

**ORGANISATIONAL OBSTINACY AND ITS EFFECT ON ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE – A  
LONGITUDINAL ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The University of Manchester

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

### **ORGANISATIONAL OBSTINACY AND ITS EFFECT ON ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE – A LONGITUDINAL ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH**

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The Study identifies a lack of investigation into 'organisational obstinacy'. Organisational resistance is critiqued for ignoring the ambivalence of individuals' and groups' feelings around change. As a consequence, work on resistance has tended to concentrate on improving change management techniques rather than influencing organisational forces. In contrast, obstinacy is felt to contain positive as well as negative attitudes which both contribute to why change programmes falter. Organisational characteristics examined include frameworks of interdependencies, the conceptual and shared understanding of the organisational change paradigm being sought, and the flow of ideas within an organisation which illuminate the direction of change that is being pursued. A research model is adopted that identifies where organisational obstinacy might be best observed.

Using a longitudinal ethnographic Action Research single case study methodology, a four stage research programme is undertaken in a metropolitan local authority in the UK. Soft System Modelling is used to bring clarity to the Action Research methodology including a clear expression of the epistemology being adopted and a complex 'framework of ideas' being developed for each stage.

A coherent explanation of the key events that took place is summarised. Two important models are developed which illustrate how ideas might flow around the organisation and where connected interdependencies might become established. These capture the idea of a 'Winding 8' with 'points of crank' and a 'critical mass' comprising contributing elements to the whole change programme.

The key findings suggest that organisational obstinacy can be observed when the organisational equilibrium is disturbed by the strength of the introduced driving forces. Under the influence of this obstinacy the organisation re-establishes the 'old normal' surprisingly swiftly. A duality of attitudes, often held by the same people, which both support driving forward as well as restraint, suggests that obstinacy can be both positive and negative in its operation.

A definition of Organisational Obstinacy is offered.

The limitations in the methodology are discussed. Conclusions are drawn on the nature of organisational obstinacy and its operation and possible new directions for further research are offered.

## DECLARATION

The thesis presented is the candidates own work. No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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## PUBLICATIONS

Clifford N, 2001, 'Strategic Alignment between Senior and Middle Managers in Local Government and Health' International Journal of Health Quality Assurance Vol 14 Nos 2 & 3

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May you have a strong foundation, when the winds of changes shift  
'Forever Young' Bob Dylan*

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And finally, as I write this, my Mum Gloria, who would have been 90 today and came late to University study in her 60's and did her undergraduate and then masters degrees here at Manchester, I am proud to be joining you as an alumnus; I hope you would feel the same of me!

Nick Clifford

September 5<sup>th</sup> 2013

## ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Audit Commission
ACE	Assistant Chief Executive (Metville)
ALC	Applied Learning Challenge
BPR	Business Process Re-engineering
CE	Chief Executive (Metville)
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CMT	Corporate Management Team (Metville)
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CSCI	The Commission for Social Care Inspection
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
DfC	Director for Change (Metville)
FMA	Framework of ideas (F); Methods used (M); and Area of concern (A) in SSM
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
OFSTED	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PAT	Policy Action Team
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PLT	Programme Liaison Team (Metville)
SLT	Senior Leadership Team (Metville)
SSM	Soft Systems Modelling
TCT	Trios Cluster Team (Metville)
TLT	Transform Learning Team (Metville)
TMN	Transforming Metville Network (Metville)
TSO	The Stationary Office

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

I have been astonishingly lucky to have had a career that has spanned more than four decades during which I have worked in the private, public and voluntary sectors. During that time I have been a community worker, local government officer, consultant and academic. I qualified as a Town Planner just as the Secretary of State was announcing the 'party's over' for local government spending (Crosland 1975), a phrase repeated recently (Osborne 2008). I first worked in Bethnal Green, East London, as a Tenants' Association fieldworker. Many in the voluntary sector at that time heavily criticised local councils for their monolithic insensitivity. Yet they seemed to have no realistic plan on how to change things. Frustrated by this, I joined my local borough council with the clear intention to change local government for the better. Since then I have encountered many intelligent and committed people, passionate about delivering local services to meet local people's needs. And yet much of the form and nature of local government has remained resolutely the same. This study is the story of my search for an explanation for this lack of organisational change and the possibility that obstinacy might play a part.

The study concentrates particularly on local government in England but has wider implications for public organisations more generally elsewhere, and potentially for the understanding of change in all types of organisations facing similar challenges.

### **The Subject of the Study**

This thesis traces an action research partnership between a local authority (for reasons of anonymity I have named the authority Metville Metropolitan Borough Council, (MBC)) and its local business school (Metville Business School, (MBS)) that lasted for seven years. It seeks to reveal how the authority developed, innovated and stretched its organisational development thinking. It traces the journey the authority took and concludes that 'organisational obstinacy' may well be a key factor that is unaccounted for in the organisational dynamics of change programmes.

The thesis explains the change process that took place in Metville; examines the underlying theory of organisational development upon which it was based; and outlines the methodological approach for the study including its reliance on action research which tracked the 'story' of how the individual players and groups took up their respective roles within the process. It also draws

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some conclusions on how the experiment matured over the course of the seven years and finally theorises on why, in the end, it failed to make the key breakthrough to new organisational forms that the programmes foretold.

### **Literature Review**

My review of the literature identifies the lack of investigation into the systemic analysis of organisational obstinacy. Work on resistance has concentrated on individuals and groups and is often problematised as something that can be handled through improved 'change management' (Oreg 2003; Oreg et al 2011). Using the work of Lewin (1947) on force-fields, field analysis, and group dynamics and Kuhn (1962) on paradigmatic change I take a systemic approach to organisational analysis. This suggests that driving and restraining forces in an organisation are held in equilibrium around a set of common assumptions and that during any radical and fundamental change in ideas, these forces become highly contested and this impedes progress. Archer's (1998) ideas on morphostasis contribute to Bhaskar's (1998) notion of an interrupted wave of societal emergence and Kotter's views (1995) on organisational transformation are referenced. Further thoughts on organisational analysis are explored and management theories on paradigms are examined before a conceptual model of the research is put forward along with two research questions:

- 'Can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?'
- 'Are the characteristics of the forces that most drive paradigm change:
  - The strength of the inter-dependencies in the organisational framework?
  - The degree to which the conceptual understanding of the need to change is shared?'

### **Context**

The research programme took place in the context of new legislation and guidance aimed at modernising local government between the late 1990s and 2011. The performance and inspection regimes adopted by the Audit Commission played a significant role. A General Election held in 2010 proved to be indecisive and resulted in a coalition government coming to power - its priority was to reduce public spending and remove inspection and regulation as part of its approach to austerity.

## **Methodology**

The study reviews the possible ways that organisational obstinacy might be investigated and concludes that a multi-dimensional methodological approach incorporating a longitudinal ethnographic Action Research style case study, would be an appropriate way forward.

## **The Research**

The opportunity to create an organisational development partnership between MBC and MBS provided the means by which an Action Research programme could be run in parallel with an executive education programme. A four stage Action Research programme took place using a Soft Systems Modelling approach (Checkland 2000) clearly setting out the epistemological basis for each iteration. During Stages One to Three, a number of initiatives were tried out which cumulatively resulted in a platform from which a significant uplift in the whole programme could be launched. From this point rapid and significant progress was made but this turned out to be extremely short-lived and within a year the programme had effectively ended.

During all four stages, Metville concentrated on strengthening its organisational capacity by identifying opportunities for applying new learning in the form of challenges to current practice. Organisationally, the interdependencies across a number of contributing elements<sup>1</sup> were seen as key driving forces which were encouraged to shift the organisational equilibrium towards new ways of working – a 'Model 2'.

The discussion of my results and their analysis suggests that a coherent explanation of the events that took place in Metville during the Action Research programme can be captured in a model – a 'Winding 8'. I describe the 'top of the eight' in the form of an 'arena' (Dawson 1996) in which three analytical threads emerge:

- The first is that a critical mass can be assembled across a number of contributing elements that position people within a 'field' (Lewin 1939). This enables them to combine into a form of network (Goleman 1996) in which engagement within a corporate change programme is possible. This avoids restructuring the organisational form because the network is held together through interdependencies (Lewin 1947). However, such networks are actually

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<sup>1</sup> A glossary of key terms used during this thesis appears at the end of Chapter 8 and contains an explanation of how I have used each term.

## Chapter One: Introduction

vulnerable and the impact of restraining forces can quickly collapse them if the directions of change shift.

- The second is that the notion of 'flow' (Seshadri and Shapiru 2003, Healey 2013) is important in offering those with new ideas for change an opportunity to come forward and participate in a change programme. The visualisation of a 'line' which describes vertical and horizontal flow moving towards organisational reform (new methods) and a new functionality (new direction) (Nonaka and Toyama 2003) can assist in strategically aligning change programmes towards radical goals (Kuhn 1962, Kotter 1995, Bhaskar 1998). However, the roles of key players, particularly change champions (Burgelman 1983), need asserting as essential in enabling change ideas to progress.
- Thirdly, establishing change across an organisation requires the protection of the emergent contributing elements which occupy those new spaces and places (Lewin 1939, Goleman 1996) and which build up the overarching narrative (or 'brand') that then assert the 'new normal' (Ogilvy 2002). The 'pull' that exists within organisational obstinacy to 'revert' to the 'old normal' is usually 'waiting in the shadows' to re-emerge and re-assert itself through those who are the least comfortable with the 'new order'.

The evidence of my research in Metville suggests that the restraining forces (Lewin 1947) that exerted themselves during the latter part of the research period were simply too strong and resulted in the loss of critical mass, the impedance of flow, and the reassertion of the 'old normal'.

### **A Definitinon**

The evidence of the research suggests that it is possible to observe the phenomenon of organisational obstinacy, and in the case of Metville it was revealed in some detail. It is therefore possible to offer a definition:

***“Organisational obstinacy comprises the balance of the forces within an organisational field that leaves the equilibrium unchanged, even when there are compelling arguments for radical change to be enacted”.***

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### **Contribution**

I believe that the product of this study provides a number of contributions to this area of knowledge:

Firstly, I have explored a relatively new area of study which looks in more detail at the dynamics of change in programmes of organisational development. I have introduced a concept of organisational obstinacy which is embedded in ideas of driving and restraining forces (Lewin 1947) being balanced out in change programmes, leaving many of them unsuccessful. Organisational obstinacy offers a useful explanation of how organisational change dynamics might work.

Secondly, I have provided a definition of organisational obstinacy that summarises the findings of my own study that seeks to explain why, even when there is an obvious and compelling reason to choose a direction of radical change, organisations will 're-normalise' and retain their equilibrium in the old paradigm (Kuhn 1962, Archer 1998).

Thirdly, the models that were developed during the different iterations provide innovative ways of conceptualising driving forces for change. The 'Winding 8' model, including the 'points of crank', offers a useful diagram to explain the radical evolution of ideas which feed both top and bottom of an organisation and help move it from a 'Model 1' to a 'Model 2' position. The 'Populating the 8' diagram suggests how contributing elements provide a critical mass which, combined with flow and momentum, might 'tip over' an organisation into 'Model 2'.

Fourthly, I have methodologically undertaken a seven year Action Research case study using ethnographic data collection (Checkland 2000, Reeves Sanday 1979). Because of the length of the study it has provided both data and research experience of an extended nature that is rarely encountered.

Fifthly, because of the long association with the key individuals involved in the Metville programme (Checkland 2000), I was able to capture the duality of attitudes and feelings that enabled me to recognise the ambivalent and uncertain nature of driving and restraining forces as they impact on individuals (Lewin 1939, 1943, 1947). This enabled me to understand more fully the positive and negative effects of obstinacy that makes it such a fluid element in organisational change.

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Sixth, the study enabled me to carry out an extended Action Research programme with four fully worked-through iterations (Checkland and Holwell 1998) during which the examination of the scale and nature of the Framework of Ideas; the methodology and the focus on the Area of Concern (the 'FMA') has been deep and extensive (Checkland 2000).

Seventh, the conducting of a study of such length and complexity collecting data ethnographically from a single site case has provided a useful addition to the body of worked examples of this kind of research method and has therefore contributed to the practice of action research.

### **Possible Directions for Further Research in this Area**

The four separate and distinct stages to the Action Research provide a clear and recoverable process. The schematic and timeline that captured the shape of the growth curve provide accurate and reliable evidence of the events that took place. I am comfortable that this study met Checkland and Holwell's (1998) standard of a clear declaration of its epistemology and therefore it would be possible to take the key elements and replicate the approach in some other situation.

I discuss the limitations associated with my choice of methodology for this study. The nature of ethnographic data is highly dependant on the researcher's judgements and choices. The limitation of the data collected also relates to the single case study organisation – while the data collected was substantial it was nevertheless restricted to one organisation only and therefore the findings are likely to be more context specific. Comparative data would add to this study. Metville attempted a remarkably comprehensive programme which produced a conceptual understanding of change (critical mass, flow and paradigm change) that included a number of models (the 'Winding 8'; 'Points of Crank') that might suggest new approaches to this research in other organisations. Metville attempted to embrace a new paradigm that included moving from 'Model 1' to 'Model 2' even though a future Model 2 could not be described in detail. This was a significant step forward and could be further developed.

Using the Peirce (1908) notion of abduction, the results of my study may go some way to explain the 'surprising fact' of the 70% failure rate in organisational change programmes (Maurer 2010) and suggest that 'organisational obstinacy' is a 'matter of course explanation'

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(Peirce 1908) for such failures. For this to be tested more rigorously, more studies building on the results of my research would give greater certainty to the abduction.

I finally reflect on my experience of the doctoral process and the opportunity to investigate a concern to understand the process of organisational change more adequately. At a personal level, the academic process associated with performing research with rigorous professionalism and being forced to think clearly and in depth on the nature of a perennially challenging problem has been particularly rewarding.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

*There is an old social work joke that goes –*

*Q: ‘How many social workers does it take to change a light-bulb?’*

*A: ‘Only one, but the light-bulb has to really want to change!’*

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION:

The focus for this study is the search for an understanding of the role that obstinacy might play in organisational change. Considerable work has been done on analysing organisational change (for example, Handy 1993, Burnes 2009, Dawson 1996) and the failure to achieve success (Jørgensen et al 2008). Some feel that as many as 70% of change programmes fail (Maurer 2010). Explanations of why change programmes have not been successful tend to suggest that there was a management failure – either not to have produced a clear vision, or not to have clarified the strategy, or not to have executed the change plan sufficiently well (Pfeffer and Sutton 1999, Clegg et al 2008, Maurer 2010). Much of the management literature concentrates on techniques aimed at helping executive managers achieve the change they are seeking for their organisations. This study approaches failure from a different perspective – what happens if the organisation itself is genuinely conflicted in what it wants to achieve? Say, despite ‘the world’ urging organisations (such as local government in the UK) to adapt and modernise, the unwillingness of organisation to do so is too great; too obstinate? Say the light-bulb simply doesn’t want to change?

References to organisational obstinacy appear to be few. There are only limited instances of study into this subject. Stefanescu (2012) argues: ‘Rigidity and obstinacy in sticking to obsolete organizational behaviours generate negative effects, having serious implications on activity performance’. March (1995) foresees the future for organisations as entities that are disposable, interacting and adapting within a system that is ever changing yet remaining held together: ‘Imaginations of the future are portrayed as instruments of the organizational obstinacy required by such an adaptive system’. The lack of research in the area of obstinacy might be because the opportunities to study organisations longitudinally are rare - they are either too expensive, or the organisational changes are too great (such as in mergers and acquisitions) (Pettigrew 1990). It appears a conceptual model of organisational obstinacy is still yet to emerge and this chapter seeks to explore the possible shape of such a model and the research questions that might be appropriate to test it.

In searching for a model I have chosen two possible explanatory perspectives. The first is organisational frameworks – the complex webs of inter-relationships that exist across organisations (Lewin 1939, Goleman 1996); the second is the conceptual understanding of ‘change’ within which the organisation believes itself to be contextualised (Kuhn 1962). To begin with, the nature of obstinacy needs to be considered.

## **2.2 OBSTINACY – ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND ‘GETTING STUCK’:**

By its nature, obstinacy will only appear when something new is proposed to which there are objections. Obviously, were there to be whole-hearted agreement to a proposal there would be little evidence of obstinacy.

‘Obstinate’ has been defined as: ‘firmly adhering to one’s chosen course of action, or opinion, not easily persuaded; inflexible; self-willed; unyielding, not readily responding to treatment etc.’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1976). It is generally felt that obstinacy in these terms is a negative attitude – but an alternative view is that there can be a positive aspect to obstinacy; for example, when someone is ‘holding on to holding on’ because they believe themselves to be acting in the best interests of everybody and themselves and significantly protecting values that they hold dear.

C. P. Scott (1921), reflecting on 100 years of the *The Guardian* newspaper (then the ‘Manchester Guardian’) saw the social and institutional position of a newspaper as ‘much more than a business; it is an institution’. He felt a newspaper should have a moral as well as a material existence, and its character and influence were determined by the balance of these two forces. He saw character as a slow deposit of past actions and ideals and for him a good character implied: ‘honesty, cleanness, courage, fairness, a sense of duty to the reader and the community . . . nothing should satisfy short of the best, and the best must always seem a little ahead of the actual’. He saw the paper as a guardian of such values. Could ‘holding on’ to such values such as organisational ‘character’ be seen as a display of organisational obstinacy rather than simply resistance?

### **2.2.1 Resistance and value sets – the challenge:**

For this study the traditional view of ‘resistance’ to change as the natural reluctance of individuals to accept alterations in their status quo is challenged. The popular view of resistance sees it as a ‘push-back’ mechanism which then prompts managerial ideas about how to work around it (Oreg 2003, Oreg et al 2011). In most literature there is a section labelled ‘managing change’ in which handling resistance is listed as one of the problems that

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needs to be addressed. However, from a systems perspective Lewin (1947) sees resistance as a force within the whole system pushing in both directions (driving forces and restraining forces) to create equilibrium and not just pushing in a single direction. Concentrating on just one side would be therefore inadequate.

Dent and Goldberg (1999) examine the origins of 'resistance' and argue that Lewin first introduced the term (restraining forces) as a systems concept, as a force that affected managers and staff equally and that because the term is often stripped from its context it becomes a psychological concept only rather than organisational one. This personalises the issue into employees who are reluctant to change versus managers who want them to (driving forces). This kind of analysis has been seen in Oreg (2003) where the notion of a 'scale' of resistance which seeks to measure an 'individual's dispositional inclination to resist change' is suggested (2003, p680). Oreg et al (2011) carried out an inductive review with explicit reactions from staff within a model of change who displayed tri-dimensional attitudes (2011 p 461). These attitudes are triggered in three scenarios – those prior to the change itself based on the recipients' personal characteristics and their understanding of the internal context; those that are the result of perceptions as to the likely benefits and threats that the changes imply to the present situation, and finally those reactions that arise from staff understanding of the likely consequences of the change in the future. Goldstein (1988) argues from a more systems based approach using the concept of 'organisational autopoiesis' – the idea that a living system uses a survival mechanism that allows it to retain its autonomous identity even though its individual components are constantly interacting with its environment. Goldstein argues that resistance needs to be reframed in much the way that family therapy methodology sees a family resisting change as 'affirmations about how the family maintains unity by avoiding anticipated scenarios that would result in change' (1988, p18). Fruytier (1996) similarly argues that organizations should be conceptualized, as autopoietic systems through which 'redesign dialogues' can develop new methods for the successful management of change. March's (1995) ideas of changing organisational entities held together through organisational obstinacy within a stable system relate to the idea of autopoiesis as well.

Dent and Goldberg (1999) argue that the personal psychological model confuses the understanding of real change dynamics and needs to be dropped in order to make way for improved understandings of how change occurs in organisations. This is picked up by Lines (2005) who argues that the focus should be on the attitudes of organisational members where change is the object of those attitudes which trigger perceptions and reactions to change in terms of emotions, cognitions, and behaviours. Lines suggests that this

perspective allows organisational changes to be framed in terms of 'aspects that are relevant for change recipients because of their relationships with important values that are held' by the other members of the organisation (p8).

Piderit (2000) advocates a view that captures more of the complexity of individuals' responses to proposed organisational changes and notices that researchers have largely overlooked 'the potentially positive intentions' (2000, p 783) that might motivate negative responses to change. He is also concerned to interrupt the varied emphases in the conceptualisation of resistance that had 'slipped into the literature' (2000 p 783) that is blurring the 'complexities of the phenomenon' (2000, p 783).

### **2.2.2 Contested value sets:**

This later notion of change has been developed by Kegan and Lahey (2009) who, working with colleagues at Harvard Graduate School of Education, examine the phenomenon of resistance from a systems perspective. Key to this is their linkage of the sociology and psychology that was referred to by Lewin – 'working at change for extended periods with an organisation's leadership team and being forced to take an organisational view by colleagues whose thinking is shaped by that orientation, we have been led to a much more dialectical way of conceiving the relationship between the sociocentric and the psychocentric perspectives' (2009, preface). In a summary and worked example of Kegan and Lahey's work, Reams (2009) has outlined how hidden commitments to a non-change agenda impede change. Quoting Kegan and Lahey (p 118) he suggests that their discovery 'simultaneously provides a cognitive awareness of the change prevention system at work, and the emotionally unsettling insight that the true barrier to change comes from within the system'. Reams observes that this has led to critical insights that allows shifts to happen, these 'come when those involved in reflecting on the challenges faced realise they are actually sustaining the very system they wish to change' (2009, p173). Kegan and Lahey's (2009) work with organisations seeks to surface the inherent behaviour of the whole organisation by first identifying an organisational challenge that is recognised as a priority by all those participating; secondly identifying behaviours that further challenge or undermine progress on that challenge; and thirdly in reflecting on why those behaviours occur, ask the question 'what would be at risk if I did the opposite?'. By seeing the alternatives and asking why they are not being chosen, an understanding of why things end up 'stuck' can then be made. From this the 'big assumption' that is the key element keeping the whole system in a state of status quo, can then be determined. Kegan and Lahey suggest that this 'big assumption' can then be seen as 'the very good reason why you are holding yourself back: you want to

save your life as you know it' (2009 p 253); a form of internally contested value set in which the status quo is the better option to resolve the contest.

### **2.2.3 Summary (organisational obstinacy):**

All these contributions suggest that attitudes to organisational change should be treated as complex and that the personal values of organisational members may reflect positive motives that lie behind negative behaviour. In searching for an explanation for organisational obstinacy, recognising the importance of the defence of the 'organisational character' (Scott 1921) of local government as a positive motive to resist 'modernisation' seems just as important as the negative ones related to 'resistance'.

This leads to the first research question: 'Can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?' Finding evidence of such a phenomenon, however, is difficult. Using Lewin's equilibrium principle, for obstinacy to be revealed there would have to be an opposing driving force against which it would then act as a restraint. Two possible ways suggest themselves – one is to seek to investigate whether important inter-relationships form amongst those members who wish to achieve broadly similar aims who might form new 'frameworks' through which to undertake such a change. Those not sharing such aims might then undermine such a change through organisational obstinacy. The second is to investigate the extent to which members favouring an organisational change share a conceptual understanding of the nature and scale of such a change which would be large enough to assist in overcoming organisational obstinacy from elsewhere in the organisation.

## **2.3 A FRAMEWORK OF ORGANISATIONAL INTER-RELATIONSHIPS:**

### **2.3.1 Organisational frameworks**

An organisational framework (as contrasted with 'structure' or 'form') is seen as the fundamental patterning of an organisation. An organisational structure is usually seen as the chart that describes function and form with, for example, departments and divisions, and with establishment positions, such as head, manager or director. A framework is more associated with the distinguishing essence that explains why the organisation exists at all. In cultural terms the framework embraces some of the higher level activities and day-to-day working arrangements. It contains the 'basic assumptions' (Schein 1985), 'theories in use' (Argyris, 1976) 'macro structures to justify commitments' (Weick 2001, p 26) or 'underlying property of purposefulness' (Checkland 1981) of the organisation. A framework is also distinguished from a network in that a framework is taken to be capable of containing

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complex networks and is the means by which networks of networks form themselves into a coherent whole, such as the idea of 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Wilkins and Dyer (1988) use the terms 'frame' or 'cultural frame' to discuss the cultural characteristics that are associated with change mechanisms.

Further discussion on organisational patterning is seen in Burnes (2004) who offers a useful reappraisal of the work of Kurt Lewin on 'planned change' arguing that the integrated nature of Lewin's thinking has been overlooked in the adoption of his popular 3-step model of planned organisational change (Lewin 1947). The Model: 'unfreeze', 'change', and 'freeze', has attracted major criticisms and yet has become, Burnes feels, decontextualised from Lewin's overall work. Alongside the 3-Step Model, three other areas should be included – Field Theory; Group Dynamics; and Action Research. 'Field theory' in particular can greatly assist in identifying the patterns and systems that are operating in the field of study when seeking to analyse a situation. People's behaviour, thoughts, and analysis can be rooted in a number of different perspectives. Lewin brings to his understanding of the whole situation, an attempt to unravel these patterns - 'To explain social behaviour it is necessary to represent the structure of the total situation and the distribution of the forces in it' (Lewin 1939 p869). It is in this sense that my study adopts the word 'framework'. What seems particularly important here is Lewin's integration of sociology and psychology in seeking to explain the 'total situation' - 'The field theoretical approach is instrumental in integrating divergent physiological, psychological and sociological facts on the basis of interdependence' (Lewin 1939 p869)

For example, Lewin (1939), in using adolescents as a research group, describes their sense of belongingness to each other as particularly conflicted – he observes adolescents are neither children nor adults. This is because their sense of personal space, physically, emotionally and temporally is profoundly uncertain - the match between their 'reality' perspective and their 'irreality' perspective is rooted in their aspirations. Time horizons for a child might be relatively clear in the short term – 'I am going swimming this afternoon' – but for an adult much more uncertain – 'will I still be doing this job in ten years time?' This idea from Lewin's point of view, that time is 'scoped' within the individual as part of their sociological sense-making, contributes to a fundamental understanding of the facts of personal development. The change in time perspective is crucial since individuals tend to cast their aspirations and personal goals into a timeframe in which they then individualise themselves – in their 'life space' (Lewin 1939 p880). This space is therefore not simply physical but also temporal and helps the individual to create a 'realistic structuring of (their) plane of expectation' (p880). He argues that when an individual becomes highly uncertain

about which 'field' to place themselves comfortably within, they become marginalised and 'stand on the boundary' between life spaces (Lewin 1939 p881).

### **2.3.2 Frameworks and Field Theory**

Lewin (Lewin 1939) also argues that the movement away from one group (for example, being a child) towards another (being an adult) is a 'social locomotion' (p874). He feels that the professions of psychology and sociology fail to sufficiently recognise that the behaviour of a person depends on his/her 'momentary position' - often the world looks very different before and after an event and this changes 'the region' in which a person is located (p869). 'That is the reason why, for instance, a *fait accompli* is so feared in politics' (p874) he remarks. Thus being familiar with the 'normal' pathway through a field of multiple 'regions' creates a sense of certainty for the individual; more importantly 'a lack of direction in the field' leads an individual to feel very uncertain about the appropriateness of their behaviour within it. He goes on: 'a lack of cognitively clear structure is likely to make every action a conflicting one' (p876). In trying to describe this uncertainty he suggests that the 'psychological environment' needs to be regarded functionally as a part of 'one interdependent field, the life space, the other part of which is the person' (p878). 'This fundamental fact is the keynote of the field-theoretical approach' he says (p878).

Lewin juggles with some substantial concepts in field-theory since he is seeking to explain how an understanding of the interdependencies within a group or 'field' (where the number and degree of variations are substantial) can assist in overcoming dangerous or destructive patterns. He understands all human behaviour to be either a 'directed action' or an 'emotional expression' (Lewin 1939 p869). Experimental psychology, he claims, has shown that the formation of an individual's goals depends directly upon the laws that govern their level of aspiration, and particularly upon the effect which success or failure has on raising and lowering that level. He is therefore seeking to link the dependency of individuals' behaviour on their social situation. The sense of belongingness to a group has, he argues, less to do with someone's shared characteristics – their 'similarities' - and more to do with their interdependencies. His challenge to both professions of psychology and sociology is to undertake a transition away from concentrating on phenotypical concepts and move towards dynamic (genetic, conditional-reactive) constructs based on interdependence '... to my mind, (this is) one of the most important prerequisites for any science which wishes to answer questions of causation' (Lewin 1939 p884). How might such interdependencies be analysed?

### 2.3.3 Frameworks, networking and emotional intelligence:

A major contributor to the psychology of organisations has been the work of Daniel Goleman (1996). He suggests that the operation of emotional intelligence is a critical aspect in organisational success. Goleman's work appears to chime directly with Lewin's ideas about emotional expression. His analysis of the physical origins of emotional behaviour includes the idea that parts of the brain 'high-jack' individuals before their rational attributes properly engage (c.f. Lewin's 'directed action' and 'emotional expression') This can result in dysfunctional workplaces and poor decision making. Goleman sees feedback as the exchange of data about how a part of a system is working knowing that it will affect all the other parts in the system. He argues that 'good feedback' can be used proactively. As a result 'any part heading off course can be changed for the better' (1996, p151). In Goleman's view 'too many managers have poorly mastered the crucial art of feedback' (1996, p151) and by so doing, miss the opportunity to collect together the wisdom of those in the workplace. Goleman then suggests that 'many things that people do at work depend on their ability to call on a loose network of followers; different tasks can mean calling on different members of the network ... just how well people can 'work' a network – in effect make it into a temporary, ad hoc team – is a crucial factor in on-the-job success' (1996, p161). A study at Bell Labs, near Princetown, is cited by Goleman where a talent pool is identified containing 'stars' who are distinguished not by their 'academic IQ, but their *emotional* (his italics) IQ. The study (Kelly and Caplan 1993) observes that after detailed interviews, critical differences emerge in the internal and interpersonal strategies the 'stars' use to get their work done. Goleman (1996) identifies 'rapport' within a 'network of key people' as one of the most important aspects of such strategies (1996, p162). Goleman references the idea that complex webs of social ties form between colleagues who communicate between themselves, which solidify over time into 'surprisingly stable networks' (1996, p162). These 'highly adaptive, informal networks move diagonally and elliptically, skipping entire functions to get things done', (1996, p162 referencing Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993). Analysis of these informal networks suggest that they comprise 'webs' based on three varieties: communication (who talks to whom); expertise (key expertise and advice), and trust (networks of trust) – successful networkers have 'thick connections' (1996, p163) in all three areas. Goleman (1996, p162) lists other emotional intelligence factors that contribute to organisational success such as team working; building consensus; seeing things from the perspective of others; persuasiveness; and promoting cooperation while avoiding conflicts. Goleman argues that as knowledge-based services and intellectual capital become more central to corporations, improving the way people work together will be a major way to leverage intellectual capital. Goleman clearly felt that ... 'to thrive, if not

survive, corporations would do well to boost their collective emotional intelligence' (1996, p163).

#### **2.3.4 Organisational frameworks and analysing networks:**

The evidence of a systematic way in which this kind of analysis of an organisation is conducted – through the examination of the informal networks and their relative success organisationally - appears empirically light. This might in part be because the level of complexity is high and the degree of causal linkage between the strength of the networks and the success of the outcomes is difficult to track.

Dawson (1996) approaches this problem by recognising the complexity of analysis and breaks it down into six distinct components. She lists these as fundamental characteristics of any organisation, namely:

- the people and the degree of shared values between them that lead to the formation of interest groups
- the strategies and tactics adopted within the organisation
- the technology available and being used, including ICT
- the environment surrounding the organisation
- the organisational structures in place, and finally
- the culture of the organisation which creates the distinctive patterns of thinking and feeling within it.

Dawson (1996) introduces seven themes of analysis through which to ensure that the analysis is robust. She observes that organisations operate through interactive open systems which effect the way changes take place; they are highly complex systems and therefore experience a high level of uncertainty; finding a 'pathway' of best fit means confronting paradox and finding an appropriate balance between apparent contradictions; resources are always scarce and therefore the value of organisational trade-offs need to be clear; interest groups within organisations will have both conflict and consensus between them in large measure; opportunities normally have associated constraints within which choices have to be reasonably exercised; and finally, depending on the level of analysis (she distinguishes between four levels of analysis: societal, organisational, group and individual) how the relative importance of the preceding themes of analysis play themselves out.

Dawson (1996) argues strongly against models of change that are too overly dependent on rational cognition, decision making and action. She argues that organisations should be seen as 'arenas, in which a variety of activities, interactions and processes ... mediate the

effects of a collection of individual, organisational and social characteristics and result in a stream of outcomes, of which particular policies, plans and work practices are examples' (1996, p233). Instead of models based on supposed rationality she suggests that a model of change needs to recognise throughout, that chance, serendipity/ creativity, learning and intuition, all play significant roles. There are linear pathways, which include precipitating factors (where exactly are we starting from); through members' felt need for change in the organisation; to making decisions and implementing them; and to recognising the outcomes, both intended and unintended, that change the nature of the key 'characteristics' listed above (1996, p236). She cites Kimberley and Quinn, (1984); Peters, (1987); Kilmann et al., (1988); Quinn, (1988) and Pascale, (1990) as examples of those who identify 'imperatives' in the management of change. Dawson sees her six fundamental characteristics of organisations as swirling and encircling, interacting and inter-lapping loops through which, she believes, analysing any organisation should be conducted. While containing complexity, her model provides recognition that organisational change analysis is nevertheless possible.

### **2.3.5 Frameworks, networks and organisational culture:**

Brown (1995 pp91-93) is particularly concerned to look at the role organisational culture plays in the change process. Acknowledging the contribution from earlier writers (Lundberg 1985, Schein 1985), Brown outlines Dyer's cycle of cultural evolution (Dyer, 1985) which offers a possible framework through which to track large scale cultural transformations. Dyer's analysis is based on a 'sophisticated understanding of culture' (Brown p91). This analysis consists of four levels: artefacts, perspectives, values and assumptions. He divides his model into a series of six sequentially ordered stages but recognises that it is possible for the stages to overlap or to occur simultaneously. The first stage is triggered by crisis and leads to a second stage where a breakdown occurs in the 'pattern-maintenance symbols, beliefs and structures' (Brown 1995). These are altered by the emergence of a new culture seen mainly through new leaders, new reward systems and system-supportive beliefs. Thirdly, a new set of cultural artefacts, values and assumptions is then introduced which in the fourth stage results in a new power structure which is cemented in the fifth stage by the new leadership and finally in a sixth stage a new set of 'pattern-maintenance' symbols, beliefs and structures are institutionalised. Dyer's work suggests that pattern formation and pattern maintenance are key elements in organisational culture being altered.

### **2.3.6 Frameworks and strategic alignment:**

One further aspect of creating an organisational framework for change is to note the work done on strategic alignment (Nutt et al 1989, Clifford 2001). This suggests that the overarching strategic objectives will be seen (or monitored) through tracking the strategic

relationships and activities that contribute to their achievement. Porter's value chain ideas are important in this connection (Porter, 1985). Gathering data to check the relationship between what senior managers say (and do) about strategic objectives for change in an organisation, with data on what middle managers believe and then act upon in their day-to-day work, can say a great deal about the strength of the alignment.

### **2.3.7 Frameworks and institutional environments:**

Having traced the thinking behind patterning within organisations in general, I now turn to local government organisations in particular. Lowndes and Wilson (2003) suggest that a New Institutionalists' definition of institutions working in the field of localities might be 'the formal and informal rules that guide and constrain political behaviour'; ... 'the institutions of local governance (that) exist within, between and around particular organisations'. They suggest that 'Complex institutional environments' (2003 p280) exist within localities in which 'contested and value laden change' is worked out (2003 p280). From this perspective therefore, organisational frameworks contain the institutional and cultural interdependences that are the drivers for and the restraints to change. .

Lowndes and Wilson's work looks at the process of modernisation of local government in the period from 1997 to about 2002 comparing those drivers and restraints which tend towards the revision of the institutional framework and those which tend towards the solidification of the existing framework. Their conclusions suggest that there was an early Government intention to allow local government to reform. Councils were expected to revise their institutional frameworks, concentrating more on outcomes rather than processes and experimenting with altered patterns of relationships. Instead a pattern of a hierarchical dominance from national government concentrating on auditing grew up. A system of inspection that counted numbers, developed indicators, and graded councils emerged that assumed a fairly simple causal relationship between 'measurement-in' and 'what works-out'. The attempt to rescue the revisability agenda by offering local government some form of 'earned autonomy' to build alternative institutions took place within a context of a progressive shift from 'commitment based to control based strategies for change' (2003 p296) and in Lowndes and Wilson's view that rescue failed. They conclude that the inspection agenda won the policy battle driven by a 'robustness' discourse, rather than the 'revisability' agenda.

### **2.3.8 Frameworks and story-telling:**

In line with similar observations from Schein (1985), Lowndes and Wilson refer to Dryzek's comment that 'no institution can operate without an associated and supported discourse' (Dryzek 1996, p104). They examine New Labour's modernisation policies from the

perspective of the overarching discourse-in-use. Lowndes and Wilson (2003) argue that a new institutionalist view sees improved design as secured more 'by clear values rather than functional necessities, and by a capacity for learning and adaptation rather than environmental 'fit' ' (2003 p281). Because, they argue, 'institutions inevitably embody values and power relationships, institutional design is inescapably a 'normative project'' (2003 p281). Work in this area suggests that the more skilled and able managers concerned with innovation link their ability to tell stories that resonate with the present, while at the same time filling in the fuller picture of how the future might look – a form of 'scenario planning' (Olgivy, 2002 and 2011). Brown (1995) also refers to the importance of stories: 'people tend to tell stories ... in order to influence other people's understanding of situations and events' (1995, p13).

### **2.3.9 Organisational frameworks and strategic change:**

In seeking to answer the question of how organisations develop their frameworks for change, it is necessary perhaps to concentrate on their strategic thinking. This is one of Dawson's fundamental characteristics (Dawson 1996). Strategy is described across much of the literature as the framework for thinking about the future and possible options for action that will secure a number of identified and specific outcomes (see, for example, Scholes 2001, Mintzberg et al 1998, Grant 1995). A popular teaching rubric uses the term 'SMART' to describe outcomes which are Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (see, for example, National Audit Office, 2011). This check-list provides a strategic framework for the organisation's ambition for the future through a series of objectives that seek to achieve its aimed-for outcomes and which will tie in to individual's 'aspirations' (Lewin 1939).

A starting point for considering the development of a framework for change might be the way in which an organisation orders its strategic development. Mintzberg et al (1998) suggest that making strategy is neither specific nor scientific but rather varied and subject to different approaches (they use the term 'schools of strategy'). They identify ten typologies (or 'schools') that recognise the variation in the way people think strategically. They stretch across a wide spectrum from more detailed planning approaches across to the wider ranging organic and emergent approaches. They bundle these 10 schools into three broad clusters – those that are prescriptive (the way strategy ought to be done) viz: Design, Planning and Positioning; those that are more descriptive (the way it appears strategy actually gets done) viz: Entrepreneurial, Cognitive, Learning, Power, Cultural, and Environmental; and finally a mixture that 'really combines (all) the others' (1998, p6) viz: a configuration that is seen as being both '...episodic as well as transformational' (1998, p7). They do not argue that one

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approach is more valid than another. Since a framework for change will be subject to similar factors, strategy development should be seen as similar to organisational change; it is therefore worthwhile considering them in the same way.

So, if an organisation begins to think about change from the perspective of strategy, how is it then translated into a new framework for change? Two strands of thought have emerged from writers who have focused on innovation (Christenson & Overdorf, 2000; and Burgelman, 1983). Christenson and Overdorf's thinking is based on the notion of major strategic change needing to address an organisation's processes and values just as much as its resources. The importance of this thinking is that radical change is rarely initiated by the 'establishment' because for them the system isn't broken (the processes still work) and the values are reinforced. Their argument is that 'processes are not really as flexible or adaptable as resources are, and values are even less so' (2000, p6). So they feel that for successful change to emerge that deals with 'disruptive innovation' (2000 p5), a separation from the mainstream needs to occur. Heavyweight teams that ignore accepted processes and values need to be encouraged. A weakness they see in concentrating on resources at the expense of process and value change is the predominance of financial rather than innovative outcomes. Their conclusion is that management responsibilities should prioritise ensuring 'that capable people (are) ensconced in capable organisations' (2000, p10). Kawalek (2007) has coined the phrase 'bubble' to capture the same notion and uses a public sector case-study as an example of a protected innovation 'bubble' which enables radical reform to take place within a larger corporate organisation where the processes and values are altered.

Burgelman (1983) interrupts the traditional top down 'ten commandments' type style of strategy dissemination. He prefers a three-layered model that sees the initiation of ideas for change grow out of experiences that derive from the interface of the organisation with its customers (see Fig 1). Champions of new ideas are encouraged to push them through the traditional layers of middle and senior management – and the responsibilities of these more senior posts includes specifically nurturing good ideas. Senior executives then need to evaluate these ideas both strategically (to place the ideas within the proper context) and organisationally (to initiate changes in the organisational form).

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		Core Processes		Overlaying Processes	
		Definition	Impetus	Strategic Context	Structural Context
Levels	Corporate Management	Monitoring	Authorizing	Rationalizing	Structuring
	New Venture Development Management	Coaching Stewardship	Strategic Building	Organizational Championing Delineating	Negotiating
	Group Leader Venture Manager	Technical And Need Linking	Strategic Forcing	Gatekeeping Idea Generating Bootlegging	Questioning

Key Activities: Monitoring, Authorizing, Rationalizing, Structuring, Coaching Stewardship, Strategic Building, Organizational Championing, Delineating, Negotiating, Technical And Need Linking, Strategic Forcing, Gatekeeping, Idea Generating, Bootlegging, Questioning.

Diagonal labels: Product Championing (from Strategic Building to Strategic Forcing), Selecting (from Rationalizing to Organizational Championing).

Fig 2.1: Internal Corporate Venturing and organisational change (Burgelman 1983)

In this way Burgelman (1983) reverses the top-down ‘pull’ into a responsive bottom-up ‘push’. Burgelman (1983) gave this process the name ‘intrapreneurship’ to distinguish it from ‘entrepreneurship’ and to suggest that internal corporate ‘venturing’ is just as important as external development in turning good ideas into innovation within the organisation.

### 2.3.10 Summary (organisational frameworks):

To summarise, in considering the question of an organisational framework, it is observed that the literature makes frequent mention of networks of inter-dependencies within organisations. This study seeks to suggest that an organisation’s ‘patterning’ is set within an overarching framework containing interdependencies which are contextualised through narrative and story, and that this framework is seen as the means by which the organisation fundamentally orders itself. A framework of networks tends to exist in organisations which is not ‘de jure’ but rather ‘de facto’. This study seeks to address the strength of inter-dependencies that might lie within an organisational framework and their effect on change. The literature appears to suggest that only through more longitudinal studies to gather greater empirical evidence will sufficient evidence emerge to indicate whether a point of critical mass might become apparent.

## 2.4 CONCEPTUALISING THE SCALE AND NATURE OF CHANGE – AND HOW TO ADDRESS IT:

### 2.4.1 Perceptions of Change

The second key aspect of how organisational obstinacy might be examined can now be addressed – to what degree does the conceptual understanding of the need to change (such as the perception of the scale and nature of the challenges an organisation faces), need to be shared, in order to overcome organisational obstinacy? This is a level above merely improvement which Christenson and Overdorf label ‘sustaining innovation’ (2000, p5). It is a level that addresses the larger change that operates both outside and inside organisations facing major upheavals. In seeking an answer to this question the word paradigm has emerged as important.

### **2.4.2 Paradigm change:**

Kuhn (1962) discusses his definition of ‘paradigm’ by referring to his understanding of ‘normal science’. He addresses the issue of why ‘normal science’ becomes nurtured and protected within a single paradigm by suggesting that once an institutional establishment is in place it is ‘given’ that the ‘hard work is now done’. Those people ‘united’ within the paradigm tend not address any further ‘problems’ since they see normal science as having solved them. Kuhn spends a considerable amount of time explaining his use of ‘paradigm’. For Kuhn, the accepted ‘model or pattern’ is the day to day, how we look at the world - and he takes that aspect of its meaning and ‘appropriates’ (p 23) it for his work. Therefore, for him ... “in a science ... a paradigm is rarely an object for replication, instead, like an accepted judicial decision in the common law, it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions” (p23). Thus, established paradigms are not expected to be the subject of challenge in the same way the principle of precedent is not challenged in the development of common law.

Kuhn’s starting point is to examine his notion of ‘paradigm’. In his ‘essay’<sup>2</sup> he explains the process through which radical change takes place. For him a paradigm represents a model or patterning of a body of knowledge that produces an institutional framework through which scientists are acknowledged, respected, and rewarded. A paradigm shift therefore, requires ‘the partial relinquishment of one set of institutions in favour of another’ (1962, p93). A grouping of scientists who together accept a body of knowledge, do so ‘within a shared understanding of common assumptions and theories’ (1962, p24). In each new paradigm the exploration through ‘normal’ science of the anomalies and contradictions in the whole body of accepted scientific knowledge is undertaken and this is necessary to test the

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<sup>2</sup> Kuhn’s terminology – a great deal of Kuhn’s ‘tone’ towards himself and his work is self-detrimental. Much of the change literature cites Kuhn as ‘the’ early exponent of paradigm thinking, yet his ‘essay’ is quite tentative and clearly exploratory. He anticipated further work from researchers who might follow him working on this in more detail.

soundness of the paradigm. However, normal science tends not to challenge the fundamental nature of a paradigm's assumptions and its governing variables.

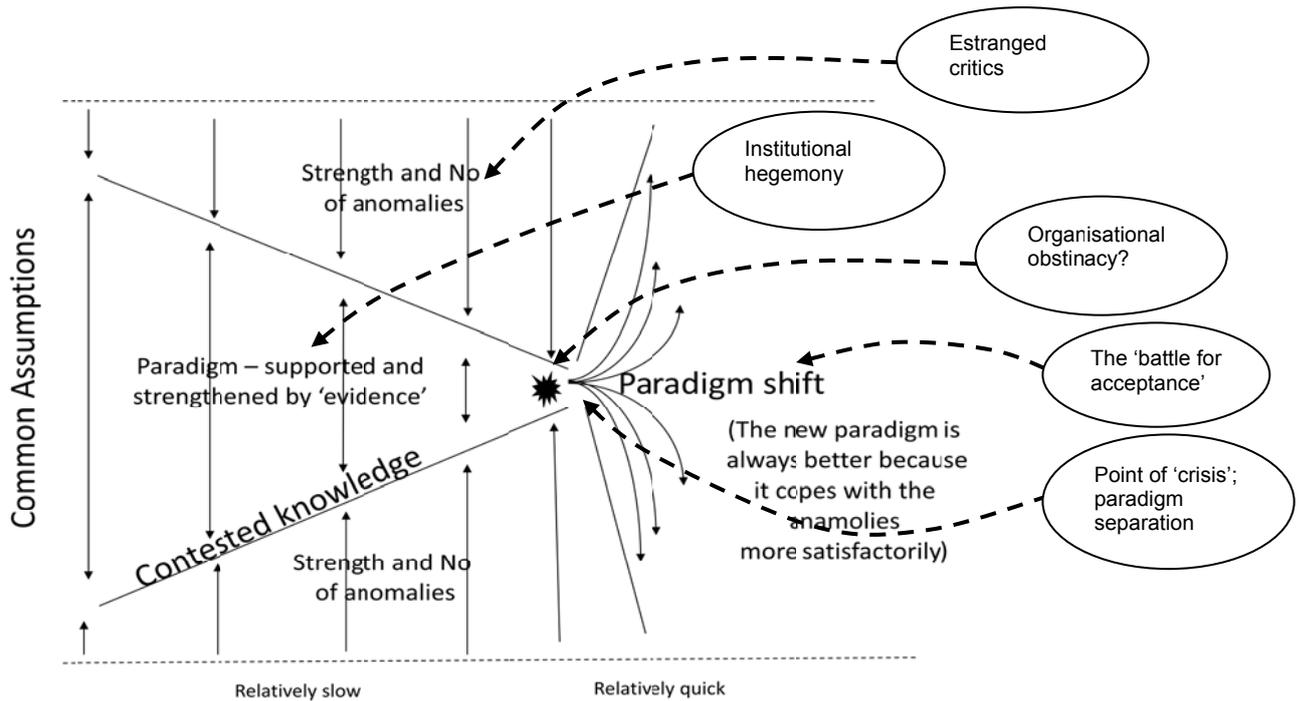


Fig 2.2: A model of Kuhnian theory of paradigm shift (Clifford, derived from Kuhn T 1962)

His findings suggest that 'normal' scientists ignore or, worse still, absorb anomalies and variation to make them 'fit' the prevailing paradigm – 'though they begin to lose faith and then to consider alternatives, they do not renounce the paradigm that has led them into crisis' (p77). In fact he asserts 'successful' members of the scientific community tend to deliberately stay within the paradigm limits to gain recognition from their peers (1962, p24) while others become 'increasingly estranged and ... behave more and more eccentrically within it' (p93), (see Fig 2.2).

His contention appears to suggest that there is a narrowing 'neck' in the paradigm, as the strength and number of anomalies outside it grow, which take the 'normal' scientific community (or professional institution) into a squeezed position that threatens its dominance.

The 'revolutionary' nature of the challenge, he argues, is similar to political and social revolutions in that the co-existence of the dominant paradigms cannot be sustained because the fundamental assumptions are different in every respect – 'a failure of existing rules is the prelude to a search for new ones' (1962, p68). 'The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgement leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other' (p77,

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his emphasis). However, this process is not a simple substitution - as the crisis of counterinstances ends with the 'emergence of a new candidate for paradigm ... (there will be) ... the ensuing battle over its acceptance' (p84). For example, he feels Copernicus' theory of planetary motion that explains a solar system with planets circulating a sun cannot co-exist with a notion of stars and planets circulating round the Earth. The 'paradigm shift' occurs when the new paradigm replaces the eroding one - 'Ptolemaic astronomy had failed to solve its problems; the time had come to give a competitor a chance' (1962, p76). In fact he spends two chapters (Section VII and Section VIII pp77-91) explaining how he feels the emergence of crisis takes place across science caught up in a paradigm change. The response to the crisis results in contentious disagreement and factionalism, which goes on to lead to a necessity for a process of revolution to take place that then 'separates' the two paradigms. As the crisis builds however, he suggests, there are no sharp dividing lines. Instead 'by proliferating versions of the paradigm, crisis loosens the rules of normal puzzle-solving in ways that ultimately permit a new paradigm to emerge' (1962, p80).

Kuhn appears to feel that paradigm revolution is both radical and relatively quick because the resolution of the impossibility of co-existence is irresistible. He sees the acceptance of a new 'world view' as the adoption of a completely new set of assumptions ('after Copernicus astronomers lived in a different world' p117). Kuhn concentrates on the process of paradigm change because he feels it explains the way that scientific knowledge fundamentally changes its set of common assumptions. He alludes to the role that institutionalism plays in cementing the new paradigm into place. His main argument is to establish an explanation of how natural science progresses. For him it begins with taking observations and then interpreting these observations into an epistemological framework. From this a broad understanding of that particular area of science is established, one to which the wider scientific community will then sign up.

Kuhn's reflections on the difficult process of scientific challenge are stark: he offers only two alternative conclusions: 'either no scientific theory ever confronted counterinstance, or all such theories confront counterinstances at all times' (p80). However, critically for my review for this study on the exposition on paradigm theory, he then unexpectedly shies away from the historical and critical elucidation of the philosophical nature of the question he has just posed by saying, "and these topics are here barred' (p80). He does not explore (although he clearly references his concern about it) the inter-relationships between natural science and social science and how obstinacy in scientific communities around change might be overcome.

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In this space, deliberately vacated by Kuhn, my current study seeks to explore why (social) scientists and practitioners might fail to recognise the need to properly explore counterinstances. Kuhn's first instinct is as a historian and not so much a philosopher – and possibly explains his choice to leave the philosophical question hanging. This thesis seeks to investigate more thoroughly the nature of the discovery of counterinstances and how handling the discovery relates to organisational and institutional change. Kuhn recognises that paradigmatic shifts, however radical, rely on the same data. Kuhn cites Butterfield (1949) saying any new paradigm is 'handling the same bundle of data as before but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework' (1962, p85); he recognises the 'duck-rabbit' issue: 'in some familiar situations (the scientist) must learn to see a new gestalt' (p112).

Kuhn appears to be identifying a form of institutional obstinacy in resolving crises around paradigm shifts. Interest in the obstinate nature of the acceptance of new ideas may be increasing – for example, Jee et al (2012) note '... newer, more accurate, or more useful ideas might be expected to consistently succeed older ones, in reality this isn't always the case'. The concern of this thesis is to use the Kuhnian explanation of how scientific communities radically alter their paradigmatic position while coping with the phenomenon of their establishment's reluctance to accept the shift, into the world of social science.

Half a century ago, in 1962, when Kuhn was first expounding his thoughts, the notion of a lens, through which everything made sense, that provided a world view of the whole situation, seemed attractive. Kuhn had perhaps hoped that 'paradigm thinking' would go on to provide a means to improve the process of investigating change and more empirical research would follow. Fifty years on, however, paradigm as a descriptor for fundamental and transformational change, is becoming less popular. As Richardson et al (2001) argue ... "It is becoming rather monotonous continually reading articles that tell us how the concept of and the requirements for the modern organisation are changing, how these are more complex than ever, and how a paradigm shift is necessary in order to facilitate our continued analysis, and management, of such entities' (2001 p6). Richardson et al. list the modern management mantras as: the search for distributed decision-making; the encouragement of individual autonomy; and the need to innovate in the rapidly changing environment. They characterise these as the apparent 'New World Order' (p6). The use of the word paradigm they feel is linked to the rejection of the "mechanistic, efficiency-driven, hierarchical, command-and-control organisation." (p6). They argue strongly that change, especially organisational change, needs to be contextualised within a complex understanding of how organisations work and how they change. Too simplistic an analysis that equates paradigm

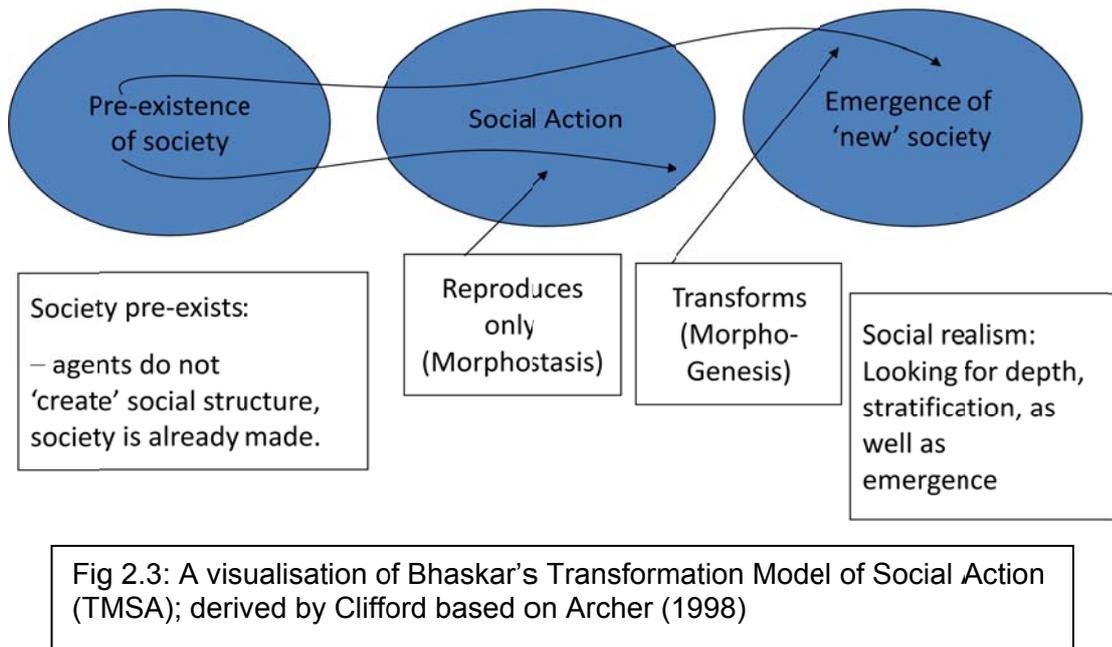
with something that is neither radical nor transformational simply perpetuates partial and inappropriate attempts to improve an organisation, when the real task is to change it.

### 2.4.3 Paradigm Change and Society

Giddens (1984) argues that society principally comprises the totality of individuals (summarised as 'no people, no society'). These individuals through a combination of nature and nurture produce a framework for society which at the same time orders and structures the actions of the actors in that society. This duality of structure and agency, or society and individual, plays out in the changing nature of the world and its institutions. Two perspectives emerge – one is individualism that sees the combination of all the activity of the different agents and actors bringing into being 'society' and the other the holist perspective where society is seen as an entity, describable as itself without reference to the whole collection of individuals and their actions.

More recently the notion of 'emergence' of a societal framework is being explored. Bhaskar (1998) suggests that 'society' might have an underlying composition in existence already. Archer (1998) views this work of particular interest because Bhaskar's ontological realism, 'premised explicitly on emergence, is used to develop the framework of social theory which seems set fair to navigate a passage between individualism and holism' (p357). This framework might be characterised as containing a notion of society that is made up of these people, here present, and *those that came before* (my emphasis). This approach forms the roots to the Bhaskarian notion of transcendental realism. This is not simply restricted to scientific realism but is also blended with a social ontological perspective. For Bhaskar (1998) the goal of science is to discover the causal mechanisms that generate major change. He is less concerned with the empirical approach of explaining 'what things do' and more concerned with the 'essential nature' of causal factors and the potential to operate the way they do. Archer (1998) notes there is a 'glaring absence of bold social theories which uncompromisingly make 'emergence' their central tenet' (p356).

She argues powerfully for the inclusion of the notions of morphogenesis (those outcomes that are transformational) and morphostasis (those outcomes that reinforce society in its present form) into the work of transcendental realism (see Fig 2.3)



Lawson (1998) builds on the critical realism of Bhaskar identifying an open system for society that contains deep structures and underlying causal mechanisms which give rise to the pattern of observed events and can then explain a general social ontology. For both Bhaskar and Lawson these deep structures and underlying mechanisms influence the outcome of events. However, it results in a messy and contingent knowledge production process. Unlike positivist elaborations of events that come to firm conclusions, Bhaskar's work leaves knowledge partial and contingent and therefore contested. Emergence suggests that society is in fact preformed and contains the essence of its future existence already and that players either 'transform' it into that (pre)formation or simply reproduce it as it is at that moment (c.f. Archer's morphogenesis and morphostasis). A strong contender to form such a framework for analysis was Bhaskar's transformational model of social action (TMSA). This suggests that the past sits alongside the present and pre-configures the emergence of the present patterns and models of society that then emerge into the future.

Archer's (1998) use of morphogenesis, which originates in molecular biology, suggests that each cell 'knows' what it is to be eventually even though the complex organism it comprises is not yet formed. The analogy is that society is as yet ill-formed but each part instinctively 'knows' what it is doing/ is about to do. Emergence is therefore based on the notion that what has been in the past, what is now, and what will/ might be for the future are all inter-related. It represents a combined Darwinian evolution of society alongside a higher level of organism/ society that is yet to emerge. Archer argues that pre-existence and autonomy denote discontinuities in the structuring and restructuring processes which can only be

grasped 'by making analytical distinctions between the before (phase 1), the during (phase 2) and the after (phase 3)' (p358).

The positivists' view of causation suggests that an object is subject to causal influences that produce a particular effect. Critical realists however, suggest that objects are subject to causal powers and liabilities that 'might' produce an effect. These causal powers and liabilities are attributed to these objects independently of any particular pattern of events and will exist by virtue of the nature of the object on which the mechanisms are acting.

Both Giddens and Bhaskar suggest that the maintenance of an organisational framework may well rely, in part, on the paradigmatic context in which an organisation is working. Thus, for example, in the public sector, if the organisational framework is broadly in line with the understood nature of how to administer public services, then most organisations will follow that framework because it falls within the accepted paradigm of the day. It is not, therefore, a consequence of the internal pressure 'not to change' that cements the organisational framework in place, but the wider paradigmatic context for which there is no other effective (or 'known' ) way to operate (morphostasis).

#### **2.4.4 Recent paradigms recognised in the literature:**

Looking now at recent consideration by management theorists of paradigm change, Burnes (2009) describes paradigms as 'a way of looking at and interpreting the world: a framework of basic assumptions, theories and models that are commonly and strongly accepted and shared' (2009, p97). He then traces a period of change over the past thirty years. "In effect, what we can see from the beginning of the 1970's is the emergence of a paradigm shift, or, to be more accurate, the search for new, more appropriate paradigms. It seemed as if the changes taking pace in the business environment were so enormous and rapid that existing paradigms, whatever their past merits, were breaking down and new ones emerging." (2009, p99). Three 'proto-paradigms' are seen as appearing during the following 20 years or so. The first is a 'culture-excellence' paradigm, one most closely attributed to Peters (1987) and Moss Kanter (1983); Charles Handy (1999) is also included in this paradigm. Handy develops a three sided view: 'shamrock organisations' - a core of people around whom satellites of specialists or short term additions are clustered; 'federal' organisations working as networks aligned around a common purpose, and finally 'triple i' organisations that place higher value on information, intelligence and ideas. The second paradigm, partly in reaction to the first, seeks to adopt the corporate 'Japanese Management' (2009, p132) type of organisation which saw such success during the 80's and 90's. It picks up on the excellence element but not the cultural aspect. This paradigm concentrates on excellence

from the point of view of continual improvement with a concentration on consistency (reduced variation); efficiency (use of materials and production methods that create 'lean' environments) and economy (a ruthless concentration on cost to drive out inefficiencies). With the Japanese Management systems, however, there are also traditional 'eastern' cultural elements such as loyalty to the firm; protection of the individual and family; and long term service in a strongly hierarchical environment, all of which translate less well into more 'western' cultures.

### **2.4.5 Organisational Learning:**

Leading on from both these paradigms, Burnes identifies a third proto-paradigm – one of 'Organisational Learning' (2009, p145). This recognises the intense pressures faced by organisations from globalisation; climate change; technological change; the rise of e-commerce; situations where customers and suppliers can be both competitors and allies at the same time; and the changing emphasis from quantity to quality and from products to services. It recognises the growing complexity of the modern world and seeks ways to acquire and utilise new knowledge quickly. It seeks to fuse the benefits from the speed of the utilisation of knowledge by Japanese Management style organisations with an emphasis on translating individual learning into organisational learning. It also accepts the methodological shortcomings in the culture-excellence approach (Carroll, 1983; Lawler, 1985) where culture and politics appear to be the 'Achilles Heel' of approaches to managing organisations: 'Despite these concerns and criticisms (inequality, insecurity, trickle-down fallacy) culture-excellence has become the most influential approach to running organisations in the USA and Europe ...' (Burnes, 2009 p132). He notes the observation of Probst and Burchel (1997) that 'organisational learning offers an alternative paradigm by which systems can change, thus permitting us to redefine the economy and society'. (Burnes, 2009 p146).

Tsang (1997) is noted by Burnes as saying 'organisational learning is a concept used to describe certain types of activity that take place in an organisation while the learning organisation refers to a particular type of organisation in and of itself. Nevertheless, there is a simple relationship between the two – a learning organisation is one that is good at organisational learning.' (Burnes 2009, p146).

Burnes discusses the wider understanding of organisational learning from two perspectives. Firstly, those things that tend to keep an organisation in a state of 'being' and therefore maintaining its framework and secondly, those which take an organisation into a state of 'becoming' which tend towards changing its framework. This resonates with Archer's (1998)

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view of morphostasis and morphogenesis. Burnes (2009, p146) refers to six disciplinary backgrounds (identified by Easterby-Smith, 1997) through which organisational learning is studied. These are: psychology; management science; sociology; organisational theory; production management; and cultural anthropology. Wang and Ahmed (2003) use five different foci through which to address organisational learning – collectivity; process or system; culture or metaphor; knowledge management; and continuous improvement. This suggests that, paradigmatically, a range of significant influences bear down on an organisation's members through which they seek to understand what it is they should be achieving. And the pressure is intense – as Cummings and Worley (2001) note 'in today's environments ... learning is directed increasingly at transformational change' (in Burnes, 2009 p147). Burnes recognises that 'it is the potential of organisational learning to enable organisations to reinvent themselves in order to compete in the changing and increasingly uncertain and competitive environment that is making it such an attractive proposition for many managers' (2009, p147).

Senge (1990) identifies five 'disciplines' that under-pin organisational learning: personal mastery; mental models; shared visions; team learning and systems thinking. The ability to think systemically is the key - he observes: 'the art of systems thinking lies in being able to recognise increasingly (dynamically) complex and subtle structures ... amid the wealth of details, pressures and cross-currents that attend all real management settings. In fact, the essence of mastering systems thinking as a management discipline lies in seeing patterns where others only see events and forces to react to' (1990, p30).

The work of Argyris and Schön (1978) draws on the understanding that all observation is contextualised – thus, the mental models we use, to make sense of a situation, colour the way we then act. They distinguish between professed theories of behaviour and thought (espoused theories) and those theories that are clearly actually being used (theories-in-use) and suggest that when, organisationally, there is conflict between the 'walk' and the 'talk' it has the effect of impairing the organisation and weakening the strategic alignment. Their typology of adaptive learning (fixing 'the problem') they call single-loop learning; reconstructive learning (re-evaluating the problem first) they call double loop learning; and finally radical transformation (questioning the whole rationale) they call triple loop learning.

Cummings and Worley (2001) suggest that to seek to influence change in an organisation, there are three main steps – firstly to discover the theories that are actually in use within the organisation and to evaluate/ highlight their consequences; secondly, to invent and produce more effective theories-in-use; and thirdly to continually monitor and improve the learning

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process across the organisation. This approach echoes the Lewin 3-Step model. To achieve these objectives Cummings and Worley suggest an organisation needs a flat and teamwork-based organisational structure; information systems that provide rapid acquisition and sharing of information; HR appraisal and reward practices that prioritise the acquisition and sharing of information, new skills, and knowledge; a culture with values and norms that promote openness, creativity and experimentation; and leadership that promotes organisational learning. Probst and Buchel (1997) suggest that organisational learning can be best achieved through a concentration of learning with development of strategy, structure, culture and the development of human resources.

The elegance of organisational learning as a possible paradigm for change is however, waning. Antonacopolou and Chiva (2007) observe 'the organisational learning debate appears to have reached a point of stalemate where little progress seems to be noticeable' (2007 p278). They observe that while emotion, power and politics support learning in the presence of diversity, it is still not clear how organisational learning takes place or what aspects to look for when investigating it. Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) compare the positive and negative aspects of organisational learning suggesting that while there are clearly some innovative aspects of the concept's applicability to organisations much of it can be seen as repackaging of more dated concepts that simply strengthen management control.

Burnes (2009, p152) reviews the position on organisational learning and feels there is no definitive understanding of it; there is a lack of rigorous empirical research; and organisational learning can be seen as a form of misnomer – it is of course people who learn (and suffer the pain of individual change associated with it) which involves 'unlearning old ways of thinking' (p153) – c.f. Lewin's 'unfreeze' stage. He suggests there is a paradox between diversity and consensus across organisations where senior people in organisations appear to be challenged and un-nerved by greater transparency; that the Japanese management culture does not suit the challenges faced by more western organisations; and finally, not all organisations operate in the fast moving environments assumed by the approach's supporters. Burnes articulates five concerns regarding the organisational learning approach: any notion of a '...one best way' approach is likely to be dangerous; people find there is a high social cost to learning that impacts on them and their careers; political operations within organisations can contain some pretty powerful 'struggles...' and '...infighting' (p157); organisational culture is actually not necessarily easy to change; and that developing a comprehensive understanding of change management methodology can be extremely challenging.

Burnes concludes his paradigm discussion with the view that no one dominant paradigm is yet emerging out of the Organisational Learning, Japanese Management, and Cultural–Excellence paradigms. Nevertheless, he feels that ‘the lack of a dominant paradigm is not necessarily a cause for despair’ (2009, p159). This suggests that while the role played by paradigms is less influential than Kuhn might have originally anticipated, Burnes still appears to feel that paradigm analysis may be a useful analytical tool through which to interpret organisational change. Kuhn’s essay continues to support the view that at any one time there is a predominant ‘world view’ at work and it is through this that ‘all’ analysis is informed and therefore understood.

### **2.4.6 Maintenance of the prevailing paradigm:**

If a paradigm provides the common assumptions (or ‘governing variables’ to use Argyris and Schön’s (1978) phrase), how or why do organisations maintain their current framework or develop a new framework for change? To investigate this, the notion of organisational culture appears to be essential. Schein’s (1985) work suggests that there are three levels of culture – the surface; the level of beliefs; and the deeper fundamental values. These provide a basis for thinking about change. Surface culture can be altered by changing myths, stories, conventions and practices that signify a change in day to day processes – e.g. dress code, celebrating birthdays etc. But to change the beliefs of staff about what they feel ‘represents’ the organisation requires a much greater level of change because it relies on the individual reconstructing their ‘inner narrative’ of the organisation they are involved with. Much harder still is the alteration of the fundamental values of an organisation since this requires deep re-questioning by the individual of their relationship to the organisation. For example, National Health Service staff holding a fundamental understanding that their personal values resonate with those of the NHS, would be hard-pressed to alter this understanding. Only with significant imperative and huge encouragement from those people they trust might this change. In turn, many NHS staff, even though frustrated and dissatisfied, would be highly resistant to joining a private health care organisation because of its perceived clash with their values.

### **2.4.7 Framework and systems thinking**

Influential for local government practitioners in the early 1970’s, McLoughlin investigates a ‘systems approach’ to local government fusing systems thinking with planning for the physical environment. He draws on the work of Stafford Beer who recognizes the need to understand the ‘whole situation’ (McLoughlin 1969). Fundamental to the understanding of systems thinking is the notion of complexity. ‘A complex (adaptive) system can be described

as a system comprised of a large number of entities that display a high level of interactivity' (Richardson et al, 2001 p7). The study of complex systems means that the focus needs to be on the interactions between the parts and how these relationships determine the identity not only of those parts but of the whole system. Richardson et al. ask 'is the concept of the 'learning organisation', so popular in current management streams, oxymoronic (2001 p7)?' Their answer, to some extent, is found in the notion of incompressibility of complex systems (Cilliers, 1998). This states that it is impossible to have an account of a complex system that is less complex than the system itself without losing some of its key aspects. Cilliers argues that: 'Incompressibility (resulting from non-linearity) is probably the single most important aspect of complex systems when considering the development of any analytical methodology, or epistemology of coping with such systems' (Cilliers 1998 in Richardson et al. 2001 p8). They reject the view that a single paradigm can cover all matters – 'incompressibility essentially negates the possibility of the existence of a globally and permanently valid perspective or paradigm' (2001 p9). They go on to claim that 'complexity science has emerged from the field of possible candidates as a prime contender for the top spot in the next era of management science' (Richardson et al. 2001, p6). Nevertheless they are cautious in their support – (when) 'the majority of the popular writings seem to claim the 'old' thinking is dead and needs to be (wholly) replaced with 'new' thinking and that a new, all embracing perspective, sometimes referred to as 'complexity thinking' is available that will solve all our apparent woes ... the inevitable disappointment is also not far away'. The problem they argue, becomes one of boundary setting – the complexity of the whole system is such that describing it requires a model as least as complex as the system itself. Furthermore, it means that there cannot be a perspective, paradigm, framework etc. that can be used 'to wholly describe any subsystem embedded within *the* complex system' (2001 p10). Where there is a focus on the parts of systems and how they function, they urge a new focus on the interactions between the parts and how these relationships determine the identity not only of the parts but the whole system. They answer the question of where should the boundaries be set, by defining a complex (or adaptive) system as one which comprises a large number of entities that display a high level of inter-activity. In nature, they argue, hard, enduring boundaries do not exist and thus all perceived boundaries are transient given a sufficiently broad timeframe.

### **2.4.8 Coping with complexity:**

Richardson et al. identify a number of key aspects in a complex system. Firstly, it tends to have memory or history captured at both the micro and macro level in such things as personal experience, personal opinions, and individual world views (micro), and culture, ritual and value systems (macro) and these features delimit how the system changes

(Cilliers 1998). A second aspect is diversity of behaviours (Allen, 2001) where a rich diversity of qualitatively different operating regimes exist that the system adopts. Thirdly, chaos and self organisation (Anyang 1999) suggest that system evolution is potentially incredibly sensitive to small disturbances whereas complex systems are often quite robust. Cilliers (2000) expounds the notion that the incompressibility of complex systems is 'probably the single most important aspect of complex systems when considering the development of any analytical methodology, or epistemology, for coping with such systems'.

Richardson et al. allude to an important aspect of sense-making around complex systems which is how both implicit and explicit assumptions create, or force, the boundary of analysis to be chosen. The importance of this discussion is that in seeking to contextualise the drivers for change in complex systems such as local government, Richardson et al. underline the importance of acknowledging 'that there is only one complex system ... since it forces the analyst to recognise the narrow scope and the provisionality of their representations'. They warn that 'the quest for frameworks that attempt to describe the many contexts of complexity is not futile, but any frameworks developed should be regarded with a healthy scepticism when it comes to making use of them in specific circumstances'. Their resolution to this dilemma is to suggest that complexity thinking, as an epistemology, requires a knowing 'fuzzification' of the boundaries that allow people to recognise a paradigm as a paradigm. They deploy a similar argument to that of Karl Popper (1945) in his approach to rationality - making the 'irrational decision to be rational' (Popper 1945) - by arguing that 'we must play the skeptic until such a time that we need to 'fake' being 'positivist' so that action can be justified and initiated' (Richardson et al. 2001, p12).

### **2.4.9 Complexity and perspectives:**

Richardson et al. suggest that dealing with matters within a complex framework is best approached by using perspectives. In this they appear to follow work done on scenario planning by the team at Shell which included Ogilvy (2002 and 2011). He seeks to provide a number of possible narratives in which to frame possible future outcomes. Richardson et al. argue that 'given that no one perspective can capture the inherent intricacies of complex systems; the analysis of (them) requires us to consider a number of perspectives ... the end point of an analysis then becomes the point at which a perspective, which may have emerged during the analysis or was present at the beginning, becomes overwhelmingly dominant' (2001 p13). This process he describes as exploration. 'Weak' explorations tend to concentrate on 'intraperspectives' which are comparative in nature; and 'strong' explorations concentrate on 'interperspectives' which are inclusive in nature. The greater the number of perspectives that become available, the more in depth the scrutiny of each

individual perspective will be and the deeper and broader the scrutiny, the higher the possibilities are of recognising the values or not, of each perspective. While recognising the criticism of pragmatists who want to 'get something done' that complexity is a distraction and impedes action, Richardson et al. argue that complexity based analysis is a 'move to a more democratic style that acknowledges the 'rights' and value of a range of perspectives, whether they be formal modelling methods or informal and (inter)subjective personal viewpoints' (2001, p14).

Richardson et al. see that managers 'must, in addition to other activities, be concerned with the management of the variety of perspectives; an activity that falls under the umbrella of facilitation' (2001, p14). They ask: 'what other frameworks, however limiting, might support such a perspective based dialogue and negotiation?' (2001, p14). They suggest that a number of 'well thought out attempts have been made in the development of 'meta-frameworks' (p15) that recognise the problematic nature of sense-making and offer guidelines as to how to manage the exploration process. These meta-methodologies are not developed within the 'official' complex systems research community but within the management science community; more specifically the operational research community'. In this connection Richardson et al. cite examples e.g. systems methodology (Jackson 1987); total systems intervention (Flood 1995; Flood and Jackson 1991); creative design of methods (Midgley 1990); critical appreciation (Gregory 1992) and the philosophies of Habermas (Finlayson 2005) around knowledge development and Foucault around power (Rabinow 1991). They are highly critical of coercive institutional forces (regulative, normative and mimetic processes) that shape the form of intervention and the culture within which an analysis is performed. They conclude that 'by assuming the universe to be a complex system, complexity science offers an alternative perspective that supports the need for criticism, creativity and pluralism through the notion of strong and weak exploration.' (2001, p15)

### **2.4.10 Summary (nature and scale of change):**

In seeking to find the level at which the scale and nature of the challenges an organisation faces will need to be agreed in order to overcome organisational obstinacy, there seem to be a number of threads to the issues of size and type of organisational change. If it is to be truly transformational then it must be paradigmatic, assumption challenging and culturally shifting in its dominant logic and sufficiently large enough to encompass the width and depth of system complexity to achieve sufficient organisational change to overcome organisational obstinacy. This will require an organisation to learn new ways to operate; new ways to think

systemically; and find new leadership methods which will drive change forward against the restraining forces of obstinacy.

## **2.5 A POSSIBLE RESEARCH MODEL:**

### **2.5.1 Scoping the research**

The research questions raised during this review focus on trying to bring the whole study together into an investigation of the effect of resistance, barriers, and restraints on an organisation when confronted with major change. Lewin's notion of the difficulties of shifting the perceptual framework of a field (unfreezing) through 'unlearning' plays a significant part in this. As does the emotional intelligence work of Golman who suggests that there is a mechanism that almost 'takes over' (hi-jacks) and which prevents a rational response.

Combining these thoughts together, the idea that resistance in a paradigm shift is like the peristaltic movement in biology – a contraction of matter that is then squeezed past the point of resistance - is captured in the notion of change needing to 'pass through a narrow neck' alluded to in the diagram of the Kuhnian formulation of paradigm (Fig 2.2) where new knowledge is pushed through the separation point (paradigm shift) by the pressures exerted from the area outside 'normal' science as well as continual tide of time and discovery.

Kuhn remarks that his analysis focuses on the historical aspect of noticing how the key stakeholders in the change process act as either those who were seeking to 'hold on' to the paradigm (or refusing to unlearn) and those who were pushing for change (the paradigm shifters). Kuhn's view appears to be that there is a kind of obstinacy that builds up within those who are influential within the institutional framework of the existing paradigm which makes them highly reluctant to let go.

This current study seeks to combine Bhaskar's morphogenesis idea (that there are forces which are enabling the pre-formed aspects of society to emerge) with Lewin's idea that there is a movement that requires unfreezing to take place in the first instance, before real change in the 'field' can take place. Included in this combination is the Gestalt tangle of actors playing out a triangle of roles (rescuer, oppressor and victim) alluded to by Kuhn (1962) as 'finding a new gestalt'. This role playing prevents growth and development that is positive – it is 'negatively patterned' and restrains change. Lewin also suggests that time is an important factor in how the patterning of the 'field' and its regions are perceived. The adolescent's time-frame is short and narrow (this week) the adult's is longer and wider (this decade) and this colours their different 'field-views'. This study therefore seeks to build a

model of understanding about obstinacy that assumes it will only become evident when sufficiently powerful driving forces for change ‘push up against it’ – at which point it will ‘kick in’ and reveal itself.

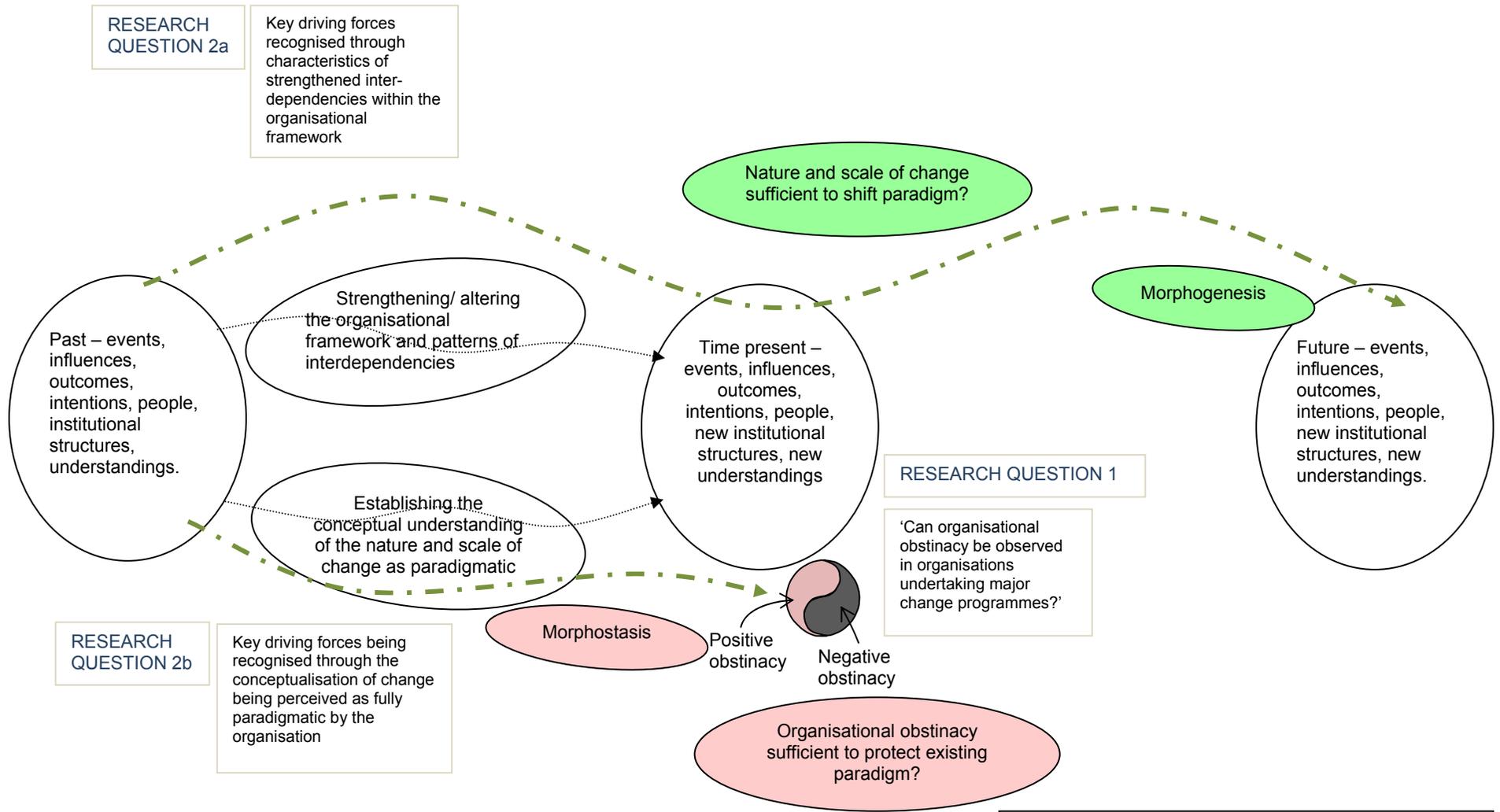
### **2.5.2 The Research Questions:**

Therefore, the research questions on which this thesis is focused are:

- **‘Can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?’**
- **‘Are the characteristics of the forces that most drive paradigm change:**
  - **The strength of the inter-dependencies in the organisational framework?**
  - **The degree to which the conceptual understanding of the need to change is shared?’**

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

The review of the literature that surrounds the two research questions indicate that in seeking to understand the possible role that organisational obstinacy might have in the process of change taking place in organisations two key analytical threads have emerged. Figure 2.4 visualises this. Firstly, the way that an organisation ‘frames’ itself both in terms of its organisational structure and the narrative about why it exists at all, are based on the interdependencies and inter-relationships across itself and those between other organisations. In fact, a more satisfactory way to understand organisations is to seek to identify the patterns that exist. Framing has been used by Lewin in Field Theory and has been followed by Schein, Weick, and Wilkins and Dyer to describe the way that patterning develops within the organisation.



**Fig 2.4: Diagramatic outline of conceptual framework of the research questions.**

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Networking has been seen as an important way for an organisation to pattern itself outside the formal structures as a form of organisational emotional intelligence (Goleman); as a way to analyse how an organisation is operating (Dawson); and as an essential way that culture affects an organisation's performance (Brown). Looking at an organisation's strategic alignment (Nutt, Clifford, Porter) offers a way of understanding how the pattern of an organisation aligns to its visions and goals. The institutional framework analysed by Lowndes and Wilson suggests that the way values and power relationships develop, affects the way the organisation is patterned. How an organisation approaches achieving its strategic goals can also affect the way the organisational framework actually works (Christenson, Burgelman, Kawalek).

Secondly, how an organisation conceptualises the nature and scale of change can affect the response it makes to factors affecting its future. Kuhn's work on paradigms informs this perspective and Richardson contributes on complexity. Bhaskar's thoughts on transformative powers in the theory of emergence and Archer's views on morphogenesis also contribute to this line of inquiry. Burnes discusses three key paradigmatic themes of change – culture-excellence, Japanese management and finally the 'learning organisation' which is followed by Senge, Argyris and Schön, and Cummings and Worley. The means by which a paradigm prevails and is then maintained have also suggested that there are cycles of change that affect the way that an organisation is either stabilised or destabilised.

Working from these two fundamental threads –the organisational framework and the understanding of the scale and nature of change (paradigms) – the possible area of organisational obstinacy is proposed. This is the idea that the organisation fails to unfreeze (or un-learn) because it is trapped in a pull between positive assertiveness and negative intransigence which combines to form an obstinacy towards change. A possible research model is proposed that seeks to investigate this issue through looking at the patterning of the organisation and the agreed level of change that will be required to overcome obstinacy in seeking to achieve paradigmatic change.

This literature review started by asking the question 'Could 'holding on' to such values such as organisational 'character' be seen as a display of organisational obstinacy rather than simply resistance?' (p18). The suggestion is that within the dynamics of changing inter-dependencies across an organisation, a change perspective emerges which begins to be recognised as paradigmatic and therefore challenges the existing framework. In response to this an obstinate

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

reaction builds up that impedes the flow of the organisation forward towards the change it is seeking.

## **CHAPTER 3: CONTEXT**

### **3.1 THE NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**

The origins of the Government reforms on which the research study has been centered can be traced back to the New Labour government that began in 1997. A key element of the approach to public sector reform was the principle of modernisation. “Our programme of renewal for Britain will touch all aspects of our country... We are modernising our party. We are modernising central government. We are modernising our constitution.... Local government cannot be left out...” (Blair 1998). A White Paper discussed the need to modernise local government (DETR 1998) and two important pieces of legislation followed – the 1999 and 2000 Local Government Acts (GB 1999 & 2000). The 1999 Act sought to bring an overarching approach to accountability introducing a new concept – ‘Best Value’. This was seen as a mechanism through which a number of different public services would be measured which included the Police, Fire and Rescue alongside local government. The following year the 2000 Act was introduced which brought structural reforms into place, notably the options to select elected Mayors, leaders and cabinets, as well as leaders and chief executives (for smaller councils). At the same time as Best Value being introduced, local authorities were given wider powers enabling them to undertake any matter that contributed to the sustainable development of the area through improvements in economic, social and environmental well-being (GB 2000).

### **3.2 INSPECTION**

Alongside these important pieces of legislation, the work of the Audit Commission was enhanced and its remit extended to cover a much greater role in the inspection of local authorities. During 2001 and 2002 all local authorities were inspected to enable the Government to have a performance achievement level score for each of them. The inspection regime included six ‘core services’ areas; the use of resources overall were assessed; and finally the council’s ability to corporately manage itself was judged (Audit Commission 2002). Overall there were five standards of performance – excellent, good, fair, weak and poor. In cases of excellent ratings the authorities were expected to be able to undertake modernising initiatives with only a light touch regulatory regime. However, as the ratings progressively dropped, the authorities were subject to both tighter inspection and more intervention to ensure that improvement was achieved. The expectation had been that all things being equal there

### Chapter Three: Context

would be likely to be a normal bell-curve with fewer excellent and poor ratings, the majority fair, and a large number of good and weak. In the metropolitan area containing Metville, there were ten authorities. One was assessed as excellent; three good; five fair; and two weak (there were no poor ratings).

Metville was one of the two 'weak' councils. Metville had experienced a corporate assessment separately and this contributed to it being assessed as weak overall, its housing service was also marked very low. Both 'weak' councils were informed that measures would be taken to encourage them to improve quickly. Two key areas were highlighted – building capacity to undertake change and to placing experienced officers from the regional government offices into each authority to assist in making improvements. The surge in support to local authorities to build greater capacity and to raise the level of competence was aimed particularly at councils that had been identified as weak and poor. A pool of resources that could be bid against for capacity building purposes was identified, intended especially for urban areas that faced particular challenges, that was to be administered through the regional government offices.

During the course of the next two years the Audit Commission further developed its inspection regimes. Going from a system of general inspection using a number of 'Best Value' indicators against which to inspect the council's performance, the Commission began to introduce a more sophisticated system of rating. While retaining the understanding of different categories, the Commission introduced a system of comprehensive performance assessment or CPA. This subjected authorities to a more general assessment looking at the corporate aims of authorities and whether they were achieving them (Audit Commission, 2004). Key categories were identified, for example the authority's work with children. If this was found to be weak or even inadequate (through a system of 'star' ratings e.g. 2 stars to indicate weak, 1 star to indicate poor and no stars to indicate inadequate) then the whole council could not achieve one of the higher ratings in the overall CPA score. This happened in councils where the performance of schools was poor, the safeguarding was substandard and the management of 'looked after children' was felt to be inadequate. Thus councils that might well be performing well in some areas would be penalised through poor services in others. Metville Council was identified as weak in 2002 and by virtue of the penalties regarding stars in children's services work remained weak in 2003 and 2004 (Audit Commission, 2004). In 2005, a refinement of CPA incorporated a new framework that measured 'use of resources' (financial reporting and management, financial standing, internal control and value for money) and a 'corporate assessment' (based on

## Chapter Three: Context

ambition, prioritisation, capacity, performance management and achievement) (Audit Commission 2005). The ODPM consulted on the future of local government (ODPM 2004).

Through the first wave of the inspection regimes the impact of their assessments was felt extremely keenly from all points of view. For those councils assessed as excellent the pressure to maintain their high rating was intense. For those with lower ratings, efforts to 'get out' of the category were the focus of attention. This was shared both managerially as well as politically. The Audit Commission was not the only inspection regime that had been introduced. Systems for education (OFSTED) and social care (CSCI) were similarly introduced. All the regimes were expected to coordinate their efforts to ensure that a full picture of a council was obtained.

A key piece of legislation that emerged during the second term of New Labour was the Children Act, (GB 2004). This effectively divided personal social services for elderly people and families away from children's provision which was then joined onto the education services in local areas under the control of directors of children's services (who could have had an educational or social work background). Driven by a policy called 'every child matters' which sought to achieve better outcomes for children around their socialisation, educational achievement, employment preparation, health and personal development, the role of the local authority was to include combining with other services such as local primary health care and policing.

By 2004/5, as the research for this study was starting, the Government realised that the costs of inspection might be unacceptably high. Criticism of an 'auditing explosion' was being expressed (Power, 2005). The Audit Commission had grown considerably to recruit the staff to undertake the inspections but, even so, their workload was high. At the same time, the CPA regime had revealed that while an individual council might be working well, the level of coordination of services across a number of public service agencies within its area might well be dysfunctional, making the overall delivery across all agencies very poor. The Audit Commission therefore began to take a more comprehensive approach and consulted (Audit Commission 2006, 2007), on a more wide ranging assessment called Comprehensive Area Assessment or CAA.

### **3.3 PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM – GOVERNMENT APPROACH**

In 2006 the Government published a summary document that spelled out the approach it was taking to public service reform (Cabinet Office 2006). This suggested that the key element of

### Chapter Three: Context

the strategy of inspection was to seek to achieve a much higher level of 'public value'. A diagram was produced that offered a model of the four contributory factors that would lead to public value improvement (See Fig 3.1). Inspection and target setting would remain overseen by central government; staff competency and capability to manage reforms better would be strengthened; co-production with the involvement of the public would be improved which would provide a better 'voice' to the users of public services; and finally the introduction of greater competition through more marketisation and the use of the private sector through improved commissioning would be encouraged.

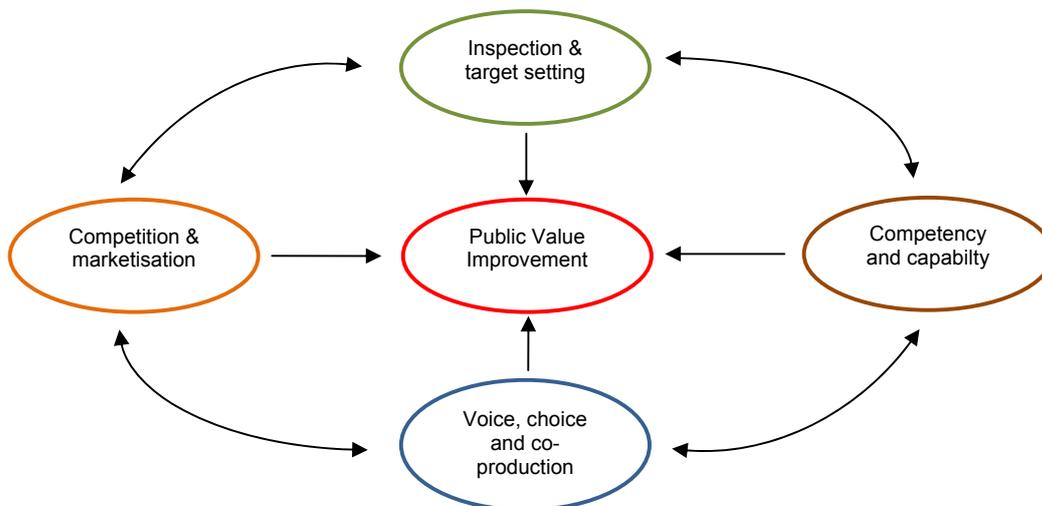


Fig 3.1: Government Approach to Public Sector Reform (*Cabinet Office adapted Clifford*)

Much of the academic background debate on public service improvement had been placed within a context of what was termed 'New Public Management' (Lynn 2005, Lapsley 2008, Levy 2010). The 'newness' was characterised by the understanding that better management of public services would be achieved through better delivery systems, better coordination, a more relaxed approach to the use of private sector agencies and companies, a greater accountability through transparent indicators of performance, and followed a political mantra that was expressed as 'what matters is what works'.

The high point of the whole performance regime/ auditing approach to public management came in about 2006/7 about the time that the transition between the New Labour leaders took place. By this time the realisation on costs, complexity and possible doubt about the efficacy of the whole approach was beginning to be felt. The auditing approach was streamlined with the different inspection agencies being combined, the number and frequency of audits/ inspections

were reduced, and the direct intervention into councils that were felt to be failing was relaxed (DCLG, 2006).

### **3.4 PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF IMPROVEMENT**

The emerging paradox, however, was that while the inspection regimes indicated that the level of performance in local government had improved the level of satisfaction felt by local residents and the users of local services was falling (Lyons, 2007). The only reasonable explanation of this phenomenon was that users/ residents expectations were rising and that while improvement had been achieved, people were expecting different delivery of something new as well as the improvement in the existing services. This presented a major challenge to local government politicians and managers/ executives.

Alongside the growth of an approach to improvement in delivery that has been outlined above, the government was also pursuing an approach to neighbourhood renewal. Originally coined by the Labour Party in opposition as 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' (Blair 1995) the underlying idea of social exclusion was investigated in the first two years of the new government through a number of policy action teams (DETR, 2000) or PATs. This resulted in several important pieces of research provided for the government by respected academics, policy researchers on the likely causes of declining social cohesion, and experienced practitioners. The resulting combined report argued for a neighbourhood based renewal policy focused particularly on the worst (88) areas in the country (Cabinet Office 2001). In these areas agencies were obliged to combine into 'local strategic partnerships' (LSPs) in order to attract funding for specific project streams that could be implemented within their areas. The funding stream (the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) sought to fund innovative approaches to joining up service delivery on the assumption that improved efficiencies could be gained by doing so. Thus, for example, housing, social welfare, children's services, health care, were all expected to be scrutinised to identify ways in which improvement could be achieved. Alongside the simple gains to be achieved through better co-ordination the notion that improvement gains could also be achieved through more competitive tendering was also pursued. The origins of competitive tendering as a means to cost reduction lay in a period two decades before, in the 1980's, when compulsory tendering of many council services was imposed on local authorities as a means of outsourcing many of their operational services, such as waste collection, into private companies. With the election of 1997, while compulsory tendering was retained, the search for

## Chapter Three: Context

'best value' was the legitimising argument for its retention. If what mattered was 'what worked' and cheaper, more efficient, and possibly more effective means of running council services could be achieved through the private sector then there could be no objection to seeking to find such ways of doing it.

A means of genuinely measuring the total impact of reform was developed through widening the role of the Audit Commission (Audit Commission 2007) to review the whole of a local area including checking on the impact of marketising public services more explicitly; focusing on councils and partners working in a more joined up way locally through Local Strategic Partnerships; and assessing the impact of building much greater social cohesion. As the Lowndes and Wilson (2003) work demonstrated, however, and later evidence confirmed it, the willingness of central government to permit experimentation in reform was overlain by the insistence on compliance with the centrally placed performance regimes. Discussion documents provided by the government (DCLG 2006, ODPM 2006) on the possibility of greater delegation to localities remained as discussion documents only, as the legislative framework developed in the period between 1999 and 2005 solidified.

### **3.5 FINANCIAL CRISIS AND GENERAL ELECTION**

During the later part of the research period (following the impact of the 2007 and 2008 financial crisis) the focus on the need to save money became a primary concern. The test of the effectiveness of all the earlier reforms would be in whether the organisational capacity that had been built during the previous years would endure into a period of severe retrenchment.

In 2010 and 2011, as the research period was ending, a General Election in the UK was held in May 2010. A new coalition government was formed with an explicit policy of significantly reducing the public services expenditure. A revised budget was set (HM Treasury 2010 i) and a new spending review took place (HM Treasury 2010 ii). The introduction of a significantly reduced public spending regime (expected to reduce by about a quarter over a period of three to four years) was felt immediately. The impact was for all local authorities to find reductions extremely quickly in their 2010/11 and their 2011/12 budgets. Schemes to reduce the staffing levels by offering inducements for staff to leave councils with either redundancy or early retirement packages were introduced.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION:

This chapter traces the search for an appropriate methodology to adopt through which to examine the research questions emerging from the literature review. In the review I examined organisational obstinacy from a force-field perspective. This approach suggests that organisational obstinacy will be observed only when driving forces for change are built up within the organisational framework and the nature and scale of change is perceived as sufficiently paradigmatic. The two research questions that have emerged during the literature review are:

- 'Can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?'
- 'Are the characteristics of the forces that most drive paradigm change in organisations:
  - The strength of the inter-dependencies in the organisational framework?
  - The degree to which the conceptual understanding of the need to change is shared?'

In discussing my methodological approach these two questions now need to be scrutinised in relation to how they might be framed to ensure they are researched properly.

### 4.2 APPROACH

Being forced to choose between inductive or deductive methods as two basic models of research can be unhelpful. Investigating interdependencies in relationships and the organisational perceptions of the nature and scale of a change environment suggest there is merit in both. The philosophy of Peirce which introduces abduction appears to be more helpful. His emphasis on 'the logic of exploratory data analysis' and 'the process of generating new ideas or hypotheses' (Eriksson and Kovalainen p23) suits this particular study. Peirce is concerned to steer social science research towards innovation in ideas; he recognises that even in the research community there are restraining forces that impede opening up new areas in which radical explanations can be explored. Peirce is struck by how often radical new ideas for explaining phenomena appear, as if from nowhere. '.. these spontaneous and instinctive judgements are apparently non-inferential, being such that even now the scientific innovator cannot give any exact reason for his best guesses' (Peirce CP5.173). Peirce's summarises his abduction process as: 'The surprising fact 'C' is observed; But if 'A' were true, 'C' would be a

## Chapter Four: Methodology

matter of course; Hence, there is a reason to suspect that 'A' is true' (Peirce CP 5.189). McKaughan (2008) discusses Peirce's contribution of abduction and argues that it enables researchers to make judgements about the most worthwhile directions to take in researching ideas. The choice of which research option to choose can be difficult. McKaughan calls for a criteria of pursuitworthiness: 'consideration of the role of pursuitworthiness judgements in scientific practice could provide a fresh perspective or yield insights bearing on decision making processes in public policy and on this question: can we theorize a role for value judgements and practical considerations in theory choice without compromising the objectivity of science?' McKaughan (2008) concludes that 'if Peirce is right, judgements about whether a hypothesis is worth pursuing turn out to be far more important to scientific practice than philosophers have typically recognized' (2008, p448). Kapitan (1992) concludes that 'abductions yield recommendations about what courses of action to pursue given our values and given the information and resources at our disposal'.

For this study, my abductive reasoning sees the volume of change programmes that appear to fail as the 'observation of a surprising circumstance' (C). To this, I am hypothesising the notion of misunderstood organisational obstinacy as an explanation (A) that would then see the high number of failures as 'a matter of course'.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) suggest that qualitative researchers have tended towards adopting philosophical positions for their work. They refer to the positivists (and postpositivists) whose research aims are to unify and make findings generally applicable; their hypothesis testing methodology is favoured as being both reliable and widely accepted. Postmodernism rejects the positivists' rational and generalisable basis of scientific research and instead seeks to explain the world from a more objective standpoint (2008 p18). Critical realism is seen as combining ideas from positivism and constructionism and is concerned to identify structures in the world. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) link together interpretivism and constructionism which they feel have backgrounds in hermeneutics and phenomenology and are concerned with seeking to find subjective and shared meanings. Hermeneutics they see as concerned primarily with the search for interpretation and understanding. They cite Berger and Luckmann (1967) as examples of those who see social constructionism as a search for discourses that provide subjective meanings through 'interconnected patterns of communication – reality is not defined by individual acts, but by complex and organised patterns of ongoing actions' (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p20). Eriksson and Kovalainen go on to cite Johnson and Duberley (2000)

## Chapter Four: Methodology

who advocate that critical realism, particularly, can allow for the use of 'multi-methodological approaches' which can enhance the ability to find the more relevant causalities from the material being investigated. A multi-methodological perspective allows for the collection of data to be fairly eclectic and from which conclusions can be drawn later. It is from this perspective therefore that the study approaches the data collection.

In view of this chosen approach, the philosophical position adopted has also sought to be interpretive and constructionist weaving a critical realism and post-modernist methodology together. In this way, the widest range of data is searched for in order to bring as many different strands together as possible. However, in adopting this approach there are also unavoidable methodological problems. These are mainly to do with the size of the data collection arena.

One such problem is to isolate and measure the type of framework that an organisation adopts. This is not simply descriptive nor one that can be discerned from following an organisational chart and mapping this onto the actual organisation. It requires a deep knowledge of the level of institutionalisation and how this plays through in the patterning of the interdependencies. These can be seen to be operating at the level of individuals, of groups, and of the whole organisation (Dawson 1996). This suggests that a large amount of data is required in order to make proper sense of what is going on. A second problem is the differing perceptions of the change paradigm that the organisation believes itself to be experiencing. This necessitates a recognition that perceptions will change over time and will also change in response to circumstances taking place inside and outside the organisation.

The necessary data sources will be difficult to identify and require methods of data extraction that largely depend on interpretation. This is not, therefore, a study that lends itself to a quantitative approach. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) suggest that qualitative methods in business research offer a better 'opportunity to focus on the complexity of business-related phenomena in their contexts' (p3) and it is this approach that feels more suitable. Gummesson (2000) recognises that: 'In terms of information gathering and analysis both participant observation and action science depend largely on qualitative methods' (p83) and this approach is explored further below.

### **4.3 ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY - SELECTING A METHOD**

## Chapter Four: Methodology

By adopting an abductive and qualitative approach, it is extremely likely that the conclusions to be drawn from such a study will be of a provisional nature. Any ontological implications will be to suggest possible truth-values that might emerge with further and more detailed enquiry. Epistemologically, therefore, clear statements concerning the key concepts, methods and management of the research will be needed to ensure that there are means to recoverability and explanation of any conclusions that are being drawn.

From both examining the literature surrounding this study and the context in which it is set, the two research questions that emerge suggest that the choice of an appropriate methodology for the study needs consideration from a number of perspectives. Firstly there is the question of observation - how might organisational obstinacy be observed? Capturing the strengthening of specific interdependencies (Lewin) within organisations and seeing how these emerge as networks within a larger framework is needed; judging at what point they become 'thick' enough connections (Goleman) to form a critical mass that is sufficient to achieve change, is also needed. In seeking to observe how an organisational understanding is generated amongst the patterns that intermix within an organisation, and how the nature and scale of change is envisaged, Kotter (1995) emphasises the role of leadership and what 'real leaders do'. In his eight-step programme for transformational change his first two steps cover the sense of the urgency he feels is needed for change and the need to bring together the necessary elements of a guiding coalition. This view has a strong resonance with Dawson (1996) and her sense of the organisational 'felt need' for change. Kotter (1996) argues that the guiding coalition needs to be clearly sponsored from the senior management team but it does not need to be necessarily hierarchical. In fact he refers to a 'complex web of aligned relationships within the organisation' (Kotter 1995) which is committed to organisational change. Leadership is discussed in depth by Grint (2001) and Brookes and Grint (2010) in emphasising the role it plays in bringing about organisational change. A likely problem therefore, will be to determine the level at which perceptions in the organisation of the nature and scale of change required to tip it over toward a paradigm shift (Kuhn) occur, and to what extent these then translate into the 'felt need' Dawson identifies as needed to trigger action for change.

To fully understand the organisational framework and the perceptions of change held within and around the organisation will require rich data sources from individuals and groups. Both these issues pose methodological problems. This chapter, therefore, covers the above criteria and sets out the rationale for a choice of method that frames the research design, outlines the

## Chapter Four: Methodology

analytical approach that might be taken to the data and discusses the validity and recoverability of the possible conclusions that can be drawn in adopting such an approach.

In considering how best to approach investigating the possible presence of organisational obstinacy, there is a need to recognise its dynamic nature. In the terms of this study, obstinacy is seen as an interacting force within a system experiencing change. A methodological approach is therefore needed which is capable of recognising the changes as they are occurring. Further, an investigative method that is both observational as well as interventionist would assist considerably in testing ideas around the origins and impact of obstinacy.

### 4.3.1 Action Research

Researchers familiar with dynamics, such as those identified above, tend to cluster within the action research (AR) community. They see AR as a method capable of focusing on problem solving issues related to specific sites from which broader meanings can then be drawn out.

Coghlan (2011) sees AR as a 'worldview that finds expression in collaborative inquiry and learning in action in order to cogenerate actionable knowledge' (p79). He feels that the process of building up our human knowledge base should be seen much more in 'how we know' rather than merely 'what we know' (p53) and that the 'notion of interiority' should be adopted to recognise the challenge needed 'to turn from the outer world of practical knowing and of theory to the appropriation of oneself as a knower, that is, one's own interiority' (p76). Coghlan (2011) sees the emergence of a 'General Empirical Method' that allows the gathering of information to take place from both an 'inside' and from an 'outside' perspective. This is achieved through adopting four means to 'ground the engagement' viz. 'Be attentive; Be intelligent; Be reasonable; and Be responsible' (Table 2 p78)

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) see AR as a method based on a 'collaborative problem-solving relationship between researcher and client which aims at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge ... generally speaking, good research is purposeful, its goals are clearly defined and significant, the methodological procedures are defensible, evidence is systematically analysed and the 'objectivity' of the researcher is clearly evident' (p20). For AR to be used effectively they see the need to establish an Action Research Cycle which clarifies explicitly the context and purpose of the research with four distinct stages in each cycle: diagnosing, planning

## Chapter Four: Methodology

action, taking action, and evaluating action (p22). These leads to the idea of a 'spiral of action research cycles' (p24) that iterates each of the four stages within a wider and rising level of understanding. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) also see the need to establish an 'experiential learning cycle' which comprises: experiencing, reflecting, interpreting, and then taking action (p33). Underpinning each research cycle, spiral, and learning cycle are the complex dynamics of action research comprising the content, the processes, and the underlying premises, all of which need to be made explicit (p41).

Advocates of AR positively affirm the necessity of the researcher being 'involved' – for example, Schein (2001) sees 'clinical research' involving a relationship that develops between clients seeking assistance from researchers who in turn offer help based on an 'attitude of inquiry' (p228) which uses the data produced to generate new knowledge. This can then be shared with other practitioners in much the same way clinicians share case notes with each other. Schein emphasises that in cases where the subject/ client initiates the project the AR can be more collaborative and interactive (p233). 'If there is one thing I have learned from my own clinical experience, it is that the research process in any form is an intervention' (p236).

There are recognised dangers in AR where the 'research' and the 'intervention' become blurred. Levin (2012) uses the analogy of the ancient Roman God Janus who is normally depicted with two heads to convey the need to hold in balance the strengths of researchers being involved in long-term change activity alongside their need to maintain a reflective distance to achieve rigorous analysis (p133). For AR to be seen as being a 'reputable scientific practice' (p134), the essential challenge is to achieve a unique combination of deep empathic and political involvement coupled with critical and reflective research, which expects the researcher to treat his or her own experiences at 'arm's length'. He sees AR as a 'strategy that aims at solving pertinent problems where problem owners and engaged researchers learn together and reflect in the same co-generative process' (p137). At the same time he is concerned to ensure that within AR 'the meaning construction process used must comply with scientific procedures' (p138).

However, for AR to be used successfully in research that is focused on thesis writing alongside a normal AR intervention, a clear distinction needs to be made. Helpfully, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) provide guidance on how to distinguish between 'core' AR and 'thesis' AR (p171). A useful way to do this is to recognise that 'the collaborative project work in the workplace and

## Chapter Four: Methodology

the individual thesis work' must enable the candidate's own contribution to the field to be clearly identifiable (p172). Thus, the core project's thematic concern refers to the situation and processes of management practice; while in contrast, the thesis project's research problem addresses intellectual propositional knowledge about organisational culture and learning (p176). Levin (2012) emphasises that the skills to conduct AR successfully can be both identified and codified through a process of 'Bildung' which he sees as a 'formation process characterised by creating standards for ethical conduct and proper practice integrated in substantive professional education'(p140) which enables the practitioner to meet the profound challenge 'to utilize the experiential potential offered through the deep engagement and at the same time be able to function as a critical and reflective researcher' (p142)

Greenwood and Levin (1998) use a combination of theoretical analysis and real case experiences to link knowledge gained through AR with increasing local understanding on the ground. They illustrate how the researcher acting as a 'Friendly Outsider' can enhance the research process through reflection to provide a new 'narrative' which can then lead on to organisational learning. From this they develop a 'cogenerative AR model' (Greenwood and Levin 1998 p116) that combines both 'insider' and 'outsider' reflection around a co-identified problem. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) see organisational learning as a process of 'collaborative action learning and action research in an organisation with the aims of solving complex problems and achieving change and improved performance at the individual, team and organisational levels' (p172).

Advocates of action research (AR) recognise the strength of the traditional model for scientific enquiry, namely hypothesis testing and replicable results leading to satisfactory theory. However, they note that this scientific method relies on three fundamental principles – reductionism, repeatability, and refutation (Checkland 1981, Chapter 2). Checkland asks 'can the method of science be applied to material which is not homogeneous over time, making complete replicability impossible? If not what else can be done?' (p11). The recognition that this approach can lead to limitations stretches back to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Checkland and Holwell suggest a chronology for action research that traces back to Lewin (1947), Blum (1955), Foster (1972), Clark (1972), Susman and Evered (1978), Hult and Lennung (1980), Argyris et al (1982), Susman (1983), and Dash (1997).

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Lewin (1947) is quoted as seeing limitations in studying complex real social events in a laboratory (Foster 1972). He recommends the emergence of the concept 'of a researcher immersing themselves in a human situation and following it along whatever path it takes as it unfolds over time (Foster 1972 p11). Argyris et al (1982), building on earlier work on reflective practice, suggest that crucial elements in a research approach should include: collaboration; critical enquiry; social practice and a deliberate process of reflective learning.

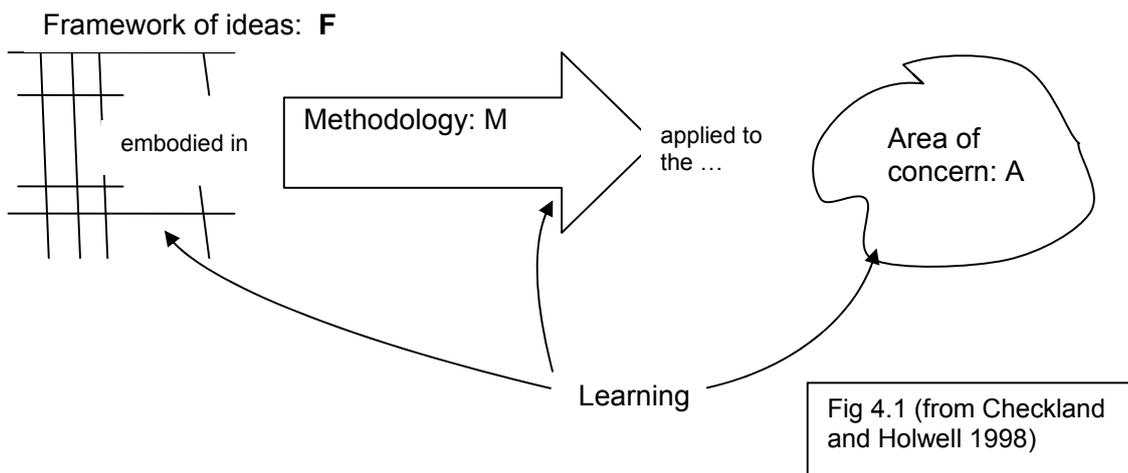
The methodological model derived from a 25 year programme of AR carried out at Lancaster University suggests that carried out within clear parameters, a degree of recoverability can be achieved which can offer a means towards substantial reliance being able to be placed on the results. Checkland and Holwell (1998) argue that through the AR process the researcher enters a 'real world situation and aims both to improve it and to acquire knowledge' (p9). They conclude that 'AR claims to validity requires a recoverable research process based upon a prior declaration of the epistemology' (p9). They see AR researchers as having a duty to connect their earlier thoughts on what they might find during the process to their results by being forced to 'declare' their prior thinking and to define the epistemology 'in terms of which what will count as knowledge from the research will be expressed' (p14).

Checkland and Holwell (1998) introduce a model (see Fig 4.2, below) in which AR researchers declare the themes that are of interest to them; their framework of ideas; and the methodology of how those ideas will be pursued. The researcher can then 'enter the 'social practice' of a real world situation in which the themes are relevant and they 'become involved as both participant and researcher' (p14). Checkland and Holwell's argument is that themes can thus replace hypotheses and a serious and organised process of AR can be made to yield 'defensible generalisations' (p16). The potential roles of both the 'researcher' and the 'participant' in the situation need to be acknowledged along with recognising when a sensible time to write up results has been reached. Knowing that this may also be the time to stop an AR study is crucial. They argue that the 'recoverability' criterion lies between the place of natural science (with its associated scientific method) and mere 'story telling'. Such a place would seek to do better than just settling for 'plausibility' and would offer some 'truth value' for their outputs and claims based on the adequacy of setting out the F (framework of ideas) and M (methodology) in the model.

## Chapter Four: Methodology

Checkland and Holwell argue that natural science aims for repeatability on material that is reasonably consistent but in social science this is rarely the case. They quote Keynes, who felt that economics could never rely on data being 'homogenous over time' (Keynes 1938). For Keynes, economics was mainly comprised of modelling – 'The object of a model is to segregate the semi-permanent or relatively constant factors from those which are transitory or fluctuating so as to develop a logical way of thinking about the latter, and of understanding the time sequences to which they give rise in particular cases'.

An essential feature of AR is the need to state the epistemology and define what will count as acquired knowledge at the outset. Checkland and Holwell argue that since 'social reality' cannot be seen as a 'given', it needs to be seen as the changing product of a continual 'intersubjective discourse' (p 20). Checkland (2000) outlines a means through which AR can be effectively carried out using a Soft System Modelling (SSM) technique.



In this process the framework of ideas (F), the methods (M) and the area of concern (A) are all used to discover the 'underlying property of purposefulness' that guides and directs the work of an organisation. The process usually starts with an attempt to identify a 'key problematic situation' on which the AR will be focused and which will then be worked on over a number of iterations.

### 4.3.2 Organisational interdependencies

Lewin (1947) suggests that in seeking to understand the framing of an organisation, concentration should be focused on the patterning of the inter-dependencies within the

## Chapter Four: Methodology

relationships among members of a 'field'. Observation of the organisational psychologies surrounding relationship development, networks, and culture requires a methodology which allows for the study of such factors and 'sense making' of their influences. Kuhn (1962) suggests that significant points of change occur where new and paradigmatic contexts emerge which provide for a fresh understanding of the total situation. In such changes it is more a question of perceived roles that matter (framework), rather than changes in position (structure). Evidence in the way people work with others and how new relationships emerge will therefore be important. The changing nature of a person's role is a function of their organisational position and authority as well as their leadership both at a personal level and in what the organisation permits. Theories on organisational change (Buchanan et al (2007) Burnes (2009)) suggest that strongly hierarchical organisations where power is recognised through position (place in structure) and authority (line management) tend to reform towards organisations that value greater personal responsibility to achieve agreed outcomes. Therefore, in seeking to monitor the process of change, opportunities are needed to track changes in the inter-dependencies.

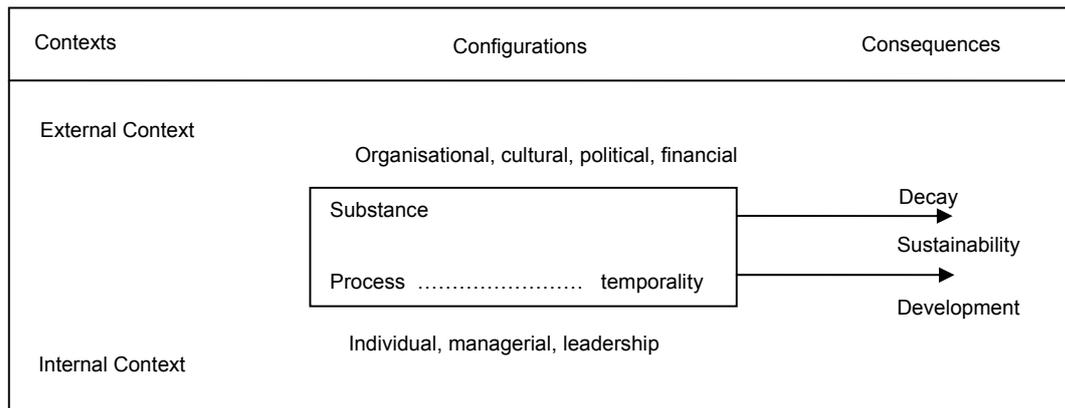
### **4.3.3 Longitudinal studies**

Changes in interdependencies are likely to be slow and therefore observation needs to take place over a period of time. This suggests that a longitudinal study is necessary to fully understand the processes of change. This follows Van de Ven and Poole (2005) and Buchanan et al (2005) in recognising the need for observation to be longer term - say a period of years rather than just months. Equally, it is appropriate to adopt an ethnographic approach that tests theory based on pre-given research questions (Girod, 2005) so that an understanding on how culture works among diverse groups and how specific instances of social life in a certain research setting can be identified (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008 p142).

Buchanan et al. (2005) offer a conceptual model for investigating the likely success of change programmes. This concentrates on seeking to understand factors which are likely to lead to decay; those which will lead to sustainability; or those which will lead to further organisational development (see Fig 4.1). Factors such as lack of appropriate skills, autocratic management, absence of clear goals and the perceived costs of change may contribute to decay; while the encouragement of change through supportive policies, a receptive culture and the backing of key power-brokers may contribute to sustainability and further development. They recognise that context is fundamentally important in a continuing drama involving 'multiple and multilayered mutual interactions between external context and internal attributes, evolving over

## Chapter Four: Methodology

time, the product of joint action, not simply determined by structures and static factor configurations' (Buchanan et al. 2007 p202). They recommend concentration on the external context since a high degree of instability may jeopardize the longer term sustainability of change (Ansoff 1997). For some researchers, understanding context is seen by some to be fundamental - 'context is an actor' (Fitzgerald et al. (2002, 1447)).



**Fig 4.2 'Process of sustainability in context'  
Reproduced from Buchanan et al 2005 (p202)**

In constructing a framework for analysis of an organization, the relationship between the internal and external context is seen as crucial in developing an understanding of the processual factors involved in the implementation process of change. By stretching the analysis from contextual considerations to the organizational configuration and then seeking to match these to consequences, Buchanan et al (2005) offer a useful framework through which to assess the likely sustainability of change. It is implicit in such a programme to recognize the importance of longitudinal considerations: "An explanation for the relative lack of research in this area is that, while implementation may be studied over relatively brief periods, sustainability requires longitudinal study and resources to which many researchers do not have access" (p190).

Pettigrew (1990) recommends that for the kinds of studies that are seeking to find explanations for change, the best approach is a longitudinal one since this offers the opportunity to monitor changes where a number of possible explanations might be examined. However, he comments, longitudinal research in the social sciences 'has always been a minority taste' (p284). He cites Whipp and Clark (1986) as an example of a longitudinal study in the design innovation process; and Lucas (1987) in work on decision making; Feldman (1987) on political

processes and Mintzberg and Walters (1982) on organisational structures and strategy as studies that have attracted longitudinal research principles. His paper emphasises the need to 'conceptualise the research process accurately and realistically'. In seeking to achieve a reduction in complexity he portrays the process as 'multi-layered' in which overall research goals, units of analysis and study questions are all clarified. His final comment is that deeper than even these considerations, 'the intellectual clarity and explicitness about theory of method are necessary together with making available a meta-level analytical framework to guide the research' for longitudinal methods to be successful (p285).

### **4.3.4 Site specific studies**

Yin (1994) suggests that 'case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (p1). He makes the point that contrary to the notion that a case study approach is only appropriate in early exploratory phases of research and not when causal and explanatory inquiries are being made, case studies in fact provide a theoretical as well as practical means to full understanding. Yin warns of the danger of 'gross misfits' when one type of strategy is planned where another would really be more advantageous (p4). He suggests that 'a case study is a distinctive form of empirical enquiry' (p9). Yin (1994) quotes Lipset et al. (1956 pp419-420) who advocate that the goal is to do 'the generalising and not a particularising analysis' using case study methodology. In discussing this approach in more detail Yin (1994) feels that it is entirely appropriate for a case study to be lengthy 'if associated with a particular technique such as ethnographies which normally require long periods of time in the field and emphasise detailed, observational evidence' (p10).

Yin (1994) sees case study as a method that can cope with 'the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points' and will thus produce multiple sources of evidence with data converging in a triangulating fashion and therefore where prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis is essential (p13). Yin goes on to discuss a case study approach as being particularly helpful when seeking to conduct evaluation research. He outlines five different applications for case study where researchers might want to: explain causal links in real life interventions that are too complex for surveys or experimental strategies; describe interventions and the real-life context in which they occurred; illustrate certain topics within an evaluation; explore those situations in which the

## Chapter Four: Methodology

intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes; and possibly where a 'meta-evaluation' is appropriate to study an evaluation study itself (p15).

Gummesson (2000) argues that AR can be used comfortably with site focused research - 'a wide range of information-gathering techniques can be used in case studies' (p83). He cites Normann (1970 p53) as saying: 'But the possibilities to generalize from one single case are founded in the comprehensiveness of the measurements which makes it possible to reach a fundamental understanding of the structure, process and driving forces rather than a superficial establishment of correlation or cause-effect relationships' (Gummesson 2000 p89). He continues 'on the basis of their paradigms and preunderstanding and given access to empirical, real-world data through their role as change agent, management action scientists develop an understanding of the specific decision, implementation and change process in the cases with which they are involved. They generate a specific (local) theory which is then tested and modified through action'. (Gummesson 2000 p208)

### **4.3.5 Ethnography**

For both research questions suitable data can be expected to be found through a number of sources, both formal and informal. Reeves-Sanday, an anthropologist, suggests that ethnographic methods to gather data are particularly suited to studies that investigate opinion and feelings but that allowing sufficient time is of the essence '... the importance of long residence and participant observation has not changed for ethnographers' (Reeves-Sanday 1979, p527). 'The ethnographer becomes part of the situation being studied in order to feel what it is like for the people in that situation' (p527) - the anthropologist is 'the main instrument of observation' (p528). In seeking to describe the different paradigms which ethnographers have tended to adopt she identifies three prevailing styles – holistic, semiotic and behavioural. A holistic style seeks to explain structure through functionality of both individuals and groups; while semiotic styles working through two different lines of enquiry (explanatory or interpretive) aim to provide an ethnoscientific explanation or 'thick description' of the situation; alternatively, a behaviourist style lends itself to hypothesis setting and deduction. The semiotic style is likened to a process of 'clinical inference which begins with a set of symptoms and attempts to place them within an intelligible frame. In culture the symptoms are symbolic acts or clusters of symbolic acts. Theory emerges out of the unapparent import of things: 'Cultural theory is diagnostic, not predictive' (p533). She suggests that 'to understand the inner workings of a bureaucracy in all its complex detail the interpretive mode seems the most relevant. If, on the

## Chapter Four: Methodology

other hand, one assumes that there are 'general rules by which bureaucracies function, the explanatory-comparative mode may be more appropriate' (p537).

Gummesson (2000) maintains that 'participant observation constitutes the core of anthropology/ethnography and participation with active intervention is known as action research or action science (p83).

Humphreys et al (2003), usefully introduces the metaphor of jazz playing to draw out three challenges in using ethnography as a form of 'investigative technique' (p6). These are handling the delicate balance between self and other in fieldwork and writing; engaging in the everyday life of the culture being studied; and choosing criteria to apply in judging the quality of the ethnographic research in much the same way that a jazz player works within and alongside a group of jazz musicians.

### **4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **4.4.1 Problems**

Criticism is made of single site ethnographic studies on the grounds of validity, reliability and generalisability. Hammersley (1998) argues single case studies have small sample sizes; replication is not possible; and ethnographic researchers are unable to exercise statistical control of variables and thus identify causal relationships. However, Donmoyer (2000) argues that the value of case studies is more in their 'heuristic value in helping to formulate questions'. Pettigrew et al (1992) argue that case studies are particularly useful for exploration of social processes, especially of organisational change. Ethnography can be seen as impressionistic and imprecise which can make results less plausible and lacking in credibility. However, this can be avoided by gathering 'thick descriptions' of the specificity of the context to provide an appropriate basis for judgement about the transferability of findings into other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Easterby-Smith et al (1991) also suggest that with adequate safeguards achieved through triangulation, bias can be overcome more effectively.

Clearly, access to a local government organisation that allows a study to be conducted over a number of years, can be difficult because the level of trust between the organisation studied and the researcher needs to be extremely high. This is both to allow access to crucial meetings and discussions with key stakeholders but also because the nature of the discussion needs to be

## Chapter Four: Methodology

reflective and open. To find even one organisation that would allow for such a level of access over an appropriate period of time might be extremely difficult and to find a multiple number of organisations might be even more so.

In addition, comparing a number of organisations against each other can present other difficulties. This is because the size and nature of the organisations can vary considerably. For example, local government varies between small county district councils, metropolitan districts, county councils, and other unitary councils. All of these organisations handle different duties and powers, at different geographical sizes, and with budgets that can be quite different in scale and nature. To gain the type of research access necessary to provide the rich and qualitative data needed from a number of organisations that might allow for some like-for-like analysis seems improbable.

It is for this reason that the study lends itself to a single organisation approach to provide the focus for the research. In this way the difficulties of size and type are overcome. Limiting the research to a single site avoids the danger of having too much variation. The contrast and comparison across a number of different sites would be extremely difficult to control and would limit the potential for a study to reveal the quality of data that would help test the research ideas thoroughly. The literature review suggests that when seeking to investigate the nature of institutionalisation and the range and nature of the interdependencies across an organisation that might explain its patterning, the possible data sets will be extensive. To properly understand these it therefore appears sensible to limit the study to one single organisation. This enables the quality of the data to be maintained at a high level. This is important because when seeking to examine the possible reasons why organisational obstinacy might occur, observing the nuanced nature of the data in real time is crucial.

Owing to the complexity of data needed to investigate these questions fully, a longitudinal study would be preferable, hopefully stretching over a considerable period of time. Added to this, access to key stakeholders with a rich variety of stories that can provide the collection, ethnographically, of data that can then fill out the material relating to organisational frameworks would be advantageous. Finally, the opportunity to be directly involved in the build up of a change programme that seeks to encourage driving forces for change within an organisational framework that might be sufficient to overcome organisational obstinacy (tested over a number of iterations) would be helpful.

#### **4.5 Revised Research Questions:**

In view of the discussion on methodology and the adoption of a multi-dimensional approach focused particularly on AR, it has been necessary to return to the previous articulation of the research questions. It is clear that rather than simply ask whether organisational obstinacy can be observed, it would be preferable to set this into the context of the AR framework being pursued and thus a revised first question emerges:

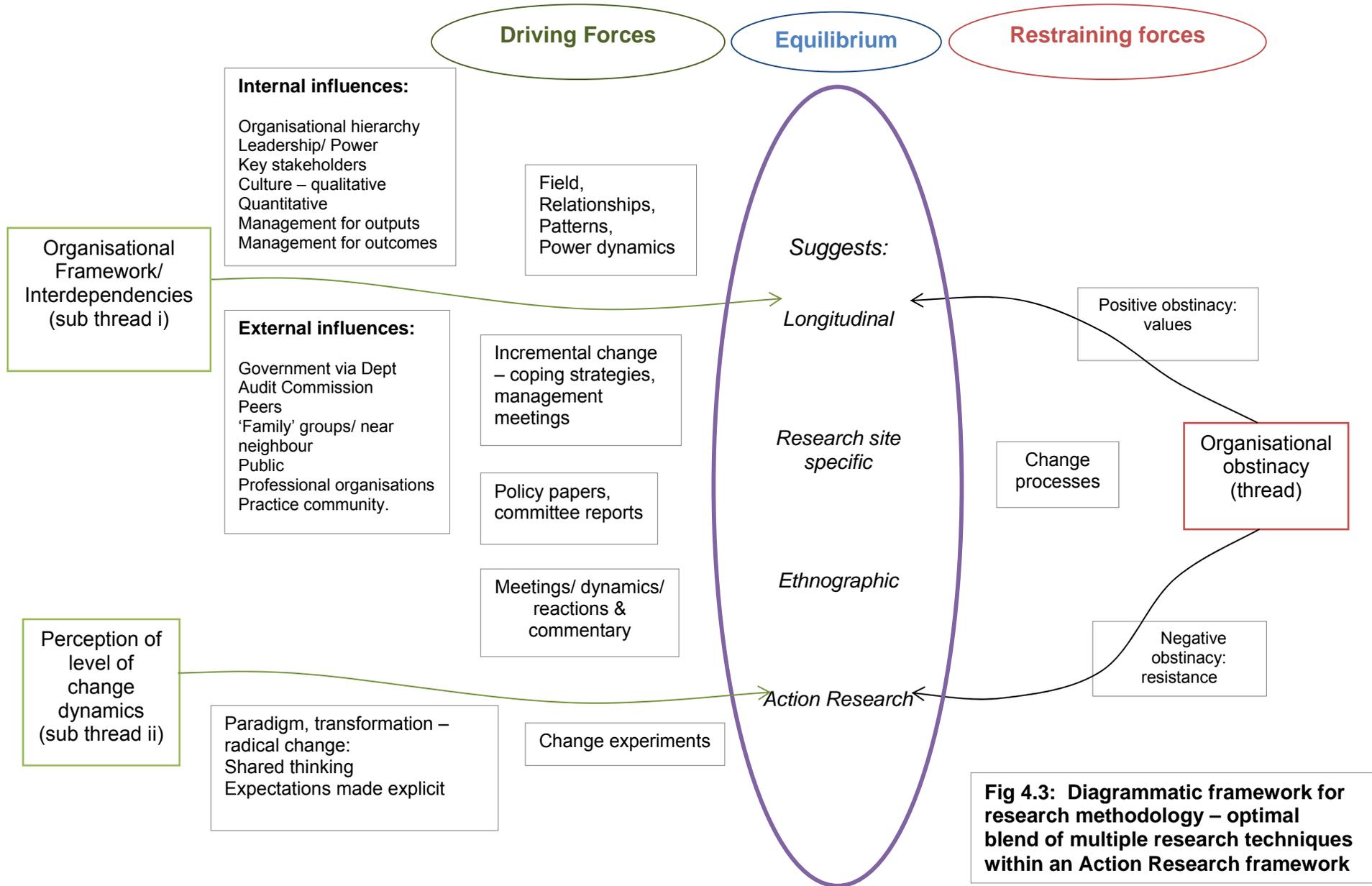
- ‘Using a process of embedded co-generative inquiry, can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?’

to which the original second question can be added:

- ‘Are the characteristics of the forces that most drive paradigm change in organisations:
  - The strength of the inter-dependencies in the organisational framework?
  - The degree to which the conceptual understanding of the need to change is shared?’

#### **4.6 A possible research model**

The two aspects of possible obstinacy – the strength of the interdependencies and the perceived nature and scale of the change the organisation feels itself to be in – rest in part on the interdependencies that can be observed between stakeholders and groups within the organisation. Lewin (1939) specifically warns against looking for similarities across organisations to explain causalities. He prefers to use relationship interdependencies to provide an explanation for the patterns. This study therefore adopts the same approach and Fig 4.3 (below) outlines this in more detail.



It is important that the key research question around organisational obstinacy is recognised as a possible abductive test of an initial idea and that should it prove promising, then more work can follow to test it more fully (Peirce 1931-58, McKaughin 2008).

### **4.6.1 Key Research Threads**

In Fig 4.3 (above) the main research threads are outlined. The implications for the research design and the typologies of research methods suggested are considered. The first sub thread – the organisational framework – is looked at through the field theory methodology of Lewin (1947) which examines relationships, patterns and power dynamics within an organisation. This is divided into two fundamental sub-threads, namely internal influences and external influences. The sorts of internal influences are thought to be those in the first box such as organisational hierarchy; leadership and power models being used in the organisation; key stakeholders and the roles they play; the culture of the organisation that provides the qualitative framework in which decisions are made; the emphasis on quantitative data such as targets, outputs, and performance standards being achieved; and the management of outputs and outcomes within the organisation. The external influences are thought to be likely to include government influences via their various departments and ministers; inspection and auditing organisations such as the Audit Commission; peer groups both organisationally as well as professionally ('family' groups and 'near neighbour' groupings); the public; professional institutions and the wider practice community. Seen through these lenses, data might be best collected through discerning the various decision-making pathways and measuring the impact on individuals and groups within the organisation of those decisions. This can be captured through not simply interviewing and observing but actively digging deeper into understanding how and why decisions have been made. Simple observation or interview will not be as effective as becoming embedded within the life of the organisation more fully and gaining the trust of key players in its development. This suggests, therefore, that a multi-dimensional method that combines a longitudinal (to answer the question of changing circumstances), ethnographic (to seek to really understand all the key players' genuine understanding of what they believe to be going on), action research based (to enable some degree of testing of perceptions and understanding of the data by the researcher) and case study (to enable to complexity and size of the data to be contained within a manageable research design) approach might be the most appropriate. The over-arching methodological framework however, will need to be set within the thinking of the AR community.

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Similarly, the second sub thread seeks to capture adequate data on the perception of change that might be present within an organisation. The nature of such data, given that it is based on perceptions, needs to be captured through conversations and interviews with people who will be able to 'mull over' their position and their understanding of the change environment, in real time. Such data will be best captured through note taking during meetings, semi-structured interviews, one-to-one discussion and debate; and testing of understandings with other third parties within the research team. The diagram seeks to outline how discussion on change might range from normal incremental change through to radical paradigmatic and transformational change and test to what extent there is shared thinking and understanding about the key concepts being adopted by the organisation. For example, a discussion which uses words like transformational may in fact be quite limited in scope and ambition – the job of the research is to be in a position to test the actual resolution of the group or team to achieve such change and whether the word captures the real organisational 'intent' for change. At the same time, the explicit aspiration of the organisation might be overtly radical (through such documents as 'strategy' or 'policy' papers) and yet when tested against the actual practice of the organisation might be quite limited. Having a rich 'nest' of contacts through which to test such matters is important. This might be particularly important where specific change initiatives are being attempted – if an 'experiment' is being tried then a clear understanding of its purpose and likely expected outcome becomes important research data. All these considerations suggest that ethnographic data, captured through involvement in an action research programme, limited to a case study site would be an extremely effective way to ensure useful research data is captured.

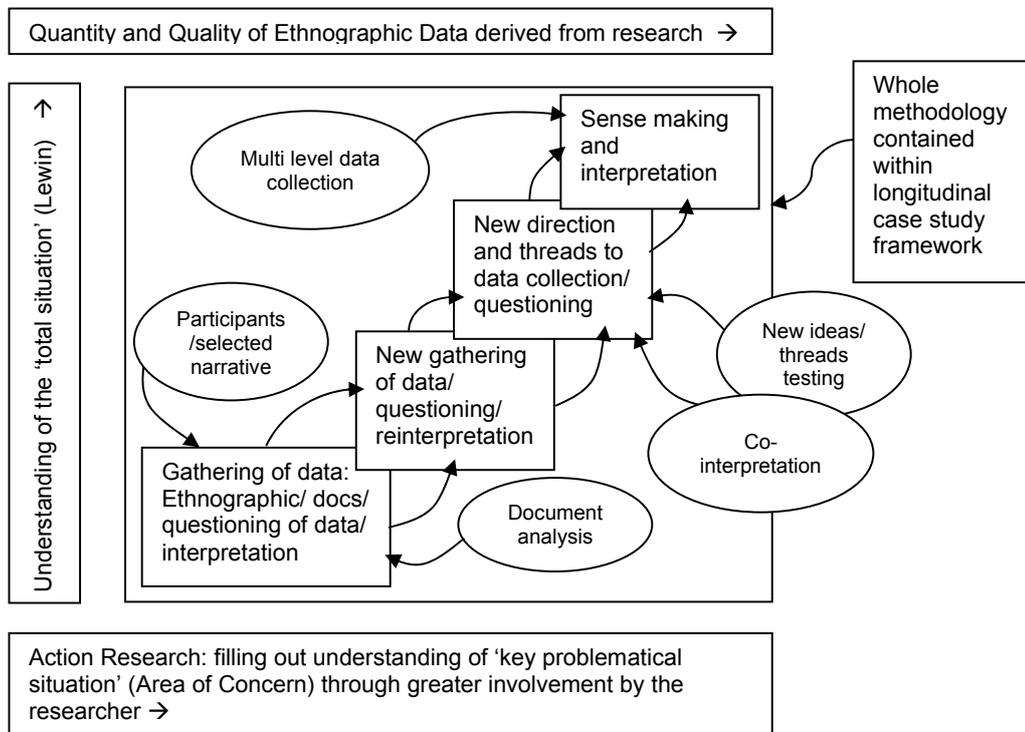
Finally, the organisational obstinacy thread seeks a means by which possible sides to obstinacy (positive and negative) might be investigated. It is felt that during change processes where specific and explicit change programmes are being conducted, if the research can be embedded within the organisation sufficiently to enable a 'sense' of whether organisational obstinacy exists, and whether it is positive or negative, then this is likely to be best sought through close observation of activities and people within the organisation in 'real time'. This again suggests that observation at meetings, formal and informal, which discuss change and context, will provide data which will address the research questions. A form of multi-dimensional methodological research which includes action research, longitudinal study, using

ethnographically obtained data, limited and framed within a single site study, is the one most likely to yield the best results.

#### 4.6.2 A multi-dimensional methodological approach

Having argued for a multi-dimensional methodological approach to fully investigate the two research questions, a possible model is now explored which combines these four elements together (longitudinal, ethnographic, action research based single site study). From the research perspective, the action research has been approached using Soft System Modelling (SSM) principles (Checkland, 2000), in the context of a longitudinal case study which has sought to capture qualitative data using ethnographic techniques. Critical to this approach has been to declare clearly the area of concern, the framework of ideas and the methods used throughout the whole study.

**Fig 4.4: Diagrammatic model of methodological approach to the study and conceptual framework.**



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In Fig 4.4 the gathering of data using a number of iterations (in this case four are suggested) is seen as providing a way in which sense making and interpretation can be reached around the three research 'threads'.

These four stages will need time to provide the necessary in-depth data collection and therefore a longitudinal study lasting for a number of years would be helpful. Gathering the richness of the data provided through observation, interview, one-to-one discussions and reflections, and formal papers and reports, suggests that this will need to use such techniques as ethnographic data capture. The longer this can be continued the greater the quantity and quality of the ethnographic data will be (top line of the box). At the same time, the understanding of the 'total situation' (Lewin) will be improved the longer the research continues (left hand line). As the research continues it is hoped that the understanding of the key 'problematical situation' (Checkland) will also be filled out.

Finally, in order to frame the research into a manageable 'whole' some containment is suggested and a single organisation study would offer just such a possibility. It was with these factors in mind that the researcher spotted the opportunity to combine a piece of work with a client which would provide just such a rich data capture for the research questions which were being investigated.

With a clear methodological approach now secure, I can proceed to discussing the key results and analysis.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS (STAGES 1 – 3)**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter my aim is to present the results of the study alongside my analysis. The nature of action research and ethnographic data collection lend themselves to presenting results and analysis together. The chapter is broken up into three stages; these align with key points in the research when the action research programme appeared to change and develop. My two research questions have informed each of these stages and at the end of each stage they are used to inform the analysis. The two questions were:

- ‘Using a process of embedded co-generative inquiry, can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?’
- ‘Are the characteristics of the forces that most drive paradigm change in organisations:
  - The strength of the inter-dependencies in the organisational framework?
  - The degree to which the conceptual understanding of the need to change is shared?’

### **5.2 ROLES OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

A single ethnographic case study research opportunity with a large metropolitan council presented itself in 2004 – for reasons of anonymity I have named the borough ‘Metville Metropolitan Borough Council’. Metville Council wished to embark on an organisational development programme and commissioned an independent consultant to advise on the engagement of a suitable business school to assist with the programme. The consultant advised the use of Metville Business School which was accepted. In the research, the key organisational stakeholders were Metville Council; the independent consultancy firm; and Metville Business School. The Council identified a senior officer to liaise on the oversight of the programme. Metville Business School normally appointed programme directors to liaise with its executive education clients and in this case the researcher took on this liaison role. The liaison responsibilities extended to management of the programme, including the design of the teaching, developing the delivery options with the client, monitoring the academic and financial outcomes and feeding back to the client. The senior council officer, independent consultant, and programme director created a triad that combined educational, consultancy, and organisational development experience to ensure that the programme ran effectively. The three

## Chapter Five Introduction

individuals worked closely throughout the whole study period and it was recognised and legitimised by the senior executives in Metville as the 'team' running the programme. For the purposes of reporting the results and analysing them, this team has been named the 'programme liaison team' (PLT).

The role of the researcher during the programme was clearly distinguished as overlapping yet separate from the Business School programme director role. In the researcher role, I took responsibility for the research including the oversight of thinking through the 'framework of ideas'; the methods deployed during each stage; and the identification of the key 'area of concern' for each iteration of the research. Monitoring the research and the collection of the key evidence including case study and ethnographic material was my responsibility entirely. During the periods of reflection after each stage the overlap became stronger as I observed the dynamics of the programme liaison team and participated in the discussion of the outcomes of each stage; at the same time I remained completely separate for the purposes of the research.

### 5.3 REPORTING THE DATA

The data, which has been assembled for this study, has principally come from the following sources: Firstly, it has been collected from the notes taken both during and after discussions when key decisions were being thought about or being made. During the course of the study key stakeholders met and discussed progress and what next-steps might be taken. These discussions, at which the researcher was an active participant, were captured in diary notes (*DN*), and notes and sketch diagrams (*HWN*) generated to help better understand the key concepts that were involved. Frequently flip-charts (*FC-plt*) were used by the PLT to enable discussion to be captured in a facilitated way by the researcher; these were often photographed and kept as a digital file. Secondly, during the course of the different teaching programmes that were commissioned by Metville Council from the business school, participants themselves would feedback their reflections. These were captured in notebooks of the researcher (*PN*) and flip-charts (*FC-p*) that were kept as a running record of progress being made and were maintained during the course of the whole research study. Some formal feedback was in hard copy (*hDoc*) Thirdly, electronic documents (*eDoc*), often formal proposals for the next-steps in the teaching and support programmes, were stored on the researcher's academic server along with emails (*eM*) and other electronic communication between the different stakeholders involved - Metville Council as the study organisation (*S-OD*) and the Business School (*eComm*)

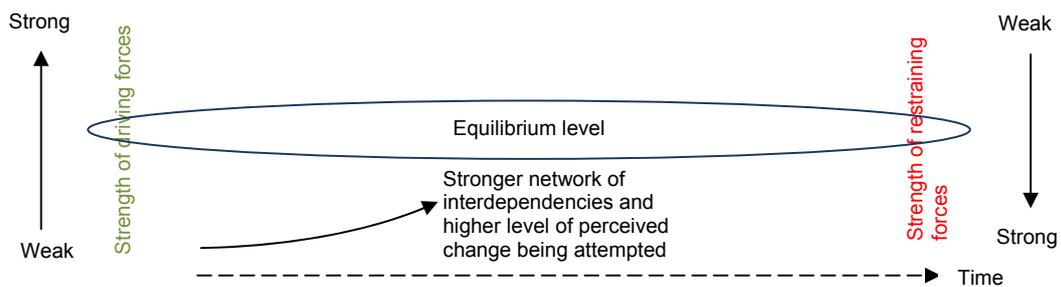
A table (Table Appendix 1) adds to these descriptions and draws the distinction between formal and informal data and personal and organisational data. These typologies are discussed in more detail including a diagram (Fig: App 1) to indicate where on the different scales the data lay.

### **5.3.1 The Overall Approach**

From an initial assessment of possible research with Metville it felt entirely appropriate to build on the literature review and methodology analysis from the previous chapters and to suggest a longitudinal case study be undertaken which sought to capture qualitative data using ethnographic techniques. From a research perspective, using Soft System Modelling (SSM) principles (Checkland, 2000) within an overall action research approach also felt appropriate. Critical to this was to declare clearly the epistemology of the area of concern, the framework of ideas and the methods used throughout the whole study. The study benefitted considerably from the longevity of the research relationship with the study organisation which spanned 2004 – 2011 and provided the opportunity to run four clearly defined iterations of the research during that period. The key problematical situation investigated throughout the study, simply stated, was the resolution by one UK local authority council of how to adapt its roles and responsibilities in the face of changes in society. The key ideas that were investigated were encapsulated in the research questions outlined in the literature review, namely the strength of the framework or pattern of interdependencies across the organisation; the level of understanding of the nature and extent of the change programme the council was engaged in and how this was expressed in its change narrative; and finally the possible presence of organisational obstinacy. Models of how these ideas might inter-relate were generated in order to provide a device through which to gain a clearer understanding of the 'problematic situation' (Checkland 2000). The method used to investigate these ideas aligned closely with the Business School's delivery of a major executive education consultancy contract containing taught programmes alongside assistance in the delivery of an ambitious change programme to the whole council. The hoped-for outcome was that key organisational players could be both identified and persuaded to join in the process of transformation leading to a number of key accommodations being achieved through which action plans could be effected. I now turn to the first stage of the results and analysis.

## 5.4 STAGE ONE

My initial ideas suggested that a council that was strengthening its organisational capacity (Rashman 2009) would be better able to adapt its roles and responsibilities in the face of rapid changes within society than one which was failing to adapt quickly to the political, financial and managerial challenges that were occurring. Such capacity would be seen in the number and nature of accommodations and adaptations in the council's working methods and organisational framework (i.e. its patterns of interdependencies) that it had been able to achieve. In Fig 5.1 these ideas are modelled as a schematic with driving forces and restraining forces held in equilibrium – the strength of interdependencies and the perceptual understanding of the change process as paradigmatic were driving change upwards (time is represented along the bottom of the schematic), restraints were seen as pushing downwards.



**Fig 5.1: Schematic to represent approach to change programme in Stage One**

During the initial conversations with the council, I was made aware that the key trigger for action had been the assessment of the inspecting agency, the Audit Commission, which concluded that the council lacked the capacity to deal with significant corporate improvement. The 2002 report on Metville in the first comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) had been that the council was judged to be 'weak' (a level in a five point scale running from 'excellent' to 'poor'). Many of the senior executives disagreed with this assessment; resented the criteria that had been used to judge the council's performance; and felt the assessment to be unjust but they did recognise that the council needed to improve.

### **5.4.1 Area of concern:**

During the initial stage of the research programme the key issue identified by the PLT (Programme Liaison Team) was capacity building. The Team saw the key 'external contextual matter' (Buchanan et al. 2005) as the Audit Commission's 'weak' assessment of the council. This might contain a possible advantage to the Council. The Government's regional office was prepared to assist such councils to build up their organisational capacity by funding innovative programmes to challenge the way they were operating and Metville was expected to seek assistance to build up its corporate capacity. Metville were open to ideas of how this might be achieved. An earlier published paper (Clifford, 2002) suggested that capacity building should concentrate on both middle managers (to strengthen their managerial competencies as well as their capacity for strategic thinking) and senior managers (to assist in strengthening organisational strategic alignment). Metville was looking for something that could be 'done quickly'. An MBS development programme that had been running with other clients within the conurbation had been reasonably well received by key stakeholders such as the staff at the Government Office for the region and adopting such a programme would be considered a 'safe' policy for Metville. The notion of capacity building, therefore, provided a means through which to initially interpret the more fundamental area of concern around how to modernise its roles and responsibilities in the face of changes in society.

### **5.4.2 Framework of ideas**

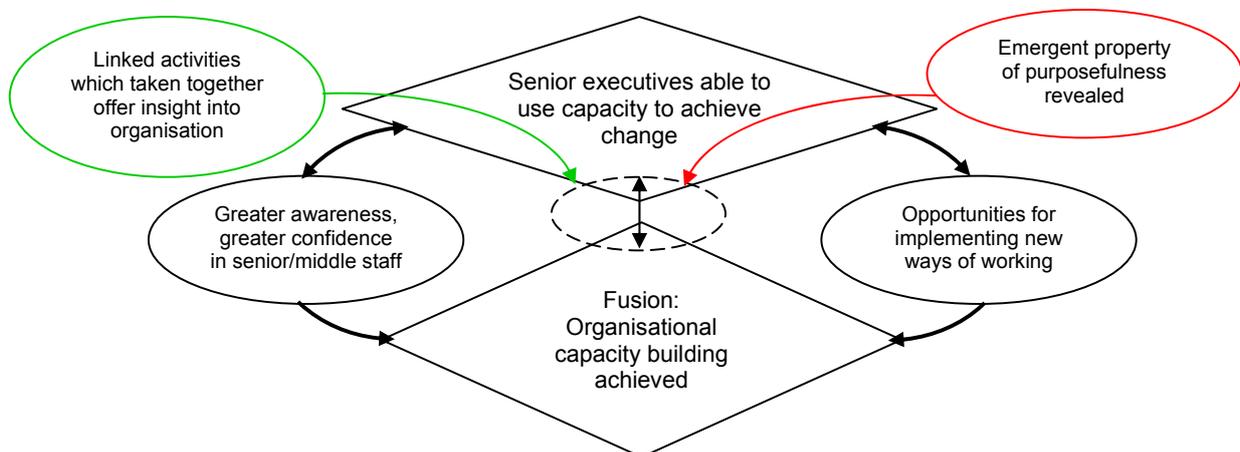
Two key ideas emerged during the initial discussions of the PLT about the nature of capacity building – the first was that organisational learning needed to involve some notion of 'doing' and the second was that individual staff needed to have a greater sense of their own 'agency' to 'try something new' in order to initiate and follow through on their ideas.

The picture drawn up in my mind, as researcher, was of an organisation which had been assessed as weak because its systems were producing delivery outcomes that were too often inefficient, ineffective and uneconomic and therefore, in the view of the Audit Commission, did not represent 'value for money'. In seeking to make sense of this, I felt that a model was needed. This might reflect the many senior staff who existed that were extremely capable of achieving rapid improvements, and the many improvement opportunities that were being ignored. If these could be drawn together it could help produce a substantial change. These ideas were strongly informed by Kotter's (1995) thinking on transformational leadership and management that suggested that strengthened personal agency alongside strategic support for

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trying out change projects would 'demonstrate' the desired direction of change which could then be later embedded and institutionalised within organisations wishing to carry out radical reform. In addition, Burgelman's ideas on entrepreneurship and internal corporate venturing, (Burgelman 1983) which suggested that behaviour aimed at challenging existing practice and championing new ways of working should be specifically encouraged, also informed this 'model' of ideas.

The Metville programme sought to build capacity through fusing together two separate threads of development activity (see Fig 5.2). The first was through individual personal development that would result in clear personal development plans being generated and agreed with senior line managers (Kotter 1995).



**Fig 5.2: Initial model of the framework of ideas for Stage One (Clifford)**

This was combined with a second thread, an applied learning opportunity which individuals would work on during the development programme (Burgelman 1983). The idea was to enable Metville managers to test out their ideas for changed ways of working at the same time as their confidence and knowledge developed during the taught part of the programme. By joining these two threads together, individuals with a greater sense of personal agency and with a clearer picture of how change might be affected would 'fuse' these two development opportunities together such that more confident and aware managers would take on change-challenges to improve the organisation.

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My initial model sought to capture this framework of ideas through which the action research change process might be examined. In this model the combination of more confident staff (left hand oval) implementing new ways of working (right hand oval) would generate two forms of learning environments. The first (the green oval) would enable the activities of the participants, working on real-life/ real-time change projects, to be linked together to reveal more clearly the organisational barriers to change that had been uncovered. Secondly, an important feature of soft system modelling (Checkland 2000) is to seek to discover the underlying property of purposefulness that guides and directs the work of an organisation (the red oval) – I hoped to use the programme activity to reveal this. My initial model supposed that by creating more confident staff and undertaking change projects promoted by senior executives, improved outcomes in organisational effectiveness would be achieved because senior executives would be better able to see how this improved capacity could be harnessed to add to their organisational purposefulness.

In parallel with the programme discussions, a competences and skills matrix had been generated by Metville (*SOrg*). This was useful because it provided further criteria through which the overall improvement process could be judged and which included the business school programme and how effectively it fed into these criteria. Metville saw organisational competences and skills as most highly developed when operating in partnership with other organisations. In a gradation of competencies, key leadership and management skills were recognised as necessary. These included leading, thinking strategically and taking people along with you, combined with some underlying attributes such as resilience. This would lead to higher level improvement in such areas as maximising potential and focusing on customers and service users, eventually rising to achieving much stronger partnership working.

A recently published government report (OPM, 2003) on capacity building had highlighted skills/ attributes that were perceived to be in need of further development such as interpersonal resilience - the link between better outcomes and skills development was recognised in improved partnership working and strategic thinking. For the purposes of the MBS programme it was hoped that the design of the programme would achieve significant improvements in the leadership and management in Metville.

Arising from these general discussions, the PLT developed an initial framework of ideas for the programme as a whole which was translated into a programme explanation diagram (*eDoc*). A simplified version of this more complicated document is provided below (See Fig 5.3).

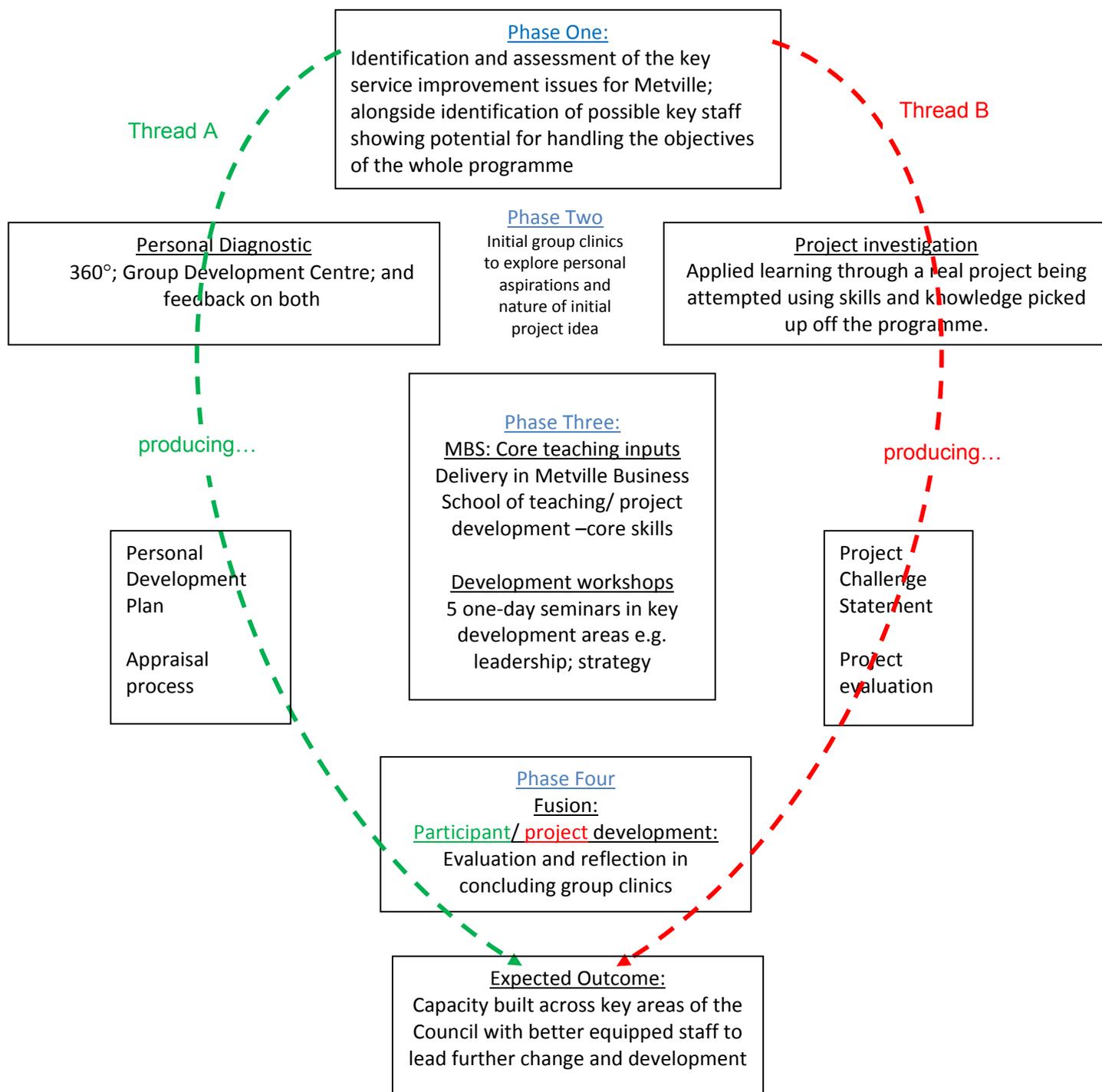
### **5.4.3 Method**

Fig 5.3 has been derived from the original proposal document presented to Metville Council which described the two development threads in the conceptual model. The original diagram was drawn up by the researcher using the approach contained in the researcher's initial model.

Elements of the later diagram were added in as the nature of the whole programme became clearer. For example, the 360° appraisal and assessment centres were initiated by Metville in parallel with the work with MBS on the wider programme. In the diagram the left hand thread (in green) described the personal development part and the right hand thread (in red) described the applied learning project implementation part. The model anticipated four phases - in phase one it was expected that the Council corporately (and therefore including elected members) would identify around perhaps a hundred ideas for change that would represent key issues that needed investigation. Staff actively participating on the programme would be aware of this and would be assured they were working on issues in their directorates that had been identified as key corporate priorities. At the same time, staff showing promise for being able to tackle key change issues would be identified as potential participants on the programme and matched with issues that needed attention.

In phase two, following the green thread, it was expected that through the assessment centres and 360° appraisal, individuals chosen to participate on the programme would be provided with feed-back on their performance and aptitudes. This would turn into a personal development plan agreed with their line managers on their short and medium term personal goals within Metville Council. The personal development plan would then form the basis for appraisals carried out by an individual's line manager for the next year or two.

**Fig 5.3**  
**Diagrammatic representation of the model for the Metville manager development programme** (derived by Clifford from original eDoc)



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At the same time, following the red thread, the key change issues would be assigned to participants who would in turn use their time on the programme to investigate in more detail the problems associated with these issues. At the start of the taught programme at MBS, group clinics of about twelve participants would be brought together to examine their development ideas and begin to use the smaller group as a form of action learning clinic.

In phase three, MBS would provide core teaching centred on contextual understanding of organisational change including the use of some management techniques followed by some key skills development workshops, both of which were aimed at building capacity in staff to handle change projects.

In phase four, a final group clinic was projected to take place at which the key learning points for both personal development and project implementation skills would be discussed in order to draw out the main barriers to change and suggest how they might be overcome. Combined with other associated work within the Council, it was hoped that the programme might provide an important contribution to the achievement of building capacity within the Council to undertake major change projects over the next five years or so.

The capacity building programme eventually adopted by Metville was derived from ideas put forward by me as programme director. However, I also made an input as researcher. The taught programme comprised a combination of teaching, learning-while-doing, and personal development. (The personal 360° appraisal and the assessment centres for development were organised by Metville separately from the MBS work through an independent agency). Both initiatives aimed at providing a platform on which staff could build their own capacity for change. By encouraging staff to recognise areas of personal strength (and areas where more development work was needed) it was hoped they might address personal development needs more directly with their personal line managers. At the same time, the teaching programme included opportunities for the participants to look at their applied learning opportunity in a learning-through-doing style in order to try and apply the new learning in a real-time, real-place scenario.

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Metville Council itself provided programme support through their organisational development team that linked the wider change work of the Council with the specific programme commissioned to MBS.

In seeking to achieve the desired outcome of building organisational capacity, the action research methodology focused on combining two elements – the first seeking to build individual skills (such as leadership and strategic thinking) alongside the second which comprised developing exemplars of good practice and changed ways of working (through the applied learning opportunities). When fused together it was expected that the Council would create a broader platform across which to experiment with modernising the way it worked which also recognised the political, managerial and financial context in which the Council was being asked to work. The methodology therefore included a focus on reflection – reflection on self and performance/ improvement alongside reflection on the organisation and what possibilities for change and improvement existed.

From a research perspective the three key elements of the initial area of concern comprised firstly, seeking to understand the dynamics of the staff interdependencies across the organisation; secondly the perceived nature of change that was generally understood across the organisation; and finally, evidence that organisational obstinacy might exist across the council. From this perspective, capacity building could begin to be modelled around these three research threads.

### **5.4.4 Key events in the first stage**

Initially, Metville aimed to procure a programme designed to build capacity through their middle managers. To further this idea, the researcher was invited in early spring, 2004, to speak to the senior executive with responsibility for organisational development (OD) and human resources (HR) management about an existing executive education programme that was already being delivered to councils across the conurbation (which included Metville). At that time, Metville was divided into about twelve separate divisions (or departments), some functional (for example, children's services or housing) and some providing corporate services (for example, legal or IT). OD and HR were delivered as part of the Council's corporate services and a senior executive was responsible for this area of work. Appendix Two describes the key managers and actors in the research study and the role they played in the whole programme.

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At the meeting the conurbation-wide programme's aims and objectives were explained; how the ideas had developed; and how the programme had been delivered up to that point. The senior executive expressed a willingness to adopt the programmes, very much in the form that had been described to him. However, the programme director/ researcher explained that where every council differed from each other, so too such capacity building programmes needed to be explicitly designed for each individual council. A very different conversation then followed. The senior executive actively discussed the individual needs of Metville. It was agreed that a different approach to delivery would be adopted for the Metville programme; the key aim would be to attempt to match staff talent and experience with the key issues faced by the council operationally and financially. The programme would be designed with a much greater focus on specific problem solving which resonated with the key priorities held by the elected members of the council (*HWN*).

This initial conversation was included into Metville's bid for government support for capacity building. Metville wrote to the government regional office outlining an ambitious capacity building programme which aimed to re-focus the council's improvement strategy towards neighbourhood based management and service transformation (*SOrg*). In May 2004 an outline bid was made to the government's capacity building fund. The bid was received favourably with a request for more details to be drawn up for the MBS submission (*eDoc*). On 24<sup>th</sup> August the first meeting of the programme liaison team took place at the Business School (*eDoc*). The overall shape of the bid was discussed and the parts that the Business School might be able to deliver. The total expected size of the Council's bid financially was £360,000. By late autumn a full proposal of MBS's contribution was put to Metville on behalf of the school for consideration (*eDoc*); the pricing estimate comprised about 25% of the total Metville bid to the government regional office (*eDoc*). The degree of innovation and a concern to commission a piece of work that would benefit the council led to protracted discussions on the details of the submission.

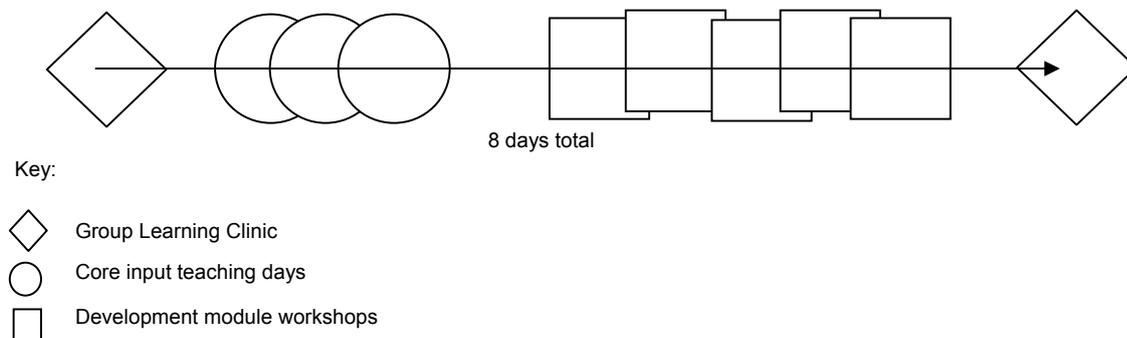
By the spring of 2005 detailed discussion had led to a re-working of the proposal and subsequent versions were put to Metville (*eDocs: 19<sup>th</sup> April and 27<sup>th</sup> April*). An anticipated start to the programme was set for May. Metville were anxious to mesh the Business School programme into a parallel process of 360° appraisals linked to assessment centres for staff coming on the programme and the emerging competency framework of Metville for improved leadership and management. As these elements were thought through a sketch diagram of the conceptual framework of the whole personal and organisational development programme was

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produced by the PLT (*HWN*). A longer document was produced that set out the context for the programme both nationally and locally and introduced a model that conceptualised the whole process (*eDoc*).

With agreement to begin the programme in full, the researcher was invited to speak to a group of prospective participants along with their line managers to explain the nature of the whole programme (*eDoc*). The diagram was broken down into a slide-presentation which explained in more detail each part of the programme (*eDoc*). The organisational development element was emphasised alongside the personal development element.

In Fig 5.4 the teaching component of Stage One of the action research is explained.



**Figure 5.4: Diagrammatic model of 'Transform' taught programmes**

In each cohort of the programme individual participants would experience an initial group learning clinic (lasting a day); three core input days, five development module workshops (each lasting a day), and a final group clinic (lasting a day). The total time spent in sessions at MBS would be 8 days – added work on applied learning projects would also be needed to complete the programme. The objectives of the initial group clinics were to introduce the participants to each other and to explore their applied learning projects together with a view to them seeing this as a form of action learning set that could last throughout the programme. This was followed by three core input teaching days which comprised an explanation of the political and organisational context to the government's agenda for modernising local government. Five development modules then followed concentrating on particular skill sets (personal resilience; strategic thinking, leadership, decision making, and business planning). The programme ended with a final group learning clinic to discuss progress in the learning project and impressions of

the whole programme. In the first stage there were five iterations of these programmes – they became known as ‘Transform’ programmes and each iteration was a ‘cohort’ hence ‘Cohort 1’; ‘Cohort 2’ and so on.

#### 5.4.5 Analysis

During this initial stage, the researcher, along with the PLT, observed the impact of the whole programme and discussed the outcomes. The PLT were testing the assumption that building a more confident cadre of middle-managers would lead to them to feel more empowered to undertake radical change within Metville and practical examples would emerge of how such change might be put into effect.

The design of the programme provided the opportunity for reflection at the final group clinic sessions and these were facilitated by me as the researcher. During the first cohort an exercise was conducted in the final group learning clinic that asked participants to discuss their observations on how their applied learning opportunities had worked out.

Three particular comments received were that the participants had felt *“flat”* and *“disappointed”* and one said they felt a *“sense of flatness”* at the end of the programme – when questioned further they said that they felt they had been *“pushing against old systems”* (PN). One participant reported that a feeling of being *“stopped in my tracks”* (PN) by their line manager who did not wish to support their project. Four participants said they had a sense of *“blockage”* in not being able to move their project forward. In wider discussion about the programme one comment was *“the Chief Executive’s leadership on the programme has felt remote”* and that because of this s/he had a *“sense of wasted energy”* and that *“the human side of change has been neglected”* (PN). Another commented *“What has become of my learning? I have a sense of disappointment”* (PN) and another commented *“I do not feel there is a sense of permission; of ‘risk’ being sanctioned, it’s as if ‘the soft issues are being ignored”* (PN).

For the second cohort a similar exercise was conducted during the final group learning clinic and similar comments were made in relation to the applied learning projects e.g. *“I didn’t have visibility or a champion in my cause”* (PN). During the wider discussion a reflection by one participant concerned the way in which inside voices were ignored – *“with consultants’ reports – they are clearly written by outsiders and are not resonating with staff inside the council”* (PN). Another comment concerned the importance of *“middle managers as the message translators”*

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(PN) of the change agenda where confidence in the message of senior executives was important. Discussion also centred on the importance of middle managers being reassured that directors and senior executives were really committed to the change agenda, as one participant said: “do (they) really mean it, and how will I know?” (PN).

In discussing capacity building, during the second cohort’s final group learning clinic, the participants drew up a list of aspects of capacity building that they felt were essential to a successful programme (PN) see Table 5.1:

<p><b>Capacity Building</b> 12 key aspects/ requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Know where we are going</li><li>• Assistance to implement strategy</li><li>• Common language</li><li>• Reduce bureaucracy</li><li>• Connect resourcing</li><li>• Self awareness/ assessment</li><li>• Celebrate success</li><li>• Empowerment</li><li>• People (right people, right things)</li><li>• Corporate approach</li><li>• Space to innovate</li><li>• Risk taking</li></ul>	<p><b>Building</b></p> <p>the low attendance rate for the e). Much of the feedback given by participants during the rest of the programme had been very positive (see Box 5.1 below), however, for the final day the relatively unstructured nature of the day, which was designed to give the participant’s the opportunity to choose priorities for themselves, appeared to result in a low attendance.</p>
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<p><u>Example feedback from evaluation forms filled in at end of ‘core input modules’ 9<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> Nov 2005</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “First time I’ve heard the ‘modernisation’ agenda explained clearly. Excellent opportunity to reflect on theory and management practice. Real encouragement for improvement in practice”.</li><li>• “Appropriate material and inputs. Helpful for conceptualising current position on processes and getting into change, A lot of ground to cover in the time”</li><li>• “I have found the programme extremely useful. The information/knowledge gained has helped me to think more strategically”.</li></ul> <p>(eDoc Nov 2005)</p>
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### Box 5.1 Example of Feedback Comments (November 2005)

For the third cohort, therefore, the last day’s learning clinic was given a clearer structure with exercises designed to achieve improved feedback and engagement with the participants. This was more successful – one of the exercises was to ask all the participants to individually write on ‘black sheets’ of paper with chalk their impressions of the whole programme under three headings – how it had affected them personally (‘you’); how it felt now within the authority (‘the

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council') and then finally what action was felt to be an immediate priority on completing the programme ('do'). The choice of sheets of black paper and chalk was to encourage a sense of exploration and experiment – chalk could easily be 'rubbed off' and a comment removed – it created a more gathered learning environment which would then prompt discussion (FC- p).

The results (see Box 5.2 below) indicated that staff felt that insufficient priority was being given to working on corporate-wide issues and this was reflected in a lack of time being allowed for this kind of work. In answer to the question 'what action would be an immediate priority' following on from the end of the programme, participants listed the following:

Feedback from 'black sheets' exercise in final group clinic April 2006 (edited)

*"Rise to the Challenge/ Drive through/ Finish something"*

*"Use the knowledge and experience learnt to benefit the Council, my team and me"*

*"Seek appropriate opportunities to apply learning to practice"*

*"Develop and bring about change"*

*"Embrace new experiences"*

*"Making the time, available for both the course and to reflect/impact in the work place"*

*"Make Time"*

*"Dedicate necessary time to do course justice"*

*"Time/energy seeing through ALC when it becomes difficult/challenging"*

*"Time to reflect and develop skills from the course"*

*"Ensure make time commitment"*

*(eDoc 2006)*

### **Box 5.2 Feedback from 'black sheets' (April 2006)**

This feedback indicated that while there was a high level of motivation to use the knowledge gained from the programme, the need to prioritise time to 'real change' projects was difficult to achieve in an environment which did not appear to support their work.

For the fourth and fifth programmes, therefore, a greater focus on how to link the work of the applied learning projects to the work of Metville was looked at and as a result the name was changed to 'applied learning challenge' (ALC). What was becoming clear from the feedback and discussion with the participants during the programmes was that middle managers felt unsure that the Council's senior managers were fully 'bought-into' the Transforming Metville aims and objectives (hence the comment 'do they really mean it?').

The use of the 'black sheets' (FC-p) exercise for the fourth and fifth cohorts revealed a growing awareness in the participants of the wider context that was developing for the Transform

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programmes. In particular when addressing the question of the personal impact of the programme deeper responses were beginning to come forward – “*Where am I going?*”, “*Have I really defined what I can do?*” were being asked. Alongside this the recognition of a growth in personal confidence was made – “*greater confidence to drive innovation to follow through on projects*”, “*I will use the learning from transformation to make positive change happen*”, “*I will improve organisational working*” (FC-p).

There was a clear sense of the need to maintain organisational learning: I will continue “*ongoing reading and learning*”, I will undertake “*more learning*”, I will “*share my learning and write-up more*”, I will “*reflect on my learning and spread it to other things at work*”, I will “*re-read all the hand-outs and follow up some references*”, I will put “*theory into practice*”, and “*link academic theory into every day work*”, I will “*undertake development opportunities from the development day and the 360°*”, I will make a “*commitment to attend Transform events*” (FC-p).

There was a determination to apply the learning to applied learning challenges (ALCs): I will “*complete ALC*”, achieve a “*successful ALC*”, “*link the learning in lectures to ALC*”, I will “*keep going with ALC and clear through Council*”, I will “*identify manageable ALC targets, but at the same time challenge*” the Council further (FC-p).

When addressing the question about how they felt the Authority might respond now the cohorts had ended, participants noted that: there was a need to “*share the course with senior colleagues*”. In fact some were more specific: “*development is needed for senior management*”, “*send heads of service on potted version of course*”, we need to “*encapsulate the key messages for management team*”. Other participants focused on the deployment of staff who had completed the programmes – we need to work out “*how to utilize, in a practical way, the Transformers*”, there should be “*further professional development for Transformers*”, senior management should “*recognise Transform*” (FC-p). One participant suggested that management should “*introduce appraisal*” based on Transform, that would “*lead into a job description for Transformers to help organisational development*” and this should be built into “*career progression*” and “*raise awareness of the (Transform) role through better communication*”. Another felt there should be “*leadership at every level*”, we should be “*exploiting the potential and investing in training NOW*”. Participants were anxious that the momentum built up on the programme should be maintained: “*keep up the momentum*”, they

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*should “support new ideas” and “support the ALC process”.* One participant, though, asked: *“is the vision shared?” (FC-p).*

Another focus in the feedback was the need for cross-directorate working to be encouraged: there should be *“compulsory representation from each division”* on the Transform programme, there should be *“better cross-directorate working”*; there must be *“equity across Directorates”* to ensure participation on Transform; there is a need to *“hold cross-directorate events and activities” and to “encourage cross-directorate working” (FC-p).* One participant went further and suggested that links should be pursued at the Local Strategic Partnership level.

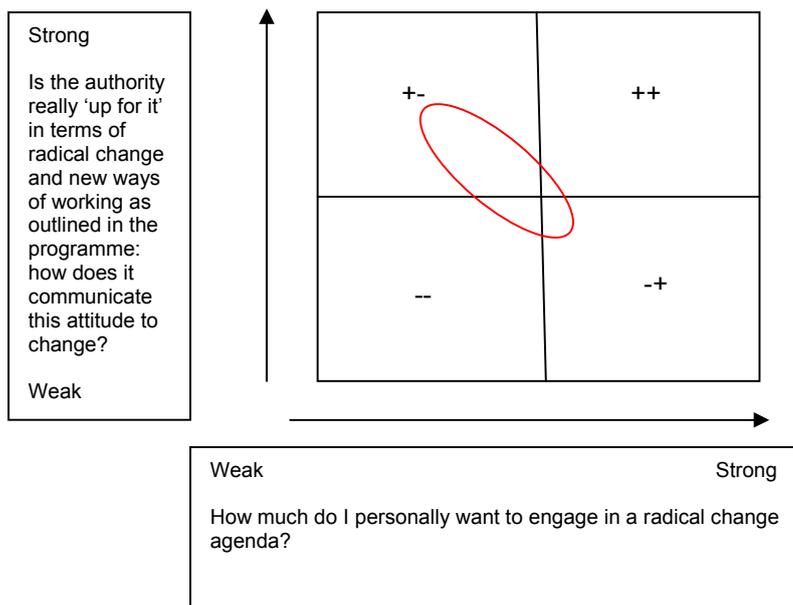
When addressing the question of what immediate action should follow at the end of the cohorts, participants suggested that the Council should *“move Transform from initiative to mainstream status”* and embed the idea of Transform into the *“development of transformational management group(s)”*, and make *“secondments to other directorates”*. The idea of mentors was floated who might support individuals in planning ALCs, and *“setting up governance systems and accountability”* around each challenge; *“sharing the outcomes from ALCs”* as a more corporate activity and beginning to think about setting up *“cross-directorate Applied Learning Challenges”*. Another aspect of the development of a more corporate approach was seen in participants recognising the need for Transform to develop a ‘brand’ within the organisational culture that could be communicated more visibly – *“there should be a web page for Transform”*; *“Transform council services and products”* should be investigated, Transform briefings should be *“fed down into teams”*, there should be *“Transform Tuesdays”* (a reference to IT gatherings in California on the first Tuesday of each month where innovators and investors met). Participants suggested there should be half yearly Transform workshops; a Forum might be created for ‘Transformers’ where learning about management tools from the core input days could be shared more widely. The use of the personal development plans (PDP) as a way of reinforcing the psychological contract of transformation with participants was emphasised – we need to *“review PDPs’ more consistently; programme notes should be re-read; opportunities to apply theories should be offered”*.

During the final group learning clinics a further exercise was conducted with the participants which became known as ‘x marks the spot’ (see Fig 5.5 below). This was a form of ‘where are you?’ exercise mapping where participants felt they were in relation to Metville Council. It was adapted from the ideas on strategic alignment already developed (Clifford 2001). The results

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suggested that while participants themselves were significantly 'up-for-it', their feeling about more senior managers was that their managers 'were not'. Capacity building was increasingly expressed in terms of 'it's not us who are the problem – it's further up the line' – the red oval in the diagram captured the position where most participants felt they were. When discussing 'transformational change' in the teaching part of the programme it was a frequent comment that senior line managers struggled to recognise transformational change in comparison to 'evolutionary' or 'directed' change at Metville. Change was therefore seen by senior managers very much in terms of incremental improvements to current practice with little exploration of the more fundamental challenge to the existing way the Council was structured or managed.

My observation at this point was that while much of the programme was seen as successful and had achieved many of the hoped for outcomes, a number of important issues had begun to emerge. Firstly, participants' work on applied learning challenges did not result in attempts to implement change ideas in a practical way that would arise out of their ALC.



**Fig 5.5: Diagram of 'X marks the spot' exercise results – taken from flip chart material (FC-p)**

Secondly, Metville had corporately managed the programme strategically in the same way that they were operating across the Council – i.e. in a siloed and hierarchical way.

The two fundamental research questions were then appraised in the context of this first stage.

The resulting analysis suggested that a gap existed between the whole organisation and the individual within their immediate work environment.

**5.4.5.1 The organisational framework:**

The comments back from participants during the feedback and reflection stage of the cohorts identified poor linkage within the framework of interdependencies across the organisation. The participants were keen to emphasise the need for improved cross-directorate working; the need for improved buy-in from senior managers overseeing the applied learning challenges; and the improved understanding of how each individual's role 'fitted-in' to the overall work of the council as a result of learning together. There were many comments stressing the benefits of having met and worked with colleagues from across different parts of the council.

**5.4.5.2 The organisational understanding of change:**

The shallow language of change as seen in the 'x marks the spot' exercise and the discussions during the context and nature of the change ideas suggested that for many participants the whole change agenda was centred on incremental change rather than more radical approaches.

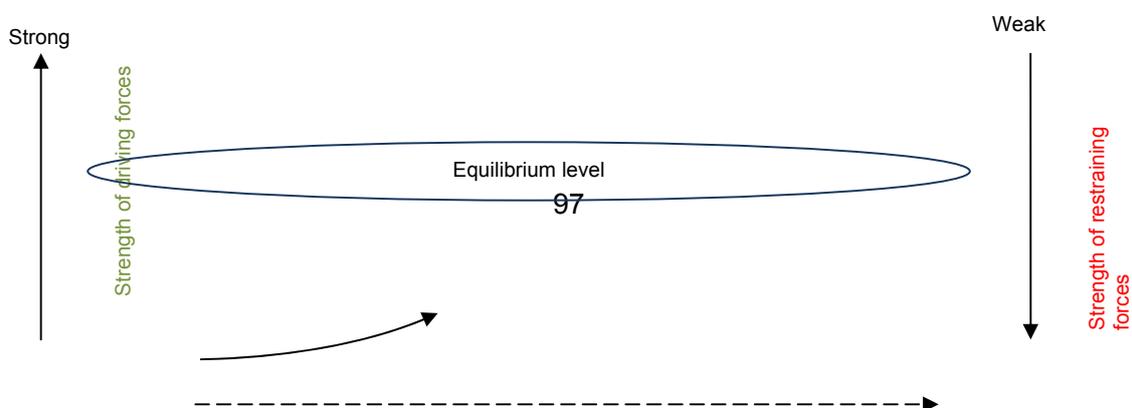
**5.4.5.3 Organisational obstinacy:**

By the time the fifth cohort took place, around 150 managers had been through the programme. This was a not inconsiderable investment by the Council when taking into account the direct financial cost of the programme and the opportunity costs of time and effort on the programmes (staff away from their 'day-jobs'). This suggested that the restraining forces against the programme were at a low level. However, some obstinacy could be seen in the unwillingness of senior managers to 'buy-in' to the work of the applied learning and to encourage individual participants who wished to explore ALCs (that might take them out of their immediate departmental base). From a research perspective, a gap appeared to exist in the implementation of the integrated capacity building programme and the low level take-up between intra-organisational programme outputs. There was therefore a sense in the mind of the researcher that there might be an organisational obstinacy (in a negative sense) in the more senior areas of the Council. At this stage it was understandable, since many of the occupiers of more significant senior posts had been appointed because they were good 'at that job' – the idea that the job might well be changing quite radically and therefore they might need to change as well did not appear to be being actively addressed by them as a whole group at this stage in the programme.

### 5.4.6 First period of reflection

A period of reflection took place within the programme liaison team (the researcher, independent consultant and senior manager) in preparing for a second stage. This followed the action research methodology that prior to any period of action research, full consideration would be given to the area of concern, the framework of ideas, and the methods being used. The discussion centred on whether the assumptions in the first stage had been born out or not. The conclusions were that while the programme to that point had been useful it had failed to achieve some of the key objectives. The most significant of these was the failure to integrate the teaching with the applied learning elements of the programme. Either because the initial ALC had been too ambitious or not thought through fully, the outcome was generally perceived to be unsuccessful. The programme had not been designed to follow up on the individual participants after the final day of the taught part of the programme and Metville did not have a monitoring system in place to enable follow up information to be gathered. In addition, individual staff members were under no obligation to provide information and more senior line managers were under no obligation to feed-back on the overall outcomes of the programme either. The programme liaison team felt it would be more useful to seek to build on the work done in the first stage by returning to the original area of concern, viz capacity building, and seeing if it could be developed further.

For the purposes of the research, I also felt that the initial assumption that a more fully enabled and confident middle manager would begin to recognise opportunities to be pro-active and to challenge the organisation to change, needed to be reappraised. I felt that after five iterations of the Transform cohorts a critical stage had been reached. A schematic diagram of the progress made during Stage One in relation to the overall area of concern is mapped in Fig 5.6. I therefore felt confident to initiate a new stage in the action research which recognised that most of what could have been achieved during the first stage was now complete.



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Metville engaged in a significant change programme with time and financial resources being committed; acknowledgement of the benefits of cross organisational learning; but apparent lack of senior management buy-in resulting in low application of learning arising from individual work on possible change projects which could produce organisational changes for Metville Council.

A new stage was needed with some fresh thinking around the idea of capacity building. I therefore felt it was now appropriate to open new discussions on how the programme might progress.

I now turn to the second stage of the results and analysis.

## **5.5 STAGE TWO**

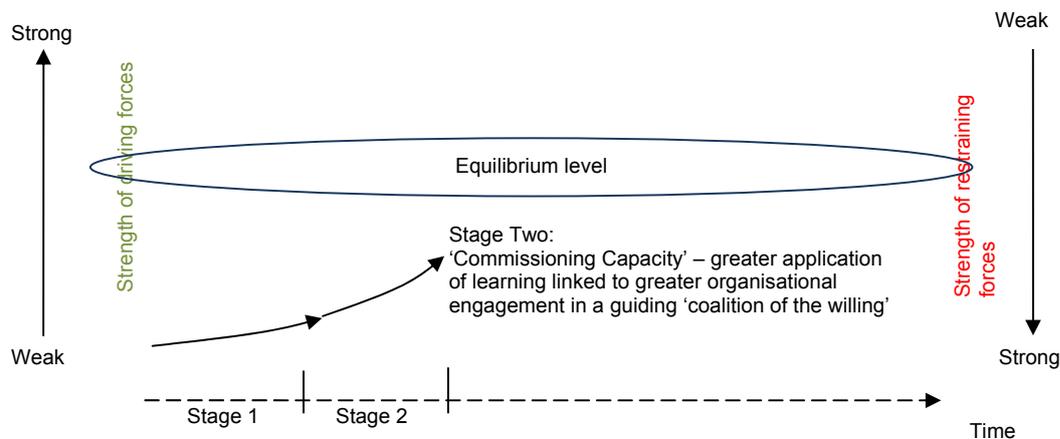
A second stage in the action research was therefore initiated by me that began with an analysis of the capacity building issues that had arisen during the first stage. I observed that while the PLT saw the positive staff feedback on the different parts of the programme as encouraging, the group was dissatisfied with the lack of 'traction' organisationally around applied learning. A fresh development of the area of concern began to emerge in my thinking. I noted especially the comments made by participants during the feedback sessions at the end of the programmes about the low level of understanding by the senior executives of the key principles delivered on the taught programme. These comments suggested that there was a lack of confidence from the participants that the language of change they were increasingly adopting was fully understood and recognised by their more senior managers. I felt this to be a first key transition point in the whole programme. The PLT discussed possible ways in which the learning from the first stage could be taken forward.

### **5.5.1 Area of Concern (2)**

Achieving improved capacity, which had been the focus for the first stage, was now re-addressed. The readiness of Metville to accommodate the political, financial and managerial challenges of modernisation needed to be re-examined. I suggested a second proposition: 'Capacity strengthening occurs when knowledge transfer takes place at all levels and across the whole organisation'. The new area of concern to be investigated, therefore, became more focused on 'commissioning capacity' rather than simply 'improving' it (see Fig 5.7). 'Coalition of the willing' is a reference to the second stage in Kotter's (Kotter 1995) 8-Step programme. These ideas were worked on in preparing for the sixth cohort of Transform which ran in the autumn of 2007.

I observed that the PLT had identified one of the key barriers to knowledge transfer to be the rigid hierarchical institutional structure of the council. With such a structure, the links between where good ideas originated and where these ideas might be implemented were weakened. For the second stage therefore, the new area of concern sought to investigate the 'missing element' in the initial model in the framework of ideas.

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**Fig 5.7: Schematic to represent approach to change programme in Stage Two**

Notes from the meetings of the PLT at that time, including hand-written notes (*HWN*) and flip (*FC-plt*) charts, captured these discussions visually and diagrammatically. Leading from these discussions a document entitled 'Commissioning the Capability' (*eDoc*) was drawn up which outlined a new stage in the Transform programme containing a radical proposal about capacity building.

Building on the findings from the first stage, the PLT now focused on why the take up of the Applied Learning Opportunities had been unsuccessful. The area of concern therefore shifted towards strengthening organisational capacity through linking individual enthusiasm for trying out new ideas and an organisational infrastructure that would encourage those individuals further forward.

### 5.5.2 Framework of Ideas (2)

In the second stage, I re-evaluated my original thoughts on the process of fusion. In Stage One my assumption was that by enabling middle management staff to identify organisational challenges that were recognised as a priority with their superiors, behaviours that would further answer those challenges would be identified and a changed organisational environment would be created (Kegan and Lahey, 2009). My learning from the first stage was that an organisational blockage remained which prevented these change ideas gaining traction within the organisation.

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I turned to a fresh idea: 'radical change needs to be explored outside the mainstream of the organisation'. This built on the work of Kawalek (2007), based on Christensen and Overdorf (2000) and Burgelman (1983), which suggested that change programmes needed to be developed within a protected 'bubble' inside an organisation that enabled it to grow and develop without interference from the 'mainstream' of the organisation.

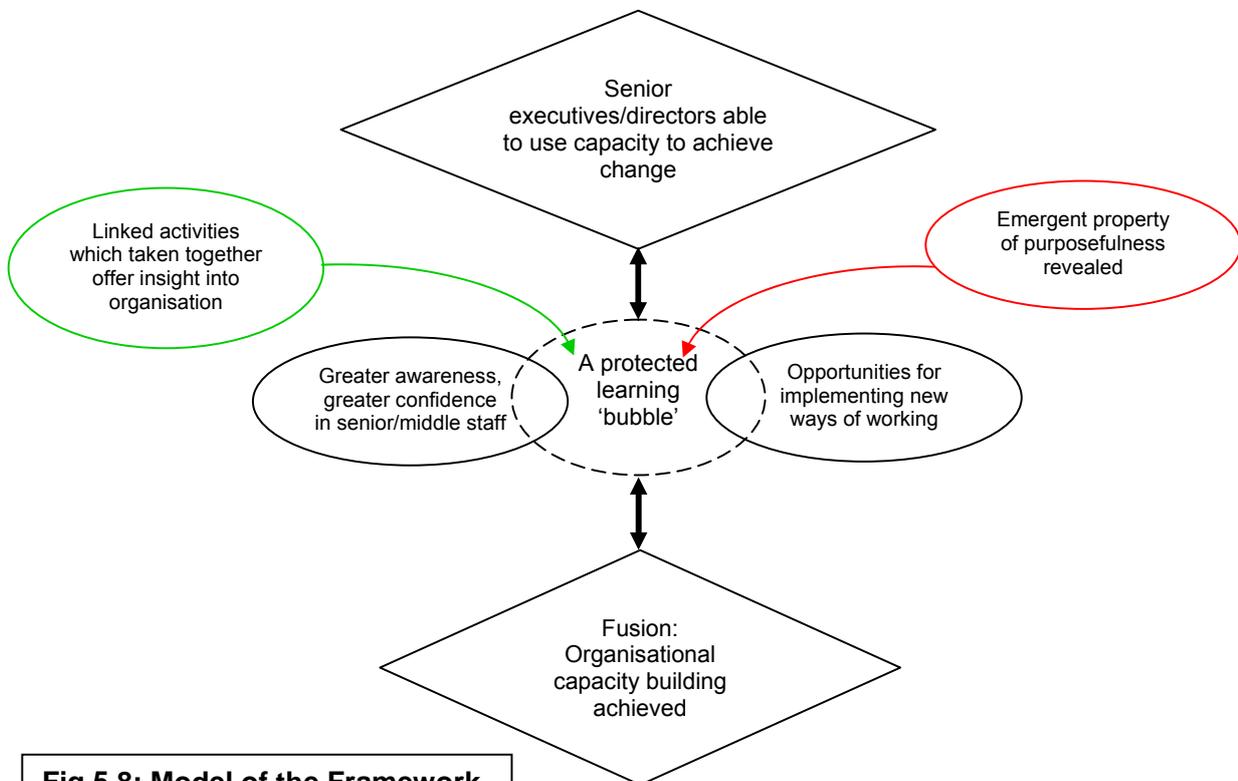
The improvement project with the council's 'benefits team' within Metville a few years earlier had moved the team from being adjudged as very poor to rapidly achieving an 'excellent' rating from the inspection commission. This offered Metville an obvious 'worked example' of change thinking and 'bubbles'. This was particularly true because the Director for Change had come up through the organisation from immediate experience of working in the project 'bubble' at Metville. This had clearly worked at the level of a team. My idea, however, was to consider whether this would be appropriate at the level of a whole organisation.

The second important idea was to seek ways to overcome individual senior middle managers' constraints, as single individuals, to deal with the cross-directorate and organisational-wide barriers to implementing their change ideas arising from their applied learning. The idea of drawing individuals into a 'learning bubble' in which small groups of staff with assistance and support challenged the organisation to work differently was developed. I felt that groups of three were small enough to be 'affordable' in terms of the opportunity cost of staff time and yet larger than just a couple of staff working together. Also three provided a 'learning dynamic' that was potentially less 'stable' and therefore more creative. I decided that the learning bubble needed to be populated by 'learning trios' who would be commissioned to work on key organisational priorities in order to develop new ways of working that might then be applicable to other areas of the Metville's work.

I therefore adapted my original model to emphasise the role of a 'learning bubble' (see Fig 5.8). This model strengthened the links with the senior executives by placing them in an unimpeded link to the 'learning bubble'. It also drew in staff engaged in investigating new ways of working to a clearly defined (and newly created) area of the organisation, which would help reveal more clearly the organisation's emergent property of purposefulness (red oval) through linking activities more (green oval). A more dynamic driver (the notion of a bubble) would lead to greater fusion of 'learning while doing' and thus add to organisational capacity. The learning

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'bubble' also drew on Kotter's (1995) notion of a 'guiding coalition' of people who populate a separate area of the organisation to think through transformational ideas for change.



**Fig 5.8: Model of the Framework of Ideas for Stage Two (Clifford)**

### 5.5.3 Method (2)

The new framework of ideas was contained in a proposal document submitted to Metville (*eDoc*) which outlined this in more detail (see diagrams in Appendix Three) that was entitled 'Commissioning the Capability'. This document, which was authored by the researcher and the independent consultant in consultation with the Council liaison manager, outlined the key methods that were expected to be deployed for the next stage. The methods were designed to develop more fully the original conception of capacity building. Where before the notion of empowered individuals developing new operational methods to address specific problems could be successful if the organisational environment was encouraging, the new ideas recognised that this was insufficient on its own to achieve real change and something further would be needed. The key change was to widen the responsibility for applied learning from individuals to groups and to embed a separate structure to nurture innovation outside the mainstream delivery of

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services. Foremost in this was to position three senior/ middle managers from different backgrounds, directorates and traditions working together in a short-term team to investigate a generic organisational problem who would report to a senior manager/ director acting outside their normal professional and line responsibilities. The three senior/ middle management staff would be named a 'Transform Trio' and the senior manager/ director a 'Trio sponsor'. The key idea was that the knowledge gathered by the Trio would be passed through the Trio Sponsor into a learning pool which the document identified as a 'Core Group'. This would be populated by the Trio Sponsors who would seek to combine the learning coming from the Trios in order to inform the strategic thinking of the Corporate Management Team. The idea of a cluster of Trios forming a 'bubble' (Kawalek 2007) in which a variety of difficult problems could be addressed felt sensible at this point. The Trio Sponsors were to be encouraged to take on more proactive leadership roles. Finally, the search for a new 'Model 2' for service development and delivery in Metville was seen as crucial. Trios, Trio Sponsors and a Trio Cluster would hopefully generate completely new ideas for operating in Metville. At the corporate level, a top-down 'supply' of problems identified by the newly formed One Council Management Team would be prioritised and worked on by a range of Trios managed by the Trio Sponsors with a bottom-up 'supply' of staff who had completed Transform. Shared learning would take place at all three levels – the operational level between service managers; the learning level between those working on innovation and sponsors who might pass this learning up to the corporate level, and finally at the corporate level with executives looking for radical ways to achieve future service delivery. This 'model' diagram suggested the kind of broad generic themes that might be worked on by Trio clusters such as economic prosperity/ education; health; environment; community engagement and crime reduction.

### **5.5.4 Key events in the second stage**

#### ***5.5.4.1 New Stage is commissioned***

The new stage of Transform was commissioned in September 2007. A presentation which explained the ideas lying behind Transform was given by the PLT to a meeting of members of the One Council Management Team with a follow up meeting in November 2007. Diagrams of the proposals were put to them and discussed in a question and answer session attended by all three members of the programme liaison team.

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My observation of the meeting was that there was some reticence shown by some members of the management team which was seen in their questions about resources – for example would staff seconded to become trio members have their work covered for the period they were absent? However, the two most senior executives, who had requested the presentation be made, were clearly committed to taking the initiative forward. Their argument was that this was a corporate initiative and therefore the resources needed should be found from across the council. To seek to ‘compensate’ donor departments/ directorates for their ‘loss’ of staff resources simply reinforced the segmented nature of the council.

The original notion of providing a teaching programme alongside the personal development programme (including the 360° appraisal and the assessment centre for development provided by MCC) was retained during this stage. The main teaching programme was also maintained and each participant was again encouraged to apply their learning through undertaking an applied learning challenge (ALC). However, to the normal ‘Cohort 6’ programme was added the ‘Commissioning the Capability’ (CtC) programme with Trio’s embedded within the ‘core group’ of the Trio Sponsors. The selection of staff to work together in this smaller cluster of staff was done on the basis of an invitation to take part and then a secondment arrangement being worked out by the senior manager/ directors involved. The small groups of designated staff (‘Transform Trios’) were asked to work on specific problems that originated in the senior executive group of the Council. Provision was made for the Trio groups to share experiences together by having facilitated sessions at MBS run by the researcher and the other members of the PLT.

### **5.5.4.2 Research broadens out more**

For the purposes of the action research, as the research became more innovative, a discursive and collaborative role was added to the existing design and delivery relationship. My framework of ideas around innovation in applied learning adopted for this stage was further explored in the PLT. The delivery of this stage of the action research entailed working in an executive education environment alongside a more research based environment. The middle/ senior staff in the Transform Trio cluster were expected to challenge traditional thinking around service delivery in seeking new ways to solve problems. This kind of working method drew the researcher/ programme director and the other two members of the programme liaison team closer together. As a result the team began to meet on a more regular and frequent basis to appraise progress being made across the different elements of the Transform programme.

#### **5.5.4.3 6<sup>th</sup> Cohort of Transform**

Momentum picked up considerably in the early part of the second stage. During the autumn of 2007, the sixth cohort of Transform was delivered to approximately 30 staff. Meanwhile selection and appointment of the staff members who had participated on previous cohorts took place to form the first 'Transform Trios'. There were sufficient staff available to cover 5 trios and five Trio Sponsors were identified to support them. The executive education activity that was planned for this stage included: support to the Senior Executive Team activity; development and facilitation of the Transform 'Core Group'; establishment of the Transform Trios and support to the Cluster; broader development of the emerging 'Transform Network' made up of previous participants of the Transform programmes; (*eDoc*).

The sixth cohort of the Transform programme ran from September 2007 up to December 2007. This cohort coincided with the acceptance of the proposals to begin to develop the 'Commissioning the Capability' programme. 34 names had been selected to attend the programme. However, the range of applied learning challenges was again diverse from the different participants and there was very little evidence that significant progress on these applied learning opportunities was being followed up with senior managers. Comments received on the black-paper sheets included fears that the applied learning ideas would be ignored: *"What will you do with my ALC once completed – don't leave it on a shelf"*; concern about senior executives' roles being supportive included *"Ensuring managers are "on board" and supportive?"* and to *"Continue (the) programme for senior managers" and "To apply learning"* (*FC-p*).

#### **5.5.4.4 Corporate activity associated with Transform**

In addition, a number of key corporate initiatives was beginning to emerge. The first of these was the Council approach to dealing with financial savings. Metville adopted a corporate brand for dealing with change initiatives namely 'Think' – these were broken down into four key areas: 'Think Customer'; 'Think Efficiency'; 'Think Businesses'; and 'Think Democracy'. Each surrounded core areas of concern containing residents, communities and businesses and livelihoods. At this point, the Council created a new post which became part of the corporate management team, named the 'Director for Change'. The appointee, who had been a key supporter of the Transform programme, now took over strategic responsibility for the programme. He was keen to begin to join up the different strands of the Transform initiative.

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At a meeting in September 2007, The Director for Change outlined his thoughts on how he saw the programme developing. At the meeting were staff who had indicated they wished to be involved in the next stages of the Transform programme to assist in building a network of people from across the whole council – mainly drawn from former participants on the Transform cohorts. The Director for Change listed out the feedback he had heard from staff:

- *“Dinosaur managers”*
- *Culture of meetings and paper shuffling*
- *Distrust, cynicism, empires, power and influence*
- *Being precious /selfish – not being managers who can see the bigger picture*
- *Uniformity, there is too much working towards the targets, plans or strategies for individual Directorates rather than for the Council as a whole*
- *Entrenched views – people nod and agree but then go back to their comfort zones continuing to do what they did before*
- *What happened to the Mori Staff survey results?”*

(SOrg)

He was extremely frank and accepted that these criticisms could not be ignored (*HWN*). He outlined the Council’s Cabinet Workplan which contained three strategic priorities – *“raising aspirations; tackling worklessness; and delivering ‘one council’ working”*. He gave examples to the staff of how this fundamental thinking might drive change in the Council. The first was to adopt at an early stage, all the advantages that might accrue through using digital technology to deal with data. Another was linking efficiency reviews with financial reviews by seeking ‘back-office’ reforms through reviewing administrative arrangements in the round and looking for ways in which staff might work with more agility; more strategically (rather than within narrow focused departments); more collaboratively (for example with neighbouring councils in sharing service delivery); and whether procuring services from outside contractors would deliver more efficiencies. At the same time, however, he recognised the Council would need to take the staff with it and this would require improved rewards, greater recognition of staff contributions, retaining staff who might be lost to other employers, effective workforce planning, and the delivery of ‘Investors in People’ styles of working across the whole council.

#### **5.5.4.5 'One Council'**

The Director accepted that in the past the council had allowed a proliferation of managerial working groups to emerge which had been organised around functionalities rather than a corporate purpose and that the idea of 'One Council' needed to be led more vigorously. He revealed the names of six senior directors who would form a 'One Council Management Team' to drive this policy forward. Finally, he highlighted the need for the Council to improve its project and programme management by aligning projects to corporate aims/pledges, and avoiding inadequate or inappropriate project prioritisation/selection; using ineffective governance arrangements for large scale programmes; having inconsistency in project/ programme management; failing to identify and manage risks, and failing to provide adequate resources and programme management support to staff working on key projects.

The Director finished his presentation by highlighting the Transform initiatives which were about to begin on Trio working and encouraged the staff to help Metville build a vibrant network of staff interested in achieving fundamental change across the Council and disseminating the organisational learning emerging from the initiative (*HWN*). A graduate trainee staff member was assigned the responsibility to assist in setting up the 'Trios'. She also worked closely with a senior consultant advising the Council on a No 10/ Cabinet Office sponsored initiative called 'SPOTlight'. Part of her role was to seek to ensure that the 'spotlight' work linked across to the 'Trio' work. I observed an early difference of approach emerging between the Trio members and the senior consultant. The former felt their role should be to challenge current thinking; the senior consultant was concentrating on more efficiency and effectiveness. In a discussion later in their own learning clinic meeting, following the presentation by the consultant, the Trio cluster identified their key early priority as "*clarifying the Trios*" roles in the whole Transform programme' (*FC-p*).

Clarifying the innovative role of 'challenging' current practice emerged in the work of the first Trio. SPOTlight issues were intended to identify particular areas with problems in an attempt to reach a clearer understanding of how a more coordinated approach might improve service delivery. By taking statistical data and highlighting anomalous 'hot-spots', SPOTlight methodology hoped to achieve rapid system change. The first trio was tasked to investigate an area where a higher than average group of younger people had been identified who were not in employment, education or training (or 'NEET'). The approach to this project was to analyse the collection and processing of the figures on this particular group of young people. However,

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closer analysis revealed that a key explanation for the anomaly was a particular clustering of 'travelling families' in the target area. This effectively skewed the geographical statistics since the factors were specific to the social group concerned. What was more important was the highly disjointed service delivery by the different agencies (e.g. work advice, education support, and benefits payments) to this social group. Intervention was therefore focused on these issues as a means to making progress. The Trio challenged a local senior agency manager to "*accept responsibility for leadership*" (HWN) on the issue of the NEETs – after some repeated attempts this occurred and an improved action plan was approved to which all the key stakeholders signed up.

### **5.5.4.6 Momentum develops**

During the Spring and Summer of 2008 the programme developed a momentum. This could be seen in the number of meetings that key stakeholders in the Transforming Metville process attended. These divided into the work of the Trio cluster; the work of the One Council Management Team (OCMT); and the work of the PLT. The first key event of the year for the PLT was to bring the Trio sponsors together in a meeting that was referred to as the 'Transform Learning Team' (TLT). This took place on 6<sup>th</sup> February and was facilitated by the PLT at MBS with a pre-circulated agenda (*eDoc*). A whole day was planned to achieve a number of key outcomes - to share the underlying theory of the Transform programme; to receive a presentation from one of the Trios; and to plan the learning team's role and responsibilities in transferring learning from the work of the Trios back to the corporate team.

During the discussion on what theory of change lay behind the Transform programme as a whole, some pre-session material was circulated and comments and discussion took place on the 'bubble theory'; strategic alignment; modernisation; and learning organisations. In addition, strategic issues were raised with specific mention of aligning the general work on Transform with the SPOTlight work. Interestingly, the sponsors themselves raised the question of whether the Trios should be taken out of this area of work ("*Should we pull Trios from the SPOTlights?*" (FC-*mbc*)). They also addressed the question "*How will we recognise success?*" (FC-*mbc*) by seeking to clarify the role of the Transform Learning Team in taking responsibility for three areas: the activities, the structure and the style of the Trios work. In developing a sketch diagram (reproduced below, see Fig 5.9) they felt that success would not just be determined in what was achieved (the 'what'), but in how it impacted on who became involved (the 'who') as well as the style of the programme (the 'how'). The TLT also discussed having a clear view on



participants on Cohort 6 of the programme) might also develop into future applied learning challenges and were acknowledged as having been important by being noted in the diagram.

#### **5.5.4.7 Changed behaviour**

During the afternoon session the first Trio were asked to come and give a case study presentation to the TLT on how they had approached their work. The Trio had discussed their approach to this at the Trio Cluster clinic in January and came prepared not simply for a 'report' but to also model their approach. Deliberately they challenged the expected format - they began by explaining what they saw as the problem and how they approached the task. They then paused and addressed the TLT with a question: "*So, what would you have done at this point?*" I observed the response of the TLT to be very 'wrong-footed'; they found engaging in a dialogue in this way with lower graded staff extremely difficult (*HWN*). The case study then continued with the Trio saying "*Well, we decided to do this*" (*HWN*) and going on to the next stage. However, this same pause and questioning took place three times. In the discussion of the case afterwards this new confidence and challenging approach was noted by the TLT (*HWN*) as challenging the hierarchical culture of Metville and challenging their assumptions on managerial reporting relationships (*HWN*).

In reporting back the approach the trio took at the TLT meeting to the 'cluster clinic' later in the month, their feelings around taking this challenging approach were shared with the other Trio members. They all recognised that in taking on the posture of 'challenge', not only did Trio 1 challenge staff colleagues in the area of work but also the TLT's assumptions on how to manage change and to learn from the case-study the key organisational change ideas being offered by the Trio.

#### **5.5.4.8 Trio cluster - identity**

The whole group of trio members, as they began to work together more as a team, referred to themselves as the "*Trio Cluster*". "*Clunch*" was adopted for the weekly lunchtime get-together meeting of the group. This had the effect of further binding the innovative nature of the group together. One important exploration for the cluster was the project development cycle within the Council. The notion of 'gateways' was being investigated as a way to monitor and approve the adoption of new projects within a more systematic process. A discussion between representatives of the cluster and the programme liaison team looked at the model diagram. It showed the preferred way that 'projects' were expected to progress from initial inception (project

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initiation document) to adoption as full council projects. What emerged was the thought that at the centre of the council should be a space, most probably a virtual space, in which learning about change took place based on 'learning from doing' (S-Org). At the same time, the work on achieving efficiency savings was being driven in Metville Council through the Corporate Programme and Project Services section. The Assistant Director wrote an explanation of how this might be approached entitled: 'Delivering successful change in Metville City Council, A pocket guide for managers and leaders of change' August 2008 (Version 0.4). The opening paragraph asserted that the *"challenge to all public sector organisations is to find the most efficient way to successfully deliver their services"*. The short guide therefore was to outline *"senior managers' roles in planning and managing successful delivery. It also describes the steps to initiate effective programmes and projects"*. The emphasis was that with effective project planning and management, the Council could innovate new ways of working. However, the cluster felt that based on their experience of this approach through the SPOTlight programme, the opportunities for more radical reform could be lost.

They were, however, particularly encouraged by the frequent 'dropping-in' meetings that the Director for Change (DfC), and the Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) conducted with the cluster group. These were normally informal and discursive rather than 'task' orientated.

The cluster team next embarked on an ambitious piece of work that they entitled the One Council Action Plan. In this they recommended that rather than a number of projects, programmes and objectives being listed and put against different functional parts of the Council, a document was prepared that sought to identify the drivers for change in an organisation.

These were identified as:

***One Council Action Plan: key priority areas of concern (Autumn 2008) – Trio Cluster submission to Director for Change.***

<i>Values and Culture</i>	<i>Governance and Accountability</i>
<i>Staff</i>	<i>Resources</i>
<i>Internal Communications</i>	<i>Performance management and Business planning</i>
<i>Knowledge Management</i>	<i>Skills</i>
<i>Vision and Strategy</i>	<i>Structure and Organisational Design</i>
<i>Learning</i>	<i>Systems</i>
<i>Leadership</i>	<i>Partnerships</i>

**Box 5.3 One Council Action Plan: Key Priorities**

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In a complex table which listed key priorities under the headings in the box above, the Trio Cluster Team (TCT) also annotated these priorities with suggested ways in which outcome targets might be determined; success measures might be attached to targets; actions be identified that were needed; links to existing programmes and projects might be made including the links to the Council's corporate plan (the Council's 'Cabinet Work Plan' agreed with the elected members); and the leadership responsibilities that might then be identified and the appropriate level of resources and 'enablers' quantified.

The document and their presentation of it impressed the Director for Change so much that he arranged for them to make a similar presentation to the One Council Management Team, who in turn recommended that they presented it to the Corporate Management Team which included the Chief Executive. The feedback was very positive. By the end of the year the cluster were 'on a high' and in the cluster learning clinic meetings at the Business School the whole group were extremely enthusiastic.

### **5.5.4.9 *We've done something – but don't know what it is***

Meanwhile, the PLT had been speaking to the Director for Change and following on from the Transform Learning Team (TLT) meeting in February and the subsequent work with the Trio Sponsors a new meeting was arranged. The Director for Change was not entirely satisfied that the working of the TLT had been successful and instead invited a number of specifically trusted senior directors to discuss a transformational approach to managing change. The meeting picked up on three key issues – 'transformational spirit'; 'gateway 0'; and the difficulty of managing complex systems. The first issue discussed the learning that came from the Trio experience. There was general assent that there had been important outcomes in the approach the Trios had taken to 'challenging' normal practices – the Assistant Director of Organisational Development noted that *"We have created 13 people who have become professionalised as internal consultants ... we have done something to them, the trouble is we don't know what we have done"*. The Director for Change noted that the Trio group were *"up for change – but will it get sustained, and are we clear what we really want to do with these people?"* The Director referred to 'transformational spirit' in trying to describe the feeling he had taken away from visiting the Trio Cluster Team at their weekly lunches. He asked how this might be found across more of the Council.

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The second issue was about the commissioning of the review and improvement of services. The Assistant Director's 'pocket guide' was identified as an important document in achieving service improvement. In discussing this more generally, the idea of 'gateways' being placed in the pathways to change was put forward. For example, projects should not be commissioned until a clear expression of the problem had been given and a clear business plan had been outlined for the proposition – this might be identified as 'Gateway 1'. However, during the course of the discussion, the Director and the Assistant Directors began exploring the idea of a 'Gateway 0'. The idea was to be able to appraise whether a project idea was likely to be 'transformational'. In a diagram very similar to the Transform Learning Team one from February the notion of 'transformational effect' was investigated. This was modelled as taking place in the centre of the organisation at a point where decisions about the likely transformational effect of an idea would be looked at - a sort of 'pre-gateway 1' or a 'gateway 0' (FC-*mbc*).

Finally, the struggle in the Council to achieve the balance between 'day job' responsibilities and the need to investigate 'transformational change' was discussed. The difficulties of competing priorities were highlighted. During the course of this discussion the Director reflected "*its not systems that we should be concentrating on, its relationships*".

As a way of addressing this point, the Director asked that effort should be made to bring as many people into the 'world of transformation' by looking at all staff who were involved in radical changes in attitudes to form a network. He identified such people as those who had been through the Transform cohorts, Investors in People advisors, Diversity leaders, Young Ambassadors, Training Mentors, and 'Springboarders' (these latter were fast-track staff). He wanted to widen the number of middle-management staff who had had experience of the programme. He wanted to acknowledge that they needed a sense of follow-up and recognition of their potential contribution. A network of staff should be formed, which contained those who had experienced the Transform programmes – as an explicit council wide grouping – which should be called the 'Transforming Metville Network'. This would be sponsored by the senior executive team as a legitimate activity and staff would be encouraged to get involved.

In August, the Director for Change remarked in a pre-planning meeting with the PLT preparing for the September One Council Management Team meeting (*HWN*) that he was finding it difficult to evidence a corporate acceptance to adopt the programme as a 'whole Council'. In his

words he felt that many of the One Council Management Team were still “*dancing round their handbags*” (*HWN*) and failing to engage with the Transform programme.

### **5.5.5 Analysis**

From the perspective of the research questions, the first issue to address was the patterning of the organisational inter-dependencies. By introducing the innovation bubble, the patterning changed considerably. It interrupted the hierarchical and siloed pattern of Metville and began to join up across the structure much more. Members of the senior executive team, including the Director for Change, had begun to visit the cluster group to ‘check on things’ and began to treat it as a separate area of expertise within the Metville. The cluster itself began to explore issues that could only be addressed at a strategic and corporate level. They asked such questions as: is there an alternative way of planning to achieve a level of expenditure reduction?; are percentage reductions applied across the council in a relatively uniform fashion dodging key issues of prioritising? They saw their role not simply in terms of problem definition and problem solving but of questioning whether the problems were being defined in the right way or not. This perception of the team inevitably challenged the way that expertise and professionalism was treated in the council. The cluster saw themselves as more ideas ‘brokers’ within a system of changing relationships. They were comfortable abandoning ‘old style’ attributions of expertise and experience to departments or sections of the council and were looking for ways in which these skills and experience could be applied in a more generic way. The cluster was also able to achieve ‘exposure’ to the most senior parts of the Council, including the Chief Executive. She was reported to have said to the Cluster members who made the presentation that it was ‘one of the best presentations on tackling change that I have heard during the course of the whole year’ (*HWN*). The other key observation at this point was the clear understanding that it was not systems that needed to be created but new forms of relationships. This emphasis on relationships echoed Lewin’s notion of ‘interdependencies’ between staff and the Council’s service users in designing appropriate service delivery mechanisms.

The language of change therefore followed this new patterning change – the cluster began to talk about a new model for the council to understand its work. Initially this centred on talking about gateways using the language of ‘project management’. During the August meeting at MBS, while discussing the ‘pocket guide’ on programme and project management the cluster formed the view that while recognising the need to have a systematised way of dealing with change, the document framed problematic situations in a very traditional way. A new way was

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needed where problems were no longer seen as how to fill deficiencies or gaps in existing services but more as issues that needed to be addressed at a much earlier point of analysis – the ‘gateway 0’ idea. Thus questions such as ‘what exactly is the problem here?’ rather than ‘how can we fix this problem?’ were asked by the cluster. They expressed this in terms of ‘single-loop’ and ‘double-loop’ (Argyris and Schön 1978) thinking that had been introduced on the taught programme. Trying to examine the more fundamental part of a question (double loop thinking) which might surround a problem was accepted by the cluster group as more important. In fact the 5<sup>th</sup> Trio were specifically tasked to look at what kind of ‘enablers’ were needed as key parts in the change programme overall. This involved looking for examples of where language would begin to re-define the ways problems were looked at and ‘described’.

The organisation as a whole was relatively accepting of the ideas surrounding innovation. The level of obstinacy at this stage might therefore be seen as weak. The secondment from their permanent positions of each member of the trios meant that each department, in providing staff to join the cluster, was acknowledging the need for a contribution to be made to change initiatives. While this was time limited, it did mean that there was a loss of talented staff from the ‘day-job’ to resource this programme. The idea that ‘joining-up’ was essential to increased efficiency and effectiveness was broadly accepted. Work of the inspection agencies suggested that better coordination was important in improving service delivery (Audit Commission 2005). Investigations by such agencies into failures of local government services, for example in the area of child protection, recommended that greater co-ordination and integration of work between and within agencies was essential. There was some acceptance therefore that looking for ways in which better collaboration could take place would be useful. However, this did not extend to challenging the fundamental ethos of children’s services (whether in child-care or education), or better working with outside agencies such as health or the police. Seen at the level of a technical improvement, more joining-up was not a challenge for professionals. As a model, ‘continuous improvement’ was still seen as a way in which all current provision could be improved without fundamentally challenging the basis on which services were delivered by Metville.

### **5.5.6 Summary**

The second stage of the action research provided an opportunity to take a significant step forward in pursuing the new framework of ideas. To the original proposition that with some teaching and learning support, individuals could become more confident and competent in

handling change, was added a new proposition. This new idea was to form a separate 'bubble' of innovation. The group challenged the SPOTlighting methodology as purely about making the current system more efficient rather than seeking more radical ways to change it. This approach very much echoed the 'hard systems' thinking of engineering based epistemology and was demonstrated in the 'pocket handbook' on using change 'systems' to effect programme and delivery efficiencies. The cluster also addressed the conceptualisation of the notion of 'One Council' by preparing a 'One Council Action Plan' that addressed key priorities for change. Part of their Action Plan submission sought to identify 'enablers' through which resources might be used differently. Meetings between some key directors and assistant directors called to investigate 'challenges' to the organisation in making change happen had raised important issues about language, change processes, and organisational forms. The successful implementation of establishing a change 'hub' within Metville Council was a key turning point and signalled significant new thinking in the change strategy of the senior executives.

### **5.5.7 Second period of reflection**

A second period of reflection followed within the PLT which sought to judge what significant changes had been achieved and whether a third Action Research stage should be embarked upon. The discussion centred on whether the assumptions in the second stage had been born out or not. The conclusions were that while the programme was making more progress it had still failed to achieve some of the key objectives. The taught programmes were still failing to integrate the teaching with the applied learning elements of the programme – the hypothesis that the problem with the nature of the learning opportunities was that they were 'over-ambitious' or 'un-thought through' was rejected by the programme liaison team (*HWN and FC-plt*). The team felt that the real problem lay in the scattered nature of the learning opportunities - individual staff members were under no obligation to provide information and more senior line managers were under no obligation to feed-back on the overall outcomes of the programme either.

On the other hand, the cluster of trios had undertaken some radical work – first by adopting a 'challenge' role in working on the SPOTlight initiatives and then secondly in preparing a One Council Action Plan. However, the cluster was also finding it difficult to plan for a clear succession and renewal of staff to work on 'higher level' problems. Some Trio members' periods of secondment were coming to an end but the new secondment appointments were taking time to come through. Slow progress on the key suggestion of the cluster that their 'One

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Council Action Plan' should be adopted by the One Council Management Team as their key operational plan was noticeable. The resistance to adopting a 'one council' understanding in favour of retaining the 'departmental/ directorate' thinking was strong and individual directors and their departmental staff still showed signs of reluctance to engage with the spirit and ethos of the programme.

Nevertheless, the general indication from Metville that the programme still enjoyed support from some key senior individuals, most especially the Director for Change, was hopeful. A further development of the programme was requested arising from many of the discussions during the summer on the progress of the Trio cluster and the development of the Transforming Metville Network.

From the perspective of the researcher, I deduced that the most significant result had been the progress of the cluster of Transform Trio staff. They appeared to have established a recognised role and validity within the inter-relationships across the Council. They had presented their thinking clearly and articulately to the most senior executives with confidence and had won praise. The acknowledgement of the Director for Change of the need for a wide network of staff to be encouraged to form was further evidence that system change was being attempted. The lack of progress in the development of single applied learning challenges for Cohort 6 was further evidence that the assumption that individual staff could work independently on change projects was flawed and the cluster idea was a much better one. However, the engagement of the senior executives and directors together within the 'commissioning the capability' agenda appeared to be weak. There appeared to be a pull towards 'hard' systems thinking in the production of pocket guides on project and programme management for the use of staff whose change ideas would be routed through the Chief Executive's Department's projects and programme team.

I therefore felt that while there was clear momentum, there were important parts of the organisation that were beginning to take 'positions' on the theory of change. These could be distinguished as 'transformational' (those who wished to embark on radical challenging of current processes and methods) and 'systematic' (those who saw radical improvement being achieved through improving the current organisational systems). I saw it as urgent to step up a gear because I sensed there was a danger that less radical reform would re-assert itself ('restraint') and weigh down the possible further development that could be made using the

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'Transform' energy and spirit that had begun to be established in members of the Transform 'family'. I therefore felt that a new stage was necessary and began to plan for Stage Three.

## 5.6 STAGE THREE

I now turn to the third stage in the action research programme. During this stage the change programme developed new ideas, improved the models and increased the momentum of development considerably.

Reflecting on the previous stage, two critical areas merited consideration and confirmed that a transition point had been reached. The first was the combined teaching and learning approach to the taught programme for participants. This approach had relied in part on an effective applied learning opportunity being pursued by individuals - this needed re-examination. The support for individuals was not being secured and the strategic importance of the learning opportunities was limited and generally short term. The second critical area centred on the lack of strategic alignment between the senior management team (comprising the executive directors and the other senior directors) and the other elements of the whole Transform programme. The work of the Transform 'cluster' had established the notion of 'challenging' orthodox management approaches and had developed a One Council dimension to its work. However, the cluster still appeared to have failed to fully engage the senior managers in 'Transforming Metville'.

At a meeting during July 2008 I observed the PLT recognising that a more joined up approach to the whole programme would be needed. It discussed new proposals for a third proposition which would seek to offer Metville a more comprehensive overall approach. The team felt the new programme needed to be more ambitious than either stages one or two (*HWN, FC-plt*).

### 5.6.1 Area of concern (3)

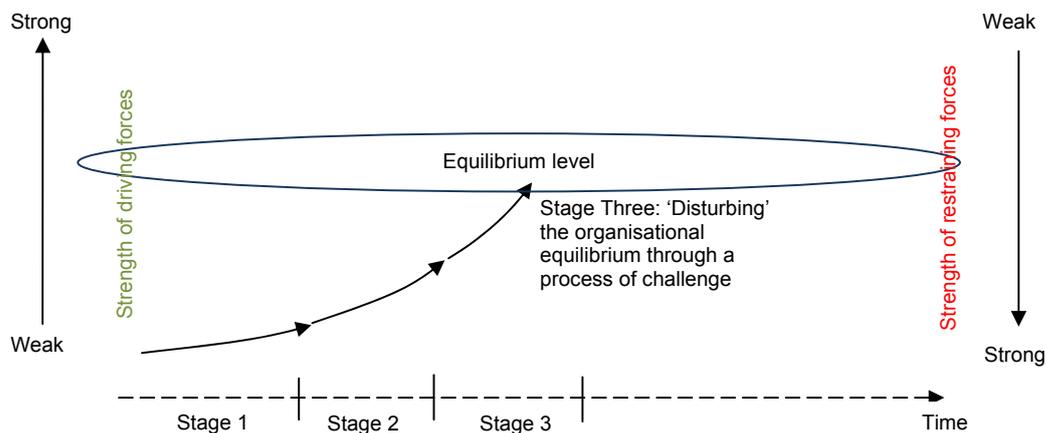
The fresh area of concern for Stage Three was to move the research programme beyond the 'building of capacity' and the 'commissioning of capability' ideas and to adopt a fuller understanding of the problem of 'developing organisational capacity'. As Rashman points out (2009) the absorption of new capacity should be seen more in strengthening an organisation in a number of specific dimensions rather than simply 'building capacity'. Metville Council's willingness to accommodate the growing political, financial and managerial challenges of modernisation appeared to be more determined and this needed to be engaged with more strongly. By mid-2008 four years had elapsed since the initial discussions between the PLT and Metville had begun. The programme had built a platform of understanding and had tested a

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number of ideas. I felt the time had now arrived where a more ambitious approach could be attempted.

The earlier ideas in Stage One had been limited – they primarily sought to achieve greater individual capacity (personal development) and to try out new practice working (applied learning opportunities) which when ‘fused together’ would bring benefits to individuals and the Council as a whole. In Stage Two this was combined with the development of Transform Trios which when clustered together would offer a learning ‘bubble’ to Metville – this was described as ‘commissioning the capability’. During this third stage the aim was to more strongly knit together individual managers with their opportunities for increased learning assisted by members of the Trio cluster and the members of the Transform Learning Team (TLT). Stage Three therefore aimed to move the whole process forward more quickly. It specifically focused on adopting a ‘whole council model’.

The area of concern for Stage Three is captured in Fig 5.11 which suggests a greater sense of urgency and that progression should take place moving from a disparate number of related activities to a combined and integrated set of initiatives, ‘flowing’ through the organisation and beginning to significantly ‘move’ it along a change trajectory thus taking the organisation forward.



**Fig 5.11: Schematic of the area of concern in Stage Three**

In reflecting on the action research at this stage, it felt to me that while the different initiatives that were being instigated were demonstrating some progress, all that really appeared to link

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them together was an 'organisational narrative'. Participants within different parts of the 'commissioning of the capability' were using 'Transform' as a useful 'badge' to describe their level of 'subscription' to the overall aims of the programme, and this appeared to be true even at an executive level. However, in terms of the overall concern - the readiness of Metville to accommodate the political, financial and managerial challenges of modernisation – there appeared to be a greater level of action needed to achieve a genuine sense that real accommodations would be made in the workings of the inter-relationships between different staff to achieve a radical new model of working for the council.

### **5.6.2 Framework of ideas (3)**

In developing the framework of ideas for Stage Three, I drew on four key ideas – transformation; knowledge transfer; idea flow; and engagement. For the first of these, 'transformation', I used the ideas of the Audit Commission that suggested 'step change' and 'organic' approaches would be needed to achieve significant, strategic and radical change. The second, 'knowledge transfer', suggested that organisational learning would need to be drawn from specifically planned organisational problem investigations and not in a scattered way across Metville. The third, 'idea flow', began to explore the notion that joining up was not a 'static and structural/mechanical' exercise but more one that depended on a 'flow' of ideas around the organisation from the 'front-line' right up to the senior executives. In giving organisational 'permission to experiment', the corporate executives needed to signal their approval by resourcing the investigation and exploration of new ideas. At the centre of the 'flow' would be a 'zone' (building further on the notion of a 'bubble') in which learning would take place, partly examining ideas for validity and achievability, and secondly working out exactly how they could be implemented effectively. The final part of the framework, 'engagement', centred on the notion that full engagement from a larger number of people would need some form of approved 'network' on which to base working together and through which a wide range of innovative ideas for the council to progress could be provided.

#### **5.6.2.1 Transformation:**

An important development in the framework of ideas during the third stage was the introduction of a transition from 'Model 1' to 'Model 2'. This phrase was drawn from a description of the 2008 US Democrats' presidential nomination race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton where a New York Times article suggested that the use of social media and new forms of engagement with younger voters had distinguished Obama's campaign from the traditional high

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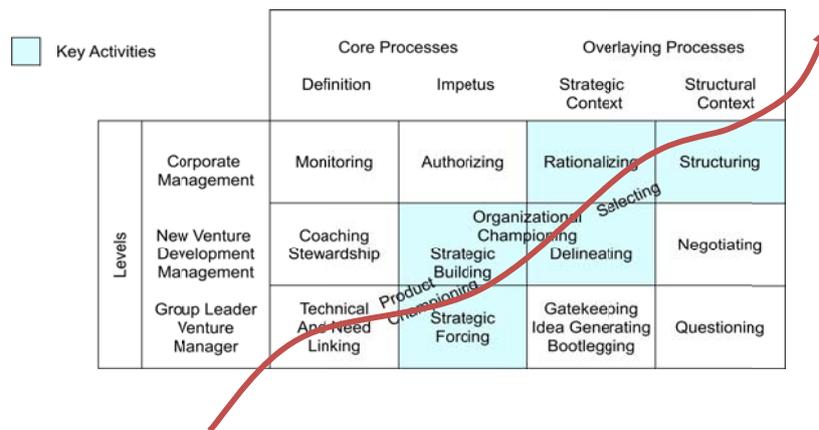
cost, 'big-hitter' contributors' campaign of Clinton. It was a case of 'Obama's Model 2' and Clinton's 'Model 1'. And Model 2 had won out. Another idea had also been imported – the notion of transformation being measured on a scale – 'a transformometer' (Kawalek 2008) – at one end of which change occurred but very little fundamental or radical change emerged, and at the other end significant change did take place that was irreversible. Similarly in SSM (Checkland 2000), the notion of transformation is also used to signal a fundamental change (in which the components remain, but work in a transformed way which produces fundamental change). In addition, ideas around the disruptive nature of technological change were also introduced. In this 'idea' the distinction was drawn between a purely incremental and improved model of delivery yet one which was essentially the same, and a model that was disruptive and resulted in transformed service change. The example explored was the difference between a high street bookstore and online shopping – in the case of some booksellers on the high street, the introduction of cafés, proactive staff engagement, gift 'credit' cards and other innovations all resulted in the bookstore still remaining a bookstore. However, in the case of online selling, the opportunity for the store to be 'alongside the browser', offering advice on other books to look at, suggesting deals on sales when one book would be combined with other books, reminding visitors of what they looked at before, and importantly allowing you to order on line and know when to expect the book to be delivered (often the next day), all for a cheaper price, were all radically different to the traditional bookstore. The difference between the two was the deployment of digital technology. The fundamental idea was therefore to explore whether there was a 'model 2' type of council that would look and feel radically different to what was being delivered at present.

### **5.6.2.2. Knowledge transfer:**

The second idea was that the discussions that had taken place so far had centred around a diagrammatic model that drew together learning from below (the supply-side 'up') and implementation and resourcing from above (the supply-side 'down') with some form of learning zone in the middle. The 'glue' that held these ideas together was the notion of applied learning – evidence of this was expected to be seen in applied learning opportunities or challenges being put forward by senior/ middle managers as part of the Transform programmes which could then be tried out in practice. This idea was therefore extended to suggest that knowledge gathered through the act of trying out new ideas could both inform improved executive management as well as operational practice through a form of knowledge transfer.

**5.6.2.3 Flow**

In seeking to develop a clearer understanding of what such a transfer of knowledge might look like I drew a diagram that contained the idea of a flow of ideas, energy and experimentation that moved within the organisation. Burgelman’s model was used as a way of ‘championing’ ideas from middle managers below that were then carried up to senior executives who noticed the contextual as well as structural implications of these ideas and implemented change. (See Fig 5.12).



**Fig 5.12: A possible line of ‘flow’ through the model (Burgelman 1983)**

In the same way, a notion of an extended line of ‘flow’ emerged in the Metville model. A more distinguishable line was drawn amongst the three areas (top, bottom and middle learning zone) to form the idea of a flowing ‘figure of 8’. The line suggested that learning was continuously being developed ‘flowing’ round the higher section above through the Corporate Management Team collecting decisions and resources, which would be then used to implement new ideas flowing through the lower area of implementation on the ground and back up again. In the centre was the zone in which learning from both a theoretical and a practical perspective would be gathered; the results could then be passed out to the levels below and above.

Seshadri and Sahpitu (2003) mention the notion that an organisation’s organic structure can allow ideas to ‘flow’ which then form ‘proposals’ for change – knowledge then becomes a ‘portfolio of options’ which are then evaluated. They reference the work of Shultz (2001) who uses a network perspective to examine the ‘flow of ideas between organisations’. Seshadri and Shapira argue that the results of Shultz’s study and their analysis ‘suggest there are potential

benefits in looking at flows of knowledge in organisations as determinants of organisational innovation'. Csikszentmihalyi argues that as organisational challenges rise alongside improved skills, individuals have an 'intrinsic motivation' to be absorbed into working on challenges and thereby reach a sense of 'flow'. With Gardner et al, Csikszentmihalyi argues that as organisations seek to make 'meaning' of situations, leadership and flow become crucial (2001). Interest is increasing in 'the flows of ideas' as improved analysis of knowledge transfer is sought (Healey 2013).

#### 5.6.2.4 Engagement

Finally, because it was joined up and continuous, the flow in the 'figure of 8' also contained the idea that the whole organisation was offering those within it, at all levels, the opportunity to be engaged in the process of transformation. Engagement would engender the courage and conviction to try out new ideas.

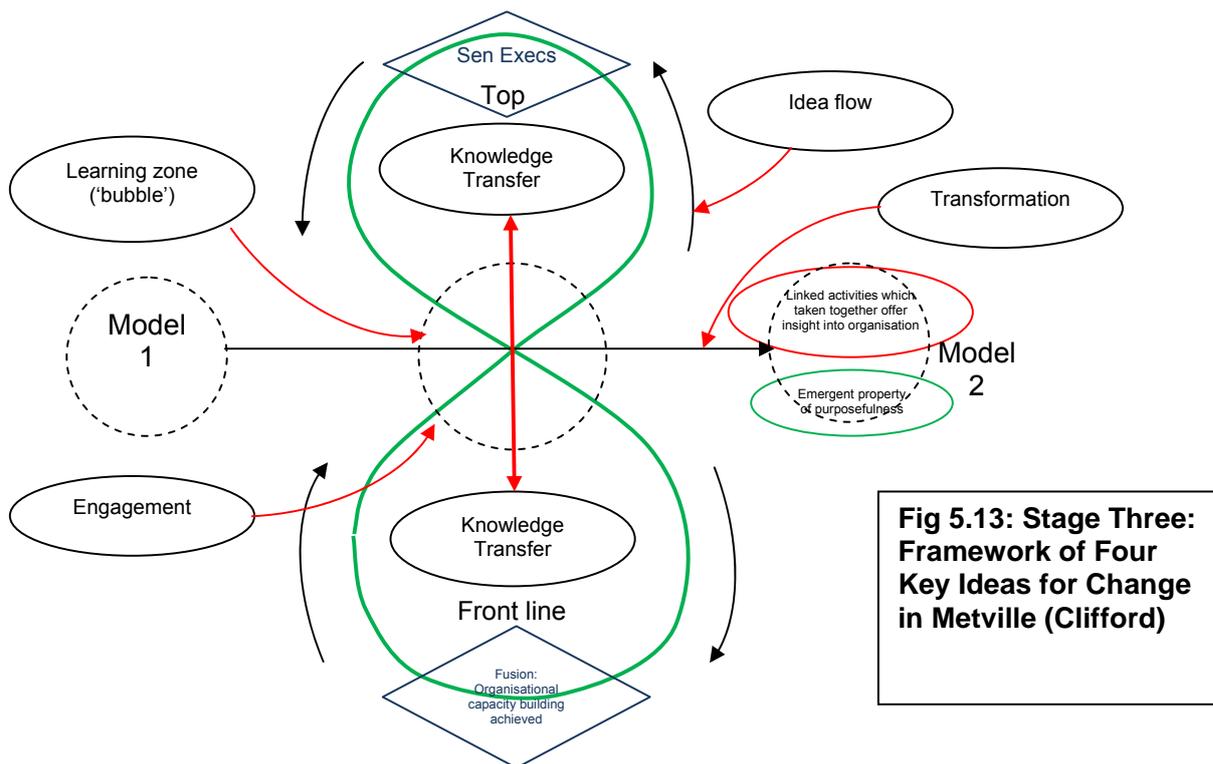


Fig 5.13 seeks to capture these four key ideas as a model. What emerged in my mind as researcher, through this modelling of ideas around 'flow', was the notion of a 'flowing figure of 8' – this 'shape' captured the changing nature of the organisational journey starting as a 'Model 1'

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and developing into a 'Model 2' very well; the idea of knowledge being transferred from top to bottom, but also from bottom to top seemed appropriate; the notion of a 'flow of ideas' travelling 'round' the organisation in a learning loop seemed apt; and finally, the idea of a core learning zone at the heart of the organisation felt important (an idea that formed part of the framework of ideas for Stage Two. Linked to this was the carry over from the earlier stages of the 'emergent property of purposefulness' and the 'linked activities which taken together offered an insight into the organisation' (Checkland 2000). Both of these ideas appeared to lie in the emergence of a new Model 2 and could usefully be seen as measures of 'successful transformation' were Metville to carry on along the line change between Model 1 and Model 2.

In summary, the new framework of ideas contained an overarching notion of whole system change from 'Model 1' to 'Model 2'; a sense of learning and new ideas 'flowing' around the organisational system in a 'Figure of 8' in which new learning and the transfer of knowledge took place within an overall context of the 'open' offer for staff to become engaged in the process.

### 5.6.3 Method (3)

As researcher, in preparing the new framework of ideas for stage 3, I was keen to explore the developmental ideas with colleagues in the PLT. This was an intense period for the team – events were moving quickly and much of stage 2 was still in train as stage 3 began to emerge. It was my judgement that a critical transition point had been reached during the summer of 2008 and I promoted discussion of this in the team. The wider political and economic environment was also changing rapidly as the likely effects of the UK financial recession in 2007/8 were beginning to be recognised. The programme liaison team met more frequently and more intensely as the theoretical foundations of the programme were discussed and decisions on suggested next steps were taken. It was also important to be sensitive to the individual position of Metville's senior manager (as the third person in the PLT). Difficult internal discussions on roles and structures were taking place during this period as decisions about budgets and staffing were being drafted with a view to significant changes being made within Metville as a reaction to reductions that were being imposed by central government.

In the discussions towards the end of Stage Two, some descriptive models had been drawn on flip charts – in particular at the meeting of the senior managers in August 2008 with the PLT (*FC-plt*). These sketch diagrams had also provided the basis for the new Framework of ideas to

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be thought through. The documents discussed with Metville senior executives at this point named the 'Figure of 8' model as a 'Transformational Flow of Organisational Change' (*eDoc*). This new set of proposals was entitled 'CtC 2' (Charting the Course) to suggest that CtC 1 (Commissioning the Capability) had contained limited objectives and that a wider approach was needed; the new name for the overall framework of ideas was 'Challenging Metville'. It was more comprehensive in scope and contained six identifiable strands to the work of capacity building (see Appendix Four) that included (i) working with the senior executives; (ii) offering consultancy support to the whole programme; (iii) developing the work of Team Metville Network building; (iv) supporting the work of the Trios and the Trio cluster; (v) developing the Transform Learning Team and assisting in developing the learning zone; and finally (vi) trying to capture the 'Transform story' in some form in order to be better able to reflect on progress in the whole programme at a later date. During the period of May to September 2008 these ideas were discussed more fully with the Director for Change (*HWN, PN, FC, eDoc and SO-D*).

In order to overcome the problem of scattered learning opportunities emerging from participants on the Transform cohorts, a new mechanism for selecting ALC topics was developed for the 7<sup>th</sup> cohort. Specific and focused applied learning would be limited to a number of strategic topics which the cohort 7 participants would undertake. The Trio cluster along with the Trio sponsors were asked to draw up the list of priority topics which needed investigation. During the initial learning clinics participating groups would be formed to discuss six topics and staff could select the one they wished to work on during the programme; in offering some choice it was hoped that participants would more readily buy-in to the process. The Trio members would act as mentors to the groups to encourage them to 'challenge' the existing status quo and to assist them in providing a presentation at the end of the programme to representative members of the One Council Management Team on the final day.

The six topics selected were:

- Internal Communication
- Staff engagement and empowerment
- Research, Intelligence and Data Sharing
- Thinking Efficiency
- Embedding Values
- Strategic Commissioning.

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In anticipation of an August meeting with the Director for Change, the researcher/ programme director and the independent consultant prepared a briefing document (*eDoc*). The document summarised the position that had been reached on the whole 'Transform' programme up to that point. The paper recognised that planning a strategic direction for the whole initiative would be challenging because it was a "*multi-layered, potentially wide-ranging (multi-agency), and potentially ground breaking*" (*eDoc*). The document pointed out that the model being put forward needed to be seen as a single entity. The paper underlined that while the model should still be seen as a draft "*it represents a model of learning around the 'flow' of ideas to implementation through interpretation and championing up towards the CMT and receiving decisions and resources back from CMT to the OCMT and onwards to managers who will be charged with implementation. The model suggests that the role of senior managers in OCMT (need) to play a significant and proactive role.*" The paper concluded that "*It's a highly experiential (sic) model with the main driver to change being 'learning' rather than new form*".

For the first time, it appeared that the 'language of change' being used comprised paradigmatic thinking and radical intentions for change, where the nature of the outcomes would be measured more in terms of changed relationships rather than new structures. With six areas of work, all designed to work into and complement each other the framework of ideas appeared to have matured significantly.

The change programme submitted comprised assisting the 'flow' of change ideas within the organisation; facilitating learning; sharing theory and knowledge; and providing planning and implementation support to a number of key events and programmes. All of these interventions were expected to assist in moving the organisation along a continuum from a notional 'model 1' position to a new 'model 2' position.

In the diagram that described 'building on commissioning the capacity', the attempt to build in further capacity was seen as taking place through a series of linked interventions (Appendix Four below). The first was to work with the senior executives (i) - this was expected to take place through liaison meetings with the key senior executives, such as the Director for Change and the Assistant Chief Executive. Requests were sometimes made and memos/ emails exchanged on particular elements of the whole programme. For example, a briefing note was prepared in early July 2008 for the Director for Change that summarised the current position (*eDoc 4<sup>th</sup> July 2008*) and suggested a programme for further work. This was discussed face to

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face a few days later and from it a larger meeting of key directors with the Director for Change was held at MBS at the end of August (*HWN, FC 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008*). The second intervention was to offer consultancy support to the whole programme (ii) – it was anticipated that an overview of the whole programme would be taken and opportunities to provide a ‘critical friend’ type of relationship would emerge. The Business School and the independent consultant anticipated that the ‘partnership’ relationship with the Council might be explored under this heading. Thirdly, developing the work of Team Metville Network (iii) was also expected to form a significant part of the next stage in the Transform programme where greater opportunities for staff to be involved in cross-directorate, cross-disciplinary working might be presented. Seeing ways in which this could be further developed was anticipated as being part of the consultancy role. Fourthly, offering intense support to the work of the Trios and the Trio cluster (iv) was expected to continue. The relationships that had built up between the Trio members themselves, and with the programme liaison team members, had grown. Confidences were shared and opportunities to speak openly about developments were offered and taken. ‘Safe areas’ for discussion and reflection by the Trio members provided in both the Business School and then later in the specifically defined work area within the Metville town hall campus, assisted the Trios to discuss sensitive issues. Fifthly, developing the Transform Learning Team and assisting in developing the learning zone were seen as key tasks in the next stage (v). The work of the Trios on the initial set of challenges associated with the SPOTlight work had begun to come to an end and the next steps were being planned. Thinking about ways in which this learning might still be captured was seen as important. Finally, trying to capture the ‘Transform story (vi) was identified as an important part of the recognition that this was a journey and there would be learning ‘along the way’. In breaking down the initiative into these segments the programme liaison team hoped that a shared understanding of the key organisational development priorities might be achieved.

This document continued to be refined over the course of the next few months during which it became formally known as “Transforming Metville ‘Charting the Course’ (CtC<sup>2</sup>) A Strategic Model for Change, April 2009”. In the conclusion to the document it was noted that the model had incorporated thinking from the programme liaison team; the Transform cluster and discussions with the Director for Change. It had become a joint piece of thinking and had benefitted from this approach. The document noted that the next stage would be exciting and probably quite difficult but there were no illusions that the model could be anything other than a guide to current activity. However, there was now an evolving feel to the model that was

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moving from a relatively static 'Figure of 8' to a moving and changing figure that was beginning to make the transformational journey from Model 1 to Model 2.

### 5.6.4 Key events in the third stage

The first critical event, and the one that addressed the issue of the perceived failure of individual applied learning, was the next cohort of Transform (Cohort 7). In conjunction with senior directors and members of the Trio cluster the six topics selected were introduced. (These were Internal Communication; Staff engagement and empowerment; Research, Intelligence and Data Sharing; Thinking Efficiency; Embedding Values; and Strategic Commissioning). At the first session of the programme two members of the Trios attended to both explain the work they had been doing as part of the Trio cluster and also to explain the background to the selection of the topics (SOrg). At this meeting the Trio members shared their learning on the key drivers for radical change. In a diagram of concentric circles they explained their thinking on working as 'one council' *"Our initial thoughts are based on the Council's values being central to a one council approach with outcomes for citizens being the result of our vision ... manifested through our behaviours and actions. There should be a clear link between all of these"* (SOrg). The five key elements within the change approach were listed as *"Values, Behaviours, Organisational Factors, Actions, and Outcomes"* (SOrg). Rather than suggest there was a complicated matrix of change drivers that needed to be analysed, the Trios Cluster was suggesting that it was through internalising some core aspects of successful change that staff could reap much higher returns.

During the course of the briefing for the group applied learning challenges, the Trio Cluster members were asked to outline their main learning from the time they had spent working in the trios. Their first comment was *"3 is a magic number!"*... *"it is small enough to challenge each other and tackle projects"*... the *"Benefits of working within a trio **cannot be underestimated** – (it) offers support and challenge, provides real opportunity for reflection and learning, trust, and share the work load"* It was therefore powerful in being able to articulate the aspirations of achieving a 'one council' way of working. They listed Trios roles as: *"Critical friend and supportive challenge"* We *"challenged the ambition of end game recommendations with the benefit of impartial independence"* We ensured *"clarity of roles, actions, expectations etc - Re-focused on primary stakeholder concerns that were in danger of being diluted because of an introspective, primarily process based set of recommendations. This took the form of the design*

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*of a set of activity plans that were outcome based, SMART, taking the best of the original recommendations and building in innovation and transformation”*

In reflecting on the experience of being in the Trios Cluster the team members shared their thoughts: being in a cluster meant *“learning from each other, challenging, advising, offsetting potential isolation and sharing individual strengths”*. *“Working from a variety of backgrounds (other experience and knowledge is brought to the table) and genuine collaboration and openness among members is available. Its a safe space to theorise, reflect, strategize, apply learning, challenge and grow – the value of reflective thinking time is recognized in time being set aside (e.g. Cluster lunches and meeting at MBS). It’s a way of thinking transformationally. To give you a sense of the cluster - it is high energy, fast paced; individuals, trios and the wider cluster have developed these really unique skill and knowledge sets – it’s created a opportunity for us as individuals to grow and build on the learning and gain an appetite for Transform”*.

The Trios thinking on the development of the Transforming Metville Network was also shared with the presenter arguing that *“The network needs more nurturing to gain its true benefits ... the Transform course is the very beginning – opportunities are there for wider engagement – the importance of not losing the enthusiasm and involvement of managers in change agendas is essential”*. There is *“potential to address this in the next 6 months, also to work with the Transform cohort 7 (ALCs)”*. It is *“important to bridge the gap between the Trios and the Network”* and recognize that *“to create the Transformation we want in Metville we need to all have a role to play”*

Members of the Trio cluster were asked to work with and ‘mentor’ the work of the ALC groups from the Cohort 7 programme. At the same time the teaching part of the MBS programme began to incorporate some important developments. The first was the importance of context, by introducing some conceptual understanding of what comprised transformational change. The teaching tried to place the whole programme into a broader context. Thus, the ideas contained in modernisation both administratively, as well as culturally, were investigated more fully with the participants. Leadership and strategic thinking were also explored. The limitations of managerial techniques, where applied inappropriately, were similarly covered. In this way, the overall programme matured from a ‘teach and learn’ to a ‘let’s learn together’ type of approach.

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During the third stage of the action research the taught programmes continued with an increasing focus on the outcome of the applied learning opportunities. These were specifically commissioned on the basis that participants had expressed some degree of choice on which issue they wished to work in the full knowledge that senior executives were fully committed to looking at the outcome of each group's work. A presentation by each group would be made to them at the end of the programme. The development from an individual learning opportunity to a major high priority organisational challenge worked on in groups was highly significant and drove the Action Research programme on. The role of the Trio cluster was integrated into the taught programmes providing advice and support to the groups as they worked on the challenges. The choice of issues was relevant and important for the whole council and not just focused on particular parts of the council services or an individual's particular interest.

The Director for Change specifically invited senior managers to the presentations and a number indicated that they would attend. Although not all of them eventually appeared, some were there to hear the participant groups feedback their findings and recommendations.

At the end of the programme, participants were again asked to fill in black-sheets with answers to questions about their feelings and future intentions – in answer to the question on whether the programme had been useful, participants said: Its been *“Daunting/Challenging/Enjoyable”*; *its “widened horizons in the way I think & opened up new ideas, revealed wider council priorities, practices,(and) experiences”*; *“I used to live in a social work bubble but I am now able to see the whole picture”*. Others said: *“It has given me more confidence to go out there and make a difference”*; *“there is a “Realisation – I can do that: ‘gizza’ a job” (then)*. Comments on the benefit of meeting others were: *“Great to go on a course with other Metville colleagues about issues relevant to Metville”*; *“Networking with individuals across Directorates and hearing things from a ‘different’ perspective” has been useful*; *“Building up (a) network of other managers in different departments (useful) – will keep in touch”*

Some reflections on the difficulties of prioritising the programme were made *“The ALC work was (not) ‘programmed’ in to give an idea of the amount of time (needed) to participate in the course”*; *(needed) “more time for working on Transform issues away from Day job – I found it was incredibly difficult to find Transform time”*; *(would have liked) “the Transform programme (to) include follow on action from the ALC”*; *“ALC’s (should be) explored as a model to facilitate transformation”*; *“Ensure we try to re engage with (the Director for Change and the Deputy Chief*

## Chapter Five Stage Three

*Executive) on our ALC". (I should have) "been more confident in the earlier stages and been more vocal about my own ideas, beliefs etc. and shared this with others"; "Have more confidence in my own ability to lead and change - Remember I'm good at (other) things – hone skills & knowledge & will remember to implement these and stand true to my conviction"; "Offer more solutions"; "Reflect and question more - Not be afraid to step forward".*

Finally participants fed-back that their future intentions were to: *"Use the opportunity I have been given"; "Have some Transform learning in mind when doing my job"; "Remembering honesty and simplicity"; and to "share knowledge & skills"; "Try and apply techniques used in my working"; "I will now... think more carefully about my communication methods"; "Change how I communicate with my team & the way I and my team communicate (outwards) and try to maintain this"; "Continue to be ambitious and imaginative in my thinking to help improve the way I/ we work as a team within and outside of our department".*

At their regular meeting at the Business School the Trios Cluster discussed their lack of skills and knowledge around internal consultancy. Their experience of working in a small team/ cluster (bubble), with the other participants on Cohort 7 had highlighted this. As a result, a two day programme was delivered through the Business School by the independent consultant and the programme director from MBS. The key learning point that was emphasised was the importance of recognising the role of the consultant in offering themselves into the change situation as enabler and facilitator. The delivery of this short programme prompted Metville to request a similar programme to be delivered to other members of the corporate programme and project services team later in the year.

At a briefing meeting with the Director for Change, a discussion about widening out the activity on Transform resulted in the PLT undertaking to formally 'launch' a 'Team Metville Network' in March 2009. This was held in a community centre where a wide invitation was extended to those who were past participants of previous cohorts of Transform; those involved in Council wide change programmes such as 'Investors in People', and particularly the participants of the previous Cohort 7 programme who had undertaken group applied learning challenges. The event had two aims – to launch the idea of a network that had the full support of the senior executives; and secondly to encourage staff to become involved actively in working for the Network. After an introduction by the Director for Change, those attending were invited to offer themselves to work with others on four corporate issues (some of which arose from the Cohort 7

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group Applied Learning Challenges): these were - Staff Alignment and Clarity of Role; Value for Money; Learning, Innovation and Creativity; and finally Communication and Involvement. The event enabled participants to engage in table-discussions at which each of these issues were discussed. Participants were also invited to select a 'gear' which reflected the amount of time, energy and commitment to the Transform programme they felt they were able to give. The descriptions of the 'gears' were 1<sup>st</sup> 'Keep me informed I am interested in this'; 2<sup>nd</sup> 'I am genuinely interested in Transform; but I am unsure on whether I can be released'; 3<sup>rd</sup> 'I would like to work with others to make something really good happen in Metville'; 4<sup>th</sup> 'I am prepared to work 'full-on, big style' to make something really go well'. As a kick-start to the network, 2-day sessions at MBS (named 'Transform Lite') were offered as refreshers/ updates, or quick introductions to the work of Transform following the meeting. These sessions aimed to provide a highly compressed version of the normal Transform cohort programmes.

A follow-up day was planned where the work that had been done by the self-selecting groups on each of the four topic areas would be presented by the groups to a Network event at which directors and senior managers were invited to listen to the feedback. This event occurred on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2009 about 6 weeks after the first launch event. The event was again introduced by the Director for Change and was attended by over 65 members of staff from across the whole council, including several members of the Corporate Management Team. The Director outlined the context for change and reiterated that he wanted to embark on a process to ensure that those who were interested in working together to address significant organisational change areas for the Council would be empowered and enabled to do so. Explanations of the ideas that were being worked on were made. The Director was impressed with the energy, enthusiasm and hard work in pulling the ideas together in such a short timescale. He challenged the network members to begin to take action where they could on what they had heard including beginning a process of "buddying and sharing" across the Team Metville Network and he agreed that senior managers (CMT and OCMT) would review the presentations and look to meet with the groups to explore how to take the ideas forward. A further follow up meeting took place on June 24<sup>th</sup> to allow more feedback on progress on each area of work – again the Director for Change led the meeting which was attended by the Chief Executive as well.

### 5.6.5 Analysis

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The patterning of the interdependencies across Metville during this period showed a marked change. The institutionalisation of a new pattern – the cluster – and the adoption of priority working on corporate issues – the Transform challenges – meant that a clear alternative to the pattern of hierarchical and segmented organisational form was becoming established. Recognition of the work of the Transform programme enabled participants to align themselves with the ‘Transform’ brand within Metville with more ease. In addition a supportive and encouraging attitude from the Director for Change towards staff being able to join a ‘network’ that was positively promoting new and different ways to address fundamental change issues was seen as radically different.

I observed particularly a relatively small group (the Trios Cluster) develop a sense of its own ability to judge strategically important issues and act accordingly. In a presentation to a regional forum of local authority staff, the Cluster accepted an invitation to talk about the dynamics of the Transform approach. They highlighted the *“unexpected benefit of the cluster as a whole” which recognized “individual strengths, learning from each other, advising, creating space for innovation/creativity, analysis, feedback, the ability to balance risk and reward, and the offsetting of potential isolation”; and “working in cross-directorate groups – from variety of backgrounds” which brought experience and knowledge to the table.* Staff in the cluster commented on the *“genuine collaboration and openness among members - a safe space to theorise, reflect, strategize, apply learning, challenge and grow”; “the value of reflective thinking time (and the importance of time set aside e.g. Cluster lunches and time at MBS); and “thinking transformationally”.* The cluster asked the question: *“How do we maximise this investment and these skills over the coming six months and beyond? (There is) is potential for Trios to be at the heart of the Council’s change agenda if this is appropriate place where (the) above skills could be applied”; “If 15 people can work together to build a platform for change, just think what 150 or 1500 could do” (SOrg)*

In terms of the patterning of the Council, the assertion of the Trios Cluster was that they had an impact on it: *“We’ve spent as much time working with partners and agencies over the last 18 months as we have with council colleagues and on reflection that’s exactly how it should be. We have often been the brokers of new relationships or of redefined shared responsibilities in partnership terms” (SOrg).*

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The Cluster were also aware of their significance in interrupting old patterns of behaviour: *“It has become part of the trio role when faced with a new commission to question where it fits strategically with the Metville agreement, our Local Area Agreement, our sustainable communities strategy, or our cabinet work plan etc. It’s pretty straightforward for any organisation to kick-start multiple pieces of work that end up tripping over each other. With organisational knowledge paired with questioning techniques, Trios help stop that from happening”* (SOrg).

The Cluster quoted a case study of their own in which they outlined the radical nature of their work: *“We’ve been fortunate to have a space, another Metville bubble, to reflect and learn from each other and it was in one such space that our proudest output of 2008 was born”... “we found that we all tripped over the same kinds of problems and issues... whether it was versions of visions, ineffective communications, dysfunctional partnerships or conflicting agendas there were a number of common barriers to success”. (We drew up a list of) ‘bear traps’ that we believe lurk around all pieces of work and if any one of these elements is not in place then the piece of work is jeopardised”* These elements comprised: *“Clear Vision; Strong, shared culture; Clear, effective leadership; Clear, effective management; Clear, effective partnerships; Clear, effective communications; Clear, effective plans and priorities; Clear, effective operational structures; Clear, shared data; Reflective, learning approach; Customer focussed, efficient delivery”* (SOrg).

*“We took this list, to One Council Management Team and had a small audience with The Chief and Assistant Chief Executive. They took the critique on the chin and challenged us right back - “Now give us solutions to fix these problems”. “So we did, we took the outcomes that we wanted and created outcome success measures and short, medium and long term actions that would get us to these outcomes”. “We then took our 35 pages of things to do, chunked it up and got it down to 23, prioritised it under leadership, communications, management and people and its now 6 pages long. We then gifted this to OCMT and use our meeting with them bi-monthly to prod them gently on what they’re doing to address these things”* (SOrg).

I observed an extraordinary confidence in the group and a growing reputation amongst the senior executives. I also noticed the steps being taken to grow a strong group of people who were prepared to be ‘badged’ as transformational and to begin to join in the networking. There

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was a definite sense in which the Council was seeking to embed the changes it was making in the organisational framework of the Council.

In addition, a new language of change appeared to have been adopted which used phrases like 'transformometer'; 'Model 1' and 'Model 2'; 'clunch'; 'cluster'; 'transformational spirit words'; '4<sup>th</sup> gear'; and 'challenge'. In particular, the 'Figure of 8' model had enabled a number of ideas about describing change to coalesce into a conceptual understanding which embodied the notion of key currency – ideas – that would begin to achieve momentum through the organisation.

A great deal of this kind of activity (the Transform Lite programmes, the Trios, the Transform Learning Team, the internal consultancy training, and the support to the Network) was emerging as a number of linked contributions, and I observed that there was a firm resolve in the top executive team to drive this work forward (*HWN*).

As a result, I observed that obstinacy in the organisation appeared to be particularly weak at this stage – there was clear momentum in the whole programme and with senior executives engaged with and leading the Transform programme, both visibly, and by attending Team Metville Network events; by supporting the continuation of the Trio working; and by signalling to staff the support of the Chief Executive for the whole programme, a clear legitimacy was asserted for it. This added weight to those involved in it.

However, I observed that the Director for Change was uncertain on how far he could comfortably go with the whole initiative. This was understandable since the support from the senior departmental directors and managers for the initiative appeared to be luke-warm. Attendance by senior departmental managers at the three Network days had been relatively sparse and patchy, and the Transform Learning Team which had a responsibility to strategically lead/ liaise on the work of the Trios did not appear to be meeting regularly with any of the participants of the programme who wished to make progress on the corporate issues launched at the Network meeting.

The role of Director for Change appeared to be a key issue. In small meetings with the PLT he could be quite open and reflective. He was an astute pragmatist who sought to 'sense' the best time to push an initiative. He fully understood the programme objectives and the framework of

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ideas that were being pursued. During an informal meeting with the Trio cluster he was reported by them to have 'drawn' in the air the 'Figure of 8' model – moving it along in the air from left to right as if across a page (*HWN*). He identified in meetings a sense of what he named 'Transform Spirit' when there was a buzz in the room and a real enthusiasm for change. The activities that had flowed from the 'Charting the Course' document were wide-ranging and engaging a significant number of Metville staff in Transform related work, in council sponsored time, that did not comprise their normal 'day-job' roles. He discussed with the PLT the means by which the council could move from Model 1 to Model 2 and recognised the difficulty of achieving whole organisation change on the scale envisaged within the programme (*HWN*).

### 5.6.6 Summary

Although there might have been double counting from some people attending the half day Network workshops and those attending the Transform Lite sessions, there were nevertheless something like 45 new people who became involved, or re-involved, in the Transform initiative following the 11<sup>th</sup> March; the April 28<sup>th</sup>; and the June 15<sup>th</sup> 2009 Team Metville Network meetings. Added to the maybe 60 staff who were already more involved through the Trio cluster, Transform 7, the Transform Lite programmes, the internal consultancy work, and the work more generally on the Team Metville Network meetings, this amounted to over 100 staff who were regularly engaged in 'Transform' related work. Through this the development of the model of change based around the fundamental idea of a 'Figure of 8' was progressing well. More importantly, the activities and attitude of the Trios Cluster members was offering some of the senior executive team an alternative 'place' in which to discuss radical ideas for change. The Trios Cluster had established a reputation for effective work that produced realistic and achievable ideas for bringing about change.

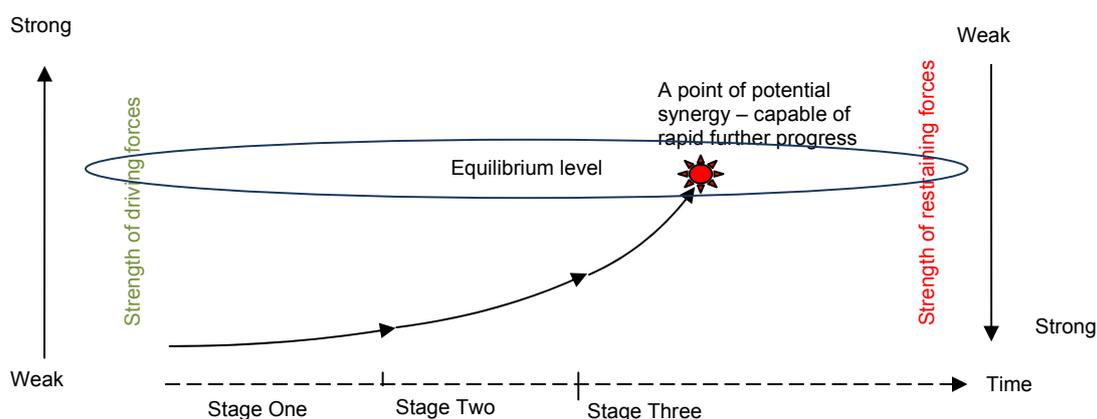
However, I was increasingly aware that while there was a clear 'buzz' emerging from the Transform activities from middle level staff, the director level was beginning to show signs of reluctance to engage. For example, at the Team Metville Network meetings the opportunity to attend was clearly made (an invitation email informing them of the meetings was sent to all members of the senior leadership team) and no prior preparation was needed by them. Some of their own directorate staff would be actively involved in presenting ideas and yet they chose not to attend. This was significant for me, because from an early stage in the whole programme it felt clear that a key part of the joining up of the 'flow' would be through managers who would need to fundamentally redefine their roles and responsibilities (Burgelman 1983) in a quite

radical way. Overcoming barriers to change would be more likely in this group of staff than perhaps others and this reluctance was beginning to show itself.

### 5.6.7 Third period of reflection

By the summer of 2009 a new transitioning point appeared to have been reached. While there had been rapid and significant progress, I observed that the framework of ideas had possibly been too timid. The language of change being adopted by staff was now much more focused. Mention of 'Model 2' was frequent and generally understood within the Transform network. Events had taken place which signalled the corporate acceptance of 'alternative' approaches. The 'bubble' had become populated with confident and outgoing staff who were willing to speak about their experiences. Knowledge was being transferred and very senior staff were now coming into contact with middle managers and talking about radical ways in which the council might change. The topics chosen to be looked at were corporate and strategic and not operationally focused for example, staff alignment and clarity of role; value for money; learning, innovation and creativity; and communication and involvement (from the first Network meeting).

Taken together this stage of the research appeared to be very satisfactory – the four key ideas of transformation, knowledge transfer, flow and engagement had produced methods for directing action across the council that were visibly affecting the way that relationships were inter-relating and developing. A point of potential synergy had been reached which might begin to disturb the equilibrium of Metville (see Fig 5.14). I felt, therefore, that at this moment a 'bold stroke' was needed in the thinking behind the programme to 'sling-shot' some more propulsion into the research.



**Fig 5.14: Stage Three – a point of potential 'lift off'**

## **CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: FINAL STAGE**

### **6.0 STAGE FOUR**

For the fourth and final stage I have collected the results and analysis in a new chapter. During this stage there was much greater momentum following on from the activities in Stage Three. The dynamics were more complex and contributions to the programme came from a number of areas. It therefore felt more appropriate to develop the results and analysis for this stage separately.

From the perspective of the preceding stages, my research now sought to link up the investigation of an organisational framework of inter-dependencies; the conceptualisation of change as a paradigm shift and the possible existence of obstinacy that might impede the change process. I wanted to draw these elements together more closely in order to investigate whether they represented an inter-locking relationship around reform that might reveal organisational obstinacy.

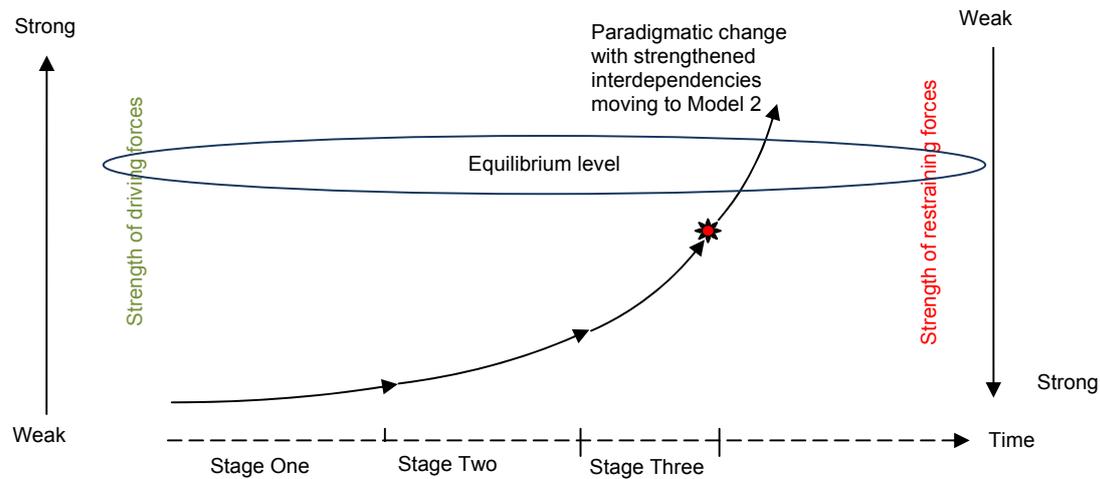
#### **6.1 AREA OF CONCERN (4)**

The early areas of concern that had originated with 'capacity building' and had led on to 'commissioning capability' had provided the basis for the development of an organisational framework of interdependencies at Metville. In turn this had led to support for more engagement, knowledge transfer and transformational thinking.

In scoping the next stage of the research, the area of concern now focused on the much greater degree of adaptation and accommodation Metville might achieve in dealing with the political, financial and managerial challenges that the council was facing and whether the speed and range of change could be substantially increased.

Figure 6.1 identifies the key objective for Stage Four as: 'shifting (disturbing) the point of organisational equilibrium' to enable paradigmatic change to occur in the organisational framework of interdependencies and to move from 'Model 1' to 'Model 2'.

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**Fig 6.1: Stage Four: Shifting the organisational equilibrium of Metville to Model 2**

Understanding how major change might come about became the key aspect of this area of concern. The previous stages had essentially developed initiatives working at a level below the 'whole council' and across a range of strategic issues. The aim had been to achieve some form of 'dynamic flow' of ideas for change that might 'attach' itself to parts of the organisation and provide examples of more radical change. At this new stage, the challenge of bringing together all the development work that had been undertaken so far was seen as critical. The next step was to take advantage of the capacity that was in place and attempt to broaden the range of linked initiatives in order to achieve a greater 'critical mass' of change within Metville. The dynamics of the whole change programme needed to be woven together into a coherent strategy.

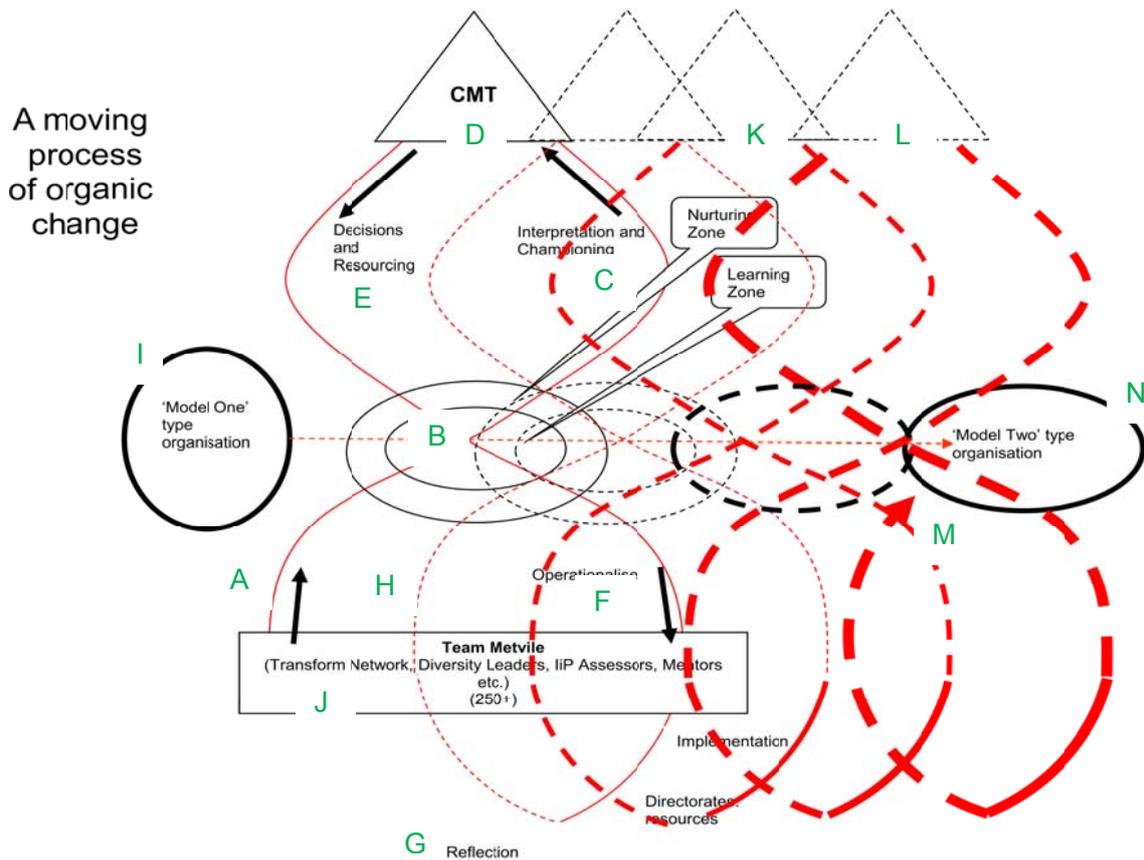
### 6.2 FRAMEWORK OF IDEAS (4)

In seeking to provide a background model for the next stage for the research programme, it felt to me that the experimental nature of the first three stages had developed a number of ideas to the point where the natural next step was to 'try it out at the level of the whole organisation'. In this I was particularly influenced by Kotter's (1995) eight step model which, in steps 7 and 8, moves from embedding change more widely to 'institutionalising' it, such that the whole organisation thinks and acts in a transformed way. Senge's (1990) 'system thinking' ideas similarly suggested that it is at the level of the whole organisational system (and beyond) that

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real change begins to take place. Checkland's (2000) idea of an organisation's 'underlying property of purposefulness' was also fundamental to this.

In this final stage I sought to link up the concept of a flow of creative ideas around an organisation which joined front-end experiences (doing) with corporate strategic thinking (learning) and executive management (deciding) and combined this with the notion of organisational 'movement' from one paradigm (Model 1) to a new one (Model 2). I began modelling a 'moving figure of 8' centred on building a learning zone in the middle of the organisation surrounded by ideas which moved between the bottom and the top in an ordered and structured way. Within the central zone, experiential learning (through trying new ideas out) would be integrated with organisational learning (what appeared to work systemically).



**Fig 6.2: A Moving Process of Organic Organisational Change**

This model harked back to my earlier ideas of 'fusion' which suggested that empowered leaders acting with a sense of personal agency (at all levels) would learn about how to implement

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successful change by trying out new ways of working and these would be adopted by the organisation because of their self-evident merit. Fig 6.2 emerged out of this thinking and seeks to model a form of radical evolutionary change that loops in a pattern of a 'figure of eight' while moving transformationally from a 'model 1' to a 'model 2'.

Point 'A' is the point of entry – this starts with the notion that the key currency in organisational change is rooted in good ideas (Seshadri and Sahpitu (2003) and Healey (2013)). Thus the thin red line at 'A' represents taking good ideas from current practice and investigating their merit as examples of wider change that the organisation might adopt. These ideas are therefore examined in a 'learning zone' 'B'. The job of this zone is to investigate the feasibility of trying out these ideas at scale, but also to provide a 'place' where staff can 'force' ideas forward. In Burgelman's (1983) model, middle managers undertake 'forcing' activities to encourage senior managers to then champion these ideas upwards to senior executives in a process of corporate 'intrepreneurship' (see Fig 5.12, p117 above).

At point 'C' I saw the journey of these 'good ideas' being taken forward by directors and assistant directors at Metville. In representing ('championing' in Burgelman's (1983) model) both the ideas, and as a consequence their authors too, Metville departmental directors would be offering assurance to their senior executives that the ideas had been tested for their feasibility and efficacy through the work done on them in the learning zone. At point 'D' the role of the corporate management team (CMT) was to appraise the strategic context of the ideas and to form a view on the likely structural impact the changed way of working was likely to have on Metville (again both these activities are highlighted in Burgelman's model).

Critically, however, the model then moves the flow of the ideas that originated at point 'A', through to point 'E' where the implementation of the ideas begins in earnest. Two critical activities of the CMT are played out – clearly signalling that the ideas have been adopted (deciding) and then providing the appropriate resources to make them happen (resourcing). By passing the ideas back down to the learning zone (point B) again, the activity of working out the detail of how to implement these ideas can then be delegated to operational staff. My model assumed that very often at this stage the 'devil is in the detail' and a good idea can become conversely destructive if it is organisationally 'fumbled'. The work of the Trios had been highly important in offering the One Council Management Team two innovations – the first was the notion of an 'action plan' of ideas for transformational cross-council change, but importantly it

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also offered the TCT itself as a 'bubble' mechanism through which to nurture these ideas on to fruition.

Point 'F' indicates the implementation of an idea that involves altering patterns of relationships; staff then begin to work in a different way. With different people doing different things, time would be needed to embed these ideas into the organisation. Part of the job of the learning zone was to encourage and monitor the changes being attempted and again part of the learning from the TCT had been the importance of 'challenging' other staff on their willingness to implement new ideas.

At point 'G', the ideas of Argyris and Schön (1978) on the 'reflective practitioner' are included to suggest that having taken good ideas and 'flowed' them through 'forcing', 'championing', 'deciding' and 'resourcing', to a point of implementation, a period of reflection would follow. During this time the 'learning' could be properly captured to evaluate whether 'single', 'double' or 'triple-loop' learning had taken place. At point 'H', the cycle could begin again with a fresh set of new ideas (in part developed from the learning that had come from the first cycle) which could then begin to loop round a new 'Figure of 8'.

Point 'I' however, is included to begin to model 'whole organisational change'. This was in part modelled on Lewin's (1947) ideas of group dynamics, Senge's (1990) ideas on system change, and McCloughlin's (1969) ideas on systems thinking and cybernetics which suggested that even a small amount of change within a 'system' might change the whole (as in the law of thermodynamics which puts a small drop of ink into a bath of water and thus changes the nature of the whole bath's contents). Conceptualising 'Model 1' as the shape and nature of Metville Council at the beginning of the change process, the flow of generating new ideas and implementing them within the system was expected to begin to fundamentally change the whole council. This slow process of gradual incremental (experimental small changes), yet radical (whole system) change – a form of radical gradualism – is captured in the 'movement of the whole 8' and this is represented in the 'dotted' line of the second iteration of the Figure 8.

Point 'J' sees the creation of a 'network' of empowered staff who can transfer knowledge and work more collaboratively by taking forward the experience they have gained through experiencing the teaching and ideas from the Transform programme, and who can begin to describe corporate issues as 'learning challenges'. Combined with strategic mentoring and Trio

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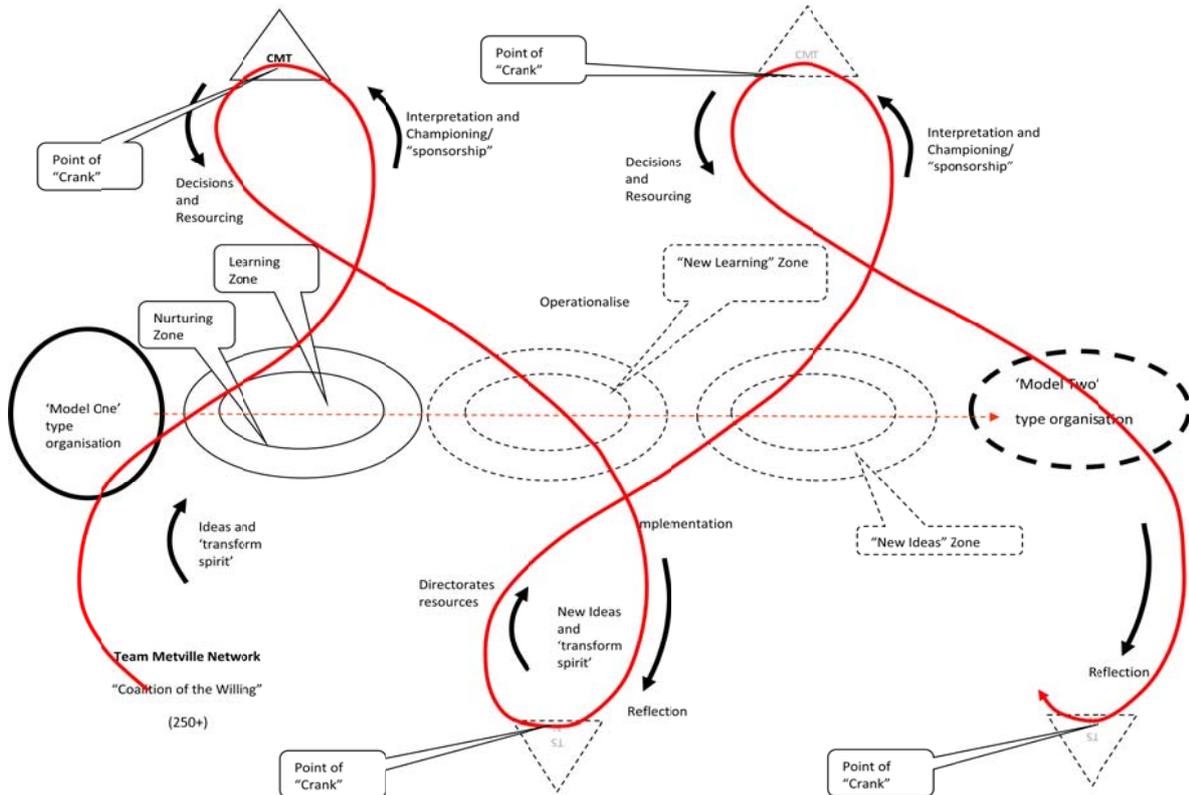
sponsorship, undertaken by senior directors as seen in Stages Two and Three, learning and action are more explicitly joined together.

Points 'K' and 'L' signify the importance of the senior executives in the Corporate Management Team (CMT) making use of the opportunities offered by adopting new ideas for organisational change. For more radical and significant progress to be made along the path from Model 1 to Model 2 means changing mind-sets and therefore the model adds a new role for decision makers around resources. This role is to signal the need for 'faster' and 'wider' exploration of new ideas. In the same way that the model uses the 'line' of the Figure 8 to trace the pathway of the ideas from inception to fruition (from point A to F) so the thickness of the line becomes analogous with the 'bandwidth' of e-communications – the thicker the line the faster and wider the exploration of new ideas.

At point 'M', the notion of arriving at a new type of organisation, where the Council has fully adapted and changed to accommodate the new political, financial and managerial challenges of modernisation, is portrayed. The model assumes the process of reform will not then stop - the critical idea of a paradigm shift occurring is implied in the model to convey that the council would not then slip backwards towards the old Model 1. Thus at point 'N', a new organisation which reflects a different patterning of the inter-dependencies across it and which works in a radically different way, will emerge.

During the course of Stage Four, I further developed my framework of ideas into those contained in Diagram 6.3. This grew out of my thoughts on points 'K' and 'L' in Diagram 6.2 in which I felt that senior executives leading such change programmes needed to recognise the use of organisational power to create momentum (to aid the speed and width of the idea flow) but also to overcome the resistance to change coming from obstinacy within staff groups either defending professional practices or seeking to adapt the status quo rather than embrace radical ideas for change. In discussing these ideas within the PLT, words such as 'sling-shot' or 'cranking' were used to convey this idea of shifting the nature of the change to accommodate the new paradigm within the executive team at the top of the organisation. The PLT then developed this idea of a 'cranking 8' at the top of the organisation a step further and suggested that the idea of an organisational 'wind' that operated at the top as well as the bottom would be more satisfactory. The momentum for radical change would not simply be a function of senior executive leadership but would also come from empowering radical opportunities for new ways

of working to be developed at the front-line of service delivery. In this way, institutional mechanisms would be introduced that made paradigmatic changes possible in the way the whole operation worked. The 'points of crank' particularly at the top and bottom of the organisation could then be investigated as possible key indicators of where obstinacy might be most influential and most usefully overcome.



**Fig 6.3: A 'Winding 8' Model of Organisational Change**

It was with this new framework of ideas for the action research, that Stage Four was begun.

### 6.3 METHOD (4)

The methods deployed within Stage Four were built using the models in the framework of ideas above. The findings from Stage Three suggested that the beginnings of a critical mass had been built up organisationally at Metville that was sufficient to provide a platform for a radical

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new push for the programme (or a ‘crank’). The new activities planned were aimed at strengthening all the components that had been put in place during Stage Three.

Table 6.1 (below) provides an overall view of the different elements of the programme in Stage Four which were all aimed at strengthening the ‘what’ & ‘how’ of key change activities and seeking to align these with the ‘who’ of the councils key actors. In the Table the ‘what’ and ‘how’ elements in the left hand column are divided into three key areas – these relate to the theoretical perspective of a ‘flow’ of ideas which strengthen the interconnectivity of those key stakeholders within the organisation such that they can deploy new skills and techniques to turn action into new learning (and new learning into new action).

**Table 6.1: Key Methodological Ideas for Stage Four**

<b>Strengthening the ‘what’ and ‘how’</b>	<b>Strengthening the ‘who’ – key stakeholders</b>
Strengthening the connectivity of the inter-relationships (framework of interdependencies)	The work of Cohort 8 would be specifically sponsored by designated members of the senior leaders (directors) and assisted by input from the Trios Cluster. The Trios Cluster would be reporting in to the DfC on the progress it was making on cross-directorate initiatives and locality focused work. The senior leaders and corporate executives would build oversight of the whole programme into their normal working to formally incorporate ‘transform’ type work.
Strengthening the flow and number of ideas around change (language)	In the same way that the learning challenges for Cohort 7 had been selected; a new set of challenges would emerge for Cohort 8. These would again be worked on by six different groups within the cohort during the course of the programme. In the meantime, the work of the Transforming Metville Network challenges would be continued and taken forward. Finally, the Trios Cluster would also be taking forward their findings from the earlier SPOTlight initiative and their work on the One Council Action Plan.
Strengthening the critical analysis and reflection to incorporate the learning into new ways of working (a learning organisation and a changing organisation)	The exploration of the new models of thinking in the framework of ideas would be taken forward through the PLT working more closely with the DfC and the ACE in a regular set of meetings to monitor progress across the whole programme. Linking up the Trios Cluster, the Network, the senior leaders and the senior executives to enable greater opportunities for analysis of progress being made and reflection would be facilitated through the PLT.

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The PLT were concerned to ensure that the momentum of the change programme was maintained – words such as ‘drive’ were used in the team to convey a sense of this. At this time the ideas of Burgelman (1983) and Kotter (1995) were especially prominent.

Kotter’s ‘eight step’ programme (1995) for transformational change linked a number of steps - generating a ‘sense of urgency’ and ‘forming a guiding coalition’; articulating a ‘clear vision’ and ‘communicating it across the organisation’; ‘empowering staff’ to achieve ‘quick wins’; ‘embedding change’ and finally ‘institutionalising’ it. I observed the discussion of this in the PLT which used it as a basis for seeking a radical step-change in the Metville programme. The team felt that much of the work on the Transform programmes aligned closely with the eight steps and future work was discussed using a formatted model of the eight steps using eight ‘boxes’. (*FC-plt, HWN, eM, eDoc*). The ‘sense of urgency’ in ‘step one’ of the eight steps was discussed extensively (Kotter 2008)

I now discuss the key activities and events that took place during Stage Four.

### 6.4 KEY EVENTS IN STAGE FOUR

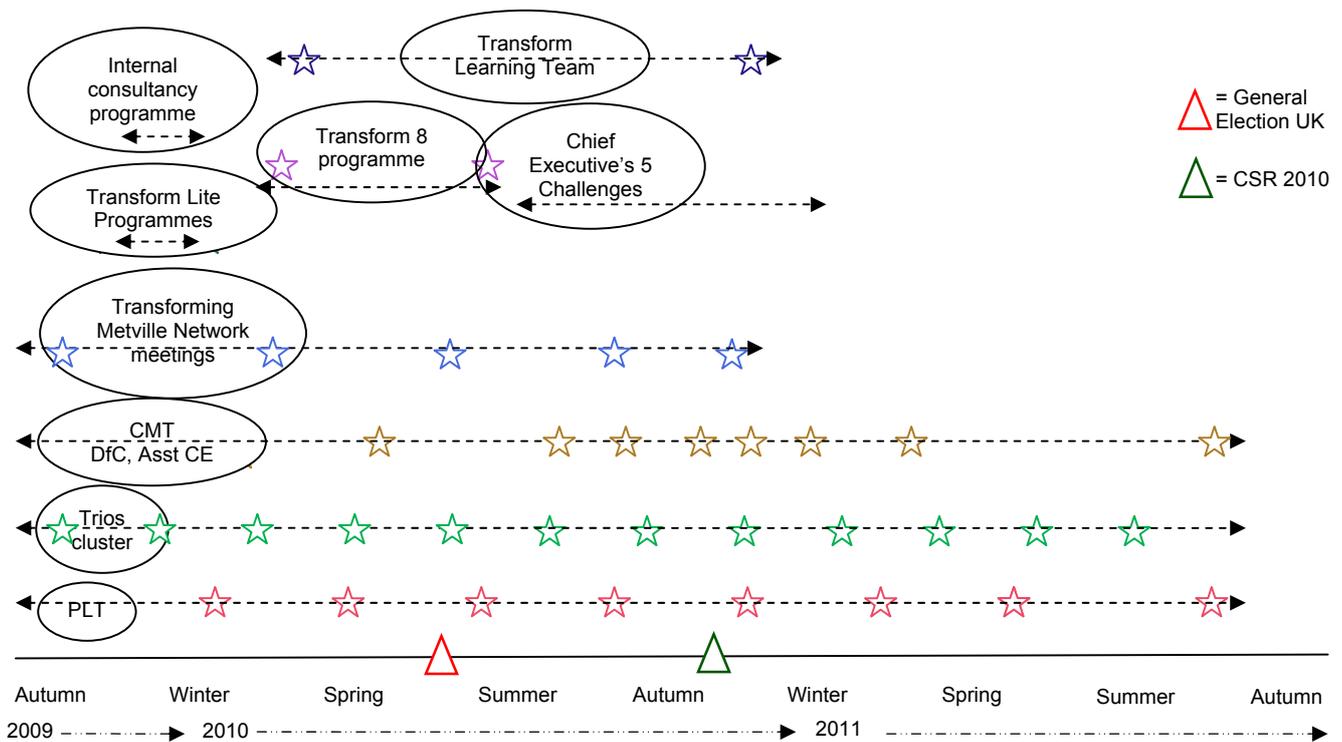
Stage Four ran from the autumn of 2009 through to the autumn and winter of 2010 and spilled over into the summer and autumn of 2011. By the autumn of 2009 a number of ‘Transform’ initiatives were in place across the whole programme and it was upon this platform that the final stage of the Action Research programme was built:

- a robust and developing model of change was emerging which was informing discussions at all levels on how the whole programme was aligned
- the programme, designed earlier to assist staff in understanding the role and potential for acting as internal consultants to Metville, was arranged to be delivered to a second group of staff
- the ‘Transform Lite’ teaching programmes were continuing with autumn dates in place
- the next cohort of Transform (Cohort 8) was about to begin which included work on the group-based ‘applied learning challenges’.
- ongoing work in the Transforming Metville Network was continuing looking at council-wide issues; senior managers/ directors were acting as sponsors
- the Transform Trios, working very much as a ‘Cluster Team’ (hereafter, Trios Cluster Team or TCT), were assisting in the work of the Network and the development of the ‘learning zone’

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- the DfC and the ACE together were actively considering ways to take the programme forward as a whole package
- regular liaison meetings between the PLT and the senior executives (DfC and ACE) were taking place

Fig 6.4, below, conveys a linked time-line showing the different elements of the whole programme from Autumn 2009 through to Autumn 2011. The diagram identifies the nine contributing elements that emerged during Stage 4, some of these were unexpected (for example the emergence of the Chief Executives 'challenges' in the Spring of 2010). For convenience, Fig 6.4 portrays these elements as initiatives that 'lasted' for a period of time. At the height of the activity in Stage Four the density of initiatives was greatest (in the Spring of 2010); it later drops off as the end of Stage Four approached.



**Fig 6.4 Key activities & stakeholders through Stage Four**

In the diagram the shorter initiatives are included at the top of the diagram, the longer lasting ones towards the bottom. The stars (☆) along the different lines are representational only – Table 6.2 (below) identifies the level of contribution to the programmes from each element.

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**Table 6.2: Metville Transform elements of the whole programme 2009/2011**

<b>Contributing element</b>	<b>Type of initiative (contribution)</b>	<b>Length of activity: Timings</b>	<b>Level of contribution – Number of formal activities</b>
Internal Consultancy Programmes	Specialist programme	2 day programme, (1 + 1 day, a week apart) <i>October 2009</i>	2
Transform Lite programmes	Spin off from the development of the Network	3 day programmes (2 + 1 day, a week apart) <i>Sept and Oct 2009</i> <i>Oct and Nov 2009</i>	6
Transform Cohort 8 programme	Major training programme	Applied Learning Clinics, Teaching days, and presentation at the end – for each individual 9 days – 18 days teaching in total <i>Started in December 2009, final presentation in April 2010</i>	18
Chief Executives '5 Challenges' response meetings	Led by DfC	Reviewing progress with a view to reporting back to CE in Autumn 2010 <i>April, June, Sept 2010</i>	3
Transform Learning Team	Senior Directors – supporting programme development	Previously supporting Applied Learning Challenges from Cohort 7; redesigned to support Challenges for Cohort 8 <i>June, July, Sept and Nov 2010</i>	4
Transforming Metville Network.	Gatherings by invitation across the Council	5 meetings spaced over the period: <i>9<sup>th</sup> September 2009</i> <i>15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010</i> <i>28<sup>th</sup> May 2010</i> <i>(1<sup>st</sup> September 2010)</i> <i>(19<sup>th</sup> November 2010)</i>	5
Corp Mangt Team (CMT) DfC and ACE	Mtgs with PLT and other key contributors	Spread out over the whole period: <i>2009: November</i> <i>2010: April (x2); May, July, September; October; November (x2); December (x2)</i> <i>2011: March, April, May, June, July</i> <i>September 2011 (x2)</i>	18
Trios Cluster Team (TCT) - personnel changed during this period; expected 'churn' took place	Mtgs with PLT members present (other mtgs held with themselves and others)	Spread out over the whole period <i>2009: September, November, December</i> <i>2010: March (x2); April, May (x2), June, July (x2); September, October, December</i> <i>2011: January (x3); March (x4); April (x3)</i>	24
Programme Liaison Team (PLT)	Mtgs with each other, and with CMT, TCT, Transform Ntwrk, etc.	Continuously as the programme unfolded <i>2009: Sept (x4); October; Nov (x4); Dec (x2)</i> <i>2010: March (x4); April (x4); May (x4); June (x2); July (x6); August (x3); Sept (x3); Oct (x4); Nov; December</i> <i>2011: Jan (x3); Feb; March (x3); Aug</i>	51

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Table 6.2 summarises the nine key elements in the diagram (Fig 6.4 above). Each element is described in terms of its contribution to the whole programme viz: the type of initiative; the length of time involved; and where possible some measure of the contribution made, such as the number of meetings or events that took place. The internal consultancy training and the Transform Lite programmes were both short taught programmes delivered in Autumn 2009. A fresh cohort of staff were recruited to the eighth cohort (Cohort 8). Two outcomes that had not been planned were the development of the Transform Learning Team (TLT) and the Chief Executive's Five Challenges. The continuing work on the development of the Network and the TCT were coordinated by the CMT and the PLT. It should be noted that a UK General Election took place in May 2010 which brought in a coalition government (this is noted with a  $\Delta$ ). The foremost policy of the new government was to reduce the national debt and to this end a revised budget (HM Treasury 2010) and a new Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Treasury 2010 marked  $\Delta$ ) set out the Government's plans for the Parliament from 2010 to 2015. Both the budget and the spending review affected the outcomes of the change programme.

For Stage Four, the key change in the methodology was not so much around the contents of the different elements in the action research but rather the intensity of them being combined and applied together. There were three main Action Research objectives for Stage Four:

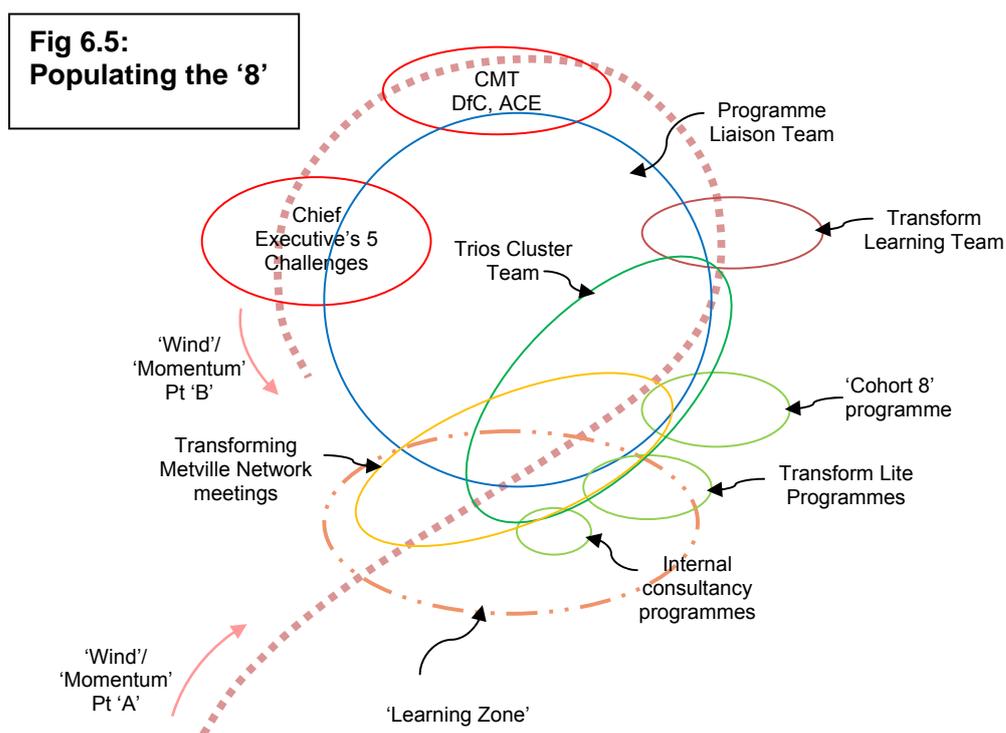
- To seek to 'populate the 8'; i.e. to initiate as many activities as possible that would contribute to the establishment of a different pattern of interdependencies based on the Figure of 8 model described above (Figs 6.2; 6.3);
- To consolidate the conceptual understanding of change being attempted across Metville Council and to establish it as paradigmatic in nature and scale;
- To maintain sufficient momentum in the pace of organisational change to overcome organisational obstinacy that might be present within the council as a whole.

### **6.5 STRENGTHENING THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERDEPENDENCIES:**

#### **6.5.1 'Populating the 8'**

During Stage 4, I observed evidence that a clear attempt was being made in Metville to 'populate the Fig 8 model' with the different contributing elements (see Table 6.2 above) and to recognise the inter-relationships between those elements.

Fig 6.5 seeks to represent the 'field' (Lewin 1939) in which the organisational change at Metville was taking place containing the 'top of the winding 8'. The dotted pink line represents the 'line' of the 'Figure 8' that is 'winding' (see Fig 6.3 above) from the lower part of the organisation and then around the top of the organisation and back down again. Placed into the diagram are the nine contributing elements from Table 6.2.



In order to 'strengthen the 'what', 'how' and 'who' (see Table 6.1 above), for Stage Four, Metville chose to increase the numbers of people involved in 'Transform' (Transform Lite and Cohort 8); to link transformational activity (the ALCs and the CE's Challenges) with senior managerial involvement (sponsorship/ Transform Learning Team) and with the executive level leadership (CMT: DfC and ACE); and to strengthen change capability and understanding across the whole system (TCT, PLT, internal consultancy skills).

### 6.5.2 Transform 'Lite'

The 'Transform Lite' programme, which had begun in Stage Three, was continued in Stage Four. The idea was to offer a rapid and concentrated introduction to the key ideas of Transforming Metville with a three day programme. By accelerating the process it was intended to 'fast track' staff who wanted to be part of the Transforming Metville Network and who wished

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to understand the principles of the 'Transform' programme more fully. It offered an introduction to the theoretical underpin of some of the organisational development elements as well as an opportunity to encounter other staff who also wished to become formally involved and accepted into the Transform 'family'.

### **6.5.3 Cohort 8**

'Cohort 8', the eighth iteration of the Transform programme, took on a very different format to the previous programmes. Cohort 8 was no longer broken up into a number of teaching topics for each day but rather concentrated on preparing the group to look at a number of challenges as a focus for exploring how change might occur across the whole council (for the programme contents for Cohort 8 see Appendix Five). The personal capacity building and the organisational learning were therefore fully integrated into a 'whole system' stream of change. The major development was that rather than have a series of teaching days and development workshops, the integration of the whole programme was tighter with three days devoted to theory and context and three days to applied learning. These were then followed by two days of development workshops – one devoted to self development and one to strategic leadership. The design, therefore, was less a programme divided into separate teaching and learning topics and more an integrated one that complemented the other initiatives which were running in the council at the same time. The whole concept was held together by a number of themed challenges worked on by project groups. Six new challenges were agreed by the DfC (who privately consulted some senior directors; the TCT; and the PLT). Each participant then chose one of the topics and formed teams to work on it together. Each team was supported by a member of the TCT and a senior manager at Director or Assistant Director level. The findings of each team on their learning challenges were expected to be presented to the Transform Network (including the DfC and other key executives) at the end of the whole programme in March 2010. Cohort 8 therefore, represented, for the first time, a clear linking up of the CMT; sponsorship through senior managers; the TCT; and the Network.

### **6.5.4 Internal consultancy**

In the autumn of 2009, a short teaching programme on 'internal consultancy' was delivered. This brought together two different contributing elements - the Trio Cluster Team and the newly consolidated 'change team' (mainly 'advisors' using a business process re-engineering approach and methodology co-created with Metville Business School). The intention was to

improve each team's understanding of their respective and yet mutual roles in the overall change process.

### **6.5.5 Trio Cluster Team (TCT)**

The role of the TCT was being increasingly recognised as a key part of the whole 'Transform' programme and was integrated into both the learning challenges and the delivery of Cohort 8. It appears in Fig 6.5 (p 147) as a link between all the activities along the 'winding' line. A significant succession within the TCT membership had also taken place with a number of the original TCT returning to their substantive posts and new staff joining the Team. I felt that the TCT had become 'established' in the model at the top of the 'learning zone' area. In the period from January to April 2010, the TCT had been actively involved in both the delivery of the Applied Learning Challenges of Cohort 8 and the progression of the Transforming Metville Network meetings which met in September 2009 and in February 2010. Following the March Network presentation by Cohort 8 and a presentation to the Senior Leadership Team by the Cohort (see later 6.7.2.4/5 p167), the TCT engaged quickly with the new agenda taking a key role in the setting up and progressing each of the working groups for the Chief Executive's challenges. I observed a high level of self-confidence and 'grasp' of the whole picture by the members of the TCT and the unique role they felt they were playing. During one of the teaching sessions for Cohort 8, one of the longer serving TCT members was invited to give a presentation on 'Trio working'. She explained why she had come to view the work of the TCT as "*exceptional*". For her it contained what she referred to as "*sleeper learning*" – i.e. the full impact was not felt until about six months later. It felt like "*planting seeds*" which would develop into broader ideas as the Trio members went back into their substantive roles where they could then see opportunities for responding in a different way. She emphasised that for her "*3 was a magic number*" because learning on your own was isolated and lonely; with two there was a tendency to 'mirror' each other; whereas with three it was 'uncomfortable' and there was honesty, creativity and time to reflect – she felt that it was a means to "*capture your own learning*" more effectively. I observed this as a clear explanation of the recognition of the wider interdependencies between staff and evidence of the action research programme being successful (HWN; SOrg).

### **6.5.6 Further strengthening through using more senior managers (TLT)**

I observed further evidence of the strengthening of the interdependencies of the different contributing elements later on when the DfC used the opportunity to approach more senior staff

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to act as challenge sponsors in responding to five challenges set by the Chief Executive at the April 2010 meeting of the SLT. The opportunity to set up a more robust framework for taking leadership and sponsorship of the 5 challenges forward occurred at a meeting of Team Metville Network on 28<sup>th</sup> May (*HWN*). This meeting included the DfC and the ACE and a number of senior managers and directors. At the meeting the PLT offered to facilitate a number of workshops within the next month to provide the challenge participants with some reassurance and assistance in thinking through the scope of each challenge. The PLT then felt that it might be useful for the five sponsors to meet as a group to bring the process of sponsoring the challenges together more. Dates in early July and late August were offered to them. The aim was to have met before the planned major report back to CMT (including the Chief Executive) in September when the key findings from the early challenge work would be complete. The PLT felt that at these sponsors' workshops they could summarise the development of Transform as a whole showing the different models that had been used as the programme had evolved. The role of sponsorship and how it would fit into the organisational learning models that had developed within Transform could also be shared. Finally, discussion could focus on fitting the current work into the context of changes to the organisational frameworks that were emerging across both the Council and rest of the council partnership area.

### **6.5.7 Programme Liaison Team (PLT)**

The key idea in Stage Four of the research was to look for prompts in the organisation that would persuade key stakeholders to make radical changes in the way they operated. The development of the Transforming Metville programme had absorbed a considerable number of theoretical and practical ideas for change. The PLT felt strongly that an extremely robust and comprehensive body of theory had been built up based on the practice of the previous 4½ years and this could be reinforced by using the Network meetings to 'display' the progress being made. This is why the Network is positioned 'after' the 5 challenges but also at the start of the ascending 'wind' on the edge of the learning zone (Fig 6.5 p 147).

The activity of the PLT is captured Fig 6.5 as a large circle encompassing the upper area of the Figure of 8 and overlapping considerably with the TCT and the CMT. This reflects the sphere of its influence. In line with the arrangements over the previous year or so, the PLT met with the TCT fairly regularly e.g. to prepare for a particular meeting of the Network, or in advance of a meeting of the PLT with the DfC. A meeting such as this took place just prior to the important meeting of the Transforming Metville Network at the end of May which was feeding back the

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outcome of the Senior Leadership Team meeting with Cohort 8. I observed a very high level of energy and enthusiasm at that time as many of the TCT felt that the preparatory work that had been done in developing the models and that now the thinking behind the Transform programme was beginning to visibly pay-off.

### **6.5.8 Discussions on deepening the programme within Metville with the DfC**

In this period, the DfC was very keen to try and understand the whole situation regarding the Transform programme. In a fairly lengthy note to him, the Head of OD, on behalf of the PLT, tried to distil the whole history of the Network from its origins in 2006 as a means for 'graduates' of programmes run at MBS to, inter alia, take on projects outside their normal remit to provide change leadership; Model 2 type desired behaviour; and drive through improvements using acquired skills and knowledge. Directors were expected to value and protect time of staff spent away from day-to-day tasks; help develop the Network; and encourage innovation and risk-taking. He explained that widening the membership of 'Transform' to include Diversity Leaders and Investors in People staff; strengthening the role of the Trios; and sponsoring innovation and developing the Figure of 8 diagram, were all connected. The link between Cohort 8 and Transforming Metville Network had been strengthened by focusing the ALCs on key corporate priorities and asking the cohort to feedback directly into the Network at the March meeting where senior directors could steer progress forward in an appropriate way. The Head of OD summarised the progress that had been made in preparation for the meeting in late March. He emphasized that the Figure of 8 'model' was "*just a representation of those relationships around the Transform agenda, and doesn't attempt to include the other change resources and activities that are around*". "*The purpose of representing this in a model is a) it helps understand processes and relationships already taking place, and b) can be used to help decide what could be achieved and what needs to be done to achieve it*". (The) "*model attempts to show how these ideas can gain traction to deliver change*" (eM). He then went on to explain in more detail the elements of the model and how the TCT's One Council Action Plan had been the first manifestation of the outcome, the TMN projects were expected to comprise the next 'wave'.

The Head of OD then suggested that the PLT viewed a perceived weakness in Metville's working of the model to be the "*lack of 'commissioning' from managers of the ideas being pressed forward. This has not been in every respect but until now we have not had a coherent connection between the top and bottom of the model. I believe that your comments at the end of*

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*the last TMN meeting about 'playing in' TMN into the council's priority agenda potentially marks a new connectivity which allows the ideas to 'flow' properly. It will provide a clear filter for ideas going upwards and clear expectations for implementation on the way down". He finished his reply saying: "but it has to be recognised that this is operating a non-traditional model of change and carries with it the risks of experimentation and unfamiliarity for those with responsibility for its successful implementation" (eM).*

In July 2010 a further paper was prepared by the PLT for the DfC (eDoc) that used the Kotter 8-Step boxes (Kotter 1995) as a means to consider the overall progress in the Transform programme in Metville. It gave percentage 'estimates' of how far the Council had moved e.g. 80% in providing a sense of urgency and modelling some quick wins; 20 – 50% in providing a vision; 0% in embedding and institutionalising change. The paper sought to prioritise where effort should be made to support the Transform programme overall.

I observed the PLT's attempts to 'see the whole picture' at the beginning of the autumn in 2009, when the team drew up a table which placed the different components of the programme into a form where it was easier to see the strategic fit of the different elements and the key outcomes that were being sought. During Stage Four, the PLT were increasingly using broad 'templates' such as the 'Figure of 8' model to form a 'checklist on progress'. For example, the progress in the Transforming Metville Network initiative, which had specifically encouraged staff to become involved in innovative and radical ideas for change, was mapped onto the model and reviewed asking such questions as:

- To what extent are staff accessing this opportunity via the Network, via Transform Lite, TMN?
- How many senior managers are actively engaged and encouraging staff to take their ideas forward?
- Are senior executives calling for swift progress in developing the ideas with a view to implementing them?
- What positive role can the Trios play in taking the development of the Transforming Metville Network forward?
- Will the Trios' work tie into the development of the Learning Zone?

All these questions were looked at in a systemic way to examine whether the whole council system was 'moving' towards a 'Model 2' position or whether it was 'stuck' at 'Model 1' (FC-plt).

### 6.5.9 Increasing recognition for the role of the PLT

During the final stage of the research, the role of the PLT became particularly significant. It appeared to me that it held the ring in the relationship between those staff who considered themselves to be already part of the Transform community (through having done part of the programme or having been appointed into a specific role); the corporate management team (and in particular the DfC); the Senior Leadership Team; and staff more generally who were interested in the development of the programme and how they might eventually become involved. Through the longevity of the relationship, the three PLT members also knew each other well and trusted each other. It was a measure of this relationship that the team met on 51 occasions over the course of Autumn 2009 to Autumn 2011 (see Table 6.2). This was particularly intense in mid 2010 when the team formally met 32 times and informally on numerous other occasions associated with days of delivery or specific meetings where members of the team were together (DN).

The PLT were also seeking to develop the theory of Transform and wanted to test the framework of ideas contained in the action research. An important part of this was to evaluate progress in the programme in relation to the models of development that had been adopted by the Council – for example the populating of the Figure 8 model with real activities and real staff members. It was interesting to note that the PLT anticipated that the learning from the whole programme might be of interest to those outside the Council and some publicity and opportunities for discussion (e.g. a conference) were being planned (HWN, FC-plt).

In a note (eDoc) to the DfC following the discussion in the PLT, the Head of OD argued that:

- a) The whole of Transform – the programme taught at MBS, the ALCs, the work of the Trios, the Cluster, the Team Metville Network, Transform Lite – needs to be refreshed and refocused.*
- b) Think Efficiency – TE2 - contains four key threads. Transform, the Trios and TMN need to be realigned to it.*
- c) The buy-in is still weak. The steer from senior managers to the programme developed in Transform needs to be more overt. The sense of a network containing staff who are genuinely committed to transforming the organisation that it is both worth joining and which is seeking to achieve real change is needed (the 'gang'). This can only really happen when there is evidence that 'they really mean it'. It remains appropriate to use the resources of MBS and [name: the*

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*independent consultant] to articulate the principles to which we are working and what we have learned so far to an appropriate senior management audience” (eDoc).*

Later, as MBS Programme Director, I wrote a note to the Head of OD referring to the development of the Transforming Metville Network – *“Although you felt that the Team Metville Network is not the Learning Zone, and I can see the need to keep the ‘doing’ bits of Transform away from the wider ‘promulgating’ of ‘transformational’ ideas, nevertheless, I think that the membership of TMN needs to be clarified and strengthened. The benefits need to be clearer but alongside this the responsibilities and obligations also need to be clearer. The notion of ‘membership’ also needs clarification. It should free people up to offer to join in Transform activities and tasks without impediment from senior managers; but what they will then be expected to do will also need clarifying to ensure there is accountability. Much of this lack of clarity has been picked up in [Hd of OD colleague]’s work with the survey of the Network. What we have not really done is survey how the senior managers feel about Transform - maybe they are the crucial area that lies between CMT/ OCMT and the rest of the ‘transformers”’ (eM).*

In referring to the ‘lack of clarity’ in authority and responsibility, the suggestion that organisational obstinacy might be prompted by uncertainty was being made. Once the ‘spirit’ of Transform had begun to pass away, the participants were searching for more certainty.

The Head of OD then reflected: *“I think I started to get a picture of the current cluster forming a skeleton for a new ‘community of practice’ which is more fluid and has more porous barriers than hitherto. Certainly I think that people now taking up the 5 tasks should become part of the Cluster for the duration of the work, and the Trio members need to play a central role in the shaping of that work - with a specific roles of ensuring that the process explicitly includes learning, and that the wider participants are nurtured during it. I’ll put some more thought into that scribbled diagram” (eM).*

He added: *“Additionally, the conversation we had about the Gold, Silver and Bronze structure of the new Place Board seemed to have an important shape to it for a) a potential ‘model 2’ structure where innovation could be ventured, and b) a vehicle to get Transform into a multi-agency approach. This needs more consideration particularly in terms of the plans for further ‘academic’ support” (eM).*

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I noticed that the PLT constantly reviewed and re-worked a number of key diagrams and models. For example in preparing for a meeting with the DfC and the ACE they set out the objectives they wished to see achieved (eDoc):

- *“To clarify the Kotter 8 step model and the Figure of 8 model to ensure all the participants in the change programme would be ‘on the same page’;*
- *To introduce the ‘problematiser’ diagram and to work through each ‘challenge’ using the boxes in the model;*
- *To draw up an ‘Action List’ based on the conclusions flowing out of the problematiser model;*
- *To allocate the different tasks to the different members of each of the groups - who would do what, and by when;*
- *To work out the role of ‘sponsoring’ a challenge in more detail to ensure the Sponsors understand the role they need to play;*
- *and to clarify the purpose and nature of a report to the Council’s CMT for their June meeting.”*

During the same discussion the Head of OD suggested that there should be a new focus on the *“the ‘professional cadre’ both in individual terms and structural alignment”*. He shared with the other members of the PLT his observation (eM) that *“Following on from that (last point) it appears from today’s meeting that this is not universally appreciated and that there is a cosiness in just doing the networking (as a bureaucratic process). In terms of how to challenge this I wonder whether the approach we used with the Sponsors of the 5 Challenges could be employed here. We gave them the opportunity of a facilitated, but far from neutral, discussion in the MBS environment. It was very successful with the Sponsors. I think its detachment from the task was important in this, as was allowing them to experiment with some of the Transform thinking” (eM).*

Having recorded the degree to which the interdependencies were strengthened between the contributing elements and the shared understanding had been developed of the ‘contributing elements’ as shared in the model (Fig 6.5) of the point of crank in the Figure of 8, I now turn to report on the changed conceptualisation of change that occurred during Stage 4.

### **6.6 THE INCREASINGLY SHARED PERCEPTION OF PARADIGM CHANGE BEING ATTEMPTED**

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In Table 6.1 ('strengthening the 'what' and 'how') the second of the key methodological ideas was to 'strengthen the flow and number of ideas around change (language)'. In this section, I deal with the degree to which the changing language of Transform assisted in strengthening the flow and number of ideas which produced a new conceptualisation of change for Metville.

At a meeting with the PLT, following the September 2009 Network meeting, the DfC expressed his pleasure in experiencing a sense of engagement and pride in the Transform work; "*you can almost feel the 'spirit' of Transform in the room*" he said (*HWN*). In response to this remark, and in preparing for a teaching exercise for Transform Lite, the PLT attempted to find the words to capture such a 'spirit' (*eDoc, eM*). As a result a list of 24 words was developed that sought to identify the values that underlay this 'spirit' (see Table 6.3 below). Large laminated copies of the words were produced that could be stuck up on walls. These were used in all the subsequent Transform events and particularly in the teaching at MBS, to prompt Cohort 8 and Transform Lite participants into discussion on their feelings and values around the programme.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passionate</li> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Focused</li> <li>• Confident</li> <li>• Questioning</li> <li>• Imaginative</li> <li>• Strategic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resilient</li> <li>• Optimistic</li> <li>• Tenacious</li> <li>• Opportunistic</li> <li>• Competent</li> <li>• Realistic</li> <li>• Reflective</li> <li>• Intuitive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicative</li> <li>• Innovative</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Caring</li> <li>• Brave</li> <li>• Ambitious</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Nouse</li> </ul>
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**Table 6.3: Transform 'Spirit' words**

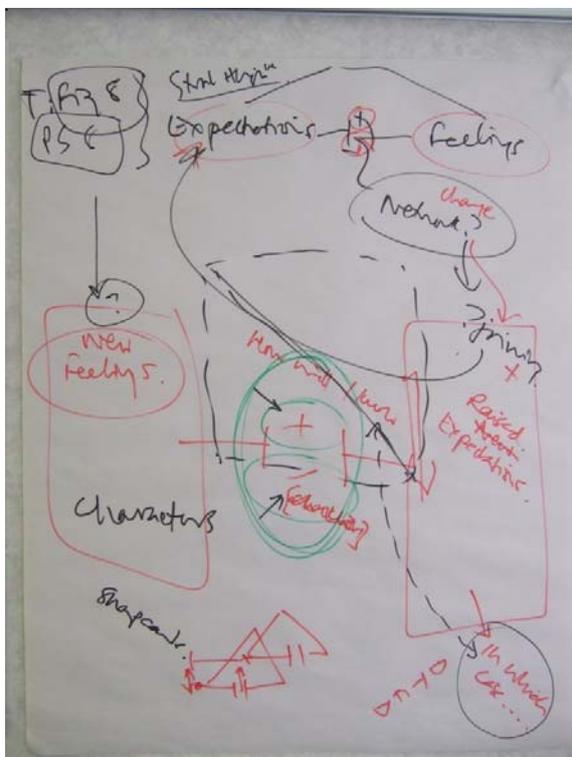
In discussing the words in more detail in the PLT, I noticed (*HWN*) that the Team began to distinguish between 'doing' words (e.g. brave, ambitious); 'feeling' words (e.g. caring, passionate); 'thinking' words (e.g. questioning, strategic, imaginative) and 'value' words (e.g. integrity, honest). Later, the DfC remarked that when he encountered this kind of 'transformational spirit' it encouraged him to seek ways to deepen the change programme of 'Transform'.

During the short internal consultancy programme (October 2009), I observed that while the Change Team staff were experienced staff in jobs they had been doing for some time, their

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extempore feedback comments revealed they were less familiar with some change concepts (*hDoc*). For example, one comment highlighted the Figure 8 model as a ‘*useful broad framework*’ for analysing change. More specifically, comments included: *(I now) “have more confidence when dealing with change; looking at the bigger picture!”*; *“Taking individual responsibility for change”*; *(helped me) “contextualise transformational change in (Metville); made me more aware of how I feel and that I can make changes for the better”*; *(I now understand) “the current situation which has made me focused and opportunistic”*; *(I have) “learnt new concepts – (have) improved confidence and knowledge of change to be delivered within the Council” (hDoc).*

I observed that staff, as a result of the short course, were beginning to be more comfortable with the type of change being envisaged needing different perceptions and new skill areas to be developed: *“The (programme) has been useful because it has broadened my skills/ideas /techniques to approach consultancy; (I am) clearer about stages and role of consultant/ Clearer about what I bring to the table”*; *“This is a completely new area/skills that I need to use as part of my job role & given me a greater awareness on what I need to improve on...” (hDoc).*



New models identified through which change can take place

New feelings through which to engage with Transform

New entry points into the process through which to join 'Transform'

New means through which to assess whether there is 'purpose'

A new form of action that is transformational not transactional

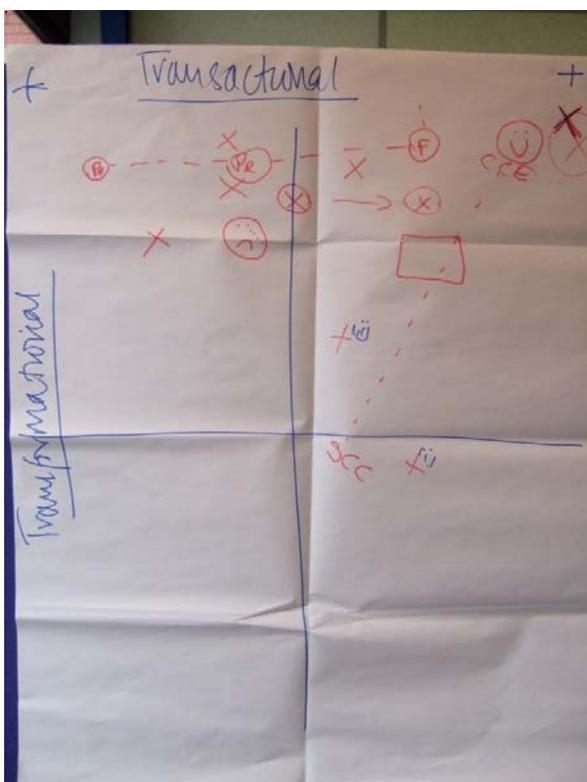
**Fig 6.6 : Discussion board produced during Transform Lite session**

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Fig 6.6 (above) is reproduced from a discussion board (*FC-p*) during one of the 'Transform Lite' sessions and illustrates the changing understanding of the whole programme. It emerged during a mini workshop when the question of how staff might be encouraged to become more engaged with the whole of the Transform programme was raised. The discussion linked new models of thinking to new feelings about change, new entry points into 'Transform' and new means to assess the 'purposefulness' of the organisation and how to translate feelings and senses into action.

I observed that a number of key discussion points appeared to be coming up; staff felt they needed reassurance that their commitment would be 'worth it'. This was captured in the comment 'how will I know?' (that the senior directors really 'meant it'). The "in which case ..." comment reflected the strong willingness of staff in Metville to engage with a radical programme of reform so long as it was strongly supported by senior executive level officers. However, some significant pre-conditions would need to be satisfied first.

By contrast in a session with a group from Transform Lite, again mapping their sense of alignment with the overall management of Metville (see Fig 6.7) it was interesting to note



Shifted position of staff from earlier position (See Fig 5.5 p84)

**Fig 6.7: Flip Chart Note – 'X marks the spot' – Transform Lite Autumn 2009**

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that the growing sense of energy and excitement was clearly present during this period. The whole group appeared to reflect a shift in the position of staff who were moving ‘upwards and across’ suggesting they felt both ‘they were up for it’ and that the senior management were ‘also up for it’.

This was developed further and, during an exercise that followed, the group discussed the kinds of indicators of assurance they would expect to see in a Council that was genuinely and radically changing. In trying to vision such a Council they drew up the chart below:

Communication In 12 – 18 months ...
We will expect to see...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared language/ a common message</li> <li>Common understanding of vision/ directorate/ change</li> <li>Stronger/ clearer relationships</li> <li>Greater success of outcomes</li> <li>Greater feeling of involvement/ engagement</li> <li>Greater sense of being a stakeholder</li> <li>Less stress/ less conflict</li> <li>Greater focus/ effort on things that matter</li> </ul>
Our test will be ...
Have they listened?

**Table 6.4: Expected evidence of ‘Real Change’ in the Council - next 12 – 18 months**

### 6.6.1 Transform Cluster Team (TCT) – the ‘story telling’

In order to lend authenticity to the message about transformation during the Transform Lite programme, two members of the TCT were again invited to speak about their experience of the whole programme. I observed that in this later talk the Trios’ representatives were confident enough to say: *“the experiment paid off”* (e-DoC). This contrasted with their earlier message that described their experience as members of the cluster as simply ‘an experiment’ (e-DoC). They described the cluster team as: *“a safe space to reflect, plan and challenge”*; a place of *“genuine collaboration and openness”*; and where there was a sense of *“valuing and celebrating the contributions of others”*. They described their work as a process in which new learning took place *“in (a) context of improvement and efficiency; outcome focused; and being a better **one council**”* (their emphasis). I observed a sense of confidence and pride in what they felt they were achieving and this was certainly conveyed to the colleagues on the programme; their final slide simply said *“Join the Challenge”*.

### 6.6.2 Cohort 8

I observed in the discussions during Cohort 8 that the participants were displaying aspects of the 'spirit words' in their expectations and aspirations. For example, when discussing their expectations for how the Council would behave in the future they listed: more "*openness, honesty and realism*"; "*opportunity to investigate ideas*"; "*the possibility of commissioning transformers*" (to undertake projects); "*being involved in real problems*"; "*be on the route to making things happen*"; "*more recognition and validation*"; "*a wider knowledge and understanding of 'one council' thinking*" (HWN, hDoc). By imagining the kind of atmosphere Metville might have when working in a 'Model 2' way the participants were beginning to envision how they would recognise a paradigmatically changed council.

During Cohort 8 a TCT member was again invited to speak; she referred, humorously, to the TCT having invented a 'language' for themselves for example: '*clunch*' (cluster lunch). She reported that they used their weekly gatherings to ask themselves the question: "*are we doing the same thing again or really trying to find different ways to deal with things?*" They felt they had a real "*permission to act*" with a clear reporting line to the most senior executives in the Council. They also recognised that the whole situation was moving on; even during the preceding year there had been change. She highlighted the emerging role of the Transforming Metville Network as a key place for learning to be shared. She concluded by asking three questions of the group: Is there anyone else available to do this job now? She answered 'No'. Are you feeling a bit scared? She answered 'Yes'. And finally, she asked: 'Will this make us move forward and get into even bigger questions soon?' She answered 'Yes'. I observed this to be a very confident delivery of the TCT view that their work was different, significant, needed and important (HWN, eDoc)

In terms of personal aspirations I noted from the feedback that there was energy and enthusiasm for moving things forward: for example – "*rise to the challenge*"; "*utilise my personal agency*"; "*build links with others in the Council – Transforming Metville Network*"; "*take responsibility for my own development*"; "*allow time to reflect and make connections and linkages*"; "*to embrace new concepts*"; "*to have an open mind*"; "*doing something different*"; "*looking for that 'eureka' moment*" (hDoc).

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During an open exercise looking at what a ‘transformed council’ (cf Kotter 1995 – ‘visioning’ the future organisation) might look like, the participants drew up a list of characteristics which such a council might display. This was captured in the table below (Table 6.5 *FC-p*):

Visionary Outward looking Aware of the situation holistically ‘Model 2’ No ‘locked-in’ thinking  Dialogue across the Council Buy-in to the idea of transformation Encouraging ideas from staff Risk-taking permitted Innovating Fast paced Empowering  Does things ‘with’ people, not ‘to’ them CMT that’s connected CMT that’s accessible Matrix management Non-hierarchical	‘Buildings with no walls’ More joined-up; partnerships Flexible organisationally Roles interchangeable Lean and streamlined  Neighbourhood/ locality focused  Tool-box of expertise on change Skills developed to match new tasks Rewarding merit Challenges to ineffective practice Deal with the ‘blockers’  ‘Tech savvy’
---	---

**Table 6.5: Features that might make a transformed council recognisable**

The format for the opening learning sets for Cohort 8 in December 2009 was to investigate the six ‘challenges’ pre-identified jointly and selected by the senior executives, the TCT and the PLT. Individual participants then chose a group they wished to work with during the course of the whole programme.

These topics had been chosen by the DfC in consultation with close colleagues, in an effort to use a language that would be challenging to the cohort participants (*eDoc*). It was almost as if to signal a change in direction of the Council and to chime in the general mood that was surrounding Transform at that time – a number of notions were important here: Model 1 and Model 2 (transformation); leadership (Kotter 1995); shared intelligence (collaboration); floating support (shifting job roles); shared services (breaking down silos); and ‘whole area’ (geography over agency). The challenges were:

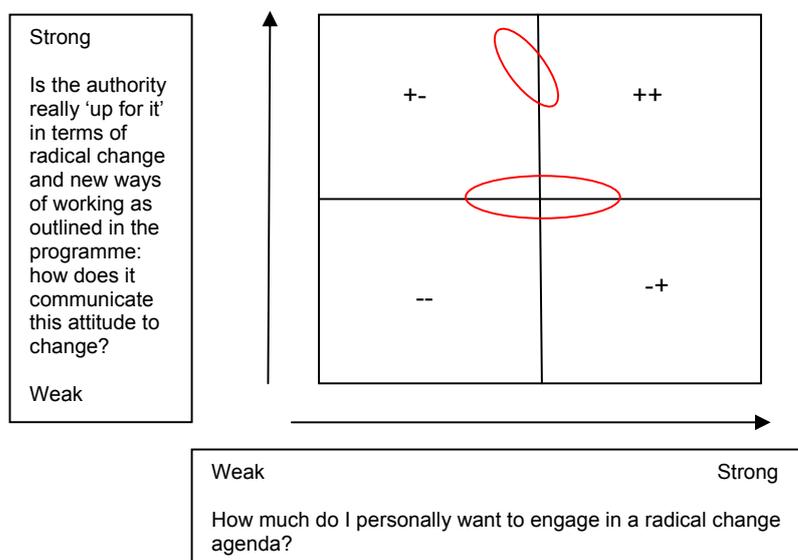
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Challenge Topic	Senior Officer support from:
Challenging custom and practice – moving from 'Model 1' to 'Model 2'	AD Chief Execs Administration
The journey from management to leadership	AD Chief Execs Org Development
Decision making based upon sound (shared) intelligence	PO Performance Management
Investing in offering 'floating support' across the council to support change initiatives	Director for Change
Progressing the shared service agenda	Head of Strategy Performance Policy and Partnerships
'Whole Area' working beyond the boundaries of the council	AD Neighbourhood Management

**Table 6.6: Transform 8 Applied Learning Challenges - Topics**

### 6.6.3 Attitudes changing

Another teaching exercise was conducted (see Fig 6.9) in the later period of Cohort 8 which plotted where the participants felt their personal aspirations and alignment lay against where they felt the Council's lay.



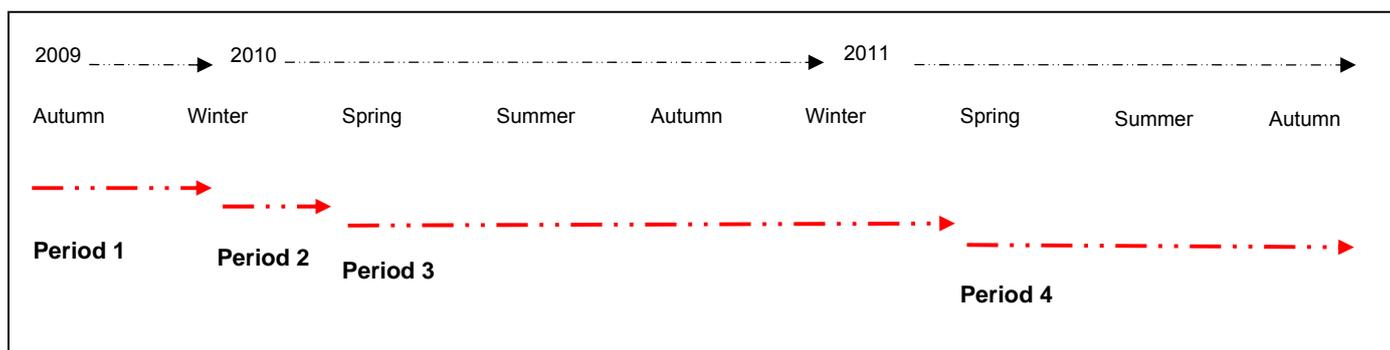
**Fig 6.8: 'X marks the spot' exercise – Cohort 8 group March 2010 (FC)**

In this case there was a recognisable 'falling back' from the previous position (see Fig 6.8). It was interesting to note that drawing to the end of the Cohort 8 programme, in contrast to the

earlier diagram (Fig 6.8), the ‘mapped’ positions of the staff between feeling ‘up for change’ personally and judging whether the Council as a whole was also similarly ‘up for it’ had altered. The new positioning of the group (in contrast to the positioning in Fig 6.8) had significantly altered to reflect a much reduced feeling of alignment with the Council. The evidence of this exercise suggested that there was still some scepticism of whether the senior staff were genuinely ‘up for it’. This may reflect the DfC’s comment about the level of support Cohort 8 felt they were receiving from the ‘sponsors’ of the learning challenges.

## 6.7 CHALLENGING THE HEGOMONY

Based on the ‘shape’ of the different contributing elements during the whole of Stage Four, (see Fig 6.4) there appeared to be four main phases – a period of build up during the autumn and winter of 2009 and 2010; a period during the early spring of 2010; and a longer period from summer 2010 through to Spring 2011; and finally a period from summer through to autumn 2011 (See Figure 6.9 below).



**Fig 6.9: Four periods of activity in Stage Four**

### 6.7.1 Period 1: Autumn and Winter 2009/10

During the autumn and winter of 2009/10, I observed a sense of ‘gathering strength’ in the whole programme – a greater sense of a ‘shape’ emerging based on the ‘winding 8’ and the different elements gradually interlocking together.

In the early autumn a programme similar to a two-day internal consultancy programme delivered to the Trios Cluster Team exclusively in early 2009 was delivered to a mixture of staff from the TCT and the Change Team. I observed that staff from the Change Team, accustomed to the established change methodology, were more ready to defend their approach to the TCT

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members, emphasising the specific outcomes they were seeking to achieve (*HWN*). In the small group sessions, I observed that as a result the learning dynamics were less cohesive and shared (*PN*). A particularly interesting comment was also made in regard to more senior staff in the Council. This related back to the earlier observation in Stage 1 about 'do they really mean it?' There was still a sense that more senior directors also needed to be familiar with the ideas and techniques around the notion of 'Transform' being discussed. In reply to the question: what improvements might be made to the programme, a comment made was: "*(it would be better if) there was a dual course on being a client (provided) for Senior Managers*".

This sense of strengthening the interdependencies was further evidenced in January 2010 when the DfC briefed the Head of OD on a meeting he had had with the Chief Executive. The Head of OD reported that the DfC felt that the Chief Executive was now "*keen to raise her internal profile*" and had agreed to play a more prominent role in the work of the Transforming Metville Network (*HWN*). He also reported that she had plans to develop CMT further and could see the Transform "*story playing a part in this*" (*HWN*). The Senior Executives planned that the TCT would shift its focus towards a closer alignment with the Council's second major efficiency initiative (internally this was referred to as 'Think Efficiency 2'). This would also link to the work of Cohort 8 on the six learning challenges.

### 6.7.2 Period 2: Early Spring 2010

Cohort 8 began in the late autumn/ early winter and had been considerably re-designed to respond to the changing circumstances of the whole change programme. The atmosphere around Cohort 8 was intense. There was a strong sense that CMT was actively pursuing a radical agenda. For example, the DfC sought reassurance that the Cohort 8 Applied Learning Challenges were being given the appropriate level of corporate support. He added: "*... I did meet with various members of the current cohort on the subject matter of floating support. They clearly had been struggling to find a route through this and had come to the right conclusion in my view that their challenge should be around organisational behaviours across the partnership in order to move into a different model of operation. The idea of floating support had caused them I think some confusion in seeing the challenge being focused on the creation of a thing called floating support rather than integrating partnership into all our day jobs...this just got me onto thinking (sorry...) If I'm giving messages to CMT about how we are seeking to lift the ALC's to the key strategic issues of the City, it would be useful for me to have a broader understanding of what we have on the go at the moment in terms of planned ALC's, it maybe that we need to*

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*allocate some broader senior support to the existing cohort as they are doing the challenges, not just waiting for the dragons den to happen. From my personal experience with this group, they have asked for a fortnightly slot with me to assist them with this, I am just concerned that we are providing this support across the piece, let me know what you think?" (eM).*

### **6.7.2.1 A Significant Intervention**

In February 2010, as Cohort 8 was preparing to report on their challenges, there was the significant intervention which altered the course of Transform. The DfC had been clearly enthused by the response from the February Transforming Metville Network meeting and shared this with colleagues at the CMT (which coincidentally happened to be meeting the following day). The date set for the feed-back from Cohort 8 of their group presentations to the Transform Metville Network was March 24<sup>th</sup>. He signalled to the PLT members that he was placing the date "*high on his agenda*" (eM). In an email to them following the meeting he outlined some of this:

*"Further to this week's meeting, a few items of follow up – I have raised Team (Metville) at CMT yesterday and encouraged all Strategic Directors, (and the Chief Executive), to attend the March Dragons Den that's not a Dragons Den, really do need to firm up timings on this as they were very keen and need to get (it) in their diaries as a matter of urgency.*

*Could we also do a brief summary note of ('TMN') current position i.e.*

*What is it? What is it working on at the moment?*

*Future plans? The figure of 8 which I can then share with colleagues?"*

This request prompted the PLT to consider in some detail a response to all these points. In the email exchanges between PLT members that followed, one member said: "*I have a sense that this is an important time for Transform – bit of a tipping point maybe*" (eM). A critical issue was the buy-in of the senior executives which was seen a critical to the success of the whole Transform initiative. As another member of the PLT put it: "*If the agenda shifts away from seeing the Figure 8 as a comprehensive explanation of the OD strategy then the (whole of the initiative) could be lost*" (eM).

### **6.7.2.2 Playing in Cohort 8's Applied Learning**

Based on a conversation with the independent consultant, the MBS programme director wrote to the Head of OD that confusion might occur through mixing up the teaching/ learning outcomes of Cohort 8 with the practical implementation of the ALC teams' presentations.

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Arguing that this would be dangerous for the whole programme he said: *‘This might be a very critical point in the Transform story and a badly organised March 24<sup>th</sup> might be crucial in losing ground. It is an unnecessary risk. I (we) are sharing our concerns because I think the next couple of weeks might be looked back on as the most significant period in the whole programme since it started’* (eM).

However, the Head of OD responded by saying: *‘I agree with a lot of the analysis below, but probably take a different tack about how we ‘manage’ the situation. My take can be summarised as follows: the original plans for the 24th were designed around our understanding of the state of play 4 months or so ago, when I certainly felt that the Transform ‘star’ was falling not rising. Therefore we expected a fairly low impact event to deliver the new cohort into TSN. The environment **appears** to have changed (although I still need to be convinced) to the extent that the Director for Change and the Assistant Chief Executive want to crank up the pace and narrow the focus with TSN, and have chosen the 24th to do it. Those two agendas are not capable of synthesis, but we can hopefully segue one into the other, the ALC topics do at least reflect the narrowing of the focus. The key issue will be to lower the expectations of senior managers about the level of ‘finish’ of the ALC projects - therefore we need to scene-set at the beginning (or even earlier). We need to get sponsorship for some of the issues raised in the presentations to be taken to a further level of sophistication before they can be commissioned for implementation. This sponsorship will need to be clear about the ‘target area’ for the further development to enable progress out of the nurturing zone therefore the Director for Change’s ‘playing in’ needs to be clarified on the 24th. I agree with this being an important juncture (but I think it isn’t potentially fatal), however the analysis we went through on Tuesday was post hoc - i.e. we are always going to be better at analysing what has happened than predicting what will happen. Therefore I would counsel against us trying to be too ‘clever’ about shaping the ALCs - in many ways they should be allowed to come out with what they come out with. I do think it will be useful to get the Trios to play into the thinking on Wednesday’* (eM).

### **6.7.2.3 Cohort 8 group March presentations**

I observed a strong signal from the staff that they were enjoying the experience as well as being challenged. During this period I observed the DfC actively encourage senior directors to widen their managerial leadership to act as sponsors in investigating organisational challenges – emphasising that he felt that this role needed to become part of senior leaders’ overall managerial briefs. One of the issues that concerned the DfC was the level of buy-in to the

Transform programme below the three key members of the Corporate Management Team. He had raised this with the PLT on a number of occasions and part of his reason for calling meetings of senior staff with responsibility for change to discuss implementation, was to draw some of the key senior staff into the programme more fully (*HWN*).

The Cohort 8 group presentations were delivered to the March meeting; I observed a confident and powerful display of ideas for action. The DfC was clearly extremely impressed. He reported to the PLT that his subsequent discussions with the Chief Executive had been full of praise for the quality and depth of work that had been done. The Chief Executive had then asked that Cohort 8 present their work again but this time to the April meeting of the whole 'Senior Leadership Team' (about 30 top managers and executives). The Cohort 8 staff were happy to grasp the opportunity to re-present their work. Here there was evidence that the linking-up of people and activities was really beginning to bite.

#### **6.7.2.4. Planning the April SLT meeting**

In planning the meeting of Cohort 8 with the whole Senior Leadership Team in mid-April, the PLT began to map out how best to maximise the benefits of the meeting. They agreed that a clear combined lead from the three senior executive members of the Corporate Management Team (Chief Executive, the ACE and the DfC) would be needed (*FC-plt*). Three key areas of discussion were proposed by the PLT to the DfC (*eDoc*): 1) How do we as senior people have to change/ behave differently to make transformation happen? 2) How do we release the energy/ capacity/ innovation/ potential in our staff as we have seen today? How do we bend what we have just heard to the priority areas - Life Chances, Media City, Think Efficiency? The note to the DfC (*eDoc*) urged that the meeting should not be limited to determining "*the level of practical sign up you want, but bearing in mind that simply 'sponsoring' further work by TSN is not sufficient, we need to turn the ideas generated into 'innovative deliverables'*" (*eDoc*)

#### **6.7.2.5 April Senior Leadership Team Meeting**

With a very few apologies, the whole Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had assembled to hear the presentations (14<sup>th</sup> April 2010). The PLT attended too. As researcher, I felt the meeting was highly significant in signalling the new language; here was the highest level of management acknowledging and thanking more junior staff for their input. In preparing for this meeting the whole cohort had revised the format and aimed it to 'flow as a narrative' (Dryzek 1996). It opened with one of the Trios' members setting a context for the Transform programme and then

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followed with presentations on five specific themes. Before the break – all those in the room were asked to take a ‘sticky-note’ and give a short ‘reaction’ to the presentation and how they felt (see Table 6.7 below). I observed that the Chief Executive herself was one of the first to place her ‘sticky’ on the wall – it contained one word: “Proud” followed by a kiss! This gesture seemed to capture the mood of the meeting. Later and in the same vein, the Chief Executive asked the whole of the SLT members to stand up and applaud the staff from the cohort for their effort, commitment and reaction to the challenges they had been set.

Ambitious Brave Buzz! Challenged Commitment Co-production Curious Customer focused Empowerment Encouraged (2)	Energy Enthused (4) (for myself and customers /citizens of Metville) Energised Eureka! Excited Exciting (2) but challenging	Hopeful (2) Increased expectations Innovative Inspirational (2) Inspired (2) Inspiring (2) Interested Invigorated! Meaningful Passionate	Positive Promotion Proud (2) (one with x) Provocative Raring to go Supported! Thought provoking (2) Visionary Well researched
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**Table 6.7 – Reactions to the presentation of Cohort 8 - Sticky-note feedback by SLT meeting, April 2010**

Other comments that were submitted at the end of the meeting on feedback sheets (*hDoc*) were clustered around answers to three questions -

- *How do we release the energy / capacity / innovation / potential in our staff as we have seen today?*

The answers to this question mainly concentrated on the organisation finding time and space to resource innovation; to improve its communication; to legitimate much more the search for alternative ways of working; and to provide stronger leadership from the SLT

- *How do we as senior people have to change / behave differently to make transformation happen?*

The answers to this question focused on enablement and empowerment of staff to make changes; to cascade out and down across the organisation more efficiently; for Senior Leaders to modify the way they behaved currently and to give a much stronger invitation for other staff to challenge current practices.

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- *How do we bend what we have just heard to the priority areas – Life Chances, Media City, Think Efficiency, Cabinet Work Plan priorities*

The answers to this question focused on mobilising more resources; prioritising more clearly and to 'stick-with-it' more.

### **6.7.2.6 Building a sense of momentum**

In giving her reaction to the whole SLT event on April 14<sup>th</sup>, the Chief Executive said that she felt this would be an extremely useful time to really challenge the whole organisation to investigate where the barriers to change lay and she laid out what she saw as five fundamental challenges (*HWN*). She said she wanted to urgently address these and use the momentum created by the programme to take them forward; she expected staff from the Cohort and SLT members to work on this and was keen to give 'explicit permission' for staff to prioritise this work. Fig 6.5 positions the '5 Challenges' around and past 'the top of the 8' to indicate the 'drive' to complete the 'wind' and move the Council forward and down towards the 'moving' learning zone to suggest the attempt to 'tip' Metville over into a Model 2 environment.

Following the April meeting, the Head of OD immediately wrote an email to the entire 'Transform' cohort to say:

*"For those of you who were unable to attend, it is unfortunate you missed the strongest indication yet that "they do really mean it". It is inevitable that everyone will not get to everything and therefore being able to take pride in your contribution at a distance (and this is something you can take pride in) and being able to catch up through sharing stories with the others, is part of being a transformer" (eM).*

He then went out to outline the actions that were needed as a matter of urgency for the challenges set by the Chief Executive needed to be progressed - in an email he said:

- "1) Get ahead (of) the game regarding ICT and the community (Media City) ...*
- 2) Test some "proper customer panels", with reference to the role of Members*
- 3) Working on a language that is "really meaningful" to citizens*
- 4) Start something on co-production (avoiding the most testing environment)*
- 5) Data - test on 'Life Chance Pilots'"*

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*“One set of things to think about is ... the **structural** possibilities for further work... (The ACE feels) the Trio model (would be valuable) ... in creating a 'time out' of the day-job to work on these issues. However (there needs to be ...)*

- a) a personal development model (a strong theme for the (Chief Executive) was the personal development aspect of what we are doing)*
- b) ... strong "parent directorate" links (should be retained) and*
- c) make sure "something is coming back into the ranch"*

*(The Chief Executive also) talked about "taking the culture back in to the day-job and also how she saw the 250 (Transforming Metville Network) as a "change team" who could be involved in task and finish activity." (eM)*

He said he expected there to be a report to the Corporate Management Team *“within the next fortnight”* (eM) and highlighted a meeting of the Transforming Metville Network in about a month's time as a possible key milestone. The DfC appointed senior Directors to act as sponsors to each of the new challenges set by the Chief Executive.

I observed that the PLT were delighted that the results of the Cohort had been well received and when the Chief Executive 'challenged' the staff with five specific topics giving explicit permission for the Transform staff to be involved and for managers to give their support, it felt a very significant moment in the development of the whole programme (HWN). However, while recognising the progress being made, the PLT was cautious that it could easily slip back. And as a result, the Head of OD wrote to the DfC:

*“Reflecting on the events of yesterday and the new agenda arising from it, I felt it would be useful for me to know your own ambition/agenda for the next phase of Transform... I'm conscious that you have personally had to 'hold your nerve' through the last couple of years or so (reference my question 'are you serious about this?' when we first pulled together the plan for Trios), and would surmise that yesterday validated some of that trust. Therefore your take of what next would help in shaping some proposals (would be helpful)”. (eM)*

The Head of OD met with the DfC shortly after this email. In sharing with the rest of the PLT the feedback from this meeting, he felt he had secured agreement that (the DfC) would: arrange for some senior managers to be aligned to these tasks; and they would have accountability; Transform 8 would be "invited" to form the core of the task groups, but more people would be

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invited from across TMN to join in; there would be no artificial mechanism for time release, it would be expected that people would get the time that was needed; (a structured arrangement might be used to help managers 'understand' this which might need some careful thinking about how to describe it); and reporting back on progress would be sequenced in to CMT over the next 3 months, but the methodology would be flexible (*HWN, eM*). The DfC also undertook to work out in more detail how the different Trios, the TCT, and the TMN structure would work in the future (*eM*).

In preparing for the May meeting, and monitoring the situation from his role in the organisation the Head of OD reported to the PLT members: *"I have spoken to [DfC] earlier this morning regarding the agenda for Friday. He is still not for having the explicit sign up (I sense there is a boundary of authority that he is not prepared to cross at the moment). However he is chasing senior managers hard around the sponsorship role and getting them along on Friday"* (*eM*).

### **6.7.2.7 Planning next steps post April 2010**

During a PLT discussion that followed the April meeting (*HWN*), an outline for the key next steps was considered. Internally within the Council, the language of project management was beginning to re-emerge with the use of 'traffic lights' (Red, Amber, Green) to denote problems and success (*eDoc*). This was taken a step further with the adoption of 'Gold, Silver and Bronze' to denote different priorities across the whole change programme (*eDoc*). The PLT recognised that they needed to resonate with this language while not losing the main threads of 'Transform'. The Head of OD outlined how the Transform programme could still mesh with the Council's mainstream initiatives – for example, *"the intense work with families needing multiple services (an ambitious, organisationally disruptive yet 'mainstream' initiative with significant personal risk for some key players) needs to be played into"*. *"Creating a tension of entrepreneurial activity, high-level risk taking and a focus on structured delivery is a vehicle for embedding new behaviours"*. *"Therefore the Gold/Silver/Bronze arrangement is a) a delivery structure and b) a system of thinking which encapsulates the way **all** the players should operate: 'Think Gold' (strategic, outcome focussed, obsessive); Network Silver ('one-team' approach involving all public services and communities); and Do Bronze (detailed development and implementation - facing outwards)"* (*eM*). He also felt that there needed to be improvement in *"the standing of the top/middle level sponsors in relation to transformation. This will involve getting them inside the Transforming Metville 'club' so they share the belief systems and understand the language"* (*eM*).

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In autumn 2010, progress appeared to be slowing; a suggested 'business plan' to outline how a 'Model 2' approach might still be approached had been prepared by the MBS Programme Director (*eDoc*). However, the Head of OD was reluctant to put it into the Council without being sure on how it was going to be received. Both the programme director and the Head of OD felt that the DfC was 'carrying the issue' and that it was difficult to bring all three executives – the Chief Executive, the ACE and the DfC – together at the same time (*HWN*). The Head of OD did not wish to by-pass the DfC; but equally he felt that it might need to be taken directly to the other senior executives at some point. He offered to 'play-in' elements of the note from MBS into a note from himself to the DfC on making progress. Sharing this with the other members of the PLT attracted a comment from the independent consultant that speedy decisions needed to be made and that "*sufficient authority to operate outside hierarchies through senior buy-in and effective sponsorship*". She saw this as absolutely crucial and it would need to be evidenced and "*not just nodded to*". (*eM*)

In a later feedback email on progress, the Head of OD reported to the PLT that the Council were engaged in "*pulling together a 'tracker' for the savings, which would be overlain with a narrative structure as a way of providing members (executive and scrutiny) with a way of identifying progress in delivering the targets. [The Director for Change] has identified the savings as being either 'Model 1' i.e. can be delivered through operational gains or surgery, or 'Model 2' i.e. transformational, or somewhere in between. He remains very concerned about capacity to deliver the Model 2 savings and thinks that the Model 1½ savings could easily undershoot*". (*eM*)

In a further feedback at the end of March 2011, the Head of OD reported that the ACE was "*bemoaning that the neighbourhoods agenda was too transactional rather than being transformational and that a number of people in the council are getting cold feet. He also said that at a senior meeting yesterday about [a local area] both Metville Chief Executive and the neighbouring Chief Executive were disappointed by the lack of initiative and pace*". (*eM*)

### **6.7.2.8 An intense period of change**

The sequence of events from March to May in 2010 was clearly significant – particularly the invitation to Cohort 8 to present their work to the whole Senior Leadership Team. It was known that the Chief Executive herself had been particularly looking forward to the event. In a chance

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meeting in the corridor of the Town Hall prior to the April event the researcher was told by her that she had very nearly come into the meeting in March but felt that this might have been seen as 'inappropriate' but that she had peeped through the window to see how things had been going. She had been both *"pleased and impressed"* (HWN).

After the March presentations event, the Programme Director at MBS was phoned up unexpectedly by the DfC asking about his reactions when the Cohort 8 groups reported back (HWN). The DfC was clearly excited and wanted to talk about the most appropriate next steps. I observed that there was a sense of achievement and a new momentum in the work of the whole programme in the mind of the DfC.

During this intense period the members of the PLT were sharing their anxiety that while progress appeared to be 'well set' there were doubts in their minds about the critical mass needed to ensure progress was maintained. For example, in early May, the Head of OD shared with the members of the PLT a draft invite for the staff to attend the working groups– he wrote: *"Attached my amended version of the invite. Have tried to address the anxieties that may be being felt by those who have signed up. The purpose of the workshops is to ensure we make quick progress (and that they don't get bogged down) and to make them feel that there is something happening that feels exciting and new. Also despite [DfC]'s upbeat assertion that the challenges are fully authorised by [Chief Executive] and therefore everyone can feel completely empowered to offer their time to the corporate good, I am not sure that all managers share the sentiments expressed by [Xxxx] yet! There needs to be some considerable reassurance generated and I think the workshops play a significant part in that at this early stage. As I mentioned on Friday I think we may need to expand our "offer" to managers in Metville to give some additional contexts to support them. Transform has focussed on the organisational development implications of new local government. I think we should also think about looking at the policy implications of the dynamic political and social environment. There is no doubt that the pace being set by the government is fast and has considerable implications"* (eM).

As this new wave of activity began to take shape, there were also some indications that there might be blockages – for example, the Head of OD reported back to the PLT in May: *"I've just heard that [DfC] has cancelled Thursday - they've called a 7:30 meeting of the Place Board (something I find interesting in itself - I wonder whether it is in reaction to the spending*

*noises that are coming out of Government?'). I'm also trying to get my head around [DfC]'s comment about 'going round the figure 8 for another 12 months'" (eM)*

#### **6.7.2.9 Following up the change programme – liaison between the PLT and the DfC**

At a meeting with the DfC about three weeks later, the PLT prepared a short discussion paper on progressing the Transform programme entitled 'A sense of Urgency' (eDoc). This offered a "list of Transform words" that would be a means to assess whether progress was being made using the 'Kotter boxes' (1995) as a set of headings. For example, for the 'embed' heading (embedding transformational practice into the organisation's culture) the following were suggested: *Normalise; 'No more pilots'; Recognise the successful; Successful people/ Successful projects/ Successful pounds; Metrics – recognition/ reward; Success looks like this – then Publicise/ Celebrate; Signal the preferred method to be adopted; Managers 'call' the wrong behaviour; Transform words vs. 'Stay as we are' words.* A summary Document entitled 'The Next Step' in April 2010 was sent to the DfC by the PLT that also annotated the Figure of 8 diagram with a clearer explanation of the activities expected in each part of the model over the short and medium term (eDoc).

#### **6.7.2.10 Commissioning the 'populated 8'**

In preparing for the meeting, planned for the end of May, of the Transforming Metville Network, the TCT planned to inform Network members of the developments arising from the Cohort 8 programme; to explain how all staff who wished to could be included in the work on the challenges; to reveal more clearly who the key sponsors of the challenges were and what their role would be; and finally to emphasise that within each challenge were possible 'quick wins' that would give immediate examples of the kinds of changes that were being sought across the whole council. As the Head of OD noted in an email to the TCT team – *"the environment appears to have changed" (the DfC and the ACE) "want to crank up the pace and narrow the focus"*.

The May meeting was again well attended with over 50 staff in the room. An explanation of the five challenges was given with an invitation to join one of challenge groups and to meet the key senior leader sponsor that had been appointed. Following the meeting, emails confirming staff choices were sent out with the programme that would follow (with some facilitated workshop sessions to get the groups started). The Head of OD's email set out the expectations for each

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group and that a full-report back from the groups was expected for the next full meeting of the Network which was planned for 1st September.

Into this activity, following the 2010 General Election in May an emergency budget was brought by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (HM Treasury 2010 i) that indicated significant reductions in expenditure were planned that would be considerably more severe than had been expected (and was followed by the Spending Review (HM Treasury 2010 ii).

### 6.7.3 Period Three: Summer 2010 – Summer 2011

However, by June I observed in meeting notes (*eDoc*) of the Challenge groups that were being coordinated by the TCT, that there were concerns. For example, staff originally signed up to a 'challenge' group were no longer attending - e.g. *"(xxx) to contact other 2 members of ALC in this area due to concerns over numbers and drop outs"*. The TCT, however, were clearly very committed to the challenges and between them produced a colour newsletter as a discussion and promotion tool to circulate to all the Transform Network; a second newsletter was produced in mid-July (*eDoc*).

The DfC chaired a meeting in mid-July to review progress in the Chief Executive's five challenges. Reports from the sponsors on each challenge were given. The DfC indicated he wanted to aim for 'something realistic' for each subject area to be able to report significant progress working to a deadline of 1<sup>st</sup> September. He offered a number of suggestions on 'tests' that could be applied to each challenge, for example, for the 'customer panels' a test of neighbourhood/ locality relevance in a specific area of the council area would be essential. He urged the whole meeting of about 26 senior staff to *"keep the dialogue going"* and assured them that the CMT would be a place that *"you can bounce ideas off"*. Finally, he responded to some of the contributions from the challenge teams to acknowledge that there might be a 6<sup>th</sup> Challenge for all the teams – he posed this in the form of a question: *"how might a 'model 2' Council go about solving some of the problems set by the five other challenges?"* (*HWN*) Underlying the work on all the challenges was the sense that the Council needed to work in a more 'transformed' way to achieve the radical change it was seeking.

At the same time, however, I observed that the energy was further draining out of the challenge work – a meeting in August was attended by only 16 people and of these only one was a Challenge Sponsor (*HWN*). I was aware that the commitment of staff to the five challenges was

beginning to wane as the promised report back to the Chief Executive was postponed by the DfC. In fact the September meeting became a smaller meeting which purely reviewed progress of the Challenge teams but did not follow the format of the previous Network meetings. (Thus in effect the May Transforming Metville Network meeting became the last formal meeting of the Transforming Metville Network).

#### **6.7.3.1 The Transform Learning Team**

I observed that the PLT was finding feedback on the availability of the Sponsors very slow and there was a clear reluctance to prioritise the suggested workshops into their work schedules (*eM*). The first meeting only took place in early July. For this meeting members of the PLT put together a pack of the key PowerPoint slides that had been used during Transform teaching (about 140) that summarised the models, the key references, and the use that had been made of them in developing Transform in the Council so that a wide ranging and strategic discussion could take place on objectives and planned outcomes (*eDoc*). However, at the meeting I observed that the concerns of the sponsors appeared to be very much around their primary responsibility to deliver on the Council's corporate work-plan (agreed by the Council's Cabinet) which included addressing child poverty, community safety, community cohesion, the local economy and other such high level priorities (*HWN*). I also observed during the meeting that as a better coherence emerged across the group as a whole, they began to share a language together and recognised the additional corporate roles they had been given as sponsors of the challenges. There was some acknowledgement of their own development needs and the importance of their behaviour as role models. It was also clear that they felt the five challenges were part of a wider challenge to achieve more radical reform. They discussed the idea of matching people from the Transform Network pool with possible 'venturing proposals'. They also discussed the question of accountability and seeking mechanisms and frameworks that would assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities to account for progress both individually as well as collectively as a team (*HWN*).

#### **6.7.3.1 TCT and the Challenge Teams**

The next meetings between the PLT and the TCT took place later in July by which time the meetings of the different challenge teams were beginning to take place. I noticed there was some concern that the momentum of the challenge teams was not felt to be quick enough for the TCT and that they felt more pressure was needed from the corporate management team (*HWN*). In late summer the TCT offered to host a weekly 'drop-in' for all 'Transformers' involved in the challenge groups (or any others that wished to meet) – the meetings (each Thursday)

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would be at lunchtime and anyone wishing to share a brown-bag meal together could do so. These proved to be quite popular over the summer period for about a dozen or so staff members and helped provide an element of cohesion to the discussions on how to initiate radical change across the Council.

### **6.7.3.2 PLT and the DfC**

The idea of a sixth challenge was picked up at a meeting between the DfC and the PLT in late July. The issue was discussed in the context of the overall need to plan for severe reductions in budgets across the whole council that had been signalled by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the post-election budget of June (HM Treasury 2010). The need for more departments to contribute to the challenge teams was raised. The Head of OD outlined where he felt the Transform programme could contribute (eM):

*“I think Transform can add 4 things to the process;*

- 1) an "edge" of pushing the agenda outside the box - encouraging transformational rather than transactional solutions*
- 2) a huge commitment to demonstrating personal agency*
- 3) joining up the common threads across all the themes*
- 4) encouraging a learning approach and making explicit links with the development of the council as a whole”.*

By the end of July some more progress had been made and reflecting on the meeting at the end of July between members of the PLT and the DfC and in my role as the programme director from MBS, I shared a brief note with the other members of the PLT. In the note I said:

*“Thanks both; felt meeting with [DfC] was significant for two reasons; the [DfC] clearly exercised a considerable level of trust in sharing his thoughts - I think it's an expression of confidence in us as a team. There was a real sense that while we may not know the answer ... yet, we are confident that we can find it - again a sense of confidence in us (all). I am genuinely humbled by the opportunity being given to us; along with the responsibility to meet the challenge well. Good days.”*

### **6.7.3.3 Critical Review**

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It was at this point that the Business School prepared the proposal for a significant level of work to be commissioned by Metville (CtC 3.0). The programme director/ researcher shared his reactions to this with the other members of the PLT (eDoc):

### "Where are we?"

1) *A relatively large (100?) reserve of staff which, given the right circumstances, will engage with key strategic issues, provide energy and innovation;*

2) *A key common denominator is that most of them (and many others who form a wider "interested but not active" group) share a common language of Transforming Metville. This is important in providing certain key concepts (belief system?) and a sense of belonging. The fact that some people do not share this language, particularly a tier of middle managers can be a barrier to future progress.*

3) *Most of the people in the "club" only demonstrate their potential in transitory phases. It is difficult to maintain a systematic presence within the organisation - this is a statement about the organisation more than the individuals.*

4) *A few have a much more professional approach and are "full-time change agents", normally because they have been given privileged positions with the organisation (Cluster). There are other change agents who have the privileged position but do not share the Transforming Metville attributes (Change Team) which must be resolved*

5) *There is a widening of the top/middle level sponsorship for the Transform journey, but it is still too weak and uncertain of its own role and potential."*

As the Autumn began, the planned report back on progress was being considered. The DfC indicated that he had agreed to a suggested timescale of meeting with the Chief Executive for the last week in September. The Head of OD commented: *"He thinks she will prefer an informal setting. He also agreed that he needed to know what his next steps were on the transform journey before that meeting"* (eM).

I observed that by this stage, the PLT began to experience a sense of the whole project losing its momentum – the feedback from the TCT was that progress in each of the challenges was either slow, or not at all; the activity across the Transform Learning Team was minimal; and no new initiatives were being planned. Also the proposal (CtC 3.0) put forward in July from MBS to Metville on possible further commissioned work from the Council had neither been approved nor rejected (HWN, eDoc).

The work with the Sponsors group continued during the summer, nevertheless, despite further attempts to draw the group together by the MBS programme director and the independent consultant, the next meeting of the sponsors as a group did not take place until early November. In preparing for this meeting a number of questions were posed to the sponsors in advance by the researcher and independent consultant asking for their 'views on progress being made' (*eDoc*). It was intended that the answers could be used as a means to reflect on progress during their session together. In the replies there was a consensus that the energy and enthusiasm of April had fallen away but that reflection and debate were absolute preconditions for moving forward; all five sponsors felt that there was still strong empowerment for senior staff to make progress without seeking 'permission' first (*HWN*).

### **6.7.3.4 Meeting of the Challenge Sponsors**

In the discussion during the November session the sponsors emphasised that '*accentuating the positive*' was important and that they felt that a critical time was approaching; '*focusing on the really critical issues would be paramount (HWN)*'. They recognised that they had acted in a supportive role but not been too involved in the day-to-day work of the groups, more could have possibly been done. They were not sure where the 'end point' for the challenges now lay and they recognised the risk of losing the 'Transform spirit' and energy. They also felt that the activities had not been connected enough in cross-challenge working to achieve wider changes. They felt they had been effective in aligning the Chief Executive's challenges to the wider emerging challenges corporately such as a focus on localities, the 'cleaner, safer, greener' agenda, and the 'life chances' work. While their attitude appeared to be supportive, there was also a clear ambivalence about how much support to give. This session was to become the final meeting of the Sponsors group. No further meetings were planned after it and the funding for the whole Transform programme began to falter from this point on.

### **6.7.3.5 Changing emphasis**

The TCT became aware during September that additional challenges were being set by the CMT to investigate savings that could be achieved from reorganising transportation; investigating debt financing; reviewing regulatory services; focusing on the opportunities for working with communities in particular localities with high expenditure needs and appraising the property estate for possible economies (*DN*). These needed to be taken into the wider challenges that had already been adopted in April with the Chief Executive's challenges. I

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observed that the TCT were anxious that the focus and momentum that had begun with the Chief Executive's original challenges were becoming diluted (*HWN*).

During this particular period I observed that the DfC was keen to maintain a sequence of meetings with the members of the PLT - four diary dates were set aside over the course of September and October. He was also keen to integrate the work of the challenges with other initiatives being worked up across the Council – such as the 'life chances pilots' work. A possible work programme was worked up by the PLT for what the next action phase of the Transform programme might look like for the autumn and winter of 2010/11 (*eDoc*). Referring to the role of the TCT, the Head of OD outlined a possible new contribution to the DfC (*eM*):

*"This is the role they played in the Spotlights and the 5 Challenges - however the aim is not to repeat those processes exactly but to develop from them. It is possible to do that because we have explicitly challenged ourselves about how well we did in those processes and because the council has moved on. Crudely we can identify the earlier relationships as follows;*

- a) Spotlights - Cluster 1 developed a very sophisticated analysis of the underlying challenges to the Council, but did so by retreating into a defensive environment which excluded senior managers (you being the exception), then "launched" the end result (OCAP) back into the organisation. Whatever the merits of the medicine it was 'delivered to' not 'created with'.*
- b) 5 Challenges - a much more open approach to the Sponsors, but without knowing how to make the relationship work. The lack of a shared language between them led to twin paths, confusion about the destination and a lack of trust.*

*Therefore this time round we need to build in trust and shared purpose from the beginning. Clarifying the objectives, negotiating roles and structuring space for learning need to be in from the start. Also we need to think about the language of Transform (some of the technical meanings, the transform spirit words etc.), who knows it and who doesn't".*

The 1<sup>st</sup> September meeting was not well attended and this suggested that the suspected loss of momentum in the programme was being realised. This was discussed at the meetings in late September and late October between the DfC and the members of the PLT. Despite being pressed the DfC was unable to commit to a continuation of funding the Business School support and the proposal for a further phase of the Transform work was held in abeyance. I observed that the sense of urgency for reports on the five challenges appeared to be reducing.

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I also observed that the normal succession plan for replacement of TCT members who were on partial secondments was not being put in place for the Autumn of 2010 and no new names were being put forward. Inevitably this indicated that the organisational momentum was indeed being lost. Through October, November and December a series of crucial meetings took place with the DfC and members of the TCT and those who had been involved in working on the Chief Executive's Challenges. I observed an increasingly tense atmosphere with the TCT (both current and past members) seeking to establish recognition for the team and the work on the Challenges (*HWN*).

### **6.7.3.6 Faltering of the whole programme**

From mid-November to late December the TCT began to recognise that the Transform initiative was faltering. In a series of emails copied round to all the staff who had been involved, either through the TCT or the Challenge groups, an attempt to provide a plan for moving forward was debated. A series of meetings and email discussions took place as the key Trios members sought to understand the problems and work out a suitable way to respond. For example one member wrote:

*"I'd be really interested to understand why people are opting out (at various different levels). (Xxxx) has queried this a few times and I think it was at the meeting in the Committee Room when it was suggested that he was asking the wrong people as we'd all opted in (and some of us struggle to stay opted in). If we haven't already I think it is time we understood this more – as this seems to be a barrier to gaining momentum and resources" (eM).*

In an email note another wrote in relation to feeding back on a meeting with the DfC

*"It was essential that (Xxxx) had that conversation with (Xxxx) and heard why people drifted in and out of the 5 challenge project" (eM)*

Another commented:

*"I recognise that mobilisation is important and I think that value is central to this. When colleagues felt their work and time was valued (e.g. straight after (the challenge) presentations) there were not problems with getting involved".(eM)*

### **6.7.3.7 PLT response to faltering**

The PLT carried out an intensive review of the whole position in early November referring to the 'Kotter model' (Kotter 1995) and the 'Figure of 8' models for Stage Four. The PLT sought to

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better understand the dynamics and inter-relationships and drew up a number of flip-charts to capture the discussion (*FC-plt*). Metville's CMT were still seeking to maintain the Transform programme but there were also signs of problems being faced. For example, the Head of OD sent an email outlining the scale of the proposed cuts: "*The £30m is now £40m (after more info and recalculation) - a state of high anxiety is setting in... can I have a copy of the typed-up flip charts, or some photographs of it today please - I think the (albeit fragmentary) contacts I have with [the DfC] over the next few days will be critical. Also should the organisation have to explicitly set this out? or should senior managers know it from subjective insights (Mintzberg)? i.e. why can't the Sponsors write it for themselves?*" (*eM*)

### **6.7.3.8 Recognising the 'pause-button'**

In mid-November a meeting held to review progress with each of the Challenge teams was again poorly attended. About 10 members of the TCT were present. During the meeting the DfC acknowledged that the CMT had rather lost momentum on the 'challenge' work. However, the DfC listened to the representations of those at the meeting that a new way of making progress should be looked at again urgently.

During the course of the November meeting the DfC admitted that '*corporately the pause button had been pressed*' as they had attempted to bring the different elements of the change programme into line with each other. This resonated with my observation that the Transform Learning Team (the Challenge Sponsors) were equally losing momentum (*HWN*). The DfC discussed the lack of progress and how the urgency to deal with the financial reductions needed was causing other policy issues to be de-prioritised.

Anticipating the nature of the meeting, as both programme director and researcher I faced a dilemma – observe the process (researcher) or intervene (programme director). I chose to prepare a 'story' for the meeting which I read out entitled 'The story of Strappedville' (see Appendix 6). The story attempted to outline the options faced by the Council to both maintain a radical strategy of reform and yet deal with the severe financial constraints that were anticipated in the light of the recently published Spending Review of the Government for public spending reductions (HM Treasury 2010 i). Choosing to intervene more directly formed part of the action research at this point which sought to respond to the threat of losing the whole programme of change from the corporate agenda.

### **6.7.3.9 'The Offer'**

Members of the TCT said that maybe a new 'offer' should be made on how the original Transform ideas might still be taken forward. The DfC agreed to re-meet and the TCT arranged to work this up for a meeting planned to take place a week later. What became known in the team as 'the offer', was the focus of activity for the next month. In the emails that passed between the TCT members, this period was referred to as the 'watershed moment'. The question 'Do they really mean it?' was posed across the group.

In preparing the 'offer' document for the proposed reconvened meeting with the DfC, its author (from the original Trios group) explained that it was *"based on the benefits to the network of joining the (very Model 1) efficiency process structures, which include access to the permissions and cranks that we lacked for the challenges"* (eM - to colleagues in the TCT). It was also intended to offer certain benefits to the Senior Leadership Team – the culture of Transform, the skills and focus on the future that had developed in the TCT and access to the key people who could enable things to happen.

The concern was that the DfC had indicated he needed a 'plan' of how the Transform staff might work from this point on. One TCT member suggested that what was needed was *"quote 'some people who can really challenge the organisation to make progress and be relied on to be like terriers going after all the barriers that lie in the way' (sounds like a plan to me)"*. (The reference to 'terriers' was the 'story' of the researcher (see Appendix Six)). The team members argument was that the Corporate Management Team needed to trust the very staff who had developed experience in the Trios to get on with achieving the goals of the teams (eM).

The feedback from the team members was positive and a slide presentation aimed for a meeting with the DfC in early December was prepared. Comments were enthusiastic and incorporated quickly with the presentation which was finished on the morning of delivery. There were two key issues in the presentation – an 'offer' was being made by a group from within the Council who were in a position to articulate what was involved but they needed a very clear 'acceptance' of that offer while it was still available. Already the energy and enthusiasm was waning and it would only continue until a point where the offer was no longer viable. One member of the TCT said:

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*“This very much feels like a watershed moment. I feel as though we need a clear forward plan” and another replied “My observations are that I agree completely that this is a watershed moment.... Plus your remarks complement the offer to (Xxxx) extremely well, and will help impress on (Xxxx) that we have direction as a group. If he cannot see the value after that then we really need to review where we are going with all of this”*

### **6.7.3.10 Critical watershed and the conundrum**

A further issue was what the group called a ‘conundrum’ – which was that to achieve radical change, a new organisation would need to begin to emerge in Metville that was unrecognisable from the one that existed at that moment; however, if it was completely unrecognisable then the best of the past might be lost in the journey to the future.

At the reconvened meeting the ‘offer’ from the staff was put to the DfC on how the principles of the Transform work could still be progressed. The meeting took place with a written submission being made on how the TCT could stay involved (*eDoc*). The DfC agreed to consider the proposals.

In feeding back the discussion from the presentation to the wider ‘Transform’ group including the members of the TCT, there was a feeling that some progress had been made but some key points for which there were still reservations remained:

*“We presented what we have come to call ‘the conundrum’ and told (DfC) there was a decision to make. At the end of the debate he very clearly stated a decision - that we get the opportunity to ‘do’ (i.e. so that we can help change the organisation – as opposed to waiting for him to change the organisation so we can then ‘do’ (the conundrum!!)”*

The reservation lay in the confidence that the most senior executives properly understood what was being ‘offered’.

*“If the conversation broke down anywhere (if that’s the right word at all) it is in (DfC) and the sponsors’ understanding of how we might work in that space – they’ve not quite got it. (DfC) is always playing catch-up in these meetings, so towards the end of the meeting I was not surprised that he started stepping back into the discussion to draw out how things will work – he asked lots of questions that were in the right ballpark, but unfortunately didn’t stop long enough for some of the really obvious ones to be answered which means he is still not utterly convinced. Our next steps are to flesh out how we add value to the process and not get consumed by it”*

#### **6.7.3.11 Christmas 2010**

Over the Christmas period the PLT and the TCT liaised closely on a related discussion initiated by the researcher on a proposal to offer a 'business plan' approach to commissioning radical change. The details are discussed below in the section on the PLT but it prompted a discussion in the TCT on the approach to the way change projects might be taken forward. There was a flurry of activity, first around the 'offer' presentation and then commenting on the MBS proposal that a business plan be agreed for Transform type projects (see Appendix 7).

#### **6.7.3.12 Polemics**

At the beginning of the New Year (2011), the Head of OD shared a 'polemic' paper with the other two members of the PLT (eDoc). I observed this to be a key episode since the Head of OD as a senior officer closely aligned with the whole Transform strategy, he was in a strong position to 'evaluate' where the programme stood at this important point. In his paper he argued that: *"all organisations (were) highly resistant to real change"* and that in his view the Transforming Metville/ Transform Trios / Transforming Metville Network "experiment" had been a conscious mechanism to: *"maximise the impact of talent on key tipping points; root out the systemic weaknesses in the council which make transformation difficult; increase the engagement of staff at all levels in the transformation journey; and encourage innovation"*. He felt that the programme overall had *"touched over 250 people in the organisation with an alternative way of trying to achieve change. There is now, however, a sense of the process having stalled. It needs a new injection of energy"* (eDoc). He felt that the experience so far had enabled the PLT to *"articulate a model of how the 'experiment' (could) develop into a virtuous process which actually moves the organisation into a different place. This 'Model 2' type organisation will enable the council to meet the challenges it now faces"*. (eM)

He went on to argue that the Council's 'Think Efficiency 2' was bold and radical and would be *"very hard to pull off if the council continues to operate as a 'Model 1' organisation"* (eM). He then observed that: *"According to our analysis, shifting the council requires not only the commitment, energy and intellectual capacity of rank and file transformers, but also the buy-in of legitimate leadership. There is a critical role for legitimate leaders to validate and resource the energy from below. So far (with notable exceptions) the evidence is that most leaders don't 'get it' yet"*. He went on: *"After one TMN meeting the Assistant Chief Executive had spoken of the TMN as being his 'gang'"*. *It is now critical that we widen the understanding of what has been*

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*created and what is possible to a wider group of senior managers. Otherwise the source of the transformational spirit will start to wither away". He concluded: "From the outside, at present, the legitimate (managerial) leadership in the council seems to be some distance from taking up this opportunity. That historical resistance to real change, identifiable in all organisations, seems to have hegemony. Our objective situation requires that hegemony to be challenged". (eDoc)*

This observation from the 'inside' of the organisation of a loss in momentum was an important indication that the organisation knew it was no longer sustaining the programme it had set out to deliver.

In the New Year (2011), the PLT were still meeting and trying to find a possible way forward sensing that the momentum on the challenges was being lost. The Head of OD reported to the PLT that Metville were still seeking a further £10m in savings. Instead of looking for further reductions in individual directorates, he suggested: the possibility of *"looking for some "blocks" of savings that are not just further lists from Directorates (but more Model 2)"* are needed. In a conversation with the DfC he had: *"suggested that he could look for a "Transform Premium" to be achieved from the existing lists, but achieving more by a Model 2 approach".(eM)*

In the New Year there was a further round of activity leading up to a critical date in late January. A great deal of discussion on the 'MBS business plan' proposal took place in leading up to a crucial meeting scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> January between the DfC, the PLT and the TCT/ Network members. There were some misgivings between the PLT and the TCT about being led into a position where the ambitiousness of the proposal would lead to failure and this would ruin all the previous work to establish Transform as a viable way to achieve radical reform. On the other hand the senior executives seemed to be genuinely unclear on how to deal with the scale and nature of the reductions needed in the Council's budget and a bold gesture might be a way to achieve a place for Transform in the wider Council plans. In preparing for this 'watershed' meeting, the TCT discussed the need to achieve a broad buy-in from across the whole Council.

They recognised that:

*"To be able to do this we will need to have the backing of (Metville) employees; this is going to be hard when people are extremely apprehensive about their own future, and as time is of the essence, the only*

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*way we can do this is by using every available means of communication - our colleagues need to know that there is someone out there that will listen and support them" (eM).*

Another felt:

*"we should be very careful ... as Transform has been perceived as elitist and removed in the past. There are many people who care deeply throughout the council who have not had the same opportunities as some of us to get involved / hear messages about Transform - or who may feel that our approaches are not the right ones. We need to work with them and be challenged by them and need to be careful that we do not alienate - so part of the plan, as (Xxxx) says should be to give as many different opportunities as possible for people to get involved".(eM)*

However, another expressed a view that the ideas and objectives in Transform were a long way from where other people were in the organisation:

*"... from my recent experiences the approaches that we discuss with (Xxxx) and sponsors don't seem to be on the radar elsewhere in the organisation. Bringing personal agency, energy and focus into some areas of our work feels a bit like running full speed into a brick wall. Working with a transform mindset outside of a Trio/group of like-minded colleagues can feel very isolating and increase vulnerability. If we are asking more people to be involved in new approaches how can we protect each other and ourselves?" (eM)*

### **6.7.3.13 Meeting is cancelled**

There was a considerable amount of activity in the build-up to the meeting with a clear recognition that a great deal was riding on it. Therefore, when an email was sent out from the DfC to say that the meeting had been cancelled and no date was offered in replacement, the energy in the group drained away. The TCT appeared to suffer the final blow.

The regret felt by the members was powerful – captured in one note that said:

*"Don't know what the answers are but it would be great to discuss a bit more before Thursday (via email or whatever) - again on a personal note I feel like the Transform programme opened my eyes to a potentially great future, where we could all be empowered to work differently and effectively with a much better deal for communities - I can't let go of this - and feel that the tensions between the way things could be and my current model 1 working day are getting stronger and stronger, if not now then when will things change?" (eM)*

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The TCT/ Transform lunches continued through the spring of 2011 but increasingly there was a feeling that the initiative had run its course. There was no proposal to replace those that had been seconded and the default was for the staff to return to their substantive posts. It was also clear that some key Transform staff were leaving the Council to seek alternative careers – one going freelance for example and another leaving local authority work altogether. The funding for the MBS support was also not renewed and therefore effectively the Trios part of the programme had ended.

### **6.7.4 Period Four: Summer/ Autumn 2011**

By about March 2011, I was increasingly aware that the interest of CMT in the Transform programme appeared to have been overtaken with other priorities such as the need for financial savings and to possibly restructure. In this atmosphere of uncertainty and as programme director for the Business School, I spoke to the DfC and explored whether the Transform programme should now be formally brought to a close. However, the discussion prompted the DfC to arrange a meeting in early April 2011 between the ACE, the DfC and the three members of the PLT which sought to revisit the Transform programme looking again at how the different elements of the 8 steps in Kotter's (1995) model might be interpreted in Metville. It was agreed not to abandon the programme at this point. As a consequence in May 2011, two further follow-up meetings were arranged. I observed that the ACE, especially, was frustrated that more radical progress was not being made across Metville. He also shared his view that for many senior executives across the conurbation, the new political and financial environment was turning into crisis management rather than investigating where radical change ideas might be emerging. In particular the work on looking for opportunities for sharing service delivery across different councils was making slow progress. The second follow-up meeting in late May took place at Metville Business School with the objective to thoroughly review the theory and practical implications of still pursuing a more radical change agenda in Metville. It was again attended by the two executives and the three PLT members. A note was produced that suggested ways in which the PLT could continue to make an input (*eDoc*).

A new proposal report was produced entitled 'Cranking the Change' (see Appendix Eight) that sought to offer an 'honest assessment' of a 'possible new vision' for council services based on four typologies of delivery and around which a renewed 'Transform' programme could be formed. In late June 2011 the DfC appeared to accept this proposal although no financial commitment was given to fund the Business School or the independent consultant's work.

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Based on the DfC's informal acceptance, further refinement was made to the proposal – the objectives were seen as achieving: “*a clearer understanding of the Transform methodology and a vision for ‘Model 2’*”; “*establishing a guiding coalition to implement ‘Model 2’*”; and “*energizing wider support from across the Council enabling change agents to emerge who are comfortable with a ‘Model 2’ vision*”.

As part of this, an attempt to bring together the most senior officers of the two adjoining authorities (Metville and its immediate neighbour) was planned. It was agreed it would be hosted by Metville Business School to offer a form of ‘neutral territory’ to both executive teams. The meeting was pre-planned by the Metville ACE and the Programme Director/ Researcher from MBS (*DN, HWN*). The meeting drew a significant number of executives from both councils including the Assistant Chief Executives of both authorities. It was run as a half day workshop and resolved to seek quick progress on working together to integrate bordering areas’ services more closely.

However, despite the apparent commitment of both teams to this plan (and a note produced by the Business School outlining the agreements (*eDoc*)) the ACE informed the School a week later that this initiative had been called off by the neighbouring authority. It was clear to the researcher that at this point the Transform programme had effectively ended – no further meetings were held between Metville and the Business School and the proposal paper (*Cranking the Change*) from April and May was not revisited.

### 6.8 ANALYSIS

I now turn to the analysis of the results from Stage Four. The research questions adopted for the study were:

- ‘Can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change programmes?’
  
- ‘Can the key driving forces for organisational change be recognised through:
  - ‘the characteristics of strengthened inter-dependencies within an organisational framework?’
  - ‘the conceptualisation of change being perceived as fully paradigmatic by the organisation?’

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During Stage Four the nine key contributing elements of the programme were brought together in the Autumn of 2009 into a coherent overall programme that included the taught programmes (the internal consultancy and Transform Lite programmes); the applied learning challenges programme (Cohort 8); the follow on from Chief Executive's 5 Challenges sponsorship (Transform Leadership Team); an inclusive membership network of those willing to explore innovation (Transforming Metville Network) and three catalyst elements (the Corporate Management Team executives, the TCT and the Programme Liaison Team).

The internal consultancy short course brought together the TCT and the Change Team; Metville's theoretical model for change was discussed and an attempt was made to re-pattern the relationship between those responsible for greater efficiencies (the business re-engineering staff) and those thinking about fundamental alteration of Metville's modus operandi (the TCT). In offering the short programme to both groups together there was an attempt to 'develop a framework of understanding' at the heart of the senior middle management for the whole change agenda. The feedback suggested that staff were beginning to recognise this challenge and to think more widely about their role and to examine the bigger picture for their work. Interestingly the recognition that the more senior management in Metville also needed to be exposed to the same experience reflected the views of a sizeable number of senior middle management that a gap existed in the theoretical understanding of their senior line managers and the rest of the Transform programme overall.

The Transform Lite programme emphasised that staff from different parts of the organisation were being brought together with the clear intention that there would be a future re-patterning of their work. Innovation would therefore come from re-thinking Metville's core objectives rather than simply re-structuring the present organisational structure. The experiential knowledge of the Trios Cluster Team was being passed on in the Transform Lite programme – 'the experiment is successful' was a powerful message about the nature of 'challenging' an organisation's current thinking and their view of their success.

For 'Cohort 8' of the Transform programme the decision to focus the teaching around six 'challenges' and to form 'groups' at the very beginning to investigate these issues was a clear signal that new frameworks of understanding were being developed. Metville's investment of considerable resources in the programme evidenced by its length (it lasted for five months - from December 2009 to March 2010 and was then extended to April) was a reflection of the

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priority being given to re-patterning. The involvement of the DfC as a senior executive who had clearly 'bought into' the development of the theoretical underpin for Transform (the Figure of 8 and the paradigm shift from Model 1 to Model 2) also signalled the need to re-pattern the organisational framework.

The unplanned follow-on work arising from the Chief Executive's challenges issued at the meeting of the Senior Leadership Team in April 2010 was the most powerful affirmation of the need to re-pattern – all staff were invited to become involved to strengthen and widen the Transforming Metville Network. The challenge groups' presentations had all signalled the need to radically re-think the delivery of services; to think in more cross-cutting ways; to challenge existing practices and to imagine a different structure to the council (a re-patterning of the existing organisation).

The emergence of the TLT as 'sponsors' of radical change with a new role (to think through the re-patterning implications of the Chief Executive's five challenges) and a new accountability (to respond to the generic lead being given by the DfC and the ACE) was a clear signal of re-patterning. The move away from functional departments with clear hierarchies was reflected in the 'choice' of the five sponsors who were seen as being sympathetic to the new way of thinking. The work of the PLT with the TLT, to ensure that the theory of the Metville Transform programme was understood with separate workshops and reflection on progress, was an attempt to build-in a consistency to the emerging framework of understanding that would maintain and develop it further.

During the early part of Stage 4, the Transforming Metville Network was seen as the means by which staff in Metville could engage with the Transform programme. Membership of the Network would normally follow a programme such as one of the Cohorts or Transform Lite and the meetings of the Network were opportunities for staff from different functional parts of the Council to come together. The appropriation of the Network into the Chief Executive's five challenges following the meeting of the April 2010 Senior Leadership Team was a clear attempt by the DfC to re-pattern relationships around the five challenge activities. However, the falling away of the Network as a separate entity during the summer and autumn of 2010 reflected the breaking up of the coherence of the Figure of 8 model.

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The position of the TCT was the most powerful signal of the characteristics of strengthened inter-dependencies within Metville. In their TCT work the team members were 'managed' by the Head of OD and not their normal functional line managers. Their lines of accountability were therefore blurred. The relationship with the PLT was close – discussion between the PLT and the TCT was focused on embedding the re-patterning into new ways of working. The key point made by members of the TCT at the Cohort 8 presentation was that their emergent role as 'challengers' of the existing framework of understanding was supported by senior executives (e.g. the DfC and the ACE). In their work with the challenge groups in Cohort 8, the members of the TCT signalled a new set of inter-dependencies between themselves and the CMT and other senior directors. They played a lead role during the transition phase from the end of Cohort 8 into the 'five challenges' work. The erosion of the TCT through members 'drifting back' to their substantive posts and not being replaced and the non-acceptance of the 'offer' made in late 2010 and early 2011 by the TCT to the DfC to take the challenge work further also signalled the collapse of the programme in 2011.

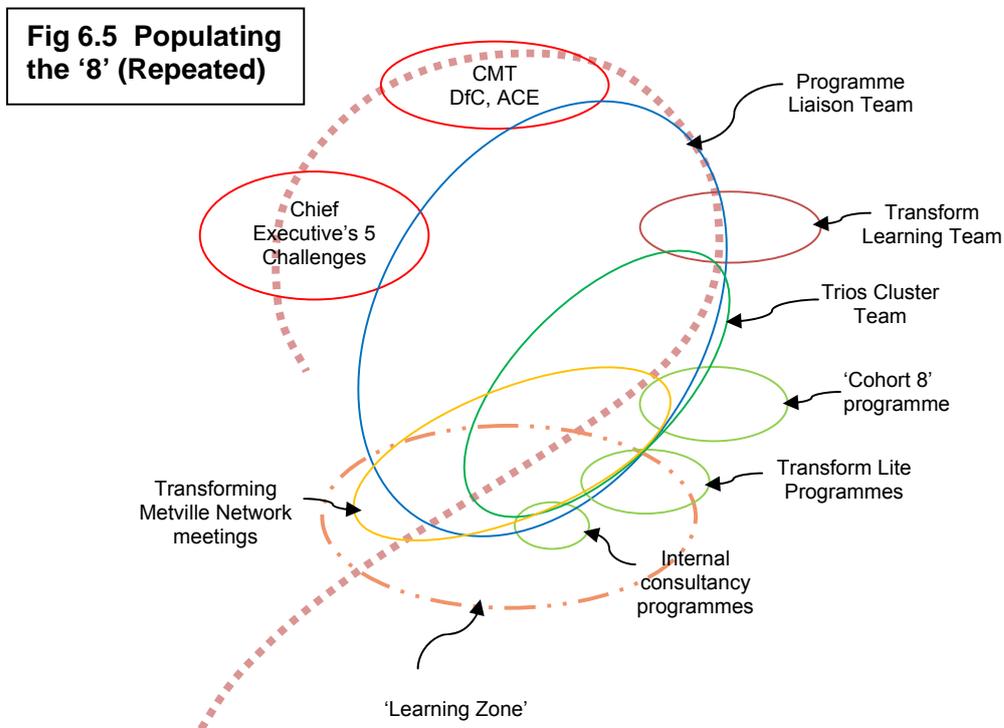
Evidence of the attempt by Metville to genuinely rethink the inter-relationships of the council can be seen in the discussions between the CMT members (DfC and ACE) with the PLT. When the ACE referred to a 'gang' of people who were 'on the same page' as each other he was perhaps referring to that sense of comfort that the 'whole' concept was shared with a group of like minded people (c.f. Kotter's 'guiding coalition' 1995). The DfC's decision to bring together the whole Transform 'project' by joining the Cohort 8 presentations with the Network and introduce the TLT to oversee the sponsorship of the five challenges woven coherently together with the PLT and TCT was a clear signal that he was seeking to 're-pattern' the framework of understanding. His anxiety that the proper level and nature of 'support' to the Cohort 8 challenge groups was further evidence of his attempts to ensure the overall re-patterning would be maintained. The PLT's attempts in the May 2011 meetings to 'lay out' clearly the conceptual framework of Transform to the DfC and the ACE through explaining the characteristics of the 'winding Figure of 8' and the notion of a Model 1 to Model 2 paradigm change, were both aimed at finding a core understanding of what was being attempted in terms of transformational change and the underlying principles of the new 'pattern'.

In Stage Four the roles of the PLT became stretched. There was a teaching role (in the internal consultancy, Transform Lite and Cohort 8 programmes); there was a consultancy role to the CMT, the TLT and the TCT; there was a learning role in seeking to make sense of the progress

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of the programme in 'real time'; there was a innovation role in thinking through new initiatives within the programme; and finally there was a supportive role to the CMT (DfC and ACE) and to the TLT and a critical friend role to the members of the TCT. In all these roles the PLT sought to focus the different members of each of the groups on the overall goal of re-thinking and re-patterning their relationships using the 'F' (in the 'framework of ideas' of SSM) as the inspiration for their actions. For example, during the discussion on next steps after the Senior Leadership Team meeting in April 2010, the use of the Figure of 8 to 'track' progress was important in placing activities and people into the same diagram. Thus the 'populating of the 8' (see Fig 6.5 repeated below) sought to place the nine elements of the 2009/10 programme into the overall change model from which progress in change could then be examined. From this perspective the characteristics of strengthened organisational interdependencies could be examined.

It certainly appeared that during March and April 2010, following the presentation of Transform 8 and the Senior Leadership Team meeting in April, the coherence of the different elements came together. Key challenges being set by the 'top' of the 8, to be worked on in and around the Learning Zone, and tested on the ground, were precisely the type of working that had been envisaged by the PLT.



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New learning was expected to come back up through the Network and new ways of implementing policy and service delivery could be worked out via the TCT and the TLT. Membership of the 'network' was divisionally and departmentally agnostic in that 'transformers' could come from anywhere across the organisation and have 'permission' to join in and thus the more rigid hierarchical and functionally separate elements of the Council services would be challenged to join-up better.

The critical findings from Stage Four can therefore be summarised as: the organisational modelling that evolved during the programme as a whole suggested that re-patterning of the interdependencies hierarchically and horizontally began to significantly break down the vertical management relationships and the siloed workings at Metville.

The conceptualisation of change emerged as paradigmatic and was accepted fairly widely but rather thinly across the organisation as the preferred direction of travel. The key positive evidence appears to have come from the introduction of 'Transform' as a form of language to discuss change at Metville (viz Model 1 to Model 2; transformational change; or paradigms).

Drawing again on the experience of each of the nine 'elements' within the programme, the feedback from the first element – the internal consultancy programme – particularly highlighted the observation that senior managers and directors did not appear to really 'get it' in relation to the wider Transform picture. Others fed back that the programme had enabled them to see the bigger picture in working on change initiatives across Metville. The bringing together of the TCT and the Change Team (mainly based on business process re-engineering) had exposed the gap between the language of change of the TCT and that of the Change Team members which suggested two different cultures in each of the two groups that were representative of thinking across the Council. The Change Team were comfortable with the language of reforming and restructuring but had not considered this in the same way the TCT saw more radical and fundamental change as paradigmatic.

In the Transform Lite programme, the exercise around envisaging change had identified important indicators of change (when it was really taking place) as: a shared language and a common message around a shared vision; stronger and clearer relationships with a greater sense of overall involvement and becoming recognised and valued as real stakeholders in

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change; a clearer focus on priorities; and more success in achieving desired outcomes. The discussion exercise on feelings and expectations had placed an emphasis on the 'walk' following the 'talk' – this was especially true in the 'and this means ...' part (see Fig 6.6). Staff made it clear that they would 'believe it' when they could 'see change happening'. Again, this group emphasised that the senior executives and managers needed to be clearly aligned with the whole change programme for it to establish credibility with the middle and senior management staff.

During the presentations made by the challenge groups from Cohort 8, the common message was what a radically different approach to change had been taken by the groups. Freed from the details of restructuring departments and with the ability to embrace 'new' ways of thinking, their suggested solutions for change were wide ranging and innovative. The language of 'Model 1' to 'Model 2' had enabled them to take their thinking past simple modifications to the existing ways of working. In the 'world' of 'Model 2', joining up working practices, focusing on service users' needs and looking for ways to co-produce changes were all possible in a completely different way from before. The energy and confidence captured in the individual 'story titles' gave a flavour of this.

In many ways the outcomes of the Chief Executive's challenges reflected the key problems to initiating truly radical reform programmes. The ideas contained in the Cohort 8 presentations which were expected to go forward, expand, and to really challenge Metville's 'Model 1' working methods, in fact fell away. The DfC firmly believed that the absorption of the Cohort 8 work into the TMN, via the challenge teams, was the right evolutionary organisational step. However, with the TLT uncertain of its role in sponsoring the teams and the wider economic and political environment causing uncertainty for the whole council, the momentum was lost quite quickly. The 'spirit' words that had been generated within the PLT and shared at the Network meetings and within the taught programmes, conveyed a sense of 'doing'; 'feeling'; 'thinking'; and 'shared values'. However, once the 'spirit' had escaped, it was difficult to put it 'back in the bottle' and if it was not picked up and responded to, there was clearly a tendency for it to dissipate and erode very quickly.

I observed that the TLT found it extremely difficult to relate the words and feelings around transform with the practical implications of each of the challenges. Thus the increasing disconnection between the work of the TCT and the TLT in the challenge groups through 2010

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appeared to reflect the loss of a coherent conceptualisation of the changes which were being sought for Metville. At the same time, the direction from the DfC and the ACE was unclear on what kind of response they were expecting back from the TLT members. During the summer and autumn of 2010 there was a failure to 'lead' the challenge groups towards a common conceptualisation of change and a failure to 'chase up' the lack of progress being made, both of which led to a further loss of momentum. This was especially felt in the TCT, whose members began to realise that the whole Transform initiative was slipping away. Their discussions between themselves on the causes and implications captured the sense of loss they were feeling by the final parts of Stage 4 when it was clear their 'offer' was not going to be taken up.

The PLT was very clear in its collective mind that the strength of the conceptual models would be key to achieving fundamental change. It believed that the framework of ideas was robust and well thought-through. It was based on both existing models (Kotter (1995), Burgelman (1983), Kuhn (1962)) as well as models developed from within the Transform programme (Figure of 8 and the 'Winding 8'). However, as late as May 2011, there was still evidence that both the DfC and ACE were unsure of the whole conceptualisation. It was not clear whether the joined-up nature of the nine elements within Stage Four were fully accepted by key stakeholders such as the members of the TLT and CMT. While the ACE's reference to the 'gang' in Transform suggested a sense of a network of staff who were up-for-change, and who would work together on the change programme, it was not clear how 'managing the gang' had truly been worked out. The actions of the PLT to constantly reference back their understanding of progress (and latterly the lack of progress) in the whole programme, using the Figure of 8 as a template, demonstrated that they had grasped the importance of having a clear conceptual framework from which to work.

In considering the research questions more generally, the main focus of the study has been on the evidence of the use of language to describe change. During Stage Four, the familiarity with 'transform words' grew. 'Transform' increasingly became a word which described all the activities in the programme, such as 'I am engaged with Transform this week'. Asked to provide a set of words which captured 'Transform Spirit' the PLT produced the 24 words which sought to describe the different elements of Transformational Working. The Trio members began making up words to self-identify their group (such as TCT and the related 'clunch'). The PLT used words to describe activity as being within the 'Transform Figure of 8' as a way to shorten the more complex descriptions of inter-related activities.

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The conceptual understanding of the change programme was also captured through the language of change used during the programme. It was clear that Metville moved from an 'incremental improvement' conceptual framework to a 'transformational one' during the course of the whole research programme. For a brief period 'Model 2' enjoyed a genuine currency within the language used at Metville to describe the radical nature of the changes being discussed.

Similarly, the reference to the Figure of 8 as a 'moving 8' or later as a 'winding 8' were all attempts to both describe the process of change as well as to identify stages in different activities from 'forcing' new ideas upwards (Burgelman 1983) to institutionalising new ways of working (Kotter 1995).

In summary, during Stage Four the language used to describe the Transform programme in Metville became more radical and paradigmatic within the conceptualisation of the models of change (e.g. the Figure of 8) and across the different contributing elements, the use of phrases like "Model 1' to 'Model 2'" to denote significant and fundamental change became commonplace. However, when considering the scale and nature of Metville's response to the challenges of organisational change across the council, the evidence suggests that use of language did not carry across into the breaking down of 'Model 1'; in fact it remained the model through which the programme of financial reductions was actually conceived.

I now turn to the research question which dealt with organisational obstinacy:

- 'Can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?'

During Stage Four the role played by the most senior members of the CMT appeared to be hesitant. Meetings between the PLT and the CMT representatives were irregular and inconsistent and often called at short notice after prompts from the PLT members. On some occasions there was a high reliance on the PLT to provide information or material in advance of meetings.

In searching for evidence of organisational obstinacy the study suggests that those who signed up to participate in the taught programmes (internal consultancy, Transform Lite, and Cohort 8)

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were open minded and generally in favour of the idea of change. The feedback both during the teaching days and in written feedback later, suggest that the opportunity to discuss the theory of organisational change and ideas for implementing change programmes were well received. However, a recurring theme for the participants was the degree to which they could rely on the senior and executive management to maintain the programme. This was usually captured in the phrase 'are they up-for-it?' The research suggests that the general 'buy-in' from the participants was high with excitement about new ideas, new opportunities to work in a different way, and forming new relationships across professional and departmental boundaries.

The evidence from the introduction of the Chief Executive's five challenges however, suggests that when presented with the need to 'step up a gear' (c.f. the first Transforming Metville Network meeting that suggested four gears of commitment) Metville found it extremely difficult to maintain the necessary momentum to bring about 'real' 'Model 2' working. The tasking of the different groups occurred at a meeting in May when preparation work had been carried out e.g. agreeing and naming the challenge sponsors and publicising the opportunity to join the different challenge groups. Two important aspects of the running of the challenges were the communications across Metville on progress and the leadership of the whole initiative. The PLT were engaged to run 'workshops' for the different challenge groups; to assist in facilitating clear work-plans; and to visualise the nature of the work that needed to be done by the group. Attendance was patchy. It was not clear from the May 'commissioning' meeting chaired by the DfC on how the expected outcomes were going to be managed. For much of the important period following the meeting in April of the SLT the Chief Executive was not often visible.

The Sponsors of the challenges (the TLT) were encouraged to get together to share progress and their learning together facilitated by the PLT. It was felt by the PLT members that while the TLT members asserted they were definitely 'up-for-it', gathering them together was difficult; progress in each of the groups was difficult to assess; and the feed-back to the DfC at his meetings in the autumn was weak. This suggested that actually the willingness of the TLT members to fully engage with the challenges as an opportunity to achieve radical change, was relatively thin.

The Transforming Metville Network (TMN) was seen as the successor to the Cohort 8 presentations and the issuing of the Chief Executive's challenges in taking radical ideas forward confirmed this. However, following the successful meeting in February 2010 that triggered the

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DfC to ramp up the response to the Cohort 8 programme, the Network's meeting in March was dominated by the presentations of the Cohort 8 groups, and no subsequent meetings of the Network took place after that. While the May and September meetings were notionally referred to as Network meetings they were not organised on the basis that the preceding meetings had been and in effect after the May 'commissioning' meeting, the Network ceased to exist.

The TCT were immediately enthused by the response of the CMT to the outcome of the April meeting of the Senior Leadership Team. They saw this as the first really powerful evidence that the conceptual framework for the Transform programme was being operationalised. However, with the rather sluggish take-off of the challenge groups and the increasing evidence of the drop-off in attendance and engagement in the groups following the meeting in May, alarm bells started to ring with the Team. The use of the One Council Action Plan as a possible means to monitor the 'fit' between the earlier aspirations of the TCT and the new 'challenges' programme was minimal. As the summer turned into the autumn of 2010, the lack of new names being proposed to maintain the TCT at its normal strength, undermined the Team. The publicising of the budget reductions that would be needed in the financial year 2010/11 and the subsequent years following also weighed heavily in the minds of all the participants in the Transform programme. In the discussions with the DfC in late 2010 and early 2011, the 'offer' made by the TCT to re-think the challenge programme and turn it much more into an action plan for reform became the 'last ditch' attempt to place the work of the Team into the wider reform programme. The fact that it was never taken up translated into a rejection in the minds of the team.

The uncertainty of the CMT in how to manage the 'five challenges' can be analysed as evidence of the difficulty of overcoming obstinacy. The challenge sponsors (the TLT) appeared reluctant to engage with the PLT members on discussing progress (or lack of it). There appeared to the PLT to be an inconsistent understanding of the framework of understanding by the TLT and therefore how they might best work individually and collectively to achieve the outcomes of the five groups. The CMT gradually lost the buy-in of the TCT members who increasingly became disheartened. During the autumn however, there was a critical period where reining back clearly appeared to be happening. The key elements in this appeared to be

- A nervousness in the executive team to follow-through with the Transform ideas
- A lack of buy-in by the senior leaders to push on with the challenges

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- A weak signal from the Chief Executive that this was a critical part of the whole change programme
- The gradual erosion of the momentum within the TCT of Trio members as they returned to their original posts
- The loss of staff who could see the gradual winding down of the programme as an entity and who then chose to leave Metville
- The lack of a clear narrative to carry the programme forward.

At the autumn meeting of the sponsors and members of the challenge teams to report back to the senior executives, a key remark by one of the senior leadership 'sponsors' was –'we have identified a 6<sup>th</sup> challenge – what does 'Model 2' really look like?' This question never appeared to receive a satisfactory answer from the DfC or the ACE.

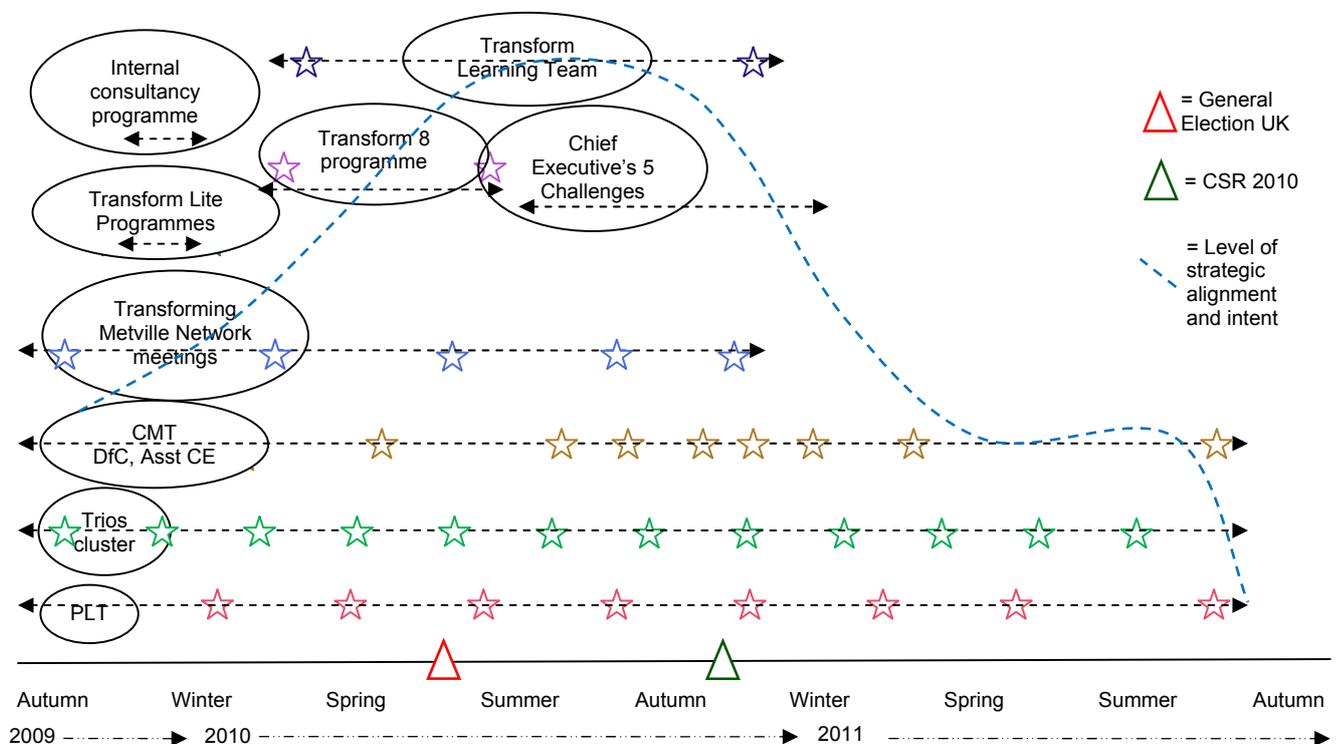
The PLT recognised the impact of the election result - an immediate new national budget was appearing and radical reductions in public spending were being signalled in the Comprehensive Spending Review. Nevertheless, there was optimism that with the momentum built up from the different elements in the whole programme, and with the robust nature of the frameworks, progress could still be made. However, as the loss of momentum and the dramatic drop in energy and engagement occurred, the researcher/ programme manager took the risky decision to introduce a proposal to seek to achieve budget reductions using 'Model 2' type ideas and put this to the DfC as a final 'pitch' to maintain the programme. This coincided with the 'offer' being presented by the TCT/ TMN members. With the cancellation of the meeting by the DfC which was to decide these issues and the effective cut-off of the programme, the organisation was effectively left without internal resources or the capability to introduce an alternative to the existing paradigm (Model 1) in which to react to the budget reductions necessary in 2011/12 and subsequent years. In effect, the hegemony of Model 1 reasserted itself.

Pushed to confirm the end of the programme, the DfC and the ACE agreed to engage with the PLT to review the position. A genuine attempt to re-engage with a programme of change with the neighbouring council's senior leadership team, led to a build up towards a meeting in September 2011. The language used in the preparation included a genuine investigation of the implications of looking for a 'Model 2' way of working. However, the almost immediate abandonment of this work by the neighbouring authority signalled the effective end of the whole initiative at Metville.

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Fig 6.11 overlays a 'line' across the 9 different elements and this seeks to trace the level of organisational buy-in to the whole programme (rising and then falling) across the period of Stage 4 (roughly Autumn 2009 to Autumn 2011) that mirrored the level of organisational obstinacy observed during the research.

In summary, the gradual application of a brake on the Transform programme could be observed from the 'zenith moment' in April 2010 when the presentations by the Transform participants, supported by input from the TCT members, provoked the Chief Executive to lay down some fundamental challenges to the whole council.



**Fig 6.10: Annotated Timeline through Stage Four**

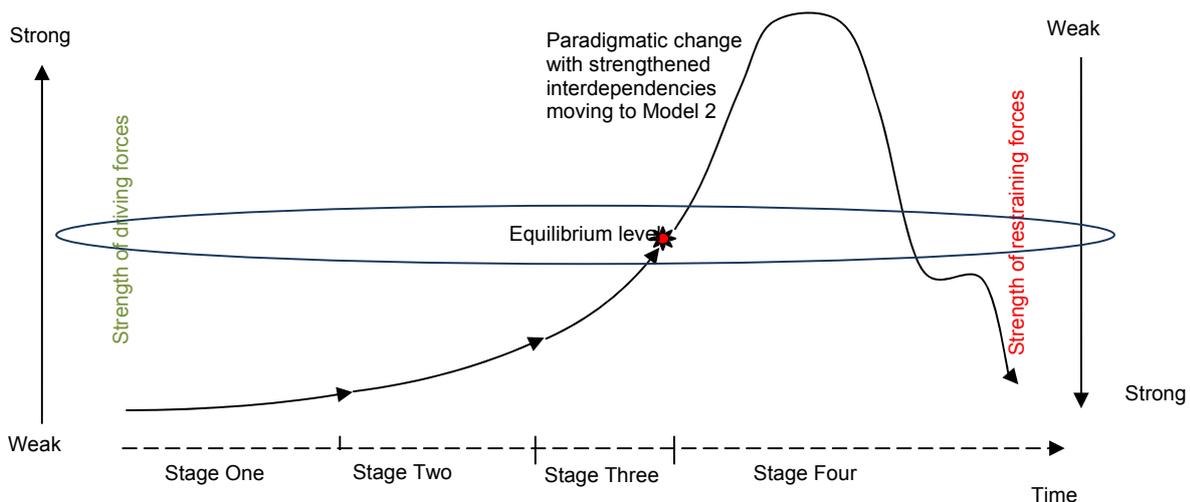
Late in 2010, senior executives were admitting that they had pushed the 'pause button' on the whole programme. The research evidence would suggest that a great many of the critical features of change programmes had been carefully put in place such that 'capacity' had been built in the institutional framework of Metville to enable a major, radical and transformational

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programme to be achieved. Nevertheless, in the face of the compelling need for significant change to take place (given the financial and political landscape faced by Metville under the new coalition based government) reluctance in the organisation to undertake radical 're-framing' of the interdependencies and to adopt a new transformational language of change was observed.

The evidence would suggest that it can be plausibly interpreted that a form of organisational obstinacy, anticipated in the literature review carried out at the beginning of the study, did occur during this programme. In adding the final stage to the cumulative diagram that has featured before each of the Stages (Fig 6.12), the research suggests that the programme experienced the first real effects of organisational obstinacy at the very point at which the greatest sense of the whole programme coming together was first generated – at the time when the biggest threats to the hegemony of the Model 1 working were being experienced and therefore the 'restraining' forces were building up the most against the driving forces of change that were seeking more paradigmatic solutions.

Fig 6.12 seeks to capture the initial lift off in the programme based on the platform that had been built up through Stages One to Three and the dramatic loss of momentum in the programme following the issuing of the 'challenges' seen in the downward plunge in the line during Stage Four.



**Fig 6.11: Stage Four: The Emergence of Organisational Obstinacy**

## Chapter Six: Stage Four

During the final stage (Stage Four) the full potential of the contributing elements was explored in an attempt to drive forward the necessary forces to achieve paradigmatic and transformational organisational change which would shift the equilibrium level and achieve the revolution at the 'point of crank' in the whole Figure of 8. The characteristics of the inter-dependencies that might have strengthened the organisational framework sufficiently began to emerge during the course of Stage Four in 'populating of the 8' and there is evidence that the conceptualisation of change had begun to be perceived as fully paradigmatic.

I now turn to discuss the findings and analysis in more detail and interpret the possible explanation for the occurrence of organisational obstinacy observed in the study.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I bring together my interpretation of both the main results and my analyses. I provide a coherent explanation of the events that took place during the case study research period in Metville. I suggest that the phenomenon of organisational obstinacy can be observed; I offer a definition; and I suggest an over-arching explanation of how it might operate. I reflect on a number of reasons why I believe Metville was affected by organisational obstinacy during their change programme initiative. I discuss a number of ways that organisational obstinacy might be better dealt with during major change programmes. I then discuss the research methodology, its advantages and its disadvantages. I then conclude with some reflections on the meaning and value of the main findings.

### **7.2 THE UNDERLYING THEORY OF CHANGE**

#### **7.2.1 The Research Questions**

I first return to my original questions in the light of the results that have been obtained during the research:

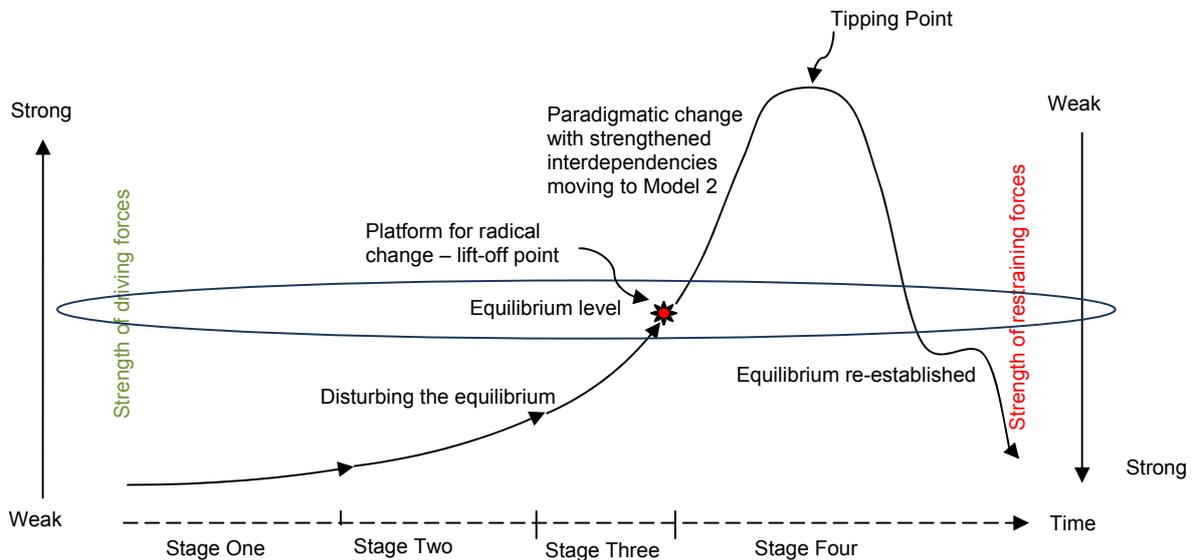
- ‘Using a process of embedded co-generative inquiry, can organisational obstinacy be observed in organisations undertaking major change?’
- ‘Are the characteristics of the forces that most drive paradigm change in organisations:
  - The strength of the inter-dependencies in the organisational framework?
  - The degree to which the conceptual understanding of the need to change is shared?’

The theory of change derived from the literature review suggested that organisational capacity is strengthened through a number of driving forces (Lewin 1947) – these comprise managers’ and directors’ personal and individual ability to ‘see’ their roles and positions in the organisation in a wider context and to recognise the inter-dependencies they share (Lewin 1947); the encouragement of a flow of new ideas for change and an organisational environment that enables staff to experiment with those ideas (Healey 2013; Seshadri and Shapira 2003;

Burgelman 1983); and finally the shared recognition that the scale and nature of change being attempted is paradigmatic (Kuhn 1962) and transformational (Bhaskar 1998, Kotter 1995).

### 7.2.2 Organisational Obstinacy

I now turn to the research question concerning obstinacy – could it be observed in Metville? There was clear evidence that coming up to the period between February and April 2010 all the indicators of change appeared to be ‘flashing green’. The slow and methodical build-up of the Metville change programme had been premised on a clear action research epistemology that included identification and nurturing of ‘contributing elements’ that would strengthen the organisational framework. A critical mass had apparently been achieved; a framework of understanding had been developed and there was a clear conceptualisation of change and how it might be delivered. On top of all of this, the Chief Executive had just signalled a very clear message to the whole organisation, including the whole team of senior managers (SLT), of where she felt the most serious organisational challenges lay. Nevertheless, in the period immediately following this, the driving forces appeared to weaken quite rapidly and the programme faltered. The meeting of the SLT in April 2010 might be represented as the ‘tipping point’ in the whole programme (See Fig 7.1) after which the programme ‘fell away’ as the former equilibrium between the driving and restraining forces was re-established



**Fig 7.1: Organisational Obstinacy revealed**

The weakening in the driving forces and strengthening in the restraining forces appeared to contribute to the rapid faltering in the whole change programme yet no one contributing factor could be isolated out – hence the notion that this is an organisation-wide phenomenon. In addition, the obstinacy was not consistent in the contributing elements; each one was partially resistant and partly transformative at the same time, suggesting it was not as simple as two ‘camps’ of ‘for and against’ the change programme. I discuss this point in more detail below (see Table 7.1)

### **7.2.3 Undisturbed equilibrium**

The application of a force-field analysis (Lewin 1947) to Metville can explain the appearance of the organisational equilibrium being disturbed and pushed upwards by the driving forces during Stage 3 and early in Stage 4 (Fig 7.1), whereas in fact this was only a temporary position and during the rest of Stage 4 the driving forces retreated back leaving the equilibrium, in the end, undisturbed. The idea of autopoiesis resonates here (Goldstein 1988) in which the overall composition of the organisation did not change and allowed Metville to ‘settle back’ into its original equilibrium state. Kuhn (1962), in seeking to explain the nature of pre-revolutionary institutional ‘crisis’, observed a similar phenomenon that took the form of an inappropriate and disproportional ‘clinging on’ to the existing paradigm in the face of a compelling argument for change (see Fig 2.2). This clinging on took place, despite (with the benefit of hindsight) the conceptual understanding being completely changed in the post-crisis era (‘after Copernicus, everything looked different’). Kuhn (1962) was perhaps aware of the phenomenon of organisational obstinacy but was not at that time able to give a name to it and ‘left the question hanging’.

As indicated in the literature review, the notion that obstinacy might be seen as both positive and negative is born out in my results. In all the contributing elements, the attitude to change was nuanced. Again this is discussed later, see Table 7.1 below. Buchanan et al (2005) argue that context is important, and Ansoff (1997) and Fitzgerald et al (2002) similarly suggest that context ‘is an actor’ in the change process. My findings suggest that, more importantly, the specific reactions to contextual influences will affect whether ideas and behaviour become ‘positively charged’ or ‘negatively charged’ and these can, in turn, affect whether in the end they predominately contribute to driving forces or restraining forces during a change process.

My finding from the above analysis is that for my first research question an answer might plausibly be that organisational obstinacy can be observed in organisations such as Metville.

I now turn to the second research question concerning the characteristics of forces that drive paradigmatic change.

### **7.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF FORCES THAT DRIVE PARADIGMATIC CHANGE**

During the research, three important characteristics of driving forces emerged in Metville. In my results chapter I identify the first as 'critical mass'. A range of elements had been built up (See Fig 6.9 above) during the course of the first three stages which were carried forward into Stage Four. The programme had sought to strengthen the interdependencies between these elements by joining them together to form a 'critical mass' (by 'populating the 8'). The second characteristic was the notion of 'flow' which grew out of the need to take ideas forward and around the organisation (see Figs 6.2 and 6.3) where a combination of 'learning loops' and the 'flow of ideas' were combined together to suggest a 'Winding 8' with points of crank at both top and bottom. The third characteristic was the degree to which the organisation as a whole shared an understanding of the scale and nature of the change being attempted during the programme as being paradigmatic ('Model 1' to 'Model 2').

By examining these characteristics, I now suggest an overarching explanation for how organisational obstinacy might operate. Firstly, it appears to weaken the interdependencies between elements that might contribute to change; secondly, it appears to impede the flow around the organisational learning loops of change ideas and their application; and finally it appears to 're-normalise' change to merely incremental gains and improvements around the existing operational model of the organisation rather than the pursuit of a new paradigm. I now discuss these in more detail.

#### **7.3.1 Weakening the interdependencies**

In the case of Metville Council, at the beginning of the Action Research programme the initial area of concern surrounded building capacity. This was partly in response to the external pressures brought on by the assessment of 'weak' capacity in the Audit Commission's CPA. There were also internal pressures to improve the Council's effectiveness through achieving greater efficiencies and reducing costs. Over time, the organisation's response to pressures for

change both internally and externally was to develop a new understanding of itself based on a 'framework of connected interdependencies' where each element contained a form of commitment to finding 'Model 2' ways of working – a form of 'critical mass'.

### **7.3.2 Critical mass**

In the transition between Stage Three and Stage Four of the Action Research programme, there was a building up of this framework of connected interdependencies. Lewin's group dynamics theory (1947) identifies two types of interdependencies – 'fate' and 'task' – where a shared fate (such as the future of local government) and a shared task (reforming the strategy and processes of the council) combine to strengthen the interdependencies of those seeking to progress the Transform agenda at Metville. The taught Cohorts (6 & 7) focused on critical corporate issues that needed investigation and they were expected to report back to senior managers on their findings. There was involvement by the Trio Cluster Team. 'Sponsors' were selected and appointed to support the cohorts and to work alongside the Trio Cluster Team. The Transforming Metville Network had been introduced and developed to enable individuals to carry on their involvement in Transform. A 'space' was thereby created, which was sanctioned by the Corporate Management Team (and particularly the Director for Change), in which 'interdependencies could be fostered' (both fate and task) and a 'critical mass' built.

### **7.3.3 'Populating the 8'**

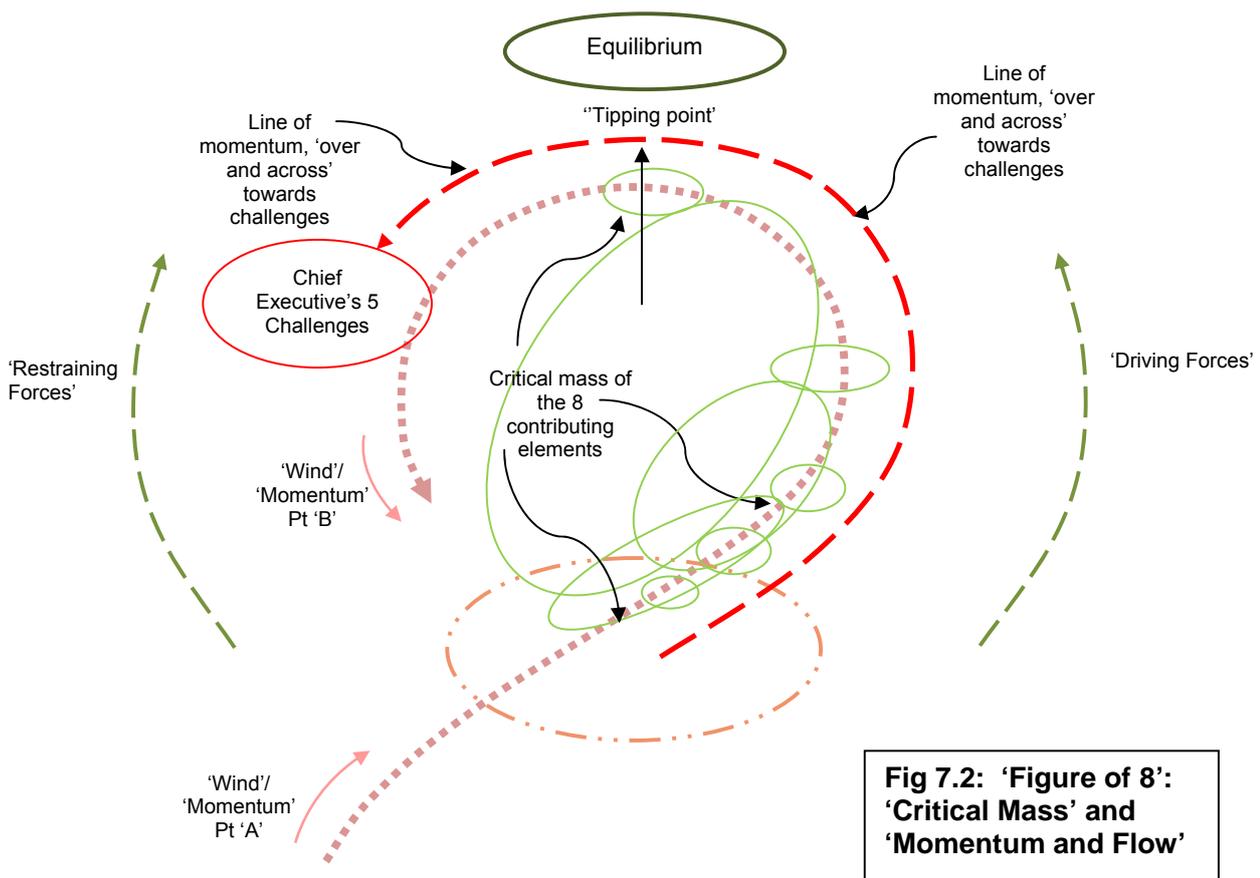
The idea of 'populating the 8' recognises Rashman's (2009) 'internal norms, structures, culture and leadership' by introducing innovatory roles, responsibilities and forms of accountancy to the organisation using the patterning framework of 'Transforming Metville' in such a way as to strengthen and expand the capacity of the organisation to achieve productive outcomes.

The evidence of Stages One to Three in Metville demonstrates the development of a 'framework' that contained the key 'characteristics of the forces that drive change'. However, the radical piece of thinking was that the linkages between the different elements in the matrix were based on organisational interdependencies and not structural relationships. Thus by the time Stage Four was beginning, the evidence from the Action Research suggested that a network of '8 contributing elements' had been established which comprised the emergence of 'places' (and in some cases they were 'virtual places') where transformational working and thinking was going on. These 'places' came to be seen as the key 'contributing elements' in the

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

Transform matrix. They are captured in the Figure 7.2 below and together formed the 'critical mass' within the framework of a 'winding 8'.

Over the course of the four Stages a considerable critical mass had been assembled. During Stage One approximately 150 managers came through the whole programme and by the end of Stage Four this had grown to approximately 240. Each one had developed a broad understanding of the purposes and benefits of appraisal and being exposed to the challenges of trying to effect change within the organisation. They went on to form the basis of the Transforming Metville Network. Similarly, the later 'Transform Lite' programmes were attempts to strengthen the 'guiding coalition' (Kotter 1995) by bringing new participants into the Transform Network more quickly. Scheduled meetings of the Transforming Metville Network had built up during Stage Two, Three and Four.



## Chapter Seven: Discussion

During Stage Four building critical mass became explicit. Cohort 8 overtly sought to rebalance the programme away from a taught programme to an action-learning one with specific chosen corporate 'challenges' to be worked on during the programme. These were specifically supported by members of the Trios Cluster Team and sponsors were appointed by the Director for Change to assist the teams in bringing forward their proposals (one of which was 'sponsored' by the Director for Change himself).

Crucial meetings of the Transforming Metville Network took place in both February and March 2010. The Programme Liaison Team had been particularly busy providing support across all these activities, including active teaching and learning support to the Cohort 8, Transform Lite, and the internal consultancy programmes. Consultancy support to the corporate executives and developing the academic/ practitioner relationship around the whole programme was also entering an exciting stage. A real sense of momentum around the passage of thinking up new ideas for how the council might work in the future was also progressing.

The establishment of the critical mass of contributing elements through the delivery of the first three action research iterations had, cumulatively, put the senior executives in a position where they could oversee a substantial move forward - in the Action Research a 'platform for a significant uplift' (See Fig 7.1) had been reached. The conceptualisation of radical change had been discussed across all parts of the contributing elements (see above) and clear objectives agreed. Populating the Figure of 8 in the first part of Stage Four, therefore, had brought a critical mass to the programme and comprised a significant driving force for change across Metville and a spirit of 'energy unleashing leadership' (Kotter 1995) to the whole programme.

### **7.3.4 A Critical Change**

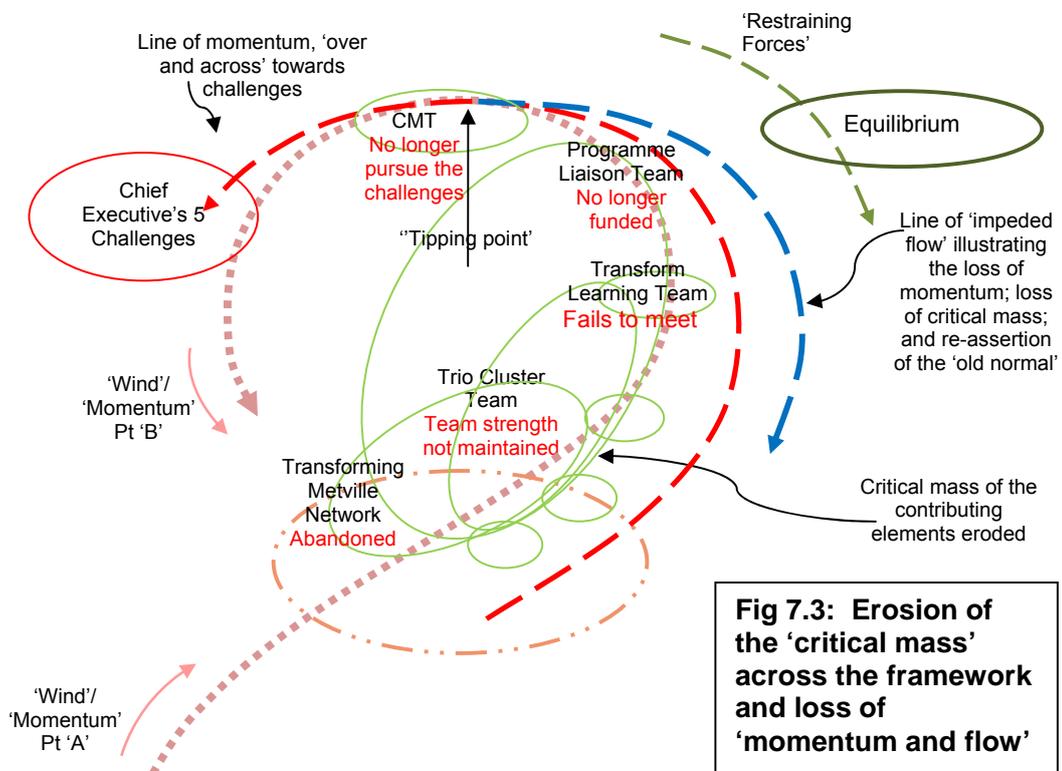
However, an unexpected set of events took place between February and April 2010. The scheduled meeting of the Transforming Metville Network took place in mid February; the Director for Change attended and was clearly impressed. He appeared to appreciate the power of a group of people speaking a common language of change to each other referencing 'Model 2' and displaying a 'transformational spirit'. As a result he chose to 'crank' the plan for the reporting back of Cohort 8 to the Transforming Metville Network at its March meeting. The preparation for the March meeting was therefore altered and the format became more formal and heightened in status. The energy and enthusiasm in the room for the report back itself was exceptional. This became the first hard evidence that the Transform agenda was becoming

'mainstreamed' into the practices of Metville under the leadership of one of the most senior executives in the whole Council. The critical mass was palpable.

The success of the presentation and the decision to 're-run' the presentation in April to the Senior Leadership Team led to a major finding. This was that once the 'critical mass' of connected interdependencies had been achieved there was an exponential lift off in activity in Transform. In summary, in April 2010, there was a clear understanding of the framework of understanding by Metville of itself, the language of Model 1 to 2, 'transformation', and personal engagement were all apparently embedded; and the 8 contributing elements were identified and established (and recognised and legitimised). However, this energy soon dissipated.

### 7.3.5 Erosion of the critical mass

The previous chapter documents the rapid reversals in Stage Four of activity across the whole programme. In particular, the cohesion across the different contributing elements began to erode. Figure 7.3 (below) seeks to explain the process of the loss of critical mass that had been tangible in March and April yet by the late autumn of 2010 was barely evident.



## Chapter Seven: Discussion

The research in Chapter Six captures how quickly what had appeared as robust and solid became fragile and unsustainable. The cumulative effects of the TLT not pursuing the CE's 5 challenges and only meeting infrequently; the TCT's team strength not being maintained; the PLT funding not being renewed; the TMN being effectively abandoned and the CMT no longer pursuing the work on the challenges in a corporate way were all highly significant. It suggests the losses were experienced both within the different elements as well as across the whole programme. In the later discussion in this chapter, I suggest that even within each element there was no consistency in the impact of these losses (see Table 7.1 below).

### **7.3.6 Impeding the flow**

In the same way that 'critical mass' had been built up within Metville, a sense of momentum had also become established. The research extended the internal venturing ideas of Burgelman (1983) illustrated in Figure 5.12, and Goleman's (1996) recognition of the importance of feedback loops and organisational learning, by using the concept of 'flow' (Seshadri and Shapira 2003, Healey 2013).

A vital part of the thinking around momentum and flow was developed during Stage Four in seeking to model a sense of ideas and changes to practice becoming a 'winding figure of 8' with cranks at top and bottom (See Fig 6.3). In part some of this thinking had come as a reaction to the work of the 'Change Team'. This team had been brought together from a number of different specialisms – some of whose origins were in ICT and some in the work of business process re-engineering. The 'handbook' on how new projects should be introduced into Metville, aimed at all staff, introduced the notion of 'gateways' that indicated points along the 'pathway' that projects needed to follow to be successfully 'managed'. These gateways enabled the team to offer advice on the 'business case' being presented and offer possibilities to 're-engineer' processes and functions. The introduction of the TCT into the council provided an alternative function based on the notion of 'challenge'. Where the Change Team were concentrating on 'how' questions, the TCT concentrated on 'why' questions. This was revealed particularly during the short internal consultancy course where the distinction between transformational and paradigmatic thinking ('Model 2') which had been developing within the TCT came up against the leaner and more efficient re-processing thinking of the Change Team ('Model 1') – where morphogenesis and morphostasis (Archer 1998) was played out.

### **7.3.7 The new model of flow**

The Trio Cluster Team and the Programme Liaison Team both began discussing a new model for the passageway of good ideas and this developed eventually into the 'Winding 8' model in the 'Framework of Ideas' for Stages Three and Four. This contrasted particularly with the idea of 'gateways' and project management. In the Transform model the ideas were encouraged to 'flow' through a 'learning zone' building momentum upwards in an attempt to disturb the organisational equilibrium by 'winding the crank' round the top of the 'Eight' past the 'tipping point' to find a new equilibrium position.

The 'top part' of the 'winding 8' model, detailed in Fig 7.2 above, outlines a 'line of flowing ideas' that are 'championed' (Burgelman, 1983) by the senior directors. This idea of 'flow' comprised the second major characteristic of driving forces of change which when flowing strongly would offer a momentum to overcome the tipping point at the 'top of the crank'.

### **7.3.8 The signal of the Chief Executive**

Into this mix, the Chief Executive then added an important component – a signal. This signal appeared to be saying – 'we have come this far, and that is great, but we need to really push on at this point'. She then issued the five 'chief executive's challenges'. There appeared to be two intentions here; the first was to affirm the work of producing challenging ideas for change; but the second was a signal to the whole programme that she intended to 'push' Metville over the 'crank' at the top of the Figure of 8 (See Figure 7.2 above) and past the 'tipping point'. The issuing of the five 'challenges' appeared to indicate that in Metville, the organisation would 'conceptualise significant and fundamental change in considering the scale and nature of its response to the future' in the form of genuinely deep and searching challenges about everything it did. The positive reports from the Head of OD in his email to the Transforming Metville Network reflected the optimism felt at that time across those who were involved in the contributing elements to 'transforming Metville'.

Initially the 'signal' was interpreted to be the challenge to find ways of turning the good ideas emerging from all the work in Cohort 8 into action plans. The work done in the Transforming Metville Network had established a pathway for radical 'Model 2' ideas for change to be passed between and across the connected interdependencies; the Council had developed a framework for understanding itself that visualised this interconnectedness as a model (see Fig 7.2). This pathway looped from operational practice through to senior executives via a key 'learning zone' in the heart of the organisation and back down again to points of implementation. The evidence

from this period suggested that the CMT believed that all that would now be needed was to 'plug the model in'. In the same way, it was expected that one of the key characteristics of forces that drove change would be evidence coming forward of more opportunities for new ideas to flow around the organisation and be tried out on the ground.

### **7.3.9 Delivering the crank**

The language of change had left no doubt that the Metville programme of transformation was not expected to be simply incremental and operational but radical and evolutionary. The recognised success of Cohort 8's reporting back on their challenges and the setting up of the Chief Executive's five challenges with designated 'champions' in the form of challenge sponsors in the Transform Learning Team were fully expected to 'deliver the crank' that would be needed to take Metville forward. The meetings between the PLT and the CMT pointed to a clear ambition to take radical change forward. By emphasising the stronger bonds of organisational interdependencies which had evolved through 'populating the 8', the momentum that appeared to have emerged was felt to be sufficient to challenge the traditional organisational structure of Metville.

### **7.3.10 Impeding the flow**

However, Figure 7.3 above illustrates the notion that despite the apparent strength of the interconnectivities and the sense of a strong 'flow' of ideas and the infrastructure in which to progress these ideas (c.f. Kotter 1995, Step 6 – quick wins), following the April meeting of the SLT and the issuing of the CE's five challenges, the flow and momentum became impeded. The flow appeared to be going in the opposite direction (Fig 7.3) away from the CE's five challenges and the further 'Point B' and ebbing away from the tipping point and down towards 'Point A' again.

Despite the attempts to 'rescue' the programme later on in 2010, the effect of organisational obstinacy appeared to be too powerful. The meetings between the DfC and the Trios; the meetings between the PLT and the DfC and the ACE; and support to the TLT by the PLT all failed to re-engage the participants within the contributing elements. The apparent strength of the interdependent linkages appeared to be overestimated and they could not sustain themselves, this resulted in the sense of 'flow' and 'momentum' being seriously impeded.

I now turn to the reasons why Metville might have been particularly affected by a phenomenon such as organisational obstinacy.

## **7.4 NORMALISING CHANGE AROUND THE EXISTING MODEL**

### **7.4.1 Transform Spirit**

When, in February 2010, the Director for Change (DfC) 'noticed' the 'spirit of Transform' (the 24 'spirit words') at the TMN meeting and was encouraged to make further progress by changing the reporting back arrangements for Cohort 8, he was recognising the commonality of those staff with his wider corporate agenda. When the Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) referred to 'my gang', he was recognising those who shared his ambitions for change. An important finding in my research was Metville's recognition that the combined connected interdependencies in 'populating the 8' led to each contributing element feeling strengthened by knowing that the other elements shared the same change agenda. This was particularly important at the beginning of Stage Four in seeking to find a 'new normal'.

The DfC had commented that where he encountered such 'spirit' he felt encouraged to go on with the experiment and the twenty-four spirit words had helped him define its contents. Capturing this spirit however, could be illusory – it seemed to appear and be tangible, but it could still be lost and disappear quite quickly. It might be that this spirit is actually fragile and can easily be dissipated. Obstinacy might be a reflection in part of the fragility of emotional buy-in to whole change projects where the negative and positive elements are most finely balanced.

In the autumn of 2009, the eight 'contributing elements' had all become clearly visible to each other, for example, the Trios Cluster Team (TCT) and the Change Team had jointly attended the internal consultancy course and cross-referred their understanding of their respective places in the framework. A similar struggle had ensued in the early work of the Trios based around the corporate initiative in Metville called 'SPOTlights'. The fundamental issue appeared to be whether SPOTlights was simply concerned to achieve an improvement in the current way of working (Model 1) or whether the work of Trios was more focused on seeking radically different ways of both thinking about and delivering future services (Model 2). The Trio members resisted being seen as the 'fixers' for the SPOTlight teams. They wanted to look more powerfully at radical change and perceived their role as more paradigmatic.

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

It was during Stage Three that a significant development took place – the way Metville ‘framed its understanding of itself’ began to change quite markedly. The ‘Transform’ identity (or ‘brand’) began to develop. The PLT encouraged this development because it began to see that the ‘framing of the understanding of Metville’ within the Council was beginning to schism into those kinds of activities which generally maintained the current organisational culture (Model 1), and those kinds of activities which echoed Kuhn’s (1962) notion of paradigmatic change prompting a radically different way of seeing Metville (Model 2) which also chimed with Bhaskar’s (1998) emergence theories in his transformational model of social action. The ‘new normal’ needed to be associated with the Transform ‘brand’.

### 7.4.2 Visualising a new future

The culmination of all the build up in ‘populating the model’ led to the fundamental challenges set by the Chief Executive to investigate key propositions involving communication, information, collaboration, and technology. From this, a way was being sought to address, in an intelligent way, how the Council might begin to visualise itself in the future. However, by the autumn, effectively very little progress had been made and the senior executives were no longer chasing the sponsoring directors for answers. Quite quickly all the work was dropped. Surprisingly, even by the early autumn, it was clear that it was very unlikely the programme could be ‘rescued’. The senior directors had met once in July and once in November in 2010. The outcomes from both meetings were felt by the PLT to be low in energy and support and they concluded that the ‘buy-in’ from them was indeed luke-warm. The senior departmental directors appeared to feel more comfortable dealing with change through traditional cuts (such as ‘a percentage per department’) rather than becoming more strategically focused on the vision of Metville in the future (‘Model 2’). The ‘old normal’ was being reasserted. The key finding, therefore, is that a failure to recognise the power and effect of organisational obstinacy which emerges ‘as a direct consequence’ of initiating change programmes, results in insufficient strength and momentum being introduced at crucial points of restraint.

The Chief Executive’s five challenges had been directed at fundamental change – the expectation was clearly that further change would occur (the challenges lay ‘over the crank’ see Fig 7.3). However, within a short period of time – probably less than four months (June to August 2010) – the programme had lost momentum and did not recover. Fig 7.3 attempts to capture this by repositioning the ‘equilibrium’ down the ‘obstinacy curve’ away from the ‘tipping point’.

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

The notion that ‘all staff had been given the necessary permission to engage in transformational change’ by the Chief Executive (see the Head of OD’s email, April 2010), would clearly only come into effect if senior departmental managers and directors gave effect to such permission. It was clear from the lack of engagement from the sponsors, and the gradual shedding of the Trio Cluster Team members, that this notional permission did not exist in the reality of the day-to-day management of the Council. Staff sensed from an early stage (see Cohort 1 -3) that one problem would be achieving a genuine buy-in from the senior management. It is a measure of obstinacy’s power that it took from 2004 to 2010 to build up all the eight ‘contributing elements’ that led to the introduction of the 9<sup>th</sup> element (the CE’s five challenges) – almost 6 years; yet it took less than 6 months to lose all the effective infrastructure of the Transform programme, along with the momentum and sense of brand.

### 7.4.3 Ambivalence

In Table 7.1 below, I analyse in more detail the often nuanced, balanced and sometimes contradictory positions of the apparent views of those in the different contributing elements within the whole change process at Metville. In Table 7.1 (below) I list the ‘Attitude to change’ that appeared to prevail within each element and in the ‘Comment’ column I briefly capture the views of the contributors and how they saw the whole situation.

**Table 7.1 Obstinacy Across All Contributing Elements**

Contributing Element	Attitude to change	Comment
Corporate Mngt Team (CMT)	Positive/ some underlying uncertainty	Positive but unclear in how all the Transform programme’s theory and practice joined together. Highly supportive of achieving transformational change but were also latterly managing a major cuts exercise through the normal management processes (Model 1).
Transform Learning Team (TLT)	Neutral/ Negative	Did not engage strongly with the Sponsorship roles in a robust way (although they didn’t boycott them). From the time of the General Election they were anticipating the impact of major financial reductions on service delivery and then on implementing cuts.
Trios Cluster Team (TCT)	V Positive/ ‘Spirit’ vulnerable to	Strongly positive; Trios had been formed to challenge the Council to think differently and be prepared to

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

	changes/ interpretation	challenge existing practices. However, lost heart (spirit) very quickly and were perhaps ambivalent in whether executives and directors 'really did mean it'.
Transforming Metville Network (TMN)	Positive/ formal status lost after Feb 2010	Positive – especially at February meeting in 2010. Network meetings were well attended especially the February and March meetings. Clear enthusiasm at the March presentation to become more involved. After the February 2010 meeting, however, were effectively written out of the official picture and absorbed into the '5 Challenges'.
Cohort 8	Very Positive/ rather left detached after the April 2010 second presentation	Worked extremely hard on the Learning Challenges, presentations were prepared fully and members spoke at both the March and April meetings with authority and composure. However, the infrastructure weakened post-April 2010 with just the 5 Challenge groupings as a way to stay involved.
Transform Lite	Positive/ useful quick introduction but no obvious after-process.	Feedback was positive and indications that despite the short programme the key understanding of what the Transform programme was trying to achieve was understood/ opportunity to join and become involved attractive. Willingness shown to join in Transform. However, as with the TMN, after the February meeting there was no wider 'network' on offer to feel part of.
Internal Consultancy programme	Strong/ revealed split between Model 1 and Model 2 thinking in Council about change.	Support from the Trio members,( less so the Change Team members). Successfully brought two elements of the change infrastructure together to discuss adopting a common language around change and achieving it. However, the Asst Director for the Change Team was not entirely reconciled to the alternative 'Transform' ways of working and stuck with Business Process Re-engineering.
Programme Liaison Team (PLT)	Very Positive/ recognised the difficult areas and tried to work on them – not always successful.	Very high positive: PLT key supporters and enablers in the reflection on new ideas and the adoption of new ways of working. Acted as enablers and linked into all the other contributing elements activities. Found it difficult to persuade the TLT to fully engage in developing a workable method for 'Model 2'. No formal position or status in the council; therefore constrained in influencing other contributing elements who formed part of the official structures within Metville

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

Chief Executive's 5 Challenges	Positive/ but very much at the 'sharp end' of internal change	Clear 'permission' for all staff to engage – powerful signal from the most senior officer in Metville of the direction of travel for the council. But needed to be actively driven by CMT and senior departmental directors (especially TLT) – no consistent 'signal' to the organisation was maintained. Did not appear to form a strong mechanism of accountability across the whole organisation. Lost its legitimising power.
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Looking across all the contributing elements together, senior departmental managers and directors (TLT) were particularly important. Their role in the Transform process was to sponsor innovatory ideas; encourage the Trios Cluster Team (TCT) members and the learning challenge groups of Cohort 8 to continue in their work; and to liaise with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) members such as the Director for Change and the Assistant Chief Executive. In Burgelman's (1983) model they comprised the elements that would 'organisationally champion' change ideas (see Fig 2.1). The TLT had a potentially important role at the top of the 'Winding 8' model since they could give ideas the final propulsion to pass the 'tipping point'. It was also clear from the feedback from the early Cohorts that there was anxiety in the middle managers about the level of 'buy-in' that their senior line managers were prepared to give to their learning projects and opportunities. The obstinacy seemed to occur when the strategic alignment across the whole organisation lost its strength. The research evidence suggests that for the TLT members, their 'life space' was firmly rooted in the current paradigm and to achieve a 'social locomotion' to a new space would prove extremely difficult (Lewin 1939). Similarly, overcoming the 'big assumption' (Kegan and Lahey 2009) would be hard when the status quo 'felt the better option'.

In each of the contributing elements positive attitudes towards change were counterbalanced by anxiety or uncertainty. These latter attitudes should be contrasted with the notion of 'resistance'. For example in the internal consultancy sessions, evidence of the wider difficulty within Metville generally became clear – the drive for more efficiency, effectiveness and economy (Model 1 ambitions) were the absolute underpin for the Council's policy on 'Think Efficiency', and suggested better project management skills. Yet Transform (Model 2) wished to pursue totally different propositions around new service delivery ideas and supported the 'Winding 8' model of radical evolution.

## 7.5 A POSSIBLE DEFINITION

My discussion so far suggests that organisational obstinacy can be observed (Fig 7.1) through a process of 'tracking' the inter-relationships between driving and restraining forces and their impact on an organisation's equilibrium. The evidence of the research suggests that the phenomenon of organisational obstinacy can be observed, and in the case of Metville was revealed in some detail, it is therefore possible to offer a definition:

***“Organisational obstinacy comprises the balance of the forces within an organisational field that leaves the equilibrium unchanged, even when there are compelling arguments for radical change to be enacted”.***

## 7.6 SUMMARY

The discussion on my results and analysis has suggested that a coherent explanation of the events that took place in Metville during the Action Research programme can be captured in a model. Figures 7.2 and 7.3 describe the 'top of the eight' in the form of an 'arena' (Dawson 1996) in which three analytical threads emerge:

The first is that critical mass can be assembled across a number of contributing elements that position people within a 'field' (Lewin 1939) which enables them to combine into a form of network (Goleman 1995) in which engagement within a corporate change programme is possible without restructuring the organisational form because the network is held together through interdependencies. However, such networks are actually vulnerable and the impact of restraining forces can quickly collapse them if the directions of change shift.

The second is that the notion of 'flow' (Seshadri and Shapira 2003) is important in offering those with new ideas for change an opportunity to come forward and participate in a change programme. The visualisation of a 'line' which describes vertical and horizontal flow moving towards new organisational processes (new methods) and a new functionality (new direction), can assist in strategically aligning change programmes towards radical goals (e.g. 'Model 2' - Kuhn 1962, Kotter 1995, Bhaskar 1998). However, it is essential in enabling ideas to progress that change champions (Burgelman 1983) play a positive role in leading the organisation forward.

Thirdly, 'normalising' change across an organisation requires the protection of the emergent contributing elements occupying those new spaces and places by building up the overarching narrative (or 'brand') that asserts the 'new normal'. The 'pull' that exists within organisational obstinacy to 'revert' to the 'old normal' is usually 'waiting in the shadows' to re-emerge and re-assert itself through those who are the least comfortable with the 'new order'.

The evidence of my research in Metville suggests that the restraining forces that exerted themselves during the latter part of the research period were simply too strong and resulted in the loss of critical mass, the impedance of flow, and the reassertion of the 'old normal'.

This may go some way to explain the 'surprising fact' of the 70% failure rate in organisational change programmes and suggest that 'organisational obstinacy' is a 'matter of course explanation' (Peirce) for such failures.

### **7.7 POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS**

Chapter Three outlined the main context within which the research was carried out in Metville. The General Election in May 2010 resulted in a new coalition government being formed. With no clear outcome there was no one manifesto to which the new government was aligned. However, a clear financial and economic agenda was broadly agreed which resulted in rapidly reducing the level of funding to local government. The new Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities was signalling a complete overhaul of the system of inspection and regulation which culminated in the abolition of some key agencies – one of these was the Audit Commission (Cabinet Office 2010). These two factors together – an imperative to reduce budgets with no clear guidance and target setting provided, placed Metville in an extremely difficult position. Coping with the level of proposed budget reductions faced by the Council in 2010/11, any institution the size of a local authority would probably have had no choice but to plan its reductions on the basis of the current establishment – and this inevitably meant that the 'Model 1' ('old normal') did reassert itself as the basis for short and medium term organisational planning.

It is also plausible to argue that a real choice, nevertheless, was offered to Metville in this period of crisis decision-taking. Given the efforts to build an alternative strategy for change

(‘Transforming Metville’) the council was uniquely positioned to drive forward further and combine budget reductions with service redesign and community involvement to bring forward radical solutions for new ways of working. Organisational obstinacy however, would probably have exerted itself with even more force.

## **7.8 RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY**

I now turn to discuss the research methodology that was chosen for this study. In Chapter Four I argued that there would be a number of key advantages to adopting a multi-methodological process (Johnson and Duberley 2000, Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). A longitudinal case-study approach (Pettigrew 1990, Easterby-Smith 1991, Dunmoyer 2000, Lincoln and Guba 2000, Buchanan et al. 2005) combined with an ethnographic (Reeves-Sanday 1979, Humphreys et al 2003) Action Research (Checkland and Holwell 1998, Checkland 2000) programme would provide a means to investigate organisational capacity. The two research questions focused on organisational frameworks, conceptual understandings of change and organisational obstinacy. I felt that only a multi-methodological approach would be adequate.

### **7.8.1 A multi-dimensional methodological approach**

I now discuss the advantages of adopting a multi-methodological approach. Firstly, the Action Research approach at Metville allowed me to conduct a thorough ‘four iteration’ study that stretched out over almost seven years. The opportunity to state clearly the framework of ideas (F), the methods (M) and the area of concern (A) (Checkland and Holwell 1998) at the beginning of each iteration was a particular benefit for the research but it also assisted in providing the work programmes of the Business School with Metville with complete clarity. Thus, the framework of ideas for each stage grew from a fairly static model of personal and organisational development at the start through to an extremely complex concept of ‘a whole system and moving model of organisational change’ (‘a winding Figure of 8’) towards the end. Soft Systems Modelling (Checkland 2000) particularly lends itself to modelling ideas and in this case SSM was particularly helpful in bringing together a number of important conceptual ideas about change which greatly assisted in researching all three questions.

Secondly, collecting ethnographic data from active participants engaged in a major piece of organisational change lends itself particularly to a multi-methodological approach that gathers rich and varied data from a wide area during the whole process of change. Thus this was not

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data collected after the event, but rather data available only at that moment – it was highly unlikely that any of this data could have been collectable later. This was particularly important in the latter stages when the reactions of the Trio Cluster Team were being gathered through electronic media when staff were almost acting as a ‘closed forum’ for discussion before and after key events – discussions to which I was ‘copied in’. The opportunity to become embedded (Reeves-Sanday 1979) in the process (as a researcher) was also important in recognising the balance that needs to be maintained between active participant and observing researcher at very much the same time. The length of time that the study ran (seven years) meant that my role had become multi-dimensional since I got to know many of the key stakeholders extremely well. The Metville study enabled me to collect data at a level of both scale and variety that gave particular validity to my approach. The richness of the data, given the length of time I was embedded as researcher into the field, was also particularly significant in lending added weight to my findings.

Thirdly, it was possible during the course of the long case study relationship, to gain the trust and confidence of many of the key participants. This meant that new and challenging behaviour could be explored with some safety – for example, when the Trio Cluster presented to the Sponsorship group of senior directors in quite a challenging way (‘so what would you have done at this point?’), the fact that they knew me, and other colleagues from the PLT, and that we would be in the meeting, provided them with extra confidence to make their presentation in a completely different way. I was also able to observe their feelings about the reactions of the senior managers in the subsequent TCT following the meeting with the sponsors.

Inevitably, in interpreting the data gathered during the study there are multiple explanations that might be given for how Metville handled the change programme. Nevertheless, the methodological clarity for the study, including the clear ‘declaration of the epistemology’ (Checkland and Holwell 1998) during each iteration of the Action Research has enabled me to interpret obstinacy across the whole programme with greater validity.

### **7.8.2 The limitations of the adopted methodology**

I now turn to discuss the limitations of the choice of methodology in this study. The key issue was the very large amount of data that was accumulated during the whole seven years. The size and diversity of the data collected over a significant length of time made it difficult to process everything satisfactorily. It was often difficult to judge whether a conversation, a

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reflection, a shared thought and so on were significant or not. Ethnographic data is not collected in the form of an interview – even a semi-structured one. It is collected and has to be processed almost immediately since the context of the events in which each bit of data occurs is also changing. It also means that where the researcher is when the data is collected can also be affected by the choices the researcher makes – meetings that are attended because they are felt to be important, and those not attended because they were deemed to be less important. These are judgements which, with the benefit of hindsight, will not always have been the best.

Equally, my research questions are not well trodden pathways in organisational research and thus evidence of the best approaches, using a multi-methodological approach, for sense-making of the data are not available. Ultimately my decisions about the importance of parts of the data over other parts rest in the hands of the ‘data-gatherer’ as well as the ‘data-interpreter’. Even an abduction approach lends itself to multiple abductions and different conclusions being reached.

As researcher, I had a considerable experience of working in public sector organisations and felt reasonably comfortable making decisions about priorities. I was also able to use this experience to maintain a careful balance between the role of researcher, the role of programme manager for the Business School and the role of consultant to the local authority. It is not clear whether my decision, in an attempt to rescue the programme in late 2010 to ‘present’ a ‘story’ to the meeting with the Director for Change pushed the boundary between research and intervention too far.

The limitation of the data collected also related to the single case study organisation – while the data collected was substantial it was nevertheless restricted to one organisation only. This has meant that there has been no opportunity to compare and reflect on other data from either similar or different organisations. The findings of this study are therefore likely to be much more context specific.

Rashman (2009), for example, makes the point that organisations with greater organisational capacity tend to be able to plan for change more effectively and to innovate more successfully; those that are weaker are less able to. In the case of Metville, the council had been judged to be weak in the Audit Commission assessment of 2002 and although it was improving throughout the study period it was likely that it would find it more difficult to plan for change and

to innovate successfully. The political dimension, both locally and nationally, have not been fully factored into this study and this might be an area for further research. Finally, the role of the Chief Executive in large public sector organisations and the extent to which they can lead this kind of change programme might also be a key factor in suggesting ways in which the longer term effects on organisational equilibrium can be affected.

### **7.8.3 Validity and generalisability**

Checkland argues strongly that Action Research can only be judged by standards of recoverability and plausibility. He asserts that only studies that have a very clear and fully declared epistemology, prior to the investigative research, can be authoritative in their findings. In this study, with that point in mind, the four stages of the research were fully developed theoretically before being enacted through the 'Transform' programme. The area of concern in Stages One to Three were built on a clear statement of the epistemology, referencing the key thinking behind the programme. Full organisational adaptation to accommodate the political, financial and managerial challenges of modernisation were to be achieved through 'building capacity'; 'commissioning that capacity'; and then developing a 'flow of ideas' through a 'learning zone' to move from a Model 1 to Model 2 style of delivery. The concern in Stage 4 was to find the fundamental principles that underpinned the 'property of purposefulness' for the whole of Metville. The Framework of ideas moved on through the four stages from a relatively static model of applied learning to a complex new theory around organisational change which 'populated' a 'winding 8' model with nine distinct and linked contributing elements. The method for investigating each new iteration was based on two main threads – personal agency and applied learning. In Stage 4 the configuration of new inter-relationships sought to interpret a fresh understanding of the council's 'property of purposefulness' and with it new ways of managing, financing and politically prioritising its services.

I am comfortable that this study does meet Checkland and Holwell's (1998) standard of a clear declaration of epistemology and therefore it would be possible to take the key elements and replicate the approach in some other situation.

The clarity of the three research questions enabled the focus of the research to concentrate on the organisational framework, the conceptual understanding of change, and the concept of organisational obstinacy. The dilemma comes back to the role of the researcher in Action Research who is activist, consultant, interpreter, and colleague as well as facilitator, teacher and

academic. These multiple roles mean reflection and exchange of views are vital aspects to successfully carrying out all the roles to the best of the researcher's ability.

## **7.9 MEANING AND VALUE OF MAIN RESULTS**

It is not often that researchers have the opportunity to be associated with a research project that is both long lasting and capable of going into significant depth. In the case of Metville, the key participants were extremely helpful, open, and thoughtful and allowed the researcher access to the whole process in a privileged way that made the findings particularly significant.

The theoretical concept of strengthening and expanding organisational capacity has been given empirical evidence through one council's journey towards change. Metville sought to work out a way of concentrating on 'interdependencies' rather than falling back on the normal response of 'restructuring' the organisation. This led to a remarkably comprehensive programme which developed nine contributing elements to organisational change; a theoretical model for achieving significant and radical change using a process of organisational learning based on the organisation challenging itself to find new ways of 'thinking and doing' its work over a period of time.

The fact that there were six years of development meant that the concept of a 'winding 8', which has merit as a way of thinking about radical change and is also based on a gradual process of reflection and learning, offers an attractive and tested form of management model for dealing with complex change issues.

The academic input to the teaching programmes ensured that there was a consistency of view about the agreed conceptual understanding of the change process. The transformational nature of change which requires strong and agreed strategic direction yet cannot be defined in detail, is counter-intuitive to public sector organisations which generally expect to be given detailed guidance on what is to be achieved and how it is to be done. Metville embraced a conceptual understanding that included moving from 'Model 1' to 'Model 2' even though Model 2 could not be described; being prepared to embrace transformation conceptually; and to use paradigm change with a reasonably clear understanding of its meaning. This was a significant step forward. This was particularly evident in the discussion between the staff on the 'offer' made to

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the DfC in the autumn of 2010. They pointed out to each other the conundrum of making an offer to work on a project to which there is no obvious known outcome and the need for executive directors to 'give the staff the permission to do it'.

The research study has provided evidence of the rich nature of ethnographic study techniques that can provide a width and depth of data that quantitative methods would miss. The range and scale of data that the study produced has meant that only a small sample of the data that has been collected has been able to be used in this thesis. The data also has the unique benefit of being collected 'in the moment' as the events were unfolding. However, properly conducted ethnographic data collection is not simply a random collection of data to which a journalist might then construct a 'storyline', it was always known that through using soft systems modelling, the key results would be rooted in the answers associated with the two research questions posed at the beginning of the study and this guided the whole approach to the FMA in each iteration.

The study introduced a novel interpretation of Lewin's work on force-field analysis suggesting that organisational obstinacy might play a significant role in enabling restraining forces to re-establish the 'old-normal' equilibrium even when the driving forces for change are both strong and comprehensive. It also evidenced in an empirical way the Kuhnian understanding of institutional 'clinging-on' to old paradigms, when embracing a new one might be the better option, and gave a clear case example for the Kegan and Lahey (2009) phenomenon of the 'big assumption' that opposes change.

The four separate and distinct stages to the Action Research provided a clear and recoverable process through which to interpret the change took place at Metville. The graph and timeline that captured the shape of the growth curve provide accurate and reliable evidence of what was taking place. The gradual uplift through Stages 1 -3 reached a pinnacle in the early summer of 2010 but during the rest of Stage 4 it then plunged quickly over the next six months and within a year was no longer in evidence. For a major change programme the withering of interest took place extremely quickly.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I summarise the origins and fundamental purposes of the research study; draw together my main findings; offer my contribution to this area of knowledge; and taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the study, I propose some possible directions for further research in this area. Finally, I reflect briefly on the doctoral process as I have experienced it.

### **8.2 THE ORIGINS AND FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:**

#### **8.2.1 Impulse to investigate**

The origins of this study stretch back to the beginnings of my career in the public and voluntary sector. Over the years I have felt the need to explore more fully why organisational change has been so difficult. This study has enabled me to investigate the notion of organisational obstinacy as a possible cause. The study theorises that obstinacy should not be seen in a purely negative light but as both positive (values laden) and negative (restraining change). The literature review revealed that this approach is rarely seen. In seeking a better conceptual understanding of this area of knowledge, Lewin's work on field theory (1939); group dynamics(1947) and force-field analysis (1943, 1947) suggested a possible systemic approach to organisational analysis. Combined with Kuhn's (1962) historical analysis of paradigmatic change which traces a period of highly contested epistemological debate before a fresh understanding emerges and Bhaskar's (1998) work on emergence in society and Kotter's (1995) on transformation, I was able to model organisational obstinacy as an organisational force that begins to restrain change as the driving forces aimed at paradigmatic and transformational change are introduced. In this way the positive and negative aspects of obstinacy can be accommodated.

In seeking a way to reveal forces that lie latent within an organisation, a programme of organisational change was conducted through a four stage Action Research single case-study exercise making considerable use of ethnographic data (Reeves-Sanday 1979) and Action Research/ Soft System Modelling (Checkland 2000; Checkland and Holwell 1998) to inform the results. A steadily increasing level of change activity steered from within the Action Research

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methodology, resulted in a critical mass of connected interdependencies across a number of contributing elements in the organisation, which developed a flow of new ideas for change. In addition, the emphasis on seeking a paradigmatic level of change which would radically and fundamentally change the organisation, gathered together a significant number of staff who saw themselves as involved in a jointly shared enterprise and who were committed to seeking the necessary outcomes to achieve such a change.

By stating clearly the epistemology being used at the beginning of each stage of the Action Research, the study highlights the changing Framework of Ideas; Methodology and Areas of Concern during the study period. It is therefore reasonable to claim the results are both plausible and recoverable.

### **8.3 KEY FINDINGS**

The overall conclusion to be drawn from the findings is that the theoretical concept of organisational obstinacy can be observed empirically. Metville's organisational change programme grew substantially during the first three stages but during Stage Four there was a rapid organisational retreat for which a plausible explanation of organisational obstinacy can be reasonably abductured.

With the benefit of a significant depth of field research in a study organisation (Metville) over a considerable period of time (seven years) I was able to focus on three important characteristics of driving forces of change. In doing so I have adopted the concept of 'critical mass' specifically in the context of this study to refer to the coming together of a number of related elements within an organisation that are sufficient to permanently shift its organisational equilibrium. I have used a concept of 'flow' as interpreted by Seshadri and Shapira (2003) and Healey (2013) to mean a flow of ideas around change that impact on organisational change. I have used the terms paradigmatic (Kuhn 1962) and transformational (Kotter 1995) to suggest a radical and permanent shift in the organisational equilibrium to a new understanding and interpretation of the organisation's 'property of purposefulness' (Checkland 2000).

The first characteristic was that critical mass can be assembled across a number of contributing elements that position people within a 'field' (Lewin 1939), which enables them to combine into a form of network (Goleman 1996) in which engagement within a corporate change programme

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is possible without restructuring the organisational form because the network is held together through interdependencies (Lewin 1947). However, such networks are actually vulnerable and the impact of restraining forces can quickly collapse them if the directions of change shift.

The second characteristic was the notion of 'flow' (Seshadri and Shapira 2003, Healey 2013). This was important in offering those with new ideas for change an opportunity to come forward and participate in a change programme. The visualisation of a 'line' which describes vertical and horizontal flow moving towards organisational reform (new methods) and a new functionality (new direction) can assist in strategically aligning change programmes towards radical goals (e.g. Model 2 - Kuhn 1962, Kotter 1995, Bhaskar 1998). However, the roles of key players, particularly change champions, (Burgelman 1983) are essential in enabling change ideas to progress.

Thirdly, 'normalising' change across an organisation requires the protection of the emergent contributing elements occupying those new spaces and places by building up the overarching narrative (or 'brand') that asserts the 'new normal' (Kotter, 1995 'Step 7'). The 'pull' that exists within organisational obstinacy to 'revert' to the 'old normal' is usually 'waiting in the shadows' to re-emerge and re-assert itself, channelled through those who are the least comfortable with the 'new order'.

By examining these characteristics, I have been able to demonstrate that organisational obstinacy appears to weaken the interdependencies between elements that might contribute to change; secondly, it appears to impede the flow around the organisational learning loops of change ideas and their application; and finally it appears to 're-normalise' change to merely incremental gains and improvements around the existing operational model of the organisation rather than the pursuit of a new paradigm.

I have also been able to identify a series of attitudes and behaviour that when collected together formed a 'transformational spirit' for change at Metville. While apparently robust and energetic this 'spirit' can dissipate very easily, suggesting that it is fragile and highly dependant on the emotional buy-in to change being experienced by the main players.

The research results have also revealed that views and attitudes to change can be nuanced and contradictory within the contributing elements during a change programme. This can explain

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the sense that there are both positive and negative aspects to obstinacy and they do not always contain clear-cut 'either/or' attitudes.

I observed during the previous chapter, which discussed the results, that organisational obstinacy can be observed through a process of tracking the inter-relationships between driving and restraining forces in order to sense the impact they have on an organisation's equilibrium.

The evidence of my research in Metville suggests that the restraining forces that exerted themselves during the latter part of the research period were simply too strong in relation to the driving forces and resulted in the loss of critical mass, the impedance of flow, and the reassertion of the 'old normal'.

I have recognised that there is an important alternative explanation for the events as they transpired in Metville. With an imperative to reduce budgets and without any clear guidance or target setting provided by central government, Metville were placed in an extremely difficult position. Faced with the level of proposed budget reductions for 2010/11 Metville reverted back to its old equilibrium operating as a 'Model 1' council and this could also explain the outcomes of the change programme. My preference for organisational obstinacy as an explanation for the cause of the outcome is its adequacy to explain in a more refined way the nature and scale of the whole process of change that was attempted at Metville during the study period and feels to be a more compelling abduction.

The evidence of the research suggests that the phenomenon of organisational obstinacy can be observed, and in the case of Metville was revealed in some detail, it is therefore possible to offer a definition:

***“Organisational obstinacy comprises the balance of the forces within an organisational field that leaves the equilibrium unchanged, even when there are compelling arguments for radical change to be enacted”.***

#### **8.4 MY CONTRIBUTION TO THIS AREA OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE**

I believe that the product of this study provides a number of contributions to this area of knowledge:

Firstly, I have explored a relatively new area of study which looks in more detail at the dynamics of change in programmes of organisational development. I have introduced a concept of organisational obstinacy which is embedded in ideas of driving and restraining forces being balanced out in change programmes, leaving many of them unsuccessful. Organisational obstinacy offers a useful explanation of how organisational change dynamics might work.

Secondly, I have provided a definition of organisational obstinacy that summarises the findings of my own study that seeks to explain why, even when an obvious and compelling reason to choose a direction of radical change, organisations will 're-normalise' and retain their equilibrium in an old paradigm.

Thirdly, the models that were developed during the different iterations provide innovative ways of conceptualising driving forces for change. The 'Winding 8' model, including the 'points of crank', offers a useful diagram to explain the radical evolution of ideas which feed both top and bottom of an organisation and help move it from a 'Model 1' to a 'Model 2' position. The 'Populating the 8' diagram suggests how contributing elements provide a critical mass which, combined with flow and momentum, might 'tip over' an organisation into 'Model 2'.

Fourth, I have methodologically undertaken a very long study – a seven year Action Research case study using ethnographic data collection. Because of its length it has provided both data and research experience of an extended study that is rarely encountered. For these reasons it has provided a rich data set which I have been unable to use in its entirety. This data set is also unique in that it was collected at the time the events were taking place and because of this I was in a privileged position to gather attitudes, behaviours and thoughts from people in real time as they were experiencing the issues.

Fifth, because of the long association with the key individuals involved in the Metville programme, I was able to capture the duality of attitudes and feelings that enabled me to recognise the ambivalent and uncertain nature of driving and restraining forces as they impact

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on individuals. This enabled me to understand more fully the positive and negative effects on obstinacy that makes it such a fluid element in organisational change.

Sixth, the study enabled me to carry out an extended Action Research programme with four fully worked-through iterations during which the examination of the scale and nature of the Framework of Ideas; the methodology and the focus on the Area of Concern (the 'FMA') has been deep and extensive and added considerably to the knowledge and experience of using this mechanism in Action Research.

Seventh, the conducting of a study of such length and complexity collecting data ethnographically from a single site case has provided a useful addition to the body of worked examples of this kind of research method and has therefore contributed to the practice of action research.

### **8.5 POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH IN THIS AREA**

#### **8.5.1 The limitations of the adopted methodology**

The four separate and distinct stages to the Action Research provided a clear and recoverable process. The graph and timeline that captured the shape of the growth curve provide accurate and reliable evidence of what was taking place. I am comfortable that this study met Checkland's (2000) standard of a clear declaration of its epistemology and therefore it would be possible to recover the key elements used in the approach in some other situation and test the results of this study against them.

It is possible that due to the unfortunate combination of the effect of organisational obstinacy and the scale of the budget reductions imposed on Metville in 2010, the Transform programme was effectively abandoned prematurely. However, the Metville experience can be recovered and developed further.

Nevertheless, there were limitations associated with the choice of methodology for this study. The nature of ethnographic data is highly dependant on the researcher's judgements and choices. As researcher, I relied heavily on a number of decades of experience in both practice and more latterly in research, to help make those judgements and choices.

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The limitation of the data collected also relate to the use of a single case study organisation – while the data collected was substantial it was nevertheless restricted to one organisation and therefore the findings are likely to be more context specific. However, the theoretical concept of organisational obstinacy has been established. The approach to strengthening and expanding organisational capacity used in this study has yielded empirical evidence based on a real-case journey towards change undertaken by one council.

Metville conducted a remarkably comprehensive programme that produced a conceptual understanding of change (critical mass, flow and paradigm change from Model 1 to Model 2) that included a number of models (the ‘Winding 8’; ‘Points of Crank’) that might suggest new approaches to this research in other organisations.

The fact that there were seven years of development in the Metville programme, meant that the concept of a ‘Winding 8’ which has considerable merit as a way of thinking about radical change and is also based on a gradual process of reflection and learning, offers an attractive and tested management model for dealing with complex change issues.

Metville embraced a conceptual understanding that included moving from ‘Model 1’ to ‘Model 2’ even though Model 2 could not be described; being prepared to embrace transformation conceptually; and adopting the notion of paradigm change with a reasonably clear understanding of its meaning. This was a significant step forward and could be further developed.

Using the Peirce notion of abduction, the results of my study may go some way to explain the ‘surprising fact’ of the 70% failure rate in organisational change programmes and suggest that ‘organisational obstinacy’ is a ‘matter of course explanation’ (Peirce) for such failures. For this to be tested more rigorously, more studies building on the results of my research would give greater certainty to the abduction.

### **8.6 REFLECTIONS ON THE DOCTORAL PROCESS**

In drawing this study to a conclusion and reflecting on the whole doctoral process, I am firstly struck by how fortunate I have been in being allowed to ‘follow a hunch’. The ‘impulse to investigate’ the conundrum of why change happens so slowly has been a crucial starting point.

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For me, the personal story of arriving at a point where the opportunity to research a topic in which I have been interested for literally decades has been extraordinary.

The completion of this research also brings to fruition a career that began as a practitioner and later developed into academic executive education and research. My research interests have been rooted in organisational development and change throughout and to have the opportunity to think about this in depth over an extended period of time has been extremely rewarding. In addition, I have been able to sit in that privileged position where theory and practice combine and I have felt able to make a contribution to both – this has been crucial.

The nature of the research and the scale of the data that has been obtained from being permitted to carry out my research alongside the organisational development programme with Metville, has enabled me to genuinely conclude with some useful findings that will contribute to the overall body of knowledge surrounding organisational change.

With the scale of the Metville programme and the length of time that it lasted, I have been given the opportunity to work on some challenging problems. Not least of these has been the design and implementation of an Action Research programme which at the height of its ambition aimed to turn around an organisation with a multi-million pound budget and over 10,000 employees. To sit in the heart of such a programme with the opportunity to contribute towards the improvement and development of the whole organisation was a privilege.

At a personal level, the academic process associated with performing research with rigorous professionalism and being forced to think clearly and in depth on the nature of a perennially challenging problem has been particularly rewarding – I feel I have earned my spurs!

### GLOSSARY

#### **Introduction:**

A number of terms are used in this thesis which have a specific meaning in the context of the study and I have outlined them briefly below

**Connected Interdependencies:** Lewin's concept of interdependencies in group dynamics suggests that individuals group around 'fate' and 'task' interdependencies. 'Connected interdependencies' is used to suggest that the strength of the bonds between individuals and groups is related to the degree of connectedness. In Metville the weight of critical mass experienced was related to the strength of the connections made.

**Contributing Elements:** Over the four stages of the Action Research a number of activities and groups emerged which were specifically related to the development of the 'Transform' programme. They were distinct and identifiable. Eight of these became key elements on the development of Stage Four and I identified them as 'contributing elements' in the overall programme.

**Crank:** In the model of change ('A Winding 8 Model', Fig 6.3 p139) I suggest that the range and strength of the ideas being generated in Metville might form a momentum for radical change which would not be simply a function of senior executive leadership but also come from empowering radical opportunities for new ways of working to be developed at the front-line of service delivery. These 'points of crank' might offer key indicators of where obstinacy might be most influential and where it might be most usefully overcome

**Critical Mass:** This phrase is used in the study to describe the coming together within the driving forces of the different contributing elements to the Transform programme which when working cohesively would provide a concentration of energy and purpose to the change being sought within Metville.

**Driving Forces:** Lewin identifies different forces within his force-field analysis of organisations; some drive change forward and others act more as a restraint. Driving forces are seen as those forces which influence change and act on the equilibrium of the organisation and push it forward.

**Flow:** In this study, flow is used specifically to suggest that 'ideas' are one of the key components of change and flow around and across organisations connecting contributing elements and offering a pathway for how new ideas might be adopted. The 'Figure of 8' is

## Glossary

based on a flow of ideas describing such a pattern (an 8). There are ideas of width, strength and speed contained in the notion of 'flow'.

**Model 1:** In this study I use the phrase 'Model 1' to denote the culture; way of working; form and general understanding of how Metville worked. It suggested that there was a 'current normal' in which the organisational equilibrium was balanced.

**Model 2:** I use 'Model 2' to suggest the radical aims and objectives of the Transform programme where Metville would adopt new ways of working and thinking that were transformational. It suggested that there would be a 'new normal' that would occur once the radical steps to change had been taken.

**Organisational Equilibrium:** Lewin's force-field analysis suggests that between driving forces and restraining forces an organisational equilibrium state is maintained. Driving forces might be seen as forces which seek to disturb the equilibrium and restraining forces as those that seek to re-establish the equilibrium.

**Populating the 8:** Having established a conceptual understanding of a flowing or winding '8' that modelled the change programme, a number of contributing elements emerged which were seen as conceptually related. Formalising these relationships into the 'crank' area at the 'top of the 8' (Fig 6.5 p145) and placing them into the model was seen as 'populating the model' such that the interdependencies were made more explicit.

**Restraining Forces:** Lewin's force-field analysis suggests that restraining forces act in such a way as to re-establish the organisational equilibrium. In the models for this study restraining forces as seen as both positive and negative influences of the nature of the restraint.

**Winding 8:** The original notion of learning loops connected through a central learning zone (or 'bubble') that acted at both the top of the organisation (through which new learning was interpreted and developed) and the bottom (through which new ideas were tested out and the practicality of implementing ideas was investigated) was developed further in Fig 6.3. This suggested that the organisational journey from Model 1 to Model 2 might be seen as a number of 'winds' (or 'cranks' see above) where added propulsion was given to the momentum and flow.

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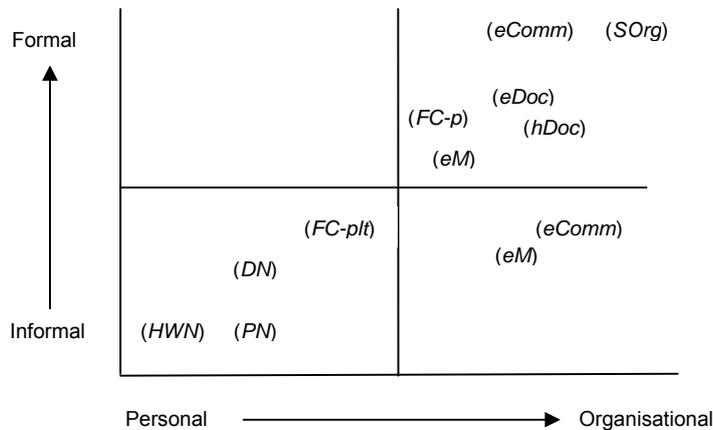
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**APPENDIX ONE**

**Table Appendix 1: Hierarchy of data available during the course of the research study**

The data, which has been assembled for this study, has principally come from the following sources:	
( <i>HWN</i> ), ( <i>DN</i> )	Data was collected from a number of sources and at different levels of formality. The researchers 'field notes' taken during meetings with Metville staff comprised notes taken during and after discussions and were captured in hand-written form in notebooks ( <i>HWN</i> ) and on notepaper or in diary notes ( <i>DN</i> ) taken to form agendas for forthcoming meetings. These were relatively informal and not expected to be shared with other staff members of Metville or the Business School.
( <i>FC-plt</i> ), ( <i>eDoc</i> ), ( <i>eM</i> )	The programme liaison team (PLT) met frequently during the course of the whole programme and often flip-charts ( <i>FC-plt</i> ) were used to enable discussion to be captured in a facilitated way by the researcher; these were often photographed and kept as a digital file ( <i>eDoc</i> ). Notes were exchanged informally and formally between the members of the team to progress thoughts or actions ( <i>eM</i> ).
( <i>hDoc</i> )	During the course of the different teaching programmes that were commissioned by Metville Council, participants would feedback their reflections as part of the programme in hard copy ( <i>hDoc</i> ). Verbal feedback was captured in notebooks of the researcher and were intended for personal use by the researcher ( <i>PN</i> ). Other materials such as flip-charts were more open and shared in the classroom ( <i>FC-p</i> ). Sometimes these were also photographed and kept as a record ( <i>eDoc</i> ). Formal feedback material was often requested by Metville from participants and comments were formally recorded but shared with Metville in an anonymised form ( <i>eDoc</i> ).
( <i>PN</i> )	
( <i>FC-p</i> )	
( <i>eDoc</i> ),	
( <i>HWN</i> ), ( <i>DN</i> ) ( <i>FC-mbc</i> )	During the course of the study key stakeholders from Metville and MBS met and discussed progress and what next-steps might be taken. These discussions, at which the researcher was an active participant, were captured in diary notes ( <i>DN</i> ), and notes and sketch diagrams ( <i>HWN</i> ) and flip-charts ( <i>FC-mbc</i> ) generated to help better understand the key concepts that were involved.
( <i>eM</i> ), ( <i>eDoc</i> )	Where key decisions were being thought about or being made and a formal record needed to be exchanged of the discussion/ decision, a document would be produced. Sometimes this might be in the form of an email ( <i>eM</i> ), or it might be in the form of an electronic document ( <i>eDoc</i> ) intended to be kept on file.
( <i>eDoc</i> ), ( <i>eM</i> ), ( <i>eComm</i> )	Electronic documents generated in the business school (often formal proposals for the next-steps in the teaching and support programmes), were stored on the researcher's academic server along with emails and other electronic communication. ( <i>eDoc</i> ), ( <i>eM</i> ),( <i>eComm</i> ).
( <i>SOrg</i> )	Similar documents which were generated by Metville Council (as the study organisation) were also available as data for the study ( <i>SOrg</i> ).

## Appendices



**Fig Appndx 1: Mapping of data capture protocol by researcher**

Fig Appndx 1 seeks to map the type of data capture and the documents that were generated – the researcher observed events and behaviours and participated in the whole programme during which time data was produced and filed.

### Personal and informal:

In some cases the data was highly subjective and observational and recorded in hand-written notes; note books; and personal diary notes. These generally comprised field-notes taken at the time or shortly afterwards. They appear in the lower left of the four quadrants. During the course of the discussions in the Programme Liaison Team notes and diagrams were also generated – often this informal but less personal data was captured on flip-charts, photographed and then shared and filed.

### Informal and organisational

On some occasions, but not frequently, an email or a draft document might be exchanged between the researcher and a member of Metville Council or the independent consultant which was more than an informal exchange. These items were often recorded in emails and attempted to capture views and opinions that needed more than a face-to-face meeting to convey them; on some occasions they were also documents but not expected to be treated in the same ways as documents and emails in the top right hand quadrant.

### Formal and organisational:

Corporate decisions, contracting material, and formal communications generated documents that were related more to the organisational level rather than personal observational material. These tended to be referred to as documents with formal identification (e.g. Version 1.1 etc. and dated).

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### APPENDIX TWO

**Table Appndx 2: Key personnel:**

Organisation	Name of post	Background
Metville Council	Chief Executive 1	Senior figure, traditionalist, had been in Metville a long time; had been Chief Finance Officer before becoming CEO. (Male)
	Chief Executive 2	Younger female appointment – fresh attitude and strong signals for change and a value-led approach. Inherited a long established senior leadership team, strongly hierarchical and traditional
	Assistant Chief Executive (ACE)	Appointed by the new CEO to ‘run’ the Chief Executive’s Department to allow the CEO to provide more strategic leadership. Had worked as senior civil servant in the Government’s Regional Office before coming to Metville
	Director for Change (Executive Director) (DfC)	Rising manager who had worked in a front-end department (Benefits Office) and implemented a radical change project to reform the council’s benefits service; not from a professional local government service tradition
	Executive Director HR and OD	Long serving senior executive with strong connections and networks within the council. Nearing retirement but still energetic and enthusiastic
	Assistant Director OD & Staff Devt (Head of OD)	Long serving manager in traditional hierarchical department; thoughtful and intellectual approach; link member in the PLT
	Assistant Director – Change Team	Specialist in process management and efficiency gains leading a team of specialists in business process re-engineering
	Trio Sponsors	Director level appointments to support and encourage the work of the Trio members seconded to work on specific problematic issues
	Challenge Sponsors (TLT)	Later appointments to take forward the cutting-edge work following the presentation of

## Appendices

		Cohort 8 to the Senior Leadership Team and the CEO's 'challenges' to the Team to investigate key corporate issues
	Trio secondments (TCT)	Short term appointments to work on a number of key issues identified by the executive team and linked to Metville's SPOTlight programme
	Participants on Transform Cohorts	A variety of staff from across the Council invited/ self-selected/ chosen to attend the 8 different cohorts of 'Transform'; often different grades/ levels of responsibility
Independent Consultant	(Appointed by Metville MBC)	Had previously been an employee of Metville; known and trusted within the council; skilled and experienced in OD and HR issues
Metville Business School	Academic Lead	Professor of strategy and information systems, special interest in public leadership and management
	Head of Executive Education	Administrative head of business school's wide ranging short bespoke client-centred programmes aimed at private corporate companies, public sector and some third sector organisations
	Programme Director/ Researcher	Senior Fellow in public policy and management in business school career spanned work in voluntary sector, local government as well as academia

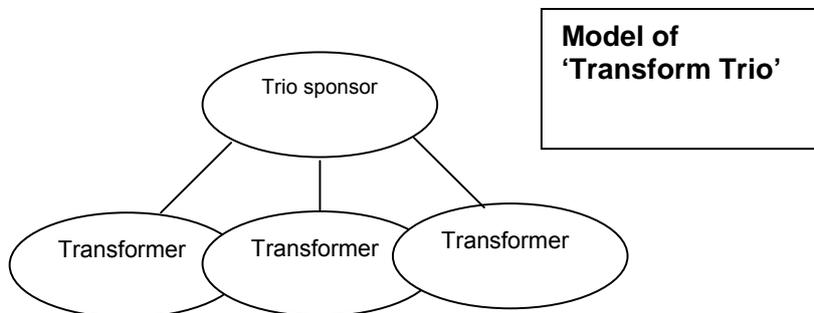
**APPENDIX THREE**

**Extract from presentation document  
from MBS to Metville Council –  
Autumn 2007**

6. Commissioning the Capability

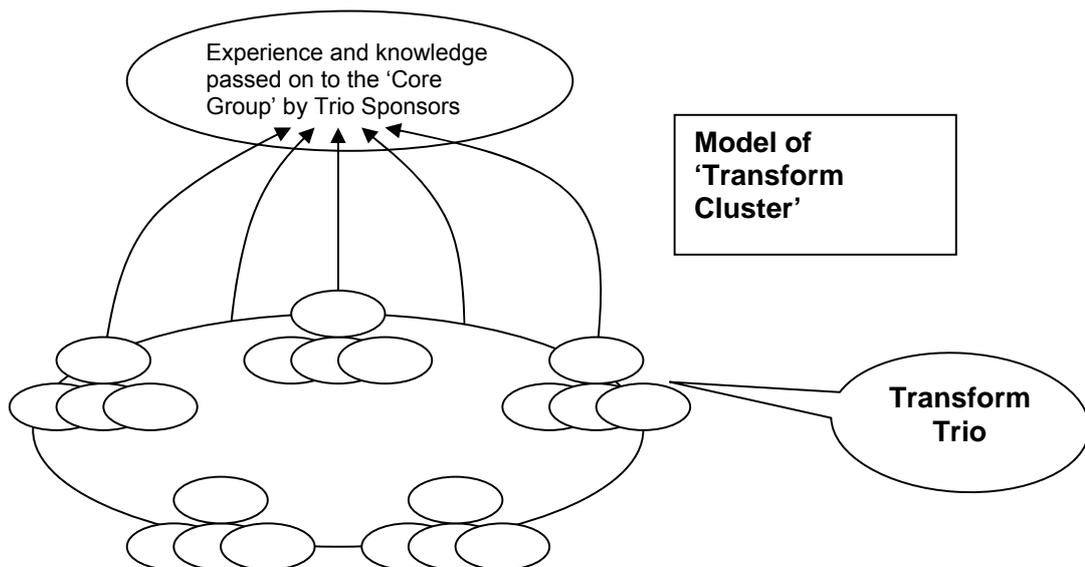
6.1 'Transform Trio'

A Trio is formed by requesting three members of the Transform Network to form a short term working group – styled on an internal consultancy model – to actively investigate, examine and recommend action regarding a strategic key issue identified by the Senior Management Team. The Trio is overseen by a 'Trio Sponsor' normally a head of service who would guide the work of the Trio, but whose main task would be to take the learning from the consultancy exercise and feed it into a Core Group. The Group would be the repository of the learning and act as the link between the talent and energy of the Transform Network and the work of the SMT.

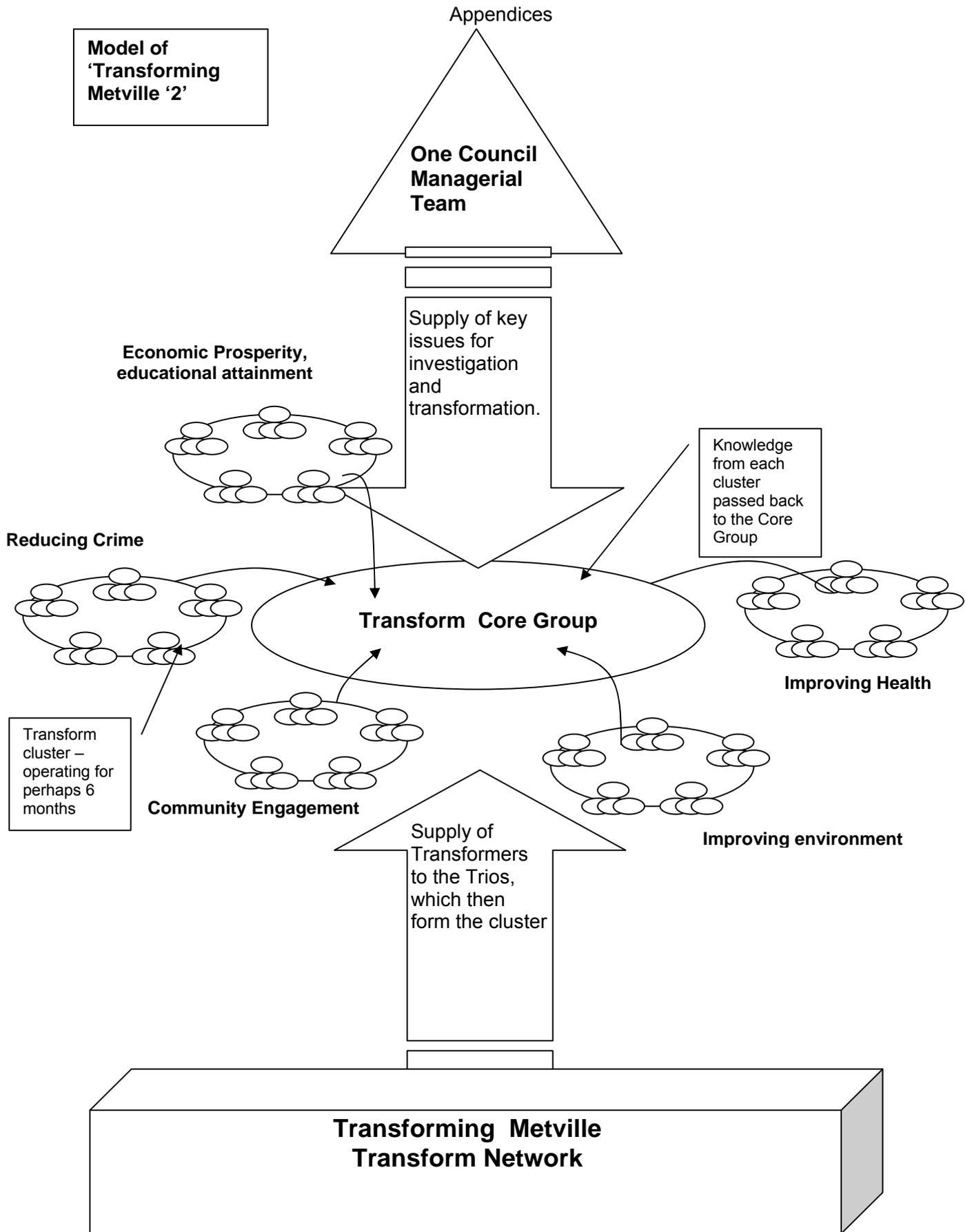


6.2 'Transform Cluster'

Each Trio would form part of a wider grouping of trios – a 'Transform Cluster'. The cluster principle would be: to set a number of trios to work, all overseen by the Trio sponsor, who together would come together to form a Core Group and from which an accelerated pattern of learning about transformation in the Council would be discerned.



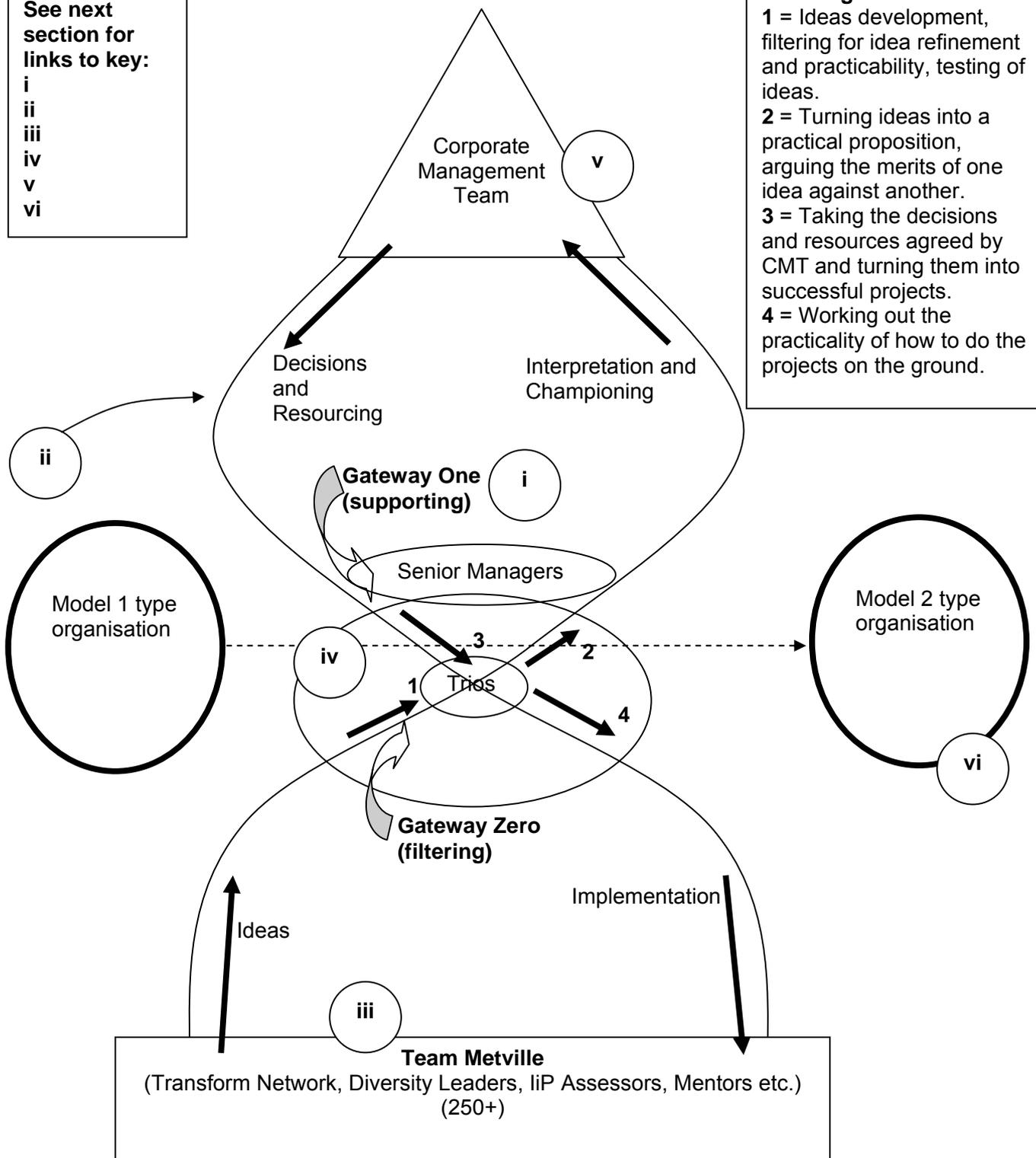
**Model of  
'Transforming  
Metville '2'**



**APPENDIX FOUR: Transformational change: An Organisational Development Model.**

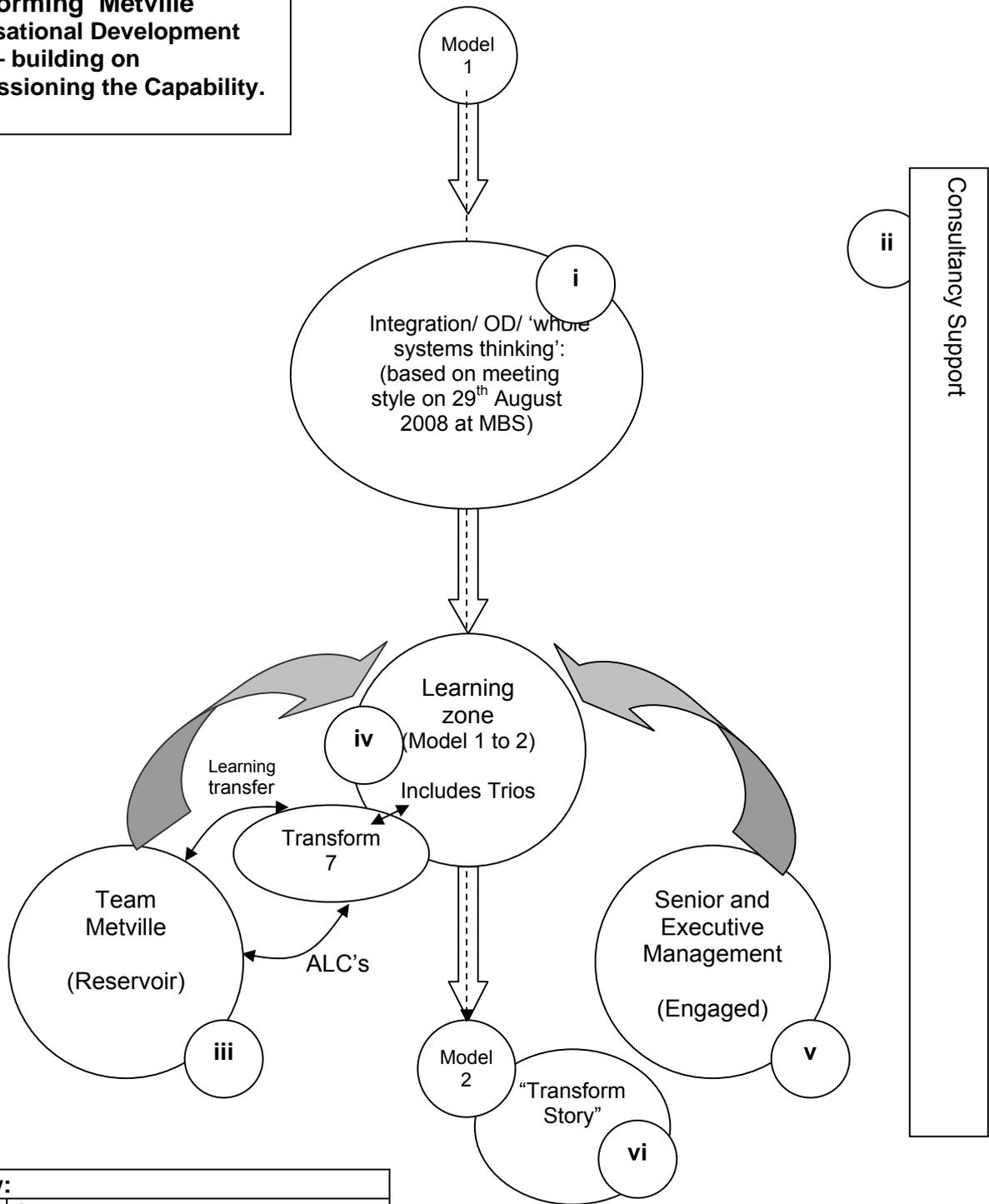
See next section for links to key:  
 i  
 ii  
 iii  
 iv  
 v  
 vi

**Learning Zone:**  
 1 = Ideas development, filtering for idea refinement and practicability, testing of ideas.  
 2 = Turning ideas into a practical proposition, arguing the merits of one idea against another.  
 3 = Taking the decisions and resources agreed by CMT and turning them into successful projects.  
 4 = Working out the practicality of how to do the projects on the ground.



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**Transforming Metville  
Organisational Development  
Model – building on  
Commissioning the Capability.**



Key:	
No	Item
i	Strategic OD planning
ii	'Critical friend'
iii	Support to Team Metville
iv	Transition and Transformation
v	New working methodology/ culture
vi	Capturing the 'Transform Story'

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### APPENDIX FIVE: Transform 8

#### Transform Cohort 8 – Outline of the programme

<p><b>Opening day:</b> MBS (3 sets of about 11 in each)</p>	<p><i>Morning:</i> Intro to each other and to the programme outline Intro to the notion of applied learning and ALC's <i>Afternoon:</i> 2 sub-sets per set of 11 (roughly 5/6 in each). Choice of subject – working in groups. Set up groups.</p>
<p><b>Day 1</b> Theory / Context</p>	<p>Modernity, change, transformation Context for change programmes/ aims/ objectives Modernisation, reform and change Transformational change and transactional change Management thinking on change and achieving change</p>
<p><b>Day 2</b> Theory / Context</p>	<p>Organisations, systems Understanding organisations – structure, organic change Systems thinking and learning in organisations Organisational culture and barriers to change</p>
<p><b>Day 3</b> Applied learning</p>	<p>Techniques (Process maps, stakeholders etc) Making sense of what is going on Using techniques sensibly and effectively Gaining a greater degree of collective understanding of what is actually going on Knowing what it is most effective to work on.</p>
<p><b>Day 4</b> Applied learning</p>	<p>Applied skills Building effective alliances Making change happen without using structure Making a new model of change for the organisation Knowing how things fit together</p>
<p><b>Day 5</b> Theory / Context</p>	<p>Personal agency and leadership Making change happen – the role of the individual Intreprenurial action and agency Boundaries to individual action and using the whole situation to your advantage. Understanding leadership and its role in forming effective collaboration</p>
<p><b>Day 6</b> Applied learning</p>	<p>Transform as a case study The Metville learning journey Where did the whole programme originate Where has it reached Where is it likely to be going – short term; longer term.</p>
<p><b>Skills Development</b> workshop 1</p>	<p>Self; resilience; dealing with the org The understanding of organisational resilience Seeing the whole situation The psychological contract What happens when there is a breach Mending hurts</p>
<p><b>Skills Development</b> workshop 2</p>	<p>Strategy and decision making</p>

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	Understanding strategic decision making What makes strategy What makes for implementation of strategy How does the notion of customer/ service user focus thinking in the organisation.
<b>Applied learning</b>	TMN Market place ALChallenge feed back at the <i>Network Market-place</i> .

## APPENDIX SIX

### Meeting on 19<sup>th</sup>. A story:

Faced with some extremely challenging numbers the senior executive team of Strappedville met on 19<sup>th</sup> November to discuss possible ways forward.

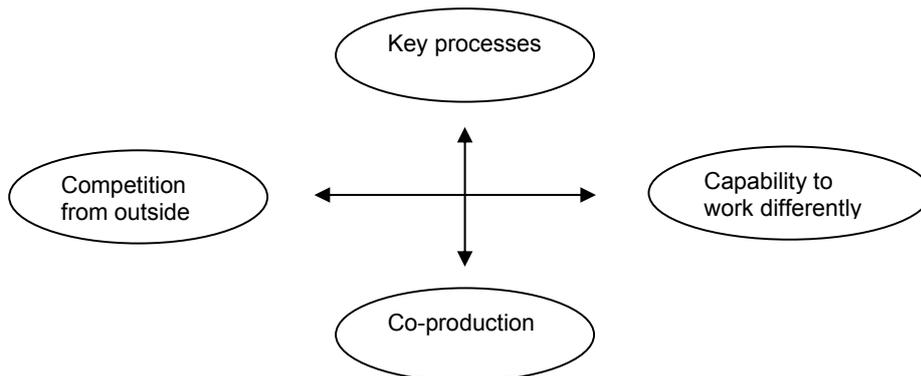
The meeting began with an outline of the scale of the problem facing Strappedville CC; not only did 2010/11 have a challenging financial out-turn but 2011/12 was proving to be even more challenging. The Financial Director said that the problem of front loaded cuts meant that there were no rabbits that could be found from the hat. "This is real" he muttered.

A comprehensive and long list of potential savings had been listed out. The team discerned that many of these could be clustered under a number of headings such as property; transport etc. One senior executive wondered aloud whether the briefing he had been reading in Local Government Chronicle wasn't right – only a new and radical understanding between elected members and the public would enable the team to have a hope of balancing the books. Decisions about what to prioritise and therefore what other things would need to be delivered in a radically different way (or not at all) were needed urgently.

They all agreed. But where to start and what should be in the plan?

They discussed how they could achieve savings based on the current model of services design into directorates, delivery areas, geography and the offices and depots that the City had at its disposal. The more they thought about this the more they felt that the existing model looked very much like the Model 1 on an academic's diagram which they had seen before called a 'Transformometer'. What was needed was model 2 thinking.

They first of all drew a diagram. It contained key areas – key processes; capability of staff to work differently; competition from outside; and co-production.



They then considered the problems of matching the key issues into these areas. If they were to avoid slipping into thinking that 'Model 1' would be able to deliver the financial reductions needed while maintaining service delivery more or less as it was, they would have to 'Think Model 2'. They decided to put Model 2 at the heart of the diagram.

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First they thought: 'what new ideas are needed to redesign Strappedville?'. We need to ensure that what is delivered is what is both needed and wanted. In fact we need to redefine 'need'. Need has increasingly become to mean what people have demanded or wanted, or what the press have suggested ought to be provided, and politicians have been responding by seeking to provide services from the City Council, the Police, or the local health services. But maybe 'need' has to be much more an agreement with people, with key decision makers, and with politicians. And maybe the only way to ensure that we have the right level and range of opinion forming is to concentrate on finding feed-back loops that tell us quickly and with certainty which services we should be providing and how they should be delivered. They put these thoughts down in the co-production box since everybody would need to have some sort of 'say' in these decisions.

They then thought about what alternative models there might be for delivering public services at the local level – what kind of governance would there be needed, who could be trusted with the money; how would things be made accountable? Quickly they realised that the senior staff across all services would need to be able to think up and implement a diverse number of ways of providing services. A level of capability to be able to vision a 'model 2' world and to begin to work in a radically different way would be needed. Managerial competence would not be measured in whether people could be entrusted to comply with the current managerial regimes but to be able to re-invent them. They put 're-inventors' in the capability box.

Of course, keeping the day job going would be essential while such changes were thought about and this would mean that ensuring that people and services across the council and the other partners were all working together. The team put this thought next to the key processes box to remind them that some stability would still be necessary.

Finally, they looked at the box with competition in it. They were aware that huge pressure was being placed on the organisation to think about reducing costs by shunting services out to cheaper providers. They were anxious however, that a slew of providers would be queuing up from 'Stack'em High Ltd', a fairly unscrupulous profit maximising firm; to Fur-Lined Collars Ltd who were rather precious about providing services in a very old fashioned way; to a staff cooperative in the offing who we keen to get their hands on some of the services they cared about the most (Weir Gettin'out Ltd); and finally KiteMark Ltd a genuine but small firm with people whose values they trusted. Into this mix there were local authority managers who had grown up with Strappedville and developed their whole careers with them. But how flexible and nimble they would be was actually very doubtful. Could those dogs be taught new tricks – and quickly?! And how would the whole process of change be managed to ensure that the balance and mix of providers was suitable?

Faced with this sketch map of change the team looked at each other. They felt that what lay at the very centre of the diagram was the need for new ideas for change. On top of that there needed to be people and processes that could put those ideas into action. All the work they had been doing over the past 5 years would need to be called on to 'pay off' – otherwise why had they spend the money on doing the whole Transform programme? They had rehearsed the figure of 8 diagram, they had tried out 'trios', they had had the cluster of trios, they had tried out challenges with sponsors and transformers joining in – but something was missing.

They looked at each other again. They realised all at once; they hadn't done the joining up!! The figure of eight had a line connecting it up and although people were dotted about across the whole of it they were not joined up.

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One Executive cautioned everybody though – its not just about joining up he said, its about how we know that the joining up is effective and moving in the right direction. He made a figure of eight in the air with his finger – “prove to me that its working, show me how its going to make the real difference” he said.

They all looked at him – he was right. A junior member of the team looked at him, with a light in her eye: “you’ve just said it” she said, you need to track the ideas for change around the figure of 8. See if there is flow, and potential for real change in the ideas. Use the ideas to give you the feedback – good ideas with real potential should be sweeping through the organisation like a river in flood carrying away the old ways and replacing them with new ones, the sheer momentum should be carrying change forward. Concentrate on the ideas.

“I see”, he said. We need somewhere that the ideas can be generated, tested, and people can get involved with the absolute permission to get on. We need a bubble at the heart of the organisation to be trying out ideas with the authority of this team to get on. But we need to kick start the bubble and have someone/ some people who can really challenge the organisation to make progress and be relied on to be like terriers going after all the barriers that lie in the way.

“People need to be in charge of really getting the bubble going who will have the complete trust of all of us. We need someone who is the business”.

But where are we going to find them? They paused to think ... ..

18Nov2010

## **APPENDIX SEVEN**

### Transforming Metville “Cranking the Change”

#### The search for a response to the CSR and financial settlement for 2011/12.

#### A discussion paper and proposal for moving Transform forward.

##### Background:

Transform has been running since 2004. It was always conceived as a radical approach to organisational development and not simply a capacity building programme. As it matured and developed it provided a framework for some important initiatives that provided the Council with the opportunity to explore new delivery arrangements and different management capabilities using an action/ research type approach in combination with MBS/ RBL acting as advisory and delivery partners. The key success has been seen when staff who have been highly motivated and energised by engaging in the process of change, have brought forward radical new thinking to senior managers and directors at meetings of the Senior Leadership Team the clear enthusiasm and willingness to engage in innovation and change has been palpable. This has been referred to as the ‘Transform Spirit’ (and has been articulated in a series of ‘transform words’ that have been shared amongst the Transform community).<sup>3</sup>

The CSR announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the subsequent Settlement Letter has challenged the Council to think and plan in a much more radical way about its way forward. The political context is that the administration is concerned to prioritise the council’s resources to protect the most vulnerable. The managerial context is to translate these priorities into a delivery environment that will be able to operate at significantly reduced cost.

This paper seeks to discuss the financial challenges in the context of the political and managerial challenges that will be necessary. To do this, a theoretical perspective on Transform is offered which discusses the three key principles that have underpinned the work with MBS. The diagrammatic overview of a ‘winding eight’ with important ‘points of crank’ are then discussed. Thirdly a scenario perspective on likely delivery channels is introduced and finally a proposal for a significant savings programme using the principles of ‘Transform’ is outlined.

### **A theoretical perspective for the next steps.**

#### **Introduction:**

There is a clear possibility that the contribution that the whole Transform programme will make to the future organisational size and shape to local services and their management and administration in Metville could be about to be decided. If the notion of ‘Model 1’ and ‘Model 2’ is carried into the future discussions on how services should be remodelled and resourced then it will be important for the theoretical principles to be understood and agreed by the key stakeholders in the debate. This short paper seeks to outline the key ‘learning’ that has taken place over the past 5 or 6 years as the Transform programme has progressed.

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<sup>3</sup> Flexible, Ambitious, Brave, Caring, Integrity, Innovative, Communicative, Intuitive, Nouse, Reflective, Realistic, Competent, Passionate, Collaborative, Honest, Focused, Confident, Questioning, Opportunistic, Tenacious, Optimistic, Resilient, Strategic, Imaginative.

## **Theoretical principles:**

There are three fundamental principles that have underpinned the Transform programme – personal agency, activity before form, and applied learning.

### **Personal agency**

The approach of hierarchies is to ensure consistency of performance through managerial oversight of people and processes with clear accountability chains back up the management 'line' (Model 1). Much of the theoretical underpin in Transform has been to interrupt this approach and replace it with managerial capacity which 'retakes' managerial responsibility (and the consequent accountability) back to the individual (Model 2). Activities are measured for effectiveness in terms of their contribution to the outcome that is agreed with corporate directors. The mechanism for accountability is therefore the performance of the team through the effective outcome of their activities that produces desirable outcomes in the community. There is personal responsibility to ensure that the strategy is understood, the resources needed are procured and utilised effectively, and that the outputs and outcomes are delivered (Bubble Theory). The benefit organisationally is that the administrative and managerial overhead is reduced, the risk is that the responsibility for successfully delivering outcomes is not taken on fully or left to 'others' further up the chain.

### **Activity before form**

The tendency in managing change has been to re-structure the organisational size and shape in order to cope with the identification of the required numbers on the payroll. This is understandable and elected members need to know where changes are occurring in services and this can usefully be done through organisational charts that show where staffing resources have been allocated. But explaining the changed activities that are implied by the new organisational form can be neglected. Transform has sought to establish the importance of showing what activities are going to change and how this will work out in practice which can then suggest new organisational form/ shapes. The theory that sits alongside the idea of a 'learning organisation' is based on allowing space for personal agency and new ideas for delivery to emerge into new organisational form as a result of applied new practice. The benefit is that inappropriate form/ shape is not imposed and new service delivery does not therefore distort as it tries to adapt to this inappropriate form. The risk however, is that while the organisational form is unclear it allows behaviour that 'contests' the emergent new organisational form and stability is not properly established.

### **Applied learning**

Learning is the creation of knowledge that enables an organisation to adapt to new circumstances quickly and effectively. This 'knowledge' is fundamentally the intellectual capital of staff to see what needs to be done and then to get on and do it. This requires managerial competence and confidence. Transform has sought to build this capability through first the Transform programmes (aimed at staff) and then organisational experiment (through the Trios/ Cluster). The recent work of staff on the CE's 'Challenges' has sought to ramp this up to involve the active engagement of the idea of 'challenge sponsorship'. This notion of sponsorship enables a link to be made between the creativity to see the whole situation and come up with new ideas for dealing with it, and the process of fundamentally shifting the role and responsibility of senior managers and directors in overseeing change. Instead of the burden of top down responsibility, sponsors act in the space between delivery (operational and managerial) and strategy (desired outcomes and political and public acceptance).

### **Theory and Practice**

Combining these three fundamental theoretical principles together, Transform has developed a unique practical instrument through which to achieve radical (and transformational) change. The organisational 'pot' into which these ideas for change have been mixed with real practitioners has been referred to as the learning zone. This zone has been the home of the

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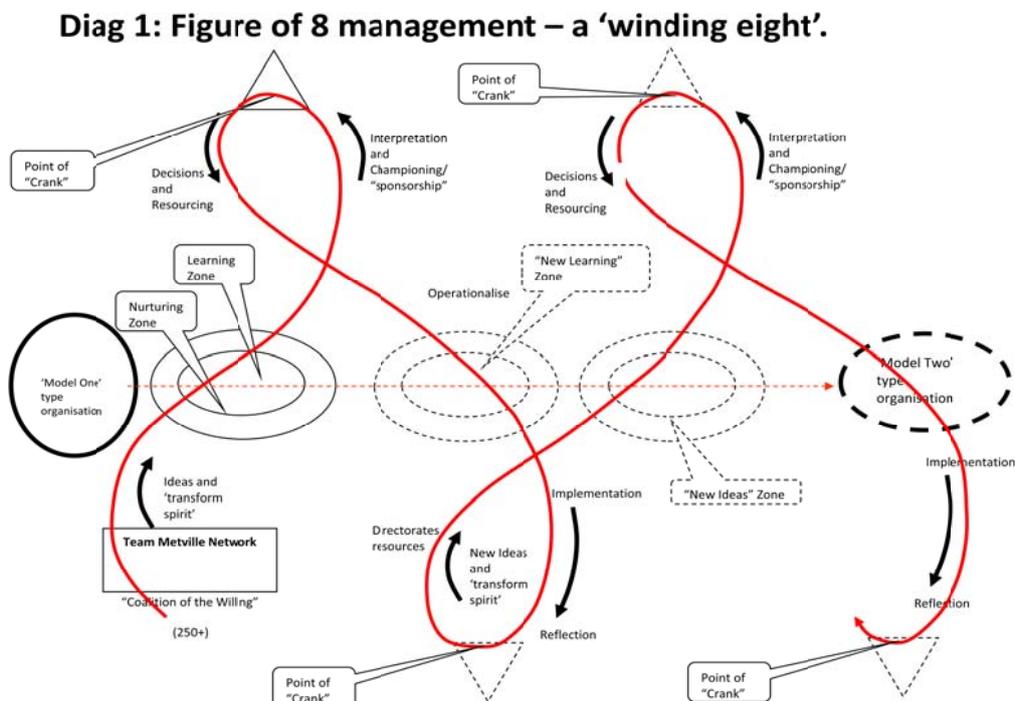
Trios/ Cluster. Picking up practical ideas from within the organisation has been developed through the Team Metville Network that has sought to bring people together to encourage greater personal agency and volunteering to experiment with new ways of working. Finally, the challenges for the organisation set by the CE in April 2010 were taken forward through groups who were able to call on the skills and experience of senior managers in the organisation who were acting as sponsors of change and could act as 'blockage breakers' in enabling change to be taken forward.

The recognition that there are two points in the cycle where change is absolutely vital emerged during the second part of 2010. These are referred to as points of 'crank' where the organisation has to bend into a more stressed state in order to deliver more radical change. These are at the 'top' and the 'bottom' of a moving 'figure of 8'. The acceptance that these points of crank are the key components for delivering a 'Model 2' solution recognises one of the key theoretical positions that Transform has discovered.

The danger is that what purports to be radical in scale (£45m) disguises the hesitancy of the organisation to embrace radical change and results in a radical reform of 'Model 1' into simply a reduced 'Model 1' and the opportunity to achieve transformational change will be lost.

### A 'figure of 8' approach

Diagram 1 (below) takes the idea of earlier Fig8 diagrams that have sought to explain the thinking behind turning ideas into delivery of innovative change. These have been rehearsed already in the literature of Transform.



The operation of the Trios (and the Trio cluster) was to provide learning on how new ideas for reform might be developed and taken forward. Critically, the 'one council action plan' sought to

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explain how the ideas around change might be pursued, identifying where resources might be found and how ideas might be progressed through to delivery and ultimately radical change. One aspect of this approach was to instigate a new role into senior management of 'sponsorship'. Senior managers who were already responsible for operational matters would be asked to assume an additional role of sponsoring innovation and assisting staff engaged in 'challenging' the status quo.

From this work there have been a number of meetings of sponsors where two key barriers have been identified. The first is the lack of a clear 'vision' of how a transformed local government world might look; and secondly the degree of authority and responsibility that needs to be placed on 'sponsorship' as a role to enable change to be driven forward. Diagram 1 suggests that this shift in role needs to be seen at critical points in the development of ideas for change – these are seen as 'points of crank' which 'wind' the organisation round a much tighter change pattern which is both urgent and systemic.

### **A possible new vision**

It is recognised that there is a considerable distance to be travelled between a set of theoretical principles, a diagram, and a contextual framework and producing the reality of change on the ground. In a 'story' about the challenges facing the senior executives and the elected members a portrait of some key delivery channels were presented. In the story they were presented as possible bidders for procuring a number of council services. In fact, they represent a range of typologies for delivery channels, all of which will be needed in a new vision (see Diag 2). The four 'types' were described as typical delivery companies with a number of characteristics. These were:

#### **'Stack'em Hi Ltd',**

This was a fairly large profit maximising firm which had been growing quite rapidly recently. They had a reputation for managing themselves extremely efficiently and being very conscious of all the contractual liabilities they undertook. Anything extra and the customer was charged for it. But they delivered well and had young and very able managers in charge of each of the 'client contracts'.

#### **'Gilt Edged Services Ltd'**

This was a company with a reputation for being rather 'precious' about providing services in a traditional way; the managing director had been around for some while but understood the business well. His style was to ensure that things had been done properly and he really knew his stuff. He was often in his office late on in the day checking items and making lists of things to follow up the next day.

#### **Pro-Service Associates Ltd**

This was a new firm that had been established from a group of professionals (possibly ex-staff). The company was keen to deliver the services they cared about the most and to run them efficiently but also effectively. Their management ethos was a light touch that expected staff to take initiatives and to get on with it – a sort of 'yes we can'.

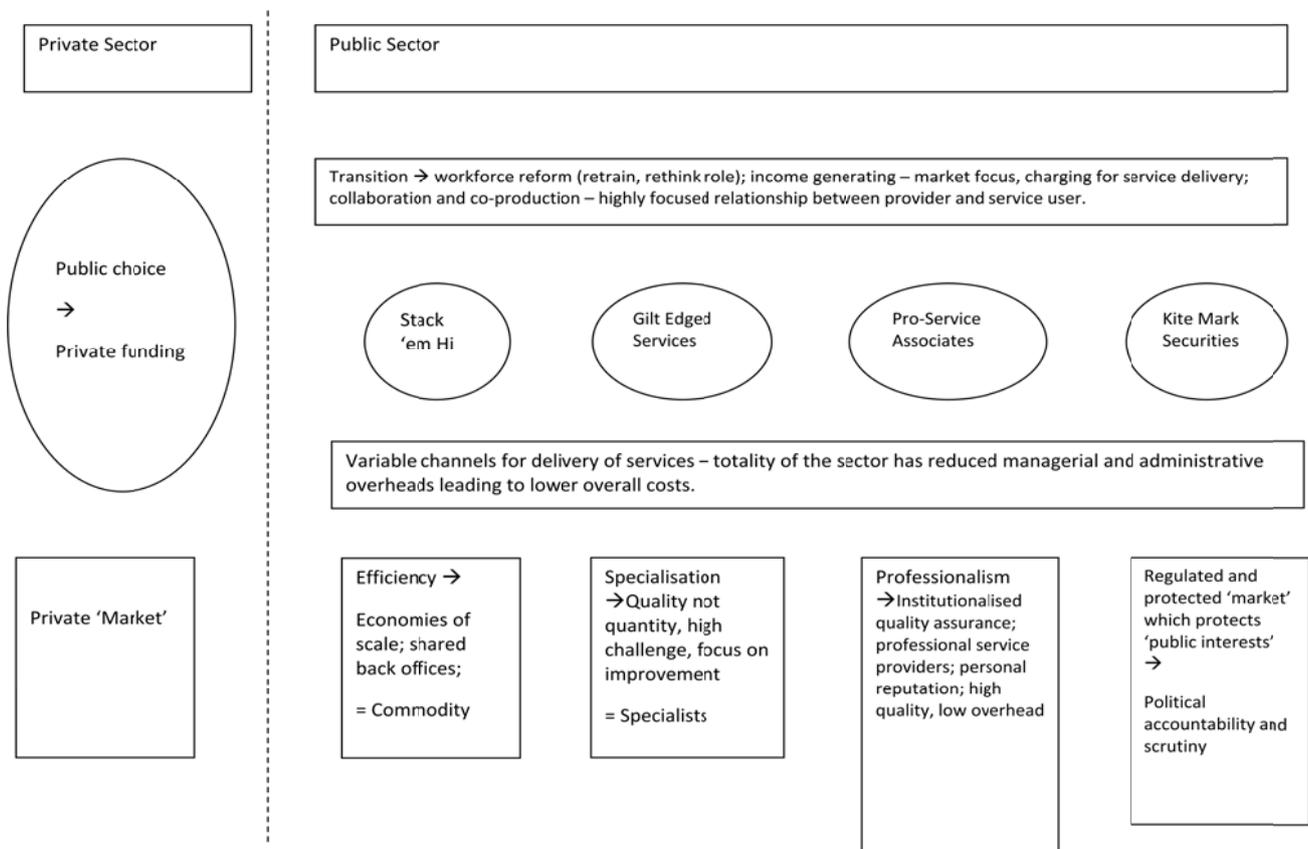
#### **KiteMark Securities Ltd**

This was a 'genuine' but 'small' firm with people whose values could be trusted. They had always been able to discern when things were changing and they changed with them. There was a good balance in the staff teams with staff running programmes that might not have been able to be promoted in other more traditional firms. They also had a reputation for innovation making suggestions on how improvements could be made.

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The fundamental reality of the financial settlement, and the emerging framework of reform that has come from the Coalition Government suggests that a radical approach will be needed which can accommodate both the size and scale of the reduced provision of resources as well as the speed of change that will be needed.

Transform is, in fact, well placed to respond to this challenge. If there is too much distortion in the 'market' then Stack'em Hi might well be favoured because of lower cost but in the end the skill, experience and expertise of Gilt Edged Services may well be lost and the quality of the service deteriorate. Using the talent and experience of Pro-Service Associates will ensure much of its knowledge capital is not lost to the City. Managing this process will be of enormous importance over the coming years.



### A proposal:

#### A proposition:

To turn investment of limited staff resources during the period of 1 year practicing 'Model 2' methodology as a way of investigating radical new ways to achieve public service reform, and establishing locality based working through shared and collaborative service delivery.

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### Delivery:

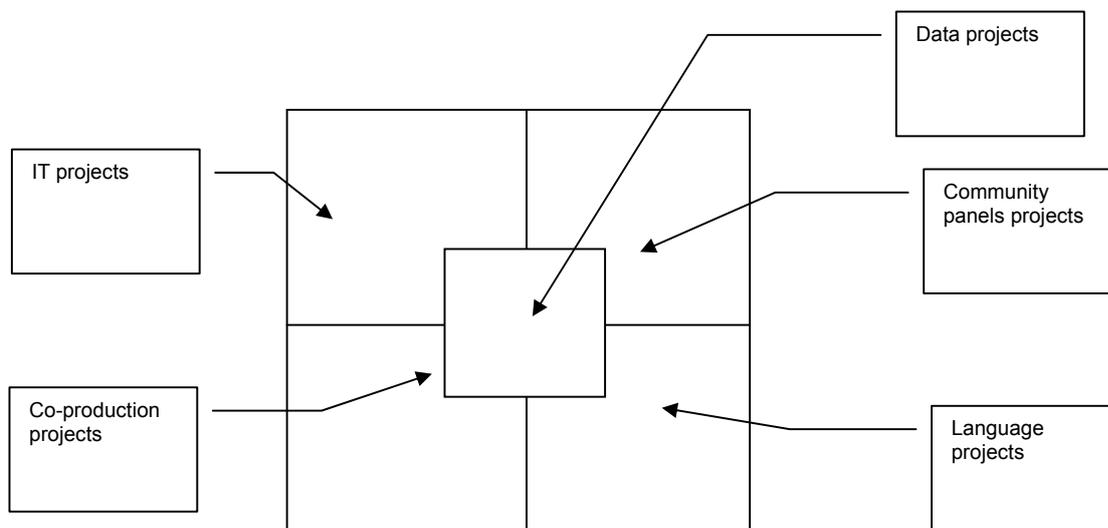
Staff members (fte – some part time, some full time) invested in making the Model 2 examples work through into real savings – say the equivalent of about 6 staff members.

Delivery of projects for Model 2 type changes that need to turn round in 12 weeks (approx 3 months) cycles - from idea through to decision to implementation. The cycle repeats every 12 weeks therefore in one year there can be 4 cycles (48 weeks total) allowing for slippage and year end. Model 2 schemes for change do not require heavy external investment since the key resources are already deployed – namely the staff on the ground.

Critical to the success of the projects will be themeing the work through the CSR key issues such as: workforce reform; income generation; budget adjustments; collaboration; property; service reduction; and service/policy redesign into the whole approach to the programme. Also essential is buy-in from community and member level involvement.

Each challenge needs to deliver savings using all the key themes as levers to delivery – IT projects will need to reduce costs (efficiency savings through workforce reform and budget adjustments) but also desist from doing certain services (service reduction), work out the real estate savings from property being used more efficiently (property), and work out more collaborative methods of delivering services through different channels. This will also be the case in co-production type projects and so on.

### Projects: 5 key challenges (the original 'BS' Challenges)



This means that conventional reform projects could be evaluated against the Model 2 type projects for comparison. There will need to be a clear decision making process from project sponsors, to CMT and then into delivery in conjunction with the change team.

### Resources

There are resources in place. The TSN 'players' ('coalition of the willing') are in place already and are being underutilised. The Trio's/ clunch members are prepared and have been developing ideas for implementation – they just need a mechanism through which they can

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work. This suggests that the authority and responsibility for sponsors and project teams are clarified to ensure that these are both clear as well as 'enabling' in their scope. The 'permission' to act needs to be clarified and what 'Model 2' language comprises.

### **Next steps**

It might be useful if a proposals list is agreed which has been discussed with the change team, where the selected staff (or fte) can be commissioned to begin work on implementation of the first group of projects. CMT will need to identify the key people selected and give them a clear understanding of their brief. This need not be complicated.

Their job will be to think through ideas for change, price and work through the savings implications. They will also need to work out a change plan for implementation that will include how to get the 'job done'. This will be a clear and well managed operation.

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**Vrsn 5.0**