by which this occurs (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.13). They explicitly distance themselves from the kind of ontological and epistemological discussion that interests Searle in his treatment of social reality, focusing on the processes by which “*a taken-for-granted ‘reality’ congeals for the man in the street*”. This perspective has obvious attractions in terms of understanding and perhaps influencing practice. In these terms, they briefly define ‘reality’ “*as a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot ‘wish them away’),*” and ‘knowledge’ as “*the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics*”. Like Searle, they then go on to identify their view of how human institutions, though constructed through the human activity of everyday life – “*a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these*” - develop an objective and “*massive*” reality.

With a background in sociology and psychology, and acknowledging a debt to Mead and the symbolic interactionist school of sociology, the starting point for their analysis is the work of Alfred Schutz on the phenomenology of “*the common sense world*” This analysis is worth summarising at some length here as it will prove of central importance in interpretation of the empirical research findings. Rather like Searle’s analysis, it helps to highlight the essential peculiarity and complexity of what is ‘taken-for-granted’ social reality, and provides a basis for understanding the social construction process as seen by Berger and Luckmann. It also provides a starting point for Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology, and background for the later discussion of sensemaking and social practice.

#### 3.3.3.4 *Schutz and the phenomenology of the everyday world*

Taking Schutz’s phenomenological perspective, the starting point is examination of the subjective experience of the reality of everyday life. According to Schutz, the important first step is to see that: “*The social world is experienced from the outset as a meaningful one*” (Schutz, 1962). It is experienced as essentially ordered, meaningful, and ‘objectified’, constituted by pre-existing and independent objects. Language continuously supports this, providing the necessary objectifications and the structure within which what would otherwise be experienced as a chaotic and formless flow of experience is given structure and meaning. Everyday reality does not just consist of the ‘here and now’, the immediate presence, though that aspect of the world that is directly accessible to bodily manipulation dominates attention; it includes ‘zones of interest’ remote in both space and time. My reality includes the keyboard I am tapping, but also the office in London where I need to carry out business on Monday, and my holiday last summer. My consciousness of different aspects of this reality is largely driven by the pragmatic motive - what I am doing, have done or plan to do in it – and so my attention moves between different ‘zones of interest’. My experience of everyday reality is therefore fluid and very particular to me, according to my ‘projects’.

The reality of everyday life further presents itself as an intersubjective world, a world shared with others. According to Schutz (1962), this intersubjective world is possible not because it is possible to share another’s subjective experience as such (he says it is not), but through two “*idealizations*”: “*the interchangeability of standpoints*” and “*the congruence of the system of relevances*”. In other words, I assume (until further notice) that the world of everyday life is



as real to others as it is to myself, that they experience very many of the same objectifications, and that there is “*an ongoing correspondence of my meanings and their meanings*” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.37). The social world “*is not regarded as an arena of merely ‘external’ and unintelligible happenings which await causal explanation, but is through and through interpreted as infused with subjective meaning and intention*” (Heritage, 1984). I assume that the actions of others can be explained in terms of their goals and motives, that they will be able to account for their actions, and that they will have similar expectations of me. While much is shared, and taken for granted until further notice, I also know that others have a perspective on this common world that is both similar to and different from mine, that their zones of interest and projects may be widely different, and I am largely ignorant of these. This reality, despite its complexity and fluidity, is nonetheless self-evident to me, requiring “*no additional verification over and beyond its simple presence*”; while it may be doubted, such doubts are suspended in order to carry out everyday existence. “*The man in the street does not ordinarily trouble himself about what is ‘real’ to him and about what he ‘knows’ unless he is stopped short by some sort of problem*” (p.14). According to Heritage (1984), the capacity for “*the suspension of doubt*” (until further notice) that things might not be as they appear, or that past experience may not be a valid guide to present and future experience, is a key characteristic of successful performance in the everyday world, and is in marked contrast to the Cartesian scepticism that underpins scientific enquiry.

An important aspect of Schutz’s analysis of the reality of the common sense world is “*the stock of knowledge at hand*” (Schutz, 1962), a stock of “*typifications*” as to how the world is to be interpreted by ourselves and is ‘known’ to be interpreted by the other inhabitants of our world, which we know to include others like our self as well as inanimate objects. “*These beings and objects are from the outset perceived typically and within a horizon of familiarity. What is new and different is recognized as unusual because it arises against a background of the ordinary. But no one has to teach us that the ordinary is ordinary, that the familiar is familiar;*” (Natanson, 1962). The stock of knowledge, constantly added to, includes ‘recipes’ for handling “*the thousands of concrete problematic situations that arise in the course of daily affairs*”. Even necessary improvisation outside recipe knowledge proceeds along typically possible lines grounded in the stock of knowledge to hand. The ‘stock of knowledge

to hand’ has clear parallels with Searle’s notion of ‘the Background’, discussed above. Broadly speaking, it can be considered as our everyday understanding of reality.

There are a number of important characteristics of the ‘stock of knowledge to hand’. It is seen as being stored in the form of typifications, and is thus by its very nature indeterminate and revisable, requiring application to the concrete particulars of situations: it “*carries along an open horizon of undetermined content*”. “*The consistency of this system of knowledge is not that of natural laws, but that of typical sequences and relations*” (Schutz, 1962, quoted in Heritage, 1984, p65, emphasis in original). The validity of this knowledge is highly contingent but is nonetheless not doubted until a problem arises; it is considered true “*until further notice*”, and we are, to varying degrees, then prepared to, and capable of, amending it. Our interest in and attention to the stock of knowledge is restricted to our pragmatic purposes, and there is little interest in going beyond the pragmatically necessary knowledge as long as any problems can be mastered thereby. The stock of knowledge is highly differentiated according to degrees of familiarity and pragmatic purposes; it is structured in terms of *relevances*, and includes also some knowledge of the relevance structures of others. Some of it (say with respect to my occupation) is rich and detailed, but much of it (say with respect to the occupational life of others, or of events in organisations beyond my immediate points of contact) is extremely sketchy. Schutz uses the analogy of our knowledge of a city, with good local knowledge of our home environs, and of places we frequent, but very patchy knowledge of the areas where we don’t usually go to. Finally, it is clear that there is a shared stock of knowledge; much of the interaction with others in everyday life is affected by common participation in the available social stock of knowledge (this perhaps take us into the territory of organisational culture and Foucault’s ‘dominant discourse’).

### 3.3.3.5 *The fuzziness and uncertainty of social reality*

What is very striking about this systematic phenomenological analysis of everyday reality is how different it appears from the mainstream positivist assumptions identified in earlier sections. Our everyday experience of social reality which is the day-to-day experience of working in organisations is not typically one of clarity, certainty, and known actions to achieve outcomes, but of highly focused and patchy “*zones of lucidity*”, moving according to our short- and long-term interests and attention, and seen in terms of the assumptions from

our ‘stock of knowledge to hand’. We may be aware of the possibility that there is always “*something going on behind our backs*” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.59) but we remain ignorant for most of the time of much of the reality we move in. Given the taken-for-granted character of the ‘natural attitude’ it does not particularly appear as such to us, but as Berger and Luckmann graphically portray it: “*My knowledge of everyday life has the quality of an instrument that cuts a path through a forest and, as it does so, projects a narrow cone of light on what lies just ahead and immediately around; on all sides of the path there continues to be darkness*”. (p.59). This view, in illustrating how different is the character of the knowledge we need to negotiate everyday life successfully, helps to highlight the relevance and power of Habermas’s concept of ‘knowledge-constituting interests’ introduced earlier in Section 3.2.5, and the different epistemological character of the ‘practical interest’ of social life from the ‘technical interest’ of the natural sciences. It is also evident that this view of the reality of social life resonates with the work of organisational scholars such as March (Cyert & March, 1963/1992) and (March & Simon, 1958) on the importance of attention, Weick (on sensemaking, discussed in Section 7.5 below) and Czarniawska (eg on the ‘logic of practice’ (Czarniawska, 2008), or the ‘problem of presence’ in conducting ethnographic research in modern organizations (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997)).

### 3.3.3.6 The process of social construction

Turning to the process of social construction, Berger and Luckmann build upon Schutz’s phenomenological foundation to explain the existence of social institutions – “*immense edifices of symbolic representation that appear to tower over the reality of everyday life like gigantic presences from another world*” (p.55). They do this from consideration of the process of everyday social interaction, starting with face-to-face interaction, seen as a process of sharing each participants’ subjective phenomenological reality. This results in ‘objectivation’ of human subjectivity, most particularly through signification (eg gestures and expressions) and then language. According to Berger and Luckmann, “*the reality of everyday life is not only filled with objectivations; it is only possible because of them*” (p.50). While language may have its origins in the face-to-face situation, it is “*capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience*”, carrying meaning beyond the ‘here and now’ of the face-to-face interaction, preserving and transmitting it

across time (generations) and space. Interestingly, Berger and Luckmann also see that the use of language “*makes ‘more real’ my subjectivity*”, helping to crystallize and stabilize personal subjectivity.

The creation of social institutions (equivalent in Searle’s terms to ‘institutional facts’) starts with the process of objectivation that is an essential condition of a social life. Other important processes which contribute to this social reality are Schutz’s *typifications*, combined with *habitualization*. The value of habitualization lies in its efficiency, reduction of mental effort, and the reduction of deeply-rooted psychological anxiety. The attempt to appreciate the subjectivity of others is aided by the development of “*typificatory schemes*” (p.45) - held in our stock of knowledge - into which we place people on the basis of our interaction, and which determines how they are understood and how they are ‘dealt with’. These typifications, which range from those which are very specific to frequent and intensive interaction (such as ‘what my wife is like’) to much more abstract and anonymous typifications (‘what IT people are like’) will continue to apply until they are challenged in some way, when they can be modified. The combination of typification and habitualization, reciprocated and negotiated through social interaction, leads eventually to institutions, which though generated through a long history of social interaction between individuals, acquire some kind of independent, objective existence. “*Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors*” (p.72). New generations are born into a world in which such institutions already exist, and are embodied and structured in language, and are thereby experienced as a part of ‘given’ reality in just the same way as the physical world. Their reality is further consolidated by the process of *legitimation*, which not only serves as an explanation for those seeking to understand the institution (like children), but also as a further means of reinforcement for those explaining, who thereby “*understand the world which they themselves have made*” (p.76). The habitualization of social interaction, structured into typifications (“*There we go again*”) ‘thickens’ and ‘hardens’ into an institutional world experienced as an objective and external reality (“*This is how these things are done*”) which shapes and constrains the individual’s subjective reality. This process can easily be extended to the development of an organizational culture, discussed in Section 2.3.4.

Berger and Luckmann recognise that the process of institutionalism has inevitable tensions – “*All social reality is precarious*” (p.121) - and go on to discuss the process of legitimation and

the role of power in supporting what they call “ *the conceptual machinery of universe-maintenance*” in the face of challenges from different world views (eg heresy). “*He who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality*” (p.127). Power relations therefore have a key role to play in the construction of social reality, as recognised most famously by Foucault.

Similar ideas of the nature of social reality can be seen in the influential ideas of symbolic interactionism, an acknowledged source for Berger and Luckmann’s ideas.

### **3.3.4 Symbolic Interactionism**

#### **3.3.4.1 What is symbolic interactionism?**

Symbolic interactionism is historically one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology (Plummer, 2008), though even by the early 90s, many of its original and distinctive ideas had already been absorbed into the sociological mainstream (Fine, 1993). Symbolic interactionism, a term coined by Blumer (Blumer, 1969/1986), was essentially a social constructionist and interpretivist approach to sociology, with an emphasis on the intersubjective creation of meaning. Its specific interest in action extends Berger and Luckmann’s treatment discussed above by focusing on how action is taken within the parameters of social reality as described. It has clear roots in American pragmatist philosophy, particularly the ideas of Mead (with whom Blumer studied), though with clear affinities with European phenomenology also. One of Mead’s central concerns was the development of the subjective Self as a social product, which was nonetheless purposeful and capable of strategic action (Blumer, 1969/1986). These central themes – of the creation of meaning through social interaction, and of autonomous individual action based on interpretation of the actions of others, and correspondingly adjusted - are clearly evident in Blumer’s articulation of symbolic interactionism, which he developed into a distinctive methodology for social research. This is a highly empirical, pragmatic and ‘micro’-focused approach, employing predominantly qualitative methods, which at the time was strongly opposed to what he saw as the dominant structuralist-functionalist theoretical focus of much of sociology. The emphasis on individual reflexive action was also seen as a counter to prevalent ideas of action as a response to stimuli, or as a direct consequence of structure of ‘social forces’.

#### 3.3.4.2 Contributions

These ideas have been very influential in ethnography (Prus, 1996) and in a number of the theoretical frameworks that are described later in this chapter. They have been incorporated into ethnomethodology (described as an ‘offshoot’ of symbolic interactionism (Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds, 1975)), and the work of Goffman; acknowledged as a central part of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995, p.41; Prasad, 1993); developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) into ‘grounded theory’ approaches to qualitative studies; and by Strauss and colleagues into a distinctive theory of social action (Strauss, 1987; Strauss, 1993; Corbin & Strauss, 1988). According to (Fine, 1993, p.67), “...leading journals are filled with scholarship that is compatible, though not identical with, interactionism”, including theories grounded in the writings of theorists such as Foucault and Derrida. There are evident similarities with the concerns of actor-network theory, and Garrety & Badham (2000) point also to strong parallels with the social construction of technology (SCOT) approach (Pinch & Bijker, 1984), another acknowledged influence on ANT. According to Maines, a leading exponent of symbolic interactionism “...these new theorists and researchers seem largely unaware that they are advocating core tenets of interactionist thought” (Maines, 1993, p.xiv).

#### 3.3.4.3 Fundamental tenets

One of the most fundamental tenets of symbolic interactionism is that meanings are created, and recreated, through social interaction. According to Blumer’s original formulation, symbolic interactionism rests on three premises (Blumer, 1969/1986, p.2):

*“The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. . . . The second premise is that the meanings of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters”.*

Following the earlier discussion in Section 3.3, it is evident that what is suggested here is an interactive process of social construction of, in Blumer’s terms, the ‘objects’ (which can be physical or social phenomena) which make up social reality. These objects have “*interpretive*

*flexibility*” (Garrety & Badham, 2000, p.104); their apparent stability is not a characteristic of the object itself. Rather, it is contingent, an outcome of complex social and political negotiations.

#### 3.3.4.4 *Criticisms*

Symbolic interactionism was subject to numerous criticisms in its early days, notably that its focus on qualitative interpretive flexibility rendered it ‘unscientific’ (Fine, 1993; Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds, 1975). These are issues that are now incorporated into a wider debate about the validity of phenomenologically-oriented and qualitative research in general (see Chapter 4). Other criticisms are directed at the lack of focus on the impact and constraints of structure, and the effects of power, which are a consequence of the focus on the micro-processes of social interaction. However, symbolic interactionism is now such a broad church (so much so that its continuing relevance as a distinctive approach (Fine, 1993, p.81) is questioned) that specific criticism is now far less common than a recognition of its influence.

#### 3.3.4.5 *Application in organizational studies*

From the perspective of organizational studies, the direct influence of symbolic interactionism (rather than its indirect influence through some of the theoretical frameworks discussed later) is seen in terms of methodological approaches to qualitative studies. However, some leading proponents of symbolic interactionism, notably Anselm Strauss, have developed theoretical constructs grounded in Blumer’s principles of symbolic interactionism which have been seen as relevant to organizational change in some research areas (eg health care, social work, education (Fine, 1993)). It is these developments (particularly the ideas of ‘trajectory’ and ‘negotiated order’) that have been most evidently picked up by researchers concerned with organizational change and projects (Alderman et al. 2005; Garrety and Badham 2000; Prasad 1993). Strauss’s symbolic interaction-based ‘theory of action’ is described fully in Section 7.6.

### 3.3.5 Ethnomethodology

#### 3.3.5.1 What is ethnomethodology?

Ethnomethodology is a sociological discipline which studies the ways in which people make sense of their world, display this understanding to others, and produce the mutually shared social order in which they live. As such, while sharing similar broad ideas to those already discussed, it takes a much finer-grained view of the processes of social construction than the macro-view taken by Searle and by Berger and Luckmann summarised above. Like symbolic interactionism, its topic of study is the social practices of real people in real settings, and is therefore an obvious focus of interest for research into the ‘actuality’ of business change projects in organisations.

The term ‘ethnomethodology’ – meaning the study of the methods people use to produce recognizable social order - was initially coined by Harold Garfinkel in the 1950s, who saw “*the objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used and taken for granted*” (Garfinkel, 1967/1984, p.vii). Drawing heavily on the work of Schutz discussed earlier, Garfinkel saw that the meaningful pattern and orderly subjective experience of everyday life was something that members of society constantly worked at, and his aim was to identify the shared methods by which they carried out that work. His research included in-depth examination of numerous and diverse work practices, including (eg) intake decisions at a psychiatric clinic, and jury decision-making which looked closely at the rules of practical judgment and categorisation; and a number of famous ‘breaching experiments’ in which he demonstrated the extent to which orderly social practices depended upon mutual acceptance of unwritten rules, and the extraordinary disruption, even moral outrage, caused by the failure of participants in social interaction to conform to expectations (Garfinkel, 1967/1984).

This work has been very influential in the work of social practice theorists (eg Giddens makes numerous references (Giddens, 1984)). Ethnomethodology is however predominantly descriptive, and – “*although the writings convey an immediate sense of theoretical power*” (Heritage, 1984, p.1) - there is nowhere a systematic theoretical statement that provides a means of summarising its central ideas. The case studies are very diverse and illustrate



different points, but some sense of the general approach can be gained from Garfinkel’s study of jury decision-making, which also has relevance in the context of organisational decision-making discussed earlier in Section 2.4, and more broadly as a process of interpretation of ‘what is so’, and the identification of appropriate responses.

### 3.3.5.2 *Methods of social inquiry*

Garfinkel (1967/1984, p.104) articulates the jurors’ task of reaching a verdict as “*a method of social inquiry*” – listening to alternative depictions of what happened and why, and deciding the harm, the allocation of blame, and the appropriate remedy. “*In short, jurors are engaged in deciding “reasonable causes and remedies”*” (p.105). Despite the apparent particularity of this case study, it can be seen as having parallels with the collective process of problem analysis and issue management in an organisational context.

In deciding ‘the facts’, jurors have to make very numerous distinctions: for example, (and using their own terms) “*between what is fact and what is fancy; between what actually happened and what ‘merely appeared’ to happen; between what is put on and what is truth, regardless of detracting appearances; between what is credible and...what is calculated and said by design; between what is an issue and what was decided; between what is still an issue compared with what is irrelevant and will not be brought up again except by a person who has an axe to grind; between what is mere personal opinion and what any right-thinking person would have to agree to;*” and so on, and on. In coming to agreement between themselves about ‘what actually happened’, Garfinkel (following Schutz) asserts that jurors assess the validity of alternative claims by reference to their consistency with “*common sense models*” of how certain types of people can be expected to behave in certain circumstances when motivated in a particular way: “*...the matter that is meaningfully consistent may be correctly treated as the thing that actually occurred. If the interpretation makes good sense, then that’s what happened*” (p.106). Through this sensemaking process, the jury builds up “*a corpus of knowledge*” or “*the case*” which is ascribed the logical status of ‘actual’ in contrast with the logical modes of ‘supposed’, ‘possible’, ‘fanciful’, ‘hypothetical’, and the like. ‘The case’ is very important in providing “*the grounds that they use in inferring the social support that they feel they are entitled to receive for the verdict they choose*”. This interest in legitimation and social support introduces the aspect of ‘accounting’ in social practice which

ethnomethodology sees as a key feature of social interaction. It is interesting to contrast this process, and the numerous criteria, for establishing ‘what actually happened’ (what is essentially the establishment of a warrantable truth claim), with the processes and criteria of scientific inquiry.

Based on what jurors talked about, Garfinkel identifies the jurors “*methodology*” as a set of rules that govern what jurors permit each other to treat as ‘the case’, rules that were seen as having ethical and moral force, and were subject to social sanction. Most of these rules were part of common everyday experience (“*A person is 95% juror before he comes near a court*” p110), including eg: the acceptance of “*What Any Competent Member of the Society Knows that Anyone Knows*”; and the need to emerge from the process with their reputations intact. A number of rules reflected a shared understanding of what it means to be a ‘good juror’, some of which involve suspending the habitually-employed formulas of everyday life (eg abandoning personal preferences and social preconceptions). As Garfinkel observes, in this complex set of rules, the classical tenets of rational decision-making “*are conspicuous only by their absence*”.

Furthermore, Garfinkel observes that the usual formulation of the decision-making process as one whereby alternatives are assessed against pre-existing criteria in the light of available information did not apply, and that “*an alternative formulation needs to be entertained*” (p.114): that the decisions are defined retrospectively once what is seen as the correct outcome has been reached, in the creation of a credible and justifiable narrative (“*assigning outcomes their legitimate history*”). It is important to recognise that this process should not be interpreted in terms of ‘error’, of departure from some superior standard of rationality. It is a deeply-rooted “*method of social inquiry*” to establish agreement on social reality that more or less successfully serves our ‘practical interests’ in the context of social interaction.

### 3.3.5.3 Key ethnomethodological themes

The drive to create sense and order in what we experience – and the expectation that such sense and order is there to be found, even if it is not immediately apparent, and needs to be ‘worked upon’ - in terms of existing typifications and common sense models is evident in much of Garfinkel’s experimental work. The need to be able to ‘account’ for actions in acceptable and legitimate terms, and the expectation that the action of others is similarly

accountable, is also a repeated theme. Its importance is related to the “*indexicality*” of language and social behaviour. Indexicality is a concept from language philosophy which refers to expressions whose meaning is dependent upon the context within which they are used, and Garfinkel’s contention was that everyday social interaction was “*irremediably*” indexical. The meaning of any social interaction can therefore only be determined at any time in its specific context, and is ‘worked upon’ by the parties involved to reach an accommodation of what it means, relying in part on the assumption of motives, intent and accountable actions by others. While it may be possible to identify rules and principles governing action, such rules will always be “*loose*” and incomplete; they can be valid even in the face of apparent exceptions, so long as an explanation can be generated in terms of conditions limiting the rules applicability (even if not hitherto formulated) (Garfinkel, 1967/1984, p.3).

The process of interpretation is also *reflexive*, in the sense that one’s own understanding, and whatever one does, contributes to the constitution of the situation as it unfolds, and as it is interpreted by others. “*The big question is not whether actors understand each other or not. The fact is that they do understand each other, that they will understand each other, but the catch is that they will understand each other regardless of how they would be understood*” (Garfinkel, quoted in Heritage, 1984, p.119). The ‘presentation of self’ (Goffman, 1990/1959) is an important process here. The sensemaking and interpretive process is referred to by Garfinkel as following “*the documentary method*” – essentially a ‘hermeneutic circle’ in which simultaneously the whole is grasped from its parts and the parts interpreted in terms of the intuitively-grasped whole, drawing on ‘frames’ (Goffman, 1974) or pre-existing knowledge of typifications. Interpretation and sensemaking also takes place over time, during which we “*must wait for further developments*”; “*by waiting to see what will have happened he learns what it is that he previously saw*” (Garfinkel, 1967/1984, p.77).

Ethnomethodology’s findings seem to have considerable relevance to an understanding of the detailed processes of the construction and maintenance of social reality within organisations. Ethnomethodology has been influential in the work of Giddens, Weick and Bourdieu, which are discussed later, and in the widely-cited research emanating from, or associated with, the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center on situated action, situated learning, and artificial intelligence: (Brown and Duguid 1991; Lave and Wenger 1991; Orr 1996; Suchman 1987;

Winograd and Flores 1987), which are often referenced in discussions of ‘social practice’ approaches to organisation studies (Demers, 2007, p.209). However, the emphasis on the importance of context, and the inappropriateness in its own terms of universal laws and theories governing social interaction, seems naturally to have meant that ethnomethodologists have focused on description of work practices in different contexts. There is not therefore a ‘theory’ of ethnomethodology which can be then ‘applied’ in practice. Suchman (1987, p.50) sees “*a reformulation of the problem of purposeful action, and a research programme, rather than an accomplished theory*”, and, rather than a search for universal causal structures, a focus on “*the processes whereby particular, uniquely constituted circumstances are systematically interpreted so as to render meaning shared and action accountably rational*”. Nonetheless, its insights into the ‘actuality’ of social practice, and the processes by which agreement is achieved on what is taken to be objectively so, have considerable force and relevance for this research.

### **3.3.6 Language and discourse**

#### **3.3.6.1 The role of language**

One very clear conclusion from all of the above, and from the discussion in Section 3.2.4 about the postmodern ‘language turn’ is that language has a central role in the construction and maintenance of social reality. Rather than a neutral mirror of an external objective reality, language can be seen as much more active, providing both a structure for what it is possible to think about, and also an active, context-specific tool for establishing meaning in the everyday activities of social practice. The structure of language, according to (Burr, 2003, p.52) following Saussure, relies on *differences* between what are essentially arbitrary categorisations which “*carve up our conceptual space for us*”. The phenomenologist perspective is that “*our experience of the world, and perhaps especially of our internal states, is undifferentiated and intangible without the framework of language to give it structure and meaning*” (Burr, 2003, p.48), and it is mainly due to language that “*The social world is experienced from the outset as a meaningful one*” (Schutz, 1962). As we have seen, language is also ‘performative’, it is a social activity, used in different ways to achieve ends: talk, writing and social encounters are “*sites of struggle and conflict, where power relations are acted out and contested*” (Burr, 2003, p.55). Studies of language settings demonstrate that

people do not use language primarily to make accurate representations of perceived objects but rather, to accomplish things (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a). In summary, language is fundamental for both sensemaking and social action (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004).

### 3.3.6.2 *Different conceptions of discourse*

This close association between language, meaning, and practice has led to the popularity of the term ‘discourse’, which can be seen as potentially embodying all three aspects to varying degrees (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b), although in ways which are not always clear.

According to Alvesson & Karreman (2000b, p.1126) “*It is often difficult to make sense of what people mean by discourse....Authors treat the term as if the word has a clear, broadly agreed upon meaning. This is simply not the case*”. A similar point is made by Potter *et al.* (1990) who claim that quite separate strands of work are called discourse analysis, often from quite contrasting theoretical and disciplinary standpoints: “*...the term is used with radically varying degrees of specificity and subtle theoretical inflection*” (Potter *et al.*, 1990, p.206). These authors see four different strands of discourse studies; for the present purposes, it is useful to identify two broad approaches, which Burr (2003) characterises as associated with ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ social constructionism.

Foucault’s concept of discourse (“*probably the single most influential author on how social scientists use the word discourse*” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b)) has already been described in Section 3.2.4.4, and is most often associated with what Alvesson and Karreman call ‘long range’ discourses, or ‘discourses with a capital D’: general and prevalent systems for the formation and articulation of ideas and practices which constitute social reality in a particular period of time, associated with power/knowledge relations. Burr (2003) sees this concept of discourse as ‘macro social constructionism’. Use of this concept of discourse (referred to as Foucauldian) tends to focus on how discourse is sustained by, and embodies, differential power relations, and stresses the way discourse constrains personal agency. Macro social constructionists would argue that subjective experience is determined by the discourses in which we are embedded, by providing “*a particular, limited set of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking, self-narratives and so on that we take on as our own*” (Burr, 2003, p.119). Some authors (eg Parker, 1990) see that the limitations and constraints that

discourses with a capital D place on individual choices mean that this should be the primary focus of analytical attention. However, this approach to discourse is criticised both for its failure to deal satisfactorily with the subjective experience of individuality (Burr, 2003), and for its failure to recognise how discourse actually exercises its effects: “*what might be called the local geography of contexts and practices and also to the devices through which the discourses are effectively realised*” (Potter *et al.*, 1990, p.209).

Another major school of discourse analysis, by contrast, focuses on texts and talk at a more local level, as a medium of interaction (Shotter, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987): in Burr’s terms, constituting ‘micro social constructionism’ (Burr, 2003). At its most micro-level, it becomes ‘conversation analysis’, examining how language is used in social interaction to achieve certain outcomes in a specific context, a development closely allied to ethnomethodology. Use of this concept of discourse tends to emphasise personal agency, focusing on the personal tactics and rhetorical skills necessary to achieve strategic purposes in social interaction. This perspective on discourse is often criticised for ignoring power and ideology, and the way in which discourse enacts wider institutional arrangements (Parker, 1990). Also, its interest in in-depth empirical analysis of the minutiae of conversation is seen as producing an unduly narrow “*empiricist and behaviorist*” perspective (Atkinson, 1988; Parker, 1990). Some of the heat and subtlety of these debates is illustrated in the papers in *Philosophical Psychology* 2:3 (1990).

Between these two opposed poles, however, there are middle-range conceptualisations of discourse, which look at the interplay between the different levels of discourse (Alvesson & Karreman (2000b) refer to ‘meso-discourse’). Even researchers focusing on the micro-level of discourse recognise constraining frameworks of social rules and/or cognitive assumptions. “*There is a clear tension between seeing people as active users, on the one hand, and seeing discourse as generating, enabling and constraining, on the other*”. People use discourse and discourse uses people. (Potter *et al.*, 1990).

### 3.3.6.3 *Interpretative repertoires and positioning*

An interesting concept within discourse analysis is that of ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter *et al.*, 1990): broadly discernible clusters of terms and figures of speech which are shared and can be drawn upon to justify a version of events or account for actions. These are in effect cultural ‘building blocks’ of argument and justification, which can be deployed differently to construct different versions of events in a rhetorical struggle. For example, an organisational event such as a project may be described using a set of terms and figures of speech reflecting cost-efficiency and the need for change; or, equally legitimately, in terms of loss of livelihood and dehumanisation of the workplace (eg see (Brown & Humphreys, 2003) on different narratives of an organisational change programme). Which version of events comes to be dominant will depend upon power relations, and/or both may continue to exist in parallel. However, it is unlikely that a legitimate discourse would be that managers were looking for interest and excitement, and enjoyed having new projects to work on; this is not part of the ‘interpretative repertoire’. (Potter *et al.*, 1990, p.213) highlight the conspicuous lack of variation in the construction of discourse they observe in their analytical work: “*one of the striking things about studying the talk of fifty or so interviewees on a particular topic is the restricted and indeed stereotypic set of terms and tropes which occur again and again*”.

Potter *et al.* (1990) see interpretative repertoires as having a similar role to that of the Foucauldian notion of discourse (in the sense of recognising the social and cultural constraints on the range of possible discourse) but in a way that provides flexibility of use in practice. They see that one person may use different and apparently contradictory repertoires in their discourse, depending on their moment to moment accounting needs; and that different people may use the same repertoire to achieve different ends. Repertoires are a social resource, which can perhaps be viewed as a socially-accepted currency of discourse.

A related concept is that of ‘positioning’, which is seen by some authors (Korobov, 2001; Burr, 2003) as providing a bridge between the macro and micro views of discourse. Here individuals are seen as taking a position within pre-existing discourses, involving (however fleetingly) a commitment to the framework of related ideas and values that constitute that

discourse, which provide our sense of what can and cannot be done, what is or is not appropriate, and so on. Certain discourses are seen as ‘speaking’ to us as individuals more than others (Parker, 1990), and offer themselves as positions. Similarly, other individuals may interpret our actions from a subject position within a discourse that we seek to resist. Social interaction can then be seen as a constant fluid process of negotiating positions within a multiplicity of different discourses, recognising the constraining and enabling force of discourse but allowing a degree of personal agency.

#### 3.3.6.4 *Discourse in organisational studies*

Discourse has been of increasing interest to organisational scholars, prompting special issues in *Organization* (2000), *Academy of Management Review* (2004), and the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2005). Doolin (2003) identifies what he calls the ‘social and discursive’ approach as one of the three main approaches to the study of organizational change, the others being ‘managerialist’ (similar to what has been referred to as ‘mainstream’ in this thesis), and ‘processual’. Grant *et al.* (2005) suggest that “*one needs to engage with change as a discursively constructed object*” and that “*to understand change, we need to understand how it is discursively constructed and interpreted*”. Reviewing the current contribution of discourse studies to organizational change, they highlight the role of discourse in shaping and constraining the social construction of organizational reality, and the need to recognise the ongoing struggle between competing discourses in the negotiation of meaning. Like Boje, Oswick & Ford (2004) in a similar review, and Alvesson and Karreman (2000a; 2000b), Fairclough (2005), Heracleous and Barrett (2001), and Heracleous and Marshak (2004), Grant *et al.* (2005) point to the need to recognise different levels of discourse between micro and macro discourse, referring to ‘intertextuality’ as the interplay between discourse at different levels. Heracleous and Marshak (2004) illustrate this empirically through analysis of a senior management workshop at a number of levels: firstly, in terms of the ‘speech acts’ and rhetoric by which participants sought to achieve their purposes; secondly, as ‘situated action’, in which the participants discourse was seen in the context of why the meeting was held, who was present and absent, and what was expected as an outcome; and thirdly, as ‘symbolic action’, in which the discourse (particularly around the contested expression ‘principal-led’) connected to a wider organizational discourse reflecting broad strategic assumptions about the



future direction of the company. This specific example serves to illustrate the power of discourse analysis in understanding organizational action, but also the sheer complexity of applying these ideas even in a narrowly-focused instance of the day-to-day reality of organizational life.

Heracleous & Barrett (2001) explored the role of discourse in shaping organizational change processes through its influence on actor's interpretations and actions in their longitudinal field study of electronic trading implementation in the London Insurance Market. Their preliminary review of discourse studies identified three categories - *functional*, *interpretive*, and *critical* – to which they added a fourth (*'structuralational'*) based on their own work. These are discussed further in the paragraphs below.

The *functional* approach concentrates on language as a tool in achieving managerial aims in managing change; the work of Ford and Ford (1994; 1995; 2003) is of interest here, where organizations are seen as a network of conversations. Producing intentional change in organisations therefore becomes a matter of creating and shifting conversations; the management of change can be understood to be the management of conversations. Drawing on speech act theory, they identify four different conversations relevant to the management of change: initiative, understanding, performative, and closure. Managing change effectively means being clear about the nature of these different conversations, recognising the relationship between them and their natural dynamic, and avoiding 'breakdowns' in that flow. Building on the work of Winograd & Flores (1987) they identify the necessary steps in conversations that ensure that they are effective and directed towards action. Scherr (2005) builds into this structure the notion of 'commitment' and reports impressive results in his practice of rigorous management of conversations for commitment and action in improving project delivery performance. However, while these ideas have been incorporated in consultancy practice and in management prescriptions (Ford & Ford, 2005) they do not appear to have been taken up more widely in the academic literature.

The *interpretive* approach to discourse is concerned not so much with the functional aspects of language but with the role of discourse in the social construction of reality and the central

role of language – as stories, metaphors, or humour - as a symbolic medium in this process of construction. Organizational researchers have placed considerable emphasis on narrative in this process of interpretation; this subject area is therefore considered in more detail in Section 3.3.7 that follows.

The *critical* approach to discourse draws on the Foucauldian notion of discourse, and its explicit power focus, to achieve critical understanding of relations of social domination. Discourses are seen as deeply politically implicated, or “*mediated through socially constructed hegemonic practices*” (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Boje, 1991).

Heracleous and Barrett’s ‘*structurational*’ approach adds to the above approaches to discourse by drawing on the basic idea of Giddens’ structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) of ‘duality of structure’ in which the structural properties of social systems are instantiated on an ongoing basis in social practices which are themselves shaped by structure. Their study of the implementation of electronic trading traced the ways in which day-to-day communicative actions and rhetorical strategies, although fluid and appearing unconnected and disparate, were influenced by the ‘deep structures’ of discourse, which shifted more slowly, but were persistently employed by actors in different practical settings. Eventual project outcomes could therefore be seen in terms of a complex and shifting network of (mostly) conflicting and (sometimes) complementary discourse which guided action and interpretation without in many cases establishing a genuine dialogue.

Overall, it is evident from these recent reviews (Grant *et al.*, 2005; Boje, Oswick & Ford, 2004) that the application in an organizational change context of the ideas of discourse analysis in its various forms is seen as potentially very powerful but at an early stage of development. While there is an increasing amount of empirical work, much of the debate is in purely theoretical terms. One area of organizational studies which has been influential in field research (albeit originating mainly from adoption of ethnographic approaches to organizational research), and which has incorporated many of the ideas of discourse discussed in this section is the area of narrative approaches. These are of particular relevance in the context of a social practice perspective, and in terms of the conditions of ‘common sense

reality’ discussed earlier, and also in terms of the epistemological issues of conducting the field research for this thesis.

### 3.3.7 *Narrative*

#### 3.3.7.1 *Introduction*

The literature in narrative approaches to organizational research has grown rapidly since the mid-nineties (Rhodes & Brown, 2005) although the issues around the use and study of narratives had by then already been well explored in the field of anthropology and ethnography (Hammersley, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988). The ethnographic background is acknowledged by one of the leading exponents of narrative research in organizations, Barbara Czarniawska (Czarniawska, 1997; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997) when she refers to narrative research in organizational studies as taking at least three forms: ‘tales of the field’; ‘tales from the field’; and conceptualizing organizational life as story-making and organization theory as story-telling. Rhodes & Brown (2005), in their recent overview of narrative approaches in the study of organizations also emphasise the multi-faceted nature of narrative approaches; narratives are recognised as a rich form of data ; a theoretical lens; and a methodological approach, and in many cases all three. They point to a “*wealth of work*” from those who collect stories told in organizations (Brown and Humphreys 2003; Gabriel 2000; O'Connor 2000) as a means of understanding organizational life; tell stories about their experience in organizations (Jacobs *et al.*, 2006 ; Schultze, 2000; Van Maanen, 1988); define organizations as storytelling systems (Boje, 1991; Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Currie and Brown, 2003; Czarniawska, 1997); or conceptualize organization studies as a set of storytelling practices (Boje, 2001), even as a form of literary genre (Czarniawska, 1999; Czarniawska-joerges & Jacobsson, 1995).

#### 3.3.7.2 *The narrative mode of knowing*

Underpinning all of these different narrative approaches is the distinctive epistemological character of narrative (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988). Bruner, a cognitive psychologist referencing also an earlier body of work by literary theorists on critical study of narrative forms, points to a “*narrative mode of knowing*” which is distinct from what he calls the ‘logico-scientific’ or ‘paradigmatic’ mode of thought typically associated with scientific

inquiry. This narrative mode of knowing “*operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality*” (Bruner, 1991, p.6) and is the principal mode of operation in the ‘common sense reality’ discussed in earlier sections. By the standards of logico-scientific knowledge (see table below for contrast) “*the knowledge carried by narratives is not very impressive. Formal logic rarely guides the reasoning, the level of abstraction is low, and the causal links may be established in a wholly arbitrary way*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, p.3). However, the narrative mode is concerned with interpretation and explanation, with understanding and attributing motive, with particularity and with context – in short, with making sense of the confusing and contradictory social world. It is also typically open-ended and ambiguous to some degree, providing room for negotiation of meaning. The connection between this narrative mode of knowing and the phenomenological and ethnomethodological approaches discussed earlier seems clear: Czarniawska in fact cites Schutz in saying that “*It is impossible to understand human conduct by ignoring its intentions, and it is impossible to understand human intentions by ignoring the settings in which they make sense*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, p.4). Bruner (1991) also stresses the importance of taken-for-granted background knowledge in interpretation of narratives and in the process of negotiation of meaning.

In their discussion of the importance of narrative approaches to organizational complexity, Tsoukas & Hatch (2001) highlight what they see as the limitations of the logico-scientific mode in a social context. The search for abstract propositional statements of universal applicability irrespective of context and history ignores purpose and motive, and by definition cannot deal with the particular: “*The ‘tyranny’ of the local, the particular, and the timely cannot be escaped in the context of practical reasoning*” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p.993). According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative has the capability to offer “*a special type of explanation*” in which “*motives are reconciled with causes in an interpretation of human action and justification is interwoven with causality in human beliefs*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, p.4) – the kind of explanation that is necessary to negotiate a path through the taken-for-granted ordinariness of the social world. According to Tsoukas & Hatch (2001), “*narrative is infused with motive*” – interpretations of our own and others’ reasons for acting - and this is its greatest strength. While the logico-scientific mode of thinking aims to explain

an event by showing that it is an instance of a general law, the narrative mode explains an event by relating it to human purpose at a particular time. Bruner claimed that the use of narrative, the “*method of negotiating and renegotiating meanings by the mediation of narrative interpretations*” is a deep-rooted “*protolinguistic*” human capability and “*one of the crowning achievements of human development*” (quoted in Ch 1 Czarniawska, 1997). There are strong resonances here with Habermas’s identification of the separate ‘knowledge-constitutive domain’ of ‘practical interest’ developed through the need to interpret and give meaning to social interaction, contrasted with the ‘technical interest’ domain governed by the ‘paradigmatic’ approach to knowledge of the natural sciences.

**Table 3.1: Bruner's two modes of thought** (source: Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p.983)

	<i>Logico-scientific mode</i>	<i>Narrative mode</i>
<b>Objective</b>	Truth	Verisimilitude
<b>Central problem</b>	To know truth	To endow experience with meaning
<b>Strategy</b>	Empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis	Universal understanding grounded in personal experience
<b>Method</b>	Sound argument Tight analysis Reason Aristotelian logic Proof	Good story Inspiring account Association Aesthetics Intuition
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Top-down Theory driven Categorical General Abstract De-contextualized Ahistorical Non-contradictory Consistent	Bottom-up Meaning centered Experiential Particular Concrete Context sensitive Historical Contradictory Paradoxical, ironic

### 3.3.7.3 *Narrative research in organizations*

If, as many narrative researchers maintain, organizational narratives are “*the main mode of knowing and communicating in organizations*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, p.16), then the high level of interest in narrative approaches is hardly surprising. Equally, this conceptualization of narrative makes narrative (like language and discourse generally) a pervasive feature of organizational reality, and makes it difficult to neatly pigeonhole different categories of narrative research. Almost anything can then be seen to have a narrative dimension, from a case study to a company communication, and it is not always clear how research with a ‘narrative’ label benefits from that approach rather than another. Rhodes & Brown (2005) see five principal areas of research interest in the field, though much of the work reviewed could fall into several of the categories:

- Narrative sensemaking
- Communicating with stories
- Narrative, change and learning
- The power and politics of narrative
- Identifying with narratives

*Narrative sensemaking* is research concerned with the use of narrative in constructing versions of reality, reflecting on the above discussion on the use of the ‘narrative mode of knowing’ and drawing particularly on Weick’s work on organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), discussed in detail in Section 7.5. Weick argues that stories, rather than simply being representations, are central to sensemaking, providing both structures and process for the interpretation of events and the development of negotiated meaning. This perspective on narrative tends to emphasise the plurality of interpretations that may exist from both a cognitive and political dimension eg in connection with implementation of business change (Alderman *et al.*, 2005; Boddy and Paton, 2004; Brown, 1998; Brown and Humphreys, 2003; Currie and Brown, 2003; Dawson and Buchanan, 2005; Fincham, 2002) and which can be exposed by analyzing the different accounts of those involved.

Research concerned with *communicating with stories* looks at organizational communications and action as driven by narratives seen (in conjunction with the sensemaking process described above) as discursive action producing organizational reality, creating order,

reflecting values and belief systems, setting expectations – but also inspiring (Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Buchanan and Dawson, 2007; Doolin, 2003; Gabriel, 2000; Jacobs *et al.*, 2006 ; O'Connor, 2000). Here the effect of narrative may not just concern the content but the way in which stories are performed (Boje, 1991).

*Narrative, change and learning* research also involves both of the above aspects of narrative but emphasises the importance of stories in both reflecting the case for change and developing new stories that embody (or undermine) new values, or expectations and roles (Currie & Brown, 2003; Doolin, 2003; Jacobs *et al.*, 2006 ; O'Connor, 2000); and in having the richness to capture and reflect real world complexity in organizational learning (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Connell, Klein & Meyer, 2004). Brown & Duguid (1991) and Orr (1996) highlight the use of narrative in capturing the context-dependent complexity of organizational practice; Williams (2007) points to a growing use of narrative in learning lessons from project implementation; Weick & Roberts (1993), in their work on ‘heedful interrelating’ also demonstrate how organizational stories provide stores of collective memory communicated and institutionalized through repetition and elaboration.

Research which focuses on the *power and politics of narrative* may cover all of the above, but emphasises the way in which groups within organizations deploy different narratives to achieve their strategic aims, and the ways in which power relations determine which narratives achieve institutional dominance and come to form the accepted ‘regime of truth’ (Martin, 1990; Mumby, 1993; Mumby and Stohl, 1991). This work, often influenced by Foucault and postmodern perspectives, could as well be considered under the heading of discourse generally, rather than narrative studies. However, the relationship between power and organizational narratives is widely recognised in the narrative research field (Boje, 1991; Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1997; Czarniawska, 2003a; Czarniawska, 2003b) and analysis of narrative has been a central analytical tool in understanding power relations in business change projects and in establishing of their success or failure (Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Fincham, 2002; Wilson & Howcroft, 2002; Currie & Brown, 2003).

The final area – *identifying with narratives* - which Rhodes & Brown (2005) identify for narrative research is that concerned with the ways in which personal and group identity is both expressed in, and formed by, narrative – that we ‘author’ our own individual and group identity (Gabriel, 1995; Holman & Thorpe, 2003). This work is closely related to discussions in earlier sections on discourse and positioning, in that individuals or groups are seen as being located, or locating themselves, within a limited repertoire of social narratives. Close analysis of the structure of personal narratives, and the way that they are performed (Riessman, 2002) can provide an insight into the interplay between individual identity and larger discourses. Similar analyses can be conducted at the group level also. Rhodes & Brown (2005) draw on a range of empirical research to suggest that frequently told tales help to establish and maintain organizational identity (Czarniawska, 1997).

#### 3.3.7.4 *The contribution of narrative research*

A narrative approach to the study of organizational reality appears to offer many advantages. It sits squarely within a view of reality as socially constructed through discourse, emphasises subjective experience as well as recognising the constraints of broader social narratives (or ‘grand’ discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b)), and reflects the postmodern concern with multiple meanings and their constant struggle for dominance. In the context of this thesis, which is seeking to understand better the ‘actuality’ of business change projects, narrative offers the opportunity of “*retreating from abstraction*” and engaging “*reflexively with the lived experience of work*”. In summary: “*Narrative can provide a different, and valuable, form of knowledge that enables researchers to engage with the lived realities of organizational life – the ‘truth’ that people at work live through every day*” (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p.182).

Narrative is not just ‘data’, however: it poses a significant methodological challenge by making it clear that researchers themselves, however ‘scientific’, are engaging in their own narrative, raising difficult questions about the status of their claims to truth. Are they themselves ‘just telling stories’? This is a debate that has been a central concern in qualitative and postmodern research (Alvesson & Deetz 1996; Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Silverman 2001) and is not likely to be



resolved here. However, it does seem important to recognise that the epistemological foundations of narrative approaches rest on the phenomenological and postmodern alternatives to positivism that have been discussed in Chapter 3, and which are reflected in the work of social constructionists and ethnomethodologists discussed earlier in this section. It may be “*obvious*”, as (Czarniawska, 199, p.54) points out, that an approach cannot be criticised or defended with reference to the criteria it is rejecting, but many of the critics (and defenders) of narrative approaches (eg Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003) appear to apply the criteria of positivism in just that way. The role of language, and narrative in particular, in structuring and making sense of the social world, and determining what constitutes knowledge in ordinary social practice strongly suggests that the ‘narrative mode of knowing’ (Bruner, 1991) which is central to the common sense world may not be subject to the same epistemological criteria that apply to the natural sciences study of the physical world. (As mentioned earlier, this reflects Habermas’s distinction between the knowledge-constitutive domains of technical and practical interest). What those criteria should be is a much debated question which is picked up again in Chapter 4 on Research Method.

### **3.3.8 Summary – the character of social reality**

In tracing the intellectual antecedents of what have been referred to as social practice approaches in this chapter, we have necessarily built up a picture of the essential characteristics of social reality which provide the context or backdrop for social practice. This is crucial in terms of attempting to provide an insight into the ‘actuality’ of day-to-day project experience; and in terms of developing alternative theoretical approaches which reflect that reality.

We have seen that, despite its ‘obvious’ character to us, social reality is in fact rather complicated and not at all obvious. What we take to be unproblematically ‘real’, as ‘social objects’ in Blumer’s terms, is (to a substantial degree) socially constructed through interaction with others. Our social reality is governed (a) by epistemological criteria that are quite different from those that are applied to warrantable truth claims in the natural sciences; and (b) by implicit social ‘loose rules’ that determine how interaction takes place, and how we apply those criteria in practice. Negotiating a path through social reality, and determining

‘social facts’, is in Habermas’s terms conducted within a different knowledge-constituting domain of ‘practical interest’, within everyday epistemological practices which have evolved for the interpretation and establishment of shared meaning between human beings, which are significantly different from those of the knowledge-constitutive domain of ‘technical interests’. As we have seen throughout this section, they are concerned with taking practical action in a reality:

- where much is uncertain and ambiguous, though perhaps not experienced as such;
- where the outcomes of social interaction are intrinsically unpredictable in detail, but normally expected to be ‘accountable’;
- where what is known is simultaneously taken-for-granted and under dispute, and mediated by diverse pre-existing knowledge structures and assumptions;
- where plausibility and alignment with pre-existing assumptions are a guide to judging ‘what is so’;
- where fuzziness and uncertainty are tolerated, until they interfere with practical intentions;
- where meaning is negotiable, depends on practical relevance, is mediated through language (particularly narrative), shared rules and structures, and is always dependent on unique context and circumstance;
- where interaction takes place in terms of a limited range of discourse and ‘interpretative repertoires’;
- where understanding what is going on and what to do about it is an intuitive, tacit skill and only partly rational;
- where stability is an ongoing and fragile achievement, and where interpretations of reality can rapidly shift in the light of events.

These broad characteristics need to be taken into account in any attempt to develop theoretical frameworks for action within this social reality. The following section introduces some leading theoretical frameworks which have sought to explain social action within this complex character of social reality.

### 3.4 Key Theoretical Frameworks

In seeking to develop an alternative theoretical perspective based on the social reality of practice on business change projects, this research has explored frameworks which appear to offer a comprehensive theoretical view on how social action unfolds and why. Scholars with an interest in social construction, social reality and situated social practice often look to coherent bodies of work in social theory to serve as foundations for the development of new theoretical perspectives which can be applied in an organizational context. ‘Social theory’ is a broad term which applies to work of a conceptual and philosophical bent aimed at clarifying the fundamental character of human activity. According to Giddens: “*Social theory has the task of providing conceptions of the nature of human social activity and of the human agent which can be placed in the service of empirical work. The main concern of social theory is the same as that of the social sciences in general: the illumination of the concrete processes of social life.*” (Giddens, 1984, p.xvii). In reviewing the literature described in Chapters 2 and earlier in this chapter, a number of prominent theories were identified which concerned themselves with social practice, and reflect the character of social reality identified earlier. These frameworks are used as ‘theoretical lenses’ to interpret the empirical research findings in Chapter 7. The five frameworks selected are:

- Giddens structuration theory
- Bourdieu’s theory of practice
- Actor-Network Theory (ANT)
- Weick’s organizational sensemaking
- Symbolic interactionism – Strauss’s ‘Theory of Action’.

The criteria for selection of the theoretical frameworks is that they are frequently cited in the literature; that they have been of interest to those concerned with the social aspects of organizational change; and that they incorporate a distinctive and coherent framework of theoretical constructs which can together be taken to offer an explanation of social action.

The sociologists Giddens and Bourdieu are seen by key proponents of the ‘practice turn’ in social theory (Schatzki, 1996; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002) as leading theorists in ‘social practice’. They have both been seen as a fertile source of

theoretical constructs for organizational scholars exploring alternatives to structuralist/functionalist treatments seen as dominating sociology until the 1970s. While Bourdieu's influence in the organizational field has been relatively limited until recently (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005), Giddens' work (most particularly structuration theory) has been very significant over the last 20 years, and his sociology "*has attracted most interest across a range of social and organizational fields...*" (Jones & Karsten, 2008).

ANT is another sociologically-based theory with its origins in the sociology of science, or 'science studies' which has also been very influential in the organizational field. A review of the use of social theory in research into the organisational aspects of information systems (Jones, 2000) identified ANT as the most frequently invoked social theory, followed by Giddens structuration theory, and Foucault<sup>3</sup>. Demers (2007) sees ANT as one of the most prominent of the discursive and practice-centred approaches to organizational change within what she calls the 'social dynamics' perspective on organizational change (identifying Giddens, Foucault, Weick and ethnomethodology as key 'antecedents').

Weick's work is not social theory as such, but certainly shares the objectives expressed by Giddens in the quote above with respect to understanding the drivers of social activity in organizations. Coming from a cognitive psychology background rather than sociology, but heavily influenced also by anthropology and ethnomethodology, Weick is extensively cited by those interested in the social aspects of organizational reality, both for his work on improvisation and for his perspective on organizational 'sensemaking'. (Hatch, 1997, p.41) in her much-cited review of organizational theories positions Weick's work as a social constructionist theory. Strauss's symbolic interactionist 'theory of action' is far less prominent in the general organizational change field though his work has been highly influential in fields such as health care and education. As a coherent body of theory with very clear links to distinctive phenomenological and socially constructionist intellectual roots, it merits detailed consideration on those grounds; furthermore, several recent authors in the

---

<sup>3</sup> While Foucault's work is extensively referred to, mainly with regard to his distinctive work on discourse and power/knowledge relations, it does not seem to constitute a theory of social interaction and practice as such, being more of a 'macro' level component of such a theory.

projects field have seen symbolic interactionism as a potentially productive source of theoretical constructs (Alderman *et al.*, 2005; Garrety & Badham, 2000).

Numerous other interesting theoretical frameworks have been referred to in the organizational change, information systems and project management literature. Notable are, for example: institutional theory (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Scott, 1987; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991); boundary objects (Horton & Wood-Harper, 2006; Carlile, 2002); Crozier and Friedberg's 'collective action in organizations' (Crozier & Friedberg, 1980); and Stacey's 'Complex Responsive Process of Relating' (Stacey, 2001; Stacey, 2002). From a preliminary review it was judged that the selected frameworks broadly captured the main features of each of these other theories, and practical considerations have limited what can be reviewed in detail in this section. The examples included serve sufficiently to illustrate the variety, range and type of alternative theoretical resources which have been developed, and themselves provide a rich source of well-established concepts and frameworks for taking an alternative perspective on business change projects within organizations.

The key concepts that distinguish these different theoretical frameworks are described in Chapter 7, rather than at this point. This is for two reasons. Firstly, as Chapter 4 describes, the empirical research was begun and largely completed before the research into these specific frameworks was begun, and it gives a misleading impression of the 'theoretical sensitisation' prior to the empirical research to describe the theories at this point of the document. Also, the frameworks were used to explore the empirical findings, and so it made more sense to describe the theories after those findings had been described.

## **4 RESEARCH METHOD**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The drivers for the empirical research arise from the review, presented in Chapter 2, of substantial body of literature from a number of different research disciplines which highlights the limitations of the existing theoretical basis for the management of business change projects.

As Chapter 2 demonstrates, there are strong calls for research with a much sharper focus on the ‘actuality’ of the experience of practitioners to identify the personal, social and political processes determining the paths of projects in practice: “*to catch reality in flight*” (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001). In the search for new ways of theorising a richer and more realistic reflection of how the process of business change is actually experienced, there is increasing interest in exploring the potential application of theories of social practice. As discussed, the epistemological standpoint of these theories reflect post-positivist developments such as phenomenology, postmodernism, and social constructionism, and as such they offer a fundamentally different approach to theorising business change projects. However, the emphasis shared by such theories on the unique, context-dependence of social action, and a social constructionist perspective’s natural antipathy to notions of ‘grand narratives’ or one ‘truth’, serves to make the development of any kind of ‘universal’ theory or prescription problematic, or even contradictory.

There are therefore considerable research challenges in this area: broadly, to develop a richer view of the reality of project experience; and to deploy new theoretical frameworks, which embody more sophisticated but highly contingent perspectives on social reality, towards the development of actionable theory.

### **4.2 Research aims**

Against this background, this research aims to address the following four broad questions:

- What is the day-to-day social reality of business change projects as experienced by practitioners? How is it different from the implicit assumptions of ‘best practice’ project management?
- Can theories of social practice contribute to understanding the reality of project experience, describing it in general terms and explaining the processes driving outcomes?
- How can a social practice perspective be used to develop an alternative theory of business change projects?
- What would be the implications of such a theory for the more effective management of business change projects?

## 4.3 Research Design

### 4.3.1 *Shaping factors*

The key factors determining the empirical research design are:

1. The primary focus of the research on building a deep understanding of ‘day-to-day social reality’ of business change projects
2. The exploratory search for new theoretical generalisations rather than testing of existing theory
3. The initial focus on issues identified in the processual literature (see Section 2.6 and conclusions of literature review in Section 2.7), including power and politics and the effect these have on actions and outcomes
4. The methodological implications of the social constructionist theories that are seen as potential theoretical resources for the analysis
5. The circumstances and opportunities available to the researcher.

There is widespread agreement (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997; Czarniawska, 1997; Dawson, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sayer, 1992; Seale, 1999a; Silverman, 2005; Strauss, 1987; Yin, 2003) that 1. and 2. above suggest the adoption of qualitative research techniques, particularly

ethnographic case study, as the most appropriate research method. The need to get as close to practice as possible implies immersion in the research site long enough to be able to follow the evolution of processes over time, and to “*grasp the social drama as it appears to the actors, their views of their roles, and their assumptions about the unfolding plot...*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, p.25). Participant observation over a substantial period of time is seen by many researchers as essential to achieve this. This is particularly so where issues of politics and power are concerned (3. above). As Pettigrew says in his classic study of organizational decision-making: “*It was felt that the best possible way to study people making a decision was to live with them while they made it. Such an approach has many advantages. If the reader is interested in covert activity, in political behaviour, it is essential to be close to the ground of the action*” (Pettigrew, 1973, p.56). Watson (1994), in his in-depth ethnographic study of management in practice, makes similar claims.

The proponents of the social practice perspectives described in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 reinforce this point more generally. All have a strong emphasis on empirical research that seeks to understand the detail of situated practice: in ANT terms, the emphasis on the ‘local’ and the need to ‘follow the actors’. Bourdieu in particular relies on in-depth ethnography as a basis for his theoretical framework.

Taking all this into account, longitudinal ethnographic study is therefore a natural choice of research method given the research aims. This choice is supported by the test of ‘methodological fit’ provided in the Academy of Management Review paper by Edmondson & McManus (2007). Edmondson and McManus see the appropriateness of research methods according to the nature of the research, and particularly to the state of prior knowledge in the field. They distinguish “*nascent theory*” from “*intermediate*” and “*mature*” theory, where, as in this research, the concern is with exploring new areas of theoretical possibility, rather than developing or testing existing theory. Table 4.1 below defines what they consider the most appropriate approach for such research, which essentially summarises the approach adopted for this research.



**Table 4.1: Methodological Fit – Nascent Theory**

<b>Methodology elements</b>	<b>Research Approach</b>
<i>Research questions</i>	Open-ended inquiry about a phenomenon of interest
<i>Type of data collected</i>	Qualitative, initially open-ended data that need to be interpreted for meaning
<i>Illustrative methods for collecting data</i>	Interviews; observations; obtaining documents or other material from field sites relevant to the phenomena of interest
<i>Constructs and measures</i>	Typically new constructs, few formal measures
<i>Goal of data analyses</i>	Pattern identification
<i>Data analysis methods</i>	Thematic content analysis coding for evidence of constructs
<i>Theoretical contribution</i>	A suggestive theory, often an invitation for further work on the issue or set of issues opened up by the study

Source: Edmondson & McManus, 2007, p.1160.

### **4.3.2 The observant practitioner**

#### **4.3.2.1 Advantages of participation**

The extent to which even ethnographic participant observation can reflect the phenomenological lived experience of members is nonetheless problematic and subject to considerable debate, not only in ethnography but in qualitative studies generally (Hammersley, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988; Van Maanen, Sorensen & Mitchell, 2007; Sayer, 1992). The post-positivist recognition (discussed in Chapter 3) that the observer is actively involved in constituting what they themselves observe means that ways need to be found by which “*the life world – that is, the experiential world every person takes for granted – is produced and experienced by members* (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998, p.138, emphasis in original). According to Schutz, whose work was discussed in Section 3.3.2: “*The safeguarding of the subjective point of view is the only ... guarantee that the world of social*

*reality will not be replaced by a fictional non-existing world constructed by the scientific observer*” (quoted in Holstein & Gubrium, 1998).

Qualitative research methods have developed in numerous ways in attempts to address this interpretive issue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000), but nonetheless the issue remains problematic (Sayer, 1992; Seale, 1999a). One particular strategy is to emphasize the researcher’s own involvement in members’ practices, to become an ‘observing participant’, rather than a ‘participant observer’. Czarniawska sees studies where the researcher assumes the role of an organisational member, or an employee becomes a researcher, as “*no doubt superior to all other types*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, P.25) because of the insight it allows. Ethnographers are typically keen to demonstrate the veracity of their accounts by evincing a sense of having ‘been there’, and of successfully ‘passing off’ as a native (Hammersley, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Seale, 1999b); an observing participant starts with an obvious advantage in this respect.

Another potential advantage of the ‘observing participant’ approach follows from an interest in the importance of action in achieving an understanding of organizational reality, demonstrated by early action researchers (see Section 2.3.5.1), such as Lewin, Argyris (who referred to ‘action science’) and Schein, and evident from the importance of action in sensemaking (see Section 3.4.5). Action researchers see benefits from “*working with organisational members on matters of genuine concern to them*” so that “*rich data can be collected about what people do and say – and what theories are used and usable – when they are faced with a genuine need to take action* (emphasis added)” (Huxham, 2003).

Interviewing people about what they do, or interpreting their observed behaviour, does not necessarily provide the same insight (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Silverman, 2001), or capture the ‘lived experience’, as does being in the thick of the action.

#### 4.3.2.2 *‘Self-ethnography’ and ‘insider research’*

However, apart from action research, it is rare (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Alvesson, 2003) that researchers are researching an environment in which they are a practitioner – what Alvesson, a leading author in interpretive research methodology, refers to as ‘self-

ethnography’<sup>4</sup>, or Brannick & Coghlan (2007) call ‘insider research’ - involving study of one’s own setting rather than the setting of a group of other people. Practical considerations are clearly a significant factor here for work settings, as the circumstances of being able to practice and do research at the same time are understandably rare. Most usually, then, qualitative research is conducted more at ‘arms length’, often seen as a journey (sometimes a literal geographical one) “*coming closer and closer [to] the lived realities of other people*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.163). Self-ethnography, by contrast, is “*a study and a text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a ‘natural access’, is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants. The researcher then works and/or lives in the setting and then uses the experiences, knowledge and access to empirical material for research purposes*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.174).

There are issues with such research: “*It is difficult to study something one is heavily involved in*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.167), both in practical terms and in terms of developing the necessary sense of distance for perspective: in Schutz’s terms, “*bracketing*” the life world, and suspending one’s taken-for-granted orientation to it (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998). Alvesson (2003) highlights the importance of wide organizational experience and a multiplicity of roles to avoid risks of the self-ethnographer becoming caught in a particular point of view. The researcher’s career in consultancy in multiple organizations, and the adoption of a number of different roles in the researched projects is therefore helpful in this regard. There are also issues of trust, role confusion, political tensions and ethics (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), particularly if exposing what Goffman (1990/1959) describes as ‘the backstage’. As Alvesson observes: “*Most well done studies working beyond front-stage and the level of image-production produce some far from positive descriptions and analysis. This may be one reason for being more inclined to study the Others rather than ourselves*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.180). In the researcher’s experience, trust and role confusion are familiar issues for consultancy work, where one is often in temporary and ambiguous roles, and/or gathering confidential views from project participants, so prior experience was a useful guide. The response in this case to

---

<sup>4</sup> Distinguished from ‘auto-ethnography’ which is concerned with exposing the normally suppressed reflections and feelings of the researcher during the research process, with a view to enhancing reflexivity, see Richardson, L. *Writing: A Method of Inquiry* in DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. 2005. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Inc. For a relevant example see: SCHULTZE, U. 2000. A Confessional Account of an Ethnography about Knowledge Work. *MIS Quarterly*, 24, 3-41.

issues of confidentiality is discussed at Section 4.7 below; and some reflections on striking the right balance between the advantages of pre-understanding and the disadvantages of over-familiarity are presented in the discussion of validity in Section 9.2.

However, despite the difficulties, there are some very significant advantages in ‘self-ethnography’ in terms of the objectives of this research, by which “*the deeper and more profound knowledge of the setting may lead to theoretical development that is more well grounded in experiences and observations than is common*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.178). It can also, according to Alvesson, offer the advantages of the “*good research economy*” compared with the time-consuming and resource-intensive demands of ethnography, as much is already understood about the culture and the meaning of practices.

In this case, from a practical point of view, the ‘self-ethnography’ approach fits well with the researcher’s work as a management consultant, and the fortunate availability of an appropriate organisational research setting (described further below).

### **4.3.3 Use of narrative**

As discussed in Section 3.3.5, where the narrative literature is reviewed, narrative techniques have become increasingly popular with interpretive organizational researchers as a means of gaining access to organizational members’ interpretations and meanings. Narrative knowledge is seen by some as the primary vehicle of knowledge in organizations, and a focus on narrative “... *enables researchers to engage with the lived realities of organizational life – the ‘truth’ that people at work live through every day*” (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p.182). Given the research aims set out in Section 4.2 above, such claims for the use of narrative suggest that it would be a valuable technique to employ in this case.

As we have seen in Section 3.3.7, the broad term ‘narrative’ covers a wide range of different approaches; but broadly, the narrative mode is concerned with interpretation and explanation, with understanding and attributing motive, with particularity and with context – in short, with making sense of the confusing and contradictory social world. In this case, it was used precisely as a means of seeking to capture the ‘lived reality’ of someone working on business

change projects, through the production of ‘A Practitioner’s Tale’, the story of the events as seen through the eyes of the researcher when acting as a practitioner. The narrative is in the first person, and is not intended as an objective account in the scientific sense. It is simply a practitioner’s attempt, in common-sense terms, to tell their own story of what happened. Like any such account, it combines objective events, personal interpretations as made at the time, and reflections of others’ interpretations as recorded at the time. The intent is to get as close to the practitioner’s experience as is possible for the researcher/practitioner in the circumstances, using the basic vehicle (narrative) by which participants make sense of what is going on within common-sense reality (Section 3.3.7.2). This narrative is then analysed closely to draw out some key aspects of the practitioner experience of wider relevance.

Given the perennial concerns in qualitative research of avoiding ‘*anecdotalism*’ (Silverman, 2005), and observer bias, this use of narrative by the researcher themselves is obviously rather unusual, though not unheard of. Seale’s very pragmatic handbook on conducting qualitative research (Seale, 1999b) gives such an example in (Bourgois, 1998). This, “*written in a style reminiscent of a detective fiction*”, is presented as a (to him) welcome return of realism in qualitative studies, after what he sees as ‘tortured’ postmodern attempts to remove the author from research accounts. Nonetheless it is important to acknowledge some of the inherent issues about the epistemological status of the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’ and its use in this case, and these are discussed further below in Sections 4.11 and 9.2. Had such a narrative account been available from a practitioner within the research setting, concerns about possible researcher bias would have been alleviated (though no doubt replaced by others about bias in the selected account). However, in this case the narrative is not used as a reporting device but as an information-gathering and consolidation device, as an intermediate step towards analysis. Its value relies heavily on the assumptions that (a) the narrative is broadly representative of a narrative that could have been prepared by a practitioner without research interests in the same situation ie that it is not unduly biased by the researcher’s preconceptions (b) that it is subsequently possible to draw out some intersubjective aspects of the personal narrative which can reasonably be considered to be shared; and (c) that the researcher is able to write the account as a practitioner and analyse it as a researcher, thereby achieving “*the status of a research account as providing more sophisticated understandings than are available to*

*individuals in the study settings*” (Seale, 1999b, p.52). The detailed process of analysis described in Chapters 5 and 6 is designed to address these issues as far as possible, and to make visible the assumptions that have been made.

#### **4.3.4 Combining the subjective and the objective**

The ‘Practitioner’s Tale’ is an important aspect of the research design in terms of exploring the subjective perspective of the practitioner as a means of ‘getting close to practice’. It is, however, ‘only a story’, one of many possible. As is evident from the discussion on some of the postmodern developments in organization studies in Chapter 3, there are many researchers working within a social constructionist perspective who would challenge the legitimacy of going beyond that, and who look for ‘polyvocality’ rather than any kind of claims of access to a wider truth (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). From this perspective, research reports can be seen as ‘stories’, hardly distinguishable in any significant respect from fiction (Czarniawska, 1997); where the usefulness of any such research depends on the user – *“Use is not an attribute of knowledge, but of a user. Generalization is not a job of an author, but of a reader”* (Czarniawska, 2003a).

There is much research that points to the importance of stories in sharing and improving practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Orr, 1996). However, the aim of the current research in extending theory suggests the need for a broader empirical base that is more ‘objective’, at least in the common-sense, intersubjective sense, if not in the purely positivist sense. This ambition is strongly supported by ‘realist’ guides to conducting qualitative research (Seale, 1999b; Sayer, 1992; Silverman, 2005); but also by the social theorists discussed in Chapter 7. Bourdieu in particular is most explicit in his discussion of research methodology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) of the need for recognising both the subjective experience and the ‘objective structures of the field’.

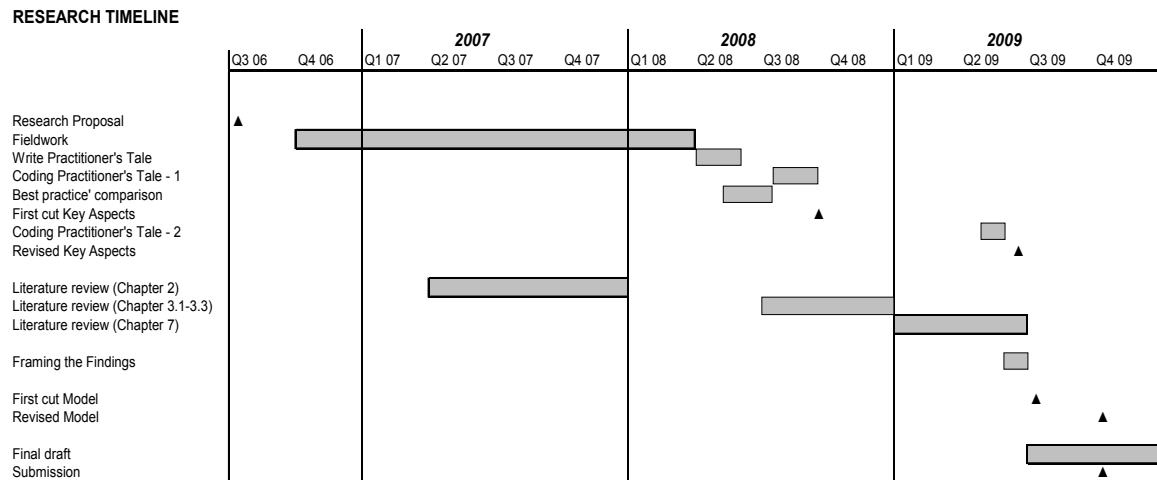
To that end, the research design includes an important attempt to obtain a more objective view of the empirical events observed through:

- identification of the particular features of the project experience through careful observation, and an ‘audit trail’ to available documentation, against those characteristics implied by the conventional ‘best practice’ model of project management (very much in the conventions of traditional ‘realist’ ethnographic research)
- systematic and transparent analysis of the narrative against some themes of more general applicability drawn from the wider literature, seeking more generic, less context-specific characteristics of the practitioner experience described.

#### ***4.3.5 The use of pre-existing theories***

A final key aspect of the research design is the part played by pre-existing theories, discussed in Section 3.4. The potential relevance of these theories to the research aims is drawn from the research literature, as having the essential features necessary as candidates for an alternative theoretical framework to the positivist, instrumental rationality of project management theory; and of being concerned with the particularities of situated social practice.

However, these theories were not used to shape data gathering for the empirical research (as they could have been, at least in some cases); they were used as a theoretical device for analytical purposes to help interpret the findings, to provide a form of ‘theoretical triangulation’ on those findings as discussed later (Denzin, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), to provide inspiration and conceptual assets for the development of the theoretical model described in Chapter 8. The fieldwork was most influenced by the research reviewed in Chapter 2, with its conclusions about critique of ‘best practice’, necessary future directions, and the emphasis on processual approaches. This (rather than the social theories described in Section 3.4, which were not properly reviewed or understood at that stage) provided the broad focus of attention during the fieldwork. The implications of this are discussed again in Chapter 9 ‘Research Reflections’.

**Fig 4.1 Research Timeline**

#### 4.4 Epistemological Assumptions

It will be clear from the above that the basic epistemological assumptions underpinning the research are pragmatic and realist (see discussion in Section 3.2, and in particular Johnson & Duberley (2000) and Sayer (1992)) – or what Hammersley (1992) and Seale (1999b) both refer to as ‘subtle realism’. Following the discussion in Chapter 3, that many aspects of what constitutes reality in day-to-day life are socially constructed is accepted, most particularly social reality. Also, while remaining agnostic on ontological questions of an absolute reality, it seems clear that any theory-neutral observation of this reality, or anything for that matter, is in principle not possible. However, within a pragmatic perspective, it seems that it is both possible and necessary to approach an intersubjective consensus on some objective reality as a condition of functioning in the world, and as a social being. This, however, is a fallible view and one subject to continuous testing in practice, and within the real constraints of the physical world and our biological and psychological make-up as human beings. Habermas’s notion of knowledge-constitutive domains (see Section 3.2.4) with their distinctive epistemologies based on pragmatic requirements seems a compelling one to this researcher, and has been adopted as a foundational assumption in this research.



Overall, this philosophical position assumes that it is reasonable, but within limits, to claim some degree of correspondence between the text of a research report and some external reality, sufficient to guide action in the real world though not sufficient to determine or predict outcomes in detail. It also assumes that there are some repeated patterns in social interaction that can be seen as ‘underlying causal mechanisms’ which can form the basis of a more general theory from which some kind of recommended actions can be derived, subject to further testing.

#### **4.5 The Research Site**

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out between Sept 2006 and April 2008 in a UK central government department. It involved participant-observation of a number of inter-related projects over that period, while working as a consultant on those projects in a variety of roles (itemised in Appendix A). This research followed a period working as an interim programme manager in the department for the previous two years, during which I had established a network of colleagues from the most senior management down. My client was the CIO (Gerry), who gave authority to conduct research on projects in the department, while commissioning a range of consultancy support, including participating in his initiative (‘Successful Delivery’) aimed at developing ‘people-based’ interventions to improve project delivery. This constituted the kind of access which Czarniawska refers to as requiring “*exceptional luck*” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, p.25). While having a free hand in designing the research, there were though some practical constraints, most obviously the need to fit into the client’s requirements.

My initial intent was to focus on the ‘Successful Delivery’ initiative and develop it into an action research project, but very shortly afterwards (Nov 06) the department launched the Phoenix business change programme, providing the opportunity to begin the kind of ‘self-ethnography’ study described in Section 4.3.2 above.

The field work therefore concentrates on four separate but closely-related projects: Successful Delivery; The Phoenix Change Programme; PhoenixIT; and (to a lesser degree) Integrated Portal. My position with respect to these projects allowed me to observe the development and

progress of these projects over an 18 month period (working 3-4 days per week) from different perspectives: as an insider, often intensely involved in specific project tasks; and as more of an outsider, with varying degrees of involvement and active engagement.

#### **4.6 Researcher preconceptions**

It is clearly important in this kind of interpretive research, and particularly so in the ‘self-ethnography’ approach adopted in this case, to understand the background and possible preconceptions of the researcher so as to be able to assess the findings in that context.

I am an engineer by training, with an early career in operations research and modelling. As indicated in Section 1.1.2, prior to this research I had some 25 years of project and programme management experience in public and private sector organizations, both as an employee and more recently as a programme management consultant. I had undertaken senior leadership roles on some 15 major business change projects, in several cases as interim programme director or programme manager accountable for delivery. Most of these programmes involved substantial business change (eg setting up a telephone bank, business process re-engineering of the UK Post Office, delivering e-government services within a large government department). As a consultant, I had carried out numerous reviews and ‘health checks’, applying the standards of ‘best practice’. I was accredited as an OGC Gateway Review team leader for high-risk projects in government, and had led on a number of initiatives within different consultancy organizations to develop programme and change management methodologies, so I already had expertise in structured methods and approaches. Most recently, my work had been with large public sector projects, though I have also had significant experience in private sector projects in large finance and retail organizations. This experience had given me good insight into the reality of business change programmes, and thereby improved my ability to interpret what was observed, but this background was also likely to have influenced my judgements on what I took to be important in the information gathering, and also in drawing out the findings from the analysis. I had also begun to develop some firm views on the most effective ways to achieve success in this kind of programme within the typical large organization environment, and I had begun to develop systematic approaches focused around leadership, delivery culture, and identifying and resolving difficult

‘political’ issues. As indicated in Section 1.1.2, I had already formed a view that much of what was referred to as ‘best practice’ was of at least questionable value, so I came into this research convinced that there was a need to find more relevant theoretical frameworks which better reflected the reality of working on business change projects.

In summary, my background gave me good insight into the issues on large business change programmes in both the public and private sectors, I had already begun a process of reflecting upon that experience and trying to structure it, with preconceptions that social and personal factors were of central importance. These preconceptions clearly influenced the focus of the information gathering; but they also gave me advantages in interpreting reliably what was observed. The effects of this on the validity of the research findings are discussed below in Section 4.12 and later in Section 9.2.

As is evident from Section 4.5 above, I had already worked in the research site as a senior manager, and so was accepted as part of the organization, with good relationships at all levels and a very wide network of relationships. A particularly important relationship was with Gerry who provided access and support for the research, and who was also my primary client. Gerry liked to use me in a variety of ad hoc ‘trouble-shooting’ roles, which provided a good opportunity to view organizational events from different perspectives, and to gain the often ‘unofficial’ view from the participants as a part of the normal conduct of business. I had worked with several of the key players before, in the department and in other organizations, and was on very friendly terms with many. This was very helpful in terms of seeking insights and gathering frank views from individuals, and generally in gaining access to a broader base of information about events. As a well-accepted ‘insider’, there were few artificial barriers or distortions in access to what others felt or meant, as in the great majority of cases my research interests were very much in the background, and of little interest to many. However, my ‘insider’ role did create some obstacles to sharing information that could sometimes be unflattering or critical between parties (see Section 4.9 on confidentiality).

## **4.7 Data Gathering**

The data gathering process was quite straightforward, consisting of:

- a daily handwritten journal of meeting notes
- a log of significant meetings and communications, and an emerging timeline of events
- retention of all emails sent and received
- retention of all project documents (mainly from personal use).

The daily journal, (eventually more than 200 pages) included notes of the meetings attended, and what seemed to be the important conversations and events of the day. This combined normal meeting notes, observations after meetings, and ‘end-of-day’ summaries of impressions. Some extracts from these handwritten notes are included at Appendix E. Tape recording was not used, as this would have created a very artificial situation (Alvesson, 2003; Huxham & Vangen, 2003) which would have disrupted the normal conduct of events. As can be seen from Appendix E, the notes taken were cryptic by recommended ethnographic standards, and served more as a prompt for the later production of the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’ than as a comprehensive source. As Alvesson says “*in many interesting and engaging situations in one’s workplace it is difficult to keep one’s mouth shut – detailed notes-taking is difficult*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.182). However, notes were added shortly after meetings, and logs were maintained of (a) all meetings and what seemed particularly significant communications (~140); and (b) a timeline of events was built up on an ongoing basis (see Appendix B and C). In this way, it was possible to recapture from contemporaneous data fuller information about what had appeared to be significant events at the time.

There were no research interviews as such, although there were numerous one-to-one meetings and informal conversations as part of ongoing project activity, involving contact with around 100 people, of whom 30-40 were engaged with on a regular basis and make some appearance in the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’. Two project ‘health checks’ provided the opportunity to gather input from individuals outside my normal working network, notably many of the top two levels of senior management.

In addition to the notes of meetings, an important additional source of information was emails and project documentation. Some 500 emails were retained from day-to-day communications,

together with an accumulation of project documentation, all of which was stored and retained, and available for later review and analysis. This included hundreds of draft documents, published documents, official communications etc, retained mainly as a by-product of personal ‘participation’. These were saved in project folders in chronological order. Some of the most significant documents are itemised in Appendix D.

While the great majority of emails and documents were retained, there was clearly an implicit filtering process at work in determining what is ‘significant’ enough to merit recording in the journal and logs. The common-sense intention was to reflect in the journal what seemed important to the researcher as a practitioner in carrying out his own project activities. However, in addition to practice-based experience and assumptions, the approach to data gathering was undoubtedly influenced by a focus on some particular aspects identified earlier from the literature as not well covered by ‘best practice’ theory – particularly politics and power, emotion, interpersonal issues, personal motivation etc. Data gathered (particularly in field notes) was aimed at ensuring the above kinds of issues were captured as well as the more obvious project stages and events. Had I been looking at issues of (say) gender or personality on project outcomes, I would very likely have noticed different events and made different notes.

#### **4.8 Producing the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’**

The ‘Practitioner’s Tale’ was written over an intense period of 6 weeks or so, during April and May 2008, as the fieldwork was reaching its natural conclusion, but when the recollection of events was still fresh. The structure of the narrative was basically chronological, though some ‘flashbacks’ and parallel tracks were necessary to maintain some kind of flow. The primary source was the daily journal and the log of significant events, with the text elaborated through recollection (recognised as playing an important but often unacknowledged role in ethnographic-type writing (Hammersley, 1992)) and by reference to the more objective record available from the retained emails and project documentation. A particularly useful source of corroboration was the complete set of weekly progress reports from the Phoenix Change Programme.

The Practitioner's Tale is inevitably a fractured and partial narrative of the projects. Pieces of the story peter out for the narrator as personal involvement changes participation and 'locale', as activities come to nothing, or events move away to be reported only through the observations of others. However, this is a true reflection of the practitioner's experience, the effect of circumstances on the narrator's point of observation (Czarniawska, 1997). The narrative is not seeking to provide an authoritative objective account of the projects in a historian's sense, it is seeking to capture the subjective perspective of the project experience. Judgements nonetheless still had to be made of what is to be included and what is to be left out. The narrative was eventually 35,000 words long, and undoubtedly could have been a lot longer. In writing the narrative, it soon became evident that an attempt to recount 'everything that happened' was going to be impractical, and so decisions had to be made about where to elaborate and add detail. The primary driver here was the extent and quality of the journal notes, reflecting the degree of attention that events were prompting at the time. On some occasions events were excluded because they could not easily be accommodated into a narrative flow, or they did not seem particularly interesting and relevant to the story of the progress of the projects. However, at least 85% of the events from the meetings and communications log were covered by the narrative.

The Tale was written as a 'real life story' with an intent to be engaging and interesting for a reader, though this proved challenging whilst seeking to be as faithful as possible to the experiences recorded, and the final full text is rather indigestible. It lacks a strong narrative plot, and understanding the narrative fully also relies on a lot of contextual understanding of the department, which would have made the text even longer. Those few who could be persuaded to read it found its general thrust and focus more interesting than its detailed blow-by-blow account, and admitted to having better things to do with their time than finish it. Also, the length of the narrative unsupported by any analysis of what it means in research terms challenges its inclusion as a whole as part of a research thesis, quite apart from the confidentiality issues discussed below. However, numerous detailed extracts are included in Chapter 5, and in Appendix F under the coded themes.

Nonetheless, the narrative did offer a solution to the perennial ethnographic problem of analysing the sheer volume of empirical material (Alvesson, 2003), providing a purchase on

the ‘actuality’ of day-to-day life on a project in a more manageable synthesis than a verbatim account of the hundreds of meetings, conversations, emails, documents, issues and concerns that this involves. It is also clear that (as the literature discussed in Section 3.3.7 highlights) the narrative reflects the everyday mix of objective observation, subjective interpretation, association, exploration of motive etc, which form the basis of the ‘common-sense reality’ of the social world.

#### **4.9 Confidentiality**

While the relevant departmental senior management had given permission to conduct the research, the majority of those organizational members engaged with were unaware that I was conducting research. To that extent, this research was therefore by default ‘covert’, though by no means secret, and it would occasionally come up in passing. However, the information imparted and collected was for the purposes of conducting business, and the normal protocols of confidentiality which govern consultancy work were assumed on both sides, certainly mine. Some of the data gathered and used in the analysis (eg documents about commercial aspects, personal performance reports etc) is therefore bound by professional confidentiality rules. This has either been anonymised or not included in detail.

In addition, the text has been anonymised, and the descriptions of the history and context and the projects have been altered to ensure that the department cannot be identified from the text. This has not, in the event, affected the analysis and conclusions but it has meant sacrificing some of the detail and verisimilitude that would reinforce claims to authenticity. Experience suggests that organizations generally are highly sensitive to any observations that could be interpreted as reflecting any criticism of their competence or integrity, or embarrassing in any way. While such observations are not a major aspect of this research, removal of all observations with such potential is in danger of taking away much of the point of this research, and so, while findings have been shared with individual members, including the client Director authorising the research, formal corporate clearance of the entire text has not been sought.

Ethical issues around some of the common-sense protocols that govern social behaviour seem more important in this case, particularly as many of the individuals included in the narrative are close colleagues. A competent member of organizational social life is expected to judge when comments made about others should or shouldn't be passed on, to others or to the person in question. Such commentary formed an important part of the events covered in the 'Practitioner's Tale' and the analysis of the 'key aspects' but its exposure would seem to be a breach of those implicit rules. At a personal level, I have undertaken to the key figures in the narrative that I would be governed by the same respect for their confidentiality. In addition to ensuring that the department cannot be easily identified, all names have therefore been changed in the narrative, and summaries and extracts only, rather than the full text of the narrative, are included in this thesis.

#### **4.10 Analysis Approach**

The analysis process is described fully in Chapters 6 and 7. An overview is illustrated in Fig 4.2. In summary, this comprises several key analytical stages:

##### ***4.10.1 Analysis of the project practice and processes***

As observed from retained documentation and notes of project meetings, against some of the key parameters of 'best practice' assumptions – reporting the way in which goals and objectives were set, plans were produced, project status was assessed and reported, issues and risks managed etc. This analysis identified 19 key 'features' of the project practice that were distinctive from what was implied by the 'best practice' model.

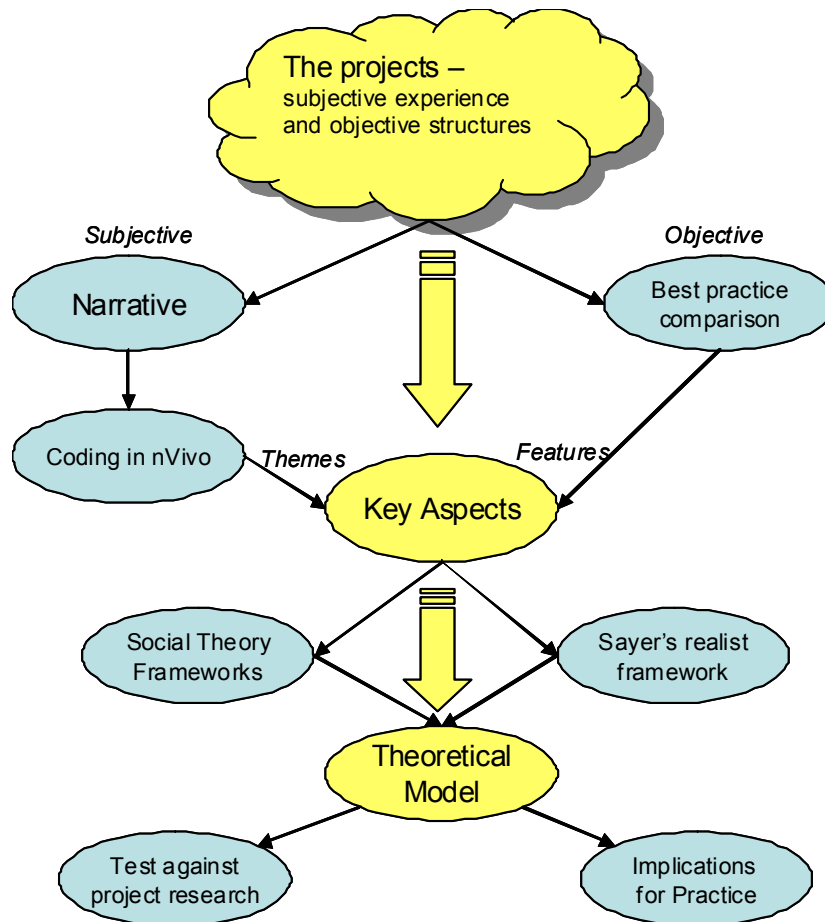
##### ***4.10.2 Analysis of the Practitioner's Tale***

The narrative was broken down into some 84 narrative elements, or 'events' and coded using the qualitative analysis tool nVivo. The schema was initially drawn from the literature review (politics, multiple stakeholder views, uncertainty, personal emotion) and progressively developed as the analysis proceeded. The coding categories went through a number of iterations, eventually 'saturated' around some categories, which are described as the 'themes' of the subjective project experience (coincidentally, also 19). Given the scale of the effort involved in this coding activity, it was not judged possible to have the coding exercise carried



out by other researchers; however, the detailed coding of extracts to themes is presented for inspection in Appendix F.

**Fig 4.2 – Overview of Research Stages**



#### **4.10.3 Combining the themes and the key features**

The 19 ‘themes’ and 19 ‘features’ were mapped against each other then systematically combined into a smaller set of 13 categories described as ‘key aspects’ of these business change projects. These ‘key aspects’ are then fully described, with examples and references to the narrative and the observations from project practice, and consolidated into a summary characterisation, proposed as a generic characterisation of business change projects in general.

The ‘key aspects’, intended to reflect some generic intersubjective characteristics of common experience, are then shared with 6 individuals who participated in the projects, and their comments taken into account.

These ‘key aspects’ are the primary input to the development of a theoretical causal model which seeks to explain what was observed in terms of a realist perspective (Sayer, 1992; Tsoukas, 1989) of underlying structures and social processes that are proposed as being of more widespread applicability to business change projects in general.

## **4.11 Theory Development**

### ***4.11.1 Analysing the findings against five social theory frameworks***

The ‘key aspects’ are analysed from the perspective of each of the five social theory frameworks introduced in Section 3.4. On this basis, a number of theoretical constructs are drawn from these frameworks and combined into a multi-level explanatory model which is able to provide the most coherent and comprehensive coverage of all the ‘key aspects’. The model is then extended into an alternative view of business change projects, linking it to an elaboration of the concept of a ‘project trajectory’.

### ***4.11.2 Exploring the implications for practice***

The implications of the theoretical model for practice to improve successful delivery of business change projects is explored in principle. In order to test out the theoretical model to some degree, it is then used to interpret some of the findings of project success factors research, and some of the findings from research into the management of projects with high uncertainty.

## **4.12 Validity and Quality Criteria**

### ***4.12.1 General approaches in interpretive research***

Although interpretive qualitative research has become a prominent part of social science research, there has been considerable debate about the criteria to be used to establish the quality of such research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tsoukas, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 2005;

Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Seale, 1999b; Silverman, 2005). Once the basic idea of establishing foundational truth claims is rejected, criteria based on correspondence with an objective reality, which form the basis for the well-established positivist methodological approaches which are used in quantitative research, are clearly not so appropriate. However, even though objective knowledge may be unattainable “*most advocates of interpretive approaches want to reject going as far as taking a complete relativistic stance*” (Sandberg, 2005, p.42) - whose paper makes evident how difficult resolving this question from a purely philosophical standpoint is. Typically, researchers have adopted an ultimately pragmatic perspective whereby “*... philosophical positions can be understood by social researchers as resources for thinking, rather than taken as problems to be solved before research can proceed*” (Seale, 1999b, p.25). Even those speaking from a position firmly within the postmodern school acknowledge “*... a question that has to be answered one way or another: Are these findings sufficiently authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the ways others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications*” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.205).

#### 4.12.1.1 Validity criteria in qualitative research

In their earlier work, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) proposed different criteria to be applied to ‘naturalistic inquiry’: *credibility*, rather than *internal validity*; *transferability* rather than *external validity*; *dependability* rather than *reliability*; and *confirmability* rather than *objectivity*. This has subsequently generated a number of alternative views of validity, leading to “*... a confusing array of terms for validity, including authenticity, goodness, verisimilitude, adequacy, trustworthiness, plausibility, validity, validation, and credibility*” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.124). However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) did suggest on the basis of their particular typology of validity a number of research strategies which could help in demonstrating these criteria, and which appear to be part of a broad consensus of how the credibility and wider applicability of research can be evaluated and improved. These include:

- prolonged engagement in the field;
- thick, rich description, demonstrating detailed awareness of the research site and practices;

- member checking (ie validating accounts with research subjects);
- researcher reflectivity, where researchers seek to make evident to readers their beliefs and values and any sources of possible bias;
- close collaboration with members in producing the research;
- the provision of a clear audit trail of all research decisions and activities;
- searching for disconfirming evidence to counteract the natural tendency for researchers to find confirming evidence for emerging findings.

Another widely-accepted (and in some respects related) approach to improving credibility developed by Denzin, one of the early leading thinkers in qualitative research, is through ‘triangulation’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Denzin, 1989; Stake, 2005) – of data, method, investigators, and theory. The essential point here is that, whatever philosophical paradigm one is working from, by looking at the data from different directions, from different perspectives, and through different theoretical lenses one approaches an account less prone to bias and preconception, more complete, and more supportable as a basis for action.

#### *4.12.1.2 Improving validity in practice*

However, even these well-accepted techniques (including member checking, and triangulation (Silverman, 2005)) can be seen to make questionable contributions to validity in certain circumstances (Hammersley, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) so there are no general rules. While there are a variety of guideline approaches, validity in qualitative research cannot be seen as depending upon adoption of a generic methodology; rather, the case has to be made as to how threats to validity in a specific case can be addressed, and with respect to the purposes of the research (Maxwell, 1992; Hammersley, 1992). Practically-oriented research guides (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Seale, 1999b; Silverman, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) are consistent in suggesting careful thought about a range of different ways of establishing the credibility of findings within the specific context and subject to practical constraints. Seale (1999b) refers to high-quality research as a ‘craft’ skill. Interestingly, Hammersley (1992) and Maxwell (1992) both echo the focus of this thesis on the epistemological characteristics of the social world (described in Chapter 3) by stressing the similarity of judgements of validity to the context-specific judgements of truthfulness, quality

or integrity in the everyday world. Maxwell (1992) looks to the actual practices of qualitative researchers to see a reliance on widespread, intersubjectively-agreed, common-sense conceptual structures, rooted in fundamental taken-for-granted assumptions about the ordinary world. However, while there may not be differences in kind, there are differences of degree: “... *there is a requirement placed on researchers routinely to subject the validity of claims and assumptions to more scrutiny than is normal in other circumstances*” (Hammersley, 1992, p.70). Even for researchers coming from a postmodern perspective, “... *there is no less urgency for researchers to assure that their sense of situation, observation, reporting, and reading stay within some limits of correspondence*” (Stake, 2005, p.453). However, this is not something for which there is a guaranteed process or an absolute point of reference, and so qualitative research is always likely to be contested (Silverman, 2005). For researchers such as Seale (1999b) and Hammersley (1992) working within the kind of realist epistemological perspective set out in Section 4.4 above, this is a careful, ongoing, and ultimately unfinished process of sceptical examination aimed at improving the credibility of research – or, as Silverman (2005, p.295) puts it, “... *to counter the cynic who comments ‘Sez you’*”.

#### 4.12.1.3 A typology of validity

In discussing the particular threats to validity in this research, Maxwell (1992) offers a useful typology of validity from within the realist perspective. This is an influential paper, included by Huberman and Miles (2002) and referred to also more recently by Stake (2005) when discussing case study validity issues in Denzin and Lincoln (2005).

Maxwell (1992) distinguishes four different aspects of validity:

*Descriptive validity* – demonstrating that the researcher is not making up or distorting matters in their accounts. Descriptive validity can be primary, in terms of directly experienced physical and behavioural events, and secondary, in terms of inferred or reported events (which could though in principle have been observed). While it is accepted that no observation is theory-neutral, the key characteristic of descriptive validity is that there is no disagreement about the theory in use; or if there is, it is a disagreement that could be

satisfactorily resolved through access to the appropriate data. Maxwell asserts that this foundational descriptive validity must underpin the other forms of validity. Descriptive validity must also take account of what has been included and omitted in the description: “*The omission of things that participants in the discussion feel are significant to the account (for the purposes at issue) threatens the descriptive validity of the account*” (Maxwell, 1992, p.47).

*Interpretive validity* – is concerned with the meanings that are attributed to actions and events, either indirectly through observation of participants, or through participants’ own accounts. This kind of interpretation is still essentially about what is ‘observed’ (and the ‘descriptive’ and ‘interpretive’ categories do shade into each other) but is also constructed from within the observer’s own frame of reference, and that of the participants, and likely to be more contestable. The validity of such interpretations cannot be challenged unequivocally by access to data, even in principle; the relevant consensus rests to a substantial extent in the community studied (Maxwell, 1992). Interpretive validity is therefore improved by evidence of the researcher’s insight into the participants’ culture, practice and meanings.

*Theoretical validity* – this is concerned with the validity of explanations that are offered for what is reported in the research account. This covers the validity of the concepts that are used, whether they are clearly defined, there is a consensus on their meanings, and that they are readily identified from the data. It also includes the validity of the postulated relationships, the extent to which causal links are supported from the evidence offered, including the extent to which alternative explanations have been explored.

*Generalisability* – this aspect of validity maps most directly on to the positivist notion of ‘external validity’ and is concerned with the validity of drawing wider conclusions from the research findings, either within the same researched community at a different time or location, or to other communities. While this aspect of validity is concerned with issues of representativeness in some way or another, there is widespread agreement that single case studies can produce valid claims for generalisability, in particular depending upon the extent

to which theoretical validity has been demonstrated. A fuller discussion of this issue is included in Chapter 9, in the light of the theoretical development in Chapter 8.

#### ***4.12.2 Validity issues and approaches in this research***

As qualitative research, this research shares many of the issues in demonstrating validity that are discussed in the earlier parts of this section. In particular, there are two distinctive aspects of this research which are central to approaching the research aims of a better view of the ‘actuality’ of the lived experience of projects, but at the same time raise particular threats to validity. The first is the basic research design of a ‘self-ethnography’ study, in Alvesson’s terms; the second is the use of a narrative produced by the ‘researcher-as-practitioner’ as a means of capturing the significant characteristics of the project experience from a practitioner perspective. As discussed earlier, these approaches have strong advantages in terms of approaching the aims of the study. However, they also raise issues around the extent to which any account is dominated by the researcher’s personal idiosyncrasies and preconceptions. Alvesson claims that the approach “...*forces the researcher to address ‘subjectivity’ and pre-understanding as a complex mix of resource and blinder*” (Alvesson, 2003, p.184) – though he himself sees a much higher risk of reflecting taken-for-granted assumptions of practice than individual bias. It seems there are few established techniques and procedures which can be drawn on to guarantee validity in these circumstances, apart from a reflexive alertness and the kind of systematic scepticism proposed by (Seale, 1999b), discussed above at Section 4.11.1.3. To this end, a variety of different techniques have been used at various stages of this research to improve claims of credibility and validity. These are essentially versions of ‘triangulation’ or some of the other techniques discussed in Section 4.11.1 applied in ways which seemed most effective within the practical constraints of this research. These include:

- Involvement over a lengthy period in day-to-day practice
- Detailed ‘thick’ description of the daily activities, demonstrating having ‘been there’, including detailed extracts from the narrative
- Combination of the subjective aspects of the project experience with the more objective observations based on an audit trail to project documentation

- Use of the ‘best practice’ characteristics of projects as a focus for analysis, explicitly guiding the selection from the observations of project practice and of the relevant project documentation
- Cross-checking of the narrative against contemporaneous notes, meeting logs and emails
- Systematic coding process of the narrative, using a software analysis tool, which provides a frequency analysis, and an explicit audit trail of coding decisions against items of the text
- Using an extensive and inclusive coding structure based on key factors identified in the processual literature
- Repeating the coding exercise after a 12 month period and identifying some necessary changes
- Systematic development of the ‘key aspects’ by identification of the most connected categories
- ‘Member checking’ of the key ‘features’ and the ‘key aspects’ with 6 other staff involved in the same projects
- ‘Theoretical triangulation’ by interpreting the findings through four different theoretical perspectives
- Use of well-supported theoretical constructs from the five social theories in constructing an explanatory model
- Iterative development of the theoretical model until all ‘key aspects’ could be successfully incorporated
- Testing of the explanatory model against existing research results from the literature.

However, the literature strongly suggests that the effectiveness of the research methodology in establishing valid research outcomes must be judged against the specifics of the research itself and the conclusions drawn from it. It therefore makes much more sense to assess that once the research itself has been demonstrated in Chapters 5 -8, returning to the discussion of validity and generalisability in Chapter 9 ‘Research Reflections’, where the findings are discussed in terms of Maxwell’s typology of descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, and generalisability.



## 5 RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

### 5.1 Introduction

This section describes the organisational events and project trajectories that were observed during the 18 month field research period, the analysis and findings of which are presented in Section 5. The purpose is to provide background and a summary view of ‘what happened’ during that period as context for the analysis and findings presented in Section 5. Given the importance of the ‘Practitioners Tale’ in the research and analysis, a summary and extract is included. This also serves to provide a summary view of events from the researcher’s perspective as a practitioner. As discussed in Section 4.8 (Confidentiality) the names for the projects, and the organizations and individuals involved, are pseudonyms.

### 5.2 History and context

#### 5.2.1 *The Department*

The government department in which the research was conducted has a very wide range of responsibilities involving regulation and direct delivery of services. It is organized with a central policy-oriented grouping of about 3000 staff developing policy for operational delivery to customers by a wide range of disparate delivery agents, comprising a further 80,000 staff. At the time this fieldwork began, the department was under pressure from the centre of government for improved performance. Staff savings promised to the Treasury in the previous budgeting round had not been delivered and the department was in difficulties negotiating the next 3-year budget. Furthermore, the department had received a critical Capability Review from the Cabinet Office, which called for the department urgently to improve its organisational performance, and accused it of "*major failings*" in certain areas. The department was seen as needing to strengthen the senior leadership team, provide services based around customer needs, create a true partnership with delivery partners, and manage individual and organisational performance better. It is against this background that a new departmental head (*Rachel*) was appointed and the Phoenix business change programme was launched.

### **5.2.2 The IT department**

In 2004, the department, following a long history of difficulties with IT, entered into a strategic outsourcing arrangement with a leading international IT supplier (ABC), covering all aspects of IT from service delivery to IT strategy. The department's own role in IT was reduced to that of a business sponsor and/or user, dealing directly with the IT supplier, with an 'intelligent customer' function managing the necessary contractual and commercial processes, and providing an overall service management and delivery assurance function. Following completion of the procurement, a new Chief Information Officer (CIO) was appointed (**Gerry**), with the remit to build on and achieve the hoped-for benefits of the new supplier arrangements, and to manage the associated organizational transition for the IT department (ITD).

Some two years or more into the outsourced contract, delivery by the outsourced supplier had been disappointing. ABC was increasingly being seen by business users as providing an expensive and poor quality service. ABC's room for manoeuvre was limited by a very tight contract which, though seen as a success for the department at the time, meant that ABC was losing money on the contract, and therefore unwilling to invest to improve. Plans to improve the desktop infrastructure, which had been part of the original contract, had been repeatedly delayed.

The implementation of the PhoenixIT system took place against this background.

### **5.2.3 Consultants**

In addition to ABC, the department was a frequent user of outside suppliers and consultancy. While the central procurement division had established some corporate frameworks, business directors, who controlled their own budgets tended to employ their particular favoured suppliers. In fact, the majority of the project staff involved in the business change projects which are the subject of this research were from the private sector, including some in 'client-side' leadership roles. Important players were consultants **Frenchay**, a leading international consultancy company, brought in to support the Phoenix Change Programme.

### 5.3 Project descriptions

As described in the previous section, the events studied in the field research were focused on four related initiatives:

- The Phoenix Change Programme, a major business process and culture change programme aimed at a radical performance improvement in the department
- PhoenixIT, a parallel programme providing new desktop infrastructure, and a number of application services designed to support the new business processes defined by the Phoenix Change Programme
- Integrated Portal, a multi-agency project aimed at providing an integrated online service to the department’s customers
- Successful Delivery, an action research project initiated by Gerry aimed at developing more behavioural approaches to project management.

The main focus of research effort was on the first two projects, Phoenix Change and PhoenixIT, though the Integrated Portal provided some valuable insights also. Successful Delivery was important in providing a regular review framework for reflection on events in the two major projects, and for developing and exploring some project interventions in the three other projects.

#### 5.3.1 *The Phoenix Change Programme*

The Phoenix Change Programme was initiated by the departmental head (Rachel) on taking up appointment. In November 2006, she outlined her vision for the future of the department: “*one that is flexible, responsive, quick on its feet, effective, whatever the priorities set for us by our Ministers, whatever the expectations that customers and citizens have of us*” (Intranet 29/6/2006). To implement this vision, she announced the formation of the Phoenix programme, which “*will put corporate, collaborative behaviour at the heart of what we do*”. Between November 2006 and January 2007, Rachel’s vision of a project-based, more collaborative organisation had been elaborated in a number of quite specific directions notably:

- The development of a standard policy lifecycle

- The development of a flexible resourcing management system
- New HR processes, including performance management
- Improved performance management of delivery agencies
- ‘Smart working’ –improved IT tools and office facilities for staff to support their work.

A dedicated Programme Director (*Kate*) was brought in from the private sector to lead the programme in January 2007, and she, with the support of external consultants Frenchay, put in place and led a very high-profile programme of change. The implementation plan for the programme was agreed in October 2007, with 1 April 2008 targeted as the point at which the new organisational arrangements and resource allocation processes were to be in place and operating, supported by an IT application (ASF) being delivered by PhoenixIT programme. The programme was seen to be a success by the department and by the Cabinet Office, contributing to addressing many of the concerns raised in the Capability Review.

### ***5.3.2 The PhoenixIT Programme***

PhoenixIT was a programme of IT projects with the two-fold purpose of refreshing the department’s office systems infrastructure and supporting the aims of the Phoenix Change Programme. Part of the programme was addressing the current instability, lack of standardisation and high maintenance costs of the existing desktop infrastructure, putting in place the new software product set from *GlobalIT*. The other was the need to provide a set of tools which could support the Phoenix Change Programme. This included: greater flexibility, agility and mobility of departmental staff; improved collaborative working; and enabling implementation of standardised business process, including working within projects.

The programme, sponsored by the CIO (Gerry), who appointed a private sector Programme Director (*Sarah*), was broken down into projects:

- **Desktop Refresh** – refresh the existing desktop infrastructure and move to the new office systems toolset provided by GlobalIT.
- **Infrastructure** – implement the backend infrastructure and technology required to support the desktop environment and business requirements.

- **Collaboration**– information systems to support new ways of working (including a resource allocation system (ASF) to support the new HR processes defined by the Phoenix Change Programme).
- **Project and Programme Management** – implement tools to support the business to operate through projects and programmes, achieve clear status information, and deliver effective decision making.
- **HR and Finance** – working to facilitate any changes required to the HR/Finance system or the front end user interface to support the Phoenix business requirements.
- **Sustainability** – promote the sustainability benefits of the programme.

PhoenixIT was partly funded through the department’s IT budget and partly by the Phoenix Change Programme. The technology was delivered mainly by ABC in conjunction with the software product suppliers, GlobalIT. Some of the originally intended outcomes were not achieved. However, the desktop roll out was successfully completed on schedule and within budget, and well-received by users. The ASF system was in place on 1 April 2008 in time to support the introduction of new flexible resourcing processes central to the Phoenix Change Programme objectives.

### ***5.3.3 The Successful Delivery Initiative***

The Successful Delivery programme was launched personally by Gerry with the aim of developing an approach to the management of projects and programmes which went beyond the process-based descriptions of PPM – the government’s recommended ‘best practice’ on project and programme management. Gerry formed a small team (including the researcher) to build up a programme of interventions based on personal experience and a ‘lessons learned’ review of some of the department’s recent project failures. These interventions involved coaching, capability development, targeted recruitment, and facilitated workshops and events focused on what the team saw as the key characteristics of project success<sup>5</sup>:

- *Strong leadership*
- *clear ownership of, and commitment to, outcomes*

---

<sup>5</sup> (extract from internal presentation March 2007).

- *real clarity of purpose*
- *team motivation and performance*
- *clear and strongly-felt accountabilities*
- *pace, drive and a bias for action*
- *the ability to handle difficult issues openly and honestly*
- *acknowledging and managing different stakeholders interests*
- *passion and caring*

The leadership and performance management aspects of this programme, and the focus on project management, were very much part of the original scope of the Phoenix Change Programme once launched, and it became difficult to progress the initiative outside Phoenix. Discussions began in February 2007 about subsuming Successful Delivery within the Phoenix programme as a workstream; though in practice, that never got off the ground. However, Gerry continued to progress the ideas and pilot the proposed interventions in PhoenixIT, for which he was responsible, in the Integrated Portal project, and in a series of ongoing but ultimately fruitless discussions with the Phoenix Change programme right through until April 2008.

#### ***5.3.4 Integrated Portal***

The Integrated Portal was a web-based service which allowed the department's customer group to deal through a single point with the large number of different regulatory bodies within the department. Each regulatory body, usually with some executive autonomy, focused on its particular responsibility and would engage with customers with no reference to the activities of its sister bodies. From the customers' perspective, their dealings with the department seemed to involve much duplication and often contradiction. The Integrated Portal (IP) was the IT component of a broader programme aimed at service integration which had made little substantive progress in four years. The research involvement with this project was under the auspices of the Successful Delivery initiative, and involved working with the senior business sponsor, his programme team, and the business stakeholders to attempt to diagnose and resolve the issues behind lengthy and repeated delays. The intervention involved working with stakeholders to surface some previously unacknowledged discrepancies between professed and actual support for the project.

## 5.4 Research activity

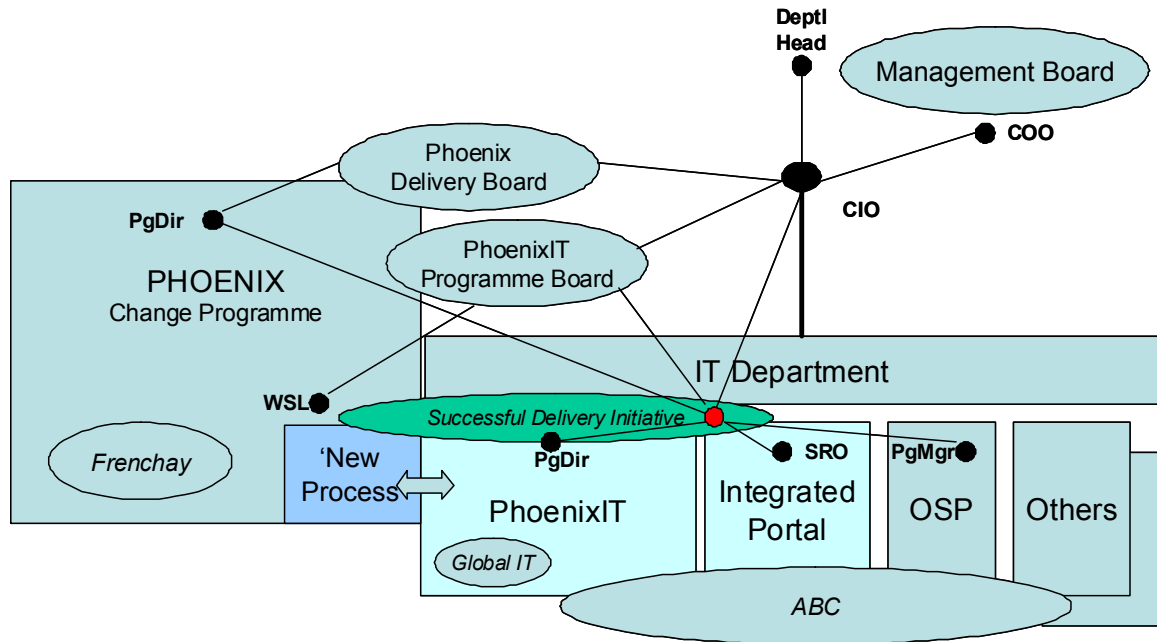
As described in Chapter 4, the research was carried out while working as a consultant on a number of tasks across the project landscape. The timing and nature of the involvement in each of the projects is itemised in detail in Appendix A. Broadly speaking, the researcher was working in an advisory role across the whole project landscape, picking up specific pieces of work as required and working in close contact with many project team members as well as those in key leadership roles, including Gerry, Kate and Sarah. In that capacity, the ethnographic research described in Chapter 4 was carried out, through the daily journal, logs, and through retention of the various documents, reports and emails encountered in the conduct of business activity.

Key tasks were:

- Membership of the Phoenix Change Programme management team for several months, providing strategic advice and managing the procurement process for the provision of external consultancy resource to undertake the change programme
- Carrying out two programme reviews (‘health checks’) of the Phoenix Change Programme, reporting to the Board
- Providing strategic advice to PhoenixIT programme, including governance design, coaching the Programme Director, and trouble-shooting on specific issues
- Leading the Successful Delivery project, including ‘lessons learned’ reviews of departmental projects, and developing and testing project interventions (including with the Integrated Portal project).

Figure 5.1 represents something of the complexity and inter-dependency of this project and organisational landscape, the connections between the different projects, and the ‘line of sight’ on the them and their key figures.

**Fig 5.1: The Organisational/Project Landscape**



## 5.5 Key players

There are a number of individuals who played important roles in the account that follows, and whose personality and style were significant factors in understanding how and why events unfold as they do. The Practitioner’s Tale includes detailed pen-portraits of these figures; the table below summarises the roles of the ‘dramatis personae’.

**Table 5.1: Key players**

<i>Players</i>	
Kate	Programme Director, Phoenix Change Programme (PCP)
Gerry	CIO, member of Phoenix Delivery Board
Sarah	Programme Director, PhoenixIT
Rachel	Head of Department, and Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for PCP



Eleanor	HR Director (at loggerheads with Kate throughout)
ABC	Department's IT supplier (several representatives/contacts)
GlobalIT	Software supplier (several representatives)
Frenchay	Consultants to PCP (some 20 strong)
Phoenix Delivery Board	Group of Director-level (one below Board level) business stakeholders for Phoenix, in effect the Programme Board for the PCP
Phoenix Executive Board	Group of key Board members, chaired by Rachel, the most senior governance group for PCP
Jeff	Programme Manager, PhoenixIT, working for Sarah
Alice	Executive coach, Successful Delivery team
Jonathan	Project Manager, OSP (the precursor to PhoenixIT)
Carolyn	Project management consultant, ex-GlobalIT, adviser to Sarah
Caroline	Senior civil servant, responsible for Collaboration project
Darren	Project Manager, ASF, Phoenix – the customer for one of the key applications on the new PhoenixIT platform
Henry	Frenchay Team Leader, Programme Manager for Phoenix Change Programme
Tony	Project manager, desktop rollout (part of the PhoenixIT programme)
Ann	Programme Office Manager, PCP
Susan	Leader of 'New Process' workstream in PCP, whose scope included PhoenixIT – Darren's manager
Fiona	Leader of the Performance Management workstream in PCP
David	Senior consultant, partner in both 'health checks'
Malcolm	Senior civil servant, partner in first 'health check'
Paul	SRO of Integrated Portal
Integrated Portal Prog Board	Senior business stakeholders for Integrated Portal, from different agencies
PhoenixIT Prog Board	Cross-departmental Board steering PhoenixIT, with reluctant membership from PCP

## 5.6 The Practitioners Tale – summary

### 5.6.1 Outline of events

The narrative was broken down into 84 different events, as described in Chapter 4. These are summarised below.

	<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
01	Research background	Sept 06	Gerry provides the opportunity to carry out research
02	Pressures from outside	- 2006	Pressures on budget from Treasury and damning Capability Review on performance
03	Key players		The characters in the narrative are introduced and their history, personality and motives described
<i>The story starts with Gerry's Successful Delivery initiative...</i>			
04	SD start up	Sept 06	Gerry brings the team together (including Sarah) and sets an open-ended agenda – morale is high
05	Lessons learned	Dec 06	We review some recent project failures and highlight the importance of leadership, politics, and the difficulties of challenge, and confronting long-running political issues
06	SD intervention programme	Jan 07	We develop a programme of behaviour-based interventions, including coaching, and look both for senior management support, and places to pilot the approach.
07	SD engagement with Phoenix	Feb 07	Gerry looks to interest Kate and the Phoenix Programme in the SD intervention programme – the first of several ultimately unsuccessful attempts
<i>The story shifts to the Phoenix Change Programme...</i>			
08	Phoenix rises	Dec 06	Rachel launches the Phoenix Change programme, and sets out her high-level vision. What does it

			really mean? Is this just downsizing?
09	Kate comes on board	Jan 07	Kate is appointed as Programme Director. Gerry asks me to help her in the set up, my focus for the next few months. I meet her and she is buzzing.
10	Bringing in Frenchay	Jan 07	Kate moves quickly to bring in consultants Frenchay she has worked with before, going straight to Rachel for approval, to the irritation of some.
11	Handling the existing team	Feb 07	Some in-house staff are in place, but have been lost without leadership, and don't have the skills. Kate tries for a while then sidelines them.
12	First team workshop	Jan 07	The growing Phoenix team get together, but all is very confused. Objectives very unclear. Frenchay are in the driving seat, and factions in the team are evident. Much plotting for position.
13	New governance	Feb 07	Kate puts in smaller senior decision-making bodies and those excluded object. She marshalls the support of the main directors and drives it through.
14	Opening communications	Mar 07	Kate launches slick video communications programme, with her personal roadshow talking directly with staff, and draws in ministers. Most senior management stunned.
15	Defining and scoping	Feb/Mar 07	Initial scope, some very high-level objectives presented to Board, and consultancy budget of £10m requested and agreed. The plan has no dates and scope is very vague and aspirational, but Kate is seen to have hit the ground running.
16	Initial Priorities	Mar 07	The emphasis is on getting a cost structure that fits Treasury demands, and work is focused on restructuring and staff numbers – now called 'rightsizing'. Scepticism grows. Frenchay become

			totally absorbed in high-level organisation design.
17	Conflict with HR	Mar07 and onwards	Kate wants to take control of personnel issues, not trusting the department's HR team to deliver on the changes. A turf war with Eleanor becomes personal, and is never resolved. Staff in both teams struggle to make progress.
18	The 98 initiatives	Mar 07	Phoenix team identifies 98 overlapping departmental initiatives and calls for rationalisation – the rhetoric of 'hard choices'. On closer inspection, most evaporate, though a few turf struggles continue.
19	Joining the Phoenix Management team	Mar 07	I take up a role (leading the consultancy framework procurement) on Kate's management team for Phoenix and get the opportunity to see it working at close quarters. An impressive team.
20	Consultancy procurement	Mar-May 07	The Frenchay team has been expanded considerably, and Kate is forced to agree to regularising the arrangement through a competitive procurement. Frenchay make sure they win it, much to Kate's relief. Intense effort goes into creating a risk/reward arrangement that is never used.
21	Preparing for Gateway 0	May 07	Kate commissions a 'health check' to make sure that the Gateway Review in July goes smoothly. I work with two colleagues, Malcolm and David, to interview stakeholders and review programme documentation. Malcolm, a senior civil servant, is convinced things are going badly and intends to speak his mind.
22	Kate feels the pressure	May 07	In a frank discussion, Kate is clearly stressed and shows how difficult she is finding it to get things

			done and to meet the commitments to the Treasury. The issue with Eleanor is a constant source of grief.
23	Review of plans	May 07	Our review of the programme documentation shows that there is little of substance behind some good presentation. The business case for Phoenix outside the downsizing is unclear.
24	Stakeholder perceptions	May 07	Senior business directors demonstrate their concerns in the Health Check interviews. There are accusations of spin, uncertainty about scope, and concerns about slow progress and capacity to deliver.
25	Kate responds	June 07	Kate is disappointed and puzzled by the negative views but quickly moves to present plans to ‘make Phoenix real for people’.
26	Resistance to Frenchay	June 07	Persistent grumbles about Frenchay’s style, and high-handedness come to a head. The Frenchay partner tries to go over Kate’s head to Rachel to raise concerns. The Frenchay team leader is summarily dismissed (but never quite goes...)
27	Tension between the Boards	May-June 07	The Phoenix Programme Board begins to work, but the department’s Executive Board members are not happy at the empowerment they are exercising.
28	Confused roles	June 07	Senior managers become vocal about the confusion in the Phoenix programme and governance arrangements about who is responsible for what. The Phoenix team are accused of restricting proper discussion.
29	Rachel reflects	June 07	Rachel, the head of the department and sponsor of Phoenix, is concerned at its lack of progress and

			apparent over-complication. She feels that she needs to give the programme more attention.
30	Airing the issues	June 07	The Health Check report seems to resolve some tensions but everyone takes from it what suits them. Malcolm holds his fire in the end.
31	OGC Gateway Review	July 07	The external Gateway 0 Review is very positive, about progress, leadership and management of risks. An agreed staff reduction number is reached. The internal criticism subsides.
<i>Flashback to 2006, and the story shifts to PhoenixIT and involvement from Jan 07...</i>			
32	PhoenixIT origins	2006	This was seen initially as a mainly technical infrastructure project (Office Systems Project) and run by technologists without much formal project structure or business visibility.
33	Gerry raises the game	Jan 07	Gerry decides to adopt the GlobalIT new release of software – the first government department to do so; broadens the scope to include business process change; and re-badges the project as PhoenixIT.
34	Demonstrator	Feb 07	Gerry pressures GlobalIT to produce a demonstrator under tight timescales to embody the new Phoenix business processes. This exposes the vagueness of the requirement. No-one knows quite what to do with it when finished.
35	Sarah appointed	Mar 07	Gerry brings in Sarah as Programme Director. She worries whether she is up to it, and welcomes coaching. PhoenixIT becomes a pilot for the Successful Delivery interventions.
36	Trying to apply SD programme	Apr 07	We struggle to hold a ‘Delivery Foundations’ start up event – ABC refuse to cooperate. Sarah doesn’t feel ready to include Phoenix stakeholders.
37	Sarah struggles	Apr 07	Sarah doesn’t think much of the state of the

	with team		programme so far. Jonathan, the previous PM, makes life difficult.
38	Case for Action workshop	Apr 07	Gerry sets out his vision for the programme in a workshop. But the key stakeholders have not been included, most notably Phoenix. The big risks are identified (and later come home to roost).
39	Team tensions revealed	Apr 07	ABC fail to step up, GlobalIT have a different agenda, and Jonathan continues to cause problems. The team is confused and Sarah gets emotional. Gerry confesses to weariness.
40	Jonathan's view of events	May 07	Jonathan feels like 'piggy in the middle', is very unhappy and has considered resigning. He doesn't understand his role and what Sarah is trying to do. Gerry shortly afterwards moves him off.
41	ABC's version	May 07	The ABC team leader blames the department for the way the project was set up, and highlights the difficulties of not having clear commercial agreements.
42	Roles and responsibilities workshop	May 07	Some of the tensions surface in the workshop which clears the air. Sarah asserts herself. Jonathan challenges the dates but doesn't get a satisfactory answer. Some feel it was a waste of time.
43	Making some progress	June 07	The first release of the basic product is achieved on time. ABC and GlobalIT manage to achieve a commercial agreement. Carolyn helps get some structures and process in place.
44	OSP grumbles	June 07	The technologists are passively obstructive, privately make clear their dissatisfaction with Gerry's approach, and see PhoenixIT as an irrelevance.
45	Bad start with	May/June	Dialogue with the Phoenix Change programme

	the Phoenix team	07	team begins about requirements but tensions arise. Phoenix Change feel PhoenixIT and its growing team are being foisted on them; PhoenixIT are critical of Phoenix Change team's ability to define requirements.
46	First PhoenixIT Prog Board	June 07	First Board held, some key issues raised but not discussed. Susan reluctantly attends as Phoenix 'Senior User' – though says outside the meeting that 'technology is being forced down our throat'.
47	Phoenix says analysis first	June 07	Phoenix team identifies the critical new business processes and starts lengthy process analysis. Gerry and Sarah are impatient for requirements to be defined.
48	Phoenix relationship deteriorates	June/July 07	Personal tensions continue to rise, particularly with Sarah and the Frenchay consultants. Phoenix raises formal risk on IT delivery. Sarah fears that she and Gerry may be 'shut out' by being too antagonistic, and looks to improve the relationship.
49	Recasting the business case	July 07	The business case for PhoenixIT is revised to downplay its contribution to Phoenix – the beginning of Gerry's U-turn, 'decoupling' from Phoenix.
50	Decoupling from Phoenix	July 07	'Early adopters' phase of roll out of PhoenixIT well received. Gerry uses next Programme Board to announce he is proceeding with rollout independently of Phoenix business requirements.
51	ABC raises commercial issues	July 07	ABC plead for resolution of commercial formalities which are causing them problems but Gerry brushes it aside.
52	Different views on EPM	July 07	Phoenix team disputes Gerry's decision to roll out some project management software, which he



			believes is essential and obvious.
53	Blow up	August 07	Kate and Gerry exchange harsh words. Sarah gets cold-shouldered by the Phoenix team, and is very stressed. She looks to bring in a programme manager to share the load.
54	Kate commissions review	August 07	David and I are asked to do another review, focusing on issues with both HR and IT, a clever move by Kate. We exchange interpretations of what's going on, and strategies for coming out in one piece.
55	Taking stock of Successful Delivery	August 07	We review the last couple of months and assess the value of the various coaching and team building interventions. There has clearly been a big problem on the stakeholder engagement side but Gerry and Sarah blame Phoenix for that.
<i>The story now shifts back to the Phoenix Change Programme...</i>			
56	Kate sets out her issues	Aug 07	Kate is under pressure to deliver some tangible outputs from Phoenix after lots of analysis and presentation of a 50 page vision. She is mostly troubled by the relationship with HR and Eleanor, and puzzled as to why Gerry is so angry.
57	Gerry presses for plans	Aug 07	Gerry is stung by accusations of being technology-driven and belabours Phoenix for their absence of plans. He makes clear to David and me what he expects the review to say. He feels Kate has acted against their friendship.
58	Pressure grows for action	Sept 07	Other senior managers are also impatient for real progress. The language shifts to 'simplicity' and 'build and learn' and soon everyone is saying the same sort of thing.
59	Rachel gets	Sept 07	It is evident that Rachel is responsible for the

	exasperated		change in language, and has become exasperated with lack of progress. She sees the problem lying with HR and weakness in key director roles.
60	Phoenix embraces implementation	Sept 07	The Phoenix team hold a series of workshops and get seriously into details of resourcing and timescales for the first time. The scope of the programme sharpens but becomes much narrower.
61	Reactions to the descoped programme	Sept 07	The programme team expected controversy on the descoped programme but everyone was relieved that they could see what was to be delivered. The original vision was far more ambitious though.
62	Eleanor has her say	Sept 07	The discussion of the HR issue was now easier as it was articulated in terms of resources and priorities rather than commitment. Eleanor feels bruised and unfairly treated (and leaves soon after)
63	Uneasy peace with PhoenixIT	Sept 07	Team members in both programmes feel that the relationship has improved. Delivery is on track and helped by recent work on implementation planning
64	Phoenix transition	Oct 07	The plans are presented at a senior management conference, and the general atmosphere is positive. A dramatic shift has taken place, though many of the same implementation challenges remain.
<i>Alice and I are asked to explore some SD interventions with the Integrated Portal...</i>			
65	Getting involved with IP	Sept 07	Gerry offers our help to the SRO (Paul) for a multi-agency project which has been struggling to make progress for several years. Paul sees the problem as one of governance and process.
66	Meeting the IP team	Oct 07	The team are demoralised, and see the problem as politics and behaviour. The new project manager thinks he can make some progress by playing the politics and ‘stitching’ an agreement.

67	Gathering stakeholder views	Nov 07	One to one meetings with stakeholders make evident their lack of real commitment, but they see an obligation to maintain involvement.
68	Negotiating feedback	Nov 07	Paul is not happy with the content of our report and does not want to ‘rock the boat’. We negotiate a compromise.
69	Feeding back to Prog Board	Nov 07	A summary of their own privately expressed views was presented back and received in uncomfortable silence. Paul moves on. At the end of the meeting the issues surface around funding.
70	Assessing the impact	Nov 07	We discuss whether this intervention made any difference, given readiness of all to accept the situation. Political moves secure funding in the end and the project moved on.
<i>For the final stage of the story, the focus shifts back to PhoenixIT ...</i>			
71	PhoenixIT moves centre stage	Oct 07	The ASF system was now central to the descoped Phoenix plan, and to be delivered on the PhoenixIT platform. Phoenix complain successful Release 1 delivery only delivers 50% - PhoenixIT say 99%.
72	Jeff comes on board	Oct 07	Sarah gets her programme manager, Jeff, who is charged with getting detailed plans in place. He seems to help the relationship issues but seems less keen on planning.
73	Tony tries to avoid the politics	Oct 07	Tony, a seasoned project manager, takes over the desktop rollout, the major strand of PhoenixIT. He sees lots of problems but has decided to keep his head down.
74	Sarah sets up Think Tank	Nov 07	Sarah is finding it difficult to manage Gerry and asks me to join a small group to discuss project issues to get a wider perspective and stop him

			‘shooting from the hip’. (this doesn’t work).
75	Blame and excuses	Nov 07	Phoenix and PhoenixIT continue to trade blame and excuses as the pressure builds up to delivery time. Sarah finds it very stressful. Gerry personally takes over ASF delivery.
76	Sarah has doubts about Jeff	Nov 07	Jeff speaks his mind, makes a couple of political gaffes, and wants to adopt a more flexible approach to project control than Sarah wants.
77	Continuing problems with ASF	Nov/Dec 07	An independent technical review commissioned by Kate reveals some technical problems, and absence of documentation. Sarah is mortified, but Jeff points to the progress made by improvising. Darren, the Phoenix PM, thinks its all broadly OK.
78	Problems with Collaboration	Jan 08	This project had been in existence for several months, but closer examination revealed little progress.
79	Crisis of 6 week gap	Dec 07	Phoenix team say they were expecting the 1 April functional release of ASF on 18 Feb to allow time for data input and training – PhoenixIT claimed that they had never been told this. Gerry steps in and tears a strip off the team.
80	Who is managing Collaboration?	Jan 08	Sarah wants to know who is responsible for delivering the Collaboration software element. Caroline, who thinks it’s Sarah, is very touchy and feels she has been set up.
81	Delivering 6 weeks early	Feb 08	Gerry drives through the 18 Feb delivery, but upsets lots of people on the way. He is furious with Kate for what he sees as an ungracious acknowledgment of the achievement. Sarah focuses on other parts of the programme.
82	Painful delivery	Mar 08	Darren says delivery continues broadly on track

			but is fraught and intense. He has some bruising encounters with Gerry, but enjoys his role. He is glad to be ‘making a difference’ but wonders whether any of the promised benefits will materialise.
83	The team winds down	Mar 08	The team gradually depart, including Jeff, many saying it has been a difficult project. Sarah says it was ‘horrible’ – and reflects that we did not manage to do any of the things we discussed in Sept 06 at the very start of the story.
84	Epilogue	Apr 08  May 08  June 2008	<p>The Cabinet Office congratulates Rachel on the Phoenix programme, and the impact it has made. The ASF system is in place in April 08, being used to match bids for resource in earnest.</p> <p>Phoenix produce a ‘transition plan’ itemising the benefits and success of the programme</p> <p>Kate moves on to a Board-level role in a venture capital company.</p> <p>Rachel features in the Honours List.</p> <p>Sarah continues heading up PhoenixIT, with an entirely new project management team selected by herself, with the next phase of development on schedule.</p> <p>Gerry fields calls from headhunters for a number of high-profile roles in government and the private sector.</p>

### 5.6.2 *Illustrative extracts*

The following sections present the complete text of some selected events from the full narrative (Events #12, #15, #56, #61, #69, #79), to give an indication of the style, content and coverage of the narrative. These events presented were chosen to be as broadly representative of the full narrative as possible within the practical limits of word count and readability. Events #12, #15, #56 and #61 were selected from four different stages of the Phoenix programme to describe key events in the unfolding project narrative; for completeness of coverage of the projects, event #79 provides a good illustration of the tensions in the PhoenixIT project; and event #69 gives a view of the key event in the Integrated Portal project. All were events with a high frequency of referencing against the coding themes, and were chosen to give the reader a good flavour of the narrative as a whole. The coding analysis, was, however, based on all 84 events, not just the six events illustrated, as can be seen in Appendix F.

#### 5.6.2.1 *Event 12: First team workshop (late Jan 2007)*

I attended the first team workshop in late January where Kate had brought together all those so far involved in the programme to discuss objectives, scope and roles and to start some team building. This was a confused and confusing session, with few of the people in the room knowing each other, or having a very clear idea about objectives, scope and roles. Some new Frenchay consultants were present, a communications manager had been assigned from elsewhere in the department, and the roles of Alice and myself were unclear (not least to ourselves). While everyone was very polite, factions were evident in the physical groupings, and there was little mixing. Kate seemed to me to be going through the motions, and her mind seemed to be elsewhere. The senior Frenchay consultants dominated the proceedings. They were polished and forceful, and obviously experienced in the field, but supported by numerous much more junior staff who said very little. Their language was aggressive, with much talk of ‘over-riding opposition’, the need for ‘ruthless prioritisation’, and ‘telling people the way it was’, and so on. I found myself stressing the need for much better clarity on the programme and its objectives, which did not spark much of a response, acquiring the support only of Mark, not a powerful ally. As a consequence, I was assigned the task by Kate of working with Mark to develop an agreed set of programme objectives.

The Frenchay consultants didn't seem to know quite what to make of me, and I was taken aside by one of the partners for a private chat about 'what I was about' and what my plans were. I was in effect told that, while it seemed I had a contribution to make given my experience, if I wanted to stay on the programme I needed to find a specific and accountable role... I was left in no doubt from this conversation how powerful Frenchay felt their position to be.

#### 5.6.2.2 *Event 15. Defining and scoping (early Feb 2007)*

[Kate's] first presentation to the Executive Board in early Feb 2007 stressed pace and progress, listing numerous achievements under the slide heading "*In the first 10 days we have achieved a great deal*". The programme was positioned as taking 14-18 months to complete, with immediate budget cover of £1m requested until the end of March, and a budget of £10m for the next 12 months. This estimate had been prepared by Frenchay on the assumption that they provided the resources to support the change programme, but included no other departmental costs (eg for IT and process changes). It very soon became the de facto budget for the whole programme, however, though exactly what that was, was unclear. The level of definition of what was to be delivered by the programme was very low at this stage. The programme vision was now articulated as:

*Through Phoenix , the department will become a more responsive and innovative department, better able to make a difference to the quality of lives of citizens, where outcomes are developed in true partnership and policy making is effective and consistent.*

*Phoenix will create an environment where staff are proud of their work and where it's easy to get things done*

*To achieve this Phoenix will ensure:*

- *Simple Customer Procedures*
- *Clear Strategic Intent*
- *Results Led Partnerships*
- *Flexible Working Procedures*
- *Efficient Organisation*

Even the key elements of implementing this vision were unclear, and though some work had been done to attempt to define ‘what success looks like’ the range of issues covered raised as many questions as it answered. Four broad workstreams to meet the aims were identified as: Delivering programme and benefits; Organising to deliver (which included the downsizing component of the programme); Building High performance organisation; and Enabling Process and Technology for the Future - each workstream further elaborated only by 6-10 brief bullet points. However, Kate and the programme team repeatedly stressed the level of detail, issuing a dense 44-slide pack referred to as the ‘plan’, identifying ‘98 projects’ - but including no dates and providing little definition of a very wide range of different activities.

The high-level programme definition thereafter went through a number of iterations, introducing an additional workstream called “Seeing ourselves as customers see us” (though this was later quietly dropped) and re-naming the downsizing activities of the programme as “Delivering the Right Size, Right Shape, Right Style Organisation” (soon abbreviated to ‘RS3’). All this was presented to a workshop of some 60 senior managers as the vision and plans for the programme in late February. Kate then sent out an email to all attendees confirming endorsement of the approach, scope and plan

#### *5.6.2.3 Event 56. Kate sets out her issues (late August 2007)*

Kate briefed David and I about the background to the review and its timing in a telephone conference on 30/8/07. Agreements were being reached about the organisational design and the new business processes, and she was now under pressure from the Delivery Board (not least from a very vocal Gerry) and also from Rachel to move to implementation, and so had instigated a burst of implementation planning. This had at last headlined some big issues in both IT and HR (which in truth had been evident for some time). Kate had set out some terms of reference in fairly anodyne terms but it quickly became clear that she had two big problems she wanted the review to help in tackling: PhoenixIT, with Sarah; and HR, with Eleanor .

As she said: “*One or two people can make everything very difficult*”. On PhoenixIT, she spoke of the frustrations of her team, some of whom felt: “*we’re being made to use more*



*technology than we need to*". Kate felt Sarah was behaving inappropriately, was not doing enough stakeholder engagement, and her behaviours were *"not helpful"* – including apparently walking out of one of the implementation planning meetings. She had wondered after her recent meeting with Sarah whether she was really *"up to it"*, and was sceptical of the need for a programme manager: *"I don't want to be difficult but why should I pay for another programme manager?"* She couldn't understand why Sarah kept insisting there weren't any requirements – Kate thought that much of this was standard delivery anyway.

Uncharacteristically for Kate, who as always was very controlled for most of the conversation, she said with real feeling that she was: *"really pissed off with all this – I believe we're doing all the right things"*. She was though, rather oddly for someone who took little interest in technical matters, concerned about the technical issue of rationalising the multiplicity of legacy applications sitting on the current desktop infrastructure, and how that was going to be managed in the new GlobalIT rollout. This concern had already infuriated Gerry and Sarah, who believed they had this well in hand, and saw it as nothing to do with Phoenix, and simply as interference. They were sure that this was prompted by Kate's partner, Ralph, a technical IT project manager and old friend of Gerry's who had already bent Gerry's ear about how ill-advised the whole PhoenixIT scheme was.

But Kate was also genuinely puzzled as to why Gerry was so emotional about it all: *"why does he think he's going to get shafted?"* David said that Gerry had been growing increasingly tense on a number of issues over the last couple of months, and David explained this as Gerry feeling that he was letting others and himself down by failing to meet his commitments – a new experience for him - in a number of areas. Apparently they had patched up their differences though, and had scheduled a *"big pow-wow"* for later that same day – Kate was hoping it wasn't all going to blow up again. (David attended that meeting, and told me that: *"it was all very polite on the surface, but there were real tensions evident, and nothing was really resolved"*.)

But Kate seemed to have even bigger problems with Eleanor, who was central to the success of Phoenix. As HR Director, she was now responsible both for (a) implementing the headcount reductions (where she was refusing, according to Kate, to allow Phoenix to

monitor progress), and (b) for implementing the substantive performance management and flexible resourcing HR changes that were central to the new design. While the new workstream leader for the ‘Our Performance’ workstream was engaging well with the HR department “*under the radar*”, Kate and Eleanor no longer met, and Kate was reduced to maintaining a log of their communications. She said that Eleanor was not behaving corporately, and (like some other members of the senior management team, she said) was not “*living the Phoenix behaviours*”. Kate wanted the review to look at the risks to successful implementation, and as part of that to bring out the importance of the senior leadership behaviours.

#### 5.6.2.4 *Event 61. Reaction to descoped programme (Sept/Oct 2007)*

Despite concerns from Ann that: “*the core of the programme is going to be a lot smaller than everyone thinks*” there was little controversy around the de-scoped plan. There was a widespread view that the programme needed to concentrate on delivering only enough to demonstrate ‘enough’ progress by March 2008 to maintain credibility with staff. Even so, this was an ambitious plan, hastily produced, and not fully thought through yet. As we commented in our final report: “*the priorities ... seem right but the plan is still at a high level – need more specifics to be sure that ‘enough’ will be delivered for March 08 and whether it can really be done*”. However, there had been a major shift in the programme to crystallise what it would be the focus for delivery. In doing so, the programme was now referring to critical ‘dependencies’ which they said they couldn’t be responsible for – these were mainly actions that were having to take place ‘in the business’, most notably HR. The senior business stakeholders were keen in principle that the focus of effort should move from the programme to the business, and some were keen to point out how much of the Phoenix objectives had already been delivered outside the programme. The Phoenix programme team, and particularly the senior Frenchay consultants, saw this transition as a major risk to delivery, and were not confident of success. As Fiona said: “*the projects will deliver, but not the outcomes.*” The programme could see that they couldn’t be successful without letting go, as they were unable to control all the dependencies; but were unconvinced that anything would happen if they ceded control. Kate though could see the writing on the wall, and began to present the programme team as custodians of the organisational design, with implementation

being the responsibility of the business, with the programme acting as a ‘design authority’. At this time she started to talk to David about her next role, and began to position Fiona rather conspicuously as her ‘Number 2’.

Lack of confidence in HR was at the heart of these concerns about implementation. Fiona had worked very hard trying to engage HR at the working level, with some success but observed that: *“HR are not committed to this programme – Phoenix is not central to their thinking”*. More generally though, the focus on implementation and de-scoping did seem to allow some defusing of the Eleanor and HR issue, allowing this to be discussed in terms of resources and priorities, rather than incompetence, bad attitude and obstruction.

In our health check report, David and I welcomed the focus on implementation, the transition of responsibility from the programme to the business, the re-scoping, and better-defined planning, but were aware also that what was being delivered was some way from the original intentions. It was difficult to see how it would address some of the performance and behaviour issues at the heart of Phoenix, and indeed the focus of the original criticisms in the Capability Review. One of our recommendations was: *“Don’t lose sight of the long-term intended Phoenix objectives – deliverables should clearly be part of ‘the Phoenix journey’ – and address the issues raised in the Capability Review”*. Frenchay’s senior partner sent a long note to Rachel emphasising the importance of the wider behavioural issues, her role in ‘becoming an icon’ and demonstrating the new behaviours. He talked of the need to break *“the tribal behaviours of Corporate Services”* (this was basically HR, IT and Finance): *“although still a minority sport, some senior leaders continue to run their own agendas, undermining Phoenix through misinformation, describing Phoenix as ‘Rachel’s agenda’, cherry picking processes, commissioning duplicative work and adding unnecessary complexity ... At present, poor behaviour goes unchallenged because the challenge will worsen working relationships”*.

However, there was a widespread feeling that now (and, for some, at last) the programme was heading in the right direction. Mixing with the department’s senior managers at the conference to present the new organisation design and the implementation plans I could tell

there was a positive response. As one member of the discussion group I joined said: “we’ve got more clarity – some substance for the first time instead of all the bullshit and pzazz of the last few conferences”.

#### 5.6.2.5 *Event 79. The crisis of the 6 week gap (Dec 2007)*

While the PhoenixIT team were aiming for a delivery date of 1 April for the final operational release, they had not made allowance for the fact that a period of 6 weeks was required in which users would enter their personal profiles on the system – the operational release was therefore required on 18 February to allow time for data entry so that the system could be launched on the promised date. Gerry was clear that this was a failure by Phoenix to be specific about their requirements; Darren felt that this basic misunderstanding was very much down to PhoenixIT. Whatever the reasons, it was a major shock. The situation prompted a further review commissioned by Kate of the technical delivery plans, including an independent review of testing. While the review was not catastrophic, it didn’t place PhoenixIT in a good light. Actions had not all been taken on recommendations from the previous review and key testing documentation was absent. Sarah went over Jeff’s head and had discussions with project team members individually, and was horrified by what she found about the state of the plans and documentation.

My meetings about Sharepoint governance were rather taken over by discussion of the issue of the moment. Gerry saw this as a problem that was down to Jeff and the project managers: “*they don’t know how to plan*”, and was concerned that Sarah was seeing this as her fault. He had said to her that: “*you’re accountable, but it’s not your fault*”. He had called a meeting for the entire team, most of whom were external contractors or private sector staff from ABC and other suppliers, and tore into them as failing him and not delivering to their commitments.

Jeff felt that the situation had got blown out of all proportion, and blamed Sarah for provoking the air of crisis. “*She has only one reaction to a problem, and that’s to take over. She’s found some gaps in plans and documentation and then behaves as if everything has gone pear-shaped*”. (He revealed that he had approached Gerry shortly prior to all this to say that he was finding it increasingly difficult to work with Sarah, and suggesting he should move on. Gerry

had said he was aware that Sarah was stressed and behaving like this because he (Gerry) was putting her under such pressure). Jeff felt Gerry's reaction had not helped the situation, and said that the reaction from the people he had spoken to was very negative – “*harsh*”, “*out of order*”, “*unfair*” - and was having a very bad effect on morale. Jeff was himself feeling responsible, though didn't seem to be aware that Gerry was blaming him for the situation. “*I don't know whether I've blotted my copybook with Gerry*”. He explained that: “*Sarah and I are doing a recovery plan – despite all our efforts, we haven't put in place what should be there.*” He saw the current difficulties as being rooted in the timescale pressures from the problems with ABC resourcing, and the deflection of the Centre of Excellence resources on to the onboarding problem from build and development. The project team had taken what he called a ‘can-do approach’, going out independently to another supplier despite ABC objections, and doing some of the testing in the project team. To keep to timescales they had ‘winged it’ and were paying the price in incomplete documentation. However, as he said, there were 800 users using the ASF system at the moment, and all seemed to be OK. Darren, offering a perspective from Phoenix remarked that, from his experience, this situation was not actually as bad as everyone seemed to think: “*these are not major problems given this stage of implementation – the problem is lack of trust and confidence*”.

My discussion with Jeff was terminated by the arrival of an angry-looking Sarah for a meeting with me, and Jeff made a hasty exit. Sarah said she was very angry with Jeff and had lost confidence in him. She had looked to him to put in the basic processes and he had not done this. She was particularly upset that “*people outside are now criticising the programme*”. She said that it was now time to “*get nasty*” – she felt she had tried very hard to be ‘nice’ and inclusive, but felt that Jeff had treated her with little respect.

I saw Gerry and Sarah a week or so later, and it was clear that Sarah was still feeling the pressure. Gerry explained to me that he was “*now going to get more involved personally, as Sarah has just got too much on*”. He now seemed to take direct hands-on responsibility for managing the delivery of ASF to the fore-shortened date of 18 February.

#### 5.6.2.6 *Event 69. Feeding back to the IP Programme Board (Nov 2007)*

At the programme board a couple of days later, most of the people we had interviewed were present. I gave my presentation, after a brief and rather vague introduction from Paul, feeding back (anonymously, of course) the comments those around the table had made about the project. I had invited comments as we went through, but no-one made eye contact and no-one said anything. I sat down to complete silence, which Paul broke after a while by thanking me, and suggesting that the meeting keep these issues in the back of their minds as matters were dealt with.

The meeting proceeded in a similarly uncomfortable vein, with Paul having to work hard to keep the discussion going. Alice had been charged with observing the process of the meeting and described it later to me as “*very unengaged*”. The road map, which had already been discussed on a bilateral basis, was agreed without much discussion. Feeling rather bruised, I risked asking the extent to which members felt committed to these plans. The main agency representatives were keen to emphasise the limitations to their commitment. One said “*they represent a commitment to talk about it*”; another that the road map was “*potential rather than agreed*”. Another said that “*the key point is who is going to pay*”. Paul chose not to pick up and pursue these comments, using the classic civil service chairing technique of seeking agreement ‘subject to some concerns’. The meeting proceeded in this vein: as my notes say “*Atmosphere of reluctance and very little enthusiasm evident*”.

Towards the end of the meeting, a paper was discussed about the likely resourcing requirements to meet the roadmap, with costs clearly identified. These were agreed as accurate. With five minutes to go, I ventured again to ask whether it was clear where the funds would come from and it became evident for the first time that the agencies clear expectation was that extra funds would be found from the centre to cover their contribution. Paul expressed surprise at this, saying “*we’re looking for individual organisations to contribute – its right that we make our respective contributions*”. At this point, all the agency representatives said that they weren’t able to commit this level of funding and that they would have to take back proposals to their Chief Executives. Paul then asked the board members to act as advocates for the project, and to ensure that they “*brief their Chief Executives*

*positively*” before a senior meeting scheduled for a few weeks hence. The response I felt was rather reluctant, with lots of caveats expressed, and no sense of real ownership of IP outside the core project team.

I felt frustrated that we had not really addressed the issue that was evident at the meeting. But talking to Paul and Peter after the meeting, I was surprised to hear that Paul thought that the meeting had gone better than expected: *“this was a much better meeting than usual”*. He felt that this had been the best one could expect and that now the next key step was to put proposals to the planned Chief Executive’s meeting. There was still a major shortfall of some £10million in funding that they needed to secure from the agency budgets.

Both thought that the initial feedback presentation had had some effect in setting the atmosphere, and encouraging clearer discussion, though I was unsure myself. Alice later gained a similar view in her one-to-one coaching session with Paul: *“but he is so polite”*.

### **5.6.3 Summary**

This section has attempted to put over some of the main features of the organisational landscape as the 4 projects observed unfolded over a period of 18 months. It has at the same time sought to summarise the characteristics of the ‘Practitioners Tale’, itself a synthesis and encapsulation of the myriad daily complications of daily project life as experienced by a (observant) practitioner – without presenting an unmanageable and unwieldy mass of text.

The following section presents the analysis of the events, combining a relatively objective analysis of the conduct of the projects from observing their compliance with ‘best practice’ approaches with the more subjective interpretation captured in the ‘Practitioners Tale’.

## 6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 6.1 Introduction

As Chapter 4 describes, the approach to the analysis of the research data is two-fold:

1. *Objective observation of project features* – this relies heavily upon project documentation, and participant observation of management meetings and day-to-day project conduct, and is structured around a comparison with ‘best practice’ expectations. It is relatively objective, or at least intersubjective, in the sense that another observer could in principle, and is likely to, have made the same determinations.
2. *Subjective interpretation of project experience* - analysis of the ‘Practitioners Tale’, a subjective, first-person practitioner’s own narrative, provides a phenomenological perspective on active participation and experience of the unfolding events. This is a mixture of relatively objective events and subjective interpretation of those events, and the interpretations of others. It is unique, though seen as having potentially common features experienced by others in the projects, and able to reveal, from its deep involvement with practice, something of underlying processes and structures.

These analyses are presented in Section 6.2 and Section 6.3 below. Both analyses draw on each other to some degree, and as one would expect, there is a degree of overlap between the findings from a relatively objective survey of project documentation and the subjective interpretation of those events as they evolved over time, encapsulated in the ‘Practitioners Tale’. Each of them draws on the huge volume of retained documentation and emails, and the field notes from several hundred meetings and informal conversations. The objective ‘features’ and the subjective ‘themes’ are then consolidated into 13 summary ‘key aspects’ as described in Section 6.4.



## 6.2 Objective Observation of Project Features

### 6.2.1 Introduction

This analysis is primarily based on the available project documentation for the two substantive projects: Phoenix Change Programme and PhoenixIT. This documentation included programme plans, progress reports, issue and risk registers, key definition documents such as Project Initiation Documents and Business Cases, and papers and presentations discussed at Programme Board meetings. Appendix D describes in more detail the key documentation on which this analysis is based.

Some care is required in interpreting the content of these documents, as it is clear from the daily involvement in the projects that such documents were usually prepared with an acute awareness of their impact on their audience, and were typically carefully ‘stage managed’ to ensure that the preferred view of the authors could as far as possible be presented. As we see from the ‘Practitioners Tale’, Kate commissioned a piece of work solely to ensure that the documentation was in place before the external OGC Gateway Review (#21); Gerry reviewed and amended Sarah’s Programme Board report to ensure it didn’t challenge ‘the politics’ (#76); and Jeff got into trouble for revealing the likely budget over-run to Finance (#76). Similarly, when it comes to description of project management process, there was a considerable disparity between what is documented and what is followed in practice; despite the fact that the majority of people working on these projects were experienced project professionals well versed in project management methodology, and the department itself was committed to adoption of standard methodologies (O’Leary & Williams, 2008). The analysis of the documentation, and the observations set out below, are therefore influenced by the journal notes which provide some additional detail and context.

There were very large numbers of documents produced on both projects during the research period, particularly the Phoenix Change Programme. These were not prepared within a specific programme or project management methodology, and were generally in an ad hoc format, most usually in high-level PowerPoint presentations, and were typically used for making a case or promoting discussion rather than for formal control. The apparent quality of

such documentation was usually high – as the external OGC Gateway Reviewer remarked: “*We saw a great deal of well presented documentation for the programme*” (P08). However, detailed examination (which these documents typically did not receive) tended to reveal lack of real substance (eg the Business Cases for both Phoenix Change Programme (P18) and PhoenixIT (I05)).

Documentation was voluminous, but in a constant state of flux. The early version of the Phoenix Change Programme plan (P04) went to at least 16 versions; the PhoenixIT Business Case went through at least 10 revisions (I05). In most cases, documents were not version-controlled, and would be current for a while around a particular issue, then disappear from trace. In practice, only current documentation was referred to outside the circumstances of a formal review. From attendance at senior management meetings, it was evident that few attendees had had the opportunity to read substantial documentation in any depth, and there was a constant pressure from management boards for more summary inputs, and for presentations to be kept short to leave time for discussion (#30).

### **6.2.2 *Structure for the analysis***

The presentation of this section is structured around a number of headings derived from the main characteristics of the ‘best practice’ project management model. This is a high-level synthesis from a range of sources, including ‘best practice’ guidance (see Office of Government Commerce, 2005b); a popular project management handbook (Newton, 2006); and the analysis discussed in Section 2.2.4 by Koskela & Howell (2002b). The categories are:

- Goals and objectives
- Plans
- Scope of work
- Execution
- Monitoring and reporting
- Change control
- Issue and risk management
- Lifecycle stages

Under each heading (defined in Table 6.1), observations were made about the extent to which actual practice on the projects were aligned with the expectations of ‘best practice’. This framework provided a useful focus, aligned with the research aims, for reporting the wide-ranging objective reality of project activity in practice, by seeking evidence of the presence of the expected features. *“One looks to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to what one might have expected on the basis of common-sense knowledge, official accounts, or previous theory; and whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions...”* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.163).

Table 6.1 below summarises the 19 objective project ‘features’ drawn out from this analysis, against the mainstream ‘best practice’ model headings, and each heading is described more fully below. Observations are supported by reference to the inventory of key documents in Appendix D (referenced as P\*, I\*); and field notes (referencing the relevant narrative event (eg #30)).

**Table 6.1: Objective Project Features**

	<b>‘Best practice’ model</b>	<b>Key Features</b>	<b>Key Sources (see Appendix D)</b>
<b>Goals and objectives</b>	Defined in detail in advance Constant throughout project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple, shifting goals</li> <li>• Constantly under negotiation</li> <li>• Re-scoped in response to what turns out to be achievable</li> </ul>	P01, P02, P04, P09, P10, P12, P14, P16, P20, P25 I01, I02, I03, I04, I05, I17 Mgt meetings and health check interviews
<b>Plans</b>	Detailed activities through to project completion prepared before execution starts End dates and resources required based on detailed analysis of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited detail and horizon</li> <li>• Done in bursts at key points</li> <li>• Key dates and available resources set ‘top-down’</li> </ul>	P04, P05, P06, P07, P09, P10, P11, P12, P14 I02, I04, I05, I06, I08  Mgt meetings and health check interviews

	required		
<b>Scope of work</b>	Follows logically from goals and objectives and managed under change control	Constantly under negotiation for ‘first half’ at least	P02, P04, P09, P10, P14, P17, P23 I03, I05, I06
<b>Execution</b>	Work defined in advance and agreed deliverables commissioned Requirements defined by customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loose specifications</li> <li>• Nugatory work</li> <li>• Work begun without plans</li> <li>• Most of the work is ‘talk’</li> </ul>	P03, P04, P09, P10, P14, P17, P24 I04, I05, I17 Mgt meetings Procurement assignment
<b>Monitoring and reporting</b>	Objective assessment of divergence of actual from planned Cost-timescale-quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few objective measures</li> <li>• A subjective and contested assessment based on confidence of outcome</li> </ul>	P08, P12, P14, P20, P21, P22, P23, P24 I06, I13, I14, I15
<b>Change control</b>	Plans and designs documented and managed under change control Corrective measures identified to return to plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need for action, and the appropriate action, are contested and negotiated</li> <li>• Control processes designed but cannot keep up with constant change</li> </ul>	P12, P14, P18, P21, P23 I03, I04, I06, I12, I15, I16 Mgt meetings
<b>Issue and risk management</b>	Flagged up and remedial actions agreed to resolve Risk register identifies risks to be monitored and contingency plans developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some fundamental issues undiscussable and remain unresolved</li> <li>• Situations become ‘issues’ (and can ‘resolve’) through a shift in the focus of management attention</li> </ul>	Private conversations Mgt meetings and health check interviews P12, P14, P18, P21 I01, I06, I13, I15
<b>Lifecycle stages</b>	Projects move through clear sequential steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous evolution with no clear end stages</li> <li>• Repeated iteration through initiation-design-implementation</li> </ul>	P03, P04, P09, P10, P11, P12, P14, P21, P22, P23, P24 I02, I06, I08, I10

### 6.2.3 Goals, objectives and scope

Tracking the retained documentation through the trajectory of both projects, it is clear that there were in fact considerable changes in definition of the goals, objectives and scope of each

project – without this being seen at any time as a major organisational decision as might be expected within the conventional models of project control. Some of these changes were major, some were more about elaboration and interpretation. For example, the ‘customer’ workstream within Phoenix was introduced because it was seen as an essential response to the department’s adverse Capability Review (#15, P09). Several months later, it was no longer part of the programme, as initial scoping work revealed the scale of the challenge involved (P24, P11). Other elements of work already underway before Phoenix were incorporated into the programme in order that the Phoenix vision could be seen to be addressed, though without any substantive change to that work itself. Some elements (eg the workstreams on ‘high performance culture’ (P10)) were presented as an essential aspect of the original Phoenix transformational vision, but in practice received far less attention and resourcing than the critical downsizing work and the subsequent focus on the (more easily achievable) introduction of flexible resource pools, and were gradually reduced to little more than re-badging of existing initiatives (P11, P25). PhoenixIT similarly shifted its focus from providing the support for the Phoenix transformational changes to that of providing a new IT infrastructure (I02, I04, I05, #50); it also introduced a ‘green’ component to the project purpose by emphasizing the ‘sustainability’ aspects of the new implementation (I02, I04).

Within these broad parameters, there was also constant elaboration and development of what exactly was meant by particular goals and objectives, sometimes retrospectively.

#### **6.2.4 Plans**

Similarly, the plans produced by both programmes were in a constant state of flux, partly reflecting the need to accommodate changes of scope and objectives discussed above. Both programmes were under pressure to produce plans (as two of the business directors said in the first Phoenix Change Programme ‘health check’ (#21): “*communication is well ahead of plans and activity – and spin is ahead of communication*”; and “*the programme is desperately in need of a plan*”) and took it for granted that they should do so. However, despite repeated efforts, they struggled to do this in the case of Phoenix Change Programme for about 9 months; and in the case of PhoenixIT some 6 months. Even then, the plans produced were high-level and constantly under revision. The first Phoenix so-called ‘plan’

produced in April 2007 was in fact a draft statement of scope rather than a plan, and included no dates for milestones (P04).

One striking characteristic of both projects is that key delivery dates were established ‘top down’, without much reference to exactly what was to be delivered or how. For Phoenix, 1 April 2008 became the key delivery date because (as interviews in the two ‘health checks’ showed – (#21, #59) Rachel and other senior directors were anxious to demonstrate to staff that this change programme was, unlike previous initiatives, actually going to change things, and the new financial year was the earliest opportunity to introduce new financial and HR processes. As interviews in the second ‘health check’ revealed, there was a general view that ‘enough’ had to be delivered by 1 April to demonstrate real change (#58, #59). In the case of PhoenixIT, Gerry imposed arbitrary delivery deadlines largely to build pace and commitment (#42); and in the event, had to move the final ASF delivery date 6 weeks forward in the light of the eventual realisation of what the 1 April delivery actually needed to be (#79).

Plans were produced for particular components of work when objectives and scope were clear and relatively stable - in the case of Phoenix Change, the two month activity to drive out agreed staffing numbers for submission to the Treasury (P14), and in the case of PhoenixIT for the desktop rollout component of the programme (I15) appropriate plans to guide implementation were in fact produced. However, these were ‘one-off’, and of restricted scope and limited time horizon.

### **6.2.5 Execution**

It follows from the above that the conventional view of project execution being driven from the pre-defined plan did not apply in these cases, and this was in fact what was observed. Rather than being drivers of activity, plans tended rather more to reflect the activity that was already under way because it was considered necessary, or to highlight, and make a case for, a broad area of work that was still to be tackled (P14, P09). Work was typically commissioned in broad terms, usually with a relatively near-horizon delivery (weeks rather than months) and more often in response to a perceived risk or issue than as a natural consequence of the plan, which as we have seen, was in a continuous process of development. This can be illustrated

by the fact that most of the work on the Phoenix Change Programme in the initial 6 months was carried out by Frenchay consultants against pre-specified work packages (#20). Despite pressure from Procurement to tighten the specification of these work packages, it proved impossible to do so beyond a 4 week horizon except in the most general terms (P17). At the end of that period, the expectation of what was necessary or reasonable to achieve had often changed (P12). The work done was usually of a high standard (P08), so this characteristic is more likely to be a function of the work environment and the characteristics of the work involved rather than a failure of competence.

In conventional project management terms, project execution is seen as the production of pre-specified deliverables. The great majority of the deliverables in the Phoenix Change Programme were designs, processes, communications, plans and so on, intended to change ways of working (P19, P50). This was particularly the case in the early ‘design’ stage of the programme, but remained true into the implementation phase. Even in PhoenixIT, the amount of effort devoted to the actual production of software was a very small proportion of the total effort, even in the later stages of implementation. Most work involved meetings and emails, in successive iterations of communication: talking to other people, developing and communicating designs and proposals, and securing agreement for the next round of conversations (P12, I15).

### ***6.2.6 Monitoring and reporting***

Monitoring and reporting were important processes in both programmes, even when there were not detailed plans and milestones to report against. Both programmes established governance bodies (P14, P15, I09), and the main function of reporting was to manage the expectations and concerns of stakeholders, and to seek support for actions to address issues which the programme team were concerned about. In both cases, the absence of formal milestones meant that what was generally reported was a subjective sense of ‘how things were going’, and was on occasion a source of contested interpretation (P21, P14). For example, in May 2007, the Phoenix Delivery Board objected to receiving bullish reports where everything was at ‘green’, after which most of the reports moved to ‘amber/red’ or ‘red’.

### 6.2.7 *Issue and risk management*

Both programmes used issues and risks as a formal management tool (P14, P18, I13), and in practice these were far more the driver of work and progress than reference to the agreed plan (#19, I15). Both programmes operated an issues and risks register, as ‘best practice’ would suggest: though this was a far more active tool in PhoenixIT, where it was used on an ongoing basis to structure activity management across the project team, than in the Phoenix Change Programme, where it was included in key external documents (notably the Business Case) but only occasionally reviewed. However, the Phoenix Change Programme Highlight Reports (P21) regularly itemised currently perceived risks and issues against each of the programme areas, and these were a source of discussion at Delivery Board meetings (P15). Perceived risks and issues were therefore in both projects the preferred approach to directing action.

The formal list of risks, though, did not always seem to reflect the management priorities and concerns. The OGC Gateway Review asked senior business stakeholders for their ‘top 3’ worries and concerns about the Phoenix Change Programme, and observed that these were rarely already present on the programme risk register (P08). At the first PhoenixIT Programme Board, Gerry carried out the same exercise around the table, with similar results (I06, #46). The process of maintenance of the formal risk and issue logs clearly had difficulty keeping up with the ongoing flow of the issues demanding attention in the project. Both programmes therefore presented views on risks and issues, and sought to manage them, in a flexible and largely ad hoc way, rather than relying on a formal process – though some ‘pretence’ of a formal process was maintained (for example, the PhoenixIT Quality Management Strategy, the Phoenix Business Case), especially where external review was likely.

In addition, the most potent and troublesome issues not only did not appear in the project documentation (P14, P21, I06, I07) they were at best only alluded to (P12), and certainly not openly discussed. The running feud between Phoenix and HR (#17, #22, #56, #62), which became a highly personal stand-off between Kate and Eleanor, is only obliquely referred to in reports in a coded fashion (P12, P14). The Phoenix Change Programme team’s concerns that PhoenixIT was being pushed on them against their will were never reported, and hardly surfaced beyond private corridor conversations. These two issues caused considerable



difficulties for both projects but were never explicitly raised for management consideration and resolution.

### **6.2.8 Change control**

As will be evident from the above, control of the programmes was not exercised through formal process, and management of exceptions against an agreed plan. Plans were never sufficiently stable to operate that model, and, while occasional efforts were made to introduce standard process, the value-added was not accepted, and compliance was low. While the language of baselining and change control was used in both projects, no such processes were observed in practice. According to the progress reports (P12), the Phoenix Delivery Board baselined the programme plan on 24 May 2007; however, it is clear from the documentation that this was substantially changed over the subsequent weeks without any reference to a change control process. PhoenixIT defined their change control process in the Quality Management Strategy (I16), but its use was never observed.

There were frequent calls from outside the Phoenix Change Programme for greater demonstration of control (most particularly for more detailed plans) though, despite the evident absence of formal control processes, even the OGC Review team (normally adherents to the OGC advice on project management methods) were far from suggesting that the programme was out of control: *“A well-designed governance structure, an appropriately scoped outline business case and coherent headline plans support a clear vision, strongly led from the top”*.

In the PhoenixIT programme, again the concern was with the existence of plans, rather than control – though the programme was on occasion embarrassed by being caught out without proper documentation, having (as Jeff says *“winged it”* (#77)) to meet the delivery deadlines.

The one aspect of formal control process which was evident was financial control, which was subject to audited departmental approval processes. However, even here, these processes were often subverted successfully, so long as the overall budget allocation was not exceeded (eg Kate’s initial acquisition of consultants (#10), and Gerry’s handling of projected cost over-run (#76)).

### **6.2.9 Lifecycle stages**

The projects observed did not fit a model of clearly defined stages, with well-defined entry and exit criteria. Broad phases of predominantly initiation-design-implementation could be discerned, but these had unclear boundaries and tended to merge into each other, with several cycles iterating at successive levels of detail. In the case of Phoenix Change it was evident by October 2007 that activities were more oriented to implementation than design (P24), though that transition could be seen as beginning to take place since August (#56, #57); furthermore, considerable detailed design work was still required in some areas, and initiated in November in a series of process design workshops (P12). The PhoenixIT programme contained within it a number of activities at different stages of development, so it was difficult to talk of a particular stage for the programme as a whole (I08). While the relatively straightforward desktop rollout proceeded in a broadly sequential process, the more complex elements of ‘collaboration’ and ‘flexible staff resourcing’ (both involving business change rather than just technology provision) went through several iterations. In both cases, requirements activity took place throughout the period from April to November (I11, I15, I17), towards the end of which implementation was well under way; and some cycles through to design and implementation proved nugatory and were started again from scratch.

### **6.2.10 Effectiveness of project management**

It is evident that actual practice on the observed projects departed considerably from the prescriptions and assumptions of ‘best practice’, or at least the structured planning and control processes of project management methodology. To that extent it is worth considering whether these projects were simply badly managed, and whether what was observed was just a consequence of this failure in management.

This is a difficult judgement to make conclusively, unless one assumes that compliance with ‘best practice’ guidance whatever the circumstances represents the only benchmark of effective project management. Another measure of the effectiveness of the project management could be whether the projects delivered what was required. Considering first the success of the projects in terms of what was achieved, we immediately encounter the difficulties discussed in Section 2.2.2.1 about assessing project success, who judges it, and against what - particularly where there is such a degree of social construction in the

programmes outcomes (eg organizational flexibility), and furthermore where the outcomes are emergent. Phoenix was certainly presented as a success, as evidenced by the response of senior stakeholders inside and outside the department, and from the favourable reports from the independent and experienced OGC reviewers; though whether the claimed outcomes were substantively achieved (eg improved flexibility of resourcing) and whether they actually contributed to any improvement in the operational performance and efficiency of the department is very difficult to say and can certainly be questioned. PhoenixIT was less enthusiastically perceived by senior stakeholders, but managed to deliver both a new computer system (arguably one of the few lasting outcomes of Phoenix) and to replace the office systems support to the entire department, so was clearly successful on that count; a conclusion reinforced by customer surveys produced by the project that demonstrated high levels of user satisfaction. Again, whether these outcomes led to the business benefits claimed in the business case is questionable, but ultimately very difficult to say conclusively. On balance, an objective ‘common sense’ assessment would be that both projects were more successful than not, though with caveats. Whether this partial success was achieved in each case because of, or in spite of, the way they were managed – and whether closer compliance with ‘best practice’ would have improved outcomes - is a further complex and perhaps unanswerable question.

One perspective on events would be that what was observed was a group of experienced and skilled individuals struggling to manage their way through complexity and uncertainty, aware of ‘best practice’ guidance and attempting to apply it in a way appropriate to the circumstances, but basically dealing with a stream of management issues as they arose as effectively as they could. With respect to the structured planning and control aspects discussed in Sections 6.2.2 to 6.2.9, management on both projects certainly acknowledged the need for, and in some cases made extensive efforts to apply, more structured planning and control. All of the key project participants were experienced, well-qualified individuals, many with impressive track records in change programme management. They were well-versed not just in project and programme management methods but also in ‘best practice’ in managing organizational change. Considerable management effort was also devoted to addressing the widely-recognised ‘success factors’ discussed in Chapter 2, including top management commitment, leadership, stakeholder management, communications, and team motivation.

Looking at what was achieved in those areas suggests that more might have been done, but also highlights some of the difficulties of defining precisely what is meant by these factors and what constitutes their effective application (and, in particular, in advance rather than in retrospect). Phoenix had charismatic leadership, the committed support of the most senior leadership, and engaged in extensive stakeholder management, and a huge degree of communications activity. It nonetheless struggled to overcome scepticism and resistance of stakeholders at all levels (though arguably achieved far more in this regard than previous change initiatives in the department). In retrospect, Kate's leadership may be seen as too directive, and insufficiently 'transformational'; Rachel's attention was perhaps distracted at key moments, and she could have been more decisive in removing opposition; divisions in the project team between Frenchay, departmental staff, and external contractors could perhaps have been addressed more actively early on; and so on. Whether such additional efforts would have been effective could only be judged in retrospect, and even then with some caution as to cause and effect. PhoenixIT also had very driven, charismatic leadership, but limited senior stakeholder support, and the project faced stakeholder management issues from the outset. Numerous attempts were made to resolve this, and while it is not at all clear even in retrospect what more could practically have been done, perhaps a more transformational leadership style may have been more successful. Set against this, the department had a history of several years of consultative approaches to organizational change that were widely acknowledged to have led nowhere, so there is some force to the suggestion that anything other than a directive and driven style of pushing things through was unlikely to have achieved a great deal. PhoenixIT also invested considerable effort in team building across the whole team and in coaching; and while it seems to have managed its key stakeholders poorly by 'best practice' standards, the project did achieve the extraordinary success of bringing forward the delivery date by 6 weeks. The picture is very mixed therefore, and, while numerous prescriptions may suggest that different action should have been taken, these speculations would perhaps not do justice to the complexity and uncertainty of the situation.

In summary, there does not appear to be strong justification for saying that what was observed was simply a result of ineffective project management. Undoubtedly, more could have been done against the standards of 'best practice', and within that discourse many of those involved (and perhaps even more so those not involved) would, and indeed did, have views on what

should or shouldn't have been done differently. Whether these constitute failures in management, or simply the exigencies of projects in real life is a moot point; and whether, given the particularities of history and context and the specific individuals concerned, such different activities could actually have been achieved, and whether those activities would have led to significantly better outcomes (on whatever measure) is speculative and remains unknown. What can be said with reasonable basis in the objective evidence is that the projects observed in close detail were managed by competent and experienced professionals attempting to apply their own experience of 'best practice' in change programme management and project management as best they could in the circumstances, and achieved what appear to be more successful outcomes than not. From the researcher's perspective based on experience, while these projects had unique characteristics, they were not particularly unusual projects, or particularly well or badly managed by commonly accepted standards. They clearly departed in some respects from 'best practice' guidelines, but there seems to be a strong case to suggest that such departures may have their roots in the particular character of business change projects in large organizations; that this is, by and large, how such projects are. This point is central to this research and is pursued further in the remainder of this chapter.

## **6.3 Subjective Interpretation of Project Experience**

### ***6.3.1 Introduction***

A second major contribution to the findings from the research is provided by systematic analysis of the 'Practitioners Tale'. This section describes the analysis process. The narrative was analysed twice, using qualitative analysis coding techniques and a qualitative analysis software tool, nVivo: once, some 3 months after its completion, when some distance had been established from the experiences described; and again some 9 months later, when some additional aspects became more evident as described below.

The intent of this analysis was to identify some themes within this particular subjective experience that were of more general relevance, and could perhaps highlight some underlying characteristics that could be seen as more objective features of the business change projects.

### 6.3.2 *Initial coding*

As illustrated in Section 5.6.1 earlier, the full text of the narrative was broken down into 84 ‘events’, comprising the total text. These ‘events’ are complete units of narrative, in that they make sense on their own, but describe a self-contained instance within the overall story, like a meeting, a decision, a conversation etc. They vary in length from a couple of paragraphs to about an A4 page of text – the average length is about 400 words. There is a degree of subjective judgement of when ‘instances’ of the narrative can be considered part of the same event, or constitute a different event; though the disaggregation is largely a matter of analytical convenience. A different formulation is unlikely to have changed the analysis significantly, as the entire text was covered by the 84 events selected.

The text of the narrative was then coded against a set of ‘themes’ to demonstrate the extent and frequency to which those themes are represented in the narrative. The coding themes can be seen as both pre-determined by the concerns of the processual literature identified in Chapter 2, and as ‘emerging’ from the text, as the initial themes were developed iteratively by being tested against repeated readings of the text to ensure comprehensive coverage. This inductive process is a familiar process in ethnographic-type studies, and the issues and various strategies have been established for some time (Strauss, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In this case, themes were added until the great majority of the text was coded (often to multiple themes). This was a deliberately ‘inclusive’ rather than parsimonious process, in order to cover as many possible aspects, although multiple coding of the same text suggested that some of the themes could be combined (eg ‘Key Players’ and ‘Power’ themes were later combined into ‘Power and Leadership’; ‘Multiple interpretations’ and ‘Uncertainty’ were combined into ‘Uncertainty and ambiguity’). However, the full list of themes were retained for analysis purposes, with the exception of one (‘SD into Phoenix’<sup>6</sup>) which was seen as a specific context-dependent instance of a number of other more general themes, and discarded.

---

<sup>6</sup> Successful Delivery into Phoenix – this referred to repeated unsuccessful attempts to get Gerry’s Successful Delivery initiative included as part of the Phoenix Change Programme.

The coding process was carried out using the qualitative analysis software tool nVivo, highlighting phrases within the text and assigning one of more codes as they appeared to reflect the particular themes. During this process, the need for three additional themes became evident (eg #17 ‘alignment’, #18 ‘external factors’, and #19 ‘events’). The coding was re-done against the full set of themes one year after the initial coding in July 2009 with only minor changes which did not alter the conclusions substantially, except for the addition of the #1 ‘key players’ theme: it was clear in returning to the narrative (and from a ‘word frequency analysis’ of the text) that the narrative was dominated by reference to the actions of key players, and this had essentially been taken for granted in the first coding. It was also clear from the extent of multiple coding against the same text extracts that some of the themes overlapped and could be amalgamated.

It would have been helpful to have an independent coding exercise of the narrative (though this itself is not unproblematic methodologically (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2001)) but this was simply not practical given the scale of work involved. However, extracts coded against each of these themes are included in Appendix F, so that the validity of the assignment of text to themes can be assessed.

Table 6.2 overleaf lists all the 19 themes used in the coding and taken forward for further analysis in combination with the ‘features’ described earlier. The summary analysis shows how many times the theme is referenced throughout the narrative (“Freq of refs”), and also the percentage of the 84 ‘events’ in which that theme is referenced. The themes are shown in descending order of the frequency of reference. Appendix F includes extracts coded under each of the themes.

**Table 6.2: Presence of themes in the narrative**

	<b>Narrative themes</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Freq of refs</b>	<b>% of events</b>
1	Key players	Description and/or interpretation of the actions of key players	160	88%
2	Multiple interpretations	Different interpretations of the current situation, motives and purposes of other players, or of appropriate action and its effect	105	71%
3	Political tactics	Actions taken for personal or group motives so as to gain advantage or protect position	97	64%
4	Personal engagement	Illustration of the personal emotional investment of individuals in the activities described	86	50%
5	Personal relationships	Indication of the importance of the quality of relationships between parties in effecting outcomes	76	45%
6	Discourse and rhetoric	Use of rhetorical presentation or prevailing discourses to defend a position or action, or oppose another	71	52%
7	Uncertainty	Reflection of recognition of the absence of full information about current or future state	65	46%
8	Limits to agency	Indication of the inability to influence the course of events, especially by leaders	55	42%
9	Undiscussability	Reference to events which were privately discussed but not publicly acknowledged	52	42%
10	Power	Indication of the use of personal and positional power to change events	48	36%
11	Control	Successful or unsuccessful attempts to introduce structure, order and stability	48	35%
12	Status assessment	Description of the contested process of establishing current project status	37	31%
13	Issues and puzzles	Repeated discussion of problematic events that remain unresolved	36	26%
14	Conflict	Open and heated disagreement blocking shared approach to required actions	35	27%



15	Emergent purpose	Reference to process of evolving definition of goals and objectives	34	24%
16	Dead ends	Activity which peters out, or prominent issues which disappear from view	24	25%
17	Alignment	The process by which those holding divergent views or perspectives come to share an agreed position	20	12%
18	External factors	Illustration of the impact of factors outside the scope or control of the project players	11	13%
19	Events	Unexpected changes within or from outside the project landscape	8	7%

It is important to recognise that this coding operation is not put forward as “*an objective, unequivocal, sure and rational procedure*” but carried out “*within a particular frame of reference*” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p.27). Here the broad frame of reference was the processual literature from the project management and organizational change fields which stressed the importance of power and politics, multiple interpretations, uncertainty and ambiguity etc which provided the initial focus for the themes. However, where the initial themes did not appear to allow comprehensive coding of the text, additional themes suggested by the text were added until ‘saturation’ had been achieved, as described above.

## **6.4 Combining objectively-based ‘features’ and subjectively-based ‘themes’**

### **6.4.1 Aim of the analysis**

The analysis described in Sections 6.2 and 6.3 provides two different perspectives on the reality of these business change projects: the relatively objectively-determined ‘features’ identified by reference to the observed conformance of process and practice with ‘best practice’ expectations; and the ‘themes’ extracted from the more subjective narrative, which are taken to represent the salient features of the project experience from a practitioner’s point of view. From this point on in the analysis process, these 38 categories are essentially taken as the empirical findings, and serve as the ‘data’, synthesised from the enormous volume of qualitative data gathered over 18 months. These are inputs to a theoretically-founded

organisation of these categories, developing a model, or theoretical framework, which identifies theoretical constructs and the relationship between them.

The development of such a model is partly based on further systematic inspection of the ‘features’ and ‘themes’ and their inter-relationships, following some aspects of what Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) refer to as ‘grounded theorizing’ (an extension of a process of ‘analytic induction’) to distinguish it from the more prescriptive procedures of ‘grounded theory’ methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). However, while the approach cannot be considered as a grounded theory approach, the coding and analysis process was informed by some of the techniques of grounded theory, particularly the identification of the ‘core category’ (see Section 6.4.3 below) and the process of building theory from the relationships between concepts identified through the coding process (Partington, 2002).

The conceptual categorisations vary in type and level, and as is typical in this kind of analysis, the observed categories can logically be consolidated into more general categories, or be seen as sub-categories. The aim of the analysis is to offer a systematic and comprehensive explanation (a theoretical model) of these 38 constructs: “...*plausible relationships produced among concepts and sets of concepts*” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **6.4.2 Sayer’s multi-level framework**

At this stage, the analysis was also influenced not just by patterns in the data but by Sayer’s much-cited<sup>7</sup> ‘realist’ framework (Sayer, 1992), whose approach to developing theories in social science is to view reality as stratified into different logical levels. Observed *events* at the most easily experienced and observed level are seen as the outcomes (dependent on context-specific *conditions*) of less-obvious underlying *mechanisms*, operating within fundamental, relatively stable *structures* (see Ch 3, Sayer, 1992). This multi-level approach is also attractive as it was evident that the ‘features’ and ‘themes’ emerging from the analysis of the research data were different in logical character. Some have the quality of a *process*<sup>8</sup> (eg ‘subjective assessment’, ‘discourse and rhetoric’, ‘dates set top-down’), some have the quality

<sup>7</sup> 1800 citations on Google Scholar

<sup>8</sup> *Process* is preferred here to Sayer’s term *mechanism*

of underlying *structure* (eg ‘uncertainty’), some can be seen as contingent *conditions* (eg ‘key players’) and some can be seen as *outcomes* of a process (eg ‘no clear stages’, ‘limited detail and horizon plans’). Generally, ‘features’ seem more to have the quality of events or *outcomes* of more general processes, though they do also include observations of processes in action (eg ‘negotiated goals’). ‘Themes’ (having emerged as coding categories) are more abstract and general, and are either more process-oriented or else more summary categories of which the ‘features’ are particular instances (eg ‘emergent purpose’ as a theme embraces a number of ‘features’). This means broadly that the ‘features’ tend to be seen at the more concrete logical levels (ie ‘events’ in Sayer’s framework) as manifestations of the more generic and abstract ‘themes’. These different logical levels were used to group or associate the different types of categories.

### 6.4.3 *Mapping themes to features*

This relationship between the categories is demonstrated in the matrix shown at Table 6.3 overleaf. This shows which of the ‘features’ is an example of any ‘theme’; and which ‘themes’ are implicated in any of the observed features. For example, ‘*uncertainty*’ as a theme can be seen to be a shared characteristic of numerous features; and ‘*Dates set top-down*’ as a feature exhibits the characteristics of several themes. The mapping between these data from different perspectives begins to explore the way in which subjectively-experienced observations and processes can be related to more objectively-determined features.

It is clear that ‘features’ and ‘themes’ are strongly related, which would be expected given that they are different perspectives on the same reality. Of particular note (the relevant rows and columns in the matrix are highlighted) is that those ‘features’ associated with most themes involve negotiation processes, alternative assessments, undiscussed issues, and rapid shifts in issues identified. Similarly, the themes of ‘multiple interpretations’ and ‘uncertainty’ (as well as being prominent in the narrative) are also associated with a great many of the objectively-observed ‘features’. Strauss (1987) defines some criteria for a ‘Core Category’ in grounded theory: it must be central ie related to many other categories; it must appear frequently; it must relate ‘*easily and abundantly*’ to other categories; and it must have clear theoretical implications (Strauss, 1987, p.36). The prominence of the related features and

themes – of negotiation, interpretation, and uncertainty - points to them as candidates for a central role in a theoretical framing of the data.

Table 6.3: Mapping ‘themes’ to ‘features’

Name	GOALS AND OBJECTIVES			PLANS			SCOPE			EXECUTION			MONITORING			CONTROL			ISSUES & RISKS			STAGES	
	Multiple shifting goals	Negotiated goals	Shared by achievability	Limited detail and horizon	Done in bursts	Dates set top-down	Constant negotiation	Loose specs	Negative work	Work unplanned	Mostly talk	Reqs negotiated	Subjective assessment	Confidence-based	Completed actions	Unused processes	Some undiscussed	Rapidly shifting	No clear stages	Repeated iteration			
Key players	X					X						X	X										
Multiple interpretations	X	X	X			X						X	X				X	X					
Polluted agendas	X		X			X						X	X				X	X					
Persons engagement												X	X				X	X					
Persons relationships												X	X				X	X					
Discourse & rhetoric												X	X				X	X					
Uncertainty	X				X	X						X	X				X	X			X		
Limits to agency						X						X	X				X	X					
Undesirability												X	X				X	X					
Power												X	X				X	X					
Control												X	X				X	X					
Status enmeshment												X	X				X	X					
Issues & puzzles												X	X				X	X					
Conflict												X	X				X	X					
Emergent purpose		X										X	X										
Dead ends												X	X										
Alignment												X	X										
External factors												X	X										
Events												X	X										

#### **6.4.4 Consolidation into the ‘key aspects’**

On the basis of the above discussion, the ‘features’ and ‘themes’ were consolidated into a more manageable 13 high-level categories called ‘key aspects’ which were seen as capturing the combination of the objectively-observed features and the subjectively-interpreted themes. This process of consolidation was a complex, iterative and partly intuitive process, which was influenced by the patterns in the data, by the logical relationship between the categories, and by initial ideas of theory formulation along the lines described in Section 6.4.2 above.

Some of the ‘themes’ were combined into more general categories as described in Section 6.3.2; several of the ‘features’ were seen as instances of the more general ‘themes’ (eg the features ‘multiple shifting goals’ and ‘limited detail and horizon’ were consolidated into the theme ‘emergent purpose’); and some of the ‘features’ were seen to be significant general categories in addition to the ‘themes’ (eg ‘discursive work’, ‘fluid status’, ‘fuzzy boundaries’). The intention through this process was to identify from the empirical data the salient aspects of the social reality of these business change projects which were shared by, and significant to, many of the events. These ‘key aspects’ were identified as:

- Negotiation through uncertainty and ambiguity
- Universal politics
- Discourse and rhetoric
- Power and leadership
- Emotion and identity
- Discursive work
- Long-running issues
- The limits to agency
- Fuzzy boundaries
- Emerging purpose

- Fluid status
- The struggle for order and control
- The force of context and history

The mapping between these ‘key aspects’ and the initial ‘themes’ and ‘features’ is shown in Appendix G. This provides an ‘audit trail’ of how each of the 38 categories have been subsumed into the 13 ‘key aspects’ and demonstrates the origins of the ‘key aspects’ in the systematic interpretation of the empirically-observed data.

The ‘key aspects’ are further described, discussed and illustrated with reference to the actual project experience in Section 6.5 below.

## **6.5 Key Aspects**

### ***6.5.1 Negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity***

A prominent feature of the day-to-day conduct of these project activities was the extent of uncertainty and ambiguity, though it was not always recognised as such. Unlike what is implied by the mainstream models of managerial rationality, actions in this case were determined from within a fog of uncertainty about: what the current situation really was; what was actually required to be delivered; what the relationship between cause and effect was; and, as a consequence of all of the above, what the future outcomes would be. Each of these areas of uncertainty, which are further exemplified below, led to continuous and intense debate and negotiation about the nature of the social reality within which the project teams were making plans and taking actions. These findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in Section 2, and the discussion of the character of social reality presented in Chapter 3.

#### *(a) Assessing the current situation*

Assessment of ‘the facts’ of the current situation was an ongoing and problematic concern in the observed projects, eg the extent to which events constituted a problem, or a reason/justification for a course of action (eg the project is not properly controlled, the plans are inadequate, this approach is too risky, this individual is not capable, this release is ready to

go live). Significant differences of interpretation were very frequently evident. For example, in the case of PhoenixIT, there were substantial disagreements about the extent to which the early releases matched requirements (“*you say we’ve delivered 99% of the functionality, we say 50%*” or, “*the delivery in 1 April includes all data loaded*” (#71, #79)). In the case of Phoenix Change Programme, Kate, Frenchay, and business stakeholders all held quite different views eg on what progress had been made so far, how ‘committed’ various stakeholders were, and what actions were necessary. Most of the ‘facts’ referred to in such discussions involved a substantial overlay of interpretation, subject to debate.

*(b) What are the requirements?*

It is evident that required outcomes, even at fairly high level, were unclear and subject to continually negotiated change and elaboration, and subject to trade-off between ambition and a realistic assessment of what was likely to be achievable (eg the ‘customer’ workstream in the Phoenix Change Programme (#15)). Equally, while debate about required outcomes was a continuous concern, there was a readiness of most to tolerate a significant degree of uncertainty (as discussed in Chapter 3, one of the characteristics of social reality).

*(c) The relationship between cause and effect*

Despite the often very assertive claims of the protagonists, the level of confidence in the causal relationships between the normal management levers and outcomes was low, and there was often little firm evidence, other than personal or shared experience, available to support one view against another. Even the benefits of some of the intended project outcomes were contestable. Do we really know that if people are managed in project teams rather than standing functions, one of the central elements of the Phoenix Change Programme, they will be more efficient? Will a standard project process lead to an improvement in management of the project portfolio? Will an IT tool to support that process add to the improvement? Similarly, what actions are necessary to remedy a problem once it has been agreed to be one? For example, if we change the performance management process, will people really change their behaviours or carry on as before? What else will make them behave differently (assuming we know what behaviours will lead to improved outcomes)?



*(d) What will be the future outcome?*

Uncertainties of the current situation, what exactly is required, and the cause-effect relationships together all make the prediction of future outcomes, and crucially the selection of actions to address acknowledged risks and issues, highly problematic. On both projects it proved difficult to develop comprehensive plans over the project lifetime to meet broadly specified goals. Can this component of the system really be delivered in 50 days? How much more resource should we assign to be sure to meet the date? Will 3 weeks testing be enough before going live? And so on and on.

In summary, uncertainty and ambiguity were not just an ‘exception’ or contingency of the experience of these business change projects, they were endemic and a driving feature of much of the activity and discussion constituting the actuality of day-to-day project work. Some of the uncertainty and ambiguity could be resolved, and often effort was expended in attempting that; however, much was a permanent feature, either in principle or because of practical constraints of time and resourcing. The sources of uncertainty and ambiguity were many and various, and made prediction and decision-making a risky business. A huge amount of time and effort was engaged in trying to ‘read’ what is going on, what the results of actions might have been, whether or not there was a problem and if so how serious it was, and what actions were likely to be effective in meeting both expressed and tacit objectives. A key component of ‘reading the situation’ was understanding the ‘politics’, a major determinant of which interpretations would prevail, which actions would be acceptable, and which could be expected to achieve the desired outcomes.

**6.5.2 *Universal politics***

The analysis demonstrates that politics was a significant feature of 64% of the events in the narrative. As we have seen, the characters in this narrative saw ‘politics’ as a natural part of day-to-day life and a key determinant of actions and outcomes. This is very much in line with previous research into organizational politics described in Section 2.5. In this case, the troubled relationship between the Phoenix programme and the HR department, and that

between Phoenix and PhoenixIT, can be seen as major examples of ‘politics’ that fundamentally shaped the trajectory of each project.

At least two things were implied when people talked about ‘politics’. Firstly, politics was used to describe a conflict that could not be straightforwardly dealt with through the normal organisational processes and hierarchy; it involved a failure of agreement (often contested interpretations) between parties able to resist in some way doing what the others said. Given the consensus-oriented nature of the department, and the acknowledged tradition of non-compliance with central direction, there was considerable scope for powerful parties to resist in some way or another when they disagreed for whatever reason – so there was a lot of politics.

Secondly, (and, again, consistent with the literature on politics and power discussed in Section 2.5) its common usage generally implied motivation which, while it might be articulated in terms of the project aims, was generally attributed by others to an unarticulated but usually ‘obvious’ self-interested agenda. Thus Frenchay’s politics was seen as related to their commercial interest in keeping control and doing more work, even if their proposals were presented as in the best interest of the department. HR’s politics was seen as retaining their influence and their jobs in the face of interference from the Phoenix project, though articulated in terms of the need for the department to ‘own the change’. One of the key characteristics of ‘politics’ was that it could not be discussed frankly with the parties involved or dealt with formally or even openly; it was dealt with obliquely and informally, through corridor conversations and a wide range of tactical manoeuvres.

A very diverse range of political tactics were observed in this case: eg failing to turn up to meetings; dominating the agenda at meetings with dense presentations and leaving no time for discussion; failing to inform the opposition of important developments; forming coalitions, and ‘getting to’ the most senior people; ‘news management’ and ‘spin’ about progress and issues etc. These are all recognisable from the discussion in Section 2.5.

Some people disliked ‘playing politics’, and thought they weren’t particularly good at it, or claimed, rather unconvincingly, to try to avoid it (eg Jeff “*I like to play a straight bat*” (#72) – while having an off-the-record conversation about his concerns about Sarah; Sarah herself saying “*I hate the programme board politics*” (#76) – but ensuring that such events were properly stage-managed). But in the day-to-day experience of working in these projects for 18 months, it was universally acknowledged as part of the fabric of daily life, and the ability to ‘manage the politics’ was seen as an essential component of personal and corporate success. For example, Sarah was concerned that she would not be able to make the ‘step up’ to the Programme Director role because “*she was not good at the politics*” (#35). Kate was widely admired as a consummate politician which was seen by others as a key factor in Phoenix being able to make a difference from previous initiatives.

### **6.5.3 Power and leadership**

As the analysis in Table 6.2 shows, the Practitioner’s Tale is overwhelmingly a story about the ‘key players’, demonstrating that for the participating practitioner, making sense of the project events was dominated by the actions of leaders, interpretations of their motives and the power relations between them. Certainly, the capability of key leaders such as Gerry, Rachel and Kate to influence the shape of events seemed to be much greater than others less powerful; and Sarah’s perceived weaknesses as a leader – of not being “*up to it*” - were frequently referred to by participants as the primary reason for problems with PhoenixIT. Much of this ability to influence outcomes was rooted in positional power, particularly the ability to command resources and launch initiatives largely independently. However, not all those with positional power (eg certain members of the Executive, Eleanor) were equally effective in exercising it. Very important was what the leadership literature (see Section 2.3.6) refers to as ‘transformational’ and ‘charismatic’ leadership – providing meaning, creating vision and sense of purpose for those involved in pursuing a common goal – combined with highly developed but less high-minded skills more often associated with Machiavelli’s ‘The Prince’. Thus Gerry was able to drive through a technology implementation for which enthusiasm was at best lukewarm through a combination of positional power, control over budget, and sheer force of personality. These findings are consistent with the literature on power and leadership (Section 2.5 and 2.3.6).

#### **6.5.4 *Discourse and rhetoric***

Where interpretations, plans or actions of leaders were contested (which was often the case), power was exerted through deploying rhetoric which claimed credibility by reference to powerful discourses. This very much reflected the findings of the literature on power (see Section 2.5.5 on Foucault) and on language and discourse in organizations presented in Section 3.2.6 – particularly the notion of ‘interpretative repertoires’ and ‘positioning’. A number of these different discourses were influential, separately or together: the ‘projects’ discourse, which emphasised the need for structured approaches to managing activity, even policy development work; the ‘delivery’ discourse, emphasising the value of action, pace and getting on with it; the ‘process’ discourse, emphasising the value of systematic approaches, consistency and completeness; the ‘living the Phoenix values’ discourse, emphasising corporateness and collaborative behaviours; the ‘accountability’ discourse, emphasising the need for senior managers to take clear responsibility for performance; and so on. Many of the negotiations around alternative interpretations of ‘what is so’ and what to do about it were conducted in the terms of these different discourses. In a sense, the discourses seemed to provide ‘the rules’ for the negotiation of accepted meaning. While powerful players had a considerable advantage in imposing their preferred position, they still had to account for their interpretations with reference to some accepted and credible standard (consistent with the ethnomethodology literature discussed in Section 3.3.5.3). Thus the relatively weak central procurement team were able to force Kate to conduct a competitive tender for the Frenchay contract because the discourses around 1. stewardship of public funds and 2. management of public sector consultancy contracts were so dominant (#20).

#### **6.5.5 *Emotion and identity***

A striking feature of the project narrative was the level of emotional involvement demonstrated by the project participants. Individuals were quick to align their personal interests and values with their corporate positions, thereby placing great emotional investment in a particular position. For example, within a few days of involvement in the department Kate became a passionate and convincing advocate of the department’s new vision, (hitherto not part of her life), to the extent that she could inspire staff with her enthusiasm and energy – something which at the same time she saw as essential to the success of her role personally.

As the Practitioners Tale relates: “Overall, her intense involvement and commitment to the success of the programme was obvious and convincingly genuine” (#22). Numerous other examples, including some highly charged and angry and very personal exchanges, are included in Appendix F (Theme 4).

All of the characters in the narrative were very alert to their personal and career interests in the position to be taken on unfolding events. Gerry wanted both to do something interesting (“If I can’t do this here then I’ll go somewhere else where I can. I don’t want to do boring things” (#39)) as well as raising his profile as an innovator across government, with a view to his next role. Kate was discussing with David long before her departure how she should position herself best for her next move (#54). However, consciousness of personal interest was only part of the story. Gerry, Sarah, Darren and others saw successful delivery as a crucial part of their personal identity (Darren: “I’ve never been a career person but I really care about delivery” (#82)) and therefore had a strong emotional engagement in what could have been thought of as just another computer system. What was articulated as a corporate issue quickly acquired a personal dimension for this reason, and what might have started as a conflict of ideas, perceptions and professional approach soon became tense and emotional. This emotional engagement was a real spur to action and progress, but was also essentially what created much of the ‘politics’ and made the politics difficult. Numerous circumstances were interpreted by the players in very personal terms – in at least three cases, as attempts by others to “shaft them”. It was these kinds of intense personal pressures that led Kate to declare: “I feel sick when I get up in the morning and I look at my day” (#22); and Sarah to say “I’m really thinking I just can’t do this” (#53).

#### **6.5.6 Discursive work**

The language of projects is typically about ‘action’, ‘work’, ‘delivery’ and ‘deliverables’. This implies a degree of solidity which was not evident in these business change projects. Most work was about talking, and to a much lesser degree trying to write down what it was that had been talked about, or to communicate proposals and structures for further conversations. ‘Resources’ were required to prepare for meetings, to spend time in meetings, or otherwise to communicate via email. This was particularly so in at least the ‘first half’ of

the projects, but remained so to a large degree even when a concrete physical computer system was in development in PhoenixIT. A great deal of text was produced, most typically in Powerpoint slide format but (consistent with the literature on language and discourse in Section 3.3.6) the most significant outputs were of meaning, shared understanding and agreement, generated through conversation. Sometimes, this shared meaning and agreement was codified in documentation, and sometimes attempted codification brought issues and disagreements that had not been evident, and provoked further discussion. Tracking the documentation for both projects over a long period demonstrates what seems like a history of proposals and shifting agreements (eg about objectives, scope, issues, responses, business designs etc). A very small number of documents, most notably those with some contractual force, actually substantively constrained behaviour (eg the Frenchay contract); rather more had a symbolic force (eg the Business Cases (P18, I05)), or can be seen as artefacts to help arrive at a shared understanding and agreement (the Phoenix Vision (P19)). Documents around which there was no disagreement or which were not the focus of a topical management issue were very rarely referred to. The ‘action’ all happened in conversations.

This is not to trivialise the nature of the work on these projects. However, the rather ephemeral nature of this kind of work had a number of implications. One is that some work, pursued with vigour and energy and consuming resources, can quite easily produce no observable outcome. Conspicuous examples of such ‘dead ends’ include: the work on a risk/reward element to the consultancy contract (#20); the original PhoenixIT demonstrator (#34); and the lack of progress on the ‘collaboration’ element of PhoenixIT which became an issue in January 2008 (#78). On the other hand, significant progress – in some cases evident mainly in people talking about things differently - can be made very rapidly and without much apparent effort when there is for whatever reason an alignment of understanding and agreement. An example of this was the October 2007 ‘implementation planning’ transition in the Phoenix programme (#60, #64).

#### **6.5.7 Long-running issues**

The projects observed had to deal more or less successfully with a constant stream of issues affecting the success of delivery. We have seen in fact that issue-raising and discussion was

the primary driver for action and progress in both the Phoenix Change Programme and in PhoenixIT. However, each suffered from long-running basic issues, with a strong political flavour, which can be seen as creating chronic obstruction to the effective development of shared understanding and agreement, thereby restricting progress. In the case of Phoenix, the critical issue was the relationship with HR, which was evident from the outset, and still unresolved 9 months later (#56). According to team members, this was making life “*almost impossible*” (#58) but it was seen as difficult to deal with directly because of the personal sensitivities. The issue was widely discussed informally, and ‘everyone’ knew about it; but it never appeared in any public document or forum.

In the case of PhoenixIT, two issues of this kind were significant: the lack of clarity around Phoenix’s requirements for the system, and indeed whether there were any; and the commercial agreement with ABC. The former led to repeated misunderstanding and wasted effort, as well as damaging working relationships. The latter had a similar effect (as the ABC representative said at the first Programme Board meeting, this was “*debilitating*” for the team at the working level (#46)) but was also instrumental in difficulties in providing resource that led to some of the delays in ‘onboarding’ the system. Both issues were clearly evident to some of the key players at the outset of the project (see the workshop in #38), but were never satisfactorily resolved or even articulated.

One of the reasons that these issues were not easily addressed was because people didn’t want to upset others, or cause embarrassment by making explicit their attributions of ulterior motive; a social constraint thoroughly explored by the ethnomethodologists (eg (Garfinkel, 1967/1984; Goffman, 1990/1959)). However, interestingly, it was not necessarily the case that ‘open and honest discussion’ would resolve these issues. Numerous attempts were made ‘behind the scenes’ by Alice, an experienced coach and facilitator, to get Kate and Eleanor to tackle their differences, without any success. One of the features of these long-running political issues is that their resolution can only be attempted by disturbing the interests that all parties have in the status quo; despite their protestations, the continued existence of these issues seemed to rely on the support of all concerned. This was highlighted by the intervention in the Integrated Portal project to directly surface an issue of this kind, that was

privately acknowledged by the project as having impeded progress for several years. This intervention created a large degree of discomfort (reminiscent of Garfinkel’s famous ‘breaching experiments’ discussed in Section 3.3.5), but had little actual effect as all parties carried on behaving as if the intervention hadn’t taken place. It seemed as if the status quo in fact suited all their interests better than the proposed resolution; and indeed progress of some sorts was made in that fashion.

#### **6.5.8 *The limits to agency***

The combination of uncertainty and ambiguity, the political dimension, and the competition for various interpretations of outcomes and organisational actions made it difficult both to know and agree exactly ‘where we are’ and to predict outcomes. Looked at this way, it seems that individual managers’ ability to control and direct outcomes in the way they apparently intended was not very great, and certainly less than everyone assumed. The actual outcomes depended on a complex and unpredictable process of multi-party interaction (involving many people not just those in the project team or even in the department), and as we have seen could be stubbornly resistant to managerial intentions. Numerous attempts to make progress proved unsuccessful (including the examples of ‘dead ends’ referred to earlier).

The belief that management can make a significant difference, and that more competent managers can make more difference, was an evident taken-for-granted assumption in the day-to-day life of these projects; and we have seen that it was the actions of leaders and other powerful players that were seen by participants as most shaping the course of events. However, even the most powerful leaders in this story, speaking in private, were struggling to exert control over events, and were frustrated and even exhausted at how difficult it was to ‘get things done’: “*Rachel in our interview was very frank in her exasperation with progress, and said that she would have liked to have seen Phoenix deliver earlier*” (#59). And Kate: “*She was clearly struggling and feeling unsupported, pointing to a constant undermining by some key senior managers, including Eleanor, and a general culture of low accountability and expectation: “Rachel says what should happen, and it doesn’t”*” (#22).



For those working at lower levels in the organisational hierarchy, there was a recognition that events may well turn out other than expected, but that there was very little they could do about it. The views expressed by project team members in the Phoenix health checks reflected considerable uncertainty, and some scepticism, about successful outcomes – but ultimately, as one middle manager said during the second ‘health check’ interviews “*Stuff happens - you just get your head down and get on with your own job*” (#58).

Overall, while some senior management actions can be seen in retrospect as influencing the broad direction of the projects (and was usually rationalised in that fashion *post hoc* eg the Phoenix Transition Report (P25)), this was difficult to predict in advance. Generally, the control over specific outcomes was much less than was taken-for-granted.

#### **6.5.9 Fuzzy boundaries**

The experience of project life in this case was more chaotic than orderly. The language of projects implies order and clear boundaries – projects start, they have clear scope and objectives, move through a sequence of stages from design to implementation, have teams and project managers who carry out specific roles, and are completed. However, while this language was well-embedded in these projects, this implied order was not evident in practice, which seemed to suit a more fluid and organic analogy. For example, it was difficult to tell quite when the projects started; they emerged from organisational and even personal circumstances whose unique and specific characteristics were influential in the future trajectory of events. They included many activities at different stages of development, and some activities iterated from implementation to design. It was difficult to talk of clear phases of the projects, which tended to evolve along the development path, and occasionally go into repeated ‘loops’ before moving forward. Even what were felt at the time as marked shifts in progress took time to occur eg the Phoenix transition to implementation, could be seen as taking place between September and October 2007 (#60, #64).

A particularly fuzzy boundary in these cases was the project ‘membership’. While the core members of each project team could be identified, and the senior stakeholders in the governance structure, these were themselves very fluid groups, which, as the organograms for

the projects show (P02, P12, I10, I15), changed continually over time. PhoenixIT’s core team changed repeatedly over the life of the project, introducing different individuals with often different views and styles; shortly after taking over as Programme Director, Sarah observed that “*its hard to have a team event when you don’t know who the team is*” (#36). Rather than a professional football game, with 22 players on the pitch, the project team seemed more like a game in the park, with players joining and leaving throughout, and being more or less active as events unfolded. Teams were also large, as many as 70 people at one stage working on aspects of the Phoenix Change Programme.

Furthermore, a large number of other influential parties could be identified apart from the core project team and governance bodies. In the case of Phoenix this included senior managers across the department, key staff in the Treasury, OGC’s Gateway Reviewers – all of whom were important influences (#02, #21). For PhoenixIT, the role of only occasionally visible senior managers in GlobalIT and ABC was crucial in setting the scope of possible action (#41, #51).

All this means that the typical concept of a project with clear boundaries operating within its organisational context is at best a convenient shorthand rather than an accurate reflection of how these projects worked in practice. While it was common practice to speak of ‘the project’ as a single entity, and almost as a kind of social actor, its character and personality was by no means well-defined or fixed.

#### ***6.5.10 Emerging purpose***

In both the projects, the fundamental purpose of the venture was under debate from the outset. Was Phoenix just about downsizing? Was PhoenixIT just Gerry’s attempt to make the department a technology leader in government? As we have seen from the analysis of the project documentation, even the ‘official’ presentation of the vision and goals of these projects changed over time. The objectives of improving external customer services and improving performance management of delivery agencies came and went. A very broad vision of transformation (“*making it easier to get things done*”) gave way to a much sharper focus on implementation of a flexible resourcing system. PhoenixIT shifted its focus from

primarily supporting Phoenix to providing a department-wide infrastructure. Beneath these broad goals there was a constant shift in detailed plans and activities with rolling plans with a time horizon of weeks rather than months. This was more marked in the earlier periods of each project but remained a characteristic throughout.

These shifts in purpose and direction were not random or whimsical, but reflected reactions to changing circumstances, and perceptions of those circumstances, as the projects evolved and their implications became clearer. Changes in scope and objectives were the outcome of the kind of intense ongoing discussion and negotiation that has been described above, and usually had its roots in some unresolved issue, or political pressure from a powerful stakeholder. For example, the desire to include work on services to external customers reflected Rachel's concerns that Phoenix should be seen as addressing all the key issues identified in the Capability Review. When it turned out that the scope of this work would be very wide and long-term, this goal simply became impractical and was abandoned as far as Phoenix was concerned. In a similar fashion, the absence of long-term detailed plans for PhoenixIT, that was such a cause of frustration for Sarah, reflected the uncertainty caused by a number of open issues, including the level of agreement about how the new business processes would work, and the commercial agreements with the suppliers.

The purpose of the projects could therefore be seen to emerge through a multi-party process of exploration of what the vision meant, what was really crucial to achieve (this having a political dimension also), what suited individual interests of the key players, and what was achievable within the constraints which applied (or were seen to apply) at any time.

#### ***6.5.11 Fluid status***

Given that the purpose of the projects was shifting over time, and there was considerable debate about the organisational realities, project status was a similarly complex construction in these cases. Different views were held by stakeholders, based on their particular perspective and sometimes on their sectional or personal interests. In May 2007, the corridor conversation among senior managers about Phoenix was overwhelmingly sceptical (#16), and even the more committed Phoenix Delivery Board objected to receiving progress reports

which they felt were unduly positive; but the experienced external reviewers nonetheless gave the project a clean bill of health. Impressions of status were related to perception of how well it was being managed, to predictions of likely outcomes, and also to concerns about the impact of outcomes on personal as well as corporate interests of those forming a judgement of the status of the project. Views formed about the project early on were hard to change: those most ‘committed’ to, or personally involved in the project, saw current status more positively; those with an antipathy to the project saw it more negatively, and would discount what they would refer to as ‘spin’ coming from the project team, who were assumed to be naturally presenting an overly-optimistic view. Nonetheless, shifts in the generally accepted view of status could happen very quickly, and in an unpredictable fashion. For example, general perceptions of the Phoenix Change Programme (seen in terms of the way organizational members talked about the project) went through a dramatic shift in the autumn of 2007, though many of the problems of lack of clarity and delivery capacity remained just as unresolved at that point as they had been a month earlier.

Like other aspects of the projects, therefore, status was socially-negotiated, fluid and volatile. (The Phoenix project team went from reporting mostly at ‘green’ to reporting mostly at ‘red’ over a short period of time in response to their stakeholders’ perceptions). This is not to say that objective issues of cost, quality and timescales were not influential. However, these were just some of the factors affecting status; and, as discussed earlier, were themselves typically capable of multiple interpretations, and being put to largely rhetorical use.

As this analysis suggests, the view of status held by the most powerful individuals or groups typically prevailed as the publicly accepted version of events. For example, no-one dared to challenge Gerry’s assertion that the ‘early adopters’ roll-out to 41 users had gone “*exceptionally well*”, with an overwhelmingly positive response in a user survey, and the team had worked “*at a fantastic pace*” (#50), although many in the Phoenix Change Programme team were actually very critical of PhoenixIT at the time. Similarly, the Phoenix Programme Transition document approved by the Board (P25) declares the project an unqualified success, despite the widespread scepticism reflected in the inputs to the Practitioner’s Tale. However, the establishment view could be challenged, and was not always accepted. As mentioned

earlier, there did seem to be rules about establishing accepted meaning and truth, and dominant discourses (including those of ‘management objectivity’ and ‘evidence-based management’) clearly played a role in the power relations.

The cybernetic model which underpins mainstream project management assumes that plans are built up from a clearly-defined objective and that the need for any corrective action is determined by assessing any divergence of the current project status from plan. In these case studies, objectives, plans and status were all seen to be fluid, and, like any action to be taken in response to perceived changes in status, were emergent from a complex social negotiation.

#### ***6.5.12 The struggle for order and control***

The impression generated from the ‘key aspects’ described above is much closer to chaos and constant flow than order and stability. Some found this very uncomfortable, particularly those with a conventional project management training; others were far less troubled by it. There was, however, a constant pressure from critics to introduce more order, and we can see in the Practitioner’s Tale how Sarah in particular was constantly striving to improve detailed plans and control. The value of such attempts was never challenged; the existence of plans and formal documentation was widely accepted as a good indicator of how well-managed the project was, though the quality of the content of such documents was very seldom critically examined. In the first ‘health check’, business stakeholders felt that “*the programme is desperately in need of a plan*” (#21) but appeared to be satisfied by sketchy and incomplete plans for some time, and by Business Cases that were almost entirely rhetorical (P18, P20, I05). The language of formal control was in frequent use, and the ‘project and programme management’ discourse was a powerful means of making a case for particular actions; but this was against a background in reality of very little order and very few, if any, structured control processes. At one point in PhoenixIT, Gerry castigates the team for poor planning and inadequate documentation and Jeff and Sarah launch a recovery activity to improve planning and control (“...*despite all our efforts, we haven’t put in place what should be there*” (#79)). However, 3 months later when the key release had been successfully delivered, Jeff said he thought that very little had come from the ‘recovery plan’, and in fact that “*some of the crisis was diversionary*”, with everyone “*madly having to produce plans for everything*”. He

attributed the progress made to political action: “*pressure from Gerry on ABC to get resource released*” (#83).

As we have seen from the analysis of project documentation and control systems in Section 6.2, repeated attempts to impose order and control were largely unsuccessful or superficial even when the existence of apparent structure (such as a properly constituted formal Programme Board) was necessary for political reasons. However, structure and order did emerge somehow when ‘the time was right’ – when shared agreement and understanding had been achieved. In these circumstances, for example, it became possible to prepare plans for some limited parts of the programme, and for a limited time horizon. It is difficult to see in retrospect how prior to this shared agreement and understanding had been achieved that the imposition of the desired structured order would have improved matters, or even been possible. It is evident though, that the urge for order and control was very influential in the discourse around the projects, despite limited success in establishing it in practice, or little evidence of its contribution to outcomes when it was.

### ***6.5.13 The force of context and history***

As the processual literature in Section 2.3.7 suggests, it is impossible to understand how and why events unfolded as they did on these projects without recognising the very specific conditions determined by their context and history. The history of the department in previous unsuccessful change programmes, the pressure from the Treasury, the history of the relationship between the department and their IT suppliers ABC, Kate’s previous history with Frenchay and Rachel, Gerry and Kate’s long-standing friendship, the role of the OGC, ABC and GlobalIT’s competitive positioning, the experiences of the Procurement Director in previous consultancy contracts, the particular discourses that were dominant in this organization, the particular personalities and skills of the key players, were just some of the influential factors which it was necessary to understand before interpreting events and attempting to predict outcomes. Furthermore, the later stages of the projects could be seen as being shaped by the initial decisions throughout but particularly at the outset of the project even Gerry’s initial unilateral decision to establish PhoenixIT can be seen as the seed of later difficulties which are only clear in retrospect. How the projects turned out was strongly

influenced by numerous forces outside the projects themselves; and history played a role throughout.

## **6.6 Summary Characterisation**

Standing back from the detailed description and analysis, this section completes the chapter on Research Findings by summarizing the findings from the research in a broad impressionistic characterisation of the real nature of these business change projects.

These projects were not experienced as carefully planned and controlled activities, with rational and objective managers engaging in neutral and logical assessment of different paths and steering their projects to a clearly-defined agreed destination. They were battlefields of ideas and social discourse, a crowded and noisy forum of social negotiation and political manoeuvring, involving individuals with very different ways of looking at the world, and with different organisational priorities; but also with egos, passions and insecurities, different values and personal ambitions. These individuals, who were many and diverse, were engaged in a constant struggle of trying to understand what was going on, how to make things different, and how to make their view of all that prevail (or how to work within it) so that they could achieve their own view of success. This was not seen by most as particularly extraordinary, though the projects were seen as rather intense and stressful; it seemed to be accepted as the way organisations are.

Overall, it is apparent that working on projects in the organisation studied was experienced as intense and often emotional interaction between individuals, working in circumstances of pervasive uncertainty and ambiguity even greater than they acknowledge. Individuals were engaged in a constant struggle between alternative interpretations of ‘what is so’ and what actions were necessary, could be taken, and would be effective. Many expressed confidence, as if they understood and were capable of controlling outcomes (and some seemed to be better at this than others), but to an objective observer their ability to do this to the extent they believed is questionable.

Alternative interpretations were negotiated through an ongoing political process where power relations were both formal and informal. A great deal of energy and effort was absorbed in discussing alternative interpretations and by individuals promoting those interpretations that fitted their ‘world view’ and/or were seen as being in their best interest. Individual’s interests were a complex and mutually-reinforcing combination of the corporate (eg the project goals), and the personal. The sensemaking process took place within a protocol of rational objectivity, and within the framework of discourses of what constituted a legitimate and credible position. Politics, power, and personal motives were common talking-points between project participants, and assumed to be a natural part of life, though disliked by many. The need for political skills in achieving successful outcomes was widely recognised, and both admired and despised.

Leaders who combined hierarchical power, and therefore access to resources, with charisma were particularly influential in promoting their view of reality and their espoused position. However, the outcome of actions was predictable to only a limited degree, even for influential leaders. It was generally assumed that the outcome of decisions and actions was far more predictable than it actually was, and past events were often interpreted in such a way to reinforce that assumption.

Much of the work done, particularly (but by no means only) in the first half of the projects’ lives, was ‘talk’ and most of the artefacts produced were ‘texts’ which were an attempt to negotiate a particular view of reality, including issues of scope, purpose, approach and design. The great majority of these were ephemeral, though a few texts played an important symbolic and (far less often) control role. Time and effort could be absorbed yet produce nothing in terms of an eventual outcome. Assessment of progress was an intersubjective process of meaning creation, and project ‘status’ shifted rapidly and in response to subjective changes in perception, understanding and political interest.

There was a strong urge to impose order and structure on the confusion and complexity, and the existence of plans and apparent control were influential in improving the assessment of project status. However, until the negotiations on purpose and scope were complete and the



level of definition was reasonably stable, such plans and controls had little impact on actual behaviours.

All of these characteristics mean that projects pursued a course that was predictable only in a very broad sense and contingent on a complex combined sensemaking and political process, determined to a considerable degree by some initial starting conditions. Stages were hard to discern, objectives were emergent, and perceptions of status changed in an unpredictable fashion.

## 6.7 Validation of the Characterisation

The project ‘features’ in Table 6.1, the ‘key aspects’ as described in Section 6.5, and the , above characterisation in Section 6.6 of the experience of working on these projects was shared with 6 other experienced professional practitioners engaged in the some aspect of the projects researched during the 18 month research period. The responses varied from a couple of lines of endorsement to a lengthy response, but all confirmed that the findings were consistent with their experience in the specific case, and in the case of similar projects generally.

**Table 6.4: Validation by other project participants**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Summary response</b>	<b>Other points</b>
R	<i>“...very interesting. And much of it struck loud chords of recognition.”</i>	Suggestion of ‘positioning’ as combination of attempting to establish ‘meaning’ combined with appropriate political ‘handling’ Engineering projects are different in that the talking stops and something gets built.
J	<i>“Interesting stuff and definitely recognisable”</i>	Recognition of politics and personal interests
S	<i>“I thought it was really excellent – spot on. You’ve captured it brilliantly in all its complexity”</i>	How representative is this experience? Can people learn from it?
D	<i>“Interesting read – you seem to have deciphered the essential way of working in [Department]”</i>	How much was the extent of the politics a feature of the department? Particular empathy with points on fluid status, the use of rhetoric and powerful discourses, and the

		difficulty of resolving long-running issues.
M (working on New Project)	<i>“Very good – and very apt at the moment! I think most of the factors you describe are common to all projects/programmes but to varying degrees”</i>	The importance of leadership in determining the extent to which these features vary.
C (working on New Project)	<i>“I think you got the title [The Phoenix Experience] wrong – don’t you mean the [New Project] experience?!”</i>	The aspects identified seemed to be present in New Project as well as in Phoenix.

## 7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS – FRAMING THE FINDINGS

### 7.1 Introduction

This section describes the outcome of interpreting the ‘key aspects’ from the empirical research through the different theoretical ‘lenses’ of five leading theoretical frameworks within the ‘social constructionist’ and ‘social practice’ perspective identified in Chapter 3, namely:

- Giddens structuration theory
- Bourdieu’s theory of practice
- Actor-Network Theory (ANT)
- Weick’s organizational sensemaking
- Symbolic interactionism – Strauss’s ‘Theory of Action’.

The reasons for selecting these particular frameworks were discussed in detail in Section 3.4. In summary, the theoretical frameworks (with the possible exception of the last) are frequently cited in the literature; they have been of interest to those concerned with the social aspects of organizational change, as evident from the processual literature on organizational change and project management; and they each appear to incorporate a distinctive and coherent framework of theoretical constructs which can together be taken to offer an explanation of social action. Strauss’s ‘Theory of Action’, while not so frequently cited, has been included because of its specific applicability to organizational change, and because of its roots in the highly influential and much more widely referenced approach of symbolic interactionism.

Firstly, it is necessary to review the relevant literature to summarise the main features of these frameworks in each case, before analysing how each framework would interpret and explain the empirically-determined ‘key aspects’ described in the previous chapter.

As in Chapter 3, this overview has to recognise that the subjects covered are complex, often assume a background in even more complex areas of sociology and philosophy, and in any case are themselves the subject of contested interpretation and wide-ranging debate. Even a

cursory reading reveals the wealth and depth of sophisticated issues which have to be understood to treat this material critically. This section does not attempt that, seeking only to grasp the main features of these theories so as to review the ways they have been applied in the context of this inquiry. However, a summary treatment of such complex material risks being superficial or arguably even wrong in some respects. Those writers providing introductions or summaries of the work of these theorists typically highlight the tendency of researchers from other disciplines drawing on this kind of social theory to either ‘cherry-pick’ ideas out the body of work as a whole, claiming some sort of spurious authority or cachet, or even to completely misunderstand what is intended (Jones and Karsten, 2008; Mutch, 2003; Shoib *et al.*, 2006; Whittington, 1992). The approach taken here has therefore sought to minimize this risk within the practical constraints by (a) relying on authoritative interpreters and recommended introductions (b) reading in depth at least one of the author’s key works (c) drawing on reviews in quality journals which appear to demonstrate good knowledge and familiarity with the body of work as a whole (d) seeking only to highlight the distinctive elements of the theory (e) aiming primarily to identify what the theory has added to the research into business change where researchers have sought to apply it.

## 7.2 Giddens’ structuration theory

### 7.2.1 Key elements of the theory

The central concern of structuration theory is the relationship between individuals and society, often described as the structure/agency problem. “*What is at issue is how the concepts of action, meaning and subjectivity should be specified and how they might relate to notions of structure and constraint*” (Giddens, 1984, p.2). Giddens developed his ideas on this initially in *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Giddens, 1979) and then set out the framework of structuration theory in *The Constitution of Society* (Giddens, 1984). This text provides the main reference point for Giddens’ position in this section.

In structuration theory, Giddens sought to reconcile the positions of two broad schools of sociological thought: on the one hand, functionalism, systems theory and structuralism, emphasizing the social whole over its constituent parts, and seeing action as determined by objective social structures; and on the other hand, interpretative sociology, or the hermeneutic

tradition, based in phenomenology, which emphasized the importance of individual agency and the subjective experience of meaning. “*If interpretative sociologies are founded, as it were, upon an imperialism of the subject, functionalism and structuralism propose an imperialism of the social object. One of my principal ambitions in the formulation of structuration theory is to put an end to each of these empire building endeavours*” (Giddens, 1984, p.2).

Giddens proposes a ‘duality of structure’: that structure and agency are not separable but dependent, they are mutually constitutive. Human agents are constrained and directed in their actions by social structures, and at the same time their actions serve to produce and reproduce social structure. To that extent, this seems to echo the ideas articulated by Berger & Luckmann (1966) in their explanation of the construction of social reality, including the emphasis Giddens places on routine and habit. However, Giddens (1984) goes much further in describing the detailed characteristics of the mutually constituting process. In structuration theory, Giddens carefully explores the notions of both agency and structure, in the process developing a rich conceptual model of social life.

#### 7.2.1.1 *Agency*

In discussing *agency*, Giddens defines both the characteristics of the human agent and the nature of social action, reflecting many of the ideas of phenomenologically-based sociology and ethnomethodology discussed in earlier sections (referencing Schutz, Garfinkel and Goffman’s work). For Giddens, human agents are above all knowledgeable and reflexive, though he distinguishes between *discursive consciousness* – by which actors rationalize and provide accounts for their actions - and *practical consciousness* – “*what actors know, but cannot necessarily put into words, about how to go on in the multiplicity of contexts of social life*” (Giddens, 1979). They are reflexive both in the sense of being self-conscious of their practice (and may even be aware of sociological accounts of social practices in ways which may influence their understanding of their own actions, what Giddens calls the *double hermeneutic*); and in the sense of continuously monitoring the ongoing flow of social life. “*To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about*

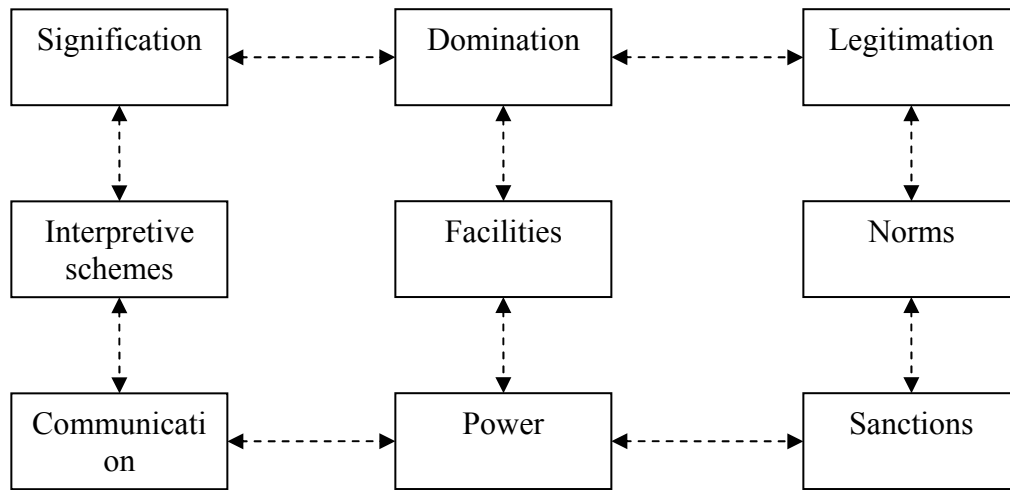
*them*)” (Giddens, 1984, p.3) – and this same competence is assumed and expected of others. According to Jones & Karsten (2008), Giddens’ view of human agency is “*strongly voluntaristic*” and has been criticised for underestimating both structural and material constraints. However, while agents may be knowledgeable, and intentional, they may not be aware of all of the factors motivating their action (“*the unacknowledged conditions of action*”, including unconscious motives, which Giddens links to a psychoanalytical theory of motivation). They may act unintentionally, in the sense of achieving effects through their actions that they did not intend. More importantly, they cannot know the “*unintended consequences of their intentional conduct*”, (Giddens, 1979, p.59) which must then be incorporated into the flow of ongoing action through reflexive monitoring of their actions, its consequences, and the reactions of others. Giddens sees that the unintended consequences of intentional action are fundamental to analysis of social activity, rendering problematic the attribution of causes and reasons to observed outcomes. “*Human history is created by intentional activities but is not an intended project: it persistently eludes efforts to bring it under conscious direction*” (Giddens, 1984, p.27). This adds to Giddens’ suspicion of the desire to apply the standards of natural science in the social sciences, and to scepticism that “*the only form of ‘theory’ worthy of the name is that expressible as a set of deductively related laws or generalizations*” (Giddens, 1984, p.xviii).

#### 7.2.1.2 Structure

Giddens rejects the notion of structure, seen as a patterning of social relations or phenomena extending over time and space, as an external constraint, with independent ontological status, constraining the actions of an independent subject. In using the term structuration he seeks to emphasize that social structure is continuously being created through the flow of everyday social practice, with patterning of social relations in time and space arising through the reproduction of situated practices according to ‘rules’ and resources. Structure is therefore “*a ‘virtual order’ of transformative relations*” – “*social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have ‘structures’ but rather exhibit ‘structural properties’ and that structure exists, as time-space presence, only in its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents* (Giddens, 1984, p.17). Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-

day activity. The rules of social life are seen as techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment of social life (eg turn-taking in conversation, or any of the many social rules exemplified in the work of Garfinkel and Goffman). Awareness of social rules is expressed primarily in practical consciousness and is the central element of the ‘knowledgeability’ of the human agent. A crucial element in the structuration process is the human agent’s psychological need for “*ontological security*” provided by “*a sense of trust in the continuity of the object world and in the fabric of social activity*” (Giddens, 1984, p.60) generated through routinization. It is this routinization of the conduct of day-to-day social practices which is “*integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent...and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their continued reproduction*” (Giddens, 1984, p.60).

Giddens places structuration theory in the context of some of the standard concerns of sociology by identifying three dimensions of *structure*: signification, domination and legitimation. The structuration process is illustrated by identifying the corresponding agent activities of *interaction* (communication, power and sanctions) and the *modalities* of interpretive schemes, facilities and norms which are seen as linking these in the structuration process.

**Fig 7.1: Dimensions of the Duality of Structure** (from Giddens, 1984, p.29)

### 7.2.2 Criticisms

Structuration theory has been criticised on a number of points. Jones & Karsten (2008) highlight the objections of Archer and others to the “conflation” of structure and agency, as ignoring the fact that historic social structure pre-exists the individual, underplaying the constraints on individual agency. A further criticism, which has been a significant issue in the IS field, and is a prominent contrasting aspect of Actor-Network-Theory, is the impact of materiality. Structuration theory sees structure as existing only virtually, in ‘memory traces’, which to some authors fails to recognise the way in which structure can be embedded or inscribed in material artefacts, including IT systems. This has led to a number of developments of structuration theory, including Advanced Structuration Theory (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994), with a particular focus on the structuration processes around advanced technology.

There have also been concerns expressed about the suitability of structuration theory as a guide to empirical research. According to Barley & Tolbert (1997), structuration theory is a theory “*of such abstraction that it has generated few empirical studies*”, and Gregson (1989) suggests that the theory is too generalized to provide empirically testable explanations of



human behaviour or even to provide guidance in specific empirical settings. Giddens himself, while seeing limits in the social sciences to general explanatory and predictive theories, certainly saw structuration theory as being relevant to empirical research, devoting a chapter of *The Constitution of Society* to discussing the issue, setting out guidelines and principles, and identifying 10 features of the theory that would particularly “sensitise” empirical research to the nature of social reality underpinning the theory (Ch 6, Giddens, 1984). According to Gregson (1989, p.246), though: “... both the guidelines offered and the concepts contained within structuration theory are useless for conducting empirical research in social science”. However, as we see below, structuration theory has continued to attract attention of researchers. Many see its value as a ‘meta theory’, a way of thinking about the social world, upon which more specifically empirically-oriented theories can build (Walsham, 1993; Weaver & Gioia, 1994); and as a means of reconciling some of the traditional dichotomies within social and organizational research (Weaver & Gioia, 1994; Orlikowski, 2000; Ranson, Hinings & Greenwood, 1980). Some recent work (Stones, 2005) has sought to build on Giddens’ work to develop what has been referred to as “strong structuration theory”, seen as providing a more easily applicable framework for empirical research (Jack & Kholeif, 2007).

### **7.2.3 Structuration theory in organizational and business change**

Several well-cited reviews of structuration theory in the management and organizational research fields (Whittington, 1992; Pozzebon, 2004; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005; Jones & Karsten, 2008) have demonstrated that the theory has been of considerable interest, most particularly for combining a process-oriented view of day-to-day management activity to be integrated with the traditional structuralist concerns of management and organization studies. Ranson, Hinings & Greenwood (1980) is an early example of this. A landmark study is that by Orlikowski (2000) of the adoption of groupware technology in several organizations, using structuration theory to highlight the way in which structures emerge through the “ongoing situated human action” of users, including improvisation, and how those same structures are constantly modified or reconstituted through users’ changes in their practices.

Structuration theory has been particularly popular within the IS research field, mainly for those with an interest in the organizational and social aspects of IS (Pozzebon &

Pinsonneault, 2005; Jones & Karsten, 2008), perhaps because this theory brings together a coherent conceptual model of social activity (Walsham, 2002) which can be ‘imported’ from the many reference disciplines in a ‘pre-synthesised’ and relatively accessible way. The influential reference work on interpretive approaches to information systems (Walsham, 1993) gives structuration theory a central place.

However, the comprehensive review by Jones & Karsten (2008) points to a number of concerns in the use of the theory by IS researchers which are echoed also by similar reviews by Whittington (1992) and Pozzebon (2004) in the broader field of management studies, about the “borrowing” of social theories in general. Jones & Karsten (2008) review 331 IS research papers in the period 1983-2004 and conclude that “*Although all the studies identified in this review either cite Giddens directly, or identify themselves as employing structuralist ideas... few of them show a close relationship between their theoretical stances and Giddens’ original formulation of structuration theory*” (Jones & Karsten, 2008, p.144); and that “*awareness of, and sensitivity to, the implications of key features of structuration theory is quite limited..*” (p.149). In the strategic management area (Pozzebon, 2004) structuration theory was usually combined with another perspective, sometimes in ways that were inconsistent with Giddens’ own fundamental assumptions. Whittington (1992) in his earlier review pointed to the application of structuration theory as “*lopsided*” and “*peculiarly limited*”. These researchers acknowledge that this is not of itself a problem (“*There is no need for theological purity*” (Whittington, 1992, p.700), or should not be taken to mean that Giddens is unchallengeable. However, they point out some of the logical and philosophical difficulties associated in developing structuration theory in ways which are at odds with its fundamental tenets and its essentially constructivist character. For example, given that structuration theory explicitly rejects both functionalist approaches on the one hand and purely hermeneutic approaches on the other, it seems inconsistent to seek to extend structuration theory from either of the rejected positions. Similarly, advocating the use of structuration theory because of its apparent focus on structure, which Giddens defines in a distinctive and careful fashion, neglects the other important aspects of the theory concerned with (eg) the knowledgeability of agents, practical consciousness, power relationships, temporality and routine, and so on. “*If what is being sought is a theory that takes structure*

*seriously, then there would seem to be better candidates available that do not bring with them structuration's theoretical overhead.*" (Jones & Karsten, 2008, p.147). They look to more rigorous understanding of the "*substantial theoretical and philosophical infrastructure*" of the theory, and a more thorough appreciation based on primary rather than secondary sources. "*Seizing on appealing concepts or apparent terminological similarities (eg the use of the word structure) without appreciating the underlying arguments risks losing essential features of the borrowed theory*" (Jones & Karsten, 2008).

Nonetheless, there are numerous applications of structuration theory in IS research relevant to the implementation of business change projects eg notably the work of Walsham and Orlikowski. In the project management research area though, the use of structuration theory, and social theories in general, is so far much more limited. Bresnen, Goussevskaia & Swan (2004) deploy structuration theory to analyse a case study of the introduction of new project management practices in a project-based organization, focusing on the complex interplay between practice and context in embedding new knowledge. However, until the publication of the collection of papers by Hodgson & Cicmil (2006), this was (according to Sydow, 2006) an isolated example of anything more than a passing reference to Giddens' work in the projects literature. Both Sydow (2006) and Green (2006) make substantive use of structuration theory in their papers, and Giddens is cited as a key reference by Linehan and Kavanagh (2006); Marshall (2006); Sillince *et al.*, (2006). Manning (2008) is a recent example of the use of structuration theory to understand the process by which projects as temporary social systems become embedded in their multiple contexts (organizations, networks and fields), and Floricel (2009) draws on structuration theory to examine the way in which emergent project structures develop. While some of these examples may be subject to some of the criticisms directed at IS scholars by Jones & Karsten (2008) it seems likely that structuration theory will increasingly be used as a theoretical framework to look at the social dynamics of projects. According to Sydow (2006, p.253): "*First, structuration theory emphasises process without ignoring the importance of structures. Second, it supports a multilevel analysis of praxis, including not only individual actors, but also different levels of social systems and institutions. And, third, it considers social context not as external to, but rather as implied in social practices: context shapes and is also shaped by these practices. In addition,*

*structuration theory is more comprehensive and balanced than most theories, for it highlights the aspects of signification and legitimation of social practices, including project practices, as well as the power and domination that is implied in any (fluid) actions and (permanent) structures”.*

#### **7.2.4 Applying structuration theory to the ‘key aspects’**

In this section, the relevance of the theoretical framework of structuration theory (ST) to the empirical findings from this research into business change projects is explored by considering the extent to which it treats the ‘key aspects’ identified in Chapter 6.

##### (a) Negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity

Uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability are pervasive features of ST, a central aspect of the theory being what Giddens describes as the ‘unintended consequences of intentional action’, making cause-effect relations and outcomes uncertain. “*Human knowledgeability is always bounded*” (Giddens, 1984, p.27). Uncertainty and ambiguity is also recognised in ‘interpretative schemes’ and in the contested nature of social reality: “... *in the not infrequent contexts of social life where what social phenomena ‘are’, how they are aptly described, is contested*” (Giddens, 1984, p.29). Awareness of this contested character is an essential part of “*knowing a form of life*”, of ‘going on’. This particular ‘key aspect’ observed is, in terms of ST, a natural part of social reality.

##### (b) Universal politics

Many aspects of social reality are contested, and Giddens refers to anthropological literature to assert that politics in the broad sense – “... *the ordering of authority relations*” (p.34) - is a feature of all social activity. Power relations, seen by Giddens in Foucauldian terms, are inherent in all social action. Power and domination are included as key aspects of the theory as set out in Fig 7.1, though the processes around enactment of these power relations does not receive much detailed attention. Power struggles are “*efforts to subdivide resources which yield modalities of control*” whereby actors seek to influence the circumstances of action of others (Giddens, 1984, p.283). Giddens says that how actors make use of the different resources available to them varies very substantially between different social contexts but goes no further than that.

Giddens places an emphasis on actors' 'strategic conduct' as one side of a complex 'dialectic of control' in interplay with structural, institutional factors (Giddens, 1984, p.288), and develops an analysis based on what he sees as a more sophisticated account of motivation involving the unconscious, as well as both discursive and practical consciousness. However, there is no particular treatment of the kinds of 'strategic conduct' that evidenced itself in the 'universal politics' that were observed empirically in this case.

(c) Discourse and rhetoric

ST is firmly within a social constructionist perspective in which: "*Language use is embedded in the concrete activities of day-to-day life and is in some sense constitutive of those activities.*" (Giddens, 1984, p.xvi). Communication/interpretative schemes/signification represent one of three key dimensions of ST set out in Fig 7.1; and Giddens stresses the importance of language in the key concept of 'discursive rationality' and, drawing on ethnomethodology, the rationalization of accounts. However, while the use of discourse and rhetoric (rather than 'interpretative schemes' – though these may perhaps imply discourse and rhetoric) in the process of contesting the nature of social phenomena seems consistent with the overall framework, it is not specifically considered.

(d) Power and leadership

As discussed above, the central role of power is clear in ST, though – beyond the recognition of 'power struggles' - the process by which it exercises effects is not discussed in any detail. As with most of the other theories, there is no particular focus on leadership as such, though this would be presumably considered as a particular form of power relation.

(e) Emotion and identity

ST has a strong emphasis on Freudian psychological motivation, unconscious motives and ‘practical consciousness’ driving action; and on the need to reduce unconscious sources of anxiety and sustain a sense of ‘ontological security’, seen in the development of routine which underpins the continuity of social life. However, while there is a clear recognition of multiple (and sometimes ‘non-rational’) drivers to action, there is no specific discussion of the impact of emotion and identity as reflected in this ‘key aspect’ of the empirical research.

(f) Discursive work

ST is concerned with social action rather than specifically with work, but the recognition of the importance of language in social construction means that much social action is speech. Acts are “*constituted only by a discursive moment of attention to the durée of lived-through experience*” (Giddens, 1984, p.3).

(g) Long-running issues

There is no particular consideration of this aspect, though such issues would presumably be seen as an indication of ‘power struggles’. ST operates at a broader-brush level than the micro-politics and personal conflicts involved in these issues.

(h) The limits to agency

ST overall demonstrates a relatively strong role for individual agency against structure, but this is within the context of the uncertainty and ambiguity described under (a) above – but cannot anticipate unintentional consequences of intentional action, or take account of the ‘unacknowledged conditions’. History “*persistently eludes efforts to bring it under conscious direction*”. This particular ‘key aspect’ would be expected as a natural consequence of the nature of social action.

(i) Fuzzy boundaries

Flow is primary in Giddens conception of the social world; it is the existence of continuity over time and space that ST seeks to explain. ‘Fuzzy boundaries’ would be expected; anything else is remarkable and requires explanation.

(j) Emerging purpose

Giddens is keen to develop the idea of unintended consequences, so while there is some discussion of intentionality, there is no emphasis on or treatment of goals and purpose. There is, though, recognition of emergence of structure from ongoing flow of experience through social acts and encounters, amid the basic unpredictability of human action. Fixed, pre-defined goals would be rather at odds with the ST overall framework.

(k) Fluid status

This is to be expected, along similar lines to (i) and (j) above. What social phenomena ‘are’ and how they should be described is contested.

(l) The struggle for order and control

ST sees a strong and motivating need for ‘ontological security’ through predictable routines that reduce anxiety.

(m) The force of context and history

The ST framework makes explicit the importance of contextual factors, and indeed Giddens is concerned to demonstrate how such ‘structural’ factors are intimately bound up with individual action. The familiar theoretical schematic (Fig 7.1) makes evident the operation of drivers of action at both the individual and institutional level via the key ‘modalities’. History is of central importance: “*An ontology of time-space as constitutive of social practices is basic to the conception of structuration, which begins from temporality and thus, in one sense, ‘history’.*” (Giddens, 1984, p.3, emphasis in original).

**7.2.5 Structuration theory - Conclusion**

Structuration theory provides a model of social life which at least touches on most of the key features observed from the empirical research, particularly with respect to the intrinsic uncertainty of social action, and the consequences of that. Much of what was observed (as summarised in the ‘key factors’) can be seen as consistent with ST, even if it is not specifically considered. In that sense, ST seems here to meet Giddens’ claims of providing a ‘sensitizing’ framework for the conduct of social research, drawing attention to the many factors driving action in a social context. Furthermore, while reflecting the fluid character of

social life, one of the primary concerns of structuration theory is the explanation of the existence of continuity in social structure. In this research, however, the interest is more in looking at the process of change and flow.

A particular issue in applying the theory to these empirical findings is that, while the theory recognises the importance of power and politics at a high-level, it treats these only in the broadest terms (at least in ‘The Constitution of Society’ (Giddens, 1984)) and offers little purchase on the processes behind issues which were of central importance in these projects. Overall, it was difficult to apply the concepts of the model in anything other than a broad-brush fashion (an observation made by several commentators, leading to its designation as a ‘meta-theory’ rather than a guide to empirical research).

### **7.3 Bourdieu – theory of practice**

#### **7.3.1 Introduction**

Bourdieu was a sociologist, philosopher, anthropologist and cultural theorist, and along with Foucault and Derrida, one of the most influential French post-structuralist thinkers. His huge body of work represents “*one of the most imaginative and fertile bodies of social theory and research of the postwar era*” (Wacquant, 1998). Central to this work is his theory of social practice (Bourdieu, 1977) “*...arguably the most significant and successful attempt to make sense of the relationship between objective social structures (institutions, discourses, fields, ideologies) and everyday practices (what people do, and why they do it)*” (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p.1). One of the distinctive features of his work was his meticulous and detailed empirical research (qualitative and quantitative) from which his theoretical concepts – or what he preferred to call “*thinking tools*” (Wacquant, 1989) – emerged. His focus on the inseparably empirical and theoretical “*logic of research*” also leads to a profound interest in the methodology of social investigation. In his “*reflexive sociology*” or “*social praxeology*” he sets out approaches which seek to blend a concern with the objective and subjective dimensions of the research field, which combine quantitative and qualitative methods, and which demand rigorous reflexivity of the role of the researcher (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Much of his early work was driven by dissatisfaction with the subjective/objective divide in social science and rationalist thought in general, as well as numerous other dualisms



such as structure/agency, micro/macro, qualitative/quantitative (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In this respect, there are areas of convergence between the concerns of Bourdieu and those of Giddens, though many differences in approach are also evident, not least Bourdieu's emphasis on the empirical.

Commentators who approach Bourdieu's work often remark that it has not received the attention (particularly in the US social science community) that it merits, and that it has been widely misunderstood (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Everett 2002; Ozbilgin and Tatli 2005; Wacquant 1989). Partly this is put down to Bourdieu's challenge to some prominent schools of thought, as well as to what he describes as "*theoreticist or intellectualist bias*" of much academic research, and to his readiness to take an active political stance; but a significant factor is "*that Bourdieu's oeuvre is simply just difficult to comprehend*" (Everett, 2002, p.77). The concepts, and crucially the relationship between them, though powerful and insightful, are complex and difficult to grasp in their entirety – according to Swartz (2008, p.46): "*...there is a systematic unity to Bourdieu's approach that is seldom grasped let alone employed*". This understanding is not helped by the legendary difficulty of Bourdieu's writing style and prose, which, while according to Wacquant (1989) partly intentional, nonetheless makes in-depth engagement with Bourdieu's original writing a daunting if ultimately rewarding challenge. "*The idiolect he has created in order to break with the common-sense understandings embedded in common language, the nested and convoluted configuration of his sentences designed to convey the essentially relational and recursive character of social processes, the density of his argumentation have not facilitated his introduction into the discourse of Anglo-American social science*" (Wacquant, 1989, p.31).

### **7.3.2 Key elements of the theory**

#### **7.3.2.1 Overview**

The key concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus* – Bourdieu's "*conceptual three-legged stool*" (Everett, 2002, p.65) are the central elements of "*an original conceptual arsenal*" (Wacquant, 1998) by which Bourdieu effects a synthesis between the subjective actions of individual agency and the effects of objective social structures to analyse and explain social practice. There are numerous other significant concepts related to these, including: *doxa* (the taken-for-

granted principles and values, or what is ‘common sense’ in the field); *symbolic violence* (when power is exercised over dominated groups through doxa); and *illusio* (interest, or stake ‘in the game’, through recognition of the capital at stake in the field); subjective *misrecognition* of the true nature of social and power relations, and *taboo*, which prevents discussion of the contradictions which are objectively evident; to name only a few. However, the bones of the theory are best explained through the “master concepts” (Swartz, 2008) of *field*, *capital* and *habitus*.

### 7.3.2.2 *Field*

Fields according to Bourdieu are “*networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions within which struggles or maneuvers take place over resources, stakes and access*” (Bourdieu, 1998). The field is a “*field of struggles*” with dominant and dominated members, who attempt to usurp, exclude, and establish monopoly over the mechanisms of the field’s reproduction and the type of power effective in it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The field is also a ‘field of play’, with arbitrary social rules which govern ‘the game’. The field is “*a structured space of positions, a force field that imposes its specific determinations upon all those who enter it*” (Wacquant, 1998, p.268). The field has hierarchies of ‘*positions*’ associated with a particular distribution of *capital* (see below), and also provides the rules and structures which “*guide the strategies by which occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively to safeguard or improve their position*” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p.40).

The boundaries of the field do not necessarily fit formal boundaries, they are themselves issues of contention as they will have some kind of institutionalized barriers to entry – “*The question of the limits of the field is always at stake in the field*” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p.39). ‘Field’ is quite different in approach from ‘system’, as it makes no assumptions of common function, internal cohesion and self-regulation (Everett, 2002).

### 7.3.2.3 *Capital*

What is at stake in the field is *capital*, which is any resource effective in allowing appropriation of some kind of valued profit in the field. Capital has many forms, of which economic capital is but one: *social capital*, and *cultural capital* are at least as important. Social capital is defined as increased power and resources that can be called upon through

membership of a group; cultural capital includes knowledge, skill, taste, lifestyle and qualifications (Everett, 2002, p.62). Bourdieu is particularly concerned with *symbolic capital*, which is essentially whatever form of capital is deemed legitimate within the field, and which confers prestige, reputation and authority. Symbolic capital provides the power to legitimise the hierarchy of position and capital in the field, and to impose what is the legitimate vision of ‘how things are’ (Everett, 2002), and to establish *doxa*.

The concepts of the field and capital are mutually dependent, in a recursive relationship which is typical of Bourdieu: “*Each field presupposes, and generates by its very functioning, the belief in the value of the stakes it offers*” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p.39). This gives rise to a ‘hermeneutic circle’: “*in order to construct the field, one must identify the forms of specific capital that operate within it, and to construct the forms of specific capital one must know the specific logic of the field*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.108).

#### 7.3.2.4 Habitus

Habitus is what Bourdieu sees as an alternative to the prevailing idea of a “*transcendent consciousness*” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.81) driving human practice, and is a system of embodied *dispositions* that guide individual practice and behaviour in everyday life, without the conscious following of rules, or evaluating ends and means. Highly critical of rationalist explanations of action, he says: “*Social agents who have a feel for the game, who have embodied a host of practical schemes of perception and appreciation functioning as instruments of reality construction, as principles of vision and division of the universe in which they act, do not need to pose the objectives of their practice as ends. They are not like subjects faced with an object (or, even less, a problem) that will be constituted as such by an intellectual act of cognition; they are, as it is said, absorbed in their affairs...they are present at the coming moment, the doing...which is not posed as an object of thought, as a possible aimed for in a project, but which is inscribed in the present of the game*” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.80).

One of the key characteristics of the habitus is its recursive relationship with the field, what Bourdieu refers to as “*ontological complicity*” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.79). Habitus is built up

through a process of conditioning over time within the field, and so ensures the active presence of past experiences in the field (or fields) as well as generating regular patterns of social activity observed in the field - the objective structures of the field - from the similarities of habitus between those in the field. It also subjectively constitutes the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy, it "*structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world*" (Bourdieu, 1998, p.81). The building blocks of habitus are "*the postulates and axioms or, even more fundamentally, the binary oppositions, labels, and categories we use to understand or lend meaning to the world – the roots of common sense, doxa*" (Everett, 2002, p.66).

Habitus is therefore at the same time both the inculcation of the objective structures of the field - in a sense, the presence of society in the individual, an inculcated intersubjectivity – as well as being the determinant of individual action which both reinforces and potentially changes the structures of the field. "*Habitus being the social incorporated, it is "at home" in the field it inhabits, it perceives it immediately as endowed with meaning and interest*". (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p.45) – like 'a fish in water', where everything (however arbitrary and contingent it may be in an objective sense) seems obvious, common sense, goes without saying. Habitus provides "a feel for the game", disposes the individual to what he or she has to do, "*without posing it explicitly as a goal, below the level of calculation and even consciousness, beneath discourse and representation*" (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p.45). Habitus also places the value on symbolic capital, by determining "*the categories of perception, the principles of vision and division, the systems of classification, the classificatory schemes, the cognitive schemata*", (Bourdieu, 1998, p.85) by embodying recognition of the differences valued in the field. In the same way, habitus provides the basis for *illusio*, the interest in the game, the being 'caught up' in the game where there is no question that the stakes are worth struggling for.

Habitus is generative and reproductive of the ordered structures of the field but is not static (though some critics see that Bourdieu's treatment emphasises its deterministic character eg (Mutch, 2003)). Because it provides classifications, structure and strategy rather than defined rules ( eg "a sense of honour rather than the rules of honour" (Bourdieu, 1977)) , and allows

for (even requires) situated improvisation, it has an “*infinite but strictly limited generative capacity*” ... “*deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend[s] to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms*” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54). But habitus provides both continuity and discontinuity: “*continuity because it stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space; discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues*” (Wacquant, 1998, p.268).

There are similarities here with Schutz’s ‘stock of knowledge’ discussed earlier, with Giddens ‘practical consciousness’ and the Aristotelian notion of ‘phronesis’ or practical wisdom; and also with Goffman’s ‘frames’ (Goffman, 1974) which feature in Weick’s sensemaking, discussed later. Emirbayer & Johnson (2008) suggest that there is a fruitful area of future development by introducing the ideas of sensemaking, and cognitive psychology in general, into the notion of habitus.

### 7.3.3 Criticisms

Bourdieu’s work has attracted a lot of criticism, much of which he and his supporters attribute to misinterpretation, or a failure to move outside the traditional dualisms (Wacquant, 1989). Everett (2002) suggests that Bourdieu has been something of a “*magnet for critique*” because his work is so substantial, intriguing and challenging. Two repeated criticisms though (Everett, 2002) are firstly that Bourdieu’s theory attributes little room to agency, the habitus seeming to provide a determinist ‘straitjacket’ of social conditioning; and secondly that the theory is essentially tautological. While there is much in Bourdieu’s writing that indicates the capacity for change in habitus and fields (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005, p.864), the emphasis is often on continuity rather than change, perhaps reflecting that the theory was developed initially from studies of traditional societies in Algeria and rural France. Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) see “*occasional hints*” of a tendency to prioritise the structural aspects. The accusation of tautology is seen by some supporters (Everett, 2002) as more problematic; that agents do what they are disposed to do because of their unconscious habitus, has been seen as

ultimately saying little more than agents do what they do, and to offer little extra by way of explanation. However, while Bourdieu himself speaks of paradox and tautology, and a “*magic circle*” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.68), he sees the accusations of tautology as arising from the persistence in thinking in terms of the dualities of subjective/objective (Bourdieu, 1977, p.95). He also does seem to go some way to ‘unpack’ habitus, identifying the characteristics of the habitus and how it develops, and many see some useful explanatory power in the concept.

But there continue to be logical difficulties with the idea of unconscious rule-following, even if it is moderated by the idea that agents behave “as if” they were unconsciously following rules (Searle, 1995, p.146). According to Schatzki (1996, p.151), while Bourdieu generates a “*meticulously rich and marvelously suggestive theory*”, it “*no more yields the true principles of practice than any other account does*”. However, Searle in his development of a similar concept to habitus, which he refers to as ‘the Background’, is driven to a similarly apparently tautologous position, which implicitly reflects an evolutionary ecological metaphor of the relationship between an organism and its environment: “*the person who behaves in a skillful way within an institution behaves as if he were following the rules, but not because he is following the rules unconsciously nor because his behaviour is caused by an undifferentiated mechanism that happens to look as if it were rule structured, but rather because the mechanism - or a set of capacities and abilities - has evolved precisely so that it will be sensitive to the rules*” (Searle, 1995, p.146). Such issues are the subject of ongoing debate (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny, 2001). However, despite the critique, it seems unquestioned that Bourdieu’s work continues to provide a benchmark for theorizing social practice (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny, 2001).

#### **7.3.4 Bourdieu’s work in organizational and business change**

As indicated earlier, Bourdieu’s work has received very little attention in the organizational and business change research fields, though a number of recent reviews have all highlighted what they see as considerable potential (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Everett 2002; Ozbilgin and Tatli 2005). According to the latter, the Bourdieuan concepts “*capture the layered, intersubjective, interdependent nature of social phenomena better than the mainstream concepts*” such as power and culture (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005, p.856). Furthermore, Bourdieu

is seen as providing a methodological framework for conducting research which cuts across the dualities of structure and agency, and objectivism and subjectivism. However, while the concepts of ‘field’ and ‘capital’ have occasionally appeared in the organizational research literature (eg institutional theory), according to Emirbayer & Johnson (2008): *“the specific ways in which these terms are being used provide ample evidence that the full significance of his relational mode of thought has yet to be sufficiently apprehended”*. In observing that Giddens has *“perhaps disproportionately influenced structuralist IS research”* Jones and Karsten (2008, p.150) suggest that IS researchers could usefully turn their attention to Bourdieu, following the analysis of the applicability of Bourdieu in IT research by Kvasny and Truex (2000). In the project management area, several papers in the recent book by Hodgson & Cicmil (2006) reference Bourdieu but only in passing, mainly as a representative of potential social theory contributions.

On the face of it, the conceptualisation of organizations as fields, as dynamic sites of struggle for symbolic capital, with agents operating according to a situated and historically-dependent ‘practical logic’ reflecting personal habitus rather than the rational decision model resonates with many of the concerns of the processual and political approaches to business change, and with the drive identified throughout earlier sections for theory reflecting the lived experience of organizational and project life. Key issues to consider are the extent to which an organization (and even more so, a project) can be considered to be a field in Bourdieu’s terms (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008); the durability of habitus and its capability to describe change (Mutch, 2003); and the extent to which modifications to Bourdieu’s framework (which he himself made continually throughout his life) can be made to reflect the issues of organizational change while still maintaining the integrity of the overall model. But overall, there seem good grounds for proposing that the wider application of Bourdieu’s ideas – *“without doubt among the most ambitious expressions to have been formulated thus far of a relational understanding of the social world”* (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, p.38) could provide *“an understanding of organizational reality, which allows for a reading of the interplay among individual choice, capacity, and strategies with structural conditions in a way that is true to organizational reality’s relational and dynamic properties”* (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005, p.867).

### 7.3.5 *Applying Bourdieu’s theory to the ‘key aspects’*

In this section, the relevance of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of social practice to the empirical findings from this research into business change projects is explored by considering the extent to which it treats the ‘key aspects’ identified in Chapter 6.

#### (a) *Negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity*

Like Giddens, Bourdieu is very interested in structure, and how it develops through the apparently chaotic flow of everyday life, through the structuring relationship between the habitus and the field. Social reality, though structured, is seen as “*imprecise, fuzzy, wooly*”. According to Bourdieu, his theory of social practice directs attention to “... *polysemic realities, underdetermined or indeterminate, not to speak of partial contradictions and of the fuzziness which pervades the whole system...*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.43). Any field presents itself as a structure of probabilities, but always implies a measure of indeterminacy – there is considerable uncertainty of the outcomes of ‘the game’. Social practice is necessarily improvisatory, working within the broad parameters but fluid structures of the field. Bourdieu’s theory of practice would therefore expect an objective aspect of the field to be considerable uncertainty and ambiguity, as observed in these empirical findings. Furthermore, it would also expect that (as observed in this case) the subjective experience of the field (the “*native relation*”), conditioned by the habitus (structured by the structures of the field) would not consider that extraordinary: “...*the coincidence between objective structures and embodied structures which creates the illusion of spontaneous understanding...*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.73).

#### (b) *Universal politics*

A central theme of Bourdieu’s theory is the endless struggle for control, itself one of the key determinants of the uncertainty, ambiguity and fluidity of the social world. The primary drive for social interaction is seen as an ongoing struggle for rewards, gains, profits or sanctions, for improving ‘position’ in the field. The ‘field’ is a space of conflict and competition for capital – both a ‘playing field’ for ‘the game’ but also a ‘battlefield’ “*in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it*”. What constitutes capital is whatever is valued in the field, by those who have decided to participate in the struggle. This



provides a potential framework for understanding ‘universal politics’ and related ‘key aspects’ observed in this empirical research.

(c) Discourse and rhetoric

Language is one of the most powerful symbolic systems, embedding the classifications and categorisations that determine social reality: “... *one can, within limits, transform the world by transforming its representation*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.14). Bourdieu sees political positioning as a continual struggle to impose the definition of the world most congruent with particular interests, to create the ‘*doxa*’ of taken-for-granted knowledge (including the categorisations and classifications used to define issues and problems in the first place). This construct appears to fit well with the observed ‘key aspect’ in this case.

(d) Power and leadership

Bourdieu does not deal with the question of leadership as such, but as is evident from the above, a concern with power (largely expressed as ‘capital’ and the ability to establish ‘*doxa*’) is central to Bourdieu’s theory. The recursively-related social (field) and mental (habitus) structures are ‘instruments of domination’, adjusted to support the interests of the most powerful, “*with all appearances of objective necessity*”. One would expect that, as observed in this ‘key aspect’, those with both positional, hierarchical power, and other forms of symbolic capital such as charisma, and a ‘feel for the game’ would be evident as dominant players.

(e) Emotion and identity

This ‘key aspect’ is again close to a central aspect of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework. All those ‘playing the game’ have *illusio* or investment in the game. “*Agents who clash over the ends under consideration can be possessed by those ends. They may be ready to die for those ends, independently of all considerations of specific lucrative profits, career profits, or other forms of profit*” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.83). This is not necessarily a rational consideration (Bourdieu objects to models of subjective psychological motivation – ‘philosophies of consciousness’) but something embodied. The body is the source of deep-seated ‘practical intentionality’, a ‘practical sense’ operating through intuition and a ‘feeling’ for the game that

takes the value of the game for granted. “*Agents well adjusted to the game are possessed by the game and doubtless all the more so the better they master it*” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.79).

(f) Discursive work

As with Giddens, Bourdieu is not specifically concerned with work as such, and there is no particular consideration of this ‘key aspect’. However, the importance of language in constituting social reality is evident (see (c) above).

(g) Long-running issues

Again, no particular treatment is offered of the ‘key aspect’ expressed in these terms, though the possibility of such would be expected in terms of the central ideas of the struggle for capital discussed at (b) and (d) above. The apparent permanence of such issues would perhaps be seen in Bourdieu’s terms as objective social structures determined by power struggles in the field, where neither side has sufficient capital to impose their view of reality.

(h) The limits to agency

As discussed earlier, agents work in a fuzzy world of uncertainty and probabilities, and so Bourdieu’s framework would expect to see limited agency, though less so for the more powerful and holders of symbolic capital. However, much is determined (bounded) by the structures of the field and the habitus. Action cannot be explained just in terms of the voluntaristic choices of individuals; the objective structures of the field both provide and limit the possibilities. This particular formulation, which sees some degree of agency within broad probabilistic limits, particularly for those powerful in the field, seems an apt articulation of what was observed in this case.

(i) Fuzzy boundaries

As discussed earlier, Bourdieu’s view of the social world and the ‘practical logic’ within it is inherently fuzzy (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.19). The substance of social reality lies not in agency or structure but in relations. Boundaries of any kind are the subject of constant struggle to change or preserve and are therefore likely to be fluid.

(j) Emerging purpose

Bourdieu's view of social action is antagonistic to views of “*conduct rationally organized and deliberately directed toward clearly perceived goals*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.25). Furthermore, the struggle for position in the field will make goals subject to change (the rules of the game – such as the goal of a project - are themselves part of the game). Any stability will necessarily be emergent through the process of political struggle for capital in the field, and will reflect the objective power structures of the field. So, unless there is a complete monopoly of power, one is likely to see the process of emergent purpose as evident in this case.

(k) Fluid status

As discussed, structure and stability is only a partial feature of social reality, with stability maintained by power structures in the field, but constantly under threat. The most powerful players will impose their view of reality.

(l) The struggle for order and control

This ‘key aspect’ is not directly evident in Bourdieu's framework, though his work on ‘homo academicus’ and intellectualization are critical of abstract theorization away from the contingent ‘more-or-less’ character of ‘practical reason’. “*Practice has a logic that is not that of logic...*” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.82) and “*the logic of practice is logical up to the point where to be logical would cease being practical*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.22). Indirectly, this particular ‘key aspect’ can be seen in terms of the structures and dispositions of the habitus, the taken-for-granted knowledge of the field (doxa), and the symbolic capital that the demonstration of order and control are recognised as having in the field.

(m) The force of context and history

Bourdieu's framework explicitly recognises context, both in terms of the definition of the structures of the field, and in the assumption of the contingent character of social life. Similarly, history is a core consideration. “*A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.16).

### 7.3.6 Bourdieu - Conclusion

Bourdieu's work on the 'logic of practice' has the disadvantage of being rather inaccessible, and of having been very little applied in an organizational context, but appears potentially to offer the most comprehensive treatment of the social processes underlying the 'key aspects' observed in the field research. Politics and power are central concerns of Bourdieu, as are the cognitive frameworks ('the principles of vision and division') that form part of the *habitus*. Though the character of such cognitive frameworks is not treated as fully as in Weick's sensemaking work (see Section 7.5 below), Bourdieu goes beyond Weick in emphasising the way power relations determine the categorisations and frameworks that determine how social reality is seen and constructed. As with the other frameworks, the intrinsic uncertainty of social interaction is a central feature, as is the emphasis on flow and the ongoing process of construction of social reality; all this means that structure, order and clear boundaries are at best temporary accomplishments. In addition, viewing the project, or rather the extended 'project network' (in ANT terms) of the project within its organizational context, as a 'field' in Bourdieu's terms, within which 'capital' is contested offers a powerful means of understanding process and outcomes. This is particularly so as the concept of 'symbolic capital' allows the inclusion of values such as prestige, personal effectiveness, longer-term career opportunity as well as more direct material and positional reward. Agency is seen as limited by the structures of the field, which combine both the cognitive and social frameworks within which problems are identified as problems, the terms in which they are discussed, and the possible solutions that are included/excluded for consideration.

## 7.4 Actor-network Theory

### 7.4.1 Introduction

Actor-network theory (ANT), also referred to as the 'sociology of translation', originated from the field of the sociology of science and technology, predominantly through the work of Latour, Callon and Law (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986; Law, 1992; Law & Hassard, 1999; Callon & Latour, 1981; Latour, 1996; Law & Callon, 1992; Latour, 1987). As remarked earlier, ANT has been influential in the field of organization research, particularly in the IS field (Jones 2000; Walsham 1997; Walsham and Sahay 1999). However, it is by no means "*a stable body of knowledge that can be drawn on by researchers in an unproblematic way,*

since its developers themselves frequently revise or extend its elements” (Walsham & Sahay, 1999, p.41). In many of the key authors’ own writings, particularly Latour (Latour, 2005, p.141), there is a strong, even provocative, reluctance to adopt rigid definitions or boundaries: “...ANT is characterized by an antipathy to self-definition” (Lee & Hassard, 1999). And sometimes “... it appears as if ANT offers little more than analytical flexibility, since everything else, including methodological terms, seems expendable” (Lee & Hassard, 1999, p.392). Famously, Latour’s reflections in ‘Actor Network Theory and After’ (Law & Hassard, 1999) are: “I will start by saying that there are only four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen! Four nails in the coffin.” – though he does later apologise (Latour, 2005, p.9) for now taking “the exact opposite position”. But the point behind much of this polemic seems to be a postmodern insistence on avoiding being boxed (even, or especially, by supporters) by the very assumptions that ANT wishes to undermine. While, as Calas & Smircich (1999) observe, “despite much trying, actor network “theory” has never been able to coalesce into a coherent theoretical perspective in the modernist sense”, it is clear that such a project was not the prime aim of its originators (Law & Hassard, 1999). “For us, ANT was simply another way of being faithful to the insights of ethnomethodology: actors know what they do and we have to learn from them not only what they do, but how and why” (Latour, 1999, p.10).

However, there are some key concepts which seem to remain central, and which appear most often in those attempting to ‘apply’ ANT (a notion in any case rather resisted by Latour (2005, p.141), and these are described more fully in the following section. But ANT – seen by Lee and Hassard (1999) as a research strategy, and by Latour as a tool for mapping associations - has a number of conceptual and philosophical commitments which are first described. Generally, despite Latour’s objections to the postmodern intellectual movement in general (Mutch, 2002), it is clear that ANT can be seen as “broadly within a post-modern mode of thinking that emphasizes the local and situated nature of all knowledge” (Doolin & Lowe, 2002), what Lee and Hassard (1999) refer to as “ontologically relativist”. But alongside recognition of the socially constructed character of social life (see (Latour, 1987) for analysis of the battle between “strong and weak rhetoric” in the collective process of construction of scientific facts) there is also, unlike most postmodern theory, a very clear

emphasis on the empirical, the need to understand situated practice and the ‘local’, to “*follow the actors*” in their interactions and to avoid any preconceptions of what groupings will be found. There is a clear affinity here with ethnography and ethnomethodology. According to Lee and Hassard (1999, p.392), ANT, while “*ontologically relativist*” is also “*empirically realist*”, and “*finds no insurmountable difficulty in producing descriptions of organizational processes*” – though recognising that these descriptions will be different from the standpoints of different actors. Calas & Smircich (1999, p.663) see this readiness to embark from within a social constructionist perspective on empirical work – providing “*many small stories that form a pattern*” – as a great strength of ANT.

The emphasis in ANT is always on relations, associations and flow rather than structure, on “*performative*” definitions rather than “*ostensive*” definitions of social groupings (Latour, 2005) – ie looking at flows and interactions, rather than postulating the existence of preconceived social entities (including, one can assume, ‘organization’ and ‘project’) taken to have clear boundaries and some shared and stable characteristics. ANT is therefore attractive to those seeking a ‘processual’ approach – ANT “*assumes that social structure is not a noun but a verb*” (Law, 1992, p.5). Generally there is a refusal to use the notion of ‘the social’ as some set of invisible causal factors, something sitting ‘behind’ interaction between otherwise autonomous actors. According to ANT, the existence of ordered patterns or apparent structure is what requires explanation, rather than providing it (Latour, 2005). *Translation* is the term that is used to describe the constant process of association, the “*ordering struggle*”, the inherently unstable “*local processes of patterning, social orchestration, ordering and resistance*” – analysis of which is central to ANT (Law, 1992, p.5). The tracing of these associations, by creating a full and rich description actually provides a form of explanation, an alternative to a causal analysis which has to rely on invoking unseen ‘social forces’.

## **7.4.2 Key elements of the theory**

### **7.4.2.1 Actor-network**

Rather than seeing outcomes as the result of invisible ‘social forces’, ANT focuses on the specific and empirical network of interactions surrounding any course of action. Agency is seen, not as the choice of autonomous rationalist individuals, nor as the effect of social

structures and rules but as “*a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled...we are never alone in carrying out a course of action*” (Latour, 1996, p.44). An actor is what is made to act by many others (Latour, 2005, p.46). Actors (or more broadly ‘actants’) are therefore best seen as networks – an actor-network is the act linked together with all of its influencing factors (which themselves are linked). The actor-network therefore brings the ‘global’ into the ‘local’, and avoids the need to rely on a blanket notion of ‘social context’. According to Latour, invoking ‘context’ is simply premature closure in the analysis (Latour, 2005). “*One does not jump outside a network to add an explanation – a cause, a factor, a set of factors, a series of co-occurrences; one simply extends the network further*” (Latour, 1996, p.9). This “*flat ontology*” in effect sidesteps the debate about agency/structure, and renders redundant conventional views of micro/macro levels of social analysis, and notions of ‘inside/outside’ of organizational and social boundaries (Latour, 1996).

#### 7.4.2.2 Non-human actors

A key feature of such networks of agency are that they are *heterogeneous*, including both human and non-human actors. This is one of the most controversial aspects of ANT, but also one of the reasons that ANT has proved attractive to researchers in the IS field. An ‘actant’ is simply “*something which acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of the action*” (Latour, 1996, p.5). This emphasis on the importance of materiality, while “*tread[ing] on a set of ethical, epistemological and ontological toes*” (Law, 1992, p.3), seems partly to arise from recognition in the earlier studies of science and technology of the inseparability of the technical and social (see Law & Callon, 1988), and partly from a concern to understand how social ties and structures of society endure across time and space: “*it is utterly impossible to understand what holds the society together without reinjecting in its fabric the facts manufactured by natural and social sciences and the artifacts designed by engineers*” (Latour, 1996, p.2). While attracting criticism in the form of the statement “*objects too have agency*” (Latour, 2005, p.63) (both that this is treating inanimate objects as human, and vice-versa) it seems that the clear intent is to reverse an overemphasis on ‘the social’, and to direct

attention to the ways in which the material world both enables and constrains human social action and places limits on social construction. As Latour remarks, “*bringing objects back into the normal course of action should appear innocuous enough. After all, there is hardly any doubt that kettles ‘boil’ water, knives ‘cut’ meat, baskets ‘hold’ provisions, hammers ‘hit’ nails on the head, rails ‘keep’ kids from falling....these implements, according to our definition, are actors, or more precisely, participants in the course of action...things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on*” (Latour, 2005, p71). The power of this approach as an analytical device is evident from Callon’s classic work on the scallop fishing industry (Callon, 1986), without having to consider that the scallops are literally ‘resisting’. According to Monteiro (2001), this “*symmetrical*” treatment of human and non-human actors has significant advantages: “...*if we allow ourselves not to distinguish a priori between the social and technical elements of a socio-technical web, we are encouraged to undertake a detailed description of the concrete mechanisms that combine to glue the network together...*”, thereby ensuring that all of the influential factors affecting outcomes are included.

#### 7.4.2.3 Translation of interests

While the broad notion of translation, as described above, is a central theme of the ANT approach, many of those researchers (Doolin and Lowe, 2002; Mitev, 2009; Sarker *et al.*, 2006; Walsham and Sahay, 1999) picking up ANT concepts draw on the model defined by Callon (1986) by which an actor-network is formed through the building up of a network of alliances with heterogeneous actors. There are four ‘moments’ of translation representing increasing degrees of alignment and coherence in the network: *problematization*; *interessement*; *enrolment*; and *mobilization*. In this process, an agent (or itself an actor-network) seeks to enroll other agents to enact particular roles by framing the problem in a particular way in terms of their respective interests, and creating a solution - an ‘*obligatory passage point*’, usually in the interests of the prime agent, and rendering them ‘indispensable’ - which provides a shared response seen to meet the interests of each agent. This process of translation, which leads to a form of organizing, rests on the ability of the prime agent to “*re-interpret, re-present, or appropriate others’ interests to one’s own*” (Monteiro, 2001, p.77) is an ongoing accomplishment, a process of continual negotiation that is prone to instability and



“*betrayal*” (by non-human as well as human actors – see Callon, 1986). However, while unstable, a situation of *irreversibility* can be reached, where the extent and strength of the network of new associations means that the system is incapable of returning to a point where alternative translation paths existed. Another important concept is that of *inscription*, whereby the interests of agents are stabilized through their incorporation in other agents, most obviously material objects, texts, computer software etc – becoming “*their more or less faithful executive*” (Callon, quoted in Monteiro, 2001).

There are other analytical concepts introduced by writers in the ANT field which can be seen as part of ANT, including *punctualization*, *black boxing*, *immutable mobiles*, *ordered narratives*, and various ways in which the concept of *translation* is interpreted. However, as Latour (1999) remarks, all the concepts were originally attempts to avoid imposing pre-formed ‘sociological’ categories or vocabularies on actors’ practice, and so care should be taken in seeing this vocabulary as representing the totality of ANT, rather than reflecting its application in some specific cases.

### 7.4.3 Criticisms

Given the positioning of ANT as “*analytically radical*” (Law, 1992), as an ‘alternative sociology’ (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986), it is not surprising that it has been critiqued from multiple directions. A notable exchange, focused on its epistemological relativism, is that provoked by Collins & Yearley (1992), but, as Latour (1999) demonstrates, criticism covers a wide range of often opposed positions. “... *this theory has been often misunderstood and hence much abused*” (Latour, 1996, p.1). This is illustrated by the fact that Whittle and Spicer (2008) accuse ANT of an essentialist, realist ontology rather than relativism, and take an exactly contrary view to Doolin and Lowe (2002) on the suitability of ANT as a critical approach in organizational studies. Given its breadth, the “*slipperiness*” of exactly what ANT can be said to be, and the readiness of the authors to see ANT as being in a state of “*permanent revolution*” (Lee & Hassard, 1999) it is not easy to discern a consistent pattern of criticism on theoretical grounds (Mutch, 2002).

Walsham (1997) identifies a number of criticisms from the organization literature, including concerns about an inadequate treatment of structure, the symmetric treatment of humans and non-humans which has already been discussed, and concerns about a moral relativism that

comes from treating all actors equally. These are echoed by an interesting and frank analysis by Mitev (2009) of attempting to apply an ANT perspective in her empirical research. While seeing many powerful aspects of ANT, she also struggled with various theoretical and methodological issues. She identifies the difficulty of focusing always on the ‘local’ level, and avoiding structural social explanations – particularly when this is the language used by the actors themselves. She also felt that the need to consider all actors equally provided little theoretical purchase on issues of conflict and understanding their eventual resolution, and in practice she sought additional theoretical framework to more explicitly handle power relations. “*ANT does not help go beyond saying that it is all complex, involves many actors, many translations which may or may not work. Why is it that certain things are contested by certain actors in certain ways at certain times, and why is it that certain coalitions win over others?*” (Mitev, 2009, p.20).

#### **7.4.4 ANT in organizational and business change**

As indicated at several points in the above, ANT has been very popular in the IS research field, highlighted by a number of broad reviews (Walsham, 1997; Hanseth, Aanestad & Berg, 2004; Doolin & Lowe, 2002; Tatnall & Gilding, 1999) which all see the strengths of ANT as offering an approach to the social aspects of technical change which (by comparison with structuration theory) is seen as able equally to take account of the influence of the nature of technology itself. Hanseth, Aanestad and Berg (2004) see ANT as “*a social theory of technology*” which is concerned with “*the construction of things normally taken for granted*”. According to Walsham (1997, p.478) ANT “*...offers considerable potential for increased understanding of the socio-technical systems which are the focus of IS research*”. Application of ANT in this field varies enormously, drawing from the rich conceptual vocabulary in different ways. Bloomfield (1995) and Bloomfield and Vurdubakis (1994) use the fundamental approach of ANT to expose the unclear boundaries between the social and technical in the introduction of health information systems. Monteiro (2001) uses the concepts of the *actor-network*, *translation* and *inscription*, *irreversibility* and *black-boxing* to analyze the development of global information infrastructure, and the adoption of information infrastructure standards (Hanseth & Monteiro, 1997). Doorewaard & Van Bijsterveld (2001) use the notion of ‘*translation*’, extending Callon’s original formulation (Callon, 1986) to

understand the adoption of a particular IT implementation approach; while Heeks and Stanforth (2007) use the idea of the *obligatory passage point*, and return to some of the earlier work of Callon and Law on the TSR2 project (Law & Callon, 1988; Law & Callon, 1992) on the interplay between the local and global to provide an analytical framework for e-Government project trajectories.

It appears from this that the ANT view of innovation or project implementation as translation is one that can productively be applied to an understanding of the emergence of project outcomes. Blackburn (2002) is one of only a few, however, in the project management research field, using the ANT concepts to emphasise the political choreography that is part of the project management role, “*the human and non-human actors and alliances which the individual draws together and mobilizes to perform a temporary social organization*” – what she calls the “*project-network*”. But growing interest in ANT can be seen in recent project management research (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006), particularly in the work of Linderoth (Linde and Linderoth 2006; Linderoth 2002; Linderoth and Pellegrino 2005). Linderoth (2002) sees “*striking parallels*” between the ANT translation process and the theory of the ‘temporary organization’ (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995) – the temporary organization “*can be seen as an actor network that has a limited life span*” (Linderoth, 2002, p.234).

In the organizational studies field, while Calas & Smircich (1999) saw ANT as having great potential in the study of organizations “Past Postmodernism”, they identified few studies which had by then made use of it. Some years later, Whittle and Spicer (2008) refer to a growing body of ANT studies in a diverse range of different subject areas. Demers (2007) sees ANT as an important contributor to organizational change theory in the ‘social dynamics’ school but cites few empirical studies, and sees little cohesion in approach: “*Actually, studies of organizational change that draw on ANT tend to borrow different concepts selectively and use them in different ways*” (Demers, 2007, p.202). The application to studies of organizational and business change still appears very limited. Sarker, Sarker and Sidorova (2006) is one of very few studies applying ANT (mainly the translation stages) to a business change project, though the concepts seem to work well in describing the course of a change project trajectory, as found more widely in the IS research field.

But there are some suggestions that much of the application of ANT does not always meet the approval of its originators (Latour, 1999; Latour, 2005). Hanseth, Aanestad and Berg (2004) observe that ANT is most often used as a “*methodology for description*” and question the extent to which “*the deeper ontological tenets have been understood and taken seriously*”. In particular, they query whether some ANT studies are really much more than stakeholder analysis, and a recognition of different political interests. Mitev (2009, p.19) sees ANT as “*very difficult to handle well*” and a tendency for ANT “*being used mechanistically and instrumentalised*”. Nonetheless, it does seem that this “*assemblage of concepts and models that are always under debate and revision, even from within*” (Demers, 2007, p.202) gathered under the broad heading of Actor-network Theory, continues to provide a rich set of theoretical insights which seem of relevance to the analysis of innovation and business change projects. However, it seems that ANT is as much, or more, an approach to the analysis of social action than it is a general theory in the sense that is being sought here.

#### ***7.4.5 Applying ANT to the ‘key aspects’***

In this section, the relevance of the theoretical framework of ANT to the empirical findings from this research into business change projects is explored by considering the extent to which it treats the ‘key aspects’ identified in Chapter 6. This is a difficult task, given the lack of theoretical coherence identified by a number of authors discussed above; and, as discussed, it may be that this is not the intent of ANT, or is counter to its core principles.

##### *(a) Negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity*

Uncertainty for actors is implicit in the concept of the actor-network, and in the inherent instability of the ‘ordering struggle’. The ‘translation’ process is prone to instability and ‘betrayal’ so outcomes are intrinsically unpredictable. ANT would therefore expect that an objective view of the process of business change would identify considerable uncertainty and different perspectives in a continuous and fluid process of alignment, and therefore this ‘key aspect’ would be likely to appear through the ANT lens. However, there is an implicit suggestion in a number of Latour’s writings that uncertainty can be reduced (at least for the analyst if not for the actors) by ‘extending the network’, by tracing the actor-network more thoroughly and thereby achieving a better understanding by ‘disentangling’ the many

agencies at work. It is not therefore clear from this whether Latour sees uncertainty and ambiguity as an intrinsic feature of social interaction, or simply a reflection of its complexity.

(b) Universal politics

ANT has a preoccupation with different interests of different actors (or actants) and the ways in which those interests are ‘translated’ to achieve alignment in the actor-network, so the existence of sectional interests is taken as read. The translation process offers a model of building up an actor-network through development of alliances with heterogeneous actors through a process of re-interpreting and aligning interests, in Callon’s terms though development of the ‘obligatory passage point’. This theoretical construct seemed to be applicable at a macro-level, with respect to the broad trajectory of the projects, but could not adequately cover the multiplicity of micro-level politics that were observed in the empirical research and are implied by this ‘key aspect’. Generally, the social interactions by which translation is achieved or not achieved is not described theoretically; these are taken to be very specific, local and contingent.

(c) Discourse and rhetoric

ANT authors fully recognise the socially constructed character of much of social reality, and given ANT’s roots in the sociology of science, even of scientific knowledge. The translation process involves the need to re-interpret and re-present others interests to one’s own, and discourse and rhetoric play a key part in this.

(d) Power and leadership

While all actors, human and non-human, are considered of equal importance, the role of representatives of groups and so-called ‘focal’ agents is recognised, and implied in the development of the ‘obligatory passage point’ in the translation process. ANT would expect to find powerful leaders playing key roles in the translation process. However, there is no explicit treatment of leadership itself, nor, as Mitev (2009) observes, the means by which power effects are achieved in practice.

(e) Emotion and identity

This can presumably be considered as one element of the interests of actors, but there is no specific treatment as such within ANT.

(f) Discursive work

ANT recognises socially constructed character of social life and the role of language and discourse in that (see (c) above). However, the focus of ANT is on the important impact of physical materiality (rather than considering the discursive aspects of work, as implied in this ‘key aspect’), as seen in the identification of non-human actants, and in the concept of inscription. The existence of ‘dead ends’ in work could be interpreted in ANT terms as failures in inscription in technology or texts. However, the constraints of the technology did not appear to be a major feature in these findings, even in PhoenixIT (though perhaps an ANT perspective would have directed more attention there). With respect to inscription in texts, the empirical findings were that most texts were of an ephemeral nature anyway, and it was the process of their construction which was most relevant in achieving ‘translation’ in ANT terms.

(g) Long-running issues

The existence of long-running issues would be expected and presumably described as failures in translation of interests, though ANT offers no particular treatment on the reasons for failure.

(h) The limits to agency

The multiplicity of associated actors with different interests in the actor-network, and the inherent instability of associations means that the outcomes of action are unpredictable and difficult for any one actor to control. This ‘key aspect’ is therefore fully covered in the ANT theoretical framework.

(i) Fuzzy boundaries

ANT focuses on flows and relationships, and the core construct of ‘translation’ is defined as being inherently unstable. Structure and clear boundaries in social interaction are less unlikely (and if they do exist probably imply some degree of inscription, or the involvement of non-

human actants), but in any case beg explanation. In particular, the actor-network extends beyond the formal project boundaries.

(j) Emerging purpose

The translation process and the establishment of the ‘obligatory passage point’ emphasise the negotiation process of reaching an agreed articulation of purpose. This will naturally lead to an emergent purpose as observed in this case.

(k) Fluid status

Similar arguments apply as for (i) ‘Fuzzy boundaries’ above.

(l) The struggle for order and control

As such, this ‘key aspect’ does not map directly on to any particular feature of the ANT theoretical framework. But this aspect can be seen in ANT terms as an attempted but largely unsuccessful translation process, with inscription in texts (plans, control documents etc) being unable to achieve ‘irreversibility’ until the actor-network had stabilized through an alignment of interests.

(m) The force of context and history

ANT plays particular attention to context, the concept of the actor-network specifically emphasizing the way in which the effect of ‘global’ agency can be traced to the local. The concept of ‘irreversibility’ recognises the importance of history, where it becomes impossible to return to a point where several translation paths existed.

**7.4.6 ANT - Conclusion**

ANT, like structuration theory, is methodologically sympathetic to an ethnographic approach of ‘following the actors’ to see what they actually do; it is as much (or more) a methodological approach as a theory of social action. Viewed as a theory of social action, it does direct attention in this case to the complexity of the network of relations (within and beyond the projects) which determine outcomes, and to the flow and instability of those relationships, implying an ongoing degree of uncertainty in those relations and a constant process of negotiation to maintain them. So while not dealing directly with uncertainty and power in theoretical terms, the key issues identified in this empirical research, ANT seems to

include concepts which work well in describing the observed events. In particular, the conceptual framework of the *translation* process, with its stages of *problematization*, *interessement*, *enrolment* and *mobilization*, and the related concepts of *inscription* and *black-boxing*, are a potentially powerful means of describing that process. However, while these concepts work well in describing and perhaps explaining the broad trajectory of the project in terms of development of an aligned vision (seen as an *obligatory passage point*), or in terms of attempts to translate interests through crystallisation of particular positions in texts and in the structure of the IT systems, it was not clear in practice how it could be used to deal with the sheer number and complexities of the micro-politics and power issues which were observed. More importantly, it also does not explain in theoretical terms why certain translations succeed and others fail, it only provides a conceptual structure within which this can be described. These observations are consistent with critiques in the literature (Mitev, 2009; Sarker, Sarker & Sidorova, 2006). The general thrust of much of the literature produced by ANT's originators, however, with its emphasis on the local and contingent character of social action does in any case suggest some antipathy to any more general theoretical ambitions.

The distinctive feature of ANT's focus on the non-human actors (notably the information technology that formed part of the project solutions), did not in fact seem to offer particular advantages in this case, as the character of the technology itself seemed to be relatively unimportant in the processes experienced with PhoenixIT. However, it may well be that adoption of the ANT perspective in carrying out the research could have highlighted these issues in ways which were not evident from the analysis as conducted.

## **7.5 Organizational Sensemaking**

### **7.5.1 Introduction**

Sensemaking is essentially concerned with the processes by which human beings deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty that is a characteristic of human experience: “*The concept of sensemaking is well-named because, literally, it means the making of sense*” (Weick, 1995, p.4). It is a widely-used generic term within a number of different disciplines (Klein, Moon & Hoffman, 2006; Naumer, Fisher & Dervin, 2008), including psychology, human-centred



computing and artificial intelligence, naturalistic decision-making, education, and organizational behaviour. For the purpose of this thesis, the focus is on organizational sensemaking as articulated in the works of Weick. The landmark work *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Weick, 1995) sets out the elements of the theory comprehensively, and is discussed in the following section, but the overall approach was prefigured in his earlier work, notably the *Social Psychology of Organizing*, first published in 1969 but much more widely read in the second edition (Weick, 1979). Weick's draws heavily on research in cognitive psychology, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, and (among others) the organizational research of March and colleagues (see Section 2.4.2), to present a view of organizations that was a challenge to the mainstream structural view of organizations as stable entities, driven by rational goal-directed behaviour. Weick presented a view of organizations as processes rather than entities, in a state of constant flux: "*The image of organizations that we prefer is one which argues that organizations keep falling apart and that they require chronic rebuilding*" (Weick, 1979, p.44). This 'chronic rebuilding' is a social process, of dynamic, unpredictable social 'double interacts' between individuals and groups seeking to cope with the ambiguity – or what Weick preferred to call "*equivocality*" – of the streams of experience of everyday life, and the '*loose coupling*' between elements of the overall system. Organizing (rather than organizations – Weick calls for more verbs and fewer nouns) is defined as "*a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviours*" (Weick, 1979, p.3). The need for 'consensual validation' implicitly reflects the socially constructed nature of organizational reality; it is the 'grammar' (or, later, "*code, or set of recipes*" (Weick, 1979, p.47) which determines which interlocked behaviours are 'sensible', rather than goal-directed rationality. What Gioia (2006, p.1713) describes as "*a kind of stealth phenomenological view*" becomes clear when Weick explicitly draws on Schutz's phenomenology of the everyday world (see Section 3.3.3.4) in elaborating his concept of organization as a grammar, code, or set of recipes, seeing them as both a scheme for interpretation of 'what is so' and as containing directives for action (Weick, 1979, pp.46-47). This all seems to place Weick within a socially constructed epistemology, but within an intersubjectively-validated but realist ontology – what he himself refers to as "*ontological oscillation*" that is a natural characteristic of everyday life, and "*helps ... understand the*

*actions of people in everyday life who couldn't care less about ontology*" (Weick, 1995, p.35).

One of Weick's central ideas is *enactment*: which recognises "*the active role that we presume organizational members play in creating the environments which then impose on them*" (Weick, 1979, p.130). Enactment is "*a simple yet complex notion*" (Mills, 2003a, p.69), which means far more than just 'taking action', and has recursive features reminiscent of Bourdieu's relation between habitus and the field. 'Noticing' or directing attention is a form of enactment, and the way in which that noticing takes place will influence the interpretation of what is noticed, and how subsequent actions unfold. As actions are taken, the nature of the reality that is faced, and within which subsequent action is taken, changes in patterned ways. In its most extreme form, enactment generates the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.

A second concept introduced in (Weick, 1979) which subsequently plays a central role within Weick's sensemaking theory is drawn from research (including Garfinkel's work on juries, discussed earlier at Section 3.3.5, cognitive dissonance theory, and some of the organizational decision-making research in Section 2.4.2) is that of the *retrospective* attribution of meaning to action. "*Actions occur for any of several reasons, and only when actions are completed is it possible for a person to review them and know what decision was made or what intention was present*" (Weick, 1979, p.92). This idea is developed in later work into Weick's often-repeated aphorism: "*How can I know what I mean until I hear what I say?*". Through this he emphasises an oppositional view to that of action based on rational choices against a perceived external reality: "*understanding does not so much guide action, as the lay view would have it, so much as action guides understanding*" (Gioia, 2006, p.1713). The combination of these two "*non-obvious*" (Gioia, 2006) ideas of enactment and retrospective attribution of meaning to action are fundamental components of Weick's version of organizational sensemaking. "*To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations*" (Weick, 1995, p.15). It also illustrates why Weick is also interested in improvisation (Weick, 1998). If action and cognition are seen as intimately connected – "*Undoubtedly the two processes are inextricably and recursively intertwined*" (Gioia, 2006, p.1714) – the action-orientated notion of improvisation, and the cognitive-oriented notion of sensemaking can readily be seen as two sides of the same coin.

## 7.5.2 Key elements of organizational sensemaking theory

### 7.5.2.1 Properties

Weick presents his approach to organizational sensemaking not as a theoretical framework or a body of knowledge but as “*a set of ideas with explanatory possibilities*” and “*a recipe for analysis*” (Weick, 1995, p.xi). Mills describes it as a “*heuristic*” for understanding organizational processes (Mills, 2003a), and a number of commentators also point out that there has been very little empirical testing of the components of organizational sensemaking (Anderson, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005).

In *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Weick, 1995) draws on a wide range of different disciplines to identify seven *properties* of the sensemaking process (p.18):

- Grounded in identity construction
- Retrospective
- Enactive of sensible environments
- Social
- Ongoing
- Focused on and extracted by cues
- Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

These provide a rough sequence: “*people concerned with identity in the context of others engage ongoing events from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, all the while enacting more or less order into those ongoing events*” (p.18).

Sensemaking is ongoing - in the sense that we are always ‘in the middle of things’, where action/inaction cannot be avoided – but it is disturbance, the unexpected or previously unknown, which most prompts the need for sensemaking, a need that is emotionally charged through our desire to resume what are our interrupted projects (Weick, 1995, p.46).

### 7.5.2.2 Frames and cues

“*To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the*

*question, ‘what’s the story?’” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.410). To make sense out of the stream of experiences is a bracketing and editing process, which requires some kind of pre-existing framework of categorisation, a concept already familiar from the phenomenologically-inspired work of Schutz, Goffman’s work on frame analysis (Goffman, 1974), and also the “perceptual filters” of cognitive psychology (Walsh, 1995; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Sense is made by connecting the cue – which is ‘noticed’, bracketed or ‘extracted’ from the stream of experience, and is relatively concrete and familiar – with the frame, which is relatively abstract. Cues are ‘seeds’ “from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (Weick, 1995, p.50). “Frames tend to be past moments of socialization and cues tend to be present moments of experience. If a person can construct a relation between these two moments, meaning is created” (Weick, 1995, p.111). A key point is that the bracketing and labeling of cues – “labels that snare specifics of present experience” (p.111) – itself takes place within frames, and so cues and the frames within which sense is made of them are themselves “connected” (another Bourdieu-like recursive relationship).*

The above process sounds like a process of interpretation, but by emphasising the role of action and incorporating the concept of enactment within sensemaking, whereby “people receive stimuli as a result of their own activity” (Weick, 1995, p.32) in the ongoing sensemaking process, Weick is insistent that sensemaking is more than interpretation, it is also about the process of creating what is there to be interpreted. This is an active process whereby sense is literally made.

### 7.5.2.3 Vocabularies

Weick expands on the notion of frames, and highlights the great variety of ways in which this apparently simple idea can be elaborated, by identifying six “vocabularies” which all provide the substance of sensemaking structures: ideologies; third-order controls (or taken-for-granted premises); paradigms; theories of action (referencing the work of Argyris and Schon); traditions; and stories. Stories are seen as very important as being the primary means by which experience is filtered, structured and given meaning, and cause-effect relations are conjectured and communicated. Reflecting the earlier discussion on narrative in Section 3.3.7, Weick stresses the importance of “*narrative knowing*” as opposed to paradigmatic knowledge

(Bruner, 1991), claiming that “*most organizational realities are based on narration*” (Weick, 1995, p.127).

#### 7.5.2.4 *Plausibility*

The anti-positivist and pragmatic orientation of the sensemaking perspective is most obvious in Weick’s characterisation of sensemaking as being driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Sensemaking is fundamentally about action: “*If the first question of sensemaking is ‘what’s going on here?’, the second, equally important question is ‘what do I do next?’*” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.412). As illustrated earlier with reference to the social construction of reality, it is clear that the everyday social world is characterised by both uncertainty – too little information – and ambiguity – too many possible explanations. Reflecting the phenomenological perspective of Schutz and the ethnomethodologists discussed earlier, Weick’s sensemaking process works by “*presumption*” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.412), by reference to expected, common-sense models based on a common ‘stock of knowledge’ built up in the pragmatic world of action: “*sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, reasonableness, creation, invention and instrumentality*”.

A concern with accuracy is grounded in models of rational decision-making, and the notion that there is an external object to be more or less accurately perceived, but Weick draws on a wide range of sources to demonstrate not only that “*actual organizations do not fit this conception*” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.415) - but that there are many reasons why people do not need to perceive the current situation or problems accurately (if that were even possible) in order to solve them; “*they can act effectively simply by making sense of circumstances in ways that appear to move toward general long-term goals*” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.415). A distinction can be seen between action rationality and decision rationality (Brunsson, 1982) - people who want to get into action tend to simplify rather than elaborate, and they filter out those aspects which confuse action choices. Through this filtering process, people see and find sensible those things that they can do something about. Furthermore, action shapes that which is emerging, and events are shaped towards those capabilities “*the bold actor*” already has. In these circumstances, plausible stories about what is happening and what to do next keep things moving so that the sensemaking process, the combination of action and retrospective interpretation, develops faster. “*A good story*

*holds disparate elements together long enough to energize action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens, and engagingly enough that others will contribute their inputs in the interest of sensemaking”* (Weick, 1995, p.61).

#### 7.5.2.5 *Identity*

Identity construction is a core element of Weick’s view of sensemaking: *“the establishment and maintenance of identity is a core preoccupation in sensemaking”* (Weick, 1995, p.20). People are concerned with self-enhancement, efficacy and consistency - to promote a positive view about themselves, to see themselves as competent and efficacious, and to sense and experience coherence and continuity (Weick, 1995, p.20). *“From the perspective of sensemaking, who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity”* (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.416) – a recursive cycle that also illustrates in passing what Weick means by enactment. In situations where sensemaking is most required, of discontinuity or disruption of normal expectations, it seems that *“individuals attempt to make sense of ambiguous stimuli in ways that respond to their own identity needs”* (Brown, 2000, p.47). In one of the few major empirical studies using the sensemaking framework to analyse an organizational change programme, Mills (2003a, p.55) concludes that identity construction is *“at the root of sensemaking and influences how other aspects, or properties, of the sensemaking process are understood.”* While Weick has been criticised for his modernist, essentialist treatment of ‘individual’ (Mills, 2003a, p.56), his treatment of identity is distinctly postmodern, a fluid and fragmented view of multiple possible identities constructed through participation in multiple discourses (Weick, 1995, p.20). The work to *“confirm one’s self”* (Weick, 1995, p.23) is therefore a continuous and intensive activity, and an important trigger to sensemaking.

#### 7.5.3 *Criticisms*

Weick’s work is highly regarded (see the tribute issue of *Organization Studies* Nov 2006) and very widely cited: (Weick, 1979) and (Weick, 1995) have around 7000 and 6000 citations respectively on Google Scholar. However, although according to Mills (2003a), critiques of Weick’s approach are *“rare”*, his version of sensemaking *“has yet to be utilized by others as a*

*framework for making sense of organizational outcomes*” (p.71). There have been some extensions of the theory, most notably the recognition of the important role of “*sensegiving*”, the influential role played by leaders and other stakeholders in the sensemaking process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Recent work on sensemaking suggests that sensegiving is now accepted as a necessary component of organizational sensemaking (Maitlis 2005; Maitlis and Lawrence 2007; Rouleau 2005). This addition points to a wider issue, identified by Mills in her study, of the failure of sensemaking to deal with power issues, and the process by which competing sensemaking positions are resolved and a particular view prevails. This led her to conclude that there were “*inherent weaknesses and limitations of the sensemaking model to fully explain the change process ...*” (Mills, 2003a, p.72). As Brown (2000, p.46) says: “*...some voices are more (and some less) privileged, and it may often be more appropriate to describe sense as a power effect rather than a negotiated consensus*”.

Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) draw together areas of critique to propose ways in which the sensemaking perspective could be strengthened. One area of concern is that sensemaking may exaggerate agency, and neglect evidence that organizational members are socialized into expected sensemaking activities (though arguably Weick’s various ‘vocabularies’ already acknowledge these institutional effects on ‘framing’). Another concern is that sensemaking tends to emphasize individual sensemaking, or uses that as its departure point. Weick points to work on collective and distributed sensemaking, including his own work on ‘heedful inter-relating’ (Weick & Roberts, 1993; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001) as a route to exploring the processes by which shared meanings are developed. The need to better incorporate power relations is also acknowledged, but Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) point out that sensemaking does afford insights into how power is expressed in acts that affect what is accepted and taken for granted: “*through things like control over cues, who talks to whom, proffered identities, criteria for plausible stories, actions permitted and disallowed, and histories and retrospect are singled out*” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.418).

#### **7.5.4 Sensemaking in organizational and business change**

As indicated earlier, while organizational sensemaking has been extensively cited, and numerous studies have used some aspects of sensemaking (Mills, 2003a), the extent of empirical work which fully employs the sensemaking framework is actually relatively limited

(Anderson, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking has been of interest in connection with how major change programmes are given ‘sense’ by senior management, and how they have been interpreted by different stakeholder groups, as a means of explaining outcomes (Balogun, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek *et al.*, 2006; Currie & Brown, 2003; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Isabella, 1990; Rouleau, 2005). The sensemaking concept appears to be attractive to researchers seeking to illustrate the point that different stakeholder groups have different ‘frames’ or ‘world views’, and so interpret initiatives and actions differently, though more often sensemaking appears to be used successfully as a broad high-level vocabulary to make that point rather than as an in-depth analytical framework to examine the processes at work in detail (Engwall *et al.*, 2005; Sambamurthy & Zmud, 1997; Von Meier, 1999). In particular, Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar (2008, p.1035) suggest that in fact, organizational sensemaking has not explored extensively what they refer to as “*discrepant sensemaking*”, or why people disagree about their interpretation of experiences they have in common, and what they do about it. According to Maitlis (2005) “*relatively little is known about the dynamics of sensemaking when different parties engage simultaneously or reciprocally....., or about the ways in which the accounts they generate are reconciled – or are not reconciled*”.

However, sensemaking as a framework appears to have considerable relevance in the implementation of business change projects - circumstances where organizational and technological change and innovation increase uncertainty and ambiguity and prompt sensemaking, and where a wide range of different stakeholder perspectives are involved (Currie & Brown, 2003; Gallivan, 2001; Griffith, 1999). In the project management research field, Thomas (1998) sees sensemaking broadly as an alternative approach to the traditional control-oriented project management approach, focusing on projects as a means of organizing rather than a form of organization. Viewing sensemaking as a process “*which includes the efforts of individuals and social groups as they seek, process and construct information to negotiate through problem situations*” project management could usefully be seen as “*an open and emergent process of sensemaking rather than a determinant and closed process of following prescriptions and rules*” (Thomas, 1998, p.35). This is picked up by Alderman *et al.* (2005) in their study of the design and development of the Pendolino train, using sensemaking processes as expressed in project participants’ narratives to suggest that “*a key project*



*management task in complex projects is the management of meaning through the promotion of particular narratives and the reconciliation of differences in sense, understanding and interpretation made of the project by the key project actors” (Alderman et al., 2005).*

Papadimitriou & Pellegrin (2007) analyse the way in which particular “*Intermediate Objects of Design*” support that process of sensemaking, and Engwall & Westling (2004) see a dramatic transition (*‘peripety’*) in an R&D project as “*a converging moment of collective sensemaking*”. Thiry (2001) identifies the importance of recognising the different sensemaking of different stakeholder groups in situations of ambiguity and uncertainty in order to make effective use of the Value Management approach to engineering projects. Each of these authors emphasizes the need to promote high levels of interaction and communication to improve the collective sensemaking process, and to reduce the chances of project failure through the common causes of “*unmet expectations or communication failures*” (Thomas, 1998, p.41) – though so far there is little emphasis on power effects in project sensemaking. However, it does seem that the potential of sensemaking as a framework for thinking about complex projects is beginning to be seriously explored, though, as with the other theoretical frameworks summarised in this section, researchers have so far only drawn on some aspects of what is a wide-ranging set of theoretical concepts.

According to the most in-depth examination of the sensemaking framework in an organizational change setting (Mills, 2003a): “*The main strengths of sensemaking lie in its ability to tie together strands of various social theories into a comprehensive framework, its ability to conceive of organizations as processes rather than outcomes, and its revelation of the role ambiguity and uncertainty play in organizing*” (p.71).

### ***7.5.5 Applying Weick’s sensemaking framework to the ‘key aspects’***

In this section, the relevance of the theoretical framework of sensemaking to the empirical findings from this research into business change projects is explored by considering the extent to which it treats the ‘key aspects’ identified in Chapter 6.

#### ***(a) Negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity***

Uncertainty and ambiguity are the central features of sensemaking theory, which is concerned with how groups and individuals construct organizational reality from the ‘equivocality’ of

the stream of experience. There are dynamic, unpredictable social ‘double interacts’ leading to ‘loose coupling’ between elements of the organizational system. The process by which individuals and groups interpret the meanings of events in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity and then take action is theorised in terms of a number of constructs, including enactment, plausibility, identity, cues, frames and organizational vocabularies.

*(b) Universal politics*

Politics is acknowledged as a weak point of Weick’s sensemaking framework, which concentrates mainly on the relation between cognitive processes and action, and sheds little light on the resolution of ‘discrepant sensemaking’. Weick does point to the importance of power relations in deciding which ‘cues’ are identified, which ‘frames’ are used for interpretation, and how organizational events are narrated; but not to political action as such.

*(c) Discourse and rhetoric*

With extensive references to phenomenology and ethnomethodology the importance of language and discourse are explicitly seen as active tools in the construction of meaning. In particular, narrative is seen as the primary sensemaking vehicle, by which experience is filtered, structured and given meaning, and by which collective sensemaking is achieved and reinforced. According to Weick, most organizational realities are based on narration; reality is an ongoing sensemaking accomplishment. The concept of organizational ‘vocabularies’ highlights the importance of certain ideologies and taken-for-granted assumptions, as can be seen reflected in this particular ‘key aspect’.

*(d) Power and leadership*

As discussed in (b) above, the role of power in sensemaking is so far not much explored. The role of leaders in ‘sensegiving’ is though seen as an important consideration, and this is clearly at play in the empirical research findings in this case.

*(e) Emotion and identity*

Identity construction is seen as a vital element - ‘a core preoccupation’ - in the sensemaking process. This is seen in largely psychological terms; a need to ‘confirm one’s self’ is an important trigger to sensemaking. Actions occur for many reasons and intuitively, rather than

for rational reasons; indeed action is a spur to sensemaking. Emotion influences sensemaking; ‘sensemaking is infused with feeling’.

*(f) Discursive work*

Sensemaking, with its combination of interpretation and action, *is* organizational work, in Weick’s terms. Talk is a vital component of this. Sensemaking theory therefore expects that one would observe this ‘key aspect’ as a prominent feature.

*(g) Long-running issues*

Weick offers no particular treatment here. As discussed earlier, the process of resolving alternative sensemaking perspectives is not well treated generally.

*(h) The limits to agency*

The theory implies a complex view of agency. On the one hand, the ‘loose coupling’ between organizational outcomes and actions creates uncertainty, and much planned management action is seen to have unpredictable effects, depending on the quality of the sensemaking process. On the other hand, the notion of ‘enactment’ emphasises the ability of agency to create its own context; and sensemaking is driven by ‘what do I do next?’ as well as ‘what is going on?’ One would expect to see a belief in the ability of leaders to influence events, but also many instances of action not leading to the intended or expected consequences.

*(i) Fuzzy boundaries*

The sensemaking framework is based around a view of organizing as a continuous process of ‘chronic rebuilding’, of flow, loose coupling, and ambiguity. Fuzzy boundaries would be a natural consequence.

*(j) Emerging purpose*

Organizational goals are developed and as necessary amended through an ongoing retrospective sensemaking process reflecting on actions taken and the interpretation of the current situation. The effect of ‘enactment’ is to change the environment that is faced, which may change the perceived outcomes required. Both these effects within the sensemaking framework mean that goals and requirements will be emergent, as observed in this case.

(k) Fluid status

Status will depend on the sensemaking process, which can suddenly shift, as different aspects of experience are bracketed for management attention. The ‘enactment’ concept suggests that people can themselves create a change in what they ‘objectively’ perceive and measure about an organizational event.

(l) The struggle for order and control

Interruptions in expectations are a trigger for sensemaking. The need for order and control can be seen as people trying to develop a plausible story to deal with the anxiety arising from ‘interrupted projects’, and from the need to make sense, and be able to act, within an otherwise chaotic world.

(m) The force of context and history

Sensemaking has a retrospective character, and history is part of current sensemaking. Furthermore, the social world implied in sensemaking theory is one which is highly contingent and sensemaking depends on interpretation of specific local conditions (‘cues’), in the light of experience and presumptions built up over time (‘frames’). Context and history will therefore be very influential, at both an individual and group level, and the balancing of these two factors is at the heart of the sensemaking framework.

**7.5.6 Weick’s sensemaking framework - Conclusion**

Weick’s sensemaking has advantages over the other frameworks in being explicitly aimed at organizational processes rather than social activity in general, and so it is rather easier to place many of the ‘key aspects’ of the organizational activity observed in these business change projects within it. The framework is directly concerned with the processes by which organizational actors deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty of organizational life, seen as a central feature of the experience of these business change projects; and sees this ‘equivocality’ arising from the ‘loose coupling’ of organizational activities rooted in the intrinsic unpredictability of ‘social interacts’ that constitute organizing processes. While offering a richer exploration of the cognitive and emotional processes behind sensemaking than any of the other frameworks, and helping to explain the range of different positions which can be taken in trying to establish the nature of organizational reality, it is largely silent

on the political and power processes which in this empirical research can be seen as being major determinants of the outcome of these processes. Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus seem stronger in highlighting power and politics, and in combining the interpretive and power drivers of action, though Weick's organizational psychology focus, and concept of cues and frames, (though broadly similar in some respects to habitus) is more detailed and easier to understand. Similarly, Weick's analysis of the various organizational 'vocabularies' that shape the sensemaking process appears directly applicable to the empirical observations and also recognises the importance of discourse and narrative in the process of the construction of organizational reality. Furthermore, sensemaking theory does look to identity and emotion as prime triggers for sensemaking; and perhaps most interesting of all is its treatment of action as an integral part of sensemaking, rather than as something arising as a consequence of prior rationalisation. The framework seems most relevant taken in its entirety (including action and discourse) rather than just the interpretative aspect which seems most often employed in the literature.

Apart, therefore, from the acknowledged weakness in the area of politics and power (though this is a significant weakness in the case of these empirical findings), it offers productive insights into most of the 'key aspects' observed.

## **7.6 Symbolic interactionism – Strauss's 'theory of action'**

### **7.6.1 Introduction**

The broad field of symbolic interactionism was introduced in Section 3.3.4. As indicated there, it is difficult to pin down what has for some time been a broad tendency (social constructionist, interpretive, focused on the creation of meaning through social interaction) rather than a specific theory. However, Strauss, one of the leading exponents of symbolic interactionism and a prominent figure in social research, developed a number of theoretical constructs in the course of his research over 40 years with a number of colleagues (notably Glaser and Corbin) which have been seen to be of general application in a range of organizational contexts, and offer some valuable ways of thinking about organizational change, the conduct of work, and (unlike the other theoretical frameworks considered here) even specifically of projects (see Strauss, 1988). His theoretical ideas, which he saw as

evolving from an essentially pragmatist philosophy to incorporate the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism (he was a student of Blumer), were developed mainly from his commitment to empirically-grounded theory; his theoretical constructs (such as ‘trajectory’, ‘negotiated order’ and ‘social worlds’) were found necessary to explain empirical findings. These were synthesized into a ‘theory of action’ in his book ‘Continual Permutations of Action’ (Strauss, 1993), which provides the main basis for the discussion in this section. Strauss makes clear his debt to the American pragmatists, particularly Dewey and Mead, and to symbolic interactionism, as a starting point expanding Blumer’s three basic tenets into 19 assumptions about the nature of social interaction; what could be seen as a particular view of the character of social reality. Strauss then seeks to build on these assumptions of the character of social reality to develop a theory of social action, and more specifically work as interaction, which more completely embraces the richness of human life: *“a theory of action that at least will enable us not to ignore the range of individual, institutional, and societal interaction addressed by ... great novelists”* (Strauss, 1993, p.49).

These basic assumptions together emphasize a fundamental difference from the *“means-ends analytical schemes”* that dominate mainstream models of rational decision-making. They acknowledge emotion, the place of the human body (echoing Bourdieu), irrationality, temporality and sequence of actions as an ongoing process, circumstances and conditions that *“..give form, direction, and, to some extent, fate to activity”* (Maines, 1993, p.xv). Courses of action are directed towards goals, but in a way that is intrinsically uncertain. Many courses have no clear-cut goals, or else they change over time, or else multiple actors have different understandings of what they are. All these considerations may apply just as much to means as to ends.

Another aspect of social reality, in Strauss’s perspective, is that actors are members of different and usually multiple *“social worlds and subworlds”* involving *“various generalized commitments”* which profoundly shape their members’ perspectives (Strauss, 1993, p.41).

## 7.6.2 Key elements of the ‘theory of action’

### 7.6.2.1 *Trajectory*

Trajectory is the central theoretical construct in Strauss’s theory of action. It refers to a course of action but also embraces the interaction of multiple actors and contingencies that may be unanticipated and not entirely manageable: “..in extreme cases so ‘fateful’ that control of the course of action is threatened and even rendered virtually impossible” (Strauss, 1993, p.53).

Trajectory is used in two ways:

*“(1) the course of any experienced phenomenon as it evolves over time (an engineering project, a chronic illness, dying, a social revolution, or national problems attending mass or ‘uncontrollable’ immigration) and (2) the actions and interactions contributing to its evolution. That is, phenomena do not just automatically unfold nor are they straightforwardly determined by social, economic, political, cultural, or other circumstances; rather they are in part shaped by the interactions of concerned actors”* (Strauss, 1993, p.53, emphasis in original).

When multiple stakeholders are involved (who may come from different ‘social worlds’ and have different perspectives) the course of the trajectory will be determined by a number of interaction processes, including negotiation, persuasion, education, manipulation, and coercion or the threat of coercion (Strauss, 1993, p.57). No single actor guides or manages the trajectory, though this does not mean that all are equal in power of influence in their attempts at shaping the trajectory. Strauss, in his studies of hospitals, used the concept of ‘*negotiated order*’ to describe the way in which some degree of social stability could be pragmatically arrived at in the conduct of work, independently of any detailed direction, by the different actors coming to terms with each others’ goals and actions. Later he preferred the term “*processual ordering*” (Strauss, 1993, p.255) acknowledging that the process of interaction may involve many more processes than implied by the term ‘negotiation’, and wishing to point more explicitly to “..the lack of fixity of social order, its temporal, mobile and unstable character, and the flexibility of interactants faced with the need to act through interactional processes in specific localized situations where although rules and regulations exist nevertheless these are not necessarily precisely prescriptive or peremptorily constraining” (Strauss, 1993, p.255).

### 7.6.2.2 *Aspects of trajectory*

Strauss identifies a number of ‘subconcepts’ which support the central concept of trajectory, including *trajectory phasing*, *trajectory projection*, *trajectory scheme* and *trajectory management*. *Trajectory phasing* highlights the importance of actors’ conceptualizations of different phases of the trajectory, which may affect their next actions or interactions. *Trajectory projection* is the actors’ individual vision of the expected direction of the trajectory, though by no means an end or a goal; actors may or may not share projections, and may also draw on different memories and experiences that shape the projection. *Trajectory schemes* represent the respective ‘plans’ or rather broad strategies within which actors take action or approach interaction. *Trajectory management* refers to the entire process by which the trajectory is shaped by the actors, and is likely to be dominated by the trajectory schemes of the most powerful.

### 7.6.2.3 *Biography*

Similar concepts to those above can be applied to the actors, rather than the trajectory, in particular to the actors’ involvement and commitment to the courses of interaction shaping the trajectory. *Biography* refers to the impact that individual identity and history has on the way in which individuals interact. *Biographical projection* is the process by which an actor anticipates the outcomes of future actions and interaction in terms of their own identity; and *biographical scheme* refers to the plans that individual has to shape the future. (It is interesting that Strauss mainly refers to identity in this concept of biography and does not discuss personal interest in the Bourdieuan sense). The references to historical events in the text makes clear the intent here is to capture the sense of many individuals caught up in, and in various ways shaping, the overarching collective trajectory of events; and the importance of their individual stories.

### 7.6.2.4 *Orders*

Another broad theoretical concept is that of *orders*: “... *analytical abstractions that summarize what, with regard to an evolving phenomenon, the actions and interactions are directed at shaping*” (Strauss, 1993, p.59). There are many kinds of orders: such as temporal order, work order, technological order, informational order; and others such as sentimental order, moral order and aesthetic order. It is not entirely clear what is meant by these different



types of ‘order’ but broadly they reflect a kind of sensemaking with reference to broader structural conditions and constraints, with Strauss maintaining that the degree of success of trajectory management is likely to be phrased by the actors in terms of one or more of these types of order, a sense of gaining control over some perceived important aspect of the social trajectory (eg interpersonal relationships, resources, schedule). “*In order for interactants to shape the sequence and the associated phenomena to their satisfaction, they will work out strategies to restore essential elements of a disturbed order*” (Strauss, 1993, p.60). This judgement may vary considerably between different actors.

#### 7.6.2.5 Action and interaction

Strauss distinguishes between the *interaction processes*, largely seen as ‘negotiation’, and *action processes* by which work is done. However, the great majority of action processes entail interaction. A particularly significant action process is what Strauss (1988) refers to as *articulation* of work tasks, the process of defining what needs to be done, by whom, and how. Actors will see the interaction processes (of negotiation and manipulation etc) as strategies by which the work is to get done. This differs from Bourdeiu’s framework which sees the interaction processes as a means of securing capital, which will include successfully getting the work done if that is valued in the field.

#### 7.6.2.6 Social worlds and arenas

An important concept in understanding the interaction processes that determine trajectories is that of *social worlds*: “*groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business*” (Clarke, 1991). Social worlds segment the social actors (though actors may be members of different social worlds simultaneously) into groups sharing differing views from other social worlds, often passionately. Social worlds seek to differentiate themselves, to establish legitimacy and authenticity, set standards and evaluate others by them; and often assume greater legitimacy for their own aims and activities than others (Strauss, 1993, p.217). Membership of social worlds is an important source of identity for individuals and groups, and has a strong emotional charge.

Interaction processes usually imply the intersection of social worlds, applying multiple perspectives, resulting in argument, debate and negotiation before any settlement (if at all). The different social worlds involved are therefore key to understanding the eventual trajectory. Strauss does not say much more about the different ‘world views’ of social worlds, or how their sensemaking is determined. However, Strauss does provide a theoretical treatment of interaction, based around ideas of “*representation, misrepresentation, and presentation*” (Ch 7, Strauss, 1993) which builds on Goffman’s ideas of ‘presentation of self’ (Goffman, 1990/1959) and acknowledges the strategic and potentially manipulative character of social interaction.

Strauss refers to *arenas* as the interaction of social worlds where issues are difficult to resolve – “*where actions concerning these are being debated, fought out, negotiated, manipulated, and even coerced within and among the social worlds*” (Strauss, 1993, p.226). Arenas can be internal to organizations, or external, such as public policy arenas. His treatment of arenas reflects the real-world complexity of such interactions: where representation is contentious; where there is dispute about what the issues are; where issues evolve as circumstances change, or additional participants join the arena; where representatives of social worlds take positions; where alliances are formed; and where different arenas intersect. Strauss stresses the “*high drama and narrative appeal*” of arenas, and looks for research which can “*convey the ambiance of the arena: its tensions, conflicts, passions, furor of the struggle that goes on beneath diverse ideological banners, the dashed hopes as well as hopes realized*” (Strauss, 1993, p.231).

#### 7.6.2.7 *Conditional matrix*

The *conditional matrix* is another major component of Strauss’s theoretical scheme, and reflects the importance of specific conditions of history and context in shaping the unfolding trajectory. The conditional matrix is described by Strauss & Corbin (1998) as a methodological analysis tool for researchers to track conditional features of the research site in terms of a series of concentric circles or levels, where the inner rings include the features bearing most closely upon local action and interaction. In general terms, the levels move from international, national, community, organizational, sub-organizational etc. The important point here, however, is the explicit recognition of the importance of ‘macroscopic’ factors in

determining local ‘microscopic’ activity in a manner that is very similar to the concerns of ANT to ‘make the global local’. Like most of the theoretical frameworks described in this section, Strauss is concerned to avoid a polarized duality between micro/macro or agency/structure.

### 7.6.3 Criticisms

Strauss’s ‘theory of action’ has not received much attention in the literature, perhaps reflecting the decline in interest in symbolic interactionism discussed in Section 3.3.3 (Fine, 1993). ‘Continual Permutations in Action’ is mainly cited in broad terms by the symbolic interactionist and health research communities, though it has also captured interest in the fields of computer-supported collaborative work in the IS research field (Schmidt & Simonee, 1996; Dourish, 2004).

Reviewing a retrospective of Strauss’s work (Schatzman & Maines, 1991), Hammersley (1997) sees the weaknesses in Strauss’s work as those of symbolic interactionism more generally, and indeed of the pragmatist philosophy that underpins it. One major objection is that the emphasis on the universal micro-processes of social interaction means that the importance of change in macro-structures and institutional forces over time is ignored (though Strauss would presumably argue that the ‘conditional matrix’ is a means of incorporating this). Power, while alluded to, and seen as an important determinant of outcomes, is not explored in any detail, though some protagonists are looking to develop the theoretical handling of this aspect by combining the *social worlds* perspective with the power/knowledge ideas of Foucault (Clarke, 2003). Generally, while the interaction processes are described in some detail, there is no theoretical treatment of how and why the ‘negotiation’ process reaches a conclusion; a criticism, as discussed in earlier sections, that has also been aimed at structuration theory and ANT (though Strauss’s treatment of ‘representation’ does provide a more detailed underpinning to social interaction).

Hammersley (1997) is also critical of some vagueness in the conceptual constructs, with Strauss reflecting Blumer’s conviction (Blumer, 1969/1986) that most constructs about social life are intrinsically uncertain, and to be considered as ‘sensitizing’ devices rather than precise and stable definitions. Certainly, there do seem to be conceptual difficulties eg about the clear distinction between interaction and action, and between the different types of ‘orders’ –

although the general thrust seems clear. Hammersley also accuses Strauss of a degree of parochialism, ignoring the literature which lies outside the field of symbolic interactionism which he sees as overlapping with Strauss's theoretical framework. He sees clear parallels with the work of Bourdieu generally, and with actor-network theory, and considers that the theory could be developed by exploring those relationships.

#### ***7.6.4 Application in organizational and business change***

If Strauss has ignored the wider literature, then the reverse could also be said to be true. As mentioned earlier, Strauss's theoretical work is hardly mentioned in the organizational and business change literature, although he is of course often cited for his methodological contribution. Some of the major reviews of the organizational change literature (Burnes, 2004b; Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001; Weick & Quinn, 1999; Demers, 2007) do not cite Strauss at all. This seems curious given the evident applicability of the 'theory of action' framework to the processes of organizational change, and the fact that the work is based on highly-regarded empirical work. One would have thought that the framework would have been of considerable interest to proponents of the processual approach to change; and indeed Pettigrew's famous study of politics in organizations cites Strauss's earlier work extensively (Pettigrew, 1973). Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron (2001, p.700), while not referring to Strauss, nonetheless highlight the evident similarities between Strauss's framework and the processual approach to change by saying: "*Trajectories of change are especially probabilistic and uncertain because of changing contexts and the resultant complexities and ambiguities of human action*". Dawson (1994) in his processual treatment of change only cites Strauss for discussion of methodology.

The ready application of the notion of trajectories and social worlds to a processual perspective on projects seems to have been recognised more in the information systems research field (albeit usually under a broad 'symbolic interactionist' label), following the long-standing interest of the impact of politics on IT development (Kling, 1980; Kling & Scacchi, 1982) and the early recognition of the value of the symbolic interactionist perspective to that issue (Kling & Gerson, 1977). More recently, Horton & Wood-Harper (2006) have found Strauss's framework of value in explaining "*IT trajectories*", and Garrety & Badham (2000) have similarly used the concepts in their analysis of the process and

outcomes of a technology change project. As mentioned earlier, Alderman et al. (2005) adopt the core construct of ‘trajectory’ in their analysis of complex projects.

Overall, the symbolic interactionist perspective articulated in Strauss’s ‘theory of action’ would seem to have greater potential for application in the understanding of business change projects than has so far been explored. Its theoretical constructs clearly share similarities with the much more widely-cited theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter; however, it has aspects, notably the ‘trajectory’ construct, which appear of particular relevance to consideration of business change projects.

### ***7.6.5 Applying Strauss’s Theory of Action to the ‘key aspects’***

In this section, the relevance of the symbolic interactionist theoretical framework of Strauss to the empirical findings from this research into business change projects is explored by considering the extent to which it treats the ‘key aspects’ identified in Chapter 6.

#### *(a) Negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity*

As discussed in Chapter 3, the symbolic interactionist view of the social world is one of “*interpretive flexibility*”. The uncertainty associated with the multiple interaction processes making up the trajectory are as a consequence implicit in this theoretical framework, which emphasizes “... *the lack of fixity of social order, its temporal, mobile and unstable character..*”. Trajectories are only predictable in broad terms, and uncertainty and ambiguity are a recognised part of social life. However, while this ‘key aspect’ of the empirical findings is therefore very much an implied, almost taken-for-granted assumption of this theoretical framework, the cognitive and interpretive aspects of dealing with this condition of social reality is not explicitly treated as it is, for instance, by Weick and Bourdieu.

#### *(b) Universal politics*

The central concept of social worlds and arenas recognises the inevitability of political sectionalism, leading to the need for negotiation. Interaction processes driving the trajectory usually imply the intersection of social worlds, applying multiple perspectives, resulting in argument, debate and negotiation before any settlement (if at all). “...*disagreement about an issue will result in argument, debate and not entirely harmonious discussion before equitable decisions are reached..*” (Strauss, 1993, p.226). Strauss refers to *arenas* as the interaction of

social worlds where issues are difficult to resolve – “*where actions concerning these are being debated, fought out, negotiated, manipulated, and even coerced within and among the social worlds*”. In terms of the political tactics observed in this empirical research, he also acknowledges the presence of ‘strategic action’ and in his own empirical research has explored strategies of “*representation, misrepresentation, and presentation*” adopted in order to manage interactions to a particular end. However, the means by which the political process is concluded is not treated theoretically, with power invoked only in a very high-level fashion.

(c) Discourse and rhetoric

The role of language in symbolic representation is central to the symbolic interactionist perspective. The social worlds and arena construct within Strauss’s framework recognises that different social worlds will represent their position to reflect their commitment to a world view, and symbolic representation through language plays the prominent role in this. Strauss does not use the terms discourse and rhetoric as such (and his limited acknowledgment of the wider social theory literature has been discussed above) but it seems clear that his framework covers, indirectly at least, the empirical findings summarised within this particular ‘key aspect’.

(d) Power and leadership

As discussed earlier, power is only alluded to as a determinant of the outcomes of the interaction process and the influence on the trajectory, and not discussed in detail which has been seen generally as a weakness arising from the symbolic interactionist focus on the micro-level of social interaction. However, while no single actor guides the course of the trajectory “... *some interactants may be much more influential or display more power in shaping either the entire course or its phases*” (Strauss, 1993, p.57). This ‘key aspect’ is therefore recognised within this theoretical framework though it does not receive specific or detailed treatment.

(e) Emotion and identity

The *biography* construct, with the associated ideas of *biographical scheme* and *biographical projection* introduces the importance of issues of individual identity in the conduct and outcome of interactions. Similarly, the emotional investment and commitment involved in

being a member of a social world, with the identity and legitimacy that grants, is an important element of the framework; a driving force for “... *tensions, conflicts, passions, furor of the struggle...*”.

(f) Discursive work

Strauss has a sophisticated theoretical treatment of work, centred around the concept of *articulation*, and recognising the interactional component that is essential to this. While distinguishing action from interaction, it is evident that the ‘discursive’ nature of work in organizations is part of this theoretical scheme.

(g) Long-running issues

In his formulation of *arena*, combined with the ideas on *representation*, Strauss’s framework comes closer than any of the other frameworks in offering a theoretical construct for ‘long-running issues’. While focused primarily on ‘external’ public policy arenas, the analysis of arenas, when connected with the *biography* ideas around personal identity, this framework provides a valuable insight into the character of long-running issues as observed in this empirical research.

(h) The limits to agency

As discussed, particularly in the kind of circumstances of a multi-party process managing an evolving set of problems which typically characterises the business change projects which were the subject of this research, this theoretical framework predicts that no single actor can guide the course of the trajectory.

(i) Fuzzy boundaries

“... *the lack of fixity of social order, its temporal, mobile and unstable character...*” implies that the boundaries of social objects will naturally be fuzzy. This is specifically reflected in Strauss’s discussion of the fluid boundaries of social worlds, and the importance of internal discussion about the boundaries (echoing Bourdieu’s statement that the limits of the field are always at stake in the field). Strauss makes particular mention of the impact of changes in membership of the arena in affecting the definition and resolution of issues.

(j) Emerging purpose

The symbolic interactionist perspective on the inadequacy of ‘means-ends analytic schemes’ in understanding social action and interaction is one of the foundational assumptions of Strauss’s framework (Assumption 11 – Strauss, 1993, p.33). Emergent goals are an integral part of the trajectory concept.

(k) Fluid status

The “*interpretive flexibility*” implied by symbolic interactionism, and “...*the lack of fixity of social order, its temporal, mobile and unstable character...*” means that project status is likely to be subject to a range of interpretations, and subject to sometimes rapid change, as observed in this empirical research.

(l) The struggle for order and control

Strauss specifically identifies *order* as a consideration driving the trajectory, and something which interactants seek in various forms.

(m) The force of context and history

The central concept of the conditional matrix emphasizes the importance of context, and seeks to provide a structure within which contextual factors can be systematically identified. The temporal character of the trajectory carries an implicit focus on history. Trajectories have histories, conditions have histories, social worlds have histories, individuals have biographies – all are considered to be “*crucial*” (Strauss, 1993, p.84) in understanding organizational work. “*History is embedded in both obvious and subtle ways in work relations and in work itself*” (Strauss, 1993, p.85).

**7.6.6 Strauss’s symbolic interactionist framework - Conclusion**

Strauss’s theoretical framework provides very good coverage of many of the ‘key aspects’ observed in the empirical research. The central concept of trajectory seems to be readily applicable to the observed social interaction associated with the development of the business change projects that were studied. The extensive range of theoretical constructs gives at the very least a rich vocabulary for describing the character of the social interactions determining outcomes and the path of the trajectory of the projects. Many of its concepts can be seen as



overlapping with or closely related to some of the theoretical constructs employed by the authors of the other theoretical frameworks discussed in this section, though interestingly coming from a quite different intellectual tradition in American pragmatism and sociology. Similarly to Weick's sensemaking, one of the weaknesses of the framework is around the treatment of power, and more generally of the processes by which 'negotiation' progresses and reaches an outcome. Personal motivation is partially covered (or at least spotlighted) by concerns with biography and identity, but the framework does seem to reflect the assumption that interaction is fundamentally driven by the requirements of the work, which does not seem to fully cover the complex range of motivations and concerns observed in this field work. Strauss himself later felt that the concept of 'negotiation' was too narrow to cover the range of factors affecting interaction outcomes, preferring the term "*processual ordering*", though it is not very clear how this process was to be constituted.

Overall, however, this symbolic interactionist perspective seems to have much of relevance to the theoretical framing of the empirical findings, and for thinking about business change projects in general. It is surprising that it has not received more attention in the literature in that respect.

## **7.7 Conclusions**

### ***7.7.1 Comparing the frameworks***

Each of the theoretical frameworks emphasises different aspects of these particular empirical findings.

*Structuration Theory* provides a coherent view of the character of social reality, though at a very broad-brush level. It tends to focus primarily on the processes of emergent structure and social order, though that was not a particular consideration in this case.

*Bourdieu's theory of practice*, while including much of what is relevant from the other theories, provides what seems the most elegant and coherent theoretical formulation and places political and power struggles centre-stage in a way that resonates well with the empirical findings.

*ANT* draws attention to the complexity of associations affecting outcomes, and to the broad negotiation and alignment processes between different constituencies; however, it did not provide a ready frame for the micro-level political interactions and motivations observed, and its strength in dealing with material constraints was not a particular concern in this case.

*Weick's sensemaking* highlights the processes and frameworks of creating meaning out of uncertainty and ambiguity, introduces a view of action that fits well with what was observed in practice, but gives little guidance on the power and politics which were a feature of the findings.

*Strauss's symbolic interactionist framework* maps readily to most of the key aspects observed, and introduces theoretical constructs such as trajectory that seem particularly relevant to the development of theory for business change. However, though stronger than Weick's sensemaking on politics, it deals only at a high level with what appear to be fundamental issues of organizational and personal power.

Table 7.1 overleaf summarises this assessment of the theoretical frameworks in terms of their respective contributions (assessed subjectively, based on the detailed analysis in Sections 7.2 to 7.6) to explaining theoretically the emergence of the 'key aspects' observed in the field research. A 'strong and relevant contribution' (●●) indicates that the theoretical framework in question offers a direct theoretical treatment of the particular 'key aspect' in a way that seems directly applicable in this case; 'some contribution' (●) indicates that the theoretical framework in question could be interpreted as offering a partial or indirect treatment of that 'key aspect' but not one that seemed directly applicable. In some cases, there was no specific treatment that could be mapped on to the 'key aspect' in question (-).

**Table 7.1: Theoretical frameworks – treatment of observed ‘key aspects’**

Key Aspect	ST	ANT	Bourdieu	Sense -making	Strauss
Uncertainty and ambiguity	●●	●	●●	●●	●
Universal politics	-	●	●●	-	●●
Discourse and rhetoric	-	●	●●	●●	●
Power and leadership	●	●	●●	●	●
Emotion and identity	●	-	●●	●●	●●
Discursive work	●	●	●●	●●	●
Long-running issues	-	●	●	-	●●
The limits to agency	●	●	●●	●●	●●
Fuzzy boundaries	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●
Emerging purpose	●	●●	●●	●●	●●
Fluid status	●	●●	●●	●●	●●
Struggle for order and control	●●	●	●	●●	●●
Force of context and history	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●

**Key:***Strong and relevant contribution* ●●*Some contribution* ●*No specific treatment* -

### 7.7.2 *Theoretical triangulation - common features*

However, the intent of this analysis is not identify a ‘best’ theory. To quote Walsham, when asked to justify his choice of ANT as a theoretical lens for a particular study: “*There is not, and never will be, a best theory. Theory is our chronically inadequate attempt to come to terms with the infinite complexity of the real world*”. He looks to theory as focusing on particular aspects of reality that are relevant to the purposes of enquiry (Walsham, 1997, p.478). In the section that follows, the theoretical framing of the empirical findings is achieved by combining a number of the concepts from these different theories in a way which seems most relevant to understanding the basic processes at work in the management of these business change projects. The theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu, Weick and Strauss seem particularly relevant to the ‘key aspects’, and to the development of an alternative to the mainstream view of project theory with respect to business change projects, discussed in Chapter 8 that follows.

However, while each of the five theories is quite different, has different intellectual antecedents, and tends to highlight different aspects of the empirical findings, it is also striking that they share some broad features. While none has been developed from the point of view of business change projects as such, each would have been to greater or lesser extent successful in predicting many of the ‘key aspects’ observed, and in predicting the observed departures in a social context from the normative expectations of ‘best practice’ project management theory. The two main features shared are:

#### 7.7.2.1 *Characterizations of the nature of social reality*

Each of the frameworks reflects the character of social reality that was the subject of discussion in Chapter 3. In some respects, this is unsurprising, as these different frameworks were selected from within a post-positivist social constructionist perspective. However, the development of quite different frameworks which are able to each reflect many of the empirically-derived ‘key aspects’ of these business change projects provides some confidence in this shared view of social reality.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this is a reality where much is uncertain and ambiguous; where the outcomes of social interaction are intrinsically unpredictable; where what is known is

simultaneously taken-for-granted and under dispute; where meaning is negotiable, mediated through discourse (language, shared categorisations, rules and structures), and dependent on context and circumstance; and where stability is an ongoing and fragile achievement.

#### 7.7.2.2 *Processes of translation, alignment, and negotiation*

Each of the frameworks sees social reality as contested, and in different ways presents some kind of multi-party process of translation, alignment or negotiation as a central feature of their schemes. This can be predominantly interpretive, in terms of the different ways of ‘seeing’ (Weick); primarily political in the sense of different interest positions (ANT, Strauss); or both together, where the ‘ways of seeing’ are themselves determined by power structures and discourse in Foucault’s terms (Bourdieu, and at a high level, Giddens). However, there is consistency in the recognition of the need to identify a process of interaction by which collective social action can be determined, including the interplay between the aggregate effects of ‘local’ individual interactions and the effects of ‘global’ or structural forces, which can explain the existence, persistence and fluidity of social order. In the context of the shared assumptions of the character of social reality described above this translation, alignment or negotiation process leads to the ‘key aspects’ that were empirically observed.

These common features between the different theoretical frameworks are particularly relevant in the light of the data analysis described in Section 6.4., As demonstrated, when the objectively-observed project ‘features’ are combined with the subjectively-interpreted ‘themes’ the prominence and relatedness of the conceptual categories of *negotiation*, *multiple interpretation*, and *uncertainty* points to them as candidates (‘core categories’) for a central role in a theoretical framing of the data.

These shared assumptions, and the particularly relevant theoretical constructs from the respective frameworks, are carried forward into the next chapter in the development of a theoretical framework tuned to the empirical findings in this case.

## 8 A THEORETICAL MODEL

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how the research findings, in the form of the constructs identified as ‘key aspects’ in Chapter 6, are used to develop a theoretical explanatory model of the processes at work in the business change projects researched. The term ‘model’ is used in the sense of a conceptual model - rather than a quantitative, predictive model – whereby a social phenomenon is represented, and its behaviour explained, in terms of some general characteristics and processes and the relationships between them (Whetten, 2002; Whetten, 1989; Weick, 1999; Weick, 1989). This is very similar to what Strauss describes as a ‘theory’ - *“plausible relationships produced among concepts and sub-concepts”* - and according to theory specialist Whetten, there is no significant distinction between ‘model’ used in this way and ‘theory’ (Whetten, 1989, p.491). However, the term ‘model’ is preferred as it carries implications of representation and characterization which do not seem so strongly implied by the term ‘theory’ (Whetten, 1989, p.50) – though it is worth noting that, according to Sayer (1992), the term ‘theory’ itself is used in a wide variety of senses in social science. This is evident from the discussion of the various social theories in Chapter 7, where the term ‘theoretical frameworks’ is used to cover what is a wide range of different types of theoretical formulation. In the absence of any authoritative definition, the term ‘theoretical model’, shortened to ‘model’ for convenience, has been used to describe the outcomes of the theorization process in this research; but exactly what that means in this case is perhaps best explained by the discussion which follows in the rest of this chapter.

The model draws on:

- the analysis in Chapter 6 of the most prominent and related categories emerging from the data;
- those theoretical concepts which appear most relevant from analysis in Chapter 7 which maps the ‘key aspects’ against a range of social theoretical frameworks;
- theoretical perspectives on the nature of social reality in Chapter 3;
- Sayer’s multi-level ‘realist’ framework, introduced in Section 6.4.2.

The theoretical model (referred to as the ‘negotiated action’ model) is then developed into an extension of the conventional model of a project by viewing it as influencing the course of the ‘project trajectory’. From this point, the implications for improving the effectiveness of the management of business change projects by improving the central ‘negotiated action’ process are considered. The model is tested broadly against the literature reviewed in Section 2, including the findings of the extensive project success factors research (Section 2.2.3), and against research into the management of complex and uncertain projects (Section 2.2.4); and the implications for practice are explored.

## 8.2 A multi-level model of the findings

### 8.2.1 *Developing the model*

As discussed in Section 6.4.2, the model adopts the multi-level ‘realist’ framework of Sayer (1992), whose approach to developing theory in social science is to view reality as stratified into different logical levels. Observed *events* at the most easily experienced and observed level are seen as the outcomes (dependent on context-specific *conditions*) of less-obvious underlying *mechanisms*, operating within fundamental, relatively stable *structures* (see Ch 3, Sayer, 1992). As discussed in more detail later in Section 9.3, this allows the unique and context-specific events observed in this particular empirical case to be interpreted in terms of more generic and enduring processes for which more general claims can be made. This multi-level approach is also attractive as it was evident, as discussed in Section 6.4.2 that the constructs emerging from the analysis of the research findings in Chapter 6 were different in logical character, some having the character of processes, some of conditions, some of outcomes. It was also possible to identify as a ‘core concept’ (ie one which was most related to most of the other constructs) as that of ‘negotiating through ambiguity and uncertainty’. This suggested some candidates for the deepest levels of structure and process<sup>9</sup>.

The analysis in Chapter 7 of the findings against the five theoretical frameworks also identified two common conceptual components across all of them: the uncertain and ambiguous nature of social reality which is rooted in its socially constructed nature; and the

---

<sup>9</sup> ‘process’ is preferred to Sayer’s term ‘mechanism’ which carries a rather more determinist connotation than seems appropriate in this case.

need for interactive processes of translation, alignment, and negotiation to engage in collective social action within that.

The consistency between the patterns emerging from the data and the analysis of the different social theories against the ‘key aspects’ suggests that: the universal and generic characteristic of the nature of social reality make that a good candidate for the fundamental *structural* component of the model; some kind of translation, alignment, and negotiation process similarly appears a good candidate as a generic *process* through which collective actions and outcomes are determined. This central alignment process is referred to in this discussion as the ‘negotiated action’ process. The five theoretical frameworks then suggested a variety of approaches to conceptualizing the ‘negotiated action’ process, which are discussed in Section 8.2.3.

On this basis, the model described below and shown diagrammatically in Fig 8.1 was developed iteratively. Various formulations were attempted, and then explored for (a) conceptual coherence and economy and (b) comprehensiveness ie the ability satisfactorily to incorporate all the ‘key aspects’ and to reflect all the ‘themes’ and ‘features’ emerging from the empirical work. Whetten (1989, p.490) refers to good theory as requiring “...*sensitivity to the competing virtues of parsimony and comprehensiveness...*”.

While the centrality of the fundamental structural character of social reality remained robust in successive iterations of the model (and was in any case well-grounded in the empirical data), the relevant constructs within the ‘negotiated action’ process went through a number of iterations before the final formulation illustrated in Fig 8.1 below was reached.

### **8.2.2 Model overview**

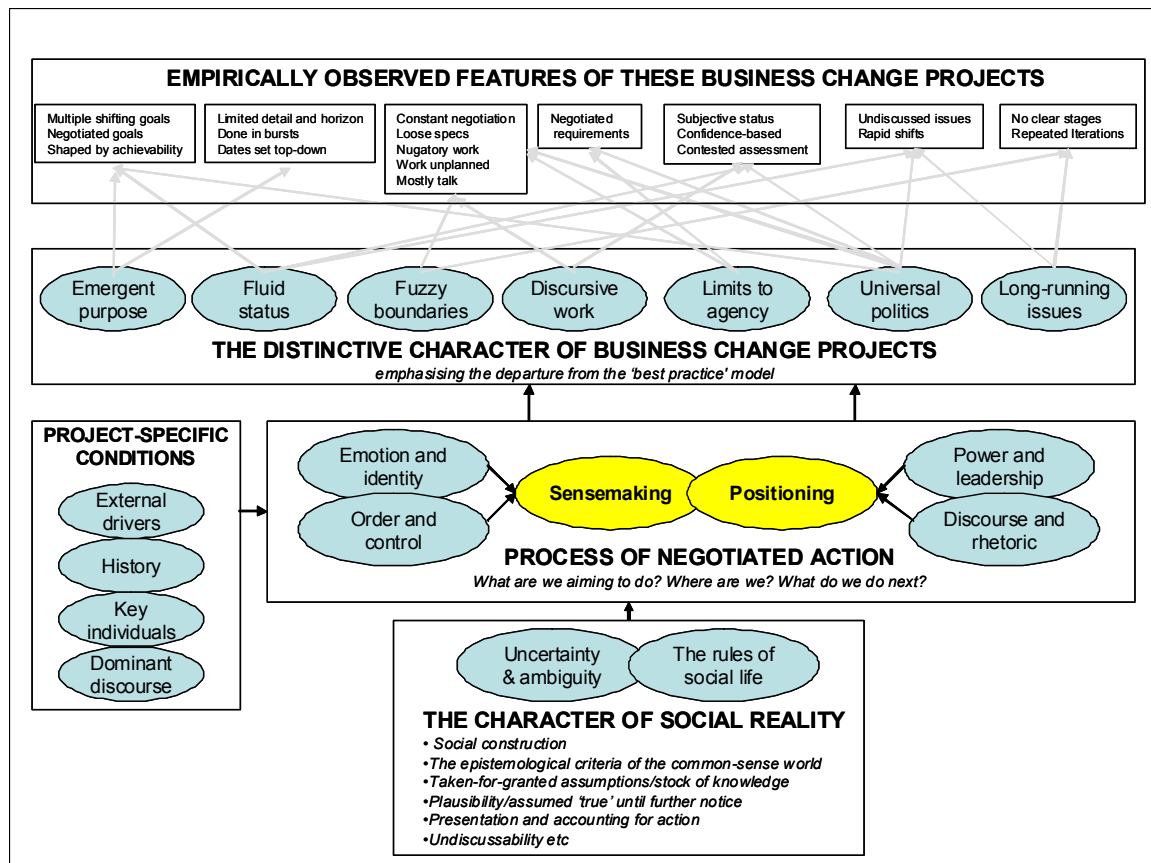
The schematic below shows diagrammatically the key concepts of the model, grouped at the different logical levels of Sayer’s framework, with the arrows representing the relationship between the different logical levels.

The model has as its basic *structural* foundation the character of social reality, with (as highlighted in Chapter 3 and in the theoretical discussion in Chapter 7) its intrinsic uncertainty and ambiguity; and its language-driven ‘rules’ of social interaction, which govern



the ways that social reality is constructed and action is accounted for (see Sections 3.2.5 and 3.2.6).

**Fig 8.1: Schematic of multi-level model**



At the next logical level of the model (above the structural level), the *process* of ‘negotiated action’ can be seen as a consequence of carrying out the goal-oriented and problem-solving activities that constitute any project, within the context whereby the necessary knowledge is gained and action is taken within the *structural* characteristics of social reality. The uncertainty and ambiguity of social reality has to be resolved through multi-party interaction, a process by which is established an accepted view of: ‘what are we aiming to do? where are we? what do we do next?’ The model suggests that this multi-party process, conducted within the character of social reality, with its loose and context-dependent epistemological criteria and rules of social interaction, within a framework of power relations and a ‘currency’ of competing discourses, generates the next logical level of the model: the ‘distinctive

character of business change projects’ that was identified through the fieldwork; articulated generically in the ‘key aspects’ and in more specific and concrete terms in the empirically-observed ‘features’. The particular exemplification of this process at work will depend upon the unique project-specific *conditions*, particularly external drivers, history, the key individuals in powerful positions, and the particular dominant discourses at play – which are instrumental in shaping the outcomes of the ‘negotiated action’ process.

**Table 8.1: The multi-level model**

<p><b>Key Aspects</b>  <i>Identified as:</i>  <i>Shared by, and significant in, many of the events</i>  <i>Divergent from ‘best practice’ expectations</i>  <i>Apparently influential on outcomes</i>          And validated with other actors sharing the same project actuality.</p> <p>NB: ‘key aspects’ in brackets have been incorporated at the lower levels of the model.</p>	<p>(Uncertainty and ambiguity)  <i>Universal politics</i>          (Discourse and rhetoric)          (Power and leadership)          (Emotion and identity)  <i>Discursive work</i>  <i>Long-running issues</i>  <i>The limits to agency</i>  <i>Fuzzy boundaries</i>  <i>Emerging purpose</i>  <i>Fluid status</i>          (The struggle for order and control)          (The force of context and history)</p>
<p><b>Context-specific conditions</b></p> <p><i>- which determine in this case the specific character of the outcomes of the underlying mechanisms</i></p>	<p>External drivers          Pre-project history          Key individuals – skills and motives and position          Dominant discourses</p>
<p><b>Underlying processes</b>  <i>Which operate as the project proceeds along its social trajectory, negotiating a path through social reality</i></p>	<p>‘Negotiated action’ process to determine ‘what is so?’ and ‘what do we do?’ driven by the related processes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensemaking (the struggle for <i>meaning</i>), influenced by <i>emotional and identity</i> needs, and by the desire for <i>order and control</i></li> <li>• Positioning (the struggle for <i>social capital</i>), influenced by <i>power and leadership</i>, and conducted within the terms of the acceptable social and management <i>discourses</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Structural conditions</b>  <i>The fundamental characteristics of social reality</i></p>	<p>Uncertainty and ambiguity about ‘what is so’ and the effect of proposed actions; social construction of reality through language and discourse.</p>

Table 8.1 above summarises the main features and levels of the model in a textual form, and shows the final distribution of all of the identified ‘key aspects’ to the different levels of the model.

For completeness, the remaining features and themes from the empirical analysis are shown in Fig 8.1 above as particular exemplifications of the broad ‘distinctive characteristics’, appearing at the highest (most concrete) level of the model.

The section that follows discusses the theorization of the central ‘negotiated action’ process.

### **8.2.3 The ‘negotiated action’ process**

As concluded in Chapter 7, the work of Weick and Bourdieu seemed particularly relevant in their focus on the salient features of the empirical findings in this case, particularly the existence of multiple interpretations, and the importance of power and politics. While Strauss’s symbolic interactionist framework explicitly identifies the ‘negotiation’ process, Weick and Bourdieu’s theoretical frameworks say more about the nature of that process and what determines its outcomes. ‘Negotiated action’ is seen here, not in terms of a formal or transactional negotiation, but as a more complex, ongoing, politically-charged, interactive and sometimes competitive sensemaking process, combining ideas of Weick’s sensemaking with Bourdieu’s notion of competition for social capital in a social field<sup>10</sup>. As Section 7.3 indicates, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework actually deals with both aspects of the ‘negotiated action’ process with the inclusion of the habitus. However, Weick’s development of the sensemaking process is more elaborated in some respects and easier to relate to an organizational context. This is important when exploring ways of improving the process, where Weick already offers some prescriptions.

The two basic components of the ‘negotiated action’ process are seen as the related processes of *sensemaking* and *positioning*.

---

<sup>10</sup> Strauss seems to be heading in this direction with his preference for the term ‘processual ordering’ (p254 STRAUSS, A. L. 1993. *Continual permutations of action*, Aldine.) but does not develop the notion any further.

### 8.2.3.1 *Sensemaking*

A core component of the ‘negotiated action’ process is an explicit sensemaking process (in Weick’s terms), by which different interpretations of the meaning of events and the actions necessary to address them have to be agreed, or at least accepted by the project participants. As discussed in Section 7.5, sensemaking theory suggests that the nature of such interpretation is influenced by many factors, rather than being a process of arriving at an objective truth. In effect, one sees what one expects to see through individual and shared cognitive frameworks and taken-for-granted assumptions, and what fits with a plausible narrative of what is going on. One also tends to make sense in such a way that promotes actions that support the personal needs of *emotion and identity* - whereby individuals look for actions and outcomes which promote a positive view of themselves, which allow them to see themselves as competent and effective, and to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity. Similarly, the search for meaning is supported by an emphasis on *order and control*, and the need to confirm management agency - which both makes the world understandable and serves to provide psychological security in the face of apparent chaos.

The explicit sensemaking process is a collaborative exercise which is typically contested and discussed within a rationalist and realist discourse which is undertaken as if there is a ‘right answer’ which is knowable (eg establishing issues and risks, defining required outcomes, identifying programmes of work to achieve those outcomes is seen as a rational and objective activity). However, (following Bourdieu) intrinsically connected with the sensemaking process is a ‘shadow’ process of *positioning*, aimed at maximizing symbolic capital: whereby attempts are made by the different parties to influence the ‘right answer’ in their interests (either directly, or through imposition of their world view) and in line with their emotional and identity needs (eg the need to be seen as someone who does what they say they will do, the need to do something that is new and interesting, or worthwhile), and their desire for order and control.

### 8.2.3.2 *Positioning*

This term has been introduced to label a more implicit and less-visible process whereby participants, in Bourdieu’s terms, seek to maximize their ‘capital’ in the ‘field’, where capital is whatever is valued by the field. The field here can be seen as the project network, nested

within a broader organizational field. Social capital in this case includes: being a corporate player; prestige as someone who delivers, or is otherwise well-regarded by senior management and peers; enhanced career prospects; ability to retain autonomy over one's future actions; and so on. As we have seen, this is a largely implicit and often undiscussable process, involving political tactics, the exercise of positional *power and leadership*, and the deployment of *dominant discourses*.

The positioning process is intimately connected to the more cognitive sensemaking aspect of the 'negotiated action' process. Within the rules of social life that are understood by all those competent in making their way in day-to-day social reality, the deployment of positioning actions will typically need to be legitimised by being carried out within the same rationalist terms, and deploying the same corporate 'vocabulary' or dominant discourses, as the more explicit sensemaking process: individuals need to account for their actions and their positions in ways that are acceptable. Furthermore, given the reliance in common-sense reality on taken-for-granted assumptions, participants (typically the most powerful) may even believe that the view of the world that maximizes their social capital is the most real.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework makes very clear that there is a relationship between sensemaking and the maximization of social capital; the structures of the habitus, which drives individual action, are seen to embody the power structures of the field and the taken-for-granted assumptions about how the social world is, and what constitutes social capital. Weick's sensemaking does not make this link so strongly, but does provide a rich model of organizational sensemaking which is more specific to the context of business change projects.

The outcome of the 'negotiated action' process in the model proposed, is therefore determined by a complex and only broadly predictable combination of sensemaking and positioning. Those who are most successful in influencing the 'negotiated action' process – like Kate and Gerry in the narrative – combine power with an intuitive understanding of the complexities: in Bourdieu's terms, a 'feel for the game'.

#### **8.2.4 *The distinctive character of business change projects***

The model proposes that it is the operation of the 'negotiated action' process within the context of the character of social reality that determines 'the distinctive character of business

change projects’, essentially the ‘key aspects’ observed from the empirical research in this case. These ‘key aspects’ can be seen as reflections of the relationships in this model.

Some of the ‘key aspects’ described (shown bracketed in Table 8.1 eg power and leadership, uncertainty and ambiguity) can be seen as direct observation of the fundamental structure and process of the model; others can be seen as predictable outcomes from the interplay between this structure and process. In other words, universal politics, emergent purpose, fluid status, fuzzy boundaries, discursive work, limits to agency are all natural consequences of the operation of the ‘negotiated action’ process in the context of the character of social reality. In terms of the model, ‘long-running issues’ can be seen as a failure in the ‘negotiated action’ process, through failures to resolve one or more of its underlying components. In the case of the Phoenix/HR dispute, several of these were evidently in play. Eleanor was defending her social capital but also her identity needs when she took an entirely contrary view from Kate of what was required and who should do it; and her and Kate’s positioning activity served to slow down progress on the project.

### **8.2.5 Project-specific conditions**

The particular character of the events is seen as being determined by context-dependent *conditions*. In this case, the pre-project *history*, the particular *external* pressures at that moment in time, the character of the particular *individuals* involved, the dominant management *discourses* will all influence the specific outcomes of the underlying processes, affecting both the starting point of the social trajectory (in Strauss’s terms) and its future path. While one might expect that similar mechanisms may apply in similar projects in similar types of organization, the conditions are unique and will produce a unique trajectory.

## **8.3 Fundamental epistemological considerations**

From the discussion above, we can see that the model theorizes that what was observed was the outcome of some fundamental processes, contingent on some project-specific conditions. The fundamental structural conditions identified are a combination of:

- the generic characteristics of any project, seen as a collaborative multi-party activity to achieve a particular aim, an activity necessarily involving knowledge-building and problem-solving processes;
- the particular character of common-sense social reality within which those project activities necessarily take place.

The empirically-observed higher levels of the model are seen as a direct consequence of the structural conditions, and the necessary ‘negotiated action’ process.

From an epistemological perspective, therefore, this model offers some insights into a fundamental alternative to the positivist assumptions underpinning project management theory which have been the subject of recent criticism (see Section 2). All projects can in principle be seen as involving knowledge-based processes of goal-seeking and problem-solving, and as such have many of the characteristics of Habermas’s knowledge-constituting domain of ‘technical interest’ in attempting to predict and control the world around us (discussed in Section 3.2). This necessary project characteristic explains the attractions of a positivist, instrumental rationalist approach, particularly where such projects involve manipulation of the material world (eg construction engineering).

However, in the case of business change projects, what is being changed is typically substantially ‘social reality’ – social constructions such as organisation, process, or even culture – which are nonetheless experienced as having an objective reality. We can see the knowledge-based processes of goal-seeking and problem-solving dealing with these ‘social facts’ are, in Habermas’s terms, necessarily conducted within a different knowledge-constituting domain of ‘practical interest’, within everyday epistemological practices which have evolved for the interpretation and establishment of shared meaning between human beings. These epistemological practices are significantly different from those of the knowledge-constitutive domain of ‘technical interests’. As we have seen in Section 3.3 and Section 3.4, they are concerned with taking practical action in a social reality whose characteristics are summarised in Section 3.3.8.

From this perspective, the attempt to apply positivist theories based on the ‘technical interest’ knowledge-constituting domain of the natural sciences within the ‘practical interest’ knowledge-constituting domain can be seen as the fundamental source of the concerns identified from the literature about the adequacy and empirical validity of mainstream approaches to project management and business change. These have often been explained in terms of ‘error’ or departure from the ‘rational’ theories from the ‘technical interest’ domain, with the implication for action (and, currently, the dominant discourse) being to reinforce the alignment of behaviours with rationalist, universal control methodologies in an attempt to improve project success. The model emerging from this research suggests rather that (at least in the case of business change projects) it is the fundamental assumptions of project management theory that are at fault rather than their implementation; and that alternative strategies for action (see Section 8.5 below) can be theoretically supported.

## **8.4 A generalized model of business change projects**

### ***8.4.1 Project trajectory***

The multi-level model set out in the previous section suggests some directions in which project management theory can be extended, at least with respect to business change projects. To do so, it is necessary to extend the theoretical model described in Section 8.2 by introducing the concept of *project trajectory*, drawing on the notion of trajectory - a term used to denote the evolution of phenomena through a process of social interaction - within Strauss’s symbolic interactionist framework. As discussed in Section 7.6, Strauss’s formulation of the factors influencing the trajectory is sympathetic to the model proposed in the emphasis it places on negotiation and the production of ‘negotiated order’; and its recognition that the trajectory is only partially predictable, because of the intrinsic uncertainty of the social interactions determining it, even when it has a preferred or expected path.

The value of the social trajectory concept in a project context has already been recognised by Alderman et al. (2005) who saw a process of sensemaking, narrative, and negotiation as determining the trajectory of complex service-led projects. The formulation below seeks to build on this trajectory view to incorporate the findings from this research and the model



described in Section 8.2 above; by postulating that the effectiveness of the project trajectory is determined by the effectiveness of the ‘negotiated action’ process. Project trajectory, and examination in detail of effectiveness and success, was not the direct focus of the empirical work, so this formulation, while inspired by the empirical findings and consistent with them, and informed by the theoretical review, is not systematically derived from them. It therefore must be seen as more speculative than the multi-level model presented in the previous section.

#### 8.4.2 Parameters of the project trajectory

Drawing on the findings from the empirical research in this case, and the multi-level model proposed, the trajectory of a business change project can be seen as being defined at any point according to: an *emergent purpose*; a *sense of direction*; a *pace*; and a *status*. All of these key parameters, defined in Table 8.2 below, are partially socially constructed in the sense that has been discussed throughout this thesis.

**Table 8.2: Parameters of the project trajectory**

Project trajectory – key parameters	Definition
<i>Emergent purpose</i>	The level of agreement and clarity of understanding about the goals and objectives of the project, and what will constitute success. This is only partly determined initially by the project-specific conditions.
<i>Sense of direction</i>	The level of agreement and clarity of understanding of required activity, determined by expressed plans, horizon of understanding, intended actions, and leadership ‘sensegiving’.
<i>Pace</i>	The level of productive activity towards the currently defined project goal. <i>Pace</i> has both a <u>magnitude</u> (influenced by resourcing, productive and motivated team efforts, speedy resolution of issues) and a <u>direction</u> . Where there is a marked discrepancy between <i>emergent purpose</i> and <i>sense of direction</i> , or major uncertainties about either, or where long-running issues impede agreement and productive work, the <i>pace</i> of the trajectory can be seen as low.
<i>Status</i>	Status will be strongly influenced by all of the mainly subjective assessments of all of the above, though progress against budget and milestones will be very influential.

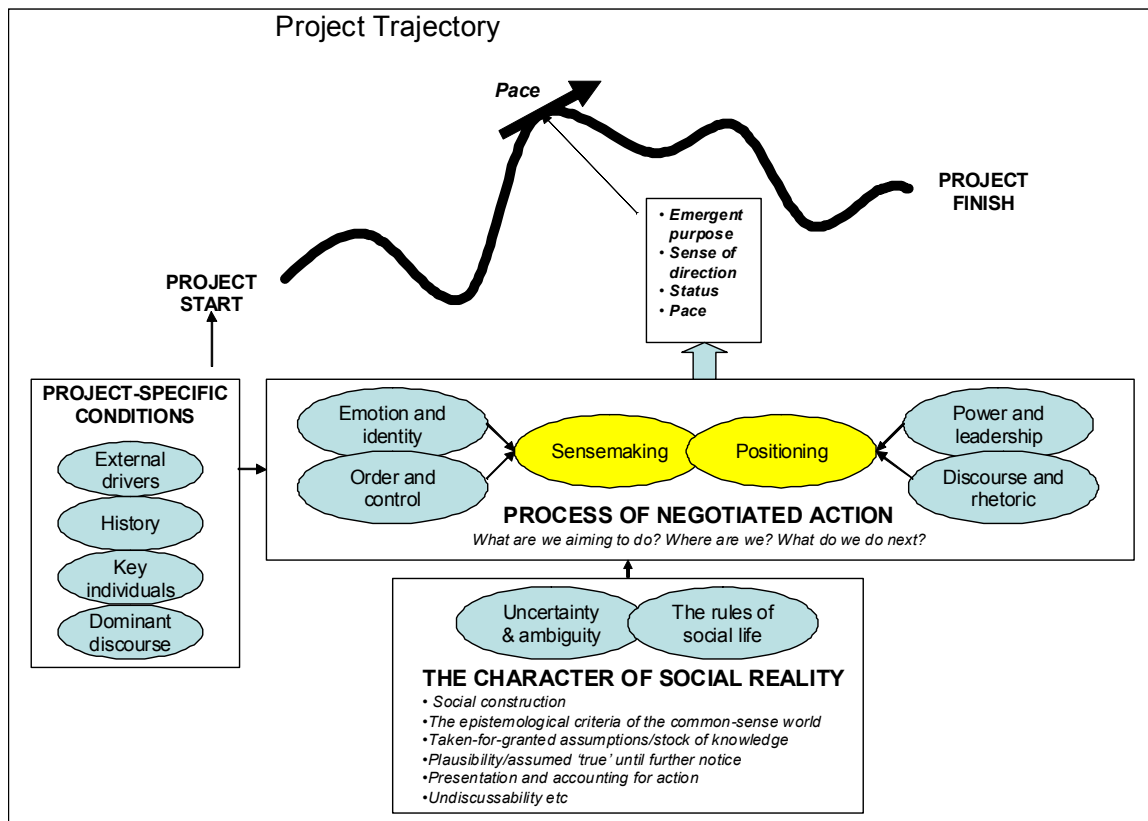
At any point along the trajectory, project *status* will be defined in part by clarity and agreement on the *emergent purpose*; by the clarity and level of agreement, particularly by the most powerful stakeholders, about the *sense of direction*; by the perceived alignment between the *emergent purpose* and the current *sense of direction*; and by the *pace* at which progress is seen to be made towards the emergent purpose. Eventually, the project status becomes the assessment of the project's success or otherwise, which is socially constructed in very much the same way as *status*. Progress against budget, milestones and required outcomes, and delivery of observable change will all play a significant part in determining the perception of the key parameters, but, as can be seen from this research, this will involve a complex and multi-factored process of interpretation.

The difficulties of establishing an absolute value of project success, and of identifying what project management effectiveness will mean have been discussed in Section 2, and are evident in the discussions of the 'key aspects' of business change projects set out in Section 6.5. However, from a managerial perspective, it is evident that increasing the *pace* (as defined) of the trajectory is likely to be seen as beneficial to project success, as seen by the most powerful organizational stakeholders.

#### **8.4.3 Linking the negotiated action process to the project trajectory**

In terms of the theoretical model set out in Section 8.2 it is the underlying process of 'negotiated action' identified in the proposed model which is crucial to the *pace* of the trajectory. Pace will drop through failures in that process to clarify purpose and outcomes, to establish a clear and purposeful sense of direction, to interpret ongoing events, to identify the right issues and address them promptly, and to resolve long-running issues driven by a complex combination of political motivation and contested sensemaking. Certainly, in the projects observed in this research it was lack of agreement and clarity, and the failure to resolve long-running issues which seemed to most restrict project participants' perception of their ability to make progress.

Fig 8.2: The ‘negotiated action’ process and the project trajectory



The value of this project trajectory model lies in:

- linking trajectory to the ‘negotiated action’ process, and seeing this process as a prime influence on the effective management of the trajectory
- by identifying the factors affecting the critical process of ‘negotiated action’ thereby pointing to the priorities for management action
- allowing some implications for practice to be derived for a radically different theoretical formulation from mainstream project management, as in Section 8.5 below.

## 8.5 Implications of the theoretical model

### 8.5.1 Introduction

This generalized model of business change projects has three ‘in principle’ implications:

- The inherent unpredictability of the trajectory of business change projects; this is seen as fundamentally rooted in the structure of social reality, in the socially constructed character of many of the outcomes of such projects, and in the significant impact of the project-specific conditions.
- The intrinsic nature of business change projects, as illustrated by the ‘key aspects’ of : emergent purpose, fluid status, fuzzy boundaries, discursive work, limits to agency, universal politics, and long-running issues. This research suggests that it is unlikely that these characteristics can be eliminated, and certainly not through the imposition of detailed planning and structured control methodologies.
- The importance of an effective process of ‘negotiated action’, combining sensemaking and maximization of the participants’ social capital, in maintaining ‘pace’ – by which the scale and direction of collective activity is most productively focused on successful project completion.

The following sections discuss how the theory would suggest that the process of ‘negotiated action’ could in principle be made more effective, concentrating on its two main components of sensemaking and positioning. Section 8.6 refers back to the literature reviewed in Section 2 and discusses in what ways the model can be seen to be both supported by, and adding to, existing knowledge. Subsequent sections consider how the proposed model can provide a theoretical explanation of the findings from research into project success factors, and also some of the research into effective strategies for managing projects with high degrees of uncertainty. The concluding section summarises the broad implications for practice.

## ***8.5.2 Improving the process of ‘negotiated action’***

### ***8.5.2.1 Improving the sensemaking process***

The ‘negotiated action’ process has two key drivers – (a) sensemaking, combined with (b) a political process of social capital maximization - which determine the assessment of the current situation and what is to be done next. This in effect reflects what Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar (2008) refer to as ‘discrepant sensemaking’, seen here as conducted within a particular structure of power relations and discourse, and the conventional rules of social interaction. Intervention in this process is complex, partly because much is either taken-for-

granted (eg particular frames of reference, dominant discourses, what one can or can't say) or undiscussable (personal motives, political tactics), particularly where emotional investment is high (Edmondson & Smith, 2006; Argyris, 1990).

As far as the sensemaking aspect is concerned, Weick offers a wide and diverse range of maxims for improving the effectiveness of sensemaking, which while broadly consistent, do change in detail (Weick, 1995, p.181; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.419; Weick, 2000, p.233). At its simplest: *“People need to act in order to discover what they face, and they need to talk to discover what is on their mind”* (Weick, 2000, p.233). At a more detailed level, prominent factors include: the importance of action in sensemaking (*“it is more important to keep going than to pause”*) (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p.419); of improvisation and experimentation; the importance of retrospect in confirming a sense of direction; of expectations in bringing a particular reality into existence; of constructing plausible narratives in order to create sufficient meaning for action; of more intense communications (*“..the most perverse-sounding implication...is that people need to meet more often...”*) (Weick, 1995, p.185), but focused less on trying to remove uncertainty than to address ambiguous interpretations.

As discussed in Section 8.5.3 below, these maxims are evident in some of the approaches that have been identified as successful in managing projects of high uncertainty. But Weick is cautious of recipes and prescriptions. In considering alternative approaches to organizational change (Beer & Nohria, 2000), Weick insists that: *“..any old program will do – as long as that program (1) animates people and gets them moving and generating experiments that uncover opportunities; (2) provides a direction; (3) encourages updating through improved situational awareness and closer attention to what is actually happening; and (4) facilitates respectful interaction in which trust, trustworthiness, and self-respect all develop equally and allow people to build a stable rendition of what they face.”* (Weick, 2000, p.233).

#### 8.5.2.2 Improving the positioning process

However, as Section 7.5 discusses, power and politics need to be taken into account, but is an acknowledged weakness in much sensemaking theory. The political aspect of the ‘negotiated action’ process, from these research findings, is a very significant factor. While Bourdieu provides a powerful model of the processes involved, as a sociologist he does not focus on

prescriptions for negotiating successfully through social reality; he does, however, highlight the importance of experience-based tacit expertise (the *habitus* provides a ‘feel for the game’) and domination, both through powerful position in the field and through association with taken-for-granted assumptions about what is so. Fairly obviously then, leaders and powerful stakeholders will have a dominant role in the ‘negotiated action’ process, and in imposing their interpretations in the sensemaking process, and this was observed in this study. The widely-accepted tenet of project practice of single-point responsibility and clear roles and responsibilities can be seen in terms of offering a point of resolution of the ‘negotiated action’ process, and thereby improving the *pace* of the trajectory. However, there is a complex tension between the inclusiveness and communication of the collaborative sensemaking process with the focus on powerful leaders’ ability to close the process down; and this tension contributes to the ‘limits to agency’ observed in this study. According to both Bourdieu and Foucault, power can be constantly challenged through alternative propositions, and through the deployment of competing discourses. Importantly, power effects can also be seen to influence the sensemaking process itself, eg in the determination of the limited range of what actions are ‘possible’.

As mentioned earlier, much of the effect of power relations, personal capital maximization and political tactics is either so taken-for-granted as to be invisible, or else is generally not publicly acknowledged or discussed. Buchanan & Badham (1999b) analyse political tactics involved in ‘winning the turf game’ but it seems unlikely that such advice will become part of professional guidance. In any case, such tactics are already part of the *habitus* of those able to succeed within the organizational field on which business change projects are played out. However, an understanding of the importance of these factors in the ‘negotiated action’ process does suggest some important implications for practice.

Firstly, the ‘negotiated action’ process will be, to a degree, improved by clear identification of ‘who calls the shots’, and ensuring their involvement. Given the ‘fuzzy boundaries’ of business change projects, such stakeholders are often not necessarily members of the project structures or closely involved in ongoing project activities, even where projects attempt to comply with advice on ‘good stakeholder management’. Furthermore, the project manager may be a relatively minor player. Early and active involvement and proper engagement of the key power holders is very difficult (and unsuccessful attempts were made in the projects in

this research) but this would seem to be crucial to an effective ‘negotiated action’ process and a successful project trajectory.

Secondly, while it is important to acknowledge the difficulty of dealing frankly with issues which are politically motivated (particularly those involving the most powerful – eg see Edmondson & Smith, 2006), in principle it seems that the ‘negotiated action’ process is likely to be more effective when a culture of openness and trust can be developed (central features of the ‘learning organization’ (Senge, 1993)); or, perhaps more realistically, where there are accepted approaches to handling ‘long-running’ issues. There are well-established techniques employed in organizational development, team development, counselling, arbitration and conflict management which could be deployed to address these kinds of issues (Edmondson, 1999; Roth & Senge, 1996) – *“to facilitate respectful interactions”* (Weick, 2000).

However, there is little research into the effectiveness of such approaches in a project context; while some initiatives of this kind were attempted in the projects researched in this case (eg Integrated Portal), it was arguable whether they in fact had any positive effect. The rules of social reality which underpin the proposed model do constrain complete openness, through well-established custom and practice. Weick & Roberts (1993), in discussing the ‘heedful inter-relating’ that characterises high-performance teams quote Eisenberg (1990) in highlighting the delicate balance between openness and respect that needs to be struck: *“a non-disclosive intimacy that stresses coordination of action over alignment of cognitions, mutual respect over agreement, trust over empathy, diversity over homogeneity, loose over tight coupling, and strategic communication over unrestricted candour”*. Intervening to achieve such a subtle balance, which in practice is emergent, is clearly a complex business which should be approached with care.

Thirdly, social theorists agree that the competence to handle the complexities of social reality is experience-based and tacit, a ‘practical wisdom’ (Cicmil, 2006; Cicmil *et al.*, 2006), reflecting what Giddens calls ‘practical consciousness’ rather than the more analytical and rational ‘discursive consciousness’ (Giddens, 1984). The ‘negotiated action’ process seems more likely to be successful where more of those participating have developed such competence, a factor increasingly recognised in project management education. However, as observed above, this research suggests that development of this competence needs to be

extended more widely than the project manager, particularly to other organizational leaders who play an important part in the ‘negotiated action’ process. This is a very large subject which has not been further explored as part of this research.

## **8.6 Mapping the model against findings from the literature**

### **8.6.1 Introduction**

Building on the discussion above of some theoretical implications in principle of the model proposed, the sections which follow examine the extent to which the findings from the research literature serve to validate the model, and where this research can be seen to add to previous knowledge. Firstly, in Section 8.6.2 the ‘success factors’ research from both the project management and organizational change fields is discussed in terms of the model’s key concepts. In Section 8.6.3 the body of recommendations emerging from research into the management of complex and uncertain projects (summarised in Section 2.2.3.7 and in Table 2.2) is similarly examined in terms of the model.

### **8.6.2 Project success factors**

The outcomes from this body of research into project success factors, including more recent work into BPR and ERP projects (good examples of business change projects) have been fully discussed at Section 2.2.

Firstly, this research can be seen to demonstrate that it is very difficult to identify general factors contributing to success (Fortune & White, 2006; Sauer, 1999). Lewis et al. (2002) in their review of product development research point out that the same activity (eg regular milestone tracking) can have quite different impacts in different circumstances.

These broad findings can be seen as consistent with the theoretical model proposed. Given the importance of unique project-specific conditions, the inherent unpredictability of the social interactions within which the project activity is conducted, and the consequent project trajectory, together with the socially constructed nature of ‘success’, the model implies that the search for universal success factors would inevitably be inconclusive. However, the uniqueness of each project’s trajectory does not mean that there are not some common processes shaping the evolution of each trajectory (Sayer, 1992; Tsoukas, 1989).



Secondly, the success factors research, while limited in many respects, does repeatedly emphasise the importance of some broad ‘organizational factors’: notably top management support, active stakeholder management, leadership, good communications, and a clear vision or goal (Fortune & White, 2006). In the terms of the model proposed these can all be seen as factors directly contributing to a more effective ‘negotiated action’ process, both in terms of alignment with power relations, and in terms of resolution of discrepant sensemaking, through improved communications and more speedy closure.

Table 8.3 below summarises how each of the ‘best practice’ themes identified in the organizational change field in Section 2.3.8 can be interpreted in terms of the ‘negotiated action’ model.

**Table 8.3: ‘Best practice’ themes and the ‘negotiated action’ model**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Implications from the ‘negotiated action’ model – impact on project trajectory</b>
Leadership, and senior management commitment	Improves the ‘negotiated action’ process through strong sensegiving, raises value of symbolic capital associated with project success, aligns project goals with personal capital maximisation, facilitates speedy closure of discrepant sensemaking
Developing and communicating a clear and compelling vision of change	Accelerates the development of emergent purpose, provides clear narrative for sensemaking, establishes value of symbolic capital associated with project success, establishes dominant discourse
A holistic view combining people, process and systems	Recognises complexity of factors influencing project trajectory
The psychological and emotional response to change, and the need to overcome resistance	Recognises the need to align personal identity and emotional needs in the sensemaking process, and the importance of (two-way) power relations in the ‘negotiated action’ process
Effective stakeholder management	Recognises the need to align power relations and interests, and the need to identify all contributors to the ‘negotiated action’ process
Effective communications	Supports more effective collective sensemaking, identifies discrepant views, issues and agendas early, accelerates progress of ‘talk-based’ work
Ownership of change, involvement and	Aligns emotional and identity needs for more

participation	effective sensemaking, helps maximise personal capital
A step-wise approach	Supports sensemaking through providing narrative of order and control
Clear objectives, good planning and project management	Supports sensemaking through providing framework of order and control, and by providing detailed narrative around vision
The need to develop ‘change skills’ and change agents to facilitate the process of change.	Recognises the political and interpersonal skills required in the ‘negotiated action’ process, the need for enactment and sensegiving, and the creation of symbolic capital through discourse.

It is evident from this that the ‘negotiated action’ model is able to provide a coherent explanation for the practice-based findings of success factors in business change projects. The model therefore offers an improvement on current project management theory, which provides no explanation of these common-places of accepted good practice.

### 8.6.3 *Managing complex and uncertain projects*

Table 2.2 in Section 2.2.3 summarised a number of approaches emerging from research into the management of complex and uncertain projects, and from developments in ‘agile’ project management, which, as discussed in Section 2.2.3, while not yet an established part of mainstream approaches to managing business change, are increasingly influencing the ‘best practice’ discourse. Table 8.4 below summarises a similar analysis to that presented in Table 8.3, interpreting each of the approaches set out in Table 2.2 in terms of the ‘negotiated action’ model.

**Table 8.4 – Approaches to managing complex and uncertain projects**

	<b>Recommended approach</b>	<b>Implications from ‘negotiated action’ model – impact on trajectory</b>
	<b>SETTING DIRECTION</b>	
1	Visioning and mission	Accelerates the development of emergent purpose, and therefore the pace of the trajectory. Involving senior stakeholders early sets the boundaries of power interests within which project team can concentrate on sensemaking, and avoids wasted time and effort. Provides clear narrative for

		sensemaking.
2	Clear goal and end-date, set top-down	As 1. above. Reduces debate about purpose, and increases creativity and improvisation.
3	Project initiation/charter	As 1. above. Improves pace by identifying issues early, with stakeholders and team. Can be used to make agendas explicit, and help individuals maximize their social capital objectives.
4	Continual review of objectives	Accelerates development of emergent purpose and enables <i>sense of direction</i> and <i>pace</i> to be maintained.
5	Powerful project leader, with good subject knowledge	Provides sensegiving, aligns project goals with own social capital, maximizes goal-oriented political tactics – accelerates negotiated action process.
	<b>PLANNING</b>	
6	High-level, limited horizon	A ‘key aspect’ of business change model. Minimises wasted effort, but supports order and control at appropriate level.
7	Split into small chunks	Makes sensemaking easier by reducing complexity. Structure provides sense of order and control.
8	Decouple most uncertain elements	As above.
9	Frequent milestones	Maintains alignment of trajectory; clarifies emergent purpose and improves sense of direction.
10	Time-boxing	Encourages speedy decision-making and accelerates ‘negotiated action’ process (though only when a degree of political consensus about scope and boundaries exists).
11	Frequent re-planning	Provides order and control for sensemaking, while maintaining alignment of trajectory.
	<b>EXECUTION</b>	
12	Take action early	Improves sensemaking (see discussion in 1.3.1 above).
13	Do things in parallel	A way of increasing action, discovering early, and thereby accelerating sensemaking.

14	Prototyping and trials	As 12. and 13. above
15	Iterate through lifecycle	As 12. 13 above. Feedback contributes to sensemaking and to development of emergent purpose and sense of direction.
	<b>MONITORING</b>	
16	Intense, inclusive communication	Supports sensemaking; identifies personal strategies for maximizing social capital; surfaces political issues early and provides more opportunity to resolve them; accelerates progress of ‘talk-based’ work.
17	Frequent reviews	Clarifies emergent purpose; improves sensemaking through retrospective reviews of action providing feedback; establishes shared view of <i>status</i> ; maintains <i>sense of direction</i> and therefore <i>pace</i> .
18	Horizon scanning	Anticipates possible impact of ‘external factors’ affecting the project.
19	Continuous testing	Similar to 17. above – action-driven feedback which enhances sensemaking and therefore the ‘negotiated action’ process.
20	Expect errors, don’t try to eliminate them	Experimentation improves sensemaking; a culture of expecting errors reduces defensiveness, which negatively affects both sensemaking and positioning for personal capital and thereby the negotiated action process.
	<b>CONTROL</b>	
21	Focus on outcomes not process	Encourages clarity of emergent purpose; improves improvisation and sensemaking.
22	Simple procedures	As 21. above.
23	Loose controls/semi-structures	Provides clarity of emergent purpose and sense of direction; sets political boundaries within which team can improvise.
24	Flexibility	An essential aid to sensemaking; also, need to be able to react to shifts in emergent purpose and to rapid changes in ‘talk-based’ views of issues and status.
	<b>TEAM</b>	
25	Leader with good subject	Provides effective sensegiving.

	knowledge	
26	Cross-functional teams	Ensures multiplicity of relevant views and encourages collaborative sensemaking; and early identification of potential political issues.
27	Participative, empowering culture	Supports collaborative sensemaking; encourages action and improvisation.
28	Team building and motivation	Aligns tasks with need for social capital; supports individuals' emotion and identity needs.
29	Experienced team members	Improving sensemaking, by raising level of experience-based, intuitive, improvisatory skills.
30	Interpersonal 'soft' skills	Improves 'negotiated action' process through improving quality of collaborative sensemaking; and by greater capability to resolve 'long-running issues'.

#### ***8.6.4 Mapping the model against findings from the literature - conclusions***

It can be seen from the above that, like the broad recommendations emerging from project success factors research summarised in Table 8.3, the wide range of approaches recommended from research into the effective management of complex and uncertain projects can also be consistently interpreted from within the framework of the proposed 'negotiated action' model for business change projects derived in this thesis. Given that these previous findings are based on a combination of experience-based prescription and empirical research into project practice, this analysis improves confidence in the explanatory power of the model for business change projects. Most significantly, it supports the claim that the model provides a new coherent theoretical justification for this range of approaches and techniques, which represent a significant difference in approach from mainstream approaches to managing projects. By taking a social practice perspective, it offers an improvement on the cybernetic systems control model seen as the main theoretical underpinning of project management 'best practice' (see Section 2.2.4) in terms of explaining the social aspects of the reality of projects in practice.

This new theoretical perspective also has some significant implications for practice, discussed in Section 8.7 below.

## **8.7 Implications for practice**

### *8.7.1.1 Approaches to improved effectiveness*

As discussed in Section 8.5.1, the model developed from this research places the process of ‘negotiated action’ as central to an effective project trajectory for business change projects. The components of the ‘negotiated action’ process of sensemaking and positioning suggest management interventions that (a) serve to improve collaborative sensemaking; (b) help the project participants negotiate through the political realities of organizational power relations while maximizing their own social capital; (c) minimize the time and effort devoted to unproductive work in the ‘negotiated action’ process – by focusing on building agreement about purpose, agreeing the interpretation of status, direction and issues, and in resolving ‘blocking’ issues.

Sensemaking theory, and the recognition of power relations, points broadly towards strategies which:

- Focus on action and experimentation, such as prototyping and ‘dress rehearsals’, as much as on analysis and planning
- Encourage intensive and widespread communication and interaction
- Engage the active participation of the most powerful stakeholders, throughout but particularly at the outset
- Focus on the development of project leadership and sponsorship skills
- Support an appropriate degree of openness and trust, and tolerance of ‘errors’
- Surface issues early
- Acknowledge personal agendas where possible
- Intensively and continuously review objectives and progress, always seeking feedback

- Provide management control through ‘semi-structures’, loose controls, and intensive communication and visibility, rather than through detailed plans and specifications
- Develop and prioritise experience-based competence in the ‘negotiated action’ process, particularly for senior executives and sponsors (not just project managers).

These broad prescriptions (by no means exhaustive) which are implied by the ‘negotiated action’ model are, as we have seen in Section 8.6 and Tables 8.3 and 8.4, consistent both with findings from the research into project success factors and research into management of complex and uncertain projects. Relatively little attention has so far been given to project management approaches which embrace intrinsic uncertainty and unpredictability; and, as discussed in Section 2.2.3.7, work in this area, as in project management generally, is seen as ‘under-theorised’. The ‘negotiated action’ model suggests a means of interpreting such practices in general theoretical terms, and prioritising and developing them from a basis of understanding the drivers of the ‘negotiated action’ process. It also provides a well-founded theoretical case, based on widely-accepted social theory, that such approaches should assume a much more significant and legitimate place in the mainstream of research, professional guidance, education and training.

The model also suggests some new approaches to intervention, which do not appear to have been much attempted in practice (though that in itself should prompt some caution). For example, explicit arbitration and counselling techniques to manage potential personal and political conflict would seem to be of potential benefit in removing obstacles to the ‘negotiated action’ process, thereby increasing the pace of the project trajectory, and thereby project effectiveness. Management processes could be explored which: explicitly recognise the contested character of many key decisions in project trajectories and help in working through issues, building on work on ‘argumentation’ approaches (Metcalf, 2002; Sillince, 1999); or which apply in a project context some of the OD-based approaches which were promoted by exponents of ‘the learning organization’ (Edmondson 1996; Roth and Senge 1996; Senge et al. 1999; Senge 1993). The empirical work in this thesis provides some support for the conclusions from the literature of how problematic such approaches can be in practice; however, the ‘negotiated action’ model suggests that the potential benefits from such approaches could be considerable in improved project effectiveness.

8.7.1.2 *Thinking differently about business change projects*

More generally, the theoretical model from this research suggests a different way of thinking about business change projects: as exploratory collaborative ‘journeys’, with as clear a sense of purpose and direction as possible but with only a broad initial specification of the final destination; where goals and plans are continually refined as more is learned about what is required and how to achieve it; where uncertainty is expected, and the management task is essentially to steer the project towards a broadly acceptable outcome. Such a view, though quite counter to the dominant discourse about projects, and therefore not easily accepted, has several implications for practice.

Firstly, it would divert effort and attention (both in practice and in education and training) from the introduction and attempted enforcement of standard mechanistic control processes and inappropriately detailed planning; and concentrate effort and attention on understanding and developing the skills and approaches which are necessary to successfully negotiate a path through the social reality of interactions within organizations (see, for example, Thomas & Mengel, 2008).

Secondly, it would require a less simplistic response to notions of project success and failure than the claims of ‘best practice’ project management actually provoke. Inherent unpredictability means that business change project trajectories may diverge from an initial ‘best guess’ as to outcomes, not least because of the emergent nature of project goals. Sponsors of projects would need to recognise this characteristic, and be ready to accept its implications; and also be prepared to recognise the importance of their own active contribution to the ‘negotiated action’ process, and thereby to the direction, pace and ultimately perceived success of the project trajectory.

The theoretical model provides some theoretical justification for such a change in the perspective on managing business change projects. However, it seems likely that the source of detailed prescriptions consistent with the model will lie in the ‘logic of practice’, where practitioners are continually evolving solutions to the problems of day-to-day reality, irrespective of what theory may say. An interesting example is described in the hardly-cited paper by Lidow (1999), a professional practitioner’s approach to managing a portfolio of projects which demonstrates adherence to many of the strategies implied by the ‘negotiated



action' model. Lidow's 'duck alignment theory' explicitly recognises the importance of multiple interpretations of purpose, and the importance of personal agendas in motivation, and mandates intensive interactive workshops to surface and address these issues. It also accepts the unpredictability of detailed outcomes on projects by an imaginative budgeting regime which is ready to divert resources as required from lower to higher priority projects without blame, accusations of failures, or defensive resistance.

The most significant implications for practice of this research thesis are to emphasise the sound theoretical justification for the more widespread value of these and similar strategies, to press for their more prominent identification and development, and to introduce them into professional guidance, education and training.

## 9 RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

### 9.1 Introduction

This section looks back over this research and assesses both the outcomes and the process of the research, prior to drawing the conclusions in Chapter 10 about the contribution of the research and directions for future research. Section 9.2 extends the discussion in Chapter 4 ‘Research Methodology’ about the validity of the findings in the light of what has been described in Chapters 5 to 8, and Section 9.3 considers generalisability. Section 9.4 reviews both what appeared to work well and also possible improvements to the research process on the basis of experience, and the overall quality of the research is assessed against some broad quality criteria suggested by Silverman (2005). Section 9.5 discusses the researcher’s personal development as a researcher through the process of conducting research.

### 9.2 Research validity

The various aspects of the research method are discussed below in terms of Maxwell’s validity typology for qualitative research (Maxwell, 1992) of *descriptive validity*, *interpretive validity*, and *theoretical validity*, fully described in Section 4.11.1 (General approaches in interpretive research). Maxwell’s fourth category, *generalisability*, is discussed at Section 9.3.

#### 9.2.1 Descriptive validity

In Maxwell’s terms, *descriptive validity*, demonstrating that the researcher is not making up or distorting matters in their accounts, is the foundation upon which the other aspects of validity are built.

Descriptive validity issues in ethnography typically focus on the accuracy and completeness of data collection, and the subsequent distillation into an account of the research setting. In this case, the ‘account’ was in two parts: the ‘best practice’ comparison of the projects’ processes and practices (Section 6.2); and the Practitioner’s Tale (Section 6.3). In both cases, descriptive validity of what was reported in each

account was reinforced by an audit trail to contemporaneous notes and meeting logs, supported by comprehensive documentation and emails, so later production of an account was substantially verifiable against those records. (Questions of interpretive validity also apply, of course, and are discussed further below).

#### 9.2.1.1 *Selectivity*

The more problematic concern was that of selectivity of data gathering. Audio recording was both impractical and inappropriate in the circumstances, so a necessarily summary view with a degree of interpretation was recorded in the notes. More importantly, why were certain events recorded and recounted? One support for descriptive validity is the very large volumes of information recorded and retained in this case. But was there additional information available in the setting about project practice that would have led to a significantly different set of conclusions? Did the researcher have preconceived ideas, for which instances were recognised and recorded, while other events not supporting those ideas were ignored?

The clear focus of the research data collection was around (a) departures from the expectations of ‘best practice’ project management, and (b) the concerns of the processual organizational and projects literature on politics, emotion, personal psychology, and ‘non-rational’ aspects of decision-making – particularly where these seemed influential in determining action and observed outcomes. This is a very broad area of concern and, while clearly not comprehensive, would seem to cover sufficiently large ground (again, taking account of the large volumes of information gathered) to avoid significant omissions with regard to the research purpose of seeking alternatives to mainstream ‘best practice’ and rationalist assumptions.

The researcher, like any researcher, had preconceptions, but (at the time of the fieldwork) these were predominantly based on experience of practice, rather than adoption of a preferred theoretical perspective. A number of different theoretical frameworks were explored in the analysis stage when the fieldwork and narrative was completed; but the original data was gathered mainly from within the preconceptions of practice, which in

this case seems to be a strength of the approach given the research aims. Alvesson (2003), while pointing to the advantages of an in-depth pre-understanding in ‘self-ethnography’ warns at the same time of the danger of ‘blind spots’ and the difficulty of standing back from the familiar. This ‘distance’ was achieved later in the research process at the analytical stage, including using what Alvesson refers to as ‘mind-shaking’ theories such as those of Bourdieu (Alvesson, 2003, p.186).

The starting point of the research was a recognition of the inadequacy of ‘best practice’ approaches in some respects, so there was potentially a risk of seeking out only those instances which departed from the norm and could be seen as confirming the inadequacies of conventional assumptions about projects. However, the structure of the ‘best practice’ comparison analysis around pre-defined aspects (goals and objectives, plans etc) did demand an evidenced demonstration against those aspects and helped remove the effects of any implicit preconceived bias. The comprehensive retention of documentation meant that it was possible to be confident (by searching through for disconfirming cases) that observations about the absence of particular features of ‘best practice’ expectations could be supported. Furthermore, the observations about compliance with ‘best practice’ expectations were confirmed through ‘member checking’ (see Section 4.11.1).

Similarly to the ‘best practice’ comparison, the descriptive validity of the Practitioner’s Tale is supported by reference to retained documentation and emails, but, being based largely on the daily journal and the log of significant meetings, is subject to the same challenge of selective omission on the basis of preconceptions of what was ‘significant’. This is clearly an issue in any qualitative ethnographic study (and one faced even more severely by proponents of grounded theory). In this case, what was ‘significant’ was taken as anything potentially relevant to outcomes from within a processual and social practice perspective. The journal notes were perforce summary in nature (see Appendix E for extracts), were in fact partly relied upon to carry out work on the projects (eg the ‘health check’ reviews) and so certainly reflected what seemed to be both accurate and important to a practitioner at the time – and the Practitioner’s Tale makes no stronger

claim for descriptive validity than that. Clearly, some preconceptions were necessary, but were they in some sense distorting? To the extent that they were, this (as discussed earlier) reflects an acknowledged and transparent concern with departures from ‘best practice’ and the importance of a processual and social practice perspective. Overall, while it is clear that claims to descriptive validity of the various accounts are bounded by the broad purpose of a more processual perspective on business change projects, within those boundaries the claim for descriptive validity seems reasonably robust.

*9.2.1.2 Some reliance on recollection*

The production of the Practitioner’s Tale was also carried out some time after the events recorded in the notes and reflected in the project documentation. The detail of the narrative in some cases relied on recollection, prompted by the journal notes and documentation. Such cases were typically not events or outcomes (85% of the contemporaneously-logged communications incidents were included in the narrative), being mainly about feelings and interpretations, so the accuracy of such recollection is very difficult to verify. Recollection undoubtedly plays a part in reports of ethnographic studies involving immersion for many months in a particular setting; what is recorded by even the most assiduous researcher is only a fraction of what comes to be known about the setting, and which can influence the final account (Hammersley, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Furthermore, an alternative data gathering approach such as research interviews would have required the same process of recollection from respondents, who would not have had extensive notes and retained documentation to refer to, and whose assumptions and preconceptions would be less open to inspection.

Certainly, the journal notes and project documentation themselves would not constitute a very rich narrative without detail being added from memory. Reliance on memory can be seen as avoiding some of the problems of selectivity in recording, but of course is subject to risks of ‘mis-remembering’ or post-hoc rationalisation. However, some distance from events was undoubtedly of value in producing the narrative – the difference between a diary and a story, with the latter’s implied retrospect. The loose rules of narrative allow the introduction of cause and motivation into the account, both in the light of events as

they turned out, as well as what was seen to be happening at the time. More comprehensive journal notes would have certainly improved descriptive validity in ideal terms though the practical difficulties would have been considerable and may have prejudiced the benefits in interpretive validity which are the main advantage of the ‘self-ethnography’ approach.

### **9.2.2 Interpretive validity**

Interpretive validity is primarily concerned with the extent to which the meanings that are attributed to the actions (including language) of others in the research setting. The risk is that observed actions are misinterpreted by the researcher and the true meaning of the observation is not reflected. Interpretive validity covers a wide range. It can be something which is close to the concerns of descriptive validity (eg ‘Sarah was upset by Gerry’s decision’) to judgements of motive (‘This was a clever move by Kate to divert attention’) to attributions of cause and effect (‘pressure from the Treasury drove the project to focus on the organisational design’).

As Maxwell (1992) makes clear, interpretive validity is generally reinforced by good descriptive validity, as discussed in Section 9.2.1 above. Beyond that, the claims to interpretive validity in this case rest mainly with the ‘observing participant’ or ‘self-ethnography’ approach and the researcher’s lengthy experience as a practitioner. The researcher is not in this case seeking to become accepted and familiar enough with the setting to ‘pass’ as a ‘member’ – he already is one, engaged in the same practice as those observed. Furthermore, in-depth and lengthy experience of the unfolding of events in similar circumstances in many previous projects, while subject to some of the risks of bias and selectivity discussed above in Section 9.2.1, mean that the researcher’s interpretations are likely to have a high degree of credibility as practitioner interpretations.

There is clearly a degree of interpretation in the ‘best practice’ comparison (eg observations about changes in project goals) though these are generally well supported by good descriptive validity through reference to documentation, and by ‘member checking’.

The Practitioner’s Tale necessarily involves much more interpretation (and that is its strength in many respects), though validity concerns should be restricted here to whether the interpretations can legitimately be considered to be ‘member’ practitioner interpretations.

‘Member checking’ was not used directly for the full Practitioner’s Tale, partly for reasons of confidentiality as explained in Chapter 4, partly because of its length and the effort required to read it, but also because the Tale is an individual story. Others will have had different stories from their own perspectives, and, as the empirical research demonstrates, interpretation of specific events is in any case contested. Validation of the typicality of the account was felt to be more reliably determined through ‘member checking’ of the ‘key aspects’ drawn from the account. (Indeed, member checking, while agreeing all the ‘key aspects’ as present, did as expected provoke discussion of alternative interpretations of the specific events). It is also important to note that interpretations of the author are implicitly validated in the account through the agreements of other characters reported in the narrative and from the actions based on the reported interpretations – as Weick and others point out, plausibility and coherence is one test of the validity of a narrative.

### **9.2.3 Theoretical validity**

Theoretical validity is concerned with the validity of explanations that are offered for what is reported in the research account. This covers the validity of the concepts that are used, whether they are clearly defined, there is a consensus on their meanings, and that they are readily identified from the data. It also includes the validity of the postulated relationships, the extent to which causal links are supported from the evidence offered, including the extent to which alternative explanations have been explored.

#### **9.2.3.1 Categories**

The analysis process proceeds in this case (as in many qualitative studies) through successive coding of the data into more abstract categories. In this case, these categories included the 19 ‘themes’ drawn from the Practitioner’s Tale; the 19 ‘features’ highlighted

by the ‘best practice’ comparison; and the final 13 ‘key aspects’ of the business change projects which were developed by consolidating and synthesising the other categories.

In the case of the ‘features’, these were categories defined by contrast with the expected features of ‘best practice’ against evidenced documentation and notes providing a clear audit trail. These ‘features’ were also checked with a number of other project participants who confirmed their validity. In the case of the ‘themes’ these were categories drawn broadly from the processual literature, and expanded during the process of coding where the pre-identified themes were not able to adequately categorise parts of the text. The coding exercise was repeated after a period of time, and while some important amendments were made then, the great majority of the coding decisions were confirmed. The visibility of this process is generally improved by the use of the nVivo qualitative analysis tool, which allowed a valuable quantitative analysis of coding frequencies, and by the inclusion of the text extracts coded to each theme in Appendix F. It was not deemed practical to seek assistance in independent coding of the narrative, though in retrospect this would have been of value in improving the validity of the ‘themes’, particularly in confirming the frequency of their appearance.

The ‘key aspects’ were derived by a systematic consolidation process (described at Section 6.4) of mapping the ‘themes’ and ‘features’ together, and identifying the central categories (the ‘core constructs’ (Strauss, 1987)) through examination of the most connected categories. While this can be demonstrated through an explicit process, it is partly an intuitive process which is difficult to articulate (what Seale (1999b) refers to as a ‘craft’ skill). However, a clear audit trail was maintained between the higher- (more concrete) and lower-level (more general) categories in the model, to make clear where ‘key aspects’ subsume more concrete categories. The ‘key aspects’ were then validated through member checking as described in Section 6.4.14, and well supported.

### *9.2.3.2 The model and theoretical triangulation*

The other aspect of theoretical validity concerns the development of the model to explain the ‘key aspects’ in terms of underlying structure and process, which forms the heart of



the findings in this research. The validity of this model is supported by a process of ‘theoretical triangulation’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Denzin, 1989) whereby the ‘key aspects’ were examined from the perspective of a number of leading theoretical frameworks, from which some shared conclusions emerged (see Chapter 7); and from the use of a generic realist framework for theory development available from a leading social science methodologist (Sayer, 1992).

Looking at the empirical results from these quite different perspectives was very productive. Each of the theories highlighted particular aspects of the research findings; but they were also each capable, to greater and lesser degrees, of offering explanations in their own terms for all or most of the aspects observed. While anything more than a superficial reading of these theories highlights the debate and difference between (or even within) these different perspectives, it was evident that they shared similar fundamental views of the nature of social reality, and the processes of its social construction. This provided a broader base of confidence in the structural and process components of the model.

However, it was also possible to identify which of the theories most obviously resonated with the empirical aspects in this case. In particular, the conceptual vocabulary of Bourdieu’s *field*, *capital* and *habitus* together with that of Weick’s sensemaking provided a powerful framework for elucidating the characteristics and drivers of the ‘negotiated action’ process, while at the same time accounting for the importance of all of the salient aspects of the empirical findings. This combination of Bourdieu and Weick’s frameworks has been mentioned in the literature as a possible fruitful direction in organizational analysis (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008), but has not previously been examined in an empirical context.

The development of the model proceeded through a number of iterations through which a formulation was achieved which satisfactorily covered all of the identified ‘key aspects’. The overall theoretical validity was therefore improved through the incorporation and synthesis of existing theoretical constructs, well supported in the literature; while maintaining complete coverage of the empirical findings.

### 9.2.3.3 *The explanatory capability of the model*

The validity of the theoretical model was further enhanced by using it to explain findings from the literature into project success factors and into the management of projects with high levels of uncertainty (see Section 8.5).

Table 9.1 provides a summary of how the different threats to the validity of the research outcomes were managed throughout the research. Section 9.3 which follows discusses Maxwell’s fourth aspect of validity – *generalisability*.

**Table 9.1: Managing the threats to validity**

<b>Account</b>	<b>Threats to validity</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Journal	Selectivity/lack of comprehensiveness/’blind spots’	Daily coverage and update Confirmation from project documentation Explicit focus on a. processual concerns and b. departures from expectations of ‘best practice’
Project documentation and emails	As above	Comprehensive retention
Practitioner’s Tale	Inaccuracy Bias False interpretations Some reliance on recollection for elaboration	Inclusion of 85% of events logged contemporaneously Practitioner insight based on experience Confirmation from project documentation and emails Narrative produced immediately on leaving field
‘Best practice’ comparison – ‘key features’	Inaccuracy/false interpretation Bias	Evidenced analysis against ‘best practice’ parameters Audit trail to documents Search through comprehensive documentation for disconfirming cases Member checking
Practitioners Tale - coding	Constructs not valid Unreliable coding	Drawn from processual literature Clearly defined Iteration and revision Systematic transparent process through use of nVivo

		Full coding available for inspection
Key Aspects	As above. Loss of coverage of ‘key features’ and ‘themes’ through consolidation process	Member checking Theoretical triangulation Systematic mapping analysis
Theoretical model	Wrong ‘core construct’ False causal relationships	Supported by literature and five leading theoretical frameworks Coverage of all ‘key aspects’ Tested against implications for practice and interpretation of previous research into projects

### 9.3 Generalisability

#### 9.3.1 Generalising from a single case

The research findings are based on very detailed description, and subsequent analysis, of the day-to-day social practice over a lengthy period in a small number of related business change projects. This has identified some ‘key aspects’ characterising these business change projects in practice which add to a growing body of research pointing to the empirical departures from the instrumental rationality and positivist assumptions underpinning mainstream project management ‘best practice’. The research is not intended purely as a descriptive study, however, and despite being in effect a single case study, some significant theoretical claims are made from the research. It is important, therefore, to address the question of the extent to which the theoretical model developed on the basis of these findings has wider validity. Some of the relevant literature is reviewed below.

Concerns about generalisation from qualitative case studies have been a recurrent issue in the literature, as discussed in Section 4.11.2 – in Maxwell’s terms, this is one aspect of the question of validity in general (Maxwell, 1992). In summary, in-depth qualitative studies are seen as providing insight into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin, 2003), or “*..how some causal process works out in a particular case or limited number of cases*” (Sayer, 1992, p.242), particularly where the search is for novel insights (or “*nascent theory*” (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) referred to earlier in Section 4.3). However, as already

discussed in Section 4.11, application of the accepted standards of ‘external validity’ in the positivist sense is problematic in such interpretive studies, and a range of alternative criteria for research quality have been proposed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Cho & Trent, 2006). Many proponents of qualitative research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Silverman, 2005; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003) point to the value of repeated or multiple cases (eg through ‘theoretical sampling’ and ‘constant comparison’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) aimed at reaching ‘theoretical saturation’) as a means of strengthening confidence in theoretical generalizations, particularly where alternative ‘disconfirming’ explanations are actively sought. However, it is accepted that in some circumstances a single case may be sufficient; this is particularly so where one can appeal to existing theoretical frameworks (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) in what Yin (2003) refers to as ‘theory-related analytic generalization’. Silverman (2005) points to “*Generalizability as present in a single case*” as being possible where some of the basic structures under investigation are pervasive: “*the basic structures of social order*” (Silverman, 2005, p.180). This is essentially the argument adopted by realists such as Sayer (1992) in asserting the value of ‘intensive’ (detailed case-based, as opposed to ‘extensive’, population-based) research studies, in that, through a process of abstraction from the observed “*concrete objects*”, it is possible to develop theories based on generic underlying mechanisms (Tsoukas, 1989). “*Abstraction seeks necessary relations, conditions and properties and does not expect to find successful generalizations at the concrete level; but in abstracting from the particular contingencies that co-determine particular concrete objects, they are likely to produce a conception characterized by generality*” (Sayer, 1992, p.239). In other words, one may use a single case study to abstract some underlying processes which can potentially be seen to be of more general applicability than the one case – though, as Sayer observes, the extent of that generality is itself a subject for empirical investigation.

It is this process of abstraction that has produced the theoretical model described in Chapter 8. As discussed in Section 9.2 above, and in Sections 8.5 and 8.6, the model can be used to explain findings from a much wider body of research. The following section

provides further argument for generalisability of the theoretical model in terms of the general characteristics of project work and social reality upon which it is constructed.

### ***9.3.2 The ubiquity of the underlying structures of the model***

The model theorizes that the ‘key aspects’ are a logical outcome of some fundamental processes, contingent on some project-specific conditions. The fundamental structural conditions identified are a combination of:

- the generic characteristics of any project, seen as a collaborative multi-party activity to achieve a particular aim, an activity necessarily involving knowledge-building and problem-solving processes;
- the particular character of common-sense social reality within which those project activities necessarily take place.

The higher levels of the model are based directly on the empirical observations from the research. The structural conditions, and ‘negotiated action’ process arising as a consequence of them, are abstractions inferred from those observations, drawing on a range of theories about the nature of social reality and the processes of social action. One can reasonably expect these fundamental structural conditions, rooted as they are in the essential characteristics of social reality, to be present in many business change projects (the limits to this assumption are discussed in the section which follows), and (following the discussion in Section 9.3.1 above) it is on this basis that the research can claim to have wider theoretical and practical relevance.

Section 8.3 further grounds the theoretical model in some general conditions of social reality with reference to the epistemological differences highlighted by Habermas between the largely positivist world of natural science and that of social reality. In the case of business change projects, what is being changed is typically substantially ‘social reality’ – social constructions such as organisation, process, or even culture. Working within the knowledge-constitutive domain of ‘practical interest’ can be seen as leading

logically to a ‘negotiated action’ process in a socially collaborative problem-solving venture such as a business change project.

### **9.3.3 Implications of the specific character of the case**

The above sections make the case for potential generalisability of the study’s theoretical findings but this single case is nonetheless a narrow base on which to make such a claim. The research setting involved a particular kind of project activity – a business change project, as defined in Section 1.2 – in a UK Government department, with a particularly federated culture, responding to particular external pressures unique to that sector, and involving a small number of unique individuals in leadership positions.

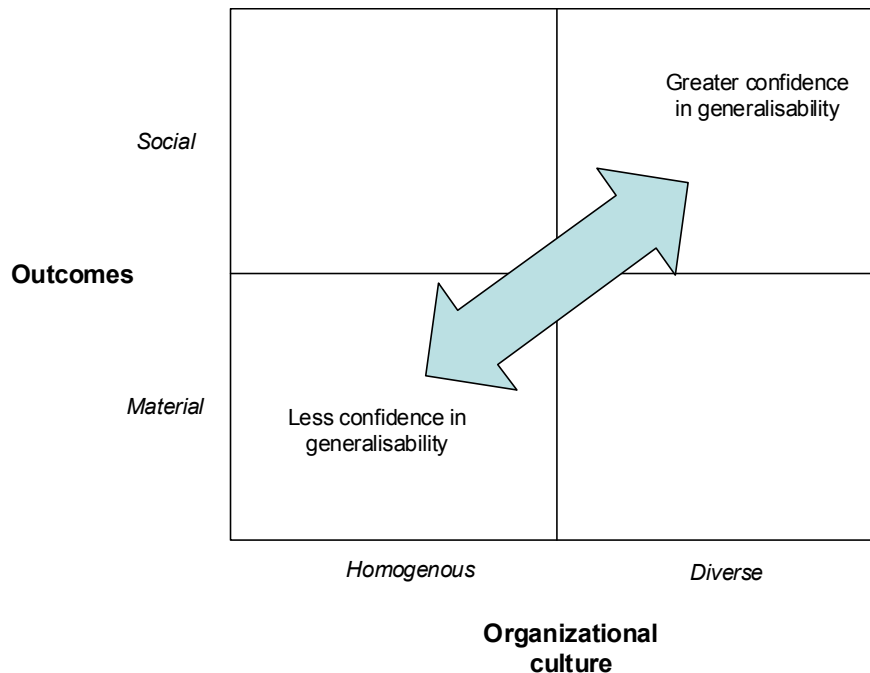
The structure of the model suggests that the extent to which the project outcomes have a socially-constructed character will be an important consideration in its applicability in a different context. Where outcomes are much more closely rooted in the material world, (such as a civil engineering construction project, where reference can be made to physically observable outcomes) and can be defined in ways whereby intersubjective agreement of what is required and how it is achieved is more likely, the importance of the ‘negotiated action’ process seems likely to be reduced. Similarly, in more innovative and exploratory projects, involving uncertainty about ends and means, the ‘negotiated action’ process will necessarily assume greater significance (and we have seen in Section 8.5 that the model is able to offer explanations for many of the findings from project research into such projects). However, even many apparently material outcomes can be seen as having a socially-constructed component (eg ‘trains’ (Alderman *et al.*, 2005)), so the model may conceivably have broader application outside business change projects as defined here.

The organization studied in this case was acknowledged to involve a wide range of different interests, within a culture of consultation – and was often jocularly referred to as a ‘dysfunctional family’. This may accentuate the importance of the ‘negotiated action’ process in this case above organizations where there is greater homogeneity of perspective, and more consistent alignment to a clear shared goal. However, as we have seen from the literature on power and politics in organizations (see Section 2.6), diversity

of views and political action are endemic to much of organizational life, so it seems likely that even in less culturally diverse environments, the ‘negotiated action’ process would be evident to some degree.

Figure 9.1 below summarises the impact of the two factors of extent of social construction and cultural diversity. On the basis of this research, it would seem that the model can be most confidently generalised within the top-right-hand quadrant; though there are reasons for claiming wider generalisation outside that, which could usefully be tested.

**Fig 9.1: Confidence in generalisability**



#### **9.3.4 Summary – how generalisable are these findings?**

From the discussion above, we can see that there can be legitimate grounds for generalising from a single case to other cases most particularly when the findings refer to fundamental underlying social processes or structures. In this case, there seem to be good grounds for generalisation on the basis of the ubiquity of the processes involved. The

theoretical model rests on (a) the characteristic uncertainty and ambiguity of social reality (as seen from a number of well-supported social theories, and from philosophical analysis of the distinctive character of social reality) and (b) the empirically-observed rules established within it for collaborative sensemaking and reaching agreement (as seen from ethnomethodological studies, social psychologists such as Weick, and from the study of social discourse). These processes therefore can be seen to supportable beyond the specific characteristics of this case.

The underlying generic processes are seen as generating a number of observed generic ‘key aspects’ of business change projects that are at odds with normative mainstream project management discourse; and which serve to illustrate how the ‘negotiated action’ process is crucial in determining the ‘project trajectory’ (eg in this case through the observed ‘long-running issues’). Section 9.3.3 suggests that the more the project outcomes are socially constructed, and the more diverse the organizational culture in which the project is undertaken, the more likely are the ‘key aspects’ to be observed; however, the underlying ‘negotiated action’ process which is seen as giving rise to those ‘key aspects’, and as fundamentally determining the project trajectory, would seem to be one that can be reasonably postulated as applying to almost any project undertaken within or across organizations. The research site from which the data was gathered and analysed is clearly unique, and in some senses both the department and the projects can be seen as relatively extreme cases; but the underlying processes and structures forming the core of the model are clearly present in most project circumstances.

On this basis, the ‘negotiated action/trajectory’ model, and its implications for practice, can be seen as in principle applicable to any large, complex project conducted within organizations in the public or private sector. The ‘key aspects’, presented as characteristic to business change projects in particular, are more restricted in their generalisability, according to the two aspects of materiality of outcomes, and homogeneity of organizational culture, as illustrated in Fig 9.1. It could be expected that these ‘key aspects’ would be more apparent in those projects (such as business change projects) where a substantial part of the outcomes are socially constructed; and also in exploratory



projects generally, such as product development and research and development projects, where uncertainty and ambiguity about outcomes and how to achieve them are in any case high. The ‘key aspects’ will be less apparent in (say) engineering and construction projects, where the level of uncertainty and ambiguity is lower (though clearly still present) with respect both to outcomes and methods. However, even buildings can be considered to comprise a degree of social construction, and large construction projects take place within organizations governed by the processes and rules of social reality. In all cases, therefore, one would expect to be able to discern the operation of the ‘negotiated action’ process, and to see that it influenced the project trajectory at least to some degree; and the broad thrust of the implications for practice put forward in Section 8.7 would therefore have some degree of application across all projects. However, these conclusions are necessarily tentative and must be considered subject to further empirical investigation.

## **9.4 Review of research process**

This section looks at the research methodology used and identifies those aspects which appeared to be most successful in contributing to the research aims, and where the process could in retrospect have been improved to improve the quality of the research outcomes. A summary evaluation is then presented against Silverman’s four broad criteria for the evaluation of the quality of qualitative research.

### **9.4.1 Strengths of the process**

#### **9.4.1.1 *Self-ethnography***

In terms of the aims of the research in getting close to the real experiences of practice, of “...*catching reality in flight*” (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001), the self-ethnography or ‘observing participant’ approach seemed to offer real benefits in practice. The recognition of the extent to which social construction and discourse dominated various reports of the reality of project life in this case would have been much more difficult to untangle even from a more conventional ‘participant observer’ study, and certainly from carrying out interviews in a conventional case study approach. The fortunate combination of circumstances to carry out such ‘self-ethnography’ research are

very unusual, but this probably unique opportunity for this researcher seems to have generated a very rich view. The approach does though raise difficult issues about bias and prejudice and confidentiality which have been fully discussed in Section 9.2 above and in Chapter 4 Research Method. However, in this case, the advantages are judged to have strongly outweighed the disadvantages.

#### *9.4.1.2 Use of narrative*

A key means of converting the subjective practitioner experience into some characteristics of more general relevance was the development of the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’. As the narrative literature suggested, this proved to be a powerful means of capturing the complex mixture of observation, interpretation and motive which characterises accounts from day-to-day reality. While originally motivated by a rather simplistic desire to ‘tell what happened’ from a practitioner perspective, it provided a relatively concise and economical means of capturing and analysing the mass of data which comprised the experience over 18 months. It was also helpful in separating the roles of practitioner and researcher/analyst, as the narrative was produced very much from within a practitioner perspective of common-sense reality. Subsequent analysis was carried out from a perspective of increased familiarity with qualitative research methods and some previously unfamiliar works of social theory which meant that the ‘researcher interpretation of the narrative was carried out without altering the original practitioner perspective.

#### *9.4.1.3 Use of nVivo*

The qualitative software analysis tool proved to be very valuable in systematic and transparent analysis of the narrative, in supporting repeated iteration, in providing simple quantitative measures of frequency which provided additional insight, and in easing the logistical burden of handling the volume of text in a rigorous fashion.

#### *9.4.1.4 Combination of subjective and objective aspects*

While the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’ provided an insight into the more subjective and less-discussed aspects of project life, the more objective analysis based mainly on retained project documentation was very important in providing a complementary perspective on

the same events, and to provide validation of what was described. While many of the ‘themes’ from the narrative and ‘features’ from the ‘best practice’ comparison overlapped, they each provided additional perspective. Their combination into the ‘key aspects’ produced a set of characteristics which could not have been produced by either approach on its own; and which could be seen to be intersubjectively valid through ‘member checking’.

#### *9.4.1.5 Use of social theories*

The ‘theoretical triangulation’ of the research findings through the lens of some leading social theories was very useful. Rather than taking a preferred theory in advance and seeking to justify or test its suitability, the triangulation process provided valuable insights into what was common to the theories and what particular concepts seemed most applicable to the empirical findings. It was, in fact, the commonality of the views of social reality which first focused attention on the character of social reality as a key structural component of the theoretical model. The work of Weick and Bourdieu then provide additional detailed frameworks from which the components of the ‘negotiated action’ process could be put together in a way that covered all the derived ‘key aspects’.

### *9.4.2 Areas for improvement*

#### *9.4.2.1 Data gathering*

The data gathering process was difficult to manage as rigorously as would ideally be desirable in a conventional ethnography study, as for most of the time the researcher’s primary focus was successful conduct of practice – paid work! The journal notes and event logs were extensive by normal working standards of practice, but probably fell short of the rigour and completeness that characterise the textbook approach to ethnography. This is a problem of participative research, including action research, and was mitigated in a variety of ways as described in Section 9.2 (eg by the large volumes of retained documentation). Also, the notes seemed entirely adequate at the time for production of the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’, and arguably events that were forgotten shortly after they took place were of little perceived significance. Nonetheless the credibility of the findings would have been enhanced by fuller and more structured records.

#### 9.4.2.2 Coding

The coding of the narrative was conducted only by the researcher himself (twice, on occasions separated by some 9 months) and so no cross-checking was available to establish the reliability of the coding. This would have increased the reliability and validity of the research, particularly as the narrative was produced by the researcher in the first place. However, the practical difficulties of securing a suitable person to carry out that quite onerous task meant that this was not possible. The detail of the analysis is presented in Appendix F to provide transparency on the coding decisions but additional coders would have gone further to strengthen reliability.

#### 9.4.2.3 Member checking

Member checking was used to validate the ‘features’ and ‘key aspects’, and the extent of support for the validity of these summary findings is an important counter to any potential weaknesses in the data gathering and coding process described above. However, the confidentiality and sensitivity of some parts of the narrative, as well as the social limits of imposing on the time of busy people did limit the extent of member checking. Also, the validation was carried out in a fairly open-ended way and so the extent of support for specific aspects was not always clear. Given the value of the views of other practitioners in confirming this view of the actuality of project experience, a more structured and extensive approach to member checking would have been very valuable, albeit more difficult to implement.

### 9.4.3 *Summary quality evaluation*

At the end of his textbook on conducting qualitative research Silverman (2005, p.288-295) presents some high-level questions under four major issues of quality against which the value of such research can be evaluated. These are discussed in the light of the earlier discussion in this section.

#### 9.4.3.1 Analytic depth

*How far can we demonstrate that our research has mobilized the conceptual apparatus of our social science discipline and, thereby, helped to build useful social theories?*

This seems to be one of the stronger areas of the research. The research has sought to provide a new theoretical perspective, and in doing so has drawn on a wide range of existing social theories to provide a coherent conceptual framework.

*9.4.3.2 Why should we believe qualitative research?*

*How far can our data, methods and findings satisfy the criteria of reliability and validity or, put more crudely, counter the cynic who comments ‘Sez you’?*

Given the particular research approach adopted, this is probably the most challenging area. The combination of the subjective and objective perspectives is a deliberate attempt to address some of the issues of ‘anecdotalism’; the threats to validity and reliability, and their attempted mitigation, have been clearly identified and discussed, and the extent to which they influence the validity of the outcomes can therefore be judged. Some areas in which reliability and validity would in retrospect have been improved have been identified in Section 9.4.2 above. The validity of the research overall is in this case supported as much by the credibility of the outcomes, both in terms of theoretical support, member confirmation, and the ability to explain outcomes of previous projects research, as by the process to demonstrate reliability and validity of the inputs.

*9.4.3.3 Only interviews?*

*To what extent do our preferred research methods reflect careful weighing of the alternatives or simple responses to time and resource constraints or even an unthinking adoption of the current fashions?*

The research method is well suited to the research aims, compared with alternatives such as interviews – both in principle, and, as it turns out, in practice. It is though rather unusual in some respects and raises some difficult problems in the conventional terms of reliability and repeatability.

*9.4.3.4 Research and practitioners*

*How can valid, reliable and conceptually defined qualitative studies contribute to practice and policy by revealing something new to practitioners, clients and/or policy-makers?*

The research outcomes seem to be of interest to those practitioners involved in validation, and the theoretical model has clear implications for practice.

## 9.5 Personal development as a researcher

Some of my personal development as a researcher is hopefully evident from this thesis and particularly from the evaluative discussion in the later chapters. In addition, the ambitious scope of the research aims has also led me to read very widely. While this coverage has presented challenges in presenting this thesis, it has both raised my standard of scholarship and given me a solid grounding in some intellectual developments that are of relevance to wider consideration of the nature of change in organizations.

The central issue for me in developing as a researcher has related to concerns similar to those discussed around the advantages and disadvantages of ‘self-ethnography’ – namely, the balancing of practice-based experience with the rigours of research discipline.

I started this research from the perspective of thinking I knew a great deal about what happened in project practice, and a desire to establish some kind of new theoretical framework for this. I saw similarities between the consultancy work that I did and research. I was after all often concerned with gathering information from respondents, trying to understand what was going on, and analysing complex social and organizational problems in ways which would make sense to others and would point the way to action. Furthermore, I was trained as a natural and social scientist.

I was, however, completely ignorant of the workings of the academic research world in a way that I suspect is shared by many of my fellow practitioners. Some of the taken-for-granted assumptions and natural disciplines of research were at first rather perplexing and even frustrating to me. (For example, it puzzled me that my responses as a practitioner to an interviewer conducting a research exercise could be considered as data, while my own unmediated observations based on experience had a far more problematic status).

However, I have learned a great deal from becoming absorbed in the debates of organizational and social research, of trying to understand how thoughtful researchers in the social world seek to carry out their work, and from a broadening of my horizons to include a range of stimulating (and sometimes bewildering) different philosophical and

intellectual perspectives. I have gradually come to realize that what is or should be driving research is exactly the reason why I wanted to do it in the first place: the central importance of creating accounts and theories that are based in the real world and are therefore ‘truthful’, have a status above ‘opinion’, and can also claim to being a legitimate basis for taking one kind of action rather than another. From the confident position of a practitioner very much at home in a familiar milieu, where much is ‘obvious’, I now realise how difficult establishing firmly-based ‘truth claims’ is. I have a much better understanding of academic research concerns and priorities and the methods and approaches that follow from that; and I am much more open-minded to a variety of different approaches to establishing essential credibility.

Some of the areas in which this research could have been improved have been discussed earlier. If I was starting this research again, I would be less easily put off by some of the practical difficulties of improving reliability and validity. Fortunately, under the guidance (and regular prompting) of my supervisor, my empirical work was sufficiently well-considered and structured to set it off in a productive direction, and to provide a sufficiently solid basis of data for subsequent analysis. Throughout I have followed processes which have met my own standards by which reliable claims can be made, with a particular emphasis on outcomes as criteria for validity; but now I would pay more attention from the outset to the need to persuade sceptical others, and to ensure obvious compliance with the relevant research community standards.

The other aspect of the balance between practice and research is the effect of the research on my practice. I now see practice, and prescriptions, in a much more problematic light, recognising the intrinsic uncertainty, the limits to managerial agency, and the influence of various discourses on establishment of ‘regimes of truth’. This is not always what my colleagues consider to be helpful! – and it almost forces me from the centre of practice to become more of an observer, becoming more sceptical and less confident of the necessary actions and what constitutes an effective response. All this, I suspect, means that I could no longer employ the device of the ‘The Practitioner’s Tale’, which, as much by luck as judgement, I believe has proved successful in capturing a practitioner’s perspective. This research perhaps represented a once-off opportunity of catching ‘reality in flight’ in this particular way which is very difficult to repeat.

I may therefore now be doomed to wander the no-man's land between research and practice. However, it seems that, despite the difficulties, there may be much productive work to be done in seeking to build bridges between these two worlds. The two-way relationship between theory and practice is complex but potentially very valuable; and worthy of much closer examination.



## 10 CONCLUSION

### 10.1 Introduction

The empirical research described in this thesis has demonstrated some of the key aspects of the social reality of business change projects, and has pointed up some significant departures in practice from the underlying theoretical assumptions of current 'best practice' in managing projects. It has drawn on an alternative social constructionist perspective, using some leading social practice theories to develop an explanatory theoretical model of the processes at work which lead to these empirically-observed key aspects. This section concludes this thesis by setting out the main contributions of this research, in terms of empirical findings, theoretical developments, methodology and implications for practice. The final section then discusses some avenues for further research to build on the findings from this work.

### 10.2 Research Contributions

#### 10.2.1 *Empirical findings*

##### 10.2.1.1 *Confirmatory*

The empirical findings from this research confirm the findings of a number of researchers from different research disciplines presented in Section 2 on the divergence in practice from mainstream rationalist models of business change projects. In particular, they confirm the importance of politics and power in organizational action and outcomes. They also support a body of research which has identified low levels of substantive compliance in practice with mainstream project management methodologies (Nandhakumar & Avison, 1999; O'Leary & Williams, 2008; Truex *et al.*, 2000; White & Fortune, 2002).

##### 10.2.1.2 *New*

In addition, the empirical research has identified some broad characteristics of business change projects (the 'key aspects') which emphasise quite different features of such projects, and in themselves raise questions about the appropriate means of managing

them. It is suggested that these ‘key aspects’ can be seen as an intrinsic characteristic of the nature of business change projects, rather than an aberration from an ideal norm.

### ***10.2.2 Theoretical contributions***

The theoretical model proposed offers an alternative view to that which is implied by project management ‘best practice’ of the drivers of activity and outcomes on business change projects. As the review of project management literature in Section 2.2.4 illustrates, numerous authors have challenged the validity and efficacy of this view of projects, particularly in the conditions of uncertainty and complexity which are typically seen as characterising business change projects. However, there is a recognition that project management is lacking sound theory which addresses these empirically-based concerns.

The call has been for approaches which do not rely on the assumptions of positivist instrumental rationality. The theoretical model proposed on the basis of this research provides such an alternative, based on a socially-constructed perspective on the nature of social reality. In Habermas’s terms, the epistemological assumptions of the model are rooted in the knowledge-constitutive domain of ‘practical interest’ rather than the ‘technical interest’ of positivist natural science, and so can be seen as offering a fundamentally different view. This view is able to offer some interpretation and explanation of the empirical findings from research into projects, and has clear implications for improving practice (see Sections 8.5 to 8.7).

The model has been structured by drawing on a number of leading social and organizational theories, and the research has thereby also contributed to a view of the respective applicability of these theories in a projects context. In particular, it has highlighted the power of the conceptual structures of Bourdieu and Weick in theorising the underlying processes driving business change project trajectories in a way not previously attempted.

### **10.2.3 Methodological contribution**

#### *10.2.3.1 Self-ethnography*

In pursuit of the research aims of getting closer to the ‘actuality’ or concrete practice of real projects, a number of unusual methods were applied. In particular, the research followed an ‘observing participant’ or ‘self-ethnography’ approach whereby research data was gathered by the researcher as an ‘insider’ in the process of conducting project work. This was judged to be successful in terms of providing insight into concrete practice in the way required. While having some similarities to action research, this approach raises distinctive methodological challenges which had to be dealt with in the conduct of the research, and are explored in Chapters 4 and 9. This research therefore contributes to the development of methods of ‘getting close to practice’.

#### *10.2.3.2 Use of narrative*

An important component of the research approach was the use of narrative in the form of ‘The Practitioner’s Tale’ which successfully consolidated and crystallised a very large amount of data gathered over an 18 month period. As suggested by the narrative literature, this text encapsulated a wide range of descriptive and interpretive detail and reflected a view of the world through the eyes of a practitioner which was then systematically analysed from a more objective research perspective. This subjective perspective highlighted particular aspects of practice which could not be captured by a complementary, more conventional analysis of observations and documentation review; it was the combination of both perspectives that generated the ‘key aspects’. In this case, the practitioner was also the researcher, which as discussed above raised particular challenges to reliability and validity which had to be addressed. The research therefore contributes to the use of narrative approaches in projects research.

### **10.3 Implications for practice**

As set out more fully in Section 8.7, this research has significant implications for practice. In summary:

- The ‘negotiated action’ model provides well-founded theoretical support, based on widely accepted social theory and in-depth ethnographic research, for emerging approaches to the management of complex and uncertain projects that have yet to form part of mainstream ‘best practice’. This research suggests that such approaches should assume a much more significant and legitimate place in the mainstream of research, professional guidance, education and training.
- The model proposed offers an explanatory framework for the drivers of the ‘negotiated action’ process and its impact on the project trajectory, and thereby provides a means of prioritising proposed interventions, and identifying and developing in practice new types of intervention.
- The model suggests a range of potential new interventions focused on recognition of the contested character of the ‘negotiated action’ process, which seek to mitigate the effects of ‘discrepant sensemaking’ and personal and political conflict.

More generally, the research suggests a different way of thinking about and discussing the management of business change projects in practice, recognizing the implications of the intrinsic unpredictability of their trajectory; and diverting effort and investment away from enforcement of mechanistic control processes and inappropriately detailed planning towards understanding and developing the approaches and skills necessary to successfully negotiate a path through the social reality of interactions within organizations.

#### **10.4 Future research**

This research suggests some avenues for future research, which can be considered under four broad headings:

- Exploring the applicability of the findings in different contexts – are the ‘key aspects’ apparent in similar business change projects in a range of different organizations? – and strengthening and extending the theoretical model accordingly

- Extending the theoretical model to link directly with views of project success, exploring the hypothesized link between improvements to the ‘negotiated action’ process and improved effectiveness
- Identifying and investigating examples from current practice of approaches consistent with the predictions of the ‘negotiated action’ model and thereby developing a repertoire of theoretically-underpinned interventions
- Exploring the implications for practice through action research of suitable management interventions.

One of the challenges in progressing this research is that it is clear that identification of the social practice aspects of projects requires close on-the-ground involvement with practice, ideally through ethnographic/participant observer studies and action research. This is, however, very time-consuming and resource-intensive, and such opportunities come rarely; should such an opportunity arise, it would provide the means of gathering more rich data about the presence of the ‘key aspects’ of business change projects in different contexts, and of closer examination of the components of the ‘negotiated action’ process. The theoretical model developed in this thesis could provide the framework for such research.

The proposed next steps for this research are to engage practitioners more widely to carry out what Sayer (1992) refers to as ‘extensive’ studies on the foundations of the initial ‘intensive’ ethnographic study. Four possible studies are outlined below:

1. A survey of practitioners (not just project managers) to establish their recognition of the ‘key aspects’, and the impact on project effectiveness of different components of the ‘negotiated action’ process
2. Recruiting willing practitioners over a population of projects to provide narratives of project trajectories, collecting and analysing these accounts to develop/seek corroboration of the ‘key aspects’
3. A search exercise to identify organizations who have attempted interventions consistent with the ‘negotiated action’ model, and to gather and consolidate their experiences

4. Action research with a number of organizations to explore a range of different interventions aimed at improving the 'negotiated action' process and thereby the effectiveness of the project trajectory.

## **APPENDICES**

- A. RESEARCHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES**
- B. PROJECT EVENT TIMELINES**
- C. SIGNIFICANT COMMUNICATIONS - LOG**
- D. KEY DOCUMENTATION SOURCES**
- E. ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM JOURNAL**
- F. NARRATIVE THEMES – with illustrative extracts coded to these themes**
- G. CONSOLIDATION OF ‘THEMES’ INTO ‘KEY ASPECTS’**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **RESEARCHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

Summary of the researcher's main project activities with respect to the projects included in the field work.



**RESEARCHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Successful Delivery</b>	<b>PhoenixIT</b>	<b>Phoenix</b>
Sept 06	Scoping and planning discussions		
Nov 06	Devpt of approach and prep for Board meeting		
Dec 06	'Lessons learned' reviews – 3 projects (notes of interviews (7), and summary reports)		
Jan 07	Developing intervention approach (notes of meetings, presentations)		Strategic support to Kate (Pg Dir) Development of objectives and scope
Feb 07		Management oversight of IT demonstrator for Phoenix	Programme scoping and definition Rationalisation of existing initiatives
March 07	Detailed definition of intervention events	Coaching Sarah (Pg Dir)	Managing consultancy procurement Membership of management team
April 07	Presentations to management teams Testing interventions for PhoenixIT	Coaching Sarah (Pg Dir)	Tender preparation, issue and bid evaluation
May 07	Designing PhoenixIT workshops Reviewing PhoenixIT experience (6 interviews)	Design of Programme governance Attending project team meetings	Designing risk/reward arrgts for consultancy contract Carrying out pre-OGC Health Check (interviews and documentation review)
June 07	Attempt to mainstream SD in Phoenix	Attending Programme Board	Preparing Frenchay work packages
July 07	Stocktake	Reviewing PhoenixIT Business Case Designing technical assurance processes	
Aug 07		Coaching Sarah	
Sept 07	Engage Integrated Portal project – initial discussions with Paul, SRO	Attending management team meetings	Pre-implementation Health Check (20 interviews, project documentation)
Oct 07	Interview Integrated	Design programme	Presentation to Exec

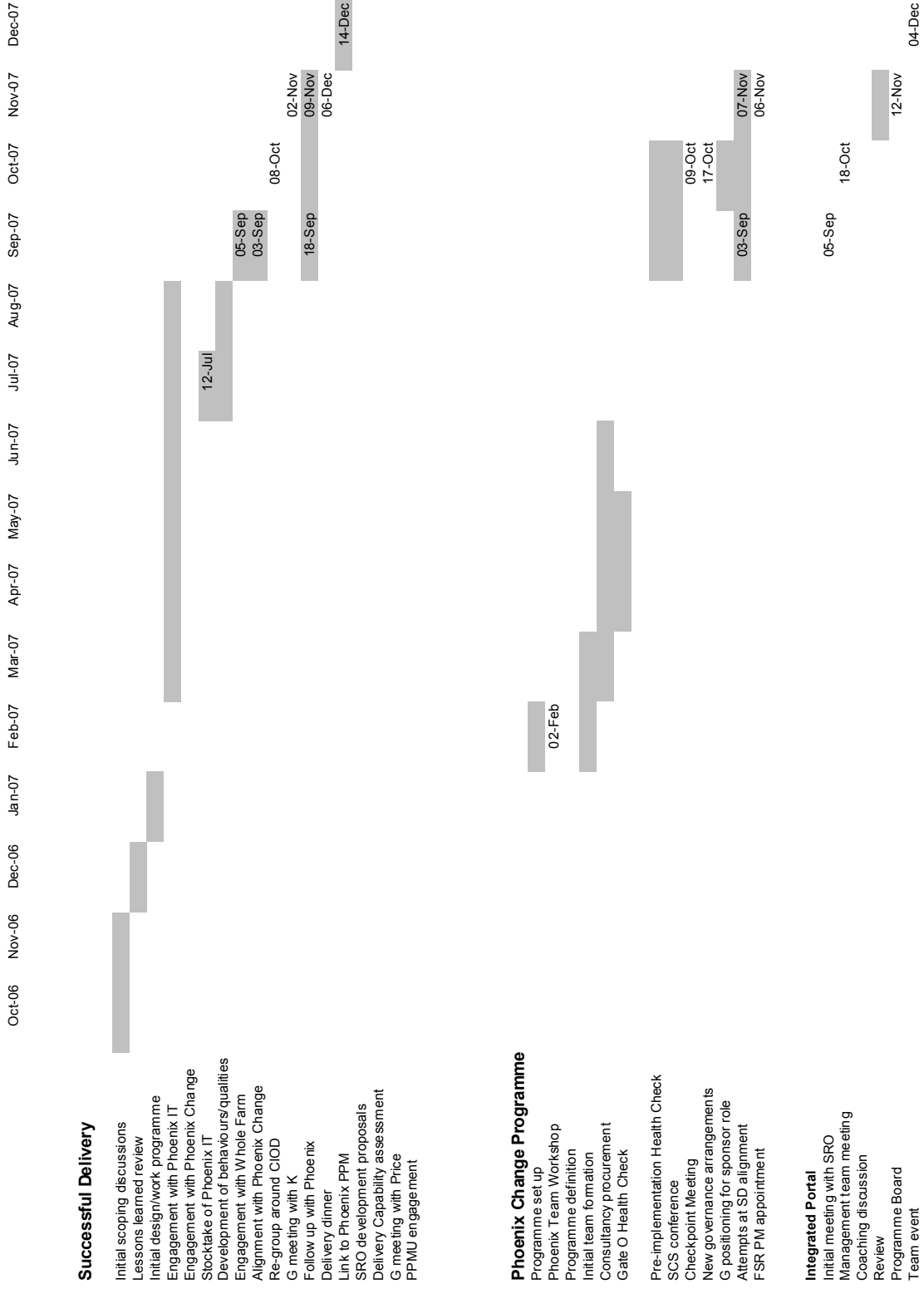
	Portal management team	governance groups	and Delivery Board Attendance at senior management conference
Nov 07	Interview Integrated Portal stakeholders (10) Presentation to Programme Board	Dinner with PhoenixIT management team	Design governance proposals for implementation phase
Dec 07			Reviewing Delivery Board papers on request
Jan 07	SRO development discussions with Phoenix		Reviewing Delivery Board papers on request
Feb 07	'lessons learned' review of major project	Further governance work	
Mar 07	Repeated discussions with Phoenix team re skills development	Interviews with Sarah, Gerry, Jeff, Darren	
April 07	Close down Successful Delivery initiative	Post-implementation review with Sarah and Alice	Review Transition Report

## **APPENDIX B**

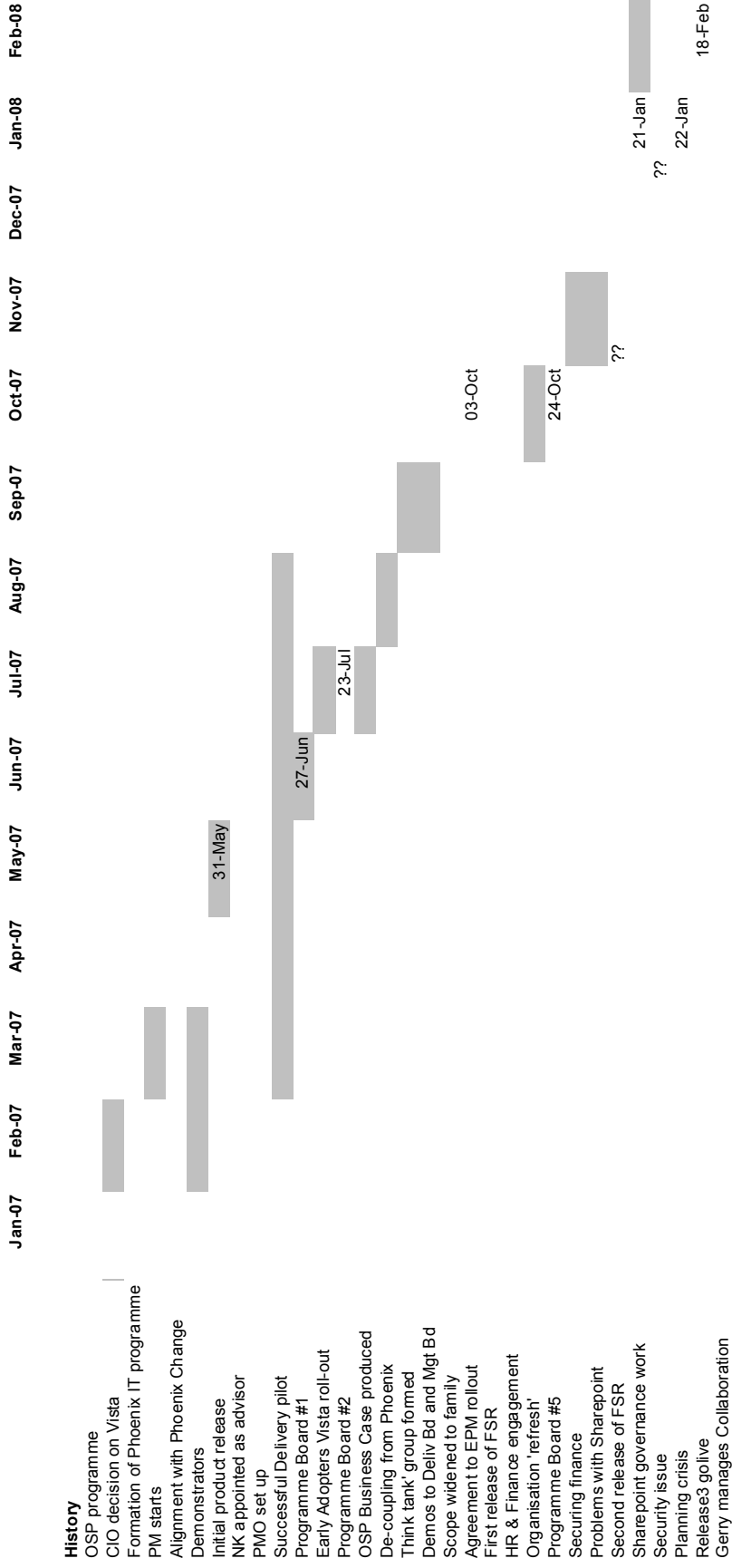
### **PROJECT EVENT TIMELINES**

Timelines built up during the course of the research on the basis of the observed events. These were used as part of the input to the 'Practitioner's Tale'.

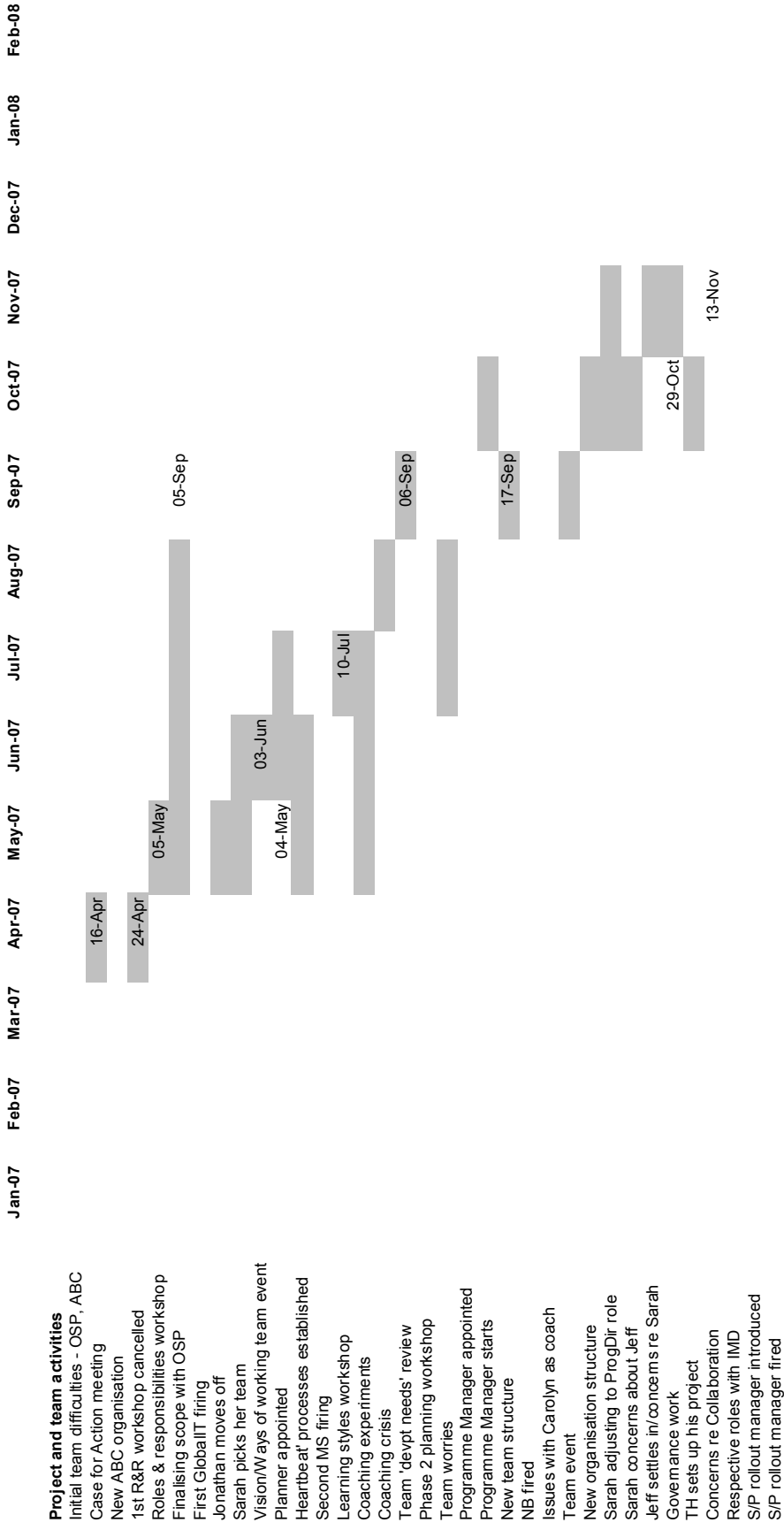
**HIGH-LEVEL TIMELINE**



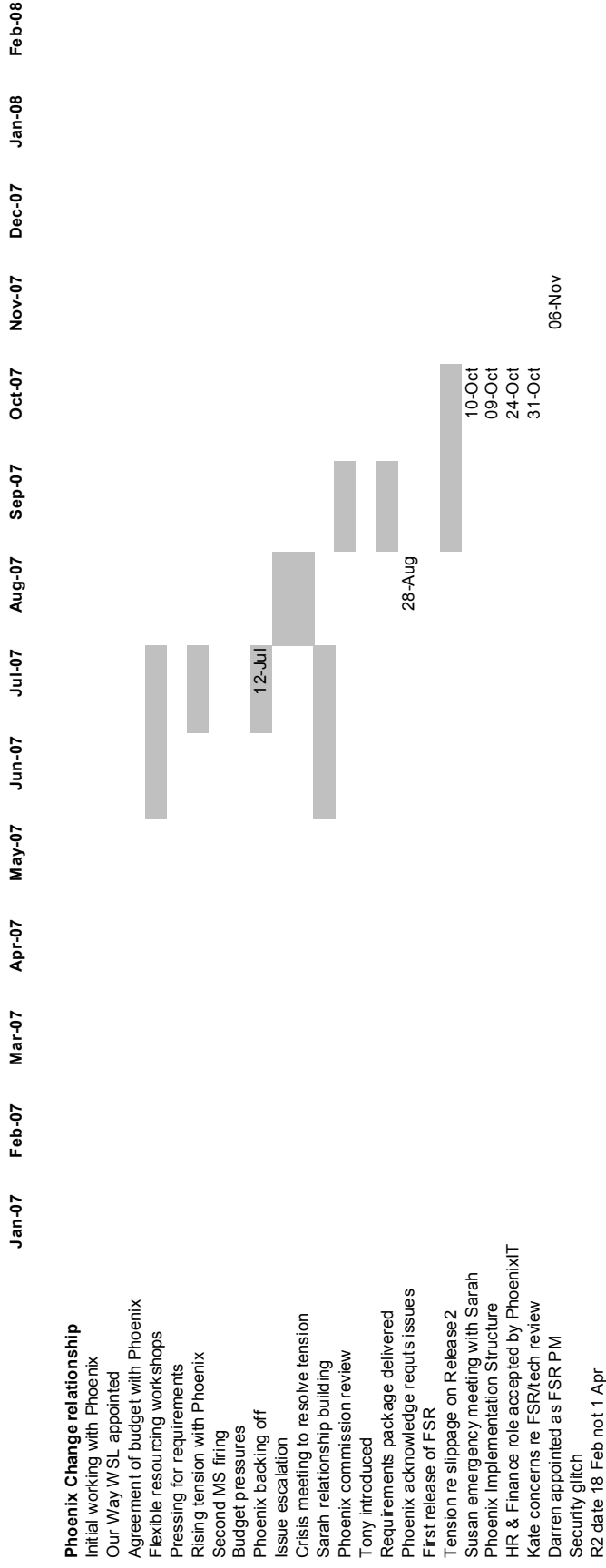
**Phoenix IT TIMELINE**



Appendix B



Appendix B



**APPENDIX C**

**SIGNIFICANT COMMUNICATIONS - LOG**

Contemporaneous log of 'significant' communications associated with events.



## SIGNIFICANT COMMUNICATIONS LOG

Date	Meeting	Project	Attendees	Subject	Comments	In Tale?
01/09/2006	Meeting	SD	G, A	Initial discussions	G prepared to commit considerable time	y
02/11/2006	Meeting	SD	G, A, S	Agree broad approach	Introduce notion of 'care'	y
29/11/2006	Meeting	SD	G, A	Agree intervention elements	Commit to lessons learned	y
25/02/2007	Meeting	SD	G, A	Need to flesh out the interventions		y
07/03/2007	Meeting	SD	A	More detailed design		y
21/03/2007	Meeting	PIT	S	Introduction to Dept	personal concerns	y
26/03/2007	Meeting	SD	G, A, S	Planning events for Phx IT	Need for pre-work before Deliv Fndtn event	y
26/03/2007	Email	PIT	S	Update to SD involvement	it seems the process is working already'	y
10/04/2007	Meeting	SD	A	Workshop design	Offline comments about HR issue in Phx	y
10/04/2007	Conversation	PIT	S	Serious project issues	Scope and relationship issues to fore	y
11/04/2007	Telcon	PIT	G, A, S	S raises concerns to G	Important discussion and reactions	y
11/04/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	S concerns re meeting	help manage G's reactions'	y
16/04/2007	Meeting	SD	CH, ABC	ABC PM development programme	Got full documentation 200pp	y
16/04/2007	Meeting	PIT	G, MSx2, TH, NK	Case for Action	G attitude/view on key risks.No stakeholders	y
17/04/2007	Conversation	PIT	S	View of critical issues/team	People-based	y
20/04/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	Cancels Delivery Foundation event	need to get more organised'	y
24/04/2007	Email	PIT	S	Cancels Roles & Resp event	ABC lack of engagement	y
26/04/2007	Meeting	PIT	S	Review	Struggling with team, scope and control	y
30/04/2007	Meeting	PIT	Caroline	Issues on PIT	C's own view on GlobalIT approach	y
30/04/2007	Meeting	PIT	S, A, + 1	Progress review on R&R	Issues with ABC and multi-supplier team	y
04/05/2007	Meeting	SD/PIT	G, A, S	Wide ranging discussion on delivery	Important conversation - see notes also in PIT	y
05/05/2007	Text	PIT	S	Views on workshop		y
05/05/2007	Meeting	PIT	PIT Project team	Roles % Responsibilities Workshop	Important. OSP difference in view evident	y
09/05/2007	Text	PIT	S	Views on workshop	Personal view on what gained	y
22/05/2007	Email	SD	MH	Review of Project Lstock	Political perspective	y
24/05/2007	Telcon	PIT	Jon	Views on project	History and Jon perspective on scope issues	y
07/06/2007	Meeting	PIT	A, Caroline	Review of workshops	Frank assessment of people issues on PIT	y

Appendix C

07/06/2007	Conversation	PIT	Caroline	Concerns	Not getting controls in place	y
11/06/2007	Meeting	SD	JM, ABC	Views on project issues	Useful. Importance of commercials	y
12/06/2007	Dinner	PIT	G, JY, S	How to move SD into Phx	LS cancelled.	y
12/06/2007	Meeting	SD/PDA	MH	New shape of PDA	Norwich Union 'co-sourcing' PM approach with ABC	y
27/06/2007	Meeting	PIT	Many	PIT Programme Board	KH not behaving as customer	y
09/07/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	Serious people issues	S's return from holiday	y
10/07/2007	Conversation	PIT	Caroline	Problems in the team	C's perspective - different from S's	y
10/07/2007	Meeting	PIT	Project Team + G	Project meeting	Important observations	y
10/07/2007	Meeting	PIT	S, A, Caroline	Team issues review	Lots of tensions	y
10/07/2007	Meeting	PIT	PIT, PPMU	Phx IT demo	Exposes doubts in proposition	y
11/07/2007	Telcon	PIT	Susan	OSP Business Case	Sense of detachment 'no-one asked for	y
11/07/2007	Meeting	PIT	Jonathan	OSP Business Case	GlobalIT	y
12/07/2007	Telcon	PIT	G	OSP Business Case	Presenting benefits independent of Phx	y
12/07/2007	Meeting	SD	G, S, Caroline, A	SD stocktake	Presenting benefits independent of Phx	y
12/07/2007	Meeting	PIT	S, Caroline	Review of stocktake	Important - notes in both sections	y
16/07/2007	Conversation	PIT	S	TDA relationship	Sensitivities. Coaching conflict of interest	y
20/07/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	Phx relationship	Continuing issues with OSP/Jonathan	y
23/07/2007	Meeting	PIT	Many (not Susan)	PIT Programme Board	Deteriorating - quotes	y
26/07/2007	Meeting	SD/PIT	G, S, A	Review of progress	Announcing 'decoupling' from Phx for roll-out	y
06/08/2007	Meeting	PIT	G, S, DMcD	Relationship PIT & TDA	Conclusions on what's req'd and PIT issues	y
06/08/2007	Conversation	PIT	S	New direction	Initial problems with OSP	y
07/08/2007	Meeting	PIT	S, Keith Holmes	Business case for PIT	Reflection on own performance	y
07/08/2007	Meeting	PIT	G, S	Meeting David Cryer	Responding to pressure from Phx - Cryer	y
07/08/2007	Conversation	PIT	A	Design of leadership component	I'll play the CIO card'	y
13/08/2007	Meeting	SD/PIT	A, NK	State of play on PIT and S	Phx and G's role on DelBd	y
13/08/2007	Conversation	PIT	S	S views on Caroline's coaching	Project gone into survival mode'	y
14/08/2007	Email	PIT	G/S/KH	Escalation of Phx/PIT issues	C not keen on Pgmgr	y
14/08/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	K queries on application rationlsn	Inflammatory	y
22/08/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	Breakdown with Phx/KH	S wanting to tackle AM	y
22/08/2007	Telcon	PIT	K sec	Setting up independent review	S stressed	y
23/08/2007	Telcon	PIT	David	What's going on?	Exchange of interpretation of motive etc	y
27/08/2007	Email	PIT	S	Falling out with Caroline	Seems happier	y
31/08/2007	Meeting	SD/PIT	G, S, A	SD stocktake	conclusions and emotions/G on delivery	?y

Appendix C

31/08/2007	Conversation	SD	A	Reflections on progress	Have we allowed the big issues to be ignored?	y
03/09/2007	Meeting	SD	Phx, A	Taking SD work into Phx	Reactions and Phx process approach	?
03/09/2007	Meeting	PIT	S, TH	First PIT 'Think Tank'	More on S and Susan	y
05/09/2007	Meeting	PIT	DKB, DDB, RayB, AD	Role of the TDA	Resentment at reduction in OSP	y
05/09/2007	Meeting	SD/IP	Paul	SD in Whole Farm	Interest and concerns re coaching	y
Sept	Interviews	Phx	Various	Pre-implementation review	See green notebook	y
06/09/2007	Meeting	Phx	K, David	Start of Pre-implementation review	Sudden shift in concern to behaviours	y
06/09/2007	Conversation	PIT	Caroline	Concerns re project and leadership	Team views on coaching/no plans etc	y
12/09/2007	Conversations	PIT	G, K	Tony's role	Sensitivities and handling them	y
17/09/2007	Meeting	PIT	TH, S, WJ	New PIT structure	Adapting to change in scope	y
18/09/2007	Conversation	SD	Cole	Taking SD work into Phx:followup	Polite interest but no engagement	?
24/09/2007	Conversation	Phx	A	Delivery Board behaviours	Evolution of group. Game-playing (Eleanor)	y
24/09/2007	Conversation	SD	S	SD overview	Not going anywhere/PIT getting under control	?
24/09/2007	Meeting	PIT	Matt	PIT requirements	Situation improving - Fin & HR out of scope?	?
24/09/2007	Conversation	SD	S	State of play on SD	S agreed not really going anywhere	?
24/09/2007	Meeting	PIT	S	Update	S feeling more in control/frustration tho	y
25/09/2007	Conversation	PIT	A	Coaching update	Taboo subjects	?
26/09/2007	Meeting	Phx	K, David	Stocktake so far	Liz personal frustrations/political skills	y
26/09/2007	Meeting	Phx	Lord	Perspective on Phx	Very frank view/limits to honesty	y
26/09/2007	Meeting	Phx	Partner, Frenchay	Perspective on Phx	Board behaviours and limitations	y
26/09/2007	Interviews	Phx	S, David	S as part of Pre-Imp review	Frustration and bad behaviours	y
01/10/2007	Dinner	Phx	G and mgt team	G stocktake	Leadership, commitment, vulnerability	?
02/10/2007	Meeting	Phx	Rachel, David	Feedback of review	Leader's frustration/mindsets	y
03/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	G, TH, DMcD, S	Think Tank/FSR slippage	Excuses, politics, perceptions	y
04/10/2007	Telcon	Phx	A	Process for EB and DB working	V Allen refuses to join in	y
08/10/2007	Meeting	SD	G:A	Review and next steps	Focus on ITD projects	?
08/10/2007	Meeting	SD	DMcD	SD in ITD	Start of new initiative	?
08/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	Update on FSR slippage	Political skills/concerns re project state	y
08/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	G	EPM rollout	Acceptance at Deliv Board	?
08/10/2007	Meeting	SD	G, A	Stocktake on SD	Trying to influence Phx to incorporate	?
08/10/2007	Meeting	SD	DMcD	SD in ITD?	Lots of behaviour issues	?

Appendix C

08/10/2007	Telcon	PIT	S	Concerns re slippage	Stressed and angry	y
09/10/2007	Conference	Phx	SCS	SCS conference re Phx		y
09/10/2007	Meeting	Phx	Board	Checkpoint meeting - Pre-Imp report	Decision-making/behaviours	y
11/10/2007	Conversations	Phx	G, K, David	G as exec sponsor for Phx/COO?	Political tactics for personal gain	y
11/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	S,G,TH,DMcD	Think Tank/stocktake	Distancing from Phx	y
11/10/2007	Meeting	Phx	G Green	Phx Benefits Management	Symbolic activity/no real engagement	?
13/10/2007	Conversation	PIT	S	Coaching need on ProgDir role	S take on TH role/frustration with CIOD	?
17/10/2007	Meeting	Phx	K, David	Phx Imp - governance	Political manoeuvring	
18/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	S, G, SimonB	HR and Fin requts governance	Now back in scope. G emotional reaction	
18/10/2007	email/slides	PIT	Jeff	J assessment/to team	"all we need to do now is convince S"	
18/10/2007	Meeting	IP	PW, TH, CS, AR	SD issues in IP	Readiness to live with ongoing issues	y
19/10/2007	email thread	PIT	G, AB, FO,	HR and Fin requts governance	heated exchange - irrational?	
22/10/2007	email	PIT	S	Concerns re Jeff's political gaffes		y
23/10/2007	slides	PIT		Programme Board	New structure inc HR & Fin (SimonB)	
25/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	S	Governance	Prog Bd as political/Think Tank outburst	y
25/10/2007	Meeting	IP	PW, TH	IP governance	lack of commitment/clarity	y
29/10/2007	Meeting	IP	A	Which SD interventions in IP	Issues with project and lack of support	y
29/10/2007	Meeting	SD	A	Reflections on SD	The corporate culture/accountability etc	
29/10/2007	Interviews	IP	Prog Bd members	Stakeholder perceptions	See green notebook and summary notes	y
29/10/2007	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	Governance and view of issues	The project politics/S too hands on	y
02/11/2007	DB papers	Phx	DB members	3 ASEs set up to define delivery spec	Slow progress and issues still open	?y
02/11/2007	Telcon/email	PIT	Jeff	Note to Finance to secure funds	Business case/tactics	y
06/11/2007	Meeting	IP	PW	Initial findings	Reluctance to rock boat	y
06/11/2007	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	Update	Tactics and politics/S role/fallout from 31Oct	y
06/11/2007	Conversation	PIT	Darren	Account of 31Oct meeting	Problems with FSR business processes	y
06/11/2007	Dinner	SD	G, TH, S	Delivery and what it means	Link to personal identity	?
06/11/2007	Dinner	PIT	Matt	Relationship PIT & Phx	perspective on S/G's contribution to probs	?
06/11/2007	Conversation	Phx/PIT	Darren	LS appointment as FSR PM	Concerns on progress to date	y
07/11/2007	Telcon	IP	AR, PW, A	How to handle presentn to Prog Bd	Reluctance to confront issue	y
07/11/2007	Email	SD	JWilson	SD into Phx	Request for documentation again	?
12/11/2007	Meeting	IP	Prog Bd	Presentation of stakeholder feedback	Lack of real engagement	y
13/11/2007	Telcon	IP	A	Views on Programme Bd	Lack of engagement and poor process	y

Appendix C

13/11/2007	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	Project structure and meetings	Problems with Collaboration and Sharepoint Project centrally funded/no further interventions	y
21/11/2007	Telcon	IP	PW	Update on project	S issues. Politics of seeking finance	y
21/11/2007	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	Update. Getting financial approval	New direction?	y
29/11/2007	email	SD	G	Rethink on SD	Need for new direction/steer. Limited success	
03/12/2007	Conversation	SD	A	Stocktake	The impact of intervention	
03/12/2007	Conversation	Genesis	David	G's actions on Project GenSys	losing close contact	
11/12/2007	email	PIT	S	Standing down from Think Tank	G pressurising for SD inclusion	?
14/12/2007	email	SD	DCope	Linking to Phx	Further pressure from G	?
08/01/2008	email	SD	DCope	SRO coaching?	real governance?	
08/01/2008	email	PIT		Programme Board cancelled	SRO resistance to process and development	
14/01/2008	meeting	SD	DCope,LDennison	Discussion re SRO coaching etc	None of the real issues acknowledged	y
15/01/2008	Intranet	Phx		Presentation of OGC gate Review	"Its all politics"	y
21/01/2008	Lunch	PIT	Darren	Perspectives on FSR and Phx	Overcoming resistance/Capability Audit	
21/01/2008	Meeting	SD	G, A	Progress on SRO coaching etc	what's the real problem?	y
21/01/2008	meeting	PIT	G, S, MC	Sharepoint governance	Customer perspective on FSR/S issues	y
21/01/2008	Meeting	PIT	Darren	FSR update	Personal engagement	?
22/01/2008	Meeting	PIT	G	Problems and response in project	J perspective. Issues with S	y
23/01/2008	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	PIT delivery issues	Long-running issue	y
23/01/2008	Meeting	PIT	S	PIT and Sharepoint issues	we've got it covered'	
25/01/2008	email	SD	G, RPrice, Phx	D Cope response to my proposals	see papers/ the 'white space'	
28/01/2008	email	SD	G, Rachel	G forwards emails to Rachel	Turf wars. S approach to delivery	y
30/01/2008	Meeting	SD	A	Designing capability audit	S stressed	
04/02/2008	Meeting	PIT	Carolyn	Sharepoint governance	New intervention?/draft TOR	
05/02/2008	Meeting	PIT	S, G	Sharepoint governance	G criticism and low morale	
12/02/2008	Meeting	SD	DMcD, CH ABC	Delivery behaviours in ABC	G hands on - S offline?	y
12/02/2008	Meeting	PIT	TH, SB, AlanM	Perspectives on PIT and ITD	Seems review might go ahead	
22/02/2008	Meeting	PIT	Jeff	Update on big changes in PIT	G picking up with Price	
25/02/2008	Conversation	SD	JDix	ABC review	Interest in new role/serendipity	
25/02/2008	Meeting	SD	G, A	Progressing capability review	Positive response but request for note	
25/02/2008	Conversation	SD	SG	Picking up SD	Catch up with S	y
26/02/2008	email	SD	G, Price	Outcome of meeting with RP		
03/03/2008	Telcon	PIT	S	PIT governance		

*Appendix C*

03/03/2008	Telcon	PIT	A	S	Feedback on behaviours
11/03/2008	Meeting	SD	SG, A	Introducing delivery skills	Opportunity to move forward with supporter
11/03/2008	Meeting	PDA	SG	Impact of PDA v PPMU	Importance of intervention

## **APPENDIX D**

### **KEY DOCUMENTATION SOURCES**

The following tables itemise and briefly describe the key documentation referred to in Chapters 5 and 6 for:

- Phoenix Change Programme
- PhoenixIT

## PHOENIX CHANGE PROGRAMME

<b>Id</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Format/content</b>	<b>Comments</b>
P01	Plans and proposals for various improvement initiatives prior to Phoenix	July- Dec 06	Miscellaneous presentations, notes and high-level plans	These mainly exploratory documents demonstrate that much of the content of the Phoenix Change Programme was under development prior to the programme's initiation
P02	Correspondence with Kate and Mark re programme goals	Feb 06	Emails and notes of meetings	Demonstration of early debate about programme scope and objectives, and influence of earlier programmes in determining scope and objectives of Phoenix
P03	Team contact lists and organograms	Feb 06 – Nov 07	Spreadsheets and Powerpoint slides	Demonstration of rapid growth of team and degree of churn
P04	Phoenix Programme Plan	Feb 07 – Apr 07	Itemisation of the activities, 48 Powerpoint slides. Multiple revisions (10+)	More of a scoping document than a plan, as no dates included. Demonstrates the progress of debates about scope, and incorporation of existing initiatives.
P05	Phoenix Programme Action Plan	Apr 07 – May 07	High-level summary of above, with approximate timeline.	Distribution of programme outcomes in quarterly bands. Speculative articulation of programme outcomes in specific personal terms for staff.
P06	Phoenix Programme – Gantt Chart	May 07	First Gantt chart for the programme	Very high-level plan with first aspirational dates. Includes 'customer' workstream at this point.
P07	Programme Plan - Frenchay Proposal	Mar 07	High-level milestone plan, 1 page	Frenchay view of feasible plan, though not accepted by department.
P08	OGC Gateway 0 Report	June 07	Report	Programme given overall positive assessment, following documentation review and stakeholder interviews
P09	Customer Stream –	April 07	Identifies scope of this stream to meet	An indication of how difficult achieving one



scope and priorities		vision	of the key aspects of the initial Phoenix vision will be.
P10 Performance Management	Sept 07	Series of papers to Delivery Board on scope of this workstream	Sets out ambitious programme of behaviour change but with no additional funds
P11 Phoenix Implementation Plan	Sept 07	Multiple revisions (15), in Powerpoint and MS Project	High-level plan on descoped programme. Identification of Phase 1 and Phase 2 deliveries. Does not include 'customer' workstream.
P12 Weekly Progress Reports	Feb 07 – Apr 08	Emails	Chatty weekly update from Kate, on wide circulation and very upbeat.
P13 Phoenix Intranet site	Mar 07 – Apr 07	Update and key policy statements, intended for general staff use	The 'official' line. Includes vision statement, and guidance for staff on voluntary severance arrangements etc.
P14 Presentations and papers to Phoenix Delivery Board	Mar 07 – Dec 07	Miscellaneous presentations and papers on various aspects of programme	Illustrates debates about scope and content of programme, and how that shifts over time.
P15 Delivery Board minutes	Mar 07 – Dec 07	Ad hoc	Key decisions eg about budget, and agreement re design and plans
P16 Roadshow Presentation to Staff	Apr 07	Powerpoint slides/video with interviews with directors and staff	Early articulation of programme vision and goals, and scope.
P17 Briefing for bidders for external consultancy support to programme	Apr 07	Documents	Early articulation of programme vision and goals, and scope.
P18 Phoenix Business Case	Mar 07 – Oct 07	Text document, with formal version control, 10 revisions	First versions based on staff savings from downsizing. Later versions to include high-level plans and benefits analysis for wider programme.
P19 Phoenix – Delivering	Oct 07	50 page document	Most detailed description of new processes

	the Vision		Presentation to Delivery Board	and implementation priorities
P20	Phoenix Benefits & Measures	Oct 07	Presentation to Delivery Board	Broad picture of the benefits, and definition of tracking measures
P21	Monthly Highlight Reports	May 07 – Oct 07	Traffic light reporting against workstreams, key risks/issues	Illustrates development of issues over time, and the exclusion of some ‘undiscussable’ issues
P22	Pre-OGC Health Check Report	May 07	Powerpoint presentation to Programme team and Delivery Board	Based on review of documentation, and interviews with stakeholders. Identifies key risks and recommends actions.
P23	Pre-implementation Health Check Report	Oct 07	Presentation to Delivery Board and Executive Board	Based on review of documentation, and interviews with stakeholders. Identifies key risks and recommends actions.
P24	Delivering the Vision	Oct 07	Presentation pack to Senior Management Conference	Summarises the key priorities and illustrates the significant reduction in scope of the programme.
P25	Phoenix Programme Transition	Apr 08	50 page report, defining handover from programme to the business	Summarises progress to date and forward programme. Marks the closedown of the separate programme structure for Phoenix.

## PHOENIXIT

	<b>Source</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Format/content</b>	<b>Comments</b>
I01	Case for Action Workshop	Apr 07	Notes from workshop	Initial discussion of objectives, scope and what were seen from the outset as key risks and issues.
I02	Outline Business Case	Apr 07	3 page note, bullet points	Sets out goals and objectives at high level
I03	Roles & responsibilities workshop	Apr 07	Presentations, plus meeting notes	Discussion and debate around roles, scope and agreed dates
I04	PhoenixIT Project Initiation Document	May 07 - Oct 07	Formal document, standard template, numerous drafts	Successive drafts illustrate developing view of scope and roles. Document never fully completed or baselined.
I05	OSP Business Case	July 07	Formal document, 10 revisions, 62 pages, required for formal funding approval	A very detailed view of benefits and scope. Exec Summary re-drafts demonstrate shift in focus of the justification. Formally approved by Programme Board and submitted to Finance.
I06	PhoenixIT Programme Boards	Mar 07 - Oct 07	Presentations, and notes of discussion	Include status report, high-level risks and issues, and forward programme
I07	Programme Board minutes	Mar 07 - Oct 07	Formal notes of meeting	
I08	High-level Milestone Plan	July 07 - Nov 07	Gantt chart, included in Oct 07 Programme Board update	High-level, very sketchy plan for programme as a whole.
I09	PhoenixIT Governance	May 07- Nov 07	Formal document, multiple revisions, setting out governance bodies and escalation procedures	Continual adjustment through revisions in presentation of goals, control structures, and project streams in programme. Never finally completed.
I10	PhoenixIT Organisation	Apr 07 - Oct 07	Powerpoint organograms, numerous revisions	Illustration of chum on team, and changing focus of priorities

I11	PhoenixIT presentation	Feb 07 – Aug 07	Demonstration of new IT facilities	Several versions used to present capabilities and plans to senior stakeholders and prospective users
I12	PhoenixIT Heartbeat	June 07	Powerpoint presentation of internal team reporting and programme management processes	Demonstration of attempt to apply detailed control, which fell into disuse in practice.
I13	Risks and Issues and Actions Tracker	June 07	Excel spreadsheet of traffic-lighted risks and issues.	Constantly updated and used to drive weekly project meetings. An active project management tool to chase actions
I14	Milestone Tracker	June 07	Excel 'dashboard' summarising progress against milestones	An attempt to introduce formal project control process. Fell into disuse due to state of flux of plans.
I15	Project team meetings	Apr 07 – Oct 07	Notes of meetings	Provided opportunity to see project management processes in practice.
I16	PhoenixIT Quality Management Strategy	May 07 – Oct 07	Formal document, in standard template, 17 pages, setting out quality management processes	Internal document, issued by PMO, describing change control processes, not widely circulated or visible in practice.
I17	Phoenix – Outline Business Requirements for IT	Aug 07	High-level Powerpoint view of requirements from Phoenix Change Programme	29 high-level requirements at bullet-point level. Demonstrates the limited extent of Phoenix Change Programme's thinking about requirements at this point.

**APPENDIX E****ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM JOURNAL**

This appendix includes extracts from the handwritten daily journal to illustrate the style and content of the key source data used in writing the ‘Practitioner’s Tale’. In each case, the recording of these incidents will have been supplemented by access to retained emails, progress reports and working documents. Highlighting indicates points marked later for possible inclusion in preparation for drafting the narrative .

The examples included are described briefly below.

Item	Description
1	2 pages, notes taken during teleconference with Kate and two colleagues on commissioning the second Health Check review. Notes then elaborated immediately after the meeting.
2	Note of private conversation with Henry, Frenchay. Written up later in the day.
3	Note of Phoenix Team Meeting, and some conversations in the margins of the meeting. Written up later in the day.
4	Notes made at time of meeting with Rachel as part of the first Health Check. Key points were summarised in interview notes for more public consumption

30/8/07

Telco: Kate, David, Ron

Implementation: of all streams Felt a good story  
Working in 2 weeks How + when

Time recording - flexible resourcing Is it realistic? Interdependencies

enough time

- ① 2 - OGC review
- ② OGC review on 4 Ambis 2 working on 0
- ③ One Way - integration with IT
- ④ Implementation
- ⑤ relationship with PPD

Board oversight

14 Board-level programmes - planning to mandate consistent approach to reporting - link to Capability Review

Not able to track plan from Eleanor. reporting directly to Rachel  
Take headcount out of Plex  
① 1 approach being taken, leaving capability for HR target.  
tied to jobs workload left behind

working around problem  
Kate + Francesca don't meet

Fiona engaging very well below the radar being behaviour.  
Eleanor not playing cooperatively - not taking visible action  
Told her people not to attend meetings!

Flexible resourcing completely crucial - who controls? Dept  
Organisational mechanism for organisational change Resource Mgr for me  
Leadership team not feeling like behaviours replace PPM

Rachel having some tough conversations

Rachel's involvement / determined to do something  
Kate emboldening conversation with Eleanor  
Ron - How can flexible resourcing work if senior mgmt situation not resolved / action taken?  
direction + facilitative

Portfolio management includes business planning  
Structure of accountability changing

Really interested in technology / reqs to blend  
Clear enough about definitions SMEs done design - 'really good job'  
'You will do this'. Gerry approached Kate - very upset 'fuckin' eh'  
Plex IT team saying 'what are your requirements' - misunderstanding of term

Kate: "One or two people can make everything very difficult"

Sarah + Kate - 'not giving detailed reports'  
difficult to understand the problem  
why haven't you developed?

Kate's perspective on meeting with Sarah - is she up to it? "I don't want to be difficult but why should I pay for another P.P.M.?"

What else is going on here?  
Unmineral?

Kate's primary concern  
Application integration/  
substitution  
600 applications

Kate quite  
measured  
overall

'Really pissed off with this'  
I believe we're doing all the right things

Sarah - Proj Mgr?

Sarah walked out of one of the  
Proj Planning meetings - not helpful

"not enough stakeholder engagement"

[The strength of the 'requirements' rhetoric used as a weapon  
'tell us your requirements']  
Susan doing her best to  
respond

Discussion on to why Gerry so emotional - why does he think he's  
going to get shafted? David says this has been happening for  
last few months, Gerry's feeling that he's letting others & himself  
down by not delivering on his commitments.

Heather Kate said she'd refused to have any more email exchanges with  
Gerry until he returned from holidays & they could meet face-to-face  
'He had been v. sweet & apologetic' & everything was fine between them  
[Tendency to focus on Sarah instead?]. Meeting planned 'big power move'  
for this pm - Kate nervous that it'll all explode again.

31/08/07 Spoke to David & who was at meeting 'All very polite on the surface  
but real tensions evident' - nothing really resolved.

David peddling my proposed approach: Gerry aggressive about state of  
implementation planning. David & I agreed to prospects for Phx since  
were uncomfortable given the people issues.

Spoke Alice. She was working with Fiona on trying to mend  
relationship with Eleanor. We discussed our failure to address  
the stakeholder engagement issue on Phx IT - Alice - lack of  
courage? Our relationship with Gerry & Sarah such that 'we've got  
along with their needs - no, their wants'.

Guy's cope Kate H  
C agreed no plans  
this frustrated that Kate left early  
Gerry Kate  
work on Red  
FY confirmed

'Problem in Phx prog.  
doesn't have plan or  
understand implement'



22/5/07 Unrestambles on <sup>commercial</sup> Private conversation with Henry, Frembay  
 both affecting work } > RSB - design finalised for end-June rather than end-July  
 > the Re-printitisation on other streams  
 Tony on hols next week  
 Need work credits

PCD - Thinking that Frembay showing Delivery Board  
 Ashley seeing notes HR - Phx - H4 reaction  
 Workshop today

Budget & cover for 9 people in Phx IT  
 - done between Gerry & Kate

Report of personal tension between Kate & Eleanor re agenda on workshop  
 - Kate sent out by <sup>workable</sup> not copied. Exchange of email, Rachel involved. K showed diary to attend w/s taking 2 w/s.  
 No program now being made on HR/Phx collaboration.

+ critical of E agenda.

Tony very concerned about risks, being pushed back by Louise team, who had issued a note on what was wrong with the programme. TM "half of this is slanderous, I refute it"  
 Call for Deptl Prog Mgt Note & not copied to Kate

Monthly Team Meeting

First monthly team meeting. W/L (apart from Susan) not present  
 Presentations on worksheets, no reaction or questions. Worthy attempt at ice-breaking/team building, but Sarah & 2 Global IT guys turned up from Phx IT. atmosphere rather flat.  
 Lots of criticism on 'lessons learned' section from the Deptl staff. Henry wrapped up, addressing concerns by saying W/Ls in place would improve things, that there was bound to be resistance/bombs thrown, needed to be a team & communicate when there are issues. Struck a slightly awkward note - needed Kate saying it rather than Henry

Conversations with Anna - concerns about programme mgmt structure & roles, Henry not doing it?

Frembay agreed with Kate on Monday to escalate risks in writing. Concerns about entering into substantial risk/award under these conditions.



26/5/07

Rachel

longevity

What are the really key things?

What is 'the enough'?

Remember the R33 in Review - thinking about it in Review Dept context

Don't matter whether perfect  
Don't have to be everything

pilots - put them in place

> some way of merging integration role

Success criteria

- > R33 happened

> tracking money on projects been

between us & Oct

> October - 2nd

bus planning exercise

Already here - already thinking about proj

Have stopped some - Stephen has a bit  
Bit of prioritisation

Climb up towards the vision

Difficult decisions → governance

active debate

will behave properly

I don't know what's going on

- take more time to find out

Time & understanding the issues

A people in sec...

8 Dcs

- have to debate & persuade

Who to lead?

Capability Review

Delivery Board

Governance

- leads

- making decisions

- behaviour

Long for R33

6 June

People use to Exec Board to be briefed

→ prioritisation key

DG as observer

- Mike ...

R33 excellent model

- look of org & prof. input

Matrix working

- Mike ... role

## APPENDIX F

## NARRATIVE THEMES – with illustrative extracts coded to these themes

## SUMMARY

	<b>Narrative themes</b>		<b>Refs</b>	<b>% of events</b>
1	Key players	Description and/or interpretation of the actions of key players	160	88%
2	Multiple interpretations	Different interpretations of the current situation, motives and purposes of other players, or of appropriate action and its effect	105	71%
3	Political tactics	Actions taken for personal or group motives so as to gain advantage or protect position	97	64%
4	Personal engagement	Illustration of the personal emotional investment of individuals in the activities described	86	50%
5	Personal relationships	Indication of the importance of the quality of relationships between parties in effecting outcomes	76	45%
6	Discourse and rhetoric	Use of rhetorical presentation or prevailing discourses to defend a position or action, or oppose another	71	52%
7	Uncertainty	Reflection of recognition of the absence of full information about current or future state	65	46%
8	Limits to agency	Indication of the inability to influence the course of events, especially by leaders	55	42%
9	Undiscussability	Reference to events which were privately discussed but not publicly acknowledged	52	42%
10	Power	Indication of the use of personal and positional power to change events	48	36%
11	Control	Successful or unsuccessful attempts to introduce structure, order and stability	48	35%
12	Status assessment	Description of the contested process of establishing current project status	37	31%
13	Issues and puzzles	Repeated discussion of problematic events that remain unresolved	36	26%

14	Conflict	Open and heated disagreement blocking shared approach to required actions	35	27%
15	Emergent purpose	Reference to process of evolving definition of goals and objectives	34	24%
16	Dead ends	Activity which peters out, or prominent issues which disappear from view	24	25%
17	Alignment	The process by which those holding divergent views or perspectives come to share an agreed position	20	12%
18	External factors	Illustration of the impact of factors outside the scope or control of the project players	11	13%
19	Events	Unexpected changes within or from outside the project landscape	8	7%

The following sections include the extracts from the text of the ‘practitioners tale’ which have been coded against each of the above themes. In the analysis, many of the extracts have been coded to two or sometimes more themes, and to avoid excessive duplication, illustrative extracts have been usually been included under what has been judged to be the predominant theme. Some extracts, however, still appear under several themes. This is particularly so for the most frequently referenced themes.

The 19 themes presented here are those from the second coding exercise. These were subsequently consolidated into the ‘key aspects’ discussed more fully in Chapter 6 Research Findings.

Theme 1	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>KEY PLAYERS</b>	<i>Description and/or interpretation of influential actions of key players</i>	160	88%
<p>Word frequency analysis</p> <p>Gerry then offered me the opportunity to work with him on his new ‘Successful Delivery’ initiative</p> <p>He appointed Sarah as Programme Director</p> <p>Gerry was looking to build the divisional capability, introducing ‘best practice’ processes, and initiating a range of quality improvement initiatives, including 360 leadership feedback.</p> <p>... pressured them to partner with some niche suppliers.</p> <p>The Successful Delivery programme was launched personally by Gerry</p> <p>He blocked out a fortnightly 2 hour slot in his diary (a very significant time commitment)</p> <p>One of the key findings coming through this lessons learned exercise was the importance of leadership</p> <p><i>Lessons learned’ reviews asked staff engaged on three unsuccessful departmental projects (which all had good PPM process in place) why some of these well-recognised problems were allowed to arise. They pointed to what they saw as: poor leadership, lack of accountability, lack of real commitment from key parties, the difficulty of challenging, and the failure to acknowledge and deal with long-running issues</i></p> <p>PhoenixIT, a project within Gerry’s control and managed by Sarah, and the integrated Portal, for which Gerry was senior sponsor.</p> <p>The Phoenix Change Programme was initiated by Rachel on taking up appointment as head of the department.</p> <p>It seemed as if Rachel was very determined to deliver the required changes on this occasion.</p> <p>Kate went straight to Rachel to gain financial approval</p> <p>Kate had brought together all those so far involved in the programme to discuss objectives, scope and roles and to start some team building.</p>			

The senior Frenchay consultants dominated the proceedings.

Kate's attention was indeed elsewhere, and she began to make dramatic impacts.

However, drawing on the support of those who had been included, a powerful group, and making one or two concessions, she succeeded in holding her line.

This was a very bold and unusual move, which marked her and the programme out from previous change initiatives

All this was presented to a workshop of some 60 senior managers as the vision and plans for the programme in late February. Kate then sent out an email to all attendees confirming endorsement of the approach, scope and plan

Eleanor saw the main thrust of the Phoenix programme as a direct challenge to her role, which effectively took away her job. A seasoned political campaigner, she was a difficult opponent. She embarked on a number of covert guerrilla tactics apparently to undermine the programme while professing strong support at every public opportunity.

It was clear that Kate was the driving force for progress, and was building a high-quality and motivated team

It was fascinating also to see at close quarters how Kate was dragging the senior management along, and refusing to let them fail to participate.

many of whom seemed to me to be uncomfortable but unable to oppose or criticise something which had Rachel's conspicuous support

Kate went directly to Rachel to overturn this

It was interesting to see that, once it became evident that the Frenchay proposal was superior, Kate felt safe to engage in an elaborate show of even-handedness throughout the evaluation process.

Kate, recognising this, was determined that the Phoenix Gate 0 would go well, setting the objective of 'getting a green'

The general impression was that many were (rather grudgingly perhaps) impressed by Kate and what she had managed to achieve

He also revealed that Frenchay's senior partner had written formally to Kate with a list of concerns about the programme

Kate had had an angry exchange and stopped him sending the note on to Rachel, as planned.

Shortly afterwards, Henry was replaced rather peremptorily by Kate as programme manager

The Delivery Board, it was generally agreed, had begun to get moving, was meeting weekly, and beginning to express itself.

Several Executive Board members were concerned about being used as a rubber-stamping body, and felt they were being bounced into decisions by the Delivery Board. Delivery Board members

Kate had cleverly assigned members of the Executive roles as ‘champions’ of the workstreams

Alice attributed this to the way Kate and the Frenchay team managed the Delivery Board meetings, setting the agenda, dominating the proceedings with dense and complex presentations, and allowing little time for discussion and debate. Over time, the Delivery Board exercised more control, insisting on brief presentations with well-articulated questions for them.

The review team were clearly impressed by Kate, by Rachel’s commitment, and by what had been accomplished in such a short time.

Two key decisions by Gerry changed the situation dramatically.

In fact, Gerry was re-badging a programme of work much of which he already intended to implement, but saw the Phoenix banner as a powerful signal of change and was personally an enthusiastic supporter of the direction of change.

In typical Gerry fashion, he moved quickly on Kate’s appointment in January 2007 to engage her in the idea of appointing GlobalIT to produce an early ‘PhoenixIT demonstrator’

Gerry had pulled in some technical experts from GlobalIT and ABC to advise on the new GlobalIT dimension, so there were numerous people involved with different perceptions of their roles. He had also imposed a deadline of the end of May for the delivery of the basic software fully tested in operational form on the department’s infrastructure.

Sarah continued to struggle with getting a grip on the team, looking to extract a credible plan for the first key delivery now only 6 weeks away. She had appointed a programme office manager, and with Carolyn’s help, was putting in place some key management and reporting processes across the team.

he now saw improvements coming through the appointment of a programme manager on their side to coordinate delivery to Sarah.

The discussion seemed to ‘clear the air’ and Sarah began to take more charge of the meeting, agreeing roles and highlighting areas of resource shortage.

Susan, who assumed a very low profile at the meeting considering her role as senior customer, did raise worries that Phoenix would not actually be able to deliver detailed requirements according to the schedule proposed

Gerry was pressing hard at the Phoenix Delivery Board,

Kate, attempting to placate Gerry, included a ringing endorsement of the new facilities in her weekly newsletter update...

Gerry though was beginning to regret his decision to hitch his wagon to the Phoenix star, and was looking to reduce the dependence on Phoenix : *“I’d step back completely if it wasn’t Kate running that”*.

Gerry then set out *“a new strategic approach”* for PhoenixIT (which he had described to me earlier as de-coupling from Phoenix )

Gerry again reacted to this as if it was something outside his control, but offered his help to exert pressure on ABC senior management if there were difficulties.

Kate felt that Sarah was *“not up to it”*.

she was now under pressure from the Delivery Board (not least from a very vocal Gerry) and also from Rachel to move to implementation, and so had instigated a burst of implementation planning.

Kate had set out some terms of reference in fairly anodyne terms but it quickly became clear that she had two big problems she wanted the review to help in tackling: PhoenixIT, with Sarah; and HR, with Eleanor .

But Kate seemed to have even bigger problems with Eleanor , who was central to the success of Phoenix .

Gerry also had strong views as to what he wanted from the review ... launching off with: *“This is all very simple: the problem is that the Phoenix programme doesn’t have plans and doesn’t understand implementation”*.

She put much of the delay down to Eleanor and Andrew, Eleanor ’s Board-level line manager, and indicated that she was *“addressing these issues”* which we took to mean making moves to replace these individuals.

It certainly seemed though as if she had now effected a significant change in the climate of the programme.

Frenchay's senior partner sent a long note to Rachel emphasising the importance of the wider behavioural issues, her role in 'becoming an icon' and demonstrating the new behaviours.

Susan, the Phoenix workstream leader, was less worried about PhoenixIT than that the HR and Finance IT requirements had not been bottomed out, and may not be deliverable.... She was appointing someone on her team to coordinate the requirements and progress was being made there.

Gerry, who had generally injected some new energy into the project, had found funds to commission some new work

Kate was keen to see Tony as the lead on PhoenixIT rather than Sarah, and made a number of moves to suggest this

Sarah formed a new group she called the 'Think Tank' involving Gerry, Tony and myself to discuss project issues and, as she said to me, "*to help manage Gerry*"

eventually Gerry was to respond by taking direct responsibility in March 2008 for the most pressured delivery

Sarah was determined to improve structure and control, with consistent 'good practice' processes in place across all the project streams

Intense pressure from Sarah, backed up by Gerry, on ABC and the team had ensured that the next FSR release had been delivered on schedule.

Gerry had taken over the final drive for delivery, at one point insisting on hourly updates on progress. According to Jeff, Gerry was acting "*disproportionately*" - "*I've never seen this side of Gerry before*".

The key factor had been that the pressure from Gerry, and the focus on planning, had forced release of the necessary resources in ABC to complete the job on time.

Gerry continued to be very closely involved, as I knew that he always did when he believed the outcome was critical

he felt that he had raised the pace and the level of belief within his own team within Phoenix, and he and the team wanted to see it through to the end. He marvelled at Kate – "*a master of communication and stakeholder management*" – who had created something now seen as a success story across Government.



Theme 2	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS</b>	<i>Different interpretations of the current situation, motives and purposes of other players, or of appropriate action and its effect</i>	105	71%
<p>she carried numerous organisational stories and views of different events, and like me, was often in a position to see events from different individual and group perspectives.</p> <p>he often provided me with a perspective from the team level rather than a senior management perspective</p> <p>The earlier strategy consultancy work had produced a top-down number but this had not engaged the relevant directors and most now denied that these reductions were achievable.</p> <p>There was a great variety of different initiatives and plans under each of these headings</p> <p>They felt that they already knew what the programme was about and what needed to be done, and they provided constant, well-argued but clearly unwelcome objections to Kate's (and Frenchay's) emerging plans.</p> <p>Certainly, all the personnel work associated with downsizing was the HR department's responsibility. Was Phoenix to take direct control of all this work?</p> <p>I had done some work on programme scope and objectives which had sought to simplify and focus down what I saw as an impossibly broad scope, but this had been amended substantially by Kate and the Frenchay consultants.</p> <p>The Phoenix programme team identified over 90 initiatives which were 'Phoenix - related', and many of these were seen to be overlapping.</p> <p>From what we all knew of the programme, our starting position was this was more about how to avoid a 'red' than getting a 'green'. Malcolm in particular was very sceptical, a civil servant who reflected the widespread cynicism from outside the programme, especially with respect to Frenchay's perceived dominance of the programme. He was enthusiastic to participate, seeing the review as an opportunity to "<i>speak some home truths</i>" and "<i>to get the programme knocked into shape</i>".</p> <p>Some expressed this concern as a change management tenet that the organisation had to own the change itself, rather than having change 'done to it'; others were critical of the competence and personal behaviours of some of the Frenchay consultants.</p> <p>Frenchay's perspective was rather different; they themselves expressed firm conviction in the need for the business to take ownership but saw the business as quite unwilling to do so. They saw a conspiracy of active undermining combined with passive resistance that</p>			

made a 'vigorous' approach entirely necessary if the programme's objectives were to be met

their attitude was that 'change' had to be driven forward with determination and pace, and that many of the process and analytical objections being raised were simply defensive routines rooted in opposition to essential change and fear of exposure

... believing that it should have been possible to define the plans and deliverables in a lot more detail, and seeing the programme as being over-run by consultants and out of control.

being marked as obvious winners by all the evaluation panel (except the HR representative who, as the corridor conversation speculated, must have been under direction from Eleanor to vote for her preferred consultants).

However, its role remained rather uncertain – as late as September I was surprised to hear the chair of the Board express the view that they had no responsibility with respect to delivering the programme. Quite apart from their name, they seemed clearly to be treated as a Programme Board by the programme team and most of the rest of the organisation.

Outside the programme, it was generally assumed that this was something of a 'show' of due process, with Frenchay being on the 'inside track' and the inevitable winners of the selection process

All parties took out of it what suited them, and seemed capable of ignoring those recommendations which were uncomfortable for them

According to Carolyn, the OSP team felt that they had been taken over by Sarah and her consultants; and ABC felt that they had had GlobalIT and their technical solution thrust upon them without any consultation.

In David's interpretation though, it appeared that the absence of detailed plans and the failure to be held to account as seen by Sarah could in fact have reflected the unwillingness to commit to something that may turn out to be commercially disadvantageous.

The team was dominated by technologists who seemed to be predominantly concerned with technical issues and experimenting with numerous pilots.

It was clear that there was still considerable debate about which activities were necessary in the project beyond the immediate pressures of the 31/5 delivery

there were numerous people involved with different perceptions of their roles

It was evident from their comments that they were deeply sceptical of the value of the whole GlobalIT venture, muttering darkly that the technology was unproven and would

probably mean just a reduced service for users

One point of contention was whether the standard GlobalIT product Enterprise Project Management (EPM) should be universally deployed. Gerry claimed that this was both within his brief and his authority, though Charles said that a decision had not been made on which was the best tool to support the more consistent use of project and portfolio management within the department.

For the trade union representative, this involved “*vast changes in HR policy*” and while the Vision and Principles document might be “*great for Management Board and Directors – its not useful for staff – there’s so much missing*” it raised huge questions of detail for staff.

It was also forcing critical examination of what was meant by the high-level outcomes, some of which (eg leadership and new ‘Phoenix ’ behaviours) were still very loosely defined.

It was evident that as far as the rest of the group was concerned there were still substantial questions about the purpose and scope of the project.

The Phoenix programme team, and particularly the senior Frenchay consultants, saw this transition as a major risk to delivery, and were not confident of success.

it had provoked a dispute as to how much of the required functionality had been delivered – a dispute that was hard to resolve given the absence of signed-off documentation.

Gerry was clear that this was a failure by Phoenix to be specific about their requirements; Darren felt that this basic misunderstanding was very much down to PhoenixIT.

Sarah saw it quite differently; she felt Caroline and IMD generally had been a “*nightmare*”, unstructured and disorganised, and creating a demand in the business without any thought to how this could be met and managed.

He was sceptical that the business changes being implemented would really be as effective as claimed,

Theme 3	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>POLITICAL TACTICS</b>	<i>Actions taken for personal or group motives so as to gain advantage or protect position</i>	97	64%
<p>With an apparently open and accessible style, a period of working closely with her convinced me that she is actually very focused in her approach to spending time with people, placing a priority on dealing with the most powerful, or those whose input she needs at that time. She has a reputation for failing to reply to emails and texts, but she has the politician's ability to make you feel you are very important when she has decided to make you the focus of her attention.</p> <p>This meant that 'getting to Rachel' was a prized lever for organizational influence.</p> <p>Gerry freely confessed his own agenda. He saw this as an important area to develop given the department's poor project delivery record and one he felt passionate about - but also one which provided a platform for him to take a wider remit with respect to project delivery across the department, and perhaps more widely across government, and a route to future promotion.</p> <p>Gerry had already begun to trail some of the emerging ideas with Rachel and senior management colleagues, was making a certain amount of political capital from that, and had been invited to make a Board presentation</p> <p>From conversation with Kate, it was clear that she saw this first piece of work as the start of a longer engagement, and it was understood that we were constructing a piece of work which could be justified as stand-alone but open the door for further support. Badging this as a piece of 'benchmarking' work, Kate went straight to Rachel to gain financial approval and in a matter of days six consultants arrived and starting working closely with Kate</p> <p>This was a very bold and unusual move, which marked her and the programme out from previous change initiatives, helped build staff support for the programme, as well as providing her with a new and influential power base which she used wherever possible to wrong-foot opposition, using staff comments and anecdotes to support her proposals</p> <p>She embarked on a number of covert guerrilla tactics apparently to undermine the programme while professing strong support at every public opportunity. She would be urgently called away from key meetings held to discuss HR plans, or withdraw her staff at short notice from meetings, or go directly to the Management Board (outside the Phoenix programme structures) on HR issues central to the Phoenix programme without consulting Kate. At one point she directed her staff not to engage the Frenchay consultants on commercial confidentiality grounds.</p> <p>...there were numerous attempts to disrupt that. At one stage, some Board members argued in principal for the appointment of several consultancies – an apparently rational</p>			

and sensible proposal which would have been unworkable in practice - and Kate went directly to Rachel to overturn this.

This 'subversive' group had already attempted to recruit me, and persuade me to carry their concerns to Kate

the way Kate and the Frenchay team managed the Delivery Board meetings, setting the agenda, dominating the proceedings with dense and complex presentations, and allowing little time for discussion and debate.

Gerry and I both felt that this was a fairly transparent attempt to divert criticism from themselves

Gerry though was beginning to regret his decision to hitch his wagon to the Phoenix star, and was looking to reduce the dependence on Phoenix

Production of this document was a rather symbolic action, as the commitment for the expenditure had already been made, but Gerry was keen not to be caught without due process having been followed. The initial approach to the business case had emphasised the support for Phoenix programme benefits - now Gerry insisted on focusing on the IT efficiency benefits in the business case and decoupling from the Phoenix business case as far as was possible.

Kate though could see the writing on the wall, and began to present the programme team as custodians of the organisational design, with implementation being the responsibility of the business, with the programme acting as a 'design authority'.

He was already engaged 'below the radar' in some intensive unilateral developments with the relevant managers in the two or three major agencies, and was confident that he could "*stitch up*" some kind of agreement

It was very obvious in conversation with the programme board members from the different agencies that they saw their participation in IP as something that was required for them from the centre, and that they were 'going along with' what was essentially a central initiative.

Kate was keen to see Tony as the lead on PhoenixIT rather than Sarah, and made a number of moves to suggest this, including structuring the new organisation chart in such a way to position Tony as in the lead.

Given Phoenix 's level of planning, I wondered why a delay of this scale was such a 'killer' issue – I had seen no plans for the pilot, and doubted whether any existed. According to Gerry: "*its only a killer if you choose to make it so, for political reasons*".

his note exposed an increase in projected spend above the original budget which had previously not been apparent, and which Gerry was hoping to deal with before it became

an issue. Sarah was horrified that Jeff was about to share all the detail with Finance who would now raise objections and challenges that would halt progress. In the end, Gerry dealt with it personally, meeting the Finance Director face-to-face and securing approval – as Jeff said, with a tone of grudging respect: *“I’d love to hear what it was he said”*.

Sarah had to work on the presentation to render it acceptable to Gerry as a Programme Board communication. She herself was not happy about that, or with the Programme Board generally. *“I don’t really like them – you’re not allowed to say what’s going on because of the politics”*.

Theme 4	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT</b>	<i>Illustration of the personal emotional investment of individuals in the activities described</i>	86	50%
<p>He is passionate about delivery and making change happen in government, and very committed to the values of public service.</p> <p>Likeable, friendly, sociable and open about her feelings, she nonetheless can get very frustrated with others' lack of performance to her standards, and often seems to be in the middle of some intense exasperation with people.</p> <p>the discussion was animated and often emotional, and seemed to touch on matters of great personal significance. We talked of how it felt to fail, what it felt like to be accountable, to make a personal commitment, and be at risk of not making it. We shared some of this discussion with colleagues (<i>dinner notes</i>) who reinforced how important delivery and meeting their commitments was to their own sense of personal identity.</p> <p>She was very excited by her new role, buzzing with energy and full of ideas of how it all might work.</p> <p>The procurement team, whose starting position was in any case very 'anti-consultant', were rather outraged</p> <p>He was, however, very concerned that he should not be held personally to account later for having failed to carry out his primary responsibility properly. Feelings ran high throughout this process, with intemperate emails being exchanged</p> <p>Overall, her intense involvement and commitment to the success of the programme was obvious and convincingly genuine.</p> <p><i>"I feel sick when I get up in the morning and I look at my day"</i> she said at one point.</p> <p>Gerry was convinced and excited by the potential of GlobalIT and the related product set to meet these business drivers</p> <p><i>"If I can't do this here then I'll go somewhere else where I can. I don't want to do boring things"</i></p> <p>she arrived late, very on edge and jumpy, clearly frustrated and angry with ABC and OSP for their response and what she saw as the absence of control and proper plans:</p> <p>When the Phoenix representative (Charles) arrived, Gerry reiterated the new approach, saying <i>"Phoenix is not working fast enough for me personally – its really important that we pick up the pace"</i>.</p> <p><i>"I am gonna get shafted here by these fuckwits and I'm not gonna stay silent for much"</i></p>			

*longer”*

She was now persona non grata in the Phoenix team, and being conspicuously cold-shouldered, being interrupted and instructed not to speak further by Susan in one meeting. She was very stressed, and lacking in confidence, and on one occasion called me almost in tears before a meeting where she feared she was “*going to be taken apart*”, saying “*I’m really thinking I just can’t do this*”.

David was also aware that Gerry was very unhappy about Phoenix, Kate, and the interface of the programme with PhoenixIT – and was concerned that Gerry and Kate, despite their friendship, were struggling to remain civil.

The emotional investment of the rather volatile Gerry and Sarah in that issue made it impossible to discuss, and while Alice and I privately mused that we had not been brave enough in pointing attention to this, we both judged that the risks to our relationships were too high.

Uncharacteristically for Kate, who as always was very controlled for most of the conversation, she said with real feeling that she was: “*really pissed off with all this – I believe we’re doing all the right things*”.

David said that Gerry had been growing increasingly tense on a number of issues over the last couple of months, and David explained this as Gerry feeling that he was letting others and himself down by failing to meet his commitments – a new experience for him - in a number of areas.

He was annoyed and upset by Kate’s intervention on application rationalisation, which he saw as a tit-for-tat response to his trenchant criticisms of the programme: “*that’s the sort of thing that people do who don’t know each other*”.

The project was frustrating, dogged by endless debate, and the team felt demoralised and disillusioned by lack of progress.

They all felt, however, that the project was at a critical point, but in a rather disengaged way that reflected very little emotional investment in the project.

I felt frustrated that we had not really addressed the issue that was evident at the meeting.

... with one of the lead Frenchay consultants getting very angry with Sarah cutting him out of a conversation with Simon

Jeff felt Gerry’s reaction had not helped the situation, and said that the reaction from the people he had spoken to was very negative – “*harsh*”, “*out of order*”, “*unfair*” - and was having a very bad effect on morale.

Sarah said she was very angry with Jeff and had lost confidence in him. She was



particularly upset that “*people outside are now criticising the programme*”. She said that it was now time to “*get nasty*” – she felt she had tried very hard to be ‘nice’ and inclusive, but felt that Jeff had treated her with little respect.

She became increasingly animated, saying that she couldn’t get Sarah or Gerry to talk to her properly about the issues.

Gerry was furious that the team’s efforts and contribution had not been acknowledged:

*“I’ve never been a career person but I really care about delivery”* - and he admired that same quality in Gerry.

*“at least I feel I’m doing something that might make a difference”*.

Theme 5	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<i>Indication of the importance of the quality of relationships between parties in effecting outcomes</i>	76	45%
<p>My client was the CIO (Gerry), who I knew well from previous organisations, and who had commissioned me when he became CIO to set up and run for a period a function responsible for ensuring improved delivery of IT-enabled change projects and programmes. Aware of my research interests, Gerry then offered me the opportunity to work with him on his new ‘Successful Delivery’ initiative...</p> <p>...she had worked with Rachel, who had since moved to head up the department, and Rachel now demonstrated her confidence by bringing Kate in as programme director of Phoenix, a crucial programme for the success of Rachel’s tenure.</p> <p>Kate and her partner were personal friends of Gerry, part of a network of successful professionals who had worked together in various settings, and shared an interest in expensive wine, Gordon Ramsey restaurants and exotic travel.</p> <p>She was very close to Gerry, who had complete confidence in her and protected her, and she used that relationship, consciously or unconsciously, to powerful effect.</p> <p>Gerry, keen to support Kate in what he saw as a vital role for the department, asked Alice and myself to work with Kate to help her get the programme set up</p> <p>One of Kate’s first steps was to secure some external support, turning to the consultants from one of the major consultancies (‘Frenchay’) who had worked for her in her previous role.</p> <p>After a period of engagement, Kate soon established that all this was a tiresome drain on her time, and effectively sidelined the team, spending time almost exclusively with her chosen consultants.</p> <p>some months later the programme team was still firmly divided between Frenchay and everyone else.</p> <p>He felt that his close relationship with Kate offered a further means of capitalising on the strategic imperative and urgency of the Phoenix programme</p> <p>He was very uncomfortable with his relationship with Sarah since she had arrived (and had considered resigning): <i>“its been really hellish”</i>.</p> <p>She felt that there were some <i>“obvious tensions”</i> in the project, illustrated by what Carolyn described as <i>“some unconstructive behaviours”</i>.</p>			

He felt that the department were “*constantly kicking us*” but were not ready to accept criticism themselves, and he referred to “*bad behaviours*” on their part.

The relationship with Jonathan and OSP continued to be a problem for some time

Delivered on time, Sarah thought that the team, and particularly the Frenchay consultants: “*have been complete bastards, about niggling problems that weren’t even PhoenixIT’s fault*”.

Sarah, however, recognised that she now had to invest more in the relationship with Phoenix, saying to Gerry: “*You and me are pushing all the time. If we’re not careful we’ll get shut out because we’re too hard to deal with*”.

Gerry, as before, seemed to be talking up Sarah’s contribution, emphasising the need for an outward-facing programme director: “*Sarah has done a brilliant job of winning hearts and minds – taking people out to dinner and what-have-you – and beginning to feel they’re getting it – she’s got them to admit that they have no plans.*”

As she said: “*One or two people can make everything very difficult*”.

Kate felt Sarah was behaving inappropriately, was not doing enough stakeholder engagement, and her behaviours were “*not helpful*” – including apparently walking out of one of the implementation planning meetings.

Apparently they had patched up their differences though, and had scheduled a “*big pow-wow*” for later that same day – Kate was hoping it wasn’t all going to blow up again. (David attended that meeting, and told me that: “*it was all very polite on the surface, but there were real tensions evident, and nothing was really resolved*”.)

While the new workstream leader for the ‘Our Performance’ workstream was engaging well with the HR department “*under the radar*”, Kate and Eleanor no longer met, and Kate was reduced to maintaining a log of their communications.

Peter, an experienced contractor who had been introduced as a new programme manager (by me in a previous role, so I knew him well and was able to get a lot of informal briefing from him)

...offering a more emollient face to the Phoenix team: in his words “*you can give the same message without winding everyone up*”.

Another key figure was Tony, who was probably one of Gerry’s most trusted colleagues, who Gerry had asked to help Sarah out by leading on the desktop rollout component of the PhoenixIT programme, a very challenging, risky and exposed piece of work

In the end, Gerry dealt with it personally, meeting the Finance Director face-to-face and

securing approval

he and Kate had had a number of “*difficult conversations*”.

There was a consensus that the inter-personal and behavioural issues we were trying to tackle “*massively impede delivery*” as well as draining energy and motivation, but that our efforts had really only scratched the surface of a huge subject.

Theme 6	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>DISCOURSE AND RHETORIC</b>	<i>Use of rhetorical presentation or prevailing discourses to defend a position or action, or oppose another</i>	71	52%
<p>within the corporate policy centre, there have been recent attempts to improve “joined-up working” across different policy areas, which have been seen as unsuccessful</p> <p>And the department was seen as needing to strengthen the senior leadership team, provide services based around customer needs, create a true partnership with delivery partners, and manage individual and organisational performance better</p> <p>Managers were well used to employing external consultants, though there was a generally-expressed conviction that this was a bad thing</p> <p>In November 2006, she outlined her vision for the future of the department: “<i>one that is flexible, responsive, quick on its feet, effective, whatever the priorities set for us by our Ministers, whatever the expectations that customers and citizens have of us</i>” (Intranet 29/6/2006). To implement this vision, she announced the formation of the Phoenix programme, which “<i>will put corporate, collaborative behaviour at the heart of what we do</i>”.</p> <p>Their language was aggressive, with much talk of ‘over-riding opposition’, the need for ‘ruthless prioritisation’, and ‘telling people the way it was’, and so on.</p> <p>This was a very bold and unusual move, which marked her and the programme out from previous change initiatives, helped build staff support for the programme, as well as providing her with a new and influential power base which she used wherever possible to wrong-foot opposition, using staff comments and anecdotes to support her proposals. She also ensured that she met the Secretary of State and relevant Ministers, and widely reported their positive reactions to the programme.</p> <p>Her first presentation to the Executive Board in early Feb 2007 stressed pace and progress, listing numerous achievements under the slide heading “<i>In the first 10 days we have achieved a great deal</i>”.</p> <p><i>Through Phoenix, the Department will become a more responsive and innovative department, better able to make a difference to the quality of lives of citizens, where outcomes are developed in true partnership and policy making effective and consistent. Phoenix will create an environment where staff are proud of their work and where it’s easy to get things done</i></p> <p>This was presented as crucial to achieving the reduced resourcing levels, by improving flexibility and effectiveness of the smaller organisation, therefore justifying how it could do the same amount of work. Staff were sceptical that the whole edifice of the Phoenix</p>			

programme was in fact simply a smokescreen for downsizing, (*“this is actually really all about reducing headcount but everyone’s pretending its about something else”*) and so senior management were adamant that the other aspects of the programme, and a new type of organisation, should be presented as being of equal importance.

This apparently evident profligacy became a rallying call for the programme, and was used to support the rhetoric of rationalisation, prioritisation and better co-operative working.

the attitude was that ‘change’ had to be driven forward with determination and pace, and that many of the process and analytical objections being raised were simply defensive routines rooted in opposition to essential change and fear of exposure

the rhetoric of pace, priority and urgency at odds with the equally powerful rhetoric of propriety, control and due process.

once it became evident that the Frenchay proposal was superior, Kate felt safe to engage in an elaborate show of even-handedness throughout the evaluation process

This was a key element of strong rhetoric around more forceful management of consultants to the public sector

*Henry is not modelling the good behaviours that Phoenix is supposed to be all about”*

Delivery Board members and the programme team saw this as a typical ‘pre-Phoenix ’ reaction from the Executive, failing to delegate and empower senior management, and wishing to engage in a process of endless debate.

Gerry was re-badging a programme of work much of which he already intended to implement, but saw the Phoenix banner as a powerful signal of change and was personally an enthusiastic supporter of the direction of change.

She also felt that many of the project management processes she would expect to see in place did not seem to be there, although Gerry had assured her that projects within ITD were generally well managed.

Frenchay were in their element, running workshops and producing process charts in great volumes. Well-versed in the rhetoric that systems requirements should be business-driven and properly thought-through, they were reluctant to engage in specifying requirements for PhoenixIT.

Charles looked increasingly uncomfortable as he tried to counter a (rather off the point) trademark monologue from Gerry on the need for the department to embrace project management disciplines and the need for Phoenix to provide firm direction to get them to do so.

The accusation of IT leading the business clearly annoyed Gerry

She said that Eleanor was not behaving corporately, and (like some other members of the senior management team, she said) was not *“living the Phoenix behaviours”*.

For Executive Board members in particular, there was a surprising consistency of views and even language, around *“getting on with it”*, *“keeping it simple”* and *“learning by doing”*.

She was keen to *“just do it”* and pilot new approaches to force out the key decisions

There was a widespread view that the programme needed to concentrate on delivering only enough to demonstrate ‘enough’ progress by March 2008 to maintain credibility with staff.

*“although still a minority sport, some senior leaders continue to run their own agendas, undermining Phoenix through misinformation, describing Phoenix as ‘Rachel’s agenda’, cherry picking processes, commissioning duplicative work and adding unnecessary complexity ...*

*“we’ve got more clarity – some substance for the first time instead of all the bullshit and pzazz of the last few conferences”*.

In her interview, Eleanor spoke of how she was *“working closely with our Phoenix colleagues”* to identify what was do-able against *“all the other things the Board wants from us”*, and how they were now working on an 80/20 process of establishing what was feasible by April.

IP was much higher profile than earlier work though - it embodied the commitment to the powerful discourses of ‘joined up government’ and ‘service modernisation’, and as such was positioned as something of a jewel in the crown of the department’s IT activities.

Despite the professed declarations of their senior management, IP was not a priority for the individual agencies, most of whom had pressing problems and issues of their own.

The delivery agencies highlighted the fact that they were expected to implement projects that were imposed on them from the centre; the policy centre bemoaned the parochialism of the delivery agencies.

She was keen to distance the project from Phoenix – impossible given the ASF commitment – and even suggested changing the name so as to emphasise the separateness of the activity.

On 16 April, Phoenix produced a ‘transition plan’ itemising the benefits and success of the programme, the most substantive element of which was the move to flexible, project-based organisation.

Theme 7	Description	Refs	% of events
UNCERTAINTY	Reflection of recognition of the absence of full information about current or future state	65	46%
<p>we were conscious that we were discussing rather nebulous concepts, the substance of which would evaporate once we attempted precise definition and structure.</p> <p>It was not clear from the outset whether Phoenix was an umbrella term for the whole programme of initiatives, or whether it was a new and separate programme, a tension that was never really resolved throughout the life of the programme.</p> <p>There was a great variety of different initiatives and plans under each of these headings</p> <p>This was a confused and confusing session, with few of the people in the room knowing each other, or having a very clear idea about objectives, scope and roles.</p> <p>This estimate had been prepared by Frenchay on the assumption that they provided the resources to support the change programme, but included no other departmental costs (eg for IT and process changes). It very soon became the de facto budget for the whole programme, however, though exactly what that was was unclear. The level of definition of what was to be delivered by the programme was very low at this stage.</p> <p>Even the key elements of implementing this vision were unclear, and though some work had been done to attempt to define ‘what success looks like’ the range of issues covered raised as many questions as it answered.</p> <p>It was however clear from this close involvement in the management of the programme that there were major gaps in the programme’s plans and control processes, many of which to my mind originated in the lack of a clear and specific agreement about the outcomes of the programme</p> <p>I became responsible for defining the programme’s requirements for external consultancy support, working closely with the procurement team. This was difficult given the absence of plans beyond the next two or three weeks, and the reluctance of the Frenchay team to commit to tying themselves to specific plans in the face of considerable uncertainty and what they saw as little control over the organisational outcomes</p> <p>The governance structure was complex with lots of matrix relationships rather fudging the issue of respective responsibilities between the programme and the existing business – or perhaps, simply reflecting the current confusion and sensitivity.</p>			



most were puzzled as to quite what that meant

These only served to confirm that the ideas of what Phoenix would mean at the detailed level were still very unclear

Sarah's initial few days getting to grips with the project had raised concerns in her mind as to the scope and boundaries of the project and indeed who was in her team

The OSP project manager, Jonathan, was proving difficult, seeing his role as undermined by Sarah's appointment, and repeatedly raising questions about reporting lines and scope: "*What am I responsible for then?*".

It was evident that as far as the rest of the group was concerned there were still substantial questions about the purpose and scope of the project.

One area of debate was the extent to which changes to the HR and Finance systems that would be necessary to support the Phoenix business changes were within the scope of PhoenixIT

A high-level phased plan was presented, though it was clear that anything beyond the first 'early adopters' phase was highly provisional

Workshops were held to identify what could be known about the requirements, but some of the Phoenix leads for certain business processes (eg PPM) were arguing (with some justification, I thought) that they didn't need IT to change the processes. In other areas, some key business decisions had yet to be made.

David and I spoke at length about what was behind all this,

Neither Phoenix or PhoenixIT mapped well onto the standard project lifecycle, and it was hard to tell when they had 'started'. They were always in a state of flux, sliding from one phase to the next, so it was hard to judge when the time was right for a specific intervention.

What was meant by the Phoenix vision was beginning to be much clearer, though how much of it would be delivered and by when was less clear.

She couldn't understand why it was taking so long to resolve some of the HR policy and procedural issues that were apparently holding up progress.

There were a lot of unexplored uncertainties and furthermore ABC continued to have difficulties providing the resources required and committing to planned dates.

he felt that everything was in such a state of flux and moving too fast.  
Kate was very concerned – “*what else is there to go wrong?*”

Sarah felt very exposed on the potential technical frailties of the system

I was puzzled as to what the underlying problem was, and what was the driver for trying to deal with it now.

There were no dates for the final release, as Gerry had instructed ABC and GlobalIT that they should not commit to a date unless they were sure they could make it

Theme 8	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>LIMITS TO AGENCY</b>	<i>Indication of the inability to influence the course of events, especially by leaders</i>	55	42%
<p>Numerous change programmes have been initiated within the department in recent years under a variety of labels, consuming large amounts of money, but generally seen as delivering little, and viewed with a weary cynicism by staff at all levels.</p> <p>Expectations from the business had been disappointed, and ABC was increasingly being seen by business users as providing an expensive and poor quality service.</p> <p>ABC's room for manoeuvre was limited by a very tight contract</p> <p>Plans to improve the desktop infrastructure, which had been part of the original contract, had been repeatedly delayed.</p> <p>ITD and Gerry in particular were under pressure to deliver against earlier promises – but struggling in particular with a supplier who did not seem able to respond.</p> <p>... is then inclined to see herself as a victim of circumstances, other incompetent people, and her own failure to trust her judgement.</p> <p>of the frustrations of trying to get things done against organisational inertia and opposing agendas,</p> <p>... a repeated series of, as it turned out, unsuccessful attempts to incorporate the ideas and findings of the work into the Phoenix Change programme's plans.</p> <p>It felt to many that the department had been talking about organisational change for several years without anything much happening.</p> <p>while I felt the purpose, structure and definition of the programme was now very confused I could also see that there was no way I could influence it further.</p> <p>However, in practice the difficulties of doing this, which required a major shift in the way the department dealt with suppliers, and/or a degree of definition of the required outputs that the programme was hardly capable of providing, proved insuperable.</p> <p>She was clearly struggling and feeling unsupported, pointing to a constant undermining by some key senior managers, including Eleanor , and a general culture of low accountability and expectation: "<i>Rachel says what should happen, and it doesn't</i>".</p> <p>Overall, I was left with the impression that Rachel had a clear high-level view of the essentials of the programme, but somehow in her role of SRO had not succeeded in driving that through to what was planned and designed.</p>			

Gerry also talked about his frustration - *“I ask for things to happen and it doesn't happen”* - and how it was wearing him down trying to make progress: *“I'm getting weary”*.

(in Sarah's view: *“he just doesn't seem to be able to do anything”*)

However, Gerry was pressing hard at the Phoenix Delivery Board, increasingly exasperated by calls for more analysis when he could see the urgency of beginning implementation if timescales were to be met

Overall, I was disappointed as to what we had achieved, particularly our inability to hold a 'delivery foundations' stakeholder event, and to really effectively surface some of the fundamental issues, particularly around the relationship between Phoenix and PhoenixIT.

Gerry had made several attempts over the last couple of months to engage Kate, who though interested and supportive, had not made any of the meetings proposed.

Rachel in our interview was very frank in her exasperation with progress, and said that she would have liked to have seen Phoenix deliver earlier.

The programme could see that they couldn't be successful without letting go, as they were unable to control all the dependencies

The Integrated Portal (IP) was the IT component of a broader programme aimed at service integration which had made little substantive progress in four years.

Basically, he was struggling with securing commitment and funding from the various independently-minded agencies, and with maintaining pace and progress.

He recognised that some of the decisions that needed to be made would in practice require the involvement of the Chief Executives of the agencies, but did not feel confident personally in undertaking engagement at that (more senior) level, something that he expressed in terms of the 'grade consciousness' that he saw as prevalent in the department.

One of them had been working on a project for as long as four years to coordinate inspections which he felt had led to no concrete change in actual services.

They were sceptical of the chances of any intervention making an impact on this situation: *“we can talk about these things but they won't change”*. There was a rather depressing conviction that *“pragmatically speaking, this is the way things are”*.

was himself sceptical of the likelihood of major change in behaviours and commitment.

He explained that: *“Sarah and I are doing a recovery plan – despite all our efforts, we*

*haven't put in place what should be there."*

*"But we still can't get plans out of ABC and the Centre of Excellence" where the main problems of resourcing were concentrated.*

It struck me that our attempts to confront the 'real issue' had had very little impact,

*"I can remember us sitting down for that first Successful Delivery meeting – all that stuff about careful team recruitment, clarity of purpose etc etc – we haven't done any of it!"*

Theme 9	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>UNDISCUSSABILITY</b>	Reference to events which were privately discussed but not publicly acknowledged	52	42%
<p>what Gerry liked to call ‘the moose on the table’ – the unacknowledged issue that is often either too difficult to address or too sensitive to discuss, but which remains a silent but pervasive block on progress</p> <p>I attempted to speak to the SRO of another project which had had considerable difficulties, via the Programme Director who I knew well, but this was refused. The Programme Director, however, sent me a confidential note based on his own discussion with the SRO (<i>“Formally, I think don’t go there! Informally, and not for wider dissemination, here are some observations:”</i>) which highlighted the political pressures and numerous factors external to the project which had ensured that it had continued when many felt it should have been brought to a halt.</p> <p>He and his team were apparently pleased with Kate’s appointment in principle, but very cautious in practice.</p> <p>While everyone was very polite, factions were evident in the physical groupings, and there was little mixing.</p> <p>The Frenchay consultants didn’t know quite what to make of me, and I was taken aside by one of the partners for a private chat about ‘what I was about’ and what my plans were.</p> <p>Staff were sceptical that the whole edifice of the Phoenix programme was in fact simply a smokescreen for downsizing, (<i>“this is actually really all about reducing headcount but everyone’s pretending its about something else”</i>)</p> <p>there were continuing problems between Kate and Eleanor but that these were not being confronted or escalated. This conflict was widely known about and gossiped about in private but referred to only obliquely in more formal circumstances</p> <p>As late as September 2007, Kate remarked to me privately that if she could change one thing in the programme it would be Eleanor .</p> <p>it was evident that the procurement director was keen not to be seen to be in any way to oppose or impede the Phoenix programme. The opposition to and scepticism of Phoenix was vocal and intense - but only privately for managers at this level.</p> <p>Henry took me aside during the review for a private conversation (after the formal interview with David and Malcolm) to put his own views more candidly.</p> <p>Some of them (like the Frenchay consultants, and to a lesser degree, Kate) were explicitly</p>			

privately critical to us of particular individuals.

some serious concerns about the role and operation of the Board emerged on a one-to-one basis, though had not been aired at the Board meetings themselves.

Malcolm though keen initially to make trenchant criticisms of the control and process inadequacies of the programme, was as pragmatic as the rest of us in judging what messages were going to be listened to, and how to put them over

It was evident from their comments that they were deeply sceptical of the value of the whole GlobalIT venture, muttering darkly that the technology was unproven and would probably mean just a reduced service for users.

When I was working with the Phoenix team at this time, I frequently heard disparaging remarks about PhoenixIT and Sarah

... mulling over how we were going to negotiate these perilously highly-charged issues

While respondents were very frank in their discussions, and quite pointed, they admitted that they had not made these same points at the programme board meeting, or at least only obliquely.

had invited comments as we went through, but no-one made eye contact and no-one said anything. I sat down to complete silence

Later he told me that he had at one point approached Gerry about whether Sarah was coping with her role, and received a very dusty response. Rather ruefully, he said: *"I've done that – I'm certainly not going there again"*.

(Jeff, who described himself as someone who *"likes to play a straight bat"* had already told me that he thought the programme was *"in a mess"*).

Jeff was himself feeling responsible, though didn't seem to be aware that Gerry was blaming him for the situation.

Sarah was having difficulties getting an honest view from ABC

Alice later gained a similar view in her one-to-one coaching session with Paul: *"but he is so polite"*.

Once the issue was out in the open, the solutions seemed to emerge quite naturally,

Theme 10	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>POWER</b>	<i>Indication of the use of personal and positional power to change events</i>	48	36%
<p>... a forceful and aggressive commercial negotiator, Gerry was piling the pressure on ABC</p> <p>... pressured [a reluctant ABC] to partner with some niche suppliers</p> <p>While the central procurement division had established some corporate frameworks, business directors, who controlled their own budgets tended to employ their particular favoured suppliers</p> <p>Having demonstrated her ability to escalate a particular issue, attract Board-level support and funding, and rapidly mobilise a large team within a very short period of time, I observed to sceptical colleagues at the time that she was ‘a heat-seeking missile for power, resources, and influence’</p> <p>she is actually very focused in her approach to spending time with people, placing a priority on dealing with the most powerful, or those whose input she needs at that time.</p> <p>She is very alert to political sensitivities and who has the power to influence events</p> <p>in this story, she was seen by others as powerful and often unreasonable.</p> <p>She used that relationship, consciously or unconsciously, to powerful effect.</p> <p>The Successful Delivery programme was launched personally by Gerry</p> <p>We were now ready to pilot the approach with PhoenixIT, a project within Gerry’s control and managed by Sarah, and the integrated Portal, for which Gerry was senior sponsor.</p> <p>The Phoenix Change Programme was initiated by Rachel on taking up appointment as head of the department.</p> <p>Initially, a small, fairly junior team of 5 or 6 staff, previously engaged in the policy review programme, was set up to coordinate all activity which was ‘Phoenix -related’ – whatever that might be. They had been working on scoping the extent of the programme and clarifying its objectives, and designing programme management processes for some months without convincing anyone that progress was being made before it was decided that the programme needed a senior programme director, reporting to Rachel, to drive the programme forward.</p> <p>Mark was a bright policy analyst with a very logical approach and a pragmatic understanding of what he believed was possible to achieve in the department, but without</p>			



the seniority to make a significant impact.

The senior Frenchay consultants dominated the proceedings. They were polished and forceful, and obviously experienced in the field

I was left in no doubt from this conversation how powerful Frenchay felt their position to be.

She was determined to make these relatively small, decision-making bodies and immediately ran into objections from those excluded. However, drawing on the support of those who had been included, a powerful group, and making one or two concessions, she succeeded in holding her line.

She also ensured that she met the Secretary of State and relevant Ministers, and widely reported their positive reactions to the programme.

Several Executive Board members were concerned about being used as a rubber-stamping body, and felt they were being bounced into decisions by the Delivery Board.

This external endorsement, combined with regularisation of the Frenchay contract through the competitive tendering process effectively ‘spiked the guns’ of those seeking to attack the programme.

Two key decisions by Gerry changed the situation dramatically

He had also imposed a deadline of the end of May for the delivery of the basic software fully tested in operational form on the department’s infrastructure

provoking an immediate angry response from Gerry, insisting that the project team needed to be directed to “*just do it*”

the contractual arrangements placed this work as service management and infrastructure issue rather than a delivery project within ABC’s internal structures, and so the right resources to introduce project delivery disciplines were harder for David to get hold of.

Gerry urged that she be more directive about what the basic elements of the project were to be

Gerry, who had generally injected some new energy into the project, had found funds to commission some new work by a specialist company who were expert in the development of these kinds of web-based services

Attendance was poor, particularly by the most powerful agency

He recognised that some of the decisions that needed to be made would in practice require the involvement of the Chief Executives of the agencies, but did not feel confident personally in undertaking engagement at that (more senior) level

Gerry controlled the meeting – as Jeff said: “*The Programme Board has no real role – Gerry will decide what gets done*”.

Kate was very concerned – “*what else is there to go wrong?*” - and commissioned an independent technical review

He had called a meeting for the entire team, most of whom were external contractors or private sector staff from ABC and other suppliers, and tore into them as failing him and not delivering to their commitments.

He now seemed to take direct hands-on responsibility for managing the delivery of ASF to the foreshortened date of 18 February.

The key factor had been that the pressure from Gerry, and the focus on planning, had forced release of the necessary resources in ABC to complete the job on time.

Theme 11	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>CONTROL</b>	<i>Successful or unsuccessful attempts to introduce structure, order and stability</i>	48	36%
<p>She recognises that she needs to be in control, and believes that as she progresses to more senior roles she will have to take more of a ‘big picture’ view.</p> <p>Even Sarah, whose inclination was to produce a clear definition of our outputs and a detailed project plan to achieve them, recognised that the usual structured management approaches that were our ingrained response to problems of complexity were likely to fail to grasp what was significant here.</p> <p>However, Kate and the programme team repeatedly stressed the level of detail, issuing a dense 44-slide pack referred to as the ‘plan’, identifying ‘98 projects’ - but including no dates and providing little definition of a very wide range of different activities.</p> <p>... there were major gaps in the programme’s plans and control processes</p> <p>... the absence of plans beyond the next two or three weeks, and the reluctance of the Frenchay team to commit to tying themselves to specific plans in the face of considerable uncertainty and what they saw as little control over the organisational outcomes</p> <p>... believing that it should have been possible to define the plans and deliverables in a lot more detail, and seeing the programme as being over-run by consultants and out of control.</p> <p>Our review of the documentation at that time clearly revealed the low level of definition of the programme outside the immediate focus of RS3</p> <p>Another said that <i>“the programme is desperately in need of a plan”</i></p> <p>Sarah was appalled by the absence of plans by the OSP team and, more worryingly, ABC.</p> <p>She also felt that many of the project management processes she would expect to see in place did not seem to be there, although Gerry had assured her that projects within ITD were generally well managed.</p> <p>Sarah continued to struggle with getting a grip on the team, looking to extract a credible plan for the first key delivery now only 6 weeks away.</p> <p>He saw himself as ‘piggy in the middle’ between Sarah and ABC, with Sarah demanding levels of detailed control that Jonathan had hitherto not felt to be necessary. <i>“Sarah is just interested in dates and delivery”</i>.</p> <p>a project managed by a group of people who were interested in the technology for its own</p>			

sake: “OSP looked like glorified toys for the boys”.

An additional consultant was appointed to manage the production of a plan for the next phase

Sarah went off on a three week holiday towards the end of June feeling that she was beginning to get on top of things, but still worrying away about the team and the internal organisation structure.

A high-level phased plan was presented, though it was clear that anything beyond the first ‘early adopters’ phase was highly provisional

Sarah was now under pressure from other ITD colleagues to sort out plans and finances, and was feeling that she had not kept a proper grip on things, and had relied on others too much to get things sorted.

She was also thinking that she needed a programme manager working to her who would keep a tight control on plans and actions, which she felt she simply didn’t have time to do

*“the priorities ... seem right but the plan is still at a high level – need more specifics to be sure that ‘enough’ will be delivered for March 08 and whether it can really be done”.*

There were a lot of unexplored uncertainties and furthermore ABC continued to have difficulties providing the resources required and committing to planned dates.

Sarah was really looking for someone to give her the framework of firm plans and structure that would give her the control she wanted.

Given Phoenix ’s level of planning, I wondered why a delay of this scale was such a ‘killer’ issue – I had seen no plans for the pilot, and doubted whether any existed.

Sarah was determined to improve structure and control, with consistent ‘good practice’ processes in place across all the project streams: *“I want every project being run off baselined plans and risks and issues registers”*

the team improvised extensively, taking on some ABC’s tasks themselves to maintain progress (a decision that Jeff was later to regret).

Phoenix ’s implementation planning had not been worked through in the areas outside IT, there were still some outstanding business decisions to be made, and the plan was overly ambitious.

Sarah went over Jeff’s head and had discussions with project team members individually, and was horrified by what she found about the state of the plans and documentation

To keep to timescales they had ‘winged it’ and were paying the price in incomplete

documentation.

He explained that: “*Sarah and I are doing a recovery plan – despite all our efforts, we haven’t put in place what should be there.*”

... he thought that very little had come from all that, and in fact that “*some of the crisis was diversionary*”, with everyone “*madly having to produce plans for everything*”.

As Jeff had found, the progress on this aspect of PhoenixIT had been poor, and this was beginning to become rather obvious – there was no plan or approach to delivery, and some major business decisions about priorities were outstanding.

A far more relaxed Sarah was still heading up PhoenixIT, with an entirely new project management team selected by herself (all good planners!), with the next phase of development on schedule.

Theme 12	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>STATUS ASSESSMENT</b>	<i>Description of the contested process of establishing current project status</i>	37	31%
<p>... believing that it should have been possible to define the plans and deliverables in a lot more detail, and seeing the programme as being over-run by consultants and out of control.</p> <p>From what we all knew of the programme, our starting position was this was more about how to avoid a ‘red’ than getting a ‘green’.</p> <p>The business directors and programme team members we interviewed were all clear that this was the case. The general impression was that many were (rather grudgingly perhaps) impressed by Kate and what she had managed to achieve in terms of mobilisation and building support, but were claiming the need to see more substance</p> <p>Kate was disappointed and puzzled at the feedback on lack of visible progress (received early on, as she was keen to hear progress of the review on a daily basis), pointing to the progress on organisational design</p> <p>Frenchay’s senior partner had written formally to Kate with a list of concerns about the programme</p> <p>The Delivery Board objected to receiving glowing progress reports in all areas, and the programme team rapidly revised their traffic light status to reflect the widely-acknowledged concerns in a number of areas</p> <p>The OGC review itself was a success, with the preparatory work paying off in an ‘amber’ status assessment and some warm words from the review team: “<i>a splendid programme</i>” with “<i>strong leadership</i>” and setting a “<i>cracking pace</i>”.</p> <p>[the release] was deemed to have happened on schedule (although this was acknowledged by the team to be defined rather loosely).</p> <p>Prior to this, Gerry had reported that the ‘early adopters’ roll-out to 41 users had gone “<i>exceptionally well</i>”, with an overwhelmingly positive response in a user survey, and the team had worked “<i>at a fantastic pace</i>”</p> <p>Both Gerry and Sarah were feeling very exposed at this point. A lot of money had been spent, months had passed, and all PhoenixIT had to show was 41 new laptops with a new operating system.</p> <p>In our health check report, David and I welcomed the focus on implementation, the transition of responsibility from the programme to the business, the re-scoping, and better-defined planning, but were aware also that what was being delivered was some</p>			

way from the original intentions.

On the PhoenixIT issue, the temperature also seemed to have dropped throughout this process.

... it did seem as if progress was being made in clarifying what was to be delivered. One of Sarah's team, Matt commented that, while the documentation was scrappy, the content was now probably there. *"I would have been worried sick 2 weeks ago, but now there's still enough time for April 08 delivery"*.

Very shortly afterwards, the head of the Cabinet Office congratulated Rachel: *"I was impressed by the progress that you and your department have already made through your Phoenix change programme, and the fact that it is starting to have an impact in the organisation"*.

... it had provoked a dispute as to how much of the required functionality had been delivered – a dispute that was hard to resolve given the absence of signed-off documentation.

This was seen as a major issue by the Phoenix team: Kate was on to Sarah directly, pointing out that Eleanor was using the excuse of *"the IT won't be ready anyway"* to excuse delays in her own HR deliverables.

His summary of the current status of the programme prepared for the Programme Board, while acknowledged by Sarah and Gerry as a helpful critique internally, nonetheless gave a strong negative impression of what had taken place so far.

his note exposed an increase in projected spend above the original budget which had previously not been apparent, and which Gerry was hoping to deal with before it became an issue.

His judgement from the Phoenix side of the fence was that: *"there are some issues on the IT side but most of the problems are about clarifying the new ways of working"*.

When I spoke to Darren in early January 2008, he felt that: *"the project seems to be going OK"*. Nonetheless, the Phoenix perspective was that there were continuing problems with PhoenixIT

With respect to the overall programme, Jeff had become concerned about the 'collaboration' component of the programme despite some months of work, plans were not developed and there were some technical problems with the newly released product set.

However, as he said, there were 800 users using the ASF system at the moment, and all seemed to be OK. Darren, offering a perspective from Phoenix remarked that, from his experience, this situation was not actually as bad as everyone seemed to think: *"these are*

*not major problems given this stage of implementation – the problem is lack of trust and confidence”.*



Theme 13	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>ISSUES AND PUZZLES</b>	<i>Repeated discussion of problematic events that remain unresolved</i>	36	26%
<p>Many of the subjects within the workstream definition were already being worked on within the department, and most of the top priority work fell within the remit of the HR department. Certainly, all the personnel work associated with downsizing was the HR department's responsibility. Was Phoenix to take direct control of all this work? This obvious conflict of interest was never satisfactorily resolved, and developed into a tense running battle at a personal level between Kate and Eleanor , the Director of HR.</p> <p>there were continuing problems between Kate and Eleanor but that these were not being confronted or escalated.</p> <p>At the working level, project team staff and middle managers complained that this tension was making progress very difficult. As late as September 2007, Kate remarked to me privately that if she could change one thing in the programme it would be Eleanor .</p> <p>The use of Frenchay as the prime drivers of the programme was a persistent concern among stakeholders</p> <p>Nonetheless, the concerns expressed in this review re-appeared in two consequent reviews.</p> <p>He was clear that for him there were two primary issues: “<i>what are Phoenix going to give us – and what will we have to do to get it?</i>”; and, given the poor performance of ABC on the contract to date, could they actually deliver something which they were unfamiliar with?</p> <p>there were already objections being raised by ABC about the commercial terms of delivering the new product set, and concerns being expressed by ABC about capacity to meet the projected timescales.</p> <p>One area of debate was the extent to which changes to the HR and Finance systems that would be necessary to support the Phoenix business changes were within the scope of PhoenixIT</p> <p>In retrospect, it is interesting that, just like the Phoenix change programme, some of the key issues identified at this early stage not only remained unresolved throughout the progress of the project but were highly influential in shaping its trajectory.</p> <p>ABC were “<i>struggling to wind GlobalIT into their processes</i>” and that some of the ABC team members were having difficulties in working within the commercial and process constraints of their corporate framework.</p>			

... the OSP team felt that they had been taken over by Sarah and her consultants; and ABC felt that they had had GlobalIT and their technical solution thrust upon them without any consultation.

the inability of ABC to produce effective plans and to make a formal commitment to project dates was a recurrent theme throughout the project

ABC raised concerns about these commercial issues which Gerry made a joke about and avoided any serious discussion

She also said “*no-one on Phoenix asked for GlobalIT*”, articulating an until-now unspoken perception in Phoenix that PhoenixIT was “*forcing the technology down our throats*”.

ABC again raised concerns about the lack of agreement on commercial terms for wider rollout, pointing out that “*this really makes life difficult for our people on the ground, it’s debilitating*”.

Relations with Phoenix continued to decline, with Gerry constantly berating the Phoenix team for failing to produce requirements and for the absence of plans

This had at last headlined some big issues in both IT and HR (which in truth had been evident for some time).

Lack of confidence in HR was at the heart of these concerns about implementation.

In the last few minutes, relaxing a little, she complained that “*it feels like we’re always being dumped on*” and that “*challenging our Phoenix colleagues is seen as being anti-Phoenix*”, finally admitting that “*personally, I feel shafted at the moment*”.

the HR and Finance IT requirements had not been bottomed out, and may not be deliverable.

ABC were insisting on formal financial coverage for the next tranche of work on FSR, and, unprepared to work any longer ‘at risk’, had effectively threatened to down tools if they didn’t see formal financial approval.

He saw the current difficulties as being rooted in the timescale pressures from the problems with ABC resourcing, and the deflection of the Centre of Excellence resources on to the onboarding problem from build and development.

“*But we still can’t get plans out of ABC and the Centre of Excellence*” where the main problems of resourcing were concentrated.

Theme 14	Description	Refs	% of events
CONFLICT	Open and heated disagreement blocking shared approach to required actions	35	27%
<p>the department has a culture of non-compliance with corporate standards and frameworks, with frequent jokes about ‘dysfunctional’ families</p> <p>Gerry was piling the pressure on ABC, and relations were very strained.</p> <p>Once the very broad outlines of the programme had been drawn, a ‘turf war’ began to break out.....This obvious conflict of interest was never satisfactorily resolved, and developed into a tense running battle at a personal level between Kate and Eleanor , the Director of HR.</p> <p>Alice was called in to help mediate but remarked to me in April that there were continuing problems between Kate and Eleanor but that these were not being confronted or escalated. This conflict was widely known about.....At the working level, project team staff and middle managers complained that this tension was making progress very difficult.</p> <p>Phoenix began to step on other toes as well</p> <p>... the communications team, who had formed a conspicuous ‘anti-Frenchay’ faction within the programme, criticising the management of the programme and the Frenchay approach.</p> <p>The discussion was becoming acrimonious, with the current incumbents from the department and ABC, in Sarah’s eyes, covering up lack of progress and proper plans with challenges to her own role</p> <p>... friction began to develop with the Phoenix team who were looking to PhoenixIT to be more proactive, and who were not yet really interested in defining detailed requirements. This friction became more and more marked over the coming months.</p> <p>... but the temperature was rising, with much of Gerry and Sarah’s anger directed at Frenchay – “<i>they’re all wankers</i>” according to Sarah.</p> <p><i>“Still loads of problems with Phoenix and with Frenchay”</i></p> <p>She was now persona non grata in the Phoenix team, and being conspicuously cold-shouldered, being interrupted and instructed not to speak further by Susan in one meeting.</p> <p>In an earlier conversation with Kate David had already detected that there was “<i>tension between Kate and Sarah</i>”, and that Kate felt that Sarah was “<i>not up to it</i>”. David was also</p>			

aware that Gerry was very unhappy about Phoenix , Kate, and the interface of the programme with PhoenixIT

Kate and Eleanor no longer met, and Kate was reduced to maintaining a log of their communications.

More generally though, the focus on implementation and de-scoping did seem to allow some defusing of the Eleanor and HR issue, allowing this to be discussed in terms of resources and priorities, rather than incompetence, bad attitude and obstruction.

*“we get on professionally but neither side trusts each other as far as they can throw them”.*

... advised much closer working between the Executive and Delivery Boards, where tensions were still evident. These had recently surfaced with respect to a key decision about how people would be managed in the new teams-based organisation, where the executive overturned a decision by the Delivery Board.

The delivery agencies highlighted the fact that they were expected to implement projects that were imposed on them from the centre; the policy centre bemoaned the parochialism of the delivery agencies.

it had provoked a dispute as to how much of the required functionality had been delivered

ABC were insisting on formal financial coverage for the next tranche of work on FSR, and, unprepared to work any longer ‘at risk’, had effectively threatened to down tools if they didn’t see formal financial approval.

Again, the tension levels were high, with some stormy scenes

She continued to accuse Phoenix of ‘pointing the finger’ and blaming’, which she felt was unreasonable

He had called a meeting for the entire team, most of whom were external contractors or private sector staff from ABC and other suppliers, and tore into them

Theme 15	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>EMERGENT PURPOSE</b>	<i>Reference to process of evolving definition of goals and objectives</i>	34	24%
<p>Between November 2006 and January 2007, Rachel's vision of a project-based, more collaborative organisation had been elaborated in a number of directions, picking up some of the existing work under the Phoenix banner...There was a great variety of different initiatives and plans under each of these headings</p> <p>The high-level programme definition thereafter went through a number of iterations, introducing an additional workstream called "Seeing ourselves as customers see us" (though this was later quietly dropped) and re-naming the downsizing activities of the programme as "Delivering the Right Size, Right Shape, Right Style Organisation" (soon abbreviated to 'RS3').</p> <p>Her view of the success criteria for the programme was: (a) that "RS3 happens" ie that the new organisation design was populated with a reduced number of staff overall; and (b) that the business planning round which began in October 2007 reflected improved collaborative behaviours, embedded the new organisation design and the move to undertaking most work in projects.</p> <p>These only served to confirm that the ideas of what Phoenix would mean at the detailed level were still very unclear</p> <p>It was evident that as far as the rest of the group was concerned there were still substantial questions about the purpose and scope of the project.</p> <p>It was clear that there was still considerable debate about which activities were necessary in the project beyond the immediate pressures of the 31/5 delivery</p> <p>technologists began to raise concerns about timescales and the risks that the pressurised deadline of the end of May presented by providing so little time for testing. "<i>This could all go very pear-shaped</i>" and "<i>We really shouldn't do it this way</i>". Before long, the question was asked: "<i>Is 31/5 a hard deadline?</i>".</p> <p>Gerry then set out "<i>a new strategic approach</i>" for PhoenixIT (which he had described to me earlier as de-coupling from Phoenix ), essentially expanding the scope to areas of the business outside the scope of Phoenix , and quickly rolling out a portfolio of the standard GlobalIT-based products.</p> <p>The team was larger, the management structures were in place and working regularly, and a 50 page document, called 'Vision and Principles' was setting out in more detail the high-level business processes.</p> <p>What was meant by the Phoenix vision was beginning to be much clearer, though how</p>			

much of it would be delivered and by when was less clear.

She wondered whether Frenchay and the programme had over-complicated the issues

One of the key factors emerging from this was the need for some significant prioritisation of focus for delivery by April 2008.

It was also forcing critical examination of what was meant by the high-level outcomes, some of which (eg leadership and new ‘Phoenix ’ behaviours) were still very loosely defined.

... were aware also that what was being delivered was some way from the original intentions.

*“Don’t lose sight of the long-term intended Phoenix objectives – deliverables should clearly be part of ‘the Phoenix journey’ – and address the issues raised in the Capability Review”.*

IT would definitely be required to support ASF, but it was now clearer what the business process would be.

On the basis of this Paul was developing a business case in conjunction with the agencies which he felt should make clear to the agencies the benefits for themselves individually as well as corporately.

In fact, after extensive discussions, a new scope had been developed for the programme, with the largest agency now co-operating by modifying its own plans for online services to fit under the IP umbrella and branding.

The Phoenix team now saw the ASF system as central to the implementation of the Phoenix plan,

PhoenixIT was now shaped much more by the desktop rollout and the Sharepoint rollout (the ‘collaboration’ work stream), with only some limited delivery being driven by the September deliverables of Phoenix

Theme 16	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>DEAD ENDS</b>	<i>Activity which peters out, or prominent issues which disappear from view</i>	24	25%
<p>The high-level programme definition thereafter went through a number of iterations, introducing an additional workstream called “Seeing ourselves as customers see us” (though this was later quietly dropped)</p> <p>Most of this work seemed unnecessary in retrospect...</p> <p>Despite the talk of the need to ‘take difficult decisions’ and ‘close projects down’ encouraged by Frenchay, closer examination failed to generate any resource savings,</p> <p>Some 9 months later, none of the risk/reward provisions in the contract had been agreed, let alone put into practice.</p> <p>The original intent of Kate and Gerry was that a ‘model office’ would be created which would include the new IT and show staff what the Phoenix vision would mean for them in their everyday work. However, this never happened</p> <p>A wider Delivery Foundations event with customers and business stakeholders would then be held subsequently once the team had ‘got its ducks in a row’ (in fact, this event never took place).</p> <p>I was charged with looking at new structures for the programme given the new approach, and worked with Sarah on what was an extremely complex configuration of tasks and interfaces with different parts of the organisation, but none of this was taken forward.</p> <p>As regards EPM, 9 months later, there was no rollout of EPM, and the PhoenixIT project team themselves were not using it.</p> <p>Attempts to use the qualities for recruitment (both in Phoenix and PhoenixIT) had foundered in the context of existing structured procedures for competency assessment and recruitment that could not really cope with something so broad and open-ended.</p> <p>One of them had been working on a project for as long as four years to coordinate inspections which he felt had led to no concrete change in actual services.</p> <p><i>“the programme adds little value as far as I’m concerned”.</i></p> <p>In fact, according to Jeff, while the second release had been delivered on schedule the Phoenix team weren’t in a position to be able to use it.</p> <p>despite some months of work, plans were not developed and there were some technical problems with the newly released product set</p>			

As Jeff had found, the progress on this aspect of PhoenixIT had been poor, and this was beginning to become rather obvious

the new governance arrangements which had seemed to be a central feature of the solution, and which were vigorously debated, were not actually introduced.

he thought that very little had come from all that, and in fact that “*some of the crisis was diversionary*”, with everyone “*madly having to produce plans for everything*”.

He was sceptical that the business changes being implemented would really be as effective as claimed,



Theme 17	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>ALIGNMENT</b>	<i>The process by which those holding divergent views or perspectives come to share an agreed position</i>	20	12%
<p>The business directors and programme team members we interviewed were all clear that this was the case. The general impression was that many were (rather grudgingly perhaps) impressed by Kate and what she had managed to achieve in terms of mobilisation and building support, but were claiming the need to see more substance.</p> <p>Amongst the senior business managers there was a growing sense of impatience</p> <p>There were many concerns about scope and the capacity of the organisation to cope with the ‘98 projects’.</p> <p>For Executive Board members in particular, there was a surprising consistency of views and even language, around “<i>getting on with it</i>”, “<i>keeping it simple</i>” and “<i>learning by doing</i>”.</p> <p>There was a widespread view that the programme needed to concentrate on delivering only enough to demonstrate ‘enough’ progress by March 2008 to maintain credibility with staff.</p> <p>However, there had been a major shift in the programme to crystallise what it was would be the focus for delivery.</p> <p>The senior business stakeholders were keen in principle that the focus of effort should move from the programme to the business</p> <p>More generally though, the focus on implementation and de-scoping did seem to allow some defusing of the Eleanor and HR issue</p> <p>However, there was a widespread feeling that now (and, for some, at last) the programme was heading in the right direction.</p> <p>One of Susan’s team responsible for implementing the new business model felt that the relationship with PhoenixIT was more mature than it had been...</p> <p>In a matter of a few weeks, the organisation’s perception of the programme, and the way it thought about itself, seemed to have gone through a major shift.</p> <p>The road map, which had already been discussed on a bilateral basis, was agreed without much discussion.</p> <p>In fact, after extensive discussions, a new scope had been developed for the programme,</p>			

with the largest agency now co-operating by modifying its own plans for online services to fit under the IP umbrella and branding. After discussions between the senior executives in the policy centre and the agency, the additional £10million had been found at the centre, which had effectively resolved this aspect of the issue of commitment.

Relations with the Phoenix team were much better at a working level...

Agreement was reached on respective responsibilities, and some new governance structures were agreed.

Theme 18	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>EXTERNAL FACTORS</b>	<i>Illustration of the impact of factors outside the scope or control of the project players</i>	11	13%
<p>Having failed to deliver any of the staff savings promised to the Treasury in the previous budgeting round (in fact, staff numbers and costs had increased), the department was in difficulties negotiating the next 3 year financial settlement.</p> <p>... the department received a damning Capability Review from the Cabinet Office... The review called for the department urgently to improve its organisational performance, and accused it of "major failings" in certain areas.</p> <p>It is against this background that a new departmental head (Rachel) was appointed and the Phoenix business change programme was launched.</p> <p>The difference this time was the recognition that the department was under severe pressure from the Treasury on staff numbers and budgets, and this had already affected most managers through the need to cut back on some planned projects.</p> <p>There was at this time a sense of real pressure on timescales, driven by the need to 'deliver a number to the Treasury' on the department's projected headcount by the end of April as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process</p> <p>She was feeling the pressure of achieving the numbers for the Treasury against constant resistance and delay; and saw that some difficult issues about ensuring that the right people were selected to go were being fudged.</p> <p>The department had been heavily criticised in the past for failing to control consultancy spend,</p> <p>as such was subject to an external OGC Gateway review (Gate 0 – Strategic Assessment) to assess the overall strategic business case, programme strategy, risks and delivery capability.</p> <p>[Rachel] confessed to having been rather distracted by other pressing and high-profile departmental issues</p> <p>This external endorsement, combined with regularisation of the Frenchay contract through the competitive tendering process effectively 'spiked the guns' of those seeking to attack the programme.</p> <p>the contractual arrangements placed this work as service management and infrastructure issue rather than a delivery project within ABC's internal structures, and so the right resources to introduce project delivery disciplines were harder for David to get hold of.</p>			

Things were now coming to a head because of the pressure on the department's funding position

Despite the professed declarations of their senior management, IP was not a priority for the individual agencies, most of whom had pressing problems and issues of their own.

Budget pressures meant that a lot of external contractors had to leave by the end of March.

Theme 19	Description	Refs	% of events
<b>EVENTS</b>	<i>Unexpected changes within or from outside the project landscape</i>	8	7%
<p>However, the introduction of the Phoenix Change Programme, with the close relationship between Gerry and Kate seemed to both offer a broader opportunity, and to some extent to pre-empt a narrower, separate initiative aimed at an apparently similar problem area.</p> <p>PhoenixIT seemed a good opportunity to pilot some of the interventions that had been outlined from the Successful Delivery work</p> <p>he felt that everything was in such a state of flux and moving too fast.</p> <p>an injunction had recently been issued that all new expenditure had to be signed off by the Finance Director</p> <p>All was going reasonably well until a security problem was discovered during the pilot testing</p> <p>Scheduled 'Think Tank' meetings were often cancelled under the pressure of various FSR project issues,</p> <p>My meetings about Sharepoint governance were rather taken over by discussion of the issue of the moment.</p>			

## **APPENDIX G**

### **CONSOLIDATION OF ‘THEMES’ INTO ‘KEY ASPECTS’**

As described in Chapter 6, 20 ‘themes’ were used to code the narrative. The relationship between these and the objectively-observed ‘features’ is described in Chapter 6 (Section 6.4). Following this, the 20 themes were consolidated into 13 ‘key aspects’. The process of consolidation took account of the fact that:

- some ‘themes’ could be considered to be sub-categories of the ‘key aspects’ (eg ‘multiple interpretations’ was a sub-category of ‘negotiating through uncertainty and ambiguity’)
- as parts of the narrative were coded to multiple themes, some ‘themes’ were persistently associated with a number of higher-level categories (eg ‘undiscussability’ was usually associated with ‘universal politics’, ‘emotion and identity’ and ‘long running issues’).

Table G.1 maps the coding themes to the consolidated ‘key aspects’ to demonstrate how the ‘themes’ found in the narrative were carried through into the ‘key aspects’ described fully in Section 6.5

**TABLE G.1 – CONSOLIDATION OF CODING ‘THEMES’ INTO ‘KEY ASPECTS’**

Name	Sources	Refs	Uncertainty and ambiguity	Universal Politics	Power & leadership	Discourse and rhetoric	Emotion and identity	Discursive work	Long-running issues	Limits to agency	Fuzzy boundaries	Emerging purpose	Fluid status	Struggle for control	Context and history
Key players	74	160			<b>X</b>										<b>X</b>
Multiple interpretations	60	105	<b>X</b>										<b>X</b>		
Political tactics	54	97		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>									
Personal engagement	42	86					<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>						
Personal relationships	38	76			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>						
Discourse & rhetoric	44	71				<b>X</b>									
Uncertainty	39	65	<b>X</b>												
Limits to agency	35	55								<b>X</b>					
Undiscussability	35	52		<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>						
Power	30	48			<b>X</b>										
Control	29	48									<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			
Status assessment	26	37													
Issues & puzzles	22	36							<b>X</b>						
Conflict	23	35	<b>X</b>							<b>X</b>					
Emergent purpose	20	34									<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			
Dead ends	21	24						<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>			
Alignment	10	20	<b>X</b>					<b>X</b>							
External factors	11	11								<b>X</b>					<b>X</b>
Events	6	8								<b>X</b>					<b>X</b>

## REFERENCES

- ABRAHAMSSON, P., WARSTA, J., SIPONEN, M. & RONKAINEN, J. 2003. New directions on agile methods: a comparative analysis. *25<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Software Engineering*, Portland, Oregon: IEEE Computer Society, Washington, USA.
- AGUANNO, K. 2005. *Managing Agile Projects*, Multi-Media Publications Inc.
- AKKERMANS, H. & VAN HELDEN, K. 2002. Vicious and virtuous cycles in ERP implementation: a case study of interrelations between critical success factors. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 11, 35-46.
- ALDERMAN, N., IVORY, C., MCLOUGHLIN, I. & VAUGHAN, R. 2005. Sense-making as a process within complex service-led projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 23, 380-385.
- ALVESSON, M. 2003. Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure. *Higher Education*, 46, 167-193.
- ALVESSON, M. & DEETZ, S. 1996. Critical theory and postmodernism: Approaches to organizational studies. In: CLEGG, R. S., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (eds.) *Handbook of Organization Studies*. Sage.
- ALVESSON, M. & KARREMAN, D. 2000a. Taking the Linguistic Turn in Organizational Research: Challenges, Responses, Consequences. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 36, 136-158.
- ALVESSON, M. & KARREMAN, D. 2000b. Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53, 1125-1149.
- ALVESSON, M. & SKÖLDBERG, K. 2000. *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*, Sage Publications Ltd.
- AMASON, A. C. 1996. Distinguishing The Effects Of Functional And Dysfunctional Conflict On Strategic Decision Making: Resolving A Paradox For Top Management Teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 123-148.
- ANCONA, D. G. & CALDWELL, D. F. 1992. Demography and Design: Predictors of New Product Team Performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 3, 321-341.
- ANDERSON, M. H. 2006. How Can We Know What We Think Until We See What We Said?: A Citation and Citation Context Analysis of Karl Weick's The Social Psychology of Organizing. *Organization Studies* 27, 1675-1692.
- ARGYRIS, C. 1990. *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning*, Prentice Hall.
- ARGYRIS, C. 1994. Good Communication That Blocks Learning. *Harvard Business Review*, July-August.
- ARGYRIS, C. & SCHÖN, D. A. 1974. *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*, San Francisco, USA, Jossey-Bass.
- ARMENAKIS, A. A. & BEDEIAN, A. G. 1999. Organizational change: a review of theory and research in the 1990s. *Journal of Management*, 25, 293-315.
- ASSOCIATION FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT 2000. *Body of Knowledge*, High Wycombe, Association for Project Management.
- ASTLEY, W. G. 1985. Administrative Science as Socially Constructed Truth. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30, 497-513.
- ASTLEY, W. G. & SACHDEVA, P. S. 1984. Structural Sources of Intraorganizational Power: A Theoretical Synthesis. *The Academy of Management Review*, 9, 104-113.



- ATKINSON, P. 1988. Ethnomethodology - a Critical Review. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 14, 441-465.
- ATKINSON, R. 1999. Project management: cost, time and quality, two best guesses and a phenomenon, its time to accept other success criteria. *International Journal of Project Management*, 17, 337-342.
- ATKINSON, R., CRAWFORD, L. & WARD, S. 2006. Fundamental uncertainties in projects and the scope of project management. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 687-698.
- AUGUSTINE, S. 2005. *Managing agile projects*, Prentice Hall PTR Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA.
- AUGUSTINE, S., PAYNE, B., SENCINDIVER, F. & WOODCOCK, S. 2005. Agile project management: steering from the edges. *Communications of the ACM*, 48, 89.
- AYLESWORTH, G. 2008. *Postmodernism* [Online]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/postmodernism/>
- BACCARINI, D. 1996. The concept of project complexity—a review. *International Journal of Project Management*, 14, 201-204.
- BACHRACH, P. & MORTON, S. B. 1962. Two Faces of Power. *The American Political Science Review*, 56, 947-952.
- BALLARD, G. & HOWELL, G. A. 2003. Lean project management. *Building Research & Information*, 31, 119.
- BAPUJI, H. & CROSSAN, M. 2004. From Questions to Answers: Reviewing Organizational Learning Research. *Management Learning*, 35, 397-417.
- BARKER, S. & COLE, R. 2007. *Brilliant project management: what the best project managers know, say and do*, Financial Times Management.
- BARLEY, S. R. & TOLBERT, P. S. 1997. Institutionalization and Structuration: Studying the Links between Action and Institution. *Organization Studies*, 18, 93-117.
- BARNEY, J. B. 1986. Organizational Culture: Can It Be a Source of Sustained Competitive Advantage? *The Academy of Management Review*, 11, 656-665.
- BASS, B. M. 1985. *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, Free Press.
- BASS, B. M. & AVOLIO, B. J. 1994. *Improving Organizational Effectiveness Through Transformational Leadership*, Sage Publications Inc.
- BECKHARD, R. F. & PRITCHARD, W. 1992. *Changing the Essence: The Art of Creating and Leading Fundamental Change in Organizations*, Jossey-Bass.
- BEER, M. & NOHRIA, N. 2000. *Breaking the Code of Change*, Harvard Business School Press.
- BELASSI, W. & TUKEL, O. I. 1996. A new framework for determining critical success/failure factors in projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 14, 141-151.
- BELBIN, R. M. 2004. *Management Teams: Why They Succeed Or Fail*, Butterworth-Heinemann.
- BERGER, P. L. & LUCKMANN, T. 1966. *The social construction of reality*, Penguin Books Ltd, England.
- BERKUN, S. 2005. *The art of project management*, O'Reilly.
- BERNSTEIN, R. J. 1983. *Beyond objectivism and relativism*, Oxford, England, Blackwell.

- BLACKBURN, S. 2002. The Project Manager and the Project-Network. *International Journal of Project Management*, 20.
- BLOOMFIELD, B. P. 1995. Power, Machines and Social Relations: Delegating to Information Technology in the National Health Service. *Organization*, 2, 489-518.
- BLOOMFIELD, B. P. & VURDUBAKIS, T. 1994. Boundary Disputes: Negotiating the Boundary between the Technical and the Social in the Development of IT Systems. *Information Technology & People*, 7, 9-24.
- BLUMER, H. 1969/1986. *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*, Univ of California Pr.
- BODDY, D., BOONSTRA, A. & KENNEDY, G. 2005. *Managing Information Systems: An Organisational Perspective* FT Prentice Hall
- BOHMAN, J. & REHG, W. 2008. *Jürgen Habermas* [Online]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/habermas/>
- BOJE, D. M. 1991. The Storytelling Organization: A Study of Story Performance in an Office-Supply Firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36.
- BOJE, D. M. 2001. *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*, Sage Publications Inc.
- BOJE, D. M., OSWICK, C. & FORD, J. D. 2004. Language And Organization: The Doing Of Discourse. *Academy of Management Review*, 29, 571-577.
- BOLAND, R. J., JR. & TENKASI, R. V. 1995. Perspective Making and Perspective Taking in Communities of Knowing. *Organization Science*, 6, 350-372.
- BOTTA-GENOULAZ, V., MILLET, P. A. & GRABOT, B. 2005. A survey on the recent research literature on ERP systems. *Computers in Industry*, 56, 510-522.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1990. *The logic of practice*, Polity.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1998. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Polity.
- BOURDIEU, P. & WACQUANT, L. J. D. 1992. *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, University of Chicago Press.
- BOURGOIS, P. 1998. Just another night in a shooting gallery. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 15, 37.
- BRADFORD, D. L. & BURKE, W. W. 2005. *Reinventing organization development: new approaches to change in organizations*, Pfeiffer.
- BRANNICK, T. & COGHLAN, D. 2007. In Defense of Being "Native": The Case for Insider Academic Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10, 59-74.
- BRESNEN, M., GOUSSEVSKAIA, A. & SWAN, J. 2004. Embedding New Management Knowledge in Project-Based Organizations. *Organization Studies*, 25, 1535-1555.
- BRIDGES, W. & BRIDGES, S. M. 2000. Leading Transition: A New Model for Change. *Leader to Leader* [Online]. [Accessed 20/4/06].
- BRINER, W., HASTINGS, C. & GEDDES, M. 1996. *Project leadership*, London, Gower.
- BROWN, A. D. 1998. *Organisational culture*, Prentice Hall.
- BROWN, A. D. 2000. Making Sense of Inquiry Sensemaking. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37.
- BROWN, A. D. & HUMPHREYS, M. 2003. Epic and Tragic Tales: Making Sense of Change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 39, 121-144.
- BROWN, A. D., STACEY, P. & NANDHAKUMAR, J. 2008. Making sense of sensemaking narratives. *Human Relations*, 61, 1035-1062.

- BROWN, J. S. & DUGUID, P. 1991. Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning and Innovation. *Organization Science*, 2, 40-57.
- BROWN, S. L. & EISENHARDT, K. M. 1995. Product Development: Past Research, Present Findings, and Future Directions. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20, 343-378.
- BROWN, S. L. & EISENHARDT, K. M. 1997. The Art of Continuous Change: Linking Complexity Theory and Time-Paced Evolution in Relentlessly Shifting Organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42, 1-34.
- BRUNER, J. 1991. The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18, 1.
- BRUNSSON, N. 1982. The Irrationality of Action and Action Rationality - Decisions, Ideologies and Organizational Actions. *Journal of Management Studies*, 19, 29-44.
- BRYMAN, A. 1984. Organization Studies and the Concept of Rationality. *Journal of Management Studies*, 21, 391-408.
- BUCHANAN, D. & BADHAM, R. 1999a. Politics and Organizational Change: The Lived Experience. *Human Relations*, 52, 609-629.
- BUCHANAN, D. & BADHAM, R. 1999b. *Power, Politics, and Organizational Change: Winning the Turf Game* SAGE Publications Ltd.
- BUCHANAN, D. A. & BODDY, D. 1992. *The expertise of the change agent: public performance and backstage activity*, Prentice Hall London.
- BURKE, C. S., STAGL, K. C., KLEIN, C., GOODWIN, G. F., SALAS, E. & HALPIN, S. M. 2006. What type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17, 288-307.
- BURKE, W. W. 1992a. *Organization Development: A Process of Learning and Changing*, Addison-Wesley.
- BURKE, W. W. & LITWIN, G. H. 1992b. A Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change. *Journal of Management*, 18, 523-545.
- BURNES, B. 2004a. Kurt Lewin and the Planned Approach to Change: A Re-appraisal. *Journal of Management Studies* 41, 977-1002.
- BURNES, B. 2004b. *Managing Change: A Strategic Approach to Organisational Dynamics*, Prentice Hall.
- BURNES, B. 2005. Complexity theories and organizational change. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 7, 73-90.
- BURR, V. 2003. *Social Constructionism*, Routledge.
- CALAS, M. B. & SMIRCICH, L. 1999. Past Postmodernism? Reflections and Tentative Directions. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24, 649-671.
- CALLON, M. 1986. Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay. In: LAW, J. (ed.) *Power, action and belief: A new sociology of knowledge*.
- CALLON, M. & LATOUR, B. 1981. Unscrewing the big Leviathan: how actors macro-structure reality and how sociologists help them to do so. *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology*.
- CAMERON, E. & GREEN, M. 2004. *Making Sense of Change Management: A Complete Guide to the Models, Tools and Techniques of Organizational Change*, London, Kogan Page.
- CARLILE, P. R. 2002. A Pragmatic View of Knowledge and Boundaries: Boundary Objects in New Product Development. *Organization Science*, 13, 442-455.

- CARNALL, C. A. 1999. *Managing Change in Organisations*, Prentice Hall.
- CHIA, R. 1995. From Modern to Postmodern Organizational Analysis. *Organization Studies*, 16, 579-604.
- CHIA, R. 2002a. Essai: Time, Duration and Simultaneity: Rethinking Process and Change in Organizational Analysis. *Organization Studies*, 23, 863-868.
- CHIA, R. 2002b. The Production of Management Knowledge: Philosophical Underpinnings of Research Design. In: PARTINGTON, D. (ed.) *Essential Skills for Management Research*. London: Sage.
- CICMIL, S. 2006. Understanding Project Management Practice through Interpretative and Critical Research Perspectives. *Project Management Journal*, 37, 27-37.
- CICMIL, S. & MARSHALL, D. 2005. Insights into collaboration at the project level: complexity, social interaction and procurement mechanisms. *Building Research and Information*, 33, 523-535.
- CICMIL, S., WILLIAMS, T., THOMAS, J. & HODGSON, D. 2006. Rethinking Project Management: Researching the Actuality of Projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24.
- CLARKE, A. E. 1991. Social worlds/arenas theory as organizational theory. *Social organization and social process: Essays in honor of Anselm Strauss*, 119-158.
- CLARKE, A. E. 2003. Situational analyses: Grounded theory mapping after the postmodern turn. *Symbolic Interaction*, 26, 553-576.
- CLEGG, R. S., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (eds.) 1996. *Handbook of Organization Studies*: Sage.
- CLEGG, S. 1990. *Modern Organizations: Organization Studies in the Postmodern World*, Sage Publications.
- COCKBURN, A. 2002. *Agile Software Development*, Addison-Wesley Boston.
- COHEN, M. D., MARCH, J. G. & OLSEN, J. P. 1972. A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17, 1-25.
- COHEN, S. G. & BAILEY, D. E. 1997. What makes teams work: Group effectiveness research from the shop floor to the executive suite. *Journal of Management*, 23, 239-290.
- COLLINS, D. 1998. *Organizational Change: Sociological Perspectives*, Routledge.
- COLLINS, H. M. & YEARLEY, S. 1992. Epistemological Chicken. In: PICKERING, A. (ed.) *Science as practice and culture*. University of Chicago Press.
- COLLYER, S. 2008. Project management approaches for dynamic environments. *International Journal of Project Management*, In Press, Corrected Proof.
- CONNELL, N. A. D., KLEIN, J. H. & MEYER, E. 2004. Narrative approaches to the transfer of organisational knowledge. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 2, 184-193.
- COOKE-DAVIES, T. 2002. The "real" success factors on projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 20, 185-190.
- COOKE-DAVIES, T. 2005. The Executive Sponsor - The Hinge Upon Which Organisational Project Management Maturity Turns? *PMI Global Congress*. Edinburgh, Scotland.
- COOPER, R. & BURRELL, G. 1988. Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: An Introduction. *Organization Studies*, 9, 91-112.
- COOPER, R. B. & ZMUD, R. W. 1990. Information Technology Implementation Research: A Technological Diffusion Approach. *Management Science*, 36, 123-139.

- CORBIN, J. M. & STRAUSS, A. 1988. *Unending work and care: Managing chronic illness at home*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- CRAWFORD, L. & BRETT, C. Year. Exploring the Role of the Project Sponsor. In: 15th IPMA World Congress on Project Management, 2000. IPMA, London, UK.
- CRAWFORD, L., MORRIS, P., THOMAS, J. & WINTER, M. 2006. Practitioner development: From trained technicians to reflective practitioners. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 722-733.
- CRAWFORD, L. & POLLACK, J. 2004. Hard and soft projects: a framework for analysis. *International Journal of Project Management*, 22, 645-653.
- CRESWELL, J. W. & MILLER, D. L. 2000. Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into practice*, 39, 124-130.
- CROSSAN, M. M., LANE, H. W. & WHITE, R. E. 1999. An Organizational Learning Framework: From Intuition to Institution. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24, 522-537.
- CROZIER, M. & FRIEDBERG, E. 1980. *Actors and Systems: The Politics of Collective Action*, University of Chicago Press.
- CUMMINGS, T. G. & WORLEY, C. G. 2004. *Organization Development and Change*, Thomson South-Western.
- CUMMINGS, T. G. & WORLEY, C. G. 2008. *Organization development & change*, South-Western Pub.
- CURRIE, G. & BROWN, A. D. 2003. A Narratological Approach to Understanding Processes of Organizing in a UK Hospital.
- CYERT, R. M. & MARCH, J. G. 1963/1992. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, Blackwell Publishing.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. 1997. *Narrating the organization: dramas of institutional identity*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. 1999. *Writing management: Organization theory as a literary genre*, Oxford University Press.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. 2001. Is it Possible to be a Constructionist Consultant? *Management Learning*, 32, 253-266.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. 2003a. Forbidden Knowledge: Organization Theory in Times of Transition. *Management Learning*, 34, 353-365.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. 2003b. Social Constructionism and Organization Studies. In: WESTWOOD, R. W. & CLEGG, R. S. (eds.) *Debating Organization: Point-Counterpoint in Organization*. Blackwell Publishers.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. 2008. *A Theory of Organizing*, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- CZARNIAWSKA-JOERGES, B. 1992. *Exploring complex organizations: a cultural perspective*, Sage Publications.
- CZARNIAWSKA-JOERGES, B. 1997. *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies* SAGE Publications (USA).
- CZARNIAWSKA-JOERGES, B. & JACOBSSON, B. 1995. Political Organizations and Commedia Della Arte. *Organization Studies (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG.)*, 16, 375-394.
- DAVENPORT, T. 1994. Re-engineering: Business Change of Mythic Proportions? *MIS Quarterly*, 18.
- DAWSON, P. 1994. *Organizational Change: A Processual Approach*, Paul Chapman.

- DAWSON, P. 1997. In at the deep end: conducting processual research on organisational change. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13, 389-405.
- DAWSON, P. 2003. *Understanding Organizational Change: The Contemporary Experience of People at Work*, Sage Publications.
- DAWSON, P. & BUCHANAN, D. 2005. The way it really happened: Competing narratives in the political process of technological change. *Human Relations*, 58, 845-865.
- DE MEYER, A., LOCH, C. H. & RICH, M. T. 2002. Managing project uncertainty: From Variation to Chaos. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 43, 60-67.
- DELONE, W. H. & MCLEAN, E. R. 1992. Information Systems Success: The Quest for the Dependent Variable. *Information Systems Research*, 3, 60-95.
- DELONE, W. H. & MCLEAN, E. R. 2003. The DeLone and McLean Model of Information Systems Success: A Ten-Year Update. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 19, 9-30.
- DEMERS, C. 2007. *Organizational Change Theories: A Synthesis*, Sage.
- DENZIN, N. K. 1989. Interpretative interactionism. *Newbury Park*.
- DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. 2005. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Inc.
- DESANCTIS, G. & POOLE, M. S. 1994. Capturing the Complexity in Advanced Technology Use: Adaptive Structuration Theory. *Organization Science*, 5, 121-147.
- DONALDSON, L. 2003. Position Statement for Positivism. In: WESTWOOD, R. I. & CLEGG, R. S. (eds.) *Debating Organization: Point-Counterpoint in Organization*. Blackwell Publishers.
- DOOLIN, B. 2003. Narratives of Change: Discourse, Technology and Organization. *Organization*, 10, 751-770.
- DOOLIN, B. & LOWE, A. 2002. To reveal is to critique: actor-network theory and critical information systems research. *Journal of Information Technology*, 17, 69-78.
- DOOREWAARD, H. & VAN BIJSTERVELD, M. 2001. The Osmosis of Ideas: An Analysis of the Integrated Approach to IT Management from a Translation Theory Perspective. *Organization*, 8, 55-76.
- DOURISH, P. 2004. *Where the action is: the foundations of embodied interaction*, The MIT Press.
- DUNPHY, D. 1996. Organizational Change in Corporate Settings. *Human Relations* 49, 541-552.
- DUTTON, J. E., ASHFORD, S. J., O'NEILL, R. M. & LAWRENCE, K. A. 2001. Moves That Matter: Issue Selling And Organizational Change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44, 716-736.
- EASTERBY-SMITH, M., ANTONACOPOULOU, E., SIMM, D. & LYLES, M. 2004. Constructing Contributions to Organizational Learning: Argyris and the Next Generation. *Management Learning*, 35, 371-380.
- EASTERBY-SMITH, M., SNELL, R. & GHERARDI, S. 1998. Organizational Learning: Diverging Communities of Practice? *Management Learning*, 29, 259-272.
- EASTERBY-SMITH, M., THORPE, R. & LOWE, A. 2002. *Management Research: An Introduction*, Sage.
- EDLEY, N. 2001. Unravelling Social Constructionism. *Theory and Psychology*, 11, 433-441.
- EDMONDSON, A. 1999. Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44.

- EDMONDSON, A. C. 1996. Three Faces of Eden: The Persistence of Competing Theories and Multiple Diagnoses in Organizational Intervention Research. *Human Relations*, 49, 571-595.
- EDMONDSON, A. C. & MCMANUS, S. E. 2007. Methodological Fit In Management Field Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 32, 1155-1179.
- EDMONDSON, A. C. & SMITH, D. M. 2006. Too Hot To Handle? How to manage relationship conflict. *California Management Review*, 49, 6-31.
- EISENBACH, R., WATSON, K. & PILLAI, R. 1999. Transformational leadership in the context of organizational change (Special Edition) *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12, 80-89.
- EISENBERG, E. M. 1990. Jamming: Transcendence Through Organizing. *Communication Research*, 17, 139-164.
- EISENHARDT, K. M. 1989. Building Theories from Case Study Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14, 532-550.
- EISENHARDT, K. M. & BOURGEOIS, L. J. 1988. Politics of Strategic Decision Making in High-Velocity Environments: Toward a Midrange Theory. *Academy of Management Journal*, 31, 737-770.
- EISENHARDT, K. M. & TABRIZI, B. N. 1995. Accelerating Adaptive Processes: Product Innovation in the Global Computer Industry. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 84-110.
- EMIRBAYER, M. & JOHNSON, V. 2008. Bourdieu and organizational analysis. *Theory and Society*, 37, 1-44.
- ENGWALL, M. 2003. No project is an island: linking projects to history and context. *Research Policy*, 32, 789-808.
- ENGWALL, M. & WESTLING, G. 2004. Peripety in an R&D Drama: Capturing a Turnaround in Project Dynamics. *Organization Studies* 25, 1557-1578.
- EVARD, B. L. & GIPPLE, C. A. 2001. *Managing Business Change for Dummies*, New York, Hungry Minds Inc (Wiley).
- EVERETT, J. 2002. Organizational Research and the Praxeology of Pierre Bourdieu. *Organizational Research Methods*, 5, 56-80.
- EWUSI-MENSAH, K. 1997. Critical issues in abandoned information systems development projects. *Communications of the ACM*, 40, 74-80.
- FERNANDEZ, D. & FERNANDEZ, J. 2008. Agile Project Management-Agilism Versus Traditional Approaches. *The Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 49, 10.
- FERRIS, G. R. & KACMAR, K. M. 1992. Perceptions of Organizational Politics. *Journal of Management*, 18, 93-116.
- FEYERABEND, P. K. 1993. *Against Method*, Verso.
- FINCHAM, R. 2002. Narratives of Success and Failure in Systems Development. *British Journal of Management*, 13, 1-14.
- FINE, G. A. 1993. The Sad Demise, Mysterious Disappearance, and Glorious Triumph of Symbolic Interactionism. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19, 61-87.
- FISKE, S. T. 1992. Thinking Is for Doing: Portraits of Social Cognition From Daguerreotype to Laserphoto. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 63, 877-889.
- FITZGERALD, G. & RUSSO, N. L. 2005. The turnaround of the London Ambulance Service Computer-Aided Despatch system (LASCAD). *European Journal of Information Systems* 14, 244-257.

- FLORICEL, S. 2009. A Theory Of The Response Capacity Of Complex Projects. *Academy of Management Conference submission*.
- FORD, J. & FORD, L. 2005. Deadline Busting: How To Be A Star Performer: . iUniverse.
- FORTUNE, J. & WHITE, D. 2006. Framing of Project Critical Success Factors by a Systems Model. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 53-65.
- FOUCAULT, M. 1969/2002. *Archaeology of knowledge*, Routledge.
- FOUCAULT, M. 1991/1975. *Discipline and Punish*, London, Penguin.
- FRAME, J. D. 2002. *The New Project Management: Tools for an Age of Rapid Change, Complexity and Other Business Realities* Jossey Bass Wiley
- FRENCH, J. R. P. & RAVEN, B. 1959/2001. The bases of social power. *The Negotiation Sourcebook*. Human Resource Development Press.
- GABRIEL, Y. 1995. The Unmanaged Organization: Stories, Fantasies and Subjectivity. *Organization Studies*, 16, 477-501.
- GABRIEL, Y. 1998. Psychoanalytic Contributions to the Study of the Emotional Life of Organizations. *Administration and Society*, 30, 292-315.
- GALLIVAN, M. J. 2001. Meaning to change: how diverse stakeholders interpret organizational communication about change initiatives. *Professional Communication, IEEE Transactions on*, 44, 243-266.
- GANDZ, J. & MURRAY, V. V. 1980. The Experience of Workplace Politics. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 23, 237-251.
- GARFINKEL, H. 1967/1984. *Studies in ethnomethodology*, Polity Press Cambridge, UK.
- GARFINKEL, H. 1986. *Ethnomethodological Studies of Work*, Routledge.
- GARRETY, K. & BADHAM, R. 2000. The Politics of Socio-technical Intervention: An Interactionist View. *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, 12, 103-118.
- GERGEN, K. J. 1999. *An invitation to social construction*, Sage.
- GIDDENS, A. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, The Macmillan Press.
- GIDDENS, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press.
- GIOIA, D. A. 2006. On Weick: An Appreciation. *Organization Studies*, 27, 1709-1721.
- GIOIA, D. A. & CHITTIPEDDI, K. 1991. Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Strategic Change Initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12, 433-448.
- GLASER, B. G. & STRAUSS, A. L. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Aldine Transaction.
- GOFFMAN, E. 1974. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*, Harper & Row.
- GOFFMAN, E. 1990/1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Penguin.
- GRANT, D., MICHELSON, G., OSWICK, C. & WAILES, N. 2005. Guest editorial: discourse and organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18, 6-15.
- GRATTON, L. & ERICKSON, T. J. 2007. 8 Ways to Build Collaborative Teams. *Harvard Business Review*, 85, 100-109.
- GREEN, S. 2006. The management of projects in the construction industry: context, discourse and self-identity. In: HODGSON, D. & CICMIL, S. (eds.) *Making Projects Critical*. Palgrave.



- GREENWOOD, R. & HININGS, C. R. 1996. Understanding Radical Organizational Change: Bringing together the Old and the New Institutionalism. *The Academy of Management Review*, 21, 1022-1054.
- GREGSON, N. 1989. On the (ir) relevance of structuration theory to empirical research. In: HELD, D. & THOMPSON, J. (eds.) *Social theories of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and his Critics*. Cambridge University Press.
- GRIFFITH, T. L. 1999. Technology Features as Triggers for Sensemaking. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24, 472-488.
- GUBA, E. G. & LINCOLN, Y. S. 2005. Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In: DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Edition)*. 3rd ed.: Sage.
- GUZZO, R. A. & DICKSON, M. W. 1996. TEAMS IN ORGANIZATIONS: Recent Research on Performance and Effectiveness. *Annual Review of Psychology* 47, 307-338.
- HACKING, I. 1999. *The social construction of what?*, Harvard University Press Cambridge, Mass.
- HACKMAN, J. R. 1987. The design of work teams. In: LORSCH, J. (ed.) *Handbook of organizational behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- HACKMAN, J. R. 2002. *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances*, Harvard Business School Press.
- HACKMAN, J. R. & WAGEMAN, R. 2005. A Theory of Team Coaching. *Academy of Management Review*, 30, 269-287.
- HALL, S. 2001. Foucault: Power, knowledge and discourse. In: WETHERELL, M., TAYLOR, S. & YATES, S. (eds.) *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*. Sage.
- HAMMERSLEY, M. 1992. *What's wrong with ethnography?*, Routledge London.
- HAMMERSLEY, M. 1997. Review of Social Organization and Social Process: Essays in Honor of Anslem Strauss. *Reviewing Sociology*, 10.
- HAMMERSLEY, M. & ATKINSON, P. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in practice*, Routledge.
- HANDY, C. B. 1995. *Gods of Management: The Changing Work of Organizations*, Oxford University Press.
- HANSETH, O., AANESTAD, M. & BERG, M. 2004. Actor-network theory and information systems. What's so special? *Information Technology and People*, 17, 116-123.
- HANSETH, O. & MONTEIRO, E. 1997. Inscribing behaviour in information infrastructure standards. *Accounting, management and information technologies*, 7, 183-211.
- HARDY, C. 1996. Understanding Power: Bringing about Strategic Change. *British Journal of Management*, 7, S3-S16.
- HARDY, C. & CLEGG, S. R. 1996. Some dare call it power. In: CLEGG, R. S., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (eds.) *Handbook of Organisation Studies*. Sage.
- HATCH, M. J. 1997. *Organization theory: Modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives*, Oxford University Press Oxford.
- HAYES, J. & ALLINSON, C. W. 1998. Cognitive Style and the Theory and Practice of Individual and Collective Learning in Organizations. 51, 847-871.
- HEEKS, R. & STANFORTH, C. 2007. Understanding e-Government project trajectories from an actor-network perspective. *Eur J Inf Syst*, 16, 165-177.

- HENDRY, C. 1996. Understanding and Creating Whole Organizational Change Through Learning Theory. *Human Relations*, 49, 621-641.
- HERACLEOUS, L. & BARRETT, M. 2001. Organizational Change as Discourse: Communicative Actions and Deep Structures in the Context of IT Implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44, 755-778.
- HERACLEOUS, L. & MARSHAK, R. J. 2004. Conceptualizing organizational discourse as situated symbolic action. *Human Relations*, 57, 1285-1312.
- HERITAGE, J. 1984. *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*, Polity.
- HICKSON, D. J., BUTLER, R. J., CRAY, D., MALLORY, G. R. & WILSON, D. C. 1986. *Top Decisions: Strategic Decision Making*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- HIGHSMITH, J. 2002. What is Agile Software Development? *Journal of Defense Software Engineering*.
- HIGHSMITH, J. 2004. *Agile project management: creating innovative products*, Addison Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc. Redwood City, CA, USA.
- HODGSON, D. 2002. Disciplining the Professional: The Case of Project Management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39, 803-821.
- HODGSON, D. & CICMIL, S. (eds.) 2006. *Making Projects Critical*, London: Palgrave.
- HOLMAN, D. J. & THORPE, R. 2003. *Management and Language: The Manager as a Practical Author*, Sage Publications.
- HOLSTEIN, J. A. & GUBRIUM, J. F. 1998. Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and Interpretive Practice. In: DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. (eds.) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. Sage.
- HOOKWAY, C. 2008. *Pragmatism* [Online]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2008 Edition), . Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/pragmatism/>
- HOPWOOD, A. G. 1987. The archeology of accounting systems. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 12, 207-234.
- HORTON, K. & WOOD-HARPER, T. 2006. The shaping of I.T. trajectories: evidence from the U.K. public sector. *European Journal of Information Systems* 15, 214-224.
- HOWELL, G., MACOMBER, H., KOSKELA, L. & DRAPER, J. 2005. Leadership and Project Management: Time for a shift from Fayol to Flores. *IGLC-13*, Sydney.
- HUBERMAN, A. M. & MILES, M. B. 2002. *The qualitative researcher's companion*, Sage Pubns.
- HUCZYNSKI, A. & BUCHANAN, D. 2001. *Organizational Behaviour*, Prentice Hall.
- HUXHAM, C. & VANGEN, S. 2003. Researching Organizational Practice through Action Research: Case Studies and Design Choices. *Organizational Research Methods*, 6, 383-403.
- INTELLECTUK. 2000. Getting IT Right for Government: A Review of Public Sector IT Projects. Available: [www.intellectuk.org/publications/guidance](http://www.intellectuk.org/publications/guidance) [Accessed April 2006].
- INTRONA, L. D. 1997. *Management, Information, and Power*, Macmillan Press.
- ISABELLA, L. A. 1990. Evolving Interpretations as a Change Unfolds: How Managers Construe Key Organizational Events. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 33, 7-41.
- IVORY, C. & ALDERMAN, N. 2005. Can Project Management learn anything from studies of failure in Complex Systems? *Project Management Journal*, 36, 5-16.

- JACK, L. & KHOLEIF, A. 2007. Introducing strong structuration theory for informing qualitative case studies in organization, management and accounting research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 2, 208 - 225.
- JANIS, I. L. 1982. *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes*, Houghton Mifflin.
- JEHN, K. A. & MANNIX, E. A. 2001. The Dynamic Nature Of Conflict: A Longitudinal Study Of Intragroup Conflict And Group Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44, 238-251.
- JIANG, J. J. & KLEIN, G. 1999. Risks to different aspects of system success. *Information & Management*, 36, 263-272.
- JOHNSON, P. & DUBERLEY, J. 2000. *Understanding Management Research: An Introduction to Epistemology*, London, Sage.
- JOHNSTON, R. B. & BRENNAN, M. 1996. Planning or organizing: The implications of theories of activity for management of operations. *Omega*, 24, 367-384.
- JONES, M. 2000. The Moving Finger: The Use of Social Theory in WG 8.2 Conference Papers, 1975-1999. *Proceedings of the IFIP TC9 WG9. 3 International Conference* Kluwer, BV Deventer, The Netherlands.
- JONES, M. & KARSTEN, H. 2008. Giddens's Structuration Theory and Information Systems Research. *MIS Quarterly*, 32, 9.
- JUGDEV, K. & MULLER, R. 2005. A Retrospective Look at our Evolving Understanding of Project Success. *Project Management Journal*, 36, 19-31.
- KANTER, R. M. 1999. The Enduring Skills of Change Leaders. *Leader to Leader* [Online].
- KANTER, R. M., STEIN, B. A. & JICK, T. D. 1992. *The Challenge of Organizational Change: How Companies Experience it and Leaders Guide it*, Maxwell Macmillan International.
- KATZENBACH, J. R. & SMITH, D. K. 1993. *The Wisdom of Teams: creating the high performance organization*, Harvard Business School Press.
- KEEGAN, A. E. & DEN HARTOG, D. N. 2004. Transformational leadership in a project-based environment: a comparative study of the leadership styles of project managers and line managers. *International Journal of Project Management*, 22, 609-617.
- KEEN, P. 1981. Information systems and organizational change. *Communications of the ACM*, 24, 24-32.
- KEIL, M., CULE, P. E., LYTTINEN, K. & SCHMIDT, R. C. 1998. A framework for identifying software project risks. *Communications of the ACM*, 41, 76-83.
- KEIL, M. & ROBEY, D. 1999. Turning Around Troubled Software Projects: An Exploratory Study of the Deescalation of Commitment to Failing Courses of Action. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 15, 63-87.
- KETS DE VRIES, M. F. R. 2004. Organizations on the Couch. *European Management Journal*, 22, 183-200.
- KETTINGER, W. J., TENG, J. T. C. & GUHA, S. 1997. Business Process Change: A Study of Methodologies, Techniques, and Tools. *MIS Quarterly*, 21, 55-80.
- KILDUFF, M. 1993. Deconstructing Organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 18, 13-31.
- KLEIN, G., MOON, B. & HOFFMAN, R. R. 2006. Making sense of sensemaking 1: alternative perspectives. *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, 21, 70-73.

- KLING, R. 1980. Social Analyses of Computing: Theoretical Perspectives in Recent Empirical Research. *ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR)*, 12, 61-110.
- KLING, R. 1987. Defining the boundaries of computing across complex organisations. In: BOLAND, R. J. & HIRSCHHEIM, R. A. (eds.) *Critical issues in information systems research*. Wiley.
- KLING, R. & GERSON, E. M. 1977. The Social Dynamics of Technical Innovation in the Computing World\*. *Symbolic Interaction*, 1, 132-146.
- KLING, R. & SCACCHI, W. 1982. The Web of Computing: Computer Technology as Social Organization. *Advances in Computers*, 21, 1-90.
- KLOPPENBORG, T. J. & OPFER, W. A. 2002. The Current State of Project Management Research: Trends, Interpretations, and Predictions. *Project Management Journal*, 33, 5.
- KNIGHTS, D. 1992. Changing Spaces: The Disruptive Impact of a New Epistemological Location for the Study of Management. *The Academy of Management Review*, 17, 514-536.
- KNIGHTS, D. & MURRAY, F. 1992. Politics and Pain in Managing Information Technology: A Case Study from Insurance. *Organization Studies* 13, 211-228.
- KOROBOV, N. 2001. *Reconciling Theory with Method: From Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to Positioning Analysis* [Online]. *Qualitative Social Research*, 2(3), Art. 11. Available: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0103119>
- KOSKELA, L. & HOWELL, G. 2002. The theory of project management: Explanation to novel methods. *IGLC-10*, Brazil.
- KOSKELA, L. & HOWELL, G. 2002b. The underlying theory of project management is obsolete. *PMI Research Conference*. Seattle, WA.
- KOTTER, J. P. 1995. *Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail*. Harvard Business Review on Change. Boston, USA: Harvard Business School Press.
- KOTTER, J. P. 1996. *Leading Change*, Harvard Business School Press.
- KOTTER, J. P. 1998. *Winning at Change. Leader to Leader* [Online].
- KOZLOWSKI, S. W. J. & ILGEN, D. R. 2006. Enhancing the Effectiveness of Work Groups and Teams. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 7, 77-124.
- KUHN, T. S. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
- KVASNY, L. & TRUEX, D. 2000. Information Technology and the Cultural Reproduction of Social Order: A Research Paradigm. In: BASKERVILLE, R. L., STAGE, J. & DEGROSS, J. I. (eds.) *Organizational and Social Perspectives on Information Technology Boston*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- LANGLEY, A., MINTZBERG, H., PITCHER, P., POSADA, E. & SAINT-MACARY, J. 1995. Opening up Decision Making: The View from the Black Stool. *Organization Science*, 6, 260-279.
- LATOUR, B. 1987. *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*, Harvard Univ Pr.
- LATOUR, B. 1996. On actor-network theory. *Soziale Welt, Jg*, 47, 369-381.
- LATOUR, B. 1999. On recalling ANT. In: LAW, J. & HASSARD, J. (eds.) *Actor network theory and after*. Blackwell.
- LATOUR, B. 2005. *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*, Oxford University Press.

- LAUFER, A., DENKER, G. R. & SHENHAR, A. J. 1996. Simultaneous management: The key to excellence in capital projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 14, 189-199.
- LAVE, J. & WENGER, E. 1991. *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation* Cambridge University Press.
- LAW, J. 1992. Notes on the theory of the actor-network: Ordering, strategy, and heterogeneity. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 5, 379-393.
- LAW, J. & CALLON, M. 1988. Engineering and sociology in a military aircraft project: A network analysis of technological change. *Social Problems*, 284-297.
- LAW, J. & CALLON, M. 1992. The life and death of an aircraft: a network analysis of technical change. In: BIJKER, W. E. & LAW, J. (eds.) *Shaping technology/building society: Studies in sociotechnical change*. MIT Press.
- LAW, J. & HASSARD, J. 1999. Actor network and after. Oxford: Blackwell.
- LAWSON, H. & APPIGNANESI, L. 1989. *Dismantling truth: reality in the post-modern world*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- LEE, N. & HASSARD, J. 1999. Organization Unbound: Actor-Network Theory, Research Strategy and Institutional Flexibility. *Organization*, 6, 391-404.
- LEWIS, M., WELSH, M., DEHLER, G. & GREEN, S. 2002. Product Development Tensions: Exploring Contrasting Styles of Project Management. *Academy of Management Journal*, 3.
- LEYBOURNE, S. A. 2007. The Changing Bias of Project Management Research: A Consideration of the Literatures and an Application of Extant Theory. *Project Management Journal*, 38, 61.
- LIDOW, D. 1999. Duck Alignment Theory: Going Beyond Classic Project Management to Maximize Project Success. *Project Management Journal*, 30, 8.
- LIM, C. S. & MOHAMED, M. Z. 1999. Criteria of project success: an exploratory re-examination. *International Journal of Project Management*, 17, 243-248.
- LINCOLN, Y. S. & GUBA, E. G. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*, Sage.
- LINDBLOM, C. E. 1959. The Science of "Muddling Through". *Public Administration Review*, 19, 79-88.
- LINDE, A. & LINDEROTH, H. 2006. An actor theory network perspective on IT projects. *Making Projects Critical, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan*.
- LINDEROTH, H. 2002. Bridging the gap between temporality and permanency. In: SAHLIN-ANDERSSON, K. & SODERHOLM, A. (eds.) *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary-Permanent Dilemma*.
- LINDKVIST, L., SODERLUND, J. & TELL, F. 1998. Managing Product Development Projects: On the Significance of Fountains and Deadlines. *Organization Studies*, 19, 931-951.
- LINEHAN, C. & KAVANAGH, D. 2004. From project ontologies to communities of virtue. In: HODGSON, D. & CICMIL, S. (eds.) *Making Projects Critical*. Palgrave.
- LUNDIN, R. A. & SÖDERHOLM, A. 1995. A theory of the temporary organization. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11, 437-455.
- LYYTINEN, K. & HIRSCHHEIM, R. 1987. Information systems failures—a survey and classification of the empirical literature. *Oxford Surveys in Information Technology* Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, NY, USA.

- MAHANTI, A. 2004. Challenges in enterprise adoption of agile methods-A survey. *Journal of Computing and Information Technology*, 14, 197.
- MAINES, D. R. 1993. Foreword. In: STRAUSS, A. (ed.) *Continual Permutations of Action*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- MAITLIS, S. 2005. The social processes of organizational sensemaking. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 48, 21-49.
- MALLON, R. 2008. *Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction* [Online]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/social-construction-naturalistic/>
- MANGHAM, I. L. 1979. *The politics of organizational change*, Greenwood Press.
- MANNING, S. 2008. Embedding projects in multiple contexts - a structuration perspective. *International Journal of Project Management*, 26, 30-37.
- MARCH & SIMON 1958. *Organizations*, Wiley; Chapman & Hall.
- MARCH, J. G. 1988a. Bounded rationality, ambiguity, and the engineering of choice. In: MARCH, J. G. (ed.) *Decisions and organizations*. Blackwell.
- MARCH, J. G. 1988b. A chronicle of speculation about organizational decision-making. In: MARCH, J. G. (ed.) *Decisions and organizations*. Blackwell.
- MARCH, J. G. 1996. Continuity and Change in Theories of Organizational Action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41, 278-287.
- MARCH, J. G. & SEVON, G. 1988. Gossip, information and decision-making. In: MARCH, J. G. (ed.) *Decisions and organizations*. Blackwell.
- MARKUS, M. L., AXLINE, S., PETRIE, D. & TANIS, S. C. 2000. Learning from adopters' experiences with ERP: problems encountered and success achieved. *Journal of Information Technology* 15, 245 - 265
- MARKUS, M. L. & ROBEY, D. 1988. Information Technology and Organizational Change: Causal Structure in Theory and Research. *Management Science*, 34, 583-598.
- MARKUS, M. L. & TANIS, C. 2000. The Enterprise Systems Experience-From Adoption to Success. In: ZMUD, R. W. (ed.) *Framing the Domains of IT Research: Glimpsing the Future through the Past*. Pinnaflex Educational Resources.
- MAXWELL, J. A. 1992. Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 63, 279-300.
- MCCASKEY, M. 1988. The Challenge of Managing Ambiguity and Change. In: BOLAND, R. J., PONDY, L. R. & THOMAS, H. (eds.) *Managing Ambiguity and Change*. Wiley.
- MCDONOUGH, E. F. & BARCZAK, G. 1991. Speeding Up New Product Development: The Effects of Leadership Style and Source of Technology. *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 8, 203-211.
- MEEK, V. L. 1988. Organizational Culture: Origins and Weaknesses. *Organization Studies*, 9, 453-473.
- MELTZER, B. N., PETRAS, J. W. & REYNOLDS, L. T. 1975. *Symbolic interactionism: Genesis, varieties and criticism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Books.
- METCALF, M. 2002. Argumentative systems for IS design. *Information Technology and People*, 15, 60-73.
- MILLER, S. J., HICKSON, D. J. & WILSON, D. C. 1999. Decision-making in organizations. In: CLEGG, S. R., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (eds.) *Handbook of Organization Studies*. Sage Publications.

- MILLS, J. H. 2003a. *Making sense of organizational change*, Routledge.
- MILLS, S. 2003b. *Michel Foucault*, Routledge.
- MINER, A. S. & MEZIAS, S. J. 1996. Ugly Duckling No More: Past and Futures of Organizational Learning Research. *Organization Science*, 7, 88-99.
- MINGERS, J. 2004. Real-izing information systems: critical realism as an underpinning philosophy for information systems. *Information and Organization*, 14, 87-103.
- MINTZBERG, H. 1989. *Mintzberg on management: inside our strange world of organizations*, The Free Press.
- MINTZBERG, H., RAISINGHANI, D. & THEORET, A. 1976. The Structure of "Unstructured" Decision Processes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21, 246-275.
- MINTZBERG, H. & WATERS, J. 1990. Studying Deciding: An Exchange of Views Between Mintzberg and Waters, Pettigrew, and Butler. *Organization Studies*, 11, 001-6.
- MITEV, N. 2009. In and out of actor-network theory: a necessary but insufficient journey. *Information Technology and People*, 22.
- MONTEIRO, E. 2001. Actor-Network Theory and Information Infrastructure. *From Control to Drift: The Dynamics of Corporate Information Infrastructures*. Oxford University Press.
- MORAN, D. & MOONEY, T. 2002. *The Phenomenology Reader*, Routledge.
- MORRIS, P. W. G. 2000. Researching the Unanswered Questions of Project Management. *Proceedings of the PMI Research Conference*.
- MORRIS, P. W. G. 2004. Science, objective knowledge, and the theory of project management. *Bartlett Construction and Project Management Research papers*. University College, London.
- MORRIS, P. W. G. 2006. Afterword: making the management of projects critical. In: HODGSON, D. & CICMIL, S. (eds.) *Making Projects Critical*. Palgrave.
- MORRIS, P. W. G., CRAWFORD, L., HODGSON, D., SHEPHERD, M. M. & THOMAS, J. 2006. Exploring the role of formal bodies of knowledge in defining a profession - The case of project management. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 710-721.
- MORRIS, P. W. G. & HOUGH, G. H. 1987. *The Anatomy of Major Projects: A Study of the Reality of Project Management*, Wiley.
- MORRIS, P. W. G., JAMIESON, A. & SHEPHERD, M. 2006. Research updating the APM Body of Knowledge 4th edition *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 461-473.
- MOTWANI, J., SUBRAMANIAN, R. & GOPALAKRISHNA, P. 2005. Critical factors for successful ERP implementation: Exploratory findings from four case studies. *Computers in Industry*, 56, 529-544.
- MULLER, R. & TURNER, J. R. 2007. Matching the project manager's leadership style to project type. *International Journal of Project Management*, 25, 21-32.
- MUTCH, A. 2002. Actors and Networks or Agents and Structures: Towards a Realist View of Information Systems. *Organization*, 9, 477-496.
- MUTCH, A. 2003. Communities of Practice and Habitus: A Critique. *Organization Studies*, 24, 383-401.
- NANDHAKUMAR, J. & AVISON, D. 1999. The fiction of methodological development: a field study of information systems development. *Information Technology and People*, 12, 176-191.

- NATANSON, M. 1962. Introduction: Schutz, A: Collected papers. 1. The problem of social reality. Nijhoff.
- NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE 2006. *Delivering successful IT-enabled business change*, London, The Stationery Office.
- NAUMER, C. M., FISHER, K. E. & DERVIN, B. 2008. Sensemaking: A Methodological Perspective. *CHI Workshop on Sensemaking*. Florence.
- NEWTON, R. 2006. *Project Management Step by Step: How to Plan and Manage a Highly Successful Project*. Prentice Hall.
- NOKES, S. & KELLY, S. 2007. *The definitive guide to project management*, FT/Prentice Hall.
- O'LEARY, T. & WILLIAMS, T. 2008. Making a difference?-evaluating an innovative approach to improving project delivery capability in a UK government department. *International Journal of Project Management*, 26, 556-565.
- OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMERCE. 2005. *Common Causes of Project Failure* [Online]. OGC. [Accessed 21/06/07].
- OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMERCE 2005a. *Managing Successful Programmes*. TSO.
- OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMERCE 2005b. *Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2*. TSO.
- OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMERCE. 2006. *Successful Delivery Toolkit - Web Site* [Online]. Available: [www.ogc.gov.uk/resource\\_toolkit.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/resource_toolkit.asp) [Accessed 21/06/07].
- OFFICE OF PUBLIC SERVICES REFORM 2003. *Improving Project and Programme Delivery: Increasing the Civil Service's Capacity and Capability to Deliver*. The Stationery Office.
- ORLIKOWSKI, W. & YATES, J. 2006. ICT and Organizational Change: A Commentary *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 42, 127-134.
- ORLIKOWSKI, W. J. 2000. Using Technology and Constituting Structures: A Practice Lens for Studying Technology in Organizations. *Organization Science*, 11, 404-428.
- ORR, J. E. 1996. *Talking about machines: An ethnography of a modern job*, ILR press Ithaca, NY.
- OZBILGIN, M. & TATLI, A. 2005. Book Review Essay: Understanding Bourdieu's Contribution to Organization and Management Studies. *Academy of Management Review*, 30, 855.
- PACKENDORFF, J. 1995. Inquiring into the temporary organization: New directions for project management research. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11, 319-333.
- PAPADIMITRIOU, K. & PELLEGRIN, C. 2007. Dynamics of a project through Intermediary Objects of Design (IODs): A sensemaking perspective. *International Journal of Project Management*, 25, 437-445.
- PARKER, I. 1990. Discourse: Definitions and contradictions. *Philosophical Psychology*, 3, 187 - 204.
- PARKER, M. 1992. Post-Modern Organizations or Postmodern Organization Theory? *Organization Studies*, 13, 001-17.
- PARTINGTON, D. 2002. Grounded Theory. In: PARTINGTON, D. (ed.) *Essential Skills for Management Research*. London: Sage.
- PERROW, C. 1979. *Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay*, Scott, Foresman and Company.



- PETERS, T. J. & WATERMAN, R. H. 1984. *In search of excellence*, Warner Books New York, NY.
- PETTIGREW, A. 1977. Strategy Formulation as a Political Process. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 1, 78–87.
- PETTIGREW, A. M. 1973. *The Politics of Organizational Decision-making*, Tavistock.
- PETTIGREW, A. M. 1985. *The Awakening Giant: Continuity and Change in Imperial Chemical Industries*, Blackwell.
- PETTIGREW, A. M. 1997. What is a processual analysis? *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13, 337-348.
- PETTIGREW, A. M., WOODMAN, R. W. & CAMERON, K. S. 2001. Studying organizational change and development: Challenges for future research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44, 697-713.
- PFEFFER, J. 1981. *Power in organizations*, 1981.
- PFEFFER, J. 1992a. *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*, Boston MA, Harvard Business School Press.
- PFEFFER, J. 1992b. Understanding Power in Organizations. *California Management Review*, 34, 29.
- PICH, M. T., LOCH, C. H. & MEYER, A. D. 2002. On uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity in project management. *Management Science*, 48, 1008-1023.
- PINCH, T. J. & BIJKER, W. E. 1984. The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology might Benefit Each Other. *Social Studies of Science* 14, 399-441.
- PINTO, J. K. & MANTEL, S. J., JR. 1990. The causes of project failure. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 37, 269-276.
- PINTO, J. K. & PRESCOTT, J. E. 1988. Variations in Critical Success Factors Over the Stages in the Project Life Cycle. *Journal of Management*, 14, 5-18.
- PINTO, J. K. & SLEVIN, D. P. 1987. Critical factors in successful project implementation. *IEEE transactions on engineering management*, 34, 22-27.
- PINTO, M. B., PINTO, J. K. & PRESCOTT, J. E. 1993. Antecedents and Consequences of Project Team Cross-Functional Cooperation. 39, 1281-1297.
- PLUMMER, K. 2008. Herbert Blumer. In: STONES, R. (ed.) *Key Sociological Thinkers*. 2nd ed.: Palgrave.
- POLKINGHORNE, D. 1988. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, State University of New York Press.
- POLLACK, J. 2007. The changing paradigms of project management. *International Journal of Project Management*, 25, 266-274.
- POLZER, J. 2004. *Creating Teams with an Edge: the complete skill set to build powerful and influential teams*, USA, Harvard Business School Publishing.
- POTTER, J. & WETHERELL, M. 1987. *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*, Sage.
- POTTER, J., WETHERELL, M., GILL, R. & EDWARDS, D. 1990. Discourse: Noun, verb or social practice? *Philosophical Psychology*, 3, 205 - 217.
- POWELL, W. W. & DIMAGGIO, P. 1991. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, University of Chicago Press.
- POZZEBON, M. 2004. The influence of a structurationist view on strategic management research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41, 247-272.

- POZZEBON, M. & PINSONNEAULT, A. 2005. Challenges in Conducting Empirical Work Using Structuration Theory: Learning from IT Research. *Organization Studies*, 26, 1353-1376.
- PRASAD, P. 1993. Symbolic processes in the implementation of technological change: a symbolic interactionist study of work computerization. *Academy of Management Journal*, 36, 1400-29.
- PROJECT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE 2004. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*, Newtown Square (PA), Project Management Institute.
- PRUS, R. C. 1996. *Symbolic interaction and ethnographic research: Intersubjectivity and the study of human lived experience*, State Univ of New York Pr.
- RANSON, S., HININGS, B. & GREENWOOD, R. 1980. The Structuring of Organizational Structures. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25, 1-17.
- RAVEN, B. H. 1992. A Power/Interaction Model of Interpersonal Influence: French and Raven Thirty Years Later. *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, 7, 217-217.
- RECKWITZ, A. 2002. Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5, 243.
- REED, M. 1996. Organizational Theorizing: a Historically Contested Terrain. In: CLEGG, R. S., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (eds.) *Handbook of Organization Studies*. Sage Publications.
- REMINGTON, K. & CRAWFORD, L. 2004. Illusions of control: Philosophical foundations for project management. *IRNOP*. Turku, Finland.
- RHODES, C. & BROWN, A. D. 2005. Narrative, organisations and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 7, 167-188.
- RIESSMAN, C. K. 2002. Analysis of personal narratives. In: GUBRIUM, J. F. & HOLSTEIN, J. A. (eds.) *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*. Sage.
- RORTY, R. 1982. *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972-1980)*, The Harvester Press Ltd.
- ROTH, G. L. & SENGE, P. M. 1996. From theory to practice: research territory, processes and structure at an organizational learning centre. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 9, 92-106.
- RUBEN, D. 1989. Realism in the Social Sciences. In: LAWSON, H. & APPIGNANESI, L. (eds.) *Dismantling truth: reality in the post-modern world*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- SAARINEN, T. 1996. An expanded instrument for evaluating information system success. *Information & Management*, 31, 103-118.
- SAHLIN-ANDERSSON, K. & SODERHOLM, A. (eds.) 2002. *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary-Permanent Dilemma*, Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- SALAS, E., SIMS, D. E. & BURKE, C. S. 2005. Is there a "Big Five" in Teamwork? *Small Group Research* 36, 555-599.
- SANDBERG, J. 2005. How Do We Justify Knowledge Produced Within Interpretive Approaches? *Organizational Research Methods*, 8, 41-68.
- SARKER, S. & LEE, A. S. 2003. Using a case study to test the role of three key social enablers in ERP implementation. *Information & Management*, 40, 813-829.

- SARKER, S., SARKER, S. & SIDOROVA, A. 2006. Understanding business process change failure: An actor-network perspective. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 23, 51-86.
- SARKIS, J. & SUNDARRAJ, R. P. 2003. Managing large-scale global enterprise resource planning systems: a case study at Texas Instruments. *International Journal of Information Management*, 23, 431-442.
- SAUER, C. 1993. *Why Information Systems Fail: A Case Study Approach* Blackwell Science Ltd.
- SAUER, C. 1999. Deciding the future for IS failures: not the choice you might think. In: CURRIE, W. L. & GALLIERS, R. (eds.) *Rethinking Management Information Systems: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- SAYER, R. A. 1992. *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, Routledge.
- SCHATZKI, T. R. 1996. *Social Practices: a Wittgensteinian approach to human activity and the social*, Cambridge University Press.
- SCHATZKI, T. R., KNORR-CETINA, K. & VON SAVIGNY, E. 2001. *The practice turn in contemporary theory*, Routledge.
- SCHATZMAN, L. & MAINES, D. R. 1991. Social organization and social process: Essays in honor of Anselm Strauss. Aldine De Gruyter New York.
- SCHEIN, E. H. 1991. Legitimizing clinical research in the study of organizational culture. Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- SCHEIN, E. H. 2004. *Organizational culture and leadership*, San Francisco CA, Jossey-Bass.
- SCHERR, A. L. 2005. Managing for Breakthroughs in Productivity. *Human Resources Management*, 28, 403-424.
- SCHEURICH, J. J. & MCKENZIE, K. B. 2005. Foucault's Methodologies: Archaeology and Genealogy. In: DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Edition)*. Sage.
- SCHMIDT, K. & SIMONEE, C. 1996. Coordination mechanisms: Towards a conceptual foundation of CSCW systems design. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 5, 155-200.
- SCHULTZE, U. 2000. A Confessional Account of an Ethnography about Knowledge Work. *MIS Quarterly*, 24, 3-41.
- SCHUTZ, A. 1962. *Collected Papers, Volume 1: The Problem of Social Reality*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- SCHUTZ, A. & NATANSON, M. 1962. *Collected papers. 1. The problem of social reality*, Nijhoff.
- SCHWABER, K. 2007. *The enterprise and scrum*, Microsoft Press.
- SCHWABER, K. & BEEDLE, M. 2001. *Agile software development with Scrum*, Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- SCOTT, W. R. 1987. The adolescence of institutional theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 32, 493-511.
- SEALE, C. 1999a. Quality in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5, 465-478.
- SEALE, C. 1999b. *The quality of qualitative research*, London: Sage.
- SEARLE, J. R. 1995. *The construction of social reality*, Penguin.
- SENGE, P. M. 1993. *The Fifth Discipline: Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* Random House Business Books.

- SHEARD, A. G. & KAKABADSE, A. P. 2002. From loose groups to effective teams: The nine key factors of the team landscape. *Journal of Management Development*, 21, 133-151.
- SHENHAR, A. & DVIR, D. 2008. Project Management Research-The Challenge and Opportunity. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, 36, 112-121.
- SHENHAR, A. J. 2001. One Size does not Fit All Projects: Exploring Classical Contingency Domains. *Management Science*, 47, 394-414.
- SHENHAR, A. J. & DVIR, D. 1996. Toward a typological theory of project management. *Research Policy*, 25, 607-632.
- SHENHAR, A. J. & LEVY, O. 1997. Mapping the dimensions of project success. *Project Management Journal*, 28, 5.
- SHENHAR, A. J., TISHLER, A., DVIR, D., LIPOVETSKY, S. & LECHLER, T. 2002. Refining the search for project success factors: a multivariate, typological approach. *R&D Management*, 32, 111-126.
- SHOTTER, J. 1993. *Conversational realities: Constructing life through language*, Sage.
- SILLINCE, J. A. A. 1999. The Organizational Setting, Use and Institutionalization of Argumentation Repertoires. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36, 795-830.
- SILVERMAN, D. 2001. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, Sage.
- SILVERMAN, D. 2005. *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*, Sage.
- SIMON, H. A. 1997/1945. *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-making Processes in Administrative Organizations*, Free Press.
- SMIRCICH, L. 1983. Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28, 339-358.
- SMITH, D. W. 2008. *Phenomenology* [Online]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/phenomenology/>
- SNYDER, W. M. & CUMMINGS, T. G. 1998. Organization Learning Disorders: Conceptual Model and Intervention Hypotheses. *Human Relations*, 51, 873-895.
- SODERLUND, J. 2004a. On the broadening scope of the research on projects: a review and a model for analysis. *International Journal of Project Management*, 22, 655-667.
- SODERLUND, J. 2004b. Building theories of project management: past research, questions for the future. *International Journal of Project Management*, 22, 183-191.
- SOMERS, T. M. & NELSON, K. 2001. The impact of critical success factors across the stages of enterprise resource planning implementations. *34<sup>th</sup> International Conference on System Sciences*, Hawaii.
- STACEY, R. 2001. *Complex Responsive Processes in Organizations: Learning and Knowledge Creation* Routledge, an imprint of Taylor & Francis Books Ltd.
- STACEY, R. 2002. *Strategic management and organisational dynamics : the challenge of complexity*. FT Prentice Hall.
- STAKE, R. E. 2005. Qualitative case studies. In: DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Edition)*. Sage.
- STARBUCK, W. H. & MILLIKEN, F. J. 1988. Executives' perceptual filters: What they notice and how they make sense. *The executive effect: Concepts and methods for studying top managers*, 35, 65.

- STAW, B. M. 1981. The Escalation of Commitment to a Course of Action. *Academy of Management Review*, 6, 577-587.
- STONES, R. 2005. *Structuration theory*, Palgrave Macmillan New York.
- STRAUSS, A. 1988. The Articulation of Project Work: An Organizational Process. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 29, 163-178.
- STRAUSS, A. L. 1987. *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, Cambridge University Press.
- STRAUSS, A. L. 1993. *Continual permutations of action*, Aldine.
- STRAUSS, A. L. & CORBIN, J. M. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, Sage Pubns.
- SUCHMAN, L. A. 1987. *Plans and situated actions: The problem of human-machine communication*, Cambridge University Press.
- SWANSON, E. B. & RAMILLER, N. C. 1997. The Organizing Vision in Information Systems Innovation. *Organization Science*, 8, 458-474.
- SWARTZ, D. 2008. Bringing Bourdieu's master concepts into organizational analysis. *Theory and Society*, 37, 45-52.
- SYDOW, J. 2006. Managing projects in network contexts: a structuration perspective. In: HODGSON, D. & CICMIL, S. (eds.) *Making Projects Critical*. Palgrave.
- TATIKONDA, M. V. & ROSENTHAL, S. R. 2000. Successful execution of product development projects: Balancing firmness and flexibility in the innovation process. *Journal of Operations Management*, 18, 401-425.
- TATNALL, A. & GILDING, A. Year. Actor-network theory and information systems research. In: 10th Australasian Conference on Information Systems, 1999. Citeseer, 955-966.
- TAYLOR, J. R. & ROBICHAUD, D. 2004. Finding the Organization in the Communication: Discourse as Action and Sensemaking. *Organization*, 11, 395-413.
- THE AGILE MANIFESTO. 2001. Available: <http://www.agilemanifesto.org>
- THE STANDISH GROUP 1995. *Chaos Report*.
- THIRY, M. 2001. Sensemaking in value management practice. *International Journal of Project Management*, 19, 71-77.
- THIRY, M. 2002. Combining value and project management into an effective programme management model. *International Journal of Project Management*, 20, 221-227.
- THITE, M. 1999. Identifying key characteristics of technical project leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 20, 253-261.
- THOMAS, J. 1998. Making sense of project management. In: LUNDIN, R. A. & HARTMAN, F. (eds.) *Projects as Business Constituents and Guiding Motives*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Press.
- THOMAS, J. 2006. Problematising project management. In: HODGSON, D. & CICMIL, S. (eds.) *Making Projects Critical*. Palgrave.
- THOMAS, J. & MENGEL, T. 2008. Preparing project managers to deal with complexity—Advanced project management education. *International Journal of Project Management*, 26, 304-315.
- TOWNLEY, B. 1993. Foucault, Power/Knowledge, and its Relevance For Human Resource Management. *Academy of Management Review*, 18, 518-545.
- TSANG, E. W. K. 1997. Organizational Learning and the Learning Organization: A Dichotomy Between Descriptive and Prescriptive Research. *Human Relations*, 50, 73-89.

- TSOUKAS, H. 1989. The Validity of Idiographic Research Explanations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14, 551-561.
- TSOUKAS, H. & CHIA, R. 2002. On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking Organizational Change. *Organization Science*, 13, 567-582.
- TSOUKAS, H. & HATCH, M. J. 2001. Complex thinking, complex practice: The case for a narrative approach to organizational complexity. *Human Relations*, 54, 979-1013.
- TURNER, J. R. 1997. *The handbook of project-based management: improving the processes for achieving strategic objectives*, McGraw-Hill.
- TURNER, J. R. 2004. Five necessary conditions for project success. *International Journal of Project Management*, 22, 349-350.
- TURNER, J. R. & COCHRANE, R. A. 1993. Goals-and-methods matrix: coping with projects with ill-defined goals and/or methods of achieving them. *International Journal of Project Management* 11, 93-102.
- TURNER, J. R. & MULLER, R. 2005. The Project Manager's Leadership Style as a Success Factor On Projects: A Literature Review. *Project Management Journal*, 36, 49-61.
- VAN MAANEN, J. 1988. *Tales of the field: on writing ethnography*, University of Chicago Press.
- VAN MAANEN, J., SORENSEN, J. B. & MITCHELL, T. R. 2007. The Interplay Between Theory and Method. *Academy of Management Review*, 32, 1145-1154.
- VICKERS, G. 1965. *The Art of Judgment: A Study of Policy Making*, Chapman & Hall.
- VINCE, R. 2001. Power and emotion in organizational learning. *Human Relations*, 54, 1325-1351.
- WACQUANT, L. J. D. 1989. Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, 7, 26-63.
- WACQUANT, L. J. D. 1998. Pierre Bourdieu. In: STONE, R. (ed.) *Key Sociological Thinkers*. NYU Press.
- WALSH, J. P. 1995. Managerial and Organizational Cognition: Notes from a Trip Down Memory Lane. *Organization Science*, 6, 280-321.
- WALSHAM, G. 1993. *Interpreting Information Systems in Organizations*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, NY, USA.
- WALSHAM, G. 1997. Actor-network theory and IS research: current status and future prospects. *IFIP TC8 WG 8.2 international conference on Information systems and qualitative research* Philadelphia, United States Chapman & Hall, Ltd. London, UK.
- WALSHAM, G. 2002. Cross-Cultural Software Production and Use: A Structural Analysis. *MIS Quarterly*, 26, 359-380.
- WALSHAM, G. & SAHAY, S. 1999. GIS for District-Level Administration in India: Problems and Opportunities. *MIS Quarterly*, 23, 39-65.
- WANG, E., CHOU, H.-W. & JIANG, J. 2005. The impacts of charismatic leadership style on team cohesiveness and overall performance during ERP implementation. *International Journal of Project Management*, 23, 173-180.
- WARD, J. & ELVIN, R. 1999. A new framework for managing IT-enabled business change. *Information Systems Journal*, 9, 197-221.
- WARD, J., HEMINGWAY, C. & DANIEL, E. 2005. A framework for addressing the organisational issues of enterprise systems implementation. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 14, 97-119.

- WARD, S. & CHAPMAN, C. 2003. Transforming project risk management into project uncertainty management. *International Journal of Project Management*, 21, 97-105.
- WATERIDGE, J. 1998. How can IS/IT projects be measured for success? *International Journal of Project Management*, 16, 59-63.
- WATSON, T. J. 1994. *In search of management*, Routledge New York.
- WEAVER, G. R. & GIOIA, D. A. 1994. Paradigms Lost: Incommensurability vs Structurationist Inquiry. *Organization Studies (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG.)*, 15, 565.
- WEBB, J., SCHIRATO, T. & DANAHER, G. 2002. *Understanding Bourdieu*, Allen & Unwin.
- WEICK, K. E. 1979. *Social Psychology of Organising* McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. .
- WEICK, K. E. 1989. Theory Construction as Disciplined Imagination. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14, 516-531.
- WEICK, K. E. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations* London, Sage.
- WEICK, K. E. 1998. Improvisation As a Mindset for Organizational Analysis. *Organization Science*, 9.
- WEICK, K. E. 1999. Conclusion: Theory Construction as Disciplined Reflexivity: Tradeoffs in the 90s. *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 797-806.
- WEICK, K. E. 2000. Emergent Change as a Universal in Organizations. In: BEER, M. & NOHRIA, N. (eds.) *Breaking the Code of Change*. Harvard Business School Press.
- WEICK, K. E. & QUINN, R. E. 1999. Organizational Change and Development. *Annual Review of Psychology* 50, 361-386.
- WEICK, K. E. & ROBERTS, K. H. 1993. Collective Mind in Organizations: Heedful Interrelating on Flight Decks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, 357-381.
- WEICK, K. E. & SUTCLIFFE, K. M. 2001. *Managing the unexpected: assuring high performance in an age of complexity*, Jossey-Bass.
- WEICK, K. E., SUTCLIFFE, K. M. & OBSTFELD, D. 2005. Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16, 409-421.
- WEICK, K. E. & WESTLEY, F. 1996. Organizational Learning: Affirming an Oxymoron. In: CLEGG, R. S., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (eds.) *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: SagePublications.
- WESTWOOD, R. I. & CLEGG, S. 2003. *Debating organization: point-counterpoint in organization studies*, Blackwell Publishers.
- WHETTEN, D. A. 1989. What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution? *The Academy of Management Review*, 14, 490-495.
- WHETTEN, D. A. 2002. Modelling-as-theorizing: A systematic methodology for theory development. In: PARTINGTON, D. (ed.) *Essential skills for management research*. Sage.
- WHITTINGTON, R. 1992. Putting Giddens Into Action: Social Systems and Managerial Agency. *Journal of Management Studies*, 29, 693-712.
- WHITTLE, A. & SPICER, A. 2008. Is Actor Network Theory Critique? *Organization Studies*, 29, 611.
- WICKS, A. C. & FREEMAN, R. E. 1998. Organization Studies and the New Pragmatism: Positivism, Anti-Positivism, and the Search for Ethics. *Organization Science*, 9, 123-140.

- WILLIAMS, D. & PARR, T. 2006. *Enterprise programme management: delivering value*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- WILLIAMS, T. 2005. Assessing and Moving on From the Dominant Project Management Discourse in the Light of Project Overruns. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 52, 497-508.
- WILLIAMS, T. 2007. *Post-Project Reviews to Gain Effective Lessons Learned*, Newtown Square, PA, US, Project Management Institute.
- WILLIAMS, T., EDEN, C. L., ACKERMAN, F. R. & TAIT, A. 1995. Vicious circles of parallelism. *International Journal of Project Management*, 13, 151-155.
- WILLIAMS, T. M. 1999. The need for new paradigms for complex projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 17, 269-273.
- WILSON, M. & HOWCROFT, D. 2002. Re-conceptualising failure: social shaping meets IS research *European Journal of Information Systems*, 11.
- WINOGRAD, T. & FLORES, F. 1987. *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design*, Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc. Boston, MA, USA.
- WINTER, M., ANDERSEN, E. S., ELVIN, R. & LEVENE, R. 2006a. Focusing on business projects as an area for future research: An exploratory discussion of four different perspectives. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 699-709.
- WINTER, M., SMITH, C., MORRIS, P. & CICMIL, S. 2006b. Directions for future research in project management: The main findings of a UK government-funded research network. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 638-649.
- WYSOCKI, R. 2006. *Effective software project management*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, NY, USA.
- YEO, K. T. 2002. Critical Failure Factors in Information Systems Projects *International Journal of Project Management*, 20.
- YIN, R. K. 2003. *Case Study Research: design and methods*, Sage Publications Inc.
- YUKL, G. A. 2002. *Leadership in organizations*, Prentice Hall International.
- ZACCARO, S. J., RITTMAN, A. L. & MARKS, M. A. 2001. Team leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12, 451-483.
- ZEY, M. 1992. *Decision making: alternatives to rational choice models*, Sage.