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# FLUID FRACTALS: LEADERSHIP AT THE APEX OF LOCAL AUTHORITY IN ENGLAND

TRIPATHI, SMITA

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Plymouth University

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**FLUID FRACTALS: LEADERSHIP AT THE APEX OF  
LOCAL AUTHORITY IN ENGLAND**

By

**SMITA TRIPATHI**

A thesis submitted to the Plymouth University  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

School of Management  
Plymouth Business School

**FEBRUARY 2013**

# **Fluid Fractals: Leadership at the Apex of Local Authority**

**Smita Tripathi**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** This thesis aims to explore the complex phenomenon of leadership at the apex of democratically elected local authority in England. It makes sense of the social construction of leadership as perceived and enacted by senior appointed officers (hereinafter officers), elected members (hereinafter members) and key stakeholders – the voices from the apex and their understandings and interpretations.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The thesis examines leadership literature through the paradigm of constructivism-interpretivism, making sense of transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with officers, members and stakeholders engaged in local authority work. Dominant/mainstream theories of leadership offer limited help to understanding the relational, processual constructions of leadership and is critiqued. One way forward is to rethink conceptualisation of leadership in terms of the empirical evidence through interviews. This research has explored how leadership is situated, shared and occasioned, processed and deployed as narratives between officers and members.

**Findings:** The constructivist-interpretivist findings of the research challenges the dominant essentialist hegemony of existing leadership theories, where heroic leaders and their skills and competencies can be replaced by less individualistic and more critical constructs through the four lenses which draw together in the fractal of leadership. This moving, forming and reforming, dynamic model highlights: i) the context in which leadership is situated and performs, ii) the shared and relational nature of leadership in interactions and continuous happenings, and the web of roles and relationships between powerful actors, which are perpetually evolving and contextualising, iii) the doing of leadership with its focus on interactive processes and practices, and iv) the narratives of leadership including the language games, the rhetoric, the metaphors and symbols which can challenge as well as reinforce the existing patterns of leadership as they emerge and mould and are moulded in diverse patterns.

**Research limitations/implications:** Though the findings themselves cannot always be generalised to other contexts, the four frames of the fractal provide theoretical perspectives for studying leadership in other contexts.

**Originality/value:** By challenging the dominating mainstream and public leadership theories, the four theme leadership framework allows for the incorporation of dynamic lenses to study the complex social phenomena of leadership. The analogy with a kaleidoscopic fractal enables a rich understanding of leadership rooted in a specific context yet with endless possibilities of leadership built from the permutations and combinations of the four themes. This thesis makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to the questions of the *how, why and what* of organisational leadership, both in a broad sense and in the specific context of the public sector and local authority in particular.

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

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### Paper Presentations and Conferences Attended:

- Conference presentation jointly with Dr. Hilary Duckett at the 10th International Studying Leadership Conference (ISLC) held between 12th and 13th December at the Bristol Business School at the University of the West of England, UK.
- Conference Presentation at the 25 Year Anniversary BAM Conference held on 13th – 15th September 2011 titled Strategic Leadership at the Apex of Local Authority: The lens of leadership narratives.
- Conference Presentation at the Public Administration Conference 2011 held on 5th & 6th September titled Strategic Leadership at the Apex of Local Authority: Some Findings, at the Business School, University of Birmingham.
- Presentation at the Social Policy Association 2011 Conference held between 4th-6th July 2011 titled Strategic Leadership at the Apex of Local Authority, Some preliminary findings.
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- Indian Institute of Management, Fourth Annual Conference on Public Policy and Management, 9-12th August 2009 titled Leadership and Governance in the New Public Management: The Paradoxes and Challenges.
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॥ ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत् सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो

देवस्य धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

(Rig Vedic Sanskrit hymn)

*To the Loving Memory of My Father, My Grandfather and My Great-Grandparents-*

*All of you, like shining beacons in the night sky, eased my way in this journey....*

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To my fellow PhD travellers .....thank you all .....

## AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD

विद्या ददाति विनयं विनयाद्याति पात्रताम् ।  
पात्रत्वाद्धनमाप्नोति धनाद्धर्मं ततः सुखम् ॥ ५ ॥

(Translated from the Sanskrit: From knowing emerges...happiness.)

*To be able to dance with one's feet, with concepts with words: need I still add that one must be able to do it with the pen too?*

**Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science (1882)**

*I grew up with fountain pens. As a child, they were as 'natural' to me as my family. My father's pen seemed to produce an endless stream of mathematical scribbles that somehow transformed themselves into papers in journals. .... The pen was destined to become my life. .... I loved to ponder and to write; the sound of the pen on paper, the flowing of the ink, the mounting columns of 'my thoughts' – all produced a special thrill....*

**Kenneth Gergen, An Invitation to Social Construction (1999:1)**

*The image gleaned from old family photographs of my great grandmother dressed in her linen sari leading the convocation at one of the top universities in India in the 1940-50s...*

*My great grandfather, grandfather and aunt each wielded their pens with effortless dexterity. The music of their pens writing over paper and of typewriter keys conjuring words remained embedded in the distal parts of my memories....*

Where the starting points of this research story lay are numerous and perhaps too tangled to tease out, but the above three narratives have had an enduring hold on the saga.

I have attempted, in what follows, to capture a sliver of what transpires in the rich sensory phenomenon of leadership which has endlessly fascinated me. As a Civil Servant when India was undergoing reforms and modernisation, I witnessed first-hand the many ambiguities and challenges that leaders and leaderships confronted. The complex emerging patterns of leadership endlessly formed and reformed, collapsing and remoulding, in perpetual motion.... These myriad and rich kaleidoscopic fractals of leadership spoke to me and beckoned. Thence commenced my research journey.



# CHAPTER 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

## 1.1 The beginnings

This research aims to explore the phenomenon of leadership at the apex of the democratically elected local authority within the context of local government in England. Leadership of a local authority is complex and multi-faceted, evolving through interaction between officers and members and key stakeholders engaged in local governance. It is a shared and relational process; it explores the social construction of leadership as perceived and enacted by senior appointed officers<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter officers), elected members (hereinafter members) and key stakeholders – the voices from the apex and their understandings and interpretations of the leadership of a local authority in the South West of England. This Chapter presents the introduction to the research, highlighting the context, motivations and positionality of the researcher in the research process. It sets the stage for the literature review and the research process.

## 1.2 Research rationale

The relevance of this research can be traced to existing gaps in leadership literature (analysed in Chapters 2, 3, 4) specifically pertaining to top-level leadership of a local authority involving the dynamic relationship between elected members and officers. Though there is existing literature, most of it looks at leaders at the top of organisations, either chief executives or political leaders, but not at the dynamic relationship between the two, which clearly impacts upon leadership of local authority. Within social constructivism, leadership is very much a relational understanding: at local authority level it is the existence and interaction between these two sets of leadership players and processes. Through my research I wish to study the intricacy and dynamism of these shared processes of leadership involving elected members and top-level officers in a

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *senior or corporate officers* in this research refer to appointed officers in the first three tiers of a local authority in England.

local authority. This research focuses on problematising the *what*, the *who* and the *how* of local leadership. This research is of interest as it addresses several gaps in literature and contributes to new knowledge arrived at through an inductive process using qualitative, interpretive research design and analysis with a constructivist-interpretivist research philosophy and case study strategy.

The research is of practical interest to scholars as well managers and leaders involved in governance worldwide as arguably strong local leadership is the elixir for reform and modernisation in the design and delivery of local public services. The theory and practice of leadership generally and of urban local places would be enriched by such a study. The contribution to knowledge of this research comes in the form of theoretical, methodological and practical knowledge (Section 12.3, of this thesis).

### **1.2.1 Why leadership**

Leadership has long been linked with organisational effectiveness and performance; it is said to play a crucial role in adapting and in fact sustaining organisations during changing and turbulent times (Bass, 1985, 1990; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999; Burke & Cooper, 2004; Yukl, 2009). It is this link, supposed or real with attaining and sustaining organisational transformation and success and effective societal functioning that lies at the heart of the enduring interest in leadership and leaders per se (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2009; Northouse, 2010; Bryman *et al.*, 2011). The decisions made by leaders matter and impact upon multitudes, often cascading outside the immediacy of the organisational context, and sometimes continuing to affect succeeding generations. This partly explains the widespread fascination among practitioners, academics and the general public with the phenomenon of leadership as well as the enduring reason for leadership studies and research.

Leadership is associated with providing: 1) vision and organisational purpose, 2) subordinate satisfaction and motivation and 3) effectiveness of outcomes (Bass, 1990; Bryman, 1992; Nanus, 1992; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999). Exemplary and outstanding leaders are described by their followers as being particularly inspirational and visionary by providing strategic focus, direction and meaning to lower level managers, guided by a critical analysis of the external environment (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Tichy and Devanna, 1990). They are expected to encourage and support sharing, enabling, empowering and directing of staff within work groups (Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Kotter, 1990, 1996). Leadership is expected to exercise authority and control and manage both change and risk (Bass 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Tichy and Devanna, 1990). In essence, it is expected to *get things done* (Kotter, 1990) by being ‘*all things to all people*’ (Rost, 1991:7); It is the key to reforming and transforming an organisation (Kotter, 1990). Though it has been practised and extensively studied since ancient times, it is cogent to remember that leadership has been perceived as being ‘*the most studied and the least understood topic of any in the social sciences*’ (Bennis and Nanus, 1985: 20). I locate my fascination with the enigma of leadership in this organisational and societal setting.

### **1.2.2 Why leadership at the apex of local authority**

Local authority is situated in a complex political administrative hierarchy and is responsible for implementing policy at the local level where it wields social, political and economic influence. Some structural and cultural changes have occurred in local authority after the Local Government Act of 2000 and subsequent amendments. More recently the Localism Act (House of Commons, 2011) seeks to relate ‘*ideas about a reduced state and an increased role for markets to community involvement and local democracy*’ (Hodgson and Spours, 2012:200). This has been underpinned by the ‘*Big Society*’ (Cameron, 2010). The local authority, its leadership and the relational dynamic

relationship between members and officers become critical elements in the translation of national policy at local levels including localism, place shaping, public engagement and participation in local democratic processes. The case study of a local authority is of immense significance, not only from academic but from strategic and policy perspectives as well.

I have a personal interest in studying leadership in government and the role it can play in reform and modernisation. I was in the Civil Services in India when it was undergoing major reform where I witnessed the role of leadership in the process of modernisation and reform at close hand and the difference it could make.

### **1.2.3 Why study public leadership?**

Leadership seems to be the essential ingredient for success and effectiveness within the public services, for improved performance, creating public value and solving *wicked* problems, and for more efficient and effective delivery of public services (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Bass, 1985; Luke 1998; Grint, 2005 b, 2010; Milner and Joyce, 2005; Maak and Pless, 2006; Morse, *et al.*, 2007; Berry, 2009; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Brookes and Grint, 2010). The concept of public value, which underpins the understanding of leadership in the public sector, can be said to mean the design of policies, programmes and practices that benefit a community as a whole (Moore, 1995, 2000). Ultimately the task of leadership is to use the building blocks of public values to achieve the common good (Crosby and Bryson, 2005).

The practice and conception of public leadership is undergoing transformation in keeping with the changes in the public sector context, which is slowly but irrevocably moving towards the era of new governance with an emphasis on networks, partnership working and communities and away from hierarchies (Salamon, 2002; Bevir and Rhodes, 2004; Stoker, 2004, 2006; Bevir, 2006; Maak & Pless, 2006; Liddle, 2010,

2012). These contextual changes require leadership to evolve and transform, to undergo metamorphosis of some sort (Morse and Buss, 2007). Governance in this sense can be clarified as collective group actions to solve public problems and create public value, much more than what governments did traditionally in the past. This links governance conceptually to the concept of public leadership. This forms a dilemma for research on public leadership: *can leadership in the public domain be substituted by management or governance? How do they differ; do leaders and managers in the public sector see it as different? Is this perceived difference significant? Does this matter?* Such questions would be part of my empirical quest at the local authority level.

The emphasis on governance marks a movement away from agency towards a diverse set of *tools* that include contracting out, inter-agency or inter-sectoral collaborations (Salamon, 2002; Bevir *et al.*, 2003 a, b; Massey and Hutton, 2006; Liddle, 2009, 2010). These two kindred movements towards governance and public leadership, not surprisingly, came at the heels of one another (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Learmonth, 2005; Milner and Joyce, 2005; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Liddle, 2010, 2012). The changes in governance are accompanied by the transformation of public leadership going well beyond leading organisations to leading networks, collaborative partnerships and communities (Salamon, 2002; Kettl, 2002; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Crosby and Bryson, 2005; Laffin and Liddle, 2006).

Brookes and Grint (2010), Raffel *et al.* (2009), Morse and Buss (2008), Van Wart and Dicke (2008) among others, elaborate on the significant role of public sector leadership in managing change, improving governance and in solving the complex challenges and *wicked* problems. While it is significant to analyse leadership in the public services, the political context in which it is played out cannot be ignored. There are inherent dangers in this peculiar situation of remaining '*politically neutral while being more political*' (Milner and Joyce, 2005: 14). Hence, the study of public leadership is not only a

riveting topic and of particular interest to me, it is crucial to the teaching and research of leadership within Business Schools which is where I locate my vocation.

### **1.3 The research context: Scope and limitations**

This research is premised upon the significance of leadership in local authority, specifically its dual dimensions, within the context of modernisation and reform. It has identified the changing context of local government with numerous stakeholders and competing and ambiguous agendas and policy goals. It has focussed on top-level executive and strategic leadership at the apex as a process involving both members and officers. This research is an attempt to contextualise and problematise the leadership of local authority.

The scope of this research covers leadership as a process of influence exercised by members and officers at the apex of local authority (*cf.* Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). It largely ignores leadership in the middle levels or even lower in the local authority hierarchy. It also focuses on leaders as people in leadership positions who initiate and take responsibility of leadership processes giving strategic direction to local authority. Within this leader and leadership arena, the relationship between members and officers at the apex is core to the process of leadership.

The research focuses on a particular case study which is distinct and not representative of councils in England with the stated intention to study in great detail a particular local authority (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). One of the premises that local leadership has, the betterment of society as a cherished goal is itself limiting; it leaves out other legitimate drivers like career aspirations and personal ambitions and the much more complex role of political parties. This research does not really consider these factors other than as peripheral outliers. Within a structural-functional or even a neo-institutional approach, leadership at local authority could have been explored in terms of institutions,

organisations, expectations and role sets. No doubt these insights would have enriched the study but for practical reasons of expediency, I did not take the research down those pathways.

The literature review has taken a very broad, multi-disciplinary approach which though exhilarating, imposes difficulties on a PhD research thesis. Most of these more focussed disciplinary orientations have valuable insights to offer and it may seem like they are not given their due. There is no way this research would have achieved this level of analysis and critique unless it followed from these rich theoretical traditions for instance, the classical *bureaucratic* public administration literature. I owe an infinite debt to that what has been theorised and empirically explored as leadership in the rich disciples of politics-political science, public administration-management, sociology and psychology.

#### **1.4 The research focus**

This section introduces the research, clarifying its purpose: to investigate how leadership is enacted, emerges and is constructed at the apex of local authority, most specifically the impact of this relationship between members and officers on the exercise of such leadership. It critically analyses how leadership is shared between members and officers and how it evolves and develops within the bounds of this relationship. It explores the nature of leadership of a local authority.

Self (1972) visualised the governmental process as an arch with the left arc representing the political process and the right representing the administrative process and at the apex or the junction at the top, the political and the administrative processes blend, energising and influencing one another (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). This research seeks to extend this conceptualisation to a local authority in England and explores how these intrinsic governance relationships between political and administrative processes

and leaders constrain and/or enable the exercise of leadership. The research explores the construction of leadership – the many layers and textures that are created and evolve within a complex process involving officers and members and the staff as well as the key stakeholders, which is thereafter interpreted and made sense of both by the participants of the research and the researcher.

The broad research aim is to understand, analyse and theorise the phenomena of leadership at the apex of local authority. More specifically it seeks to address three research questions (Table 1.1).

**Table 1-1: The research questions**

<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>
1. What does leadership mean to members and officers at the apex of local authority? Are there compatible understandings of leadership of a local authority between members and officers?
2. Who provides leadership to local government (members, officers, both or some other category)? How is the process of leadership enacted between the members and the officers? How do leaders make sense of the relationship between them? How is this relationship negotiated?
3. How is leadership constructed and shared at the apex of local authority between the members and the officers? What is the nature of this relationship?

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These research questions would be critically analysed theoretically – using relevant leadership theories, and empirically – using qualitative strategies and methods of data collection and analysis.

### **1.5 The situated researcher**

The researcher is crucial in the research process not just through the selection of the topic of research. The political and managerial interface has personally fascinated me as a *lapsed practitioner in academia*. This forcibly reminds one of the centrality of the researcher rooted in a particular cognitive and experiential frame. The values they hold

in terms of locationality and positionality have a bearing on the research process. Qualitative, constructive interpretivist case study depends partly upon the creative insights and conceptualisations of the researcher; the acknowledgement and reflection on positionality and adoption of a reflective and critical stance through the process of research can minimise bias and sustain the rigour of the process. Hence, the purpose is to seek to preserve a balance between objectivity and subjectivity visualised not as polarities but as a continuum, and one that acknowledges the complex identity of the researcher (following from Haraway's (1991) concept of situated knowledge). Ensuing from Harding's (1991) standpoint theory, positionality theory (Kezar and Lester, 2010: 166) claims that individuals have a '*position that impacts how they socially construct the world*'. Their position is informed by multiple identities, so my being a civil servant, an economic emigrant from another country, a communitarian keen on working and engaging with local and regional charities, a customer with an heightened civic and green consciousness, a voter (being part of the Commonwealth) and a tax payer, an academician and researcher were all part of my *being* which influenced the various stages of the research process. This identity and position promotes certain forms of knowing, behaving and interpreting.

#### **1.6 The emergence of the integrative theory of leadership: The four themes as lenses of leadership**

The four leadership themes – contextual, shared and relational, processual and discursive narratives of leadership are the lenses to analyse the leadership of a local authority (Chapters 7-11). The conceptualisation of this integrative framework for the study of leadership is my unique contribution to theoretical knowledge. Through the narratives expressed by the participants at the apex of local authority, a rich *modus operandi* of local authority leadership can be built. The use of these four lenses has the capacity to generate rich analytical and conceptual descriptions of the context of local

authority leadership, shared nature of leadership between officers and members, process and practices of leadership and the narratives that are constructed through speech, text and cognitions, and interactive experiences. The constructivist-interpretivist findings of the research challenges the dominant essentialist hegemony of existing leadership theories where heroic leaders and their skills and competencies can be replaced by less individualistic and more critical constructs through the four lenses coming together in the fractal<sup>2</sup> or kaleidoscope of leadership. Leadership is hence envisaged as a fluid fractal, a kaleidoscope with changing yet recurring, iterative patterns, continuously being and moving, composed of the four thematic lenses with their multivariate elements.

### **1.7 Practical considerations**

The research required the collection of empirical material in great depth through semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews from a local authority in the South West. The location was carefully chosen to enable prolonged access; negotiation started early in the research process and quality and ethical issues were carefully considered and built into the research process. Paradigmatic, theoretical and methodological coherence was crucial and insisted upon.

The local authority selected is a unitary one with two well defined parties with a leader and Cabinet structure which provides an opportunity to study a more overtly politicised local urban leadership (more about the case study in Chapter 6) in the South West of England. Besides the primary data, a range of secondary data was collected through archives, websites, local government practitioner magazines etc. along with observations of council and civic meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> Fractals or rather fractal geometry is a way of describing the real world of nature or of modelling nature based on Mandelbrot's sets (Mandelbrot, 1982; Lesmoir-Gordon *et al.*, 1992; Lesmoir-Gordon, *et al.*, 2009).

## 1.8 Outline of the Chapters

Very briefly, I provide the structure of the PhD thesis, outlining the contents of each Chapter in the table (Table 1.1).

**Table 1-2: Structure of the PhD thesis**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Chapter 1 – a general introduction to the research and the researcher; its rationale, context, aims and structural content;
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> Chapter 2 – an elaboration of the literature review on leadership with a focus on the strategic, process, shared and relational approaches, clarifying gaps; Chapter 3 – critical appraisal of the public leadership literature and the new developments in the field, locating this research in the gaps in the literature; Chapter 4 – focusing on the local government context and contextualising leadership research therein;
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN</b> Chapter 5 – specific exploration of the research philosophy including the ontological, epistemological, methodological, rhetorical and axiological assumptions Chapter 6 – an investigation of the research design and the quality, ethics and practical issues linked with collecting the data;
<b>FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS</b> Chapter 7 – outlining the process of making sense of the empirical material generated; Chapter 8 – 11 – exploration and analysis of the findings of the research in terms of the context, shared nature of leadership, process and practice of leadership and the narratives of leadership; and,
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Chapter 12 – concluding the research and clarifying the contributions of the research in terms of theory, methodology and findings.
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## 1.9 Conclusion

This Chapter frames the research process, providing its rationale and motivations, locating the research in the context of leadership of a local authority and outlining a road map of the PhD thesis. The research is grounded in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm where reality is relative, contextual and constructed and co-constructed with the participants and researcher offering interpretations of the subjective reality of leadership. Both locationality and positionality are issues within this interpretive and reflexive research. As a researcher, I am both mindful of, and reflective on ‘*building a*

*convincing case*' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007: 1279) through a process which generates rich empirical material, interpretive repertoire and elements of reflexivity (*ibid.*). Attention is invited to the research process, the narrative in the research thesis and the situated researcher who interprets meaningfully and co-creates the research with the participants. The researcher has a story to tell of leadership of a local authority in the *Nagar*<sup>3</sup> local authority. It follows that the phenomenon of leadership, the findings and the analysis move back and forth between relevant literature and experience. It reminds one of the skills of a *bricoleur* (Levi-Strauss, 1966; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003a) exploring the complex phenomenon of leadership of a local authority that is embedded in a specific context and given meaning through interpretations of complex patterns and meaningful relationships in such leadership.

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<sup>3</sup> I use the *noms de plume Nagar*, Sanskrit term meaning city, for the Local Authority under study (Section 6.8.3, this thesis).



## **CHAPTER 2 LEADERSHIP: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This Chapter begins with an overview of the leadership literature and critically analyses the theoretical perspectives to understand this complex phenomenon and its multiple variations. It critically analyses the evolving nature and developments within the field of leadership. The Chapter aims to explore meanings and understandings around leadership as much to acknowledge and recognise the earlier research as to set boundaries and parameters, in the process making the research journey feasible as well as contextualising the empirical research that follows.

The vast literature around leadership is acknowledged and its understanding is explored through a number of relevant theoretical perspectives. Leadership is crucially situated in a dynamic context, its relational and processual natures are highlighted and its study is grounded in constructivism. The gaps in the literature are identified and this research is placed firmly in these revealed gaps. The next Chapter looks at public leadership (Chapter 3) followed by the context of local authority (Chapter 4).

### **2.2 Understanding leadership**

As a starting point, it is useful to understand leadership through the three elements that are widely acknowledged as being the crux of leadership and common to almost all leadership definitions (see Rost, 1991; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999; Yukl, 2009; Northouse, 2010; Bryman *et al.*, 2011). These three elements are influence, group and goals. By and large the focus remains on the leaders who initiate, command and influence the leadership process.

Any attempt to understand leadership should be grounded in the premise that leadership is a complex social phenomenon, lacking in real boundaries and where clear definitions are likely to be elusive (Fiedler, 1971; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Antonakis *et al.*, 2004;

Crosby, *et al.*, 2010) and endlessly contentious (Rost, 1991; Barker, 1997; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Fairhurst, 2009). Leadership can meaningfully be analysed from different perspectives as it is a multidimensional, multilevel (Pearce and Sims, 2000; Gardner *et al.*, 2005; Chen *et al.*, 2007) and complex concept (Bass, 1990; Sashkin and Burke, 1990; Yukl, 2009) where the focus can and does move from individual to group levels, motives, styles and behaviours, situations and other aspects.

In the words of Northouse (2010:3), leadership *'is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal'*. In accepting that there is no *'single correct definition'* of leadership, Yukl (2010: 41) does not distinguish between leadership and management. Antonakis *et al.*, (2004:5) refer to leadership as an influencing process, and the resultant outcome between leader and followers is explained by leaders' behaviour and characteristics and the followers' perceptions and attributions of the leader, and significantly, the context within which this influencing process occurs. The understanding of this influencing process and its context are enduring sources of debate.

*'The study of leadership rivals in age the study of civilisation, which shaped its leaders as much as it was shaped by them. From its infancy the study of history has been the study of leaders - what they did and why they did it'* (Bass, 1990: 3). Grint's (1997, 2011) focus is historical as well, he uses the details to cast leadership as an ensemble of arts: 1) philosophical: identity issues: *who we are?*; 2) fine: vision issues, *what this organization wants to achieve?*; 3) martial: tactics - *how this will we achieved?*; and, 4) performing: persuasion to mobilize others: *why we should want this identity, pursue this vision, and adopt these tactics?*. These four elements are all dedicated to understanding how leaders and followers often create the contexts to which they would have to respond (Grint, 2000).

With the advent of the New Leadership theories (Bryman, 1996), the focus shifts to the leader as the *manager of meaning* (Weick, 1979, 1995; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Pye, 2005) and engaging in sensemaking (Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, *et al.*, 2005) becomes the focus. Leadership emerges as symbolic action where the leaders define organisational reality for others and give direction and sense of purpose, actively promoting values that provide shared meanings about the organisation and its context. Leaders functional profile in more recent times in many organisations has broadened to cover services to employees and stakeholders, designing and supporting cross-functional teams and shaping strategy at the macro (or systemic) and micro levels (See Kanter, 1989; Hunt, 2004; Antonakis *et al.*, 2004). Managerial leaders have to '*learn to*' lead where they have neither '*command authority*' nor are '*controlled or controlling*' (Drucker, 1993:115). This requires them to lead upwards and laterally as well as downwards (Osborn *et al.*, 1980; Sayles, 1993; Conger, 1993; Hunt, 1996).

The root definition of leadership from the Oxford English Dictionary clarifies '*to lead*' as '*to guide with reference to action or opinion, to bring by persuasion. . . . to or into a condition, to conduct by argument or representation to a conclusion, to induce to do something*'(Oxford English Dictionary). The understanding of leadership is problematic as '*to lead*' has double meaning as it is both a verb and a noun and has '*multiple implications*' (Barnard, 1968: 81). Weick (1979) also engages in this discussion of verbs and nouns and encourages the former usage so that '*more attention would be paid to process and we'd learn about how to see it and manage it*' (1979: 44). Many of the substantive works on leadership theories like those by Northouse, Yukl, Storey, Bass, Burns, and Kakabadse all aver to the definitional issues within leadership studies.

Leadership as a process of influence is hard to distinguish from many other influences in relationships between people (Pondy, 1978; Pye, 2005), and as a form of social influence is closely related to organisational culture (Schein, 1985). Hence, leadership

*'seems intimately allied to a conceptualisation of organising'* (Pye, 2005: 32). *'Key to this is the emphasis on relationships between actors and developing context(s) over time(s) which ensures leadership is situated and seen through the improvisational dynamics of 'moving to' the future: a conception not dissimilar to that of organizing'* (*ibid.*: 32). Pye (2005: 33) goes on to suggest *'framing our subject, not as leadership, but as a case of sensemaking in action'*. According to Weick *et al.* (2005), *'Sensemaking is about labelling and categorising to stabilise the stream of experience' in communication with organisational others'* (*ibid.*: 411).

Though there are plenty of references to strategic, executive, top-level leaders and their significance in rallying organisational performance, much of the actual research has been limited to the study of leadership at the lower levels (Storey, 2005; Zaccaro and Horn, 2003; Day and Lord, 1988). Some useful research has focused on CEOs (Tosi *et al.*, 2004; Waldman and Yammarino, 1999; Waldman *et al.*, 2004) and executive leadership (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Boal, 2004). Top leaders like Roddick, Welch, Iacocca, Branson have often been the obsession of business journalism; this cult of prominent individuals or superstar CEOs (Bennis and O' Toole, 2000; Khurana, 2002) makes greater demands on leaders and heightened expectations from followers. Leadership at the apex involving both elected and appointed officials is rarer (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis).

Leadership occurs at all levels within an organisation and is a multi-level phenomenon involving individuals, teams and groups, organisational and multiple organisations (Chen *et al.*, 2007; Gardner *et al.*, 2005; Pearce and Sims, 2000). At the micro-level, it concentrates on teams and groups, their culture and communications within it (Sheard and Kakabadse, 2006, 2007) while macro level focuses on the strategic and the top-levels influencing not only the organisation but also stakeholders, partners. Storey (2005: 90) attributes the lack of focus in leadership research to the *'unrestricted, free,*

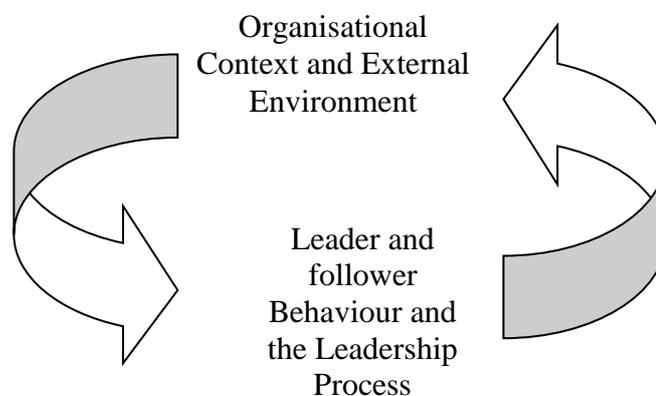
*switching between levels*'. Zaccaro and Horn (2003) note that theories and models of leadership generally assume that the same processes of leadership apply at higher and lower levels. Most of the leadership training and development also occur at junior and middle levels (Storey, 2005). This distinction between micro and macro levels of leadership can also be analysed by looking at leadership *in* organisations and leadership *of* organisations respectively (See also section 2.4 of this thesis). The former can be taken to refer to team or functional or departmental leadership and the latter to overall, strategic leadership, which includes responsibility for strategic planning and implementation, and aligning resources and capacities to enable achievement of strategic goals and outcomes.

Storey (2005: 90) classifies the critical issues pertaining to top-level leadership as: 1) the structural/relational closely linked with organisational *governance*; 2) the functional issues linked with the priorities, challenges and problems which confront leaders of whole organisations; and, 3) legitimacy linked with exercise of power and authority. This forms the domain of the executive or corporate level leadership which constitutes the research focus here. The challenges of understanding leadership are summed up aptly in these words, '*it is something grounded in identity construction, about which we make **retrospective** sense, **enactive** of sensible environments, undoubtedly **social** and **ongoing**, focused on and extracted by **cues** and most definitely driven by **plausibility** – shaping plausible meaning – **rather than** any notion of **accuracy***' (Pye, 2005: 38. Highlighted by italics in the original).

### **2.3 The context of leadership**

Leadership *in* and *of* organisations does not take place in a vacuum but within specified organisational and external contexts. Earlier trail blazing research on context in behavioural sciences would include names like Lewin (1947), Weber (1946), Fiedler (1967), and House and Mitchell (1974). There is available a fairly large body of

literature which has reviewed the organisational context as a factor affecting leaders' behaviour and effectiveness of the leadership processes. Context can be distinguished into internal and external; the external has sometimes been referred to as the environment (Osborne *et al.*, 2002; Porter and McLaughlin, 2006; Fairhurst, 2009; Liden and Antonakis, 2009). What is of interest to this research is how it can impact on processes and practices of leadership and to what extent the exercise of leadership can bring changes to this context. Liden and Antonakis (2009: 1) define context as the '*the milieu- the physical and social environment-in which leadership is observed*'. Others have identified context as critical in organisational behaviour and more specifically leadership behaviour and psychology (Blair and Hunt, 1986; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001; Rousseau and Fried, 2001; Johns, 2001, 2006). Pawar and Eastman (1997) and Bryman *et al.*, (1996) suggest that leadership is embedded within organisations and includes an adaptive or context-determined component. Pawar and Eastman (1997) identify four contextual factors which have an impact on transformational leadership; these are 1) organisational orientation (for e.g. adaptation vs. efficiency), 2) task systems, 3) structure, and finally, 4) mode of governance. Liden and Antonakis (2009: 2) include both national and organisational culture and team as constituents of the context which has a bearing on leadership.



**Figure 2-1: Link between organisational context and the external environment**

Context and environment can be both an influencing factor on leadership as well as being impacted upon by leadership; significantly this link can be both ways. In the words of Osborne, *et al.*, (2002: 797), ‘(l)eadership and its effectiveness, in large part, are dependent upon the context. Change the context and leadership changes...’ In their review of literature in 2006, Porter and McLaughlin (2006: 563) identified major components of the internal organisational context as culture/climate, goals/purposes, people, composition, process, state/condition, structure and time, Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2-1: Major components of organisational context: Examples of elements of components**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Examples of Elements</b>
<b>Culture/climate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of culture (e.g.; bureaucratic, adaptive)</li> <li>• Norms that reflect the culture</li> <li>• Cultural emphasis on ethics</li> </ul>
<b>Goals/purposes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals, strategies, and missions of individuals, groups and organisational units</li> </ul>
<b>People / composition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic variability within the organisation</li> <li>• Capabilities of individuals and groups</li> </ul>
<b>Processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type(s) of technologies in use</li> <li>• Task factors (e.g.; differentiation, complexity, ambiguity)</li> <li>• Mode of governance</li> <li>• Degree of standardization of processes within the organisation</li> <li>• Policies (e.g.; HRM policies)</li> </ul>
<b>State/condition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stability or crisis</li> <li>• Availability of resources</li> <li>• Organisational health (e.g.; financial, reputational)</li> </ul>
<b>Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size, shape, and type of organisation</li> <li>• Degree of formalization and centralization</li> <li>• Hierarchical levels of individuals and groups under consideration</li> <li>• Spatial distances between individuals/groups</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration of leadership effects</li> <li>• Organisational life cycle stage effects</li> <li>• CEO/TMT succession history</li> </ul>

Source: Porter and McLaughlin, 2006: 563.

For Rousseau and Fried (2001:1), contextualizing research meant '*linking observations to a set of relevant facts, events, or points of view*', including factors like organisational characteristics, work functions, external environmental factors, and demographic variables. They go on to suggest that the context will determine '*the variability that we can potentially observe*' (2001: 3). Johns (2001: 32) links context with behaviours and attitudes and crucially with relationships and states, '*(c)ontext often operates in such a way as to provide constraints on or opportunities for behaviour and attitudes in organizational settings. . . [and] serve[s] as a main effect on organizational behaviour and/or moderator of relationships*'. Pawar and Eastman (1997: 82) specifically link context with transformation and change and argue that there is a '*need to study the nature of contextual influences on the transformational leadership process*'. More generally, Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001: 12) lament that leadership is often studied without adequate relevance to the structural considerations that both affect and moderate its conduct and that much of the confusion in the leadership measurement literature may stem from this lack of understanding of contextual factors. Based on arguments regarding the effect of context on leader behaviour, Antonakis *et al.*, (2003) point to three often cited contextual factors that could theoretically affect the factor structure of the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ): 1) environmental risk, 2) leader hierarchical level, and 3) leader-follower gender (*cf.* Lowe *et al.*, 1996; Bass, 1998; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999; Zaccaro, 2001; Brown & Lord, 2001; Lord *et al.*, 2001; Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). In this research the first two factors are crucial, the latter less so; they are associated with the nature of the local authority and are explored more in Chapter 4.

Despite the long history of locating human behaviour in both nature and nurture, many mainstream leadership theories have divorced the study of leaders from study of the context, for example Grint (2000) criticises trait, situational or contingency approaches

for ignoring the context; Liden and Antonakis (2009: 3) point a finger of blame on charismatic-transformational theories; House and Aditya (1997: 445) blame leadership scholars for generally assuming that *'leader-follower relationships can exist in a vacuum'* while Boal and Hooijberg (2000:528) criticise many of the new theories of leadership for appearing *'context free. That is, they do not consider how environmental and organisational context influence the process'*. This is however changing and the call for incorporating context in empirical research on leadership is becoming more strident in recent times (Liden and Antonakis, 2009; Fairhurst, 2009).

### **2.3.1 Reciprocal relationship between leader, leadership and context**

There exists an almost reciprocal relationship between leaders, follower and the context (refer to figure on page 7), with scholars especially psychologists asserting that behaviours in organisations cannot be fully understood when examined in isolation of the context in which they occurred (Fairhurst, 2009). Empirical studies investigated the interplay between context and individual attitudes and behaviours (Ostroff, 1992; Fairhurst, 2009) with the context mediating or constraining the behaviours that are considered prototypical (Lord *et al.*, 1984, 2001; Pye, 2004; Pye and Pettigrew, 2005). In effect, the leaders' capacity to mediate the context is premised on the following: 1) design of vision and direction rather like a *'chaotic web of impressions'* (Fairhurst, 2009: 1615); 2) development of enabling landscape taking into account a range of possible actions; 3) designing rights and duties or commitments for all stakeholders; 4) the ability to argue, persuade and authorise within this landscape; and, 5) the ability to perform the above with others (Fairhurst, 2009: 1615. Also see Holman and Thorpe, 2003 and Shotter, 1993).

Weick (1979, 1995, 2009, 2012; Weick *et al.*, 2005) saw communication and sensemaking, significantly situated in the context which moves it away from individual choice-making to focus instead on interpretive understanding and meanings that are

embedded in and enact the context. Weick *et al.*, (2005) and Pye (2004, 2005, with Pettigrew, 2005) highlight the social and systemic context of sensemaking where meanings emerge in social, often contested environments. Sensemaking is context dependent and making meaning is ‘*about labeling and categorizing to stabilise the stream of experience*’ in communication with organisational others (Weick *et al.*, 2005: 411).

Liden and Antonakis (2009) classify the context or the situation in terms of strong and weak: the *stronger* the situation, like in military organisations, the emphasis on strong norms, strict rules and procedures guide (or in their words over-determine) behaviour whereas comparatively weak situations are marked by substantial variation in individual behaviours (Antonakis & House, 2002; Antonakis *et al.*, 2003).

#### **2.4 Leadership at the apex**

Leadership at the apex is underpinned by the role of the ‘*variable human*’ in influencing organisational action (Thompson, 1967: 101) and the organisation as reflection of its top managers (Hambrick and Mason, 1984. Also see Locke, 2003). Leaders at the apex, in strategic positions, those ‘*who have overall responsibility for an organisation*’ (Hambrick, 1989: 6) ‘*perform many activities and wear many hats as they carry out their roles*’ (Boal and Schultz, 2007: 411). They could be individual executives, top management teams and other governance bodies (Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Hambrick, 1989; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Denis, *et al.*, 2001; Kakabadse, *et al.*, 2006; Pye, 2004; Boal and Schultz, 2007; Denis, *et al.*, 2011). Their roles could involve making strategic decisions, creating and communicating a vision of the future; developing key competencies, developing organisational structures, processes, and controls, managing multiple stakeholders and constituencies, selecting and developing the next generation of leaders, sustaining effective organisational culture and infusing ethical value systems into the

organisation's culture (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Boal and Schultz, 2007). Hence, it is useful to distinguish between supervisory theories of leadership which focus on *leadership in organisations*, and strategic theories of leadership which focus on the *leadership of organizations* (Hunt, 1991; Selznick, 1984; Dubrin, 2000; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Boal and Schultz, 2007). In making this distinction between supervisory theories of leadership and strategic leadership, the focus shifts from task and person-oriented behaviours of leaders to creation of meaning and purpose for the organisation (House and Aditya, 1997; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000). The top team (Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Pye, 2004; Kakabadse, *et al.*, 2006; Boal and Schultz, 2007) is variously conceptualised as the upper echelon theory, Top Team Management (TMT) or dominant coalition (Cyert & March, 1963). Hence, attempts to provide guidance, support, and feedback to subordinates is replaced by a focus on strategic direction and the processes to enable this. Strategic leadership is ‘*marked by a concern for the evolution of the organization as a whole, including its changing aims and capabilities*’ (Selznick, 1984: 5). In a recent overview of strategic leadership based on Hambrick’s (1989) initial conceptualisation, Denis *et al.*’s (2011) highlight the *who strategic leaders are* and *what they do* as illustrated in the table below:

**Table 2-2: Four Perspectives on strategic leadership**

	Who strategic leaders are		What strategic leaders do	
	Strategic leadership as collective cognition	Strategic leadership as individual inspiration	Strategic leadership as political action	Strategic leadership as social practice
<b>Focus</b>	The impact of top management team members personalities and cognitions on strategic	The histories, visions, qualities, weaknesses, emotions and motivations of specific	How leaders position themselves politically in order to act strategically How leaders	The micro-level activities strategic leaders engage in to produce organisational strategy day-

	decisions and performance	individual leaders that underlie their behaviour	control internal political games in their organisations	to-day
<b>Key variants and labels</b> <b>Foundational authors</b>	Upper Echelons' theory	Great man theories Psychodynamic approaches Visionary and transformational leadership	Resource dependence Leading with power Organisational politics	Strategy as practice Doing leadership
<b>Units of analysis</b>	Top management teams as a collective unit	CEOS or remarkable public leaders	Senior executives in relation to their teams and external actors	Individuals whose activities can contribute to constituting strategy
<b>Epistemological roots</b>	Positivist	Interpretive	Positivist or interpretive	Interpretive or discursive
<b>Typical research methods</b>	Statistical analysis based on arrival data or survey data	In-depth life history based case studies of individual leaders	Case studies of top team decision-making; some survey-based studies	Ethnographic studies, narratives of practice, conversation analysis
<b>Strengths and contributions</b>	Has shown that TMTs 'do make a difference' Allows generalisation of results for basic TMT variables+ performance	Provides a holistic view of strategist as feeling-thinking-acting human beings Reveals the emotional dimensions of leadership	Illuminates the political dimensions of leadership and its shifting distributed nature Introduces a dynamic dimension of leadership	Illuminates the lived experience and tacit skills of strategists Broadens notion of strategic leadership to leaders at all levels
<b>Weaknesses and limitations</b>	Weaknesses of demographic proxies Contradictory findings Hard to apply to individual cases	Overemphasis on role of individual leaders Post-hoc cases subject to hindsight bias Hard to generalise	Contradictions between leading with power and containing 'politics' Multiple and confusing definitions of	Generates contextual and descriptive knowledge that may be hard to generalise

			power	
<b>Illustrative application to Local Authority Leadership where a Cabinet with leaders model prevails (based upon Denis <i>et al.</i>, 2011: 72 and adapted from empirical findings)</b>	Corporate officers and Cabinet members are the prime movers and shakers though a collective team, chief executive and leader can be overwhelming influence	Personal characteristics and experience are crucial to negotiate the different and overlapping arena of local authority	The overlapping and boundary issues between officers and members have the potential to derail the strategic focus and direction	The shared nature, process and practices, narratives of leadership contribute to organisational and strategic change but they cannot be dissociated from the constraints and challenges of the context
<b>Source: Denis <i>et al.</i>, 2011: 72</b>				

## 2.5 Leadership as social construction

Different forms of social constructionism or constructivism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Shotter 1993; Meindl, 1995; Pearce, 1995; Searle 1995; Potter 1996; Gergen, 1999, 2001; Hacking, 1999; Bleakley, 2003; Chapter 5 of this thesis) revolve around the fundamental premise that reality is said to be a social construction, built out of meanings which are social in origin and social in persistence (Berger and Luckmann, 1966); what counts as *true*, as *objective* and as *fact* are the result of contending accounts of *reality*, implying that *reality* is constructed through language and, in turn, since language is a social phenomenon, the account of reality which prevails is often both a temporary and a collective phenomenon (Gergen and Gergen, 2003). People are active interpreters of their own social worlds and shape, as well as are shaped, by their environments.

Gergen (1999: 258) distinguishes between social constructionism and social constructivism: '*for social constructionists, what we take to be real is an outcome of*

*social relationships. . .*’ whereas the social constructivist position ‘*proposes that individuals mentally construct the world, but they do so largely with categories supplied by social relationships.*’ Howell (2012:89) too makes this distinction clear: though they take ‘*different directions*’, their starting point remains the same ‘*in that reality is not external to human existence but determined and defined through social interactions*’. In this research, the individual leader as the crucial purposive driver or creative initiator in the construction of leadership does appear in the findings; actors hence have a crucial role to play in the social construction of leadership. This focus on people driving leadership remains incidental and rather than perusing individual cognitive processes, the dominant focus remains on the meanings and behaviour that are the life-blood of leadership and how they are developed through social interactions and relationships. In this research this doesacerbate the leader-leadership tangle. Both these terms are often deployed interchangeably (Kinsey, 2012; Bryman and Bell, 2003). However, like Pye (2005), I consider that the distinction between the two is ambiguous (Young and Collin, 2004) and difficult to sustain.

Social constructionist/constructivist approaches, distinction notwithstanding, are not new and can be traced to Kuhn’s (1962) work on scientific paradigms, C Wright Mill’s (1959) work on vocabularies of motive and the seminal work by Berger and Luckmann’s, (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality*. For Gergen (1999), the important themes within social construction are the role of language in constituting the view of the world, reflexivity, indeterminacy and the omnipresence of power relations. For Grint (2005: 1469) it is the ‘*processes through which decision-makers persuade their followers, and perhaps themselves, that a certain kind of action is required*’. If situational theories like Fielder (1967), House and Dessler (1974) and later ones like Nadler and Tushman (1997) assume that context or the situation determines how leaders respond, social constructionists opine that significantly the context or situation is

actively determined by the leaders, which not only legitimises a particular form of action through perhaps a vision but also by the processes through which leadership emerges. Extending it further, social constructivists recognise that individual leaders do construct their leadership worlds but these are prescribed and framed within the social relationships which are part of their worlds. Hence, the focus is on the interdependence of both social and individual processes in the co-construction of leadership (based on Palincsar, 1998) since constructivism focuses not only on human consciousness or awareness but also on its place in the social world of interactions. Power to define meaning in the context of leadership was elaborated by Smircich and Morgan (1982) but remains largely undeveloped (Pye 2005). Though, I do not explore power as a concept, as that could only be justified by another PhD, it is integral within the contested and complex public sector arena within democracies where both politicians and officers share decision making (Dixon and Koch, 2007; Joyce, 2011; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Liddle, 2010).

## **2.6 Leadership as entitative and relational process perspective**

Uhl-Bien (2006) in talking about relations-based leadership differentiates between either an entity or relational perspective. The entity perspective focuses on individuals (e.g., leaders and followers) and their perceptions, intentions, behaviours, personalities, expectations, and evaluations relative to their relationships with one another (e.g., Hollander, 1978; Lord, *et al.*, 1999; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2000). Dachler and Hosking (1995) call this approach a *subject-object* understanding of relationships: ‘(s)ocial relations are enacted by subjects to achieve knowledge about, and influence over, other people and groups’ (1995: 3). The relational perspective views reality as socially constructed and socially distributed, not the prerogative of individual leaders. This understanding can also be perceived as a non-essentialist position which is contrasted with the

essentialist perspective<sup>4</sup>(Barker, 2001; Grint, 1997). As Uhl-Bien (2006: 655) opines, *‘(T)aking a relational orientation means recognizing that organisational phenomena exist in interdependent relationships and intersubjective meaning’*. This *‘...(~~K~~k)nowing occurs between two subjects or phenomena simultaneously’*, *‘multiple meanings and perspectives’* are always emerging (Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000: 552). Knowing is hence conceived as a process of relating and meaning-making. This process is emergent and ongoing, constructive and temporary, based on common understandings of language and limited by socio-cultural contexts (Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Uhl-Bien 2006; Grint, 2000, 2005). It is through the process of socially constructing meanings that an understanding of leadership comes about. Whether the focus is on the leader-individual or the process of relating, leadership is viewed as a social process. However, the meaning of process, particularly with respect to their ontology and epistemology differs; the leader-individual perspective is rooted in the individuals' perceptions and cognitions as they engage and influence one another, while the relational perspective views individuals and organisations as *‘ongoing multiple constructions made “in” processes and not the makers “of” processes’* (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 655; Hosking 2000). These *‘different ontologies result in very different ways of conceptualizing and operationalising relational leadership, with the former adopting primarily a variable-based approach and the latter more of a constructionist approach’* (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 655).

The *shared* nature of leadership highlights communication and language as a means of communication (Pierce and Conger, 2003; Uhl-Bien, 2006: 664; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004) and is a major element in the narratives of leadership. The linguistic turn in the social and the organisational sciences (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a; Rorty, 1967;

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<sup>4</sup> Essentialism adheres to the philosophy that the attributes or the essence define the property and hence reality, while non-essentialist position is exemplified by differences through a complex system of cultural, social, psychological, and historical realities rather than any pre-determined or pre-existing sets which constitute phenomenon (Kezar, 2004; Fuchs, 2001).

Fairhurst, 2009) introduced the discursive strand in social constructionism / constructivism which assumes that language does not merely mirror reality but constitutes it (Fairhurst, 2009). Communication is not just about exchange and transmission but a discourse involving the construction and negotiation of meaning (Deetz, 1992; Jian *et al.*, 2008). As leaders, actors can be passive receptors of meaning (Foucault, 1980, 1990, 1995; Shapiro, 1992) and disciplined (Foucault, 1980, 1990, 1995) as much as they can be transformative change agents (Fairhurst, 2007).

**Table 2-3: Comparison of entity and relational perspective**

<b>Comparison of entity and relational perspectives</b>		
	<b>Entity</b>	<b>Relational</b>
<b>Ontological assumptions</b>	Realist (assumes an objective reality)  Views individuals in relationships as separate, independent bounded entities	Relational (assumes a social reality)  All social realities—all knowledge of self and of other people and things—are viewed as interdependent or co-dependent constructions existing and known only in relation
<b>Approach to process</b>	Cognitivist, constructivist  Individuals performing internal cognitive operations(separable from external social influences) to make sense of and understand how things really are	Constructionist  Person and context are interrelated social constructions made in ongoing local-cultural-historical processes
<b>Approach to methodology</b>	Views relating as an individual act These acts are reduced to one-way causal relations with feedback; therefore, the basic unit of analysis is the individual and studies are operationalized using individual-level variables	Assumes the primacy of relations  Focuses on communication as the medium in which all social constructions of leadership are continuously created and changed
<b>View of leadership</b>	Emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships  Focuses primarily on leadership in conditions of already <i>being organized</i>	Emphasizes the importance of <i>relating</i> and relatedness  Considers leadership as <i>a process of organizing</i>
<b>Source: Uhl-Bien 2006: 665</b>		

As change agents, the ability to co-create the contexts becomes crucial through the ‘*management of meaning*’ (Smircich and Morgan, 1982) which reinforces the perception that though leadership actors cannot always control events they are perceived as having the ability to control the context (Fairhurst, 2007, 2009). For discursive scholars, leadership is a design problem with those aspiring to lead designing what leadership is in the context of what they do and persuading themselves and others that they are doing it (Kelly, 2008; Fairhurst, 2009). Leadership therefore becomes a set of language games, in the sense of Wittgenstein’s (1953) ‘*forms of life*’ which are grounded in the everyday realities of those who aspire to lead and be led (Kelly, 2008).

## **2.7 The problem of leadership literature**

Leadership research, despite being prolific, suffers from a lack of agreement regarding definition, understanding and scope. Its widespread currency and usage adds to its complexity; leadership as an abstraction *ab initio* would be far less complex. The complexity of this subjective phenomenon which emerges as a key organisational and people aspiration is rendered more acute by a series of factors. In any discussion of leadership the personal intuitive understanding, assertions and value preferences of the discussant intrudes. Kellerman and Webster (2001: 510) highlight this saying, leaders ‘*are in our nature*’ and add that all of us are ‘*hardwired to, in one or the other role, to engage in the leader-follower dynamic*’. It is a complex social phenomenon, lacking in real boundaries and hence prone to elusivity with respect to definitions (Bennis, 1989; Barker, 1997; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Antonakis *et al.*, 2004; Bass, 2008); a complex social construct that can be defined in an almost any way by those leading and the led in terms of their world views and the context: ‘*leadership is neither an individual fact nor a social fiction: it is a ‘virtual reality’ insofar as it constitutes a socially constructed concept that is filtered, interpreted, and acted upon in very different ways,*

*dependent upon diverse cognitive outlooks and experiential circumstances*' (Bresnen, 1995: 499).

Much of the literature assumes that leadership is in itself, a *good thing* and is therefore *essential* for the survival and success of the organisation, the dangerous underlying normative connotations being that leadership is in itself, a positive thing and the means through which organisations can thrive (Wallis and Dollery, 1997; Lawler, 2004, 2008; Albrecht, 2005). The word leadership, in the absence of clarity or certainty about events, often is an interpretive device, sometimes enabling people to make sense of events or even to ascribe some causality in the situation. The effect of the observer on the observation of leadership is another dilemma facing leadership research.

The field of leadership is nested by many subject areas – politics, organisations, management, and sociology to name a few. It has evolved and grown through input from three distinct sources —the scholarly, popular and educational —thereby adding to its myriad complexity and leading to the literature being scattered and loosely connected, narrowly focussed or highly specialised (Wart and Dicke, 2008: xi). The trend for leadership studies to become multi-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary has been highlighted by many including Rost (1991: 2). All these factors add to the complexity in having an agreed upon, deterministic and inclusive theory suitable for all people, institutions, issues and contexts. This heralds a comparatively new approach to studying leadership, the *critical leadership studies* movement in leadership research (Collinson, 2011) which has been an enduring influence on this research.

### **2.7.1 Definitional and boundary issues**

The definitional problems make it open to multiple interpretations, providing alternative sources of meaning and identity, the expectations of what leadership can deliver creates a diversity of aspirations. However, this lack of definitism can be a potential blessing in

disguise or as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003b: 362) point out: ‘*we doubt that a common definition of leadership is practically possible, would not be very helpful if it were, does not hit the target and may also obstruct new ideas and interesting ways of thinking*’. Pertinently, ‘*leadership is easy to identify in situ; however, it is difficult to define precisely*’ (Antonakis *et al.*, 2004: 5). The lack of an enduring definition leaves leadership studies open to multiple interpretations and alternate source of meanings providing an immense scope for expectations of what leadership can provide and leaders aspire to (Barker, 1997).

One of the great challenges in organising leadership literature is the enormous situational variety related to different sectors, organising structures, levels and focus of analysis. This prevents the building up of systematic, coherent generalisations and models. Although there are similarities among leaders, from a research point of view, the dissimilarities are far outweighed, rendering the task of research challenging and fraught with problems. For example the leaders of paid employees have different tasks and responsibilities as compared to that of volunteers. In addition there is what Brunner calls ‘*contextual complexity*’ (1997:219 quoted by van Wart, 2003: 215) which apply to mission, culture, structures, scope of problems, types of opportunities and levels of discretion (Baliga and Hunt, 1998).

Leadership has become a catch all label, a panacea for organisational ills as well as successes; this has fostered misuse as well as misconceptions. Leadership is an essentially contested concept<sup>5</sup> (Grint, 2005; Collinson, 2003; Bresnen, 1995) like power, structure and culture in organisational studies whose definitions are implicit and their meanings self-evident rather than otherwise. This partially explains the lack of a robust

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<sup>5</sup> Gallie (1955–56) identified elusive yet compelling concepts as ‘Essentially Contested Concepts’.

definition and the absence of the definitive evidence of leadership effectiveness, which was explored earlier.

### **2.7.2 Lack of dominant theories or leadership school**

Burns famously bemoans the lack of dominant theories or leadership schools in his monumental book (1978:3) but points out the '*rich abundance and variety*' in the literature with enormous potential for '*such a school*'. A definitive dominant theory or theories of leadership remains a pipe dream. The field of leadership studies incorporates traits, skills, behaviour, situational, contingency, dyadic, charismatic and transformational theories and research on power and influence as significant variables (Fairholm, 2004; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2009; Bryman *et al.*, 2011). Harris (2008: 172) refers to this fondness for new theories or labels '*that are often produced without any recourse to empirical enquiry*'. New theories emerge, are re-labelled and re-packaged without any recourse to rigorous conceptualisation or empirical enquiry (Van Wart, 2003, 2008; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). Collinson and Grint (2005: 5) opine '*(l)eadership research has frequently been at best fragmented and at worst trivial, too often informed by rather superficial ideas of management and academic consultants keen to peddle the latest, pre-packaged list of essential qualities deemed necessary for individual leaders and as the prescribed solution to all leadership dilemmas.*' The academic literature on leadership suffers from fragmentation, what Fernandez quaintly but aptly refers to as balkanisation '*into several competing clusters of theories and approaches*' with different foci. (2005: 197).

In recent times, there have been attempts by scholars to move beyond disarray towards integrative frameworks or holistic perspectives of leadership: such as, Bass's full range theory (1985, 1996), Hunt's stratified systems theory (1996), Fernandez (2005) and The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership (GTOL Sorensen, *et al.*, 2011). Integrative frameworks attempt to incorporate leadership skills, traits, behaviours, and styles and

situational variables in a single theoretical model to explain leadership effectiveness. As such, they seem to offer the best opportunity for explaining the impact of leadership on subordinate and organisational performance. This disarray in the state of the field leaves open the way for the development of integrative theoretical framework for the study of leadership which is what this research sets out to do (Section 1.6, 7.5, 12.3, of this thesis).

### **2.7.3 Conflation of leaders and leadership**

Within organisations, there is an overlap of leader and leadership. Thus, a rigid distinction is spurious and its existence lies in theory rather than in practice. Leaders can be seen as individuals who have some figurehead role and positional power that colour their leadership role, usually within an organisational hierarchy. Leadership is relational process to produce certain outcomes rather than a prescribed role, this process is through and with a number of people contributing differently throughout the process. Hartley and Allison (2000) stress this important distinction as well as note its overlap. Leadership is a collective process even though there are individual leaders with a focus on actively leading in various situations. Such collective and relational leadership processes might be well suited to the public sector context with an overlap of managers and politicians, especially to the complex governance layer in which local authority in England is situated.

### **2.7.4 Conflation of leadership and management**

Within organisations, not only is there an overlap or conflation of management and leadership making it difficult to separate leadership from other management functions (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992; Bresnen, 1995). This lack of clarity and certainty about organisational processes furthers the tendency to explain organisational results and successes in terms of leadership; *‘to explain organization outcomes by attributing*

*causality to leadership*' (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992: 117). This further reinforces the influence of leadership; employees unwittingly collude in this process as leadership begins to *'frame and define the reality of others'* (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992:121).

The conflation between leadership and management is an enduring debate in the field. There is the recognition that the differentiation between the two extends to different roles for the two requiring different skills and competencies (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Zaleznik, 1977). This divide is specifically recognized in military organisations. In some studies, leadership is but one of the many roles of managers (for example Mintzberg (1973)) whereas in others, leadership is considered broader than management (for example Hershey and Blanchard (1988)).

Some authors have tended to see these distinctions as binary oppositions (see Kotter, 1990a and b, 1999, among others). Kotter (1990) analysed the essence of leadership in terms of the contrast it represented to what he termed and defined as management. These *'binary oppositions'* (Milner and Joyce, 2005: 18) can be elaborated thus: *'Managers bring consistency and order, leaders help organisations cope with change; Managers plan and budget, leaders set a direction; Managers control by monitoring against the plan, leaders inspire and motivate and persuade followers; managers organise people, leaders align them to the organisation and get their commitment; and then solve the problems'*. Some of Kotter's ideas associating leadership with change have been an enduring legacy: management is about executing and implementing routines and maintaining organisational stability – essentially about control, whereas leadership is about direction setting and the new – essentially about change. These views find a resonance in the works of Gulick, Drucker and many others. Sometimes the leadership-management divide is interpreted to mean that different people fulfil these two kinds of roles. For instance, leadership is equated with the political while management with the administrative in local authority. However, this is a very

superficial distinction: the obvious reality in these complex times is an overlap (for example, Mintzberg, 1973) which results in, and is the product of, dynamic interchange between management and leadership, whether lodged in the same person or in different persons. This debate is a definitional exercise as these differences between leadership and management begin to dissipate if one incorporates strategic elements to management. Rigid dichotomies leave out stakeholders like tax-payer, citizens etc. from the reckoning and relegate the context to a trivial factor. Despite this stance, leadership has ethical and normative values attached which are ‘... *evocative of the higher achievements of the human spirit*’ (Safty, 2004:42).

Based on an understanding of change, Grint (2005) and Weick (1993) clarify that management corresponds with *déjà vu* (seen this before) whereas leadership is what we would call *vu jàdé* (never seen this before). By linking leadership squarely to organisational change, Kotter (1990:72) and others have made leadership a grounded reality essential in the attempts at and the transformation of organisations. With great foresight, he wrote:

*‘Leadership is different from management, but not for the reasons most people think. Leadership isn’t mystical and mysterious. It has nothing to do with having charisma or other exotic personality traits. It is not the province of a chosen few. Nor is leadership necessarily better than management or a replacement for it. Management is about coping with complexity. Its practices and procedures are largely a response to...the emergence of large complex organisations...Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change. Part of the reason it has become so important in recent years is that the...world has become more competitive and more volatile... More change always demands more leadership’*(1990: 72).

Despite these distinctions, leadership and management are two complementary ‘*systems of action, each with its own function and characteristic activities*’ (Kotter, 1990: 72)

and both are necessary for facing the dynamic challenges of the workplace. Gardner and Schermerhorn (1992) summarise this debate as a three-part conceptualisation:

1. Leadership equals management
2. Leadership does not equal management (they are entirely different concepts)
3. Leadership and management are complementary.

Hence, whether or not management and leadership are different from each other has long been debated about and has strong supporters both for this distinction (Kotter, 1990, 1999; Zaleznik, 1977/91) and against it (Mintzberg, 1973; Quinn *et al.*, 2002).

The differences articulated between the leader and manager, following from the above debate, hinges around characteristics and personality traits of a leader and what he does compared to a manager. Though useful this dichotomy in its extreme has its limitations: as an analytical heuristic tool it is significant but does not match the complexity of real workplaces where complementarity is as crucial as an overlap and blurring. Gemmill and Oakley (1992) as well as Bresnen (1995) note the conflation of management and leadership with the result that it is difficult to separate leadership effects from those of other management functions, leading to further valorisation of leadership.

Leadership has often been defined in terms of how it differs from or complements management. It is useful to think of management and leadership as aspects of organising to achieve positive outcomes, while recognising that though these terms helpfully label different aspects of this process, there are no water tight distinctions. There are some obvious overlaps and some distinctions in emphasis.

### **2.7.5 Romanticisation of leadership literature**

Some scholars illustrate how leadership has become romanticised so that many developments in organisations are ascribed to its effectiveness (Meindl and Ehrlich,

1987; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992; Drath, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Lawler, 2007). This tendency can also be traced in the emphasis on romanticised heroic leaders which abound in history and aided the growth of celebrity CEO phenomenon (Jackson and Parry, 2008). There exists a strong tendency to explain organisational outcomes by '*attributing causality to leadership*' (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992:117). This not only aggravates the influence of leadership but further leads to leadership '*framing and defining the reality of others*' sometimes in collusion by employees, and sometimes unknowingly (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992: 121). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 362) echo this notion of the romantic role of leadership through a tendency to ascribe leadership to complex and ambiguous organisational events, despite certainty whether such events or processes are attributable to leadership or not. Hence, it suggests the use of leadership as an interpretive device (Lawler, 2007), something which enables people to make sense of events and processes, outputs and outcomes in organisational life. Though this invokes leadership as sensemaking or sensegiving process (*cf.* Morgan, 1980; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Gioia and Chittipedi, 1991; Weick, 1995; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Grint, 2005; Pye, 2005) it dissociates phenomenon from the context which is its biggest drawback.

### **2.7.6 Leadership and followership**

Leadership is widely recognized to be a social process of influence that depends on both leaders and followers (Graen and Scandura, 1987; Hollander, 1992; Hollander and Offerman, 1990; Kelley, 1992, 2008; Lord and Maher, 1991; Lord *et al.*, 1999; Shamir, 2007; Shamir *et al.*, 2007; Jackson and Parry, 2008; Bligh, 2011). This dyadic relationship has commonly conceptualised the follower as a single entity which remains an under explored source of variance in understanding leadership processes (Hall and Lord, 1995; Meindl, 1995). Moving beyond follower-centred perspectives, Meindl *et al.*,

(2004: 1347) focussed '*attention squarely on processes connected to followers and their context, independent of what leaders are actually doing*'.

The varying reactions to the term leadership also stems from understanding the leader-follower dynamic in different ways (Milner and Joyce, 2005: 4). In a paper presented at a Conference in 1928 Mary Follett (Metcalf and Urwick, 1941: 291) said: '*I have sometimes wondered whether it would be better to give up the word "leader" since to so many it suggests merely the leader-follower relation. But it is far too good a word to abandon.....*' (Also see Graham, 1995; Mendenhall, *et al.*, 2000). The follower leader debate is acerbated when leader is narrowly interpreted as the one giving orders and followers who blindly obey and follow the orders. The command and control model which emanated from this kind of understanding is widespread perhaps also because it is useful. But it also limited the field or the function of leadership to leader who perpetrated and orchestrated the end result while subjugating the role of the followers as mere tools. The leader-follower debate intensified with the emergence of what has been called New Leadership theories which moved away from the command and control perspective and accorded a more significant role to the followers. Leaders depend on followers to do the actual work and the dealing with people issues is an essential part of leadership skills. Empowerment emerged as a crucial element of the leader-follower relationship but it has not been much researched (Milner and Joyce, 2005)<sup>6</sup>. Leadership credibility intervenes between the vision of the leader and empowerment and therefore modifies the effects that leaders have and in sustaining empowerment, the hope of being rewarded plays a part (Milner and Joyce, 2005). Such conceptual understandings are crucial to the study of leadership within the distributed and fragmented public sector arenas.

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<sup>6</sup> Milner and Joyce (2005: 29) define empowerment as '*occurring when people are invited to share responsibility for making the organisations vision come true and when they accept this responsibility and act accordingly using their initiative*'.

## **2.8 Conclusion: Situating the research in the gaps**

This literature review highlights: the lack of definitive clarity around the understanding of leadership (section 2.2), its disassociation with the context (section 2.3), the lack of any dominant theory which can be applied to the varying legitimate kinds of leadership processes (section 2.5), the emphasis on leader rather than leadership (sections 2.4 and 2.5), and the nature of leadership as a multi-dimensional, multi-level and complex phenomena in the making. As a result, leadership emerges as a kaleidoscope, a fluid dynamic fractal which on being rotated in various angles reveals a slightly different reality perhaps even composed of different constitutive elements creating diffuse patterns. I am reminded of Meindl *et al.*'s (1985) provocative article, *The romance of leadership* with their still pertinent observation 'it has become apparent that, after years of trying, we have been unable to generate an understanding of leadership that is both intellectually compelling and emotionally satisfying. The concept of leadership remains elusive and enigmatic' (1985: 78). This research provides an opportunity to reframe the lenses for a study of leadership at the apex of local authority within what is a very diffuse and ubiquitous field. Rather than adopting a leadership theory for application, this research emphasises more critical explorations of leadership that are contextual, processual, relational, socially constructed and discursive.

The aim of this Chapter is to highlight the inadequacies of the dominant existing leadership theories; it adapts and improvises theoretical perspectives for use. Hence, contextual, strategic, processual and relational narratives and discourses hold primacy and make important contributions when seen in relation to one another. This research defines leadership as a social phenomenon with strong roots in the context in which it is situated, with a relational, processual and shared nature. The leadership process is dynamic and fluid emerging, disappearing, re-emerging in myriad combinations and patterns. Though an understanding of leadership is grounded in daily routine and

strategic interactions in processes, players play infinite roles in specific contexts which lead to emergence and constructions of the social phenomenon of leadership. The next Chapter presents the public context of leadership and the complexities of understanding leadership in the public sector followed by Chapter 4 in which leadership is situated in the context of local authority.



## **CHAPTER 3 PUBLIC LEADERSHIP: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This Chapter will explore understanding of public leadership underpinned by existing research both conceptual and empirical<sup>7</sup>. It aims to explore meanings and understandings of public leadership in order to conceptualise, contextualise and concretise leadership as a dynamic process of the public world. It will critically analyse the evolving nature of the context, and the challenges facing public leadership, including the implications of reform and modernisation for public leadership. While such a review of literature will undoubtedly enhance scholarship, insights and reflection, it will also serve to create boundaries by framing the scope and limits of this research.

I begin with a discussion of the public context and the need to study public leadership. Thereafter, what is meant by public leadership is clarified along with the developments in the literature. Briefly, the problems existing in the literature are reviewed before concluding the Chapter. The earlier Chapter looks at leadership generally, whereas this Chapter embeds it in the public context exploring the flavour it gives to leadership processes and practices. Though the boundaries between public and private have become blurred, an appreciation of the nature of the public sector, and the challenges it provides brings valuable meaning and insights. The next Chapter looks at leadership in the context of local authority.

### **3.2 The public context**

The interconnectedness of problems, the localisation, regionalization and globalization of solutions, and the decrease in government resources have emphasized the need to

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<sup>7</sup> It draws upon some conceptual and theoretical explorations done earlier and presented at the EFMD Conferences on Public Sector Management with my colleagues, Professor John Dixon and Dr. Alan Sanderson in 2004, 2005, 2007 (Dixon, *et al.*, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007).

move increasingly from government to governance (Cf. Rhodes, 1996 and Peters and Pierre, 1998) and from hierarchy to networks (Bingham *et al.*, 2005; Maak & Pless, 2006; Koch and Dixon, 2007; Dixon, *et al.*, 2007; Newbold and Terry, 2008; Greener, 2009; Osborne, 2010; Martin, 2010). The theory and practice of public administration is constantly evolving and the multi-disciplinary study of leadership within it has moved from a bureaucratic and/or administrative and political leadership focus to that of organisational or managerial leadership with the rise and entrenchment of the New Public Management (herein after NPM)<sup>8</sup>. As the developmental journey of NPM widened to embrace networks, joined up government, collaboration and partnership working (Newman, 2001; Benington, 2001; Vangen and Huxham, 2003, 2010; Silvia, 2011), the focus of leadership research was transformed, and public leadership slowly came centre stage (Terry, 1995; Behn, 1998; Van Wart, 2003; 't Hart and Uhr, 2008; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Petrovsky, 2010; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Liddle, 2010).

The wider changes in public sector emanate from the broader societal, political and economic contexts in a flatter, global and interconnected world. It is in this changing and dynamic context in which public leaders make decisions; it is in this broader context that the leadership processes are situated for which they hold responsibility and which creates and realises opportunities. Ingraham and Slyke (2006:393) in discussing the challenges and opportunities facing public leaders now and in the future refer to the new internal and external pressures facing them:

*'Internally, they struggle with issues of ethos creation and capacity across often diverse organizational parts, recruiting, developing, and retaining a leadership pool that can guide the organization in the future and training and mentoring organizational members to be more flexible, adaptive, and willing to initiate and exercise leadership. Externally, they must deal with extensive demands for collaboration with far-reaching networks and communication processes that are*

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<sup>8</sup> OECD refers to NPM as 'a new paradigm for public management' aimed at 'fostering a performance-oriented culture in a less centralised public sector' (OECD, 1995:8).

*at once more transparent and more constraining of strategic decision processes. At the same time that leaders in all sectors must take more risks and act more quickly, their leadership and judgment are questioned more readily' (2006: 393).*

The public leadership landscape is changing along with the practice of public leadership; the way one thinks about public leadership in turn shapes practice and ultimately impacts upon the context (Morse and Buss, 2007). Context as discussed in the previous Chapter can be distinguished as *internal* or the context and *external* or the environment; for the sake of consistency, context is used for both internal and external rather than drawing this further distinction. Leach and Wilson (2002: 665) alluding to the complexity of the context facing the public leaders, point out that '*there has not been a deterministic relationship between context and the leadership role*' which is especially true for local government (Chapter 4).

It is pertinent to explore the distinctive nature of the public sector in the UK (Massey, 1993, 2005; Stoker and Wilson, 2004; Wilson and Game, 2006; Greener, 2009) and governance structures and arrangements within it (Osborne, 2010). Much of this discussion centres on the comparisons between public and private management, the differences, (Rainey *et al.*, 1976; Allison, 1983; Solomon, 1986; Perry and Rainey, 1988; Nutt and Backoff, 1992; Rainey and Bozeman, 2000; Boyne, 2002; Rainey, 2003; Nutt, 2006), similarities (Simon, 1995, 1998) and the blurring (Rainey and Chun, 2005; Haque, 2001; Wright, 2000) which creates tensions and leads to ambiguities and paradoxes (Dixon, *et al.*, 2005; Tripathi and Dixon, 2008; Greener, 2009). The large-scale tasks and the services that the public sector provides are the activities that sustain society through the delivery of the essential public services. Supplying public goods in the public interest requires consistency under conditions of uncertainty. These large scale tasks are trans-organisational in scope, functions and impact of their outcomes<sup>9</sup>; the delivery of public goods and services involves significant externalities that have

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<sup>9</sup> Kettl (2002) calls them the never-ending tasks of public administration.

implications for managing and leading them (Brookes and Grint, 2010; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Liddle, 2010, 2012). These persistent tasks require organisation, processes and resources, best provided by some form of bureaucracy. Traditionally public sector organisations are an approximation to Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy (Weber, 1946, 1968; Dahl and Lindblom, 1953; Goodsell, 1983; Beetham, 1987; du Gay, 2000; Schofield, 2001; Dunleavy, 2001). Bureaucracy or conventional civil service administration have tended to be hierarchical, with specialisation, bureaucratization, formalisation, rigid career structures based on merit and seniority with a focus on standard rules and procedures (Weber, 1946, 1968; Beetham, 1987; Ferlie *et al.*, 1996; du Gay, 2000; Schofield, 2001).

Consistency and the fact of carrying out the routine everyday tasks that have to be done no-matter-what make change an anathema and foster risk aversion. It follows that there is much greater emphasis on ensuring conformity with rules and norms and pursuing change only if it is sanctioned through wider changes in the overarching legal, political or democratic framework or under severe resource constraint. Externally imposed or mandated changes are frequent but managers tend to express less enthusiasm and support for these types of change rather than changes originating internally (Rainey and Chun, 2005).

Bureaucrats serve several masters ranging from the service user, (tax) payer of the service, political *bosses* at several levels and professional organisations (Dixit, 2002; Propper and Wilson, 2003). The complexity of satisfying and managing multiple stakeholders in the public sector (another point of difference from the private sector) is a problematic task (Bryson, 2004; Ferlie *et al.*, 2003; McAdam *et al.*, 2005) especially as political legitimacy and valuable resources follow the relative ability of the various stakeholders to influence outcomes (Rainey, 2003). Coping with contentious and ambiguous goals and performance criteria requires frequent trade-offs and contested

public spaces, for example achieving efficiency and equity in the delivery of public services (Dixon *et al.*, 2007; Flynn, 2007; Ferlie *et al.*, 2005; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Tripathi and Dixon, 2008; Liddle, 2010, 2011).

The public sector is pluralistic in nature (Denis *et al.*, 2001): the multiple stakeholders and multiple tasks (or goals) have implications – incentives are less high powered than for the private sector that make them far more risk averse than their private sector counterparts (Propper and Wilson, 2003). The absence of economic markets for outputs and the greater reliance on public monies puts additional responsibilities and constraints while inhibiting their response to be efficient and reduce costs (Dahl and Lindblom, 1953; Niskanen, 1971). Managers in the public sector are motivated more by non-pecuniary benefits and other career concerns. The linkage between pay, promotion, discipline and performance is not as straight forward in the public as the private sector (Rainey, 2003; Rainey and Bozeman, 2000). With the prominence of the competency movement in the public sector (Horton, 2000), leadership increasingly became a skill to be acquired.

The public sector produces goods and provides services in the public interest; often their activity is more monopolistic, coercive and has a greater depth of impact (Rainey and Chun, 2005). They therefore face higher levels of external oversight, regulation and control; evaluation, regulatory frameworks and performance measurement are used as active sources of authority to inform, legitimate and control decision-making (Noordegraaf and Abma, 2003; Lane, 2000; Lane and Wallis, 2009; Springer, 2007). Along with frequent external oversight and regulatory control, the constraining administrative networks like the civil service procedures and centralised purchasing and procurement means that managers have less authority over their organisations (Lynn, 1987). The resulting *steering paradox* (du Gay, 2000; Stokes and Clegg, 2002) and *performance paradox* (Meyer and Gupta, 1994; Thiel and Leeuw, 2002) is a challenge

for leadership requiring critical skills, reflexivity and judgements. The public sector faces stronger expectations and often higher standards of fairness, honesty, integrity, commitment, transparency, democratic accountability from managers and leaders (see Berry, 2009). Public management is a value-driven activity; imbued by a powerful service ethics (UN, 1996; OECD, 1998, 2001; Dobel, 2005). The *management in a fishbowl syndrome*, real or perceived, puts the managers and leaders in the spotlight and the *raw* exposing of public sector failures, usually under the glare of media and opposition parties' attention adds to their dilemmas.

The public sector is intrinsically linked with the political dynamics in liberal democracies (Kane and Patapan, 2008; Uhr, 2008; Newbold and Terry, 2008); the presence of unique political environments and electoral cycles can further complicate along with frequent turnovers of politicians (Peters, 1995, 2000; Kane, 2007). This constrains their decision-making autonomy and flexibility – sometimes translating into a greater reluctance at the higher levels to delegate and to be more formally in control of lower levels (Rainey and Chun, 2005). Balancing effectiveness and efficiency with the requirements of democracy puts contradictory strains on the public sector as the demands and interests of different stakeholders have to be reconciled (deLeon, 2005; ‘t Hart and Uhr, 2008; Newbold and Terry, 2008; Raffel, *et al.*, 2009). This brings focus to the issue of democracy and democratic management of public sectors (Waldo, 1948; Denhardt, 1993; Bevir, 2006) (explored in 3.4.6). As de Leon (2005: 122) sums it a ‘*public management worthy of trust must produce outcomes that are both efficient and democratic*’. There is yet another balancing act within the public sector arena, namely that of ethical decisions and values versus discretion and initiative choices (Held, 1987; Hirst, 2000; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2003; Morrell, 2004; Haus *et al.*, 2005; Dobel, 2005; Morrell and Hartley, 2006; Springer, 2007; Greener, 2009).

The complex nature of the public sector has evolved within a distinctive and complex environmental context of multiple stakeholders, diffuse power, divergent multiple objectives, multiplicity of rules and procedures, paradoxical and evolving goal posts and shifting outcomes, and scarce and ever shrinking resources. The public sector organisations and their distinctive context have unique transactions and interactions that impose distinctive roles, structures, processes and practices, performance, attitude and behaviours upon their leaders and managers including adding a unique political dimension to public management and governance. It gives rise to distinct organisational and political leadership in the public domain (Section 3.5 and 3.6). However, reform and more generally, the government's response to widespread global and societal changes have moved the public sector far closer to the private sector and changed the scope and boundary of the public sector forever.

The question of who gives leadership to the public services involves normative issues given the distinctive nature of the public sector and the complexity of the overarching politico-administrative systems and multiplicity of public service delivery organisations. This creates contending and perhaps irreconcilable public interest, ethical, political, jurisdictional, statutory, bureaucratic, and community imperatives, exacerbated by the complex political nature of public governance (Moore, 1995; Kickert, 1997; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Bovaird, 2005; 't Hart and Uhr, 2008; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Liddle, 2010, 2012). In the resulting hybrid governance mode, leadership is the crucial arbiter for the determination of public interest (OECD, 2001; Dixon *et al.*, 2007; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Raffel *et al.*, 2009). Whilst organisational leadership is expected to resolve these contradictions, the interplay of politico-administrative and governance arrangements, more specifically the nature of the public sector plays a significant but often ignored part in these leadership discourses (Luke, 1998; Van Slyke and Alexander, 2006; Tripathi and Dixon, 2008).

The nature of the public sector and the problems that lie at its heart are crucial issues, interconnected across organisational and jurisdictional lines, often moving into the private domain. On their own public sector organisations lack the resources, authority and influence to bring about changes at the societal and whole of government level and across various tiers and levels which interact closely with markets and society. The onus on public leadership is hence to connect across these levels, tiers and spheres and bring policy, design and delivery together and to collaborate in participatory governance to address the public challenges while stimulating multiple strategies. The necessity of co-ordinating between the organisational and political domains involves complex issues around how leadership is shared and operationalised between these two realities and contexts - it has no easy or simple answers (section 3.5). It would require leadership to shift and emerge depending on internal organisational dynamics interfacing with external drivers and pressures. It would require the political and the organisational domains to have mutual respect and understanding and cohere into some form of top team leadership (Finkelstein, 1992; Edmondson *et al.*, 2003; Ensley, *et al.*, 2003; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2010 have explored top teams in various sectors).

### **3.3 What is public leadership**

Public leadership can be conceived as a process that occurs at all levels of organisations, designing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating public services for the common good and between public-service entities which could include the public sector, private sector and the non-profit sectors as well as groups, communities, and individual citizens. Public leadership is distinctive, the generic treatments of leadership are insufficient for public leaders navigating the transformation of governance; this reflects the changes in policy domain as well as communities (Kettl, 2002; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Liddle, 2010, 2012). Public leadership as process hence extends beyond public organisations and beyond formal positional leaders and embraces what the

Centre for Public Leadership based in the Kennedy School of Government calls '*acts, large and small, of individuals and groups as they tackle challenges facing a community or society*' (Pittinsky *et al.*, 2006:17).

At the most simplistic level, public leadership can be defined as '*the study of leadership from the public sector perspective*' and '*is the domain of those in the public service*' creating public value and solving public problems (Morse and Buss, 2007: 3. Please see 't.Hart and Uhr, 2008; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Liddle, 2010, 2012 for the challenges facing leadership). Hence, legitimately it is a multi-disciplinary area attracting the attention of public administration, policy studies, politics, psychology, business and management and the social sciences. This enhances the richness and diversity of the existing literature as well as creates issues of terminology, scope and theory. Even in public sector literature the broad distinction between leadership and management is recognised (Selznick, 1957; Zaleznik, 1977; Kotter, 1990; Van Wart, 2003). By public leadership, I mean leadership as a dynamic and interactive process exercised by specific persons in positions of influence and responsibility to create and enhance public value and the public interest within the unique public context. This forms the crux of the definition for the purposes of the empirical research. Before proceeding much further, the distinction between an understanding of leadership and public leadership needs to be clarified. Leadership in its most fundamental sense is a process of influence where a person or a group influences followers to work towards achieving certain common goals (detailed review in the previous Chapter). This influencing process can also be geared for creating public value in favour of the public interest and solving *wicked* problems. The leader is no longer in charge in the sense of directing, initiating and controlling but the process is much more dynamic yet subtle, which works with stakeholders (fellow leaders, followers and other stakeholders of other local agencies etc.) making sense, sharing meaning and understanding through a

collective vision; this process is far more interactive and implies a dynamic give and take and cross boundary working. The dynamic dyadic construct of leader and followers interacting within the influence process defeats its explanatory potential in a *shared-power world* (Crosby and Bryson, 2005) which has been described as *nobody in charge* (Cleveland, 2002). Cleveland (2002: xv) goes on to define leadership as *'bringing people together to make something different happen.'* Gardner's (1990:1) definition of leadership seems relevant to the complex context and environment of the public services:

*'The process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leaders and his or her followers.....Leaders cannot be thought of apart from the historic context in which they arise, the setting in which they function (e.g., elective office), and the system over which they preside (e.g., a particular city or state). They are integral parts of the system, subject to the forces that affect the system' (1990:1).*

Mary Follett's notion of *power-with* rather than *power-over* epitomises the core of what public leadership means in a complex dynamic and network age. In the following passage from the essay, *'The Essentials of Leadership'* (1995: 172):

*'Leaders and followers are both following the invisible leaders-the common purpose. The best executives put this common purpose clearly before their group. While leadership depends on depth of conviction and the power sharing coming there from, there must also be the ability to share that conviction with others, the ability to make purpose articulate. And then that common purpose becomes the leader'.*

This captures the exercise and practice of public leadership in traditional organisations with boundaries but whose success often depends upon collaboration across these boundaries, be they functional, departmental, organisational, jurisdictional or sectoral, to create public value or solve public problems. Morse and Buss (2007: 18) opine, *'(e)ffective leadership in this (public) context is less about motivating followers to work*

*towards one's own vision than it is discovering or creating that common purpose, or common vision that becomes the driving force for joint work or shared accountability. These new public leaders produce not just results but results that matter*'. The public domain hence witnesses a fragmentation in the exercise of leadership between different layers, tiers, spheres and types of agencies (Flinders and Mathews, 2007; Pedersen and Hartley, 2008). Complex interactions between the electoral, policy making and implementation arenas result in either a high or low degree of vertical integration between policy making, planning and service delivery provision. These structural and ever-changing contexts have implications for the exercise of leadership as they fragment it up between different tiers and spheres<sup>10</sup> of leadership. Most of the public services are co-produced not delivered in; they require the positive input of customers, who may be directly paying taxes and of other stakeholders /partners, for example, patients using GP surgery, paying online taxes or using the local rubbish collection services. This complicates the management and ultimately leadership of public service provision.

This transformation of public leadership is closely associated with the modernisation discourse (Petrovsky, 2010) which has resulted in not only a weakening of the hierarchically organised state in favour of a more differentiated policy and governance regime but has also blurred the traditional boundaries between the public, private and third sectors as well as made complex the relationships across various levels of government (Clarke and Newman, 1997; du Gay, 2000; Newman, 2001; Benington, 2007). The emphasis on public leadership is hence located as a continuation of public sector managerialism.

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<sup>10</sup> The presence of organisational and political leadership at the local, regional, national and European levels further complicates the processes of public leadership. These levels differ in the relative degree of power and control and their interface and interactions are fluid as balance of power and competency shifts prescribing and proscribing how one or the other enable, constrain or interfere in the exercise of discretion, decision-making and choices exercised by public leaders and leadership.

### 3.4 Typology of leadership in the public sector

There is not much unanimity regarding what is meant by leadership in the public services and its terminology and it is necessary to clarify whether public leadership is the same as bureaucratic or organisational, administrative or managerial leadership (Morse and Buss, 2007). Crosby and Bryson (1992) famously clarify public leadership as *leadership for the common good* and include both political and organisational leadership in its ambit. Much of the literature on public leadership focuses on what is more appropriately referred to as political leadership including Burn's definitive text on leadership (1978). The definitional or terminology issue remains one of using a particular looking glass or lenses for exploring and understanding the phenomena. Hence, a precise distinction of the terms management and leadership and their conflation and blurring along with usage of a myriad of prefixes, like administrative, political, and democratic to refer to leadership in the public sector, is acceptable.

It is pertinent to remember the typology developed in the earlier Chapter of analysing leadership in terms of the interpersonal, of self and of the organisation and outside organisations. The interpersonal analyses interrelationships between the managerial and political and how they interact with the public, building trust in the process. The leadership of self is significant for values, traits, competencies, skills and styles which frame ethical and moral positions of individuals. Organisational leadership is needed to enhance performance of organisations and make them flexible and responsive to the public. Outside organisation leadership makes sense in a joined up world where leadership has to work across boundaries in a network and partnership governance public realm.

### **3.4.1 Bureaucratic or administrative leadership**

Bureaucratic or administrative leadership traditionally refers to the leadership exercised by the front line supervisor to the non-political head of the organisation (Terry, 1995; Van Wart, 2003). It can be understood as public organisational leadership and the typology (choice) of bureaucratic or administrative is indicative of the frame of values within which leadership operates. Generally, bureaucratic leadership goes back to the traditional Weberian bureaucracy with both its detractors and supporters taking opposing views. This leadership is quite squarely within the remit of public administration. Weber's (1968, *Economy and Society*) and Selznick's (*Leadership in Administration*, 1957) classics form good starting points for leadership in this sense. Terry (1995: 4) referred to the 'neglect' by scholarly research of 'bureaucratic leadership' and urged for greater attention to public leadership by noting the conspicuous absence of 'bureaucratic leadership' in all 'this talk about more effective leadership'; he cited numerous reasons for this problem and elaborated a 'conservator' model advocating a balance of stewardship and deliberative action (1995:2). This type of organisational leadership focuses on formal leadership within government ranging from supervisors to top leadership positions who often pursue organisational change and performance outputs and outcomes (Morse and Buss, 2007).

### **3.4.2 Executive leadership**

Chester Barnard (1968: 217) in his landmark *The Functions of the Executive* describes the essential executive functions as, 'first to provide a system of communication; second, to promote the securing of essential efforts; and third, to formulate and define purpose'. Executive leadership has been used to refer to top level leadership in both public and the private sectors (Carlson, 1951; Robbins and Duncan, 1988; Zaccaro, 1996, 2001; Wood and Vilkinas, 2003; Pearce *et al.*, 2008; Kakabadse, *et al.*, 2006; Leach and Lowndes, 2007 provide some other perspectives). Day and Lord (1998) aver that executive

leadership can explain as much as 45% of an organisation's performance, and established the trend of analysing executive succession to see the relationship between upper level leaders and organisational performance. Leadership at top organisational levels has been variously called senior, executive and strategic leadership (Carlson, 1951; Barnard, 1968; Heller, 1972; Zaccaro, 1986, 2001; Sections 2.4 and 3.4.2 of this thesis). Executive leadership is more commonly used to denote top level leadership in the non-profit sectors and the military. Strategic leadership has strategic organisational connotations while executive leadership is indicative of the top level rather than any strategic intent.

### **3.4.3 Political leadership**

Burns' (1978) book with political leaders as its focus of analysis was significant in the rise of transformational leadership which was adopted vigorously by mainstream theorists. However, this emphasis and transfer resulted in the loss of some of the more subtle distinctions between types of leader and contexts for leadership (for instance, managerial in for-profit organisations, managerial in public or voluntary organisations, political leadership on a national stage or local political leadership (*cf.* Broussine and Fox, 2002; Broussine, 2003; Borraz and John, 2004; Berg and Rao, 2005; Elcock, 2006)). There is always a political (small p) dimension to leadership, as organisational members will either mobilize support for or against policies, rules, decisions. '*Politics is thus the exercise of power*' (Robbins, 1987: 194). Political leadership focuses on the policy elites or political leaders that are elected or high appointees with formal positional power in government (for e.g. legislators, senior executives) who often pursue transforming and change agendas (Morse and Buss, 2007).

### **3.4.4 Managerial leadership<sup>11</sup>**

Managerial leadership focuses on ways and methods by which successful leaders exercise influence over individuals and groups in organisations and the impact of the leadership process on performance. The usage of the term ‘*managerial leadership*’ attempts to integrate management and leadership behaviours in keeping with the trend to emphasise the close relationship between management and leadership (the earlier Chapter discusses leadership and management). It is what managers in leadership positions do, both *doing right things* and *doing things right* thereby indicating some kind of a causal relationship between leadership effectiveness and management efficiency. The NPM philosophy focuses on the term management rather than leadership however the emphasis on governance and inter-sectoral networks and partnerships working in close collaboration with communities and citizens has brought into focus the term public leadership (or its variants like public sector leadership). The managerialised concept of leadership has broadened to incorporate collaborative and networked realities with an emphasis on public value and democratic participation (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; Stoker, 2006; Alford and Hughes, 2008; Berry, 2009; Wallis and Gregory, 2009; Benington and Moore, 2010; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Bouckert, 2010; Liddle, 2012).

### **3.4.5 Collaborative, shared or relational leadership**

Public leadership is labelled by others as relational, collaborative, shared or distributed leadership (Bryson & Crosby, 1992/2005; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Chrislip, 2002; Fletcher & Käufer, 2003; Crevani, *et al.*, 2007, 2008; Gronn, 2000; 2002, 2008), and catalytic leadership (Luke, 1998). *Leadership for the Common Good* (Crosby and Bryson, 2005) focuses not so much on the source of leadership, the person, but on the

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<sup>11</sup> In the internet search I conducted, it was essential to use both, either, and or to get the widest range of articles and sources.

process through which public value is created, at any level of the organisation, both within and outside government. Public leadership hence has explanatory potential not merely for the intra-organisational context but emphasises the inter-organisational as well (Morse and Buss, 2007). Collaboration in some or other way has been leveraged as a driver for improvement and reform of service delivery both in academic literature and policy documents (Huxham, 1996, 2005; DETR, 2001; Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; DCLG, 2006; Laffin and Liddle, 2006; Koch and Dixon, 2007; Entwistle, 2010; Martin, 2010; Vangen and Huxham, 2010).

### **3.4.6 Democratic Leadership**

Democracy frames the context for leadership in the public domain in the Western world. Gallie's (1956) analysis of Essentially Contested Concepts included democracy where he argues that democracy is '*the appraisive political concept par excellence*' (1956: 184. Emphasis in the original). '*Politics being the art of the possible, democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter*' (*ibid.* 1956: 186). This brings to mind the normative and ethical nature of the public leadership with accountability and responsibility linked to constraints and challenges politicians face, including their re-election. Democratic leadership is a contested term but often used in the literature with the contrast between democratic and autocratic leadership as the '*primary conceptual distinction*' (Gastil, 1994: 385. See also Lewin & Lippitt, 1938; Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939; White & Lippitt, 1960). Functions associated with democratic leadership include distributing responsibility, empowering, facilitating and aiding deliberation and participation in democratic decision making (Finer, 1941/2008; Gastil, 1994; Springer, 2007; Newbold and Terry, 2008; Kane and Patapan, 2008). This makes pertinent a clarification with the concept of distributed leadership (Woods, 2004: 22). Besides the democratic context of the public sector, there is a powerful debate regarding democratic participation, facilitation and engagement which follows from it and the incorporation

of democratic values like transparency in decision making in organisational life. The search for public value (Moore, 1995; Kelly *et al.*, 2002; Aldridge & Stoker, 2002; Benington & Moore, 2010) and steering and governing for the public good are deeply rooted within this conception of leadership. Leadership is played out in this research in the context of democratic processes within the party politicised arenas of local authority.

### **3.5 Dual dimension of leadership: The political and managerial interface**

The nature of the public sector and its distinctive governance structures and processes provide a unique leadership praxis, where decision making, responsibility and accountability constantly oscillate between managerial and political leadership. Managerial leadership is provided by public managers of particular organisations, mostly appointed officers and political leadership is provided by responsible politicians, mostly elected but including high appointees, at multiple levels of government. These shared environments – power, responsibility, decision-making, accountability, influence, strategy - inevitably leads to agreements and disagreements which have the ability to enable as well as to destabilise, through action as well as inaction – this is the pervasive reality of public governance, within which public provision for services is designed and delivered. In literature the complementary as well as contentious relationship between politicians and administrators is recognised (Aberbach *et al.*, 1981; Aberbach and Rockman 2000, 2006; Peters and Pierre, 2001, 2004; Mouritzen and Svara, 2002; Sausman and Locke, 2004; Pollitt and Bouckart, 2004; Hutton and Massey, 2006).

*‘In this interaction of top officials where the legislative meets the executive function, the political and administrative logics may converge or collide, the political and administrative levels (what I prefer to call managerial in this research) of government may be tied together or remain separate, and the individuals who occupy the political and administrative office may conflict or cooperate’* (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002: 1).

Conceptually, the idea of the apex can be attributed to Peter Self (1972) and to Mouritzen and Svava (2002) presenting the fusion or the blending at the apex of the administrative (in this thesis managerial) and the political leadership. Self (1972) conceptualises the governmental process as an arch with the left arc representing the political process and the right arc the administrative process; at the top the *junction* represents the critical point where the political will flows into and energises the administrative systems while the administrative process flows back into the higher levels of the political process. At the top of the arch, the fusion of political and administrative influences take place that have been generated lower down the two arcs (Self, 1972).

The relation between top managers and elected administrators occurs within a specific organisational and environmental context, and shapes the attitudes and behaviours of both. In order to align public services to the needs of the public, political leadership has given more responsibility for organisational performance to managers (or managerial leadership); increased autonomy is accompanied by increased accountability through performance management systems which makes it imperative for the managerial leaders to acquire the political support. Top managers must acquire political support if they are to exercise leadership of their organisations (Heyman, 1987; Moore, 1995; Mouritzen and Svava, 2002; Peters and Pierre, 2001; Milner and Joyce, 2005; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Joyce, 2010). The relationship between managers and politicians is '*specific to leadership in the public sector as against leadership in the private sector*' (Milner and Joyce, 2005:155) Heyman (1987) writing in 1987 pointed out that the leaders skilled in political skills should enjoy more political support and therefore achieve success in implementing strategic plans. Political support is an essential ingredient of effective leadership in the public sector and an important source of bureaucratic power (Rainey, 1997/2003; Meier, 2000; Stokes and Clegg, 2002; Peters and Pierre, 2004; Hutton and

Massey, 2006; Koch and Dixon, 2007). According to Meier (2000), public agencies develop political support in response to certain conditions in the public sector environment.

Political support for managers is crucial for effective leadership and enhances bureaucratic power (Rainey, 1997/2003; Meier, 2000; Fernandez, 2005). Alban-Metcalfe and Alimo-Metcalfe's (2000) study of data from 1,500 local government managers, used principal components analysis to identify nine factors, including one they labelled *political sensitivity and skills*. This factor referred to understanding the political pressures on elected politicians, the dynamics of relationships between the different groups and amongst the politicians and working with the politicians to achieve goals. It testifies to the importance of managerial leaders possessing political skills and assumes the presence and significance of both kinds of leadership, political and managerial. Gabris *et al.*'s (2000) empirical research substantiates the above. Their findings suggest that political skills in relation to both elected politicians and external stakeholders are crucial in establishing credibility of public services leadership. They report a strong correlation between the leadership credibility of CAOs and their perceived effectiveness in managing/interacting with elected politicians and the members of the public (political and external actions).

Morrell and Hartley (2006: 57) analyse the importance of ethical awareness for effective political leadership in local government and develop and test a scale for measuring it. They also acknowledge the key differences between political leadership and managerial leadership, and emphasise the importance of seeing political leadership as socially constituted, in a wide ranging network of stakeholders (Hartley, 2002; Elcock, 2006). For Morrell and Hartley (2006: 57-8), the difference between the two emanates from: 1)

Modes of appointment, authority, and nature of the task; 2) Service provision and regulation; and, 3) Responsibilities and potential conflict.

### **3.5.1 Relationship between Managerial and Political Leadership**

While trying to understand this crucial distinction between managerial and political leadership, Zaleznik's (1997:23) perspective of managers and leaders proves useful; the basic premise being that politicians are the leaders/members while the managers are the appointed officers:

*'Managers tend to adopt impersonal, if not passive, attitudes towards the goals....whereas leaders adopt a personal and active attitude towards them. Managers tend to view work as an enabling process involving some combination of people and ideas interacting to establish strategies and make decisions. Leaders work from high risk positions, indeed often are temperamentally disposed to seek out risk and danger, especially where opportunity and reward appear high. (Zaleznik, 1997:23).'*

The literature narrates four models of the relationship between officer and member (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; Mouritzen and Svara, 2002) which are compared in the table 3.1:

1. Separate roles model relying heavily on the traditional public administration model which envisages separate roles but power resting wholly with elected members who decide while officers are in charge of implementation (Gains, 2004);
2. Autonomous administrator, in terms of bureaucratic reality, officers mostly dominate by virtue of their professional know-how (knowledge and training), full-time, salaried and permanent positions (Alexander, 1982);
3. Responsive administrator with officers subordinate and elected officials potentially involved in administration; and,
4. Overlapping roles with reciprocal influence between the officers and members and roles of the two overlapping. This could result in two possible outcomes: while officers and members in reality inevitably differ, a state of '*dynamic*

*dependency*’ prevails where differences of perspectives are resolved through negotiation and exchange on a case by case basis between the two groups (Gains 2004; Entwistle et al 2005); and, where officers and members are heading in the same strategic direction, the emergent ‘*dual elite*’ results in harmonious co-leadership (Gains, 2004: 93-94).

**Table 3-1: Comparison of models of political administrative relations (Mouritzen & Svava, 2002: 43)**

	<b>Separate Roles</b>	<b>Autonomous administrator</b>	<b>Responsive administrator</b>	<b>Overlapping roles</b>
<b>Degree of hierarchy of politicians and administrators</b>	Clear subordination	Administrators have equal or greater influence	Clear subordination	Reciprocal influence
<b>Extent of separation of spheres</b>	Clear division of roles and functions	Administrators shape policy; elected officials excluded from administration	Elected officials potentially involved in administration	Each set of officials involved in roles of the other
<b>Nature of administrative norms</b>	Commitment to neutral competence	Commitment to neutral competence and maintaining agency prerogatives	Commitment to responsive competence	Commitment to neutral competence and responsiveness to politicians and the public
<b>Form of government</b>	Uncertain: commonly linked to appointed executive systems (council manager form)	Uncertain: greatest potential in appointed executive systems	Strong political executive systems (mayor council form )	Parliamentary systems (committee leader or collective leadership form) or appointed executive system
<b>Key elected role and contribution</b>	Elected officials set policy goals and oversee implementation	Elected officials approve policy	Executive drives enactment and implementation of the policies	Elected officials make policy and interact with administrators in implementation
<b>Involvement in policy by administrators</b>	Low although active in advice and comment to	High	Low except as agent of politician	Moderate to high as initiators as well

	elected officials			as advisors
<b>Level of influence on policy making</b>	Low	High	Low	Moderate
<b>Source: Mouritzen &amp; Svava, 2002: 43</b>				

In reality, which model prevails is very much dependent on particular issues, contexts, individuals concerned, culture of the local authorities among other factors.

### 3.6 The public leadership literature

Despite this seemingly broad range of literature, there are significant gaps in literature in which this research locates itself. The lack of empirical testing or even the a-theoretical nature of the models in the ambiguous and changing context of the public sector has often been highlighted (Hood, 1991, 1998, 2000; Terry, 1993; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1998, 1999; Osborne and McLaughlin, 2002; Van Wart, 2003 and 2008; Greener, 2009; Brookes and Grint, 2010). The mainstream literature on leadership has grown phenomenally in the last 100 years: the prolificacy of business and management literature on leadership has increased with the incorporation of New Leadership approaches (e.g. Bryman, 1996) and the attempt at creation of integrated meta-theories and so the refinement of these approaches and theories for the public sector is generally meaningful (Morse and Buss, 2007). Despite these borrowings and adaptations, public sector leadership literature is still relatively smaller (Bennis, Parikh, and Lessem, 1994; Chemers, 1997; Rost, 1991; Senge, 1990; Terry, 1993, 1995; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Morse and Buss, 2007; Getha-Taylor, *et al.*, 2011). There is however one exception, ethical leadership which is more developed for the public context (Moore and Sparrow, 1990; Morrell and Hartley, 2006; Brown and Trevino, 2006; Springer, 2007). Ingraham (2006:361) bemoans the ‘*limited extent of systematic analysis of public leadership issues*’ while Fairholm (2004: 577) talks about the ‘*struggle to discuss the philosophy of leadership in public administration*’. This search for its core has also led to normative

debates about the best style of public leadership ranging from the entrepreneurial and market-focused in one extreme, to a more restrained stewardship and distributed leadership which is top-down, bottom-up and lateral as well; it also seeks to better understand how to drive successful change and modernisation in public sector settings while being collaborative and upholding public values and the public interest.

Leadership studies are ablaze with new theories or labels which are often produced without rigorous empirical analysis and weak, inconsistent and contradictory findings (Van Wart 2003, 2008; Morse and Buss 2007). Harris (2008: 172) bemoans that the *'new leadership theories have been formulated, packaged and successfully sold to schools without adequate scrutiny or testing'*. There is a lack of any dominant theory of leadership, *'instead the literature remains balkanized into several competing clusters of theories and approaches, each emphasising different aspects of leadership'* (Fernandez, 2005: 197). The assumption that theories and models of leadership can be transferred from the private to the public sectors is debatable; the main argument being that the public sector is distinctive from the private sector (section 3.2).

A body of literature notes the difficulties involved in generic transfers (Smith and Perry, 1985; Stewart and Ranson, 1988; Ackroyd *et al.*, 1989; Pollitt, 1990; Hood, 1991); Some like Pettigrew *et al.* (1992) are in favour of generic transfers but caution against over mechanistic transfer; Pettigrew *et al.*, (1992) are disparaging of the parochialism and isolation of public sector organisations that has prevented this adoption, though they do aver that similarities and differences exist and need to be understood. Moore (1995) highlighted some similarities between the work of public and private sector managers along with the need for sensitivity to the public context.

Overlaps in the boundary between leadership and management have come in for much discussion (Section 2.7.4 this thesis). There are some obvious distinctions, though not necessarily unanimity, between their functions, Gardner (1990:3) evocatively points out:

*'every time I come across first-class managers they turn out to have quite a lot of leader in them'*. As Van Slyke and Alexander (2006: 366) summarise:

*'Public sector leadership research parallels developments on the private sector side but lags temporally in empirical tests, application, and modifications of leadership concepts and frameworks as they relate to public organizations. Understanding the interactions between the micro-level attributes of the individual leader (traits, characteristics, and competencies) and the macro-level attributes of the organization (structure, culture, environment, products, people, and partnerships) is critical for discovering and developing appropriate models of public sector leadership'* (Van Slyke & Alexander, 2006: 366).

### **3.6.1 A generalisability despite vastness**

In the hundred years of modern leadership research, the problem of leadership literature has been complicated *'by several paradigm shifts and voluminous body of knowledge'* (Antonakis *et al.*, 2004: 4). Many scholars point out the vast quantity of leadership literature despite the lack of a robust definition of the concept or the definitive evidence of leadership effectiveness (Barker, 1997; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Rost, 1991; Antonakis *et al.*, 2004). Even if one was to narrow the focus of organisational leadership down to the public sector context, the variations across the sector, specific to services or departments would be significant making conceptualisation difficult and approaches a-generalisable. For example, Harris' (2008) study focused strictly on public sector leadership in the educational arena, which is only one of many public management settings. This complexity is abetted by debates whether such findings from one sector are generalisable to the public sector overall. For instance, organisational or programme performance in functional areas like social services may not be as readily measurable as educational performance, and it may not be as easy to hire or fire a leader based on his or her performance. Also, local colleges or schools are relatively simple structures in the sense that only a small portion of implementation is carried out by private or non-profit third parties; public programmes and policies regarding provision

of social services are implemented through more elaborate hierarchical structures and with extensive involvement of private and non-profit sectors. Bennis and Nanus summarize the increasing interest and volume, but nevertheless elusiveness in leadership research: *'Leadership is like the abominable snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but who is nowhere to be seen'* (Bennis and Nanus, 1985: 20).

### **3.6.2 Leadership at the apex and followership**

Though followers have vital significance *'as moderators or constructors, substitutes, or co-producers of leadership'* (Jackson and Parry, 2008: 60), in this research, the role of followers in the phenomenon of leadership is understated. This research focused on the apex and on the relationship between senior officers and politicians (Mouritzen and Svava, 2002), and to make the research possible and practical it was decided to largely ignore the voices of followers unless they were senior leaders themselves. Also, in terms of practical reality, the phenomenon of leadership was contested enough between officers and members without having the added complexity of followers which would make the project more complex still. This is acknowledged as a weakness of the research yet it is considered necessary to limit the scope of this research in this manner

### **3.6.3 Dependence on private sector literature**

Though there exists a substantial body of work on public sector leadership; some of it is quite dependent on private-sector literature (van Wart with Dicke, 2008) especially the concepts of strategic leadership, processual and relational leadership and the emphasis on context. Borrowing rather than re-inventing the wheel does have strengths, but at the same time it is important to exercise caution and keep borrowed theory at a general level of abstraction along with a willingness to adapt and modify for the case study. I agree with Newman (2002: 79) who argues that public sector organisations are being: *'encouraged to look to the business world for models of good practice in a drive to*

*inculcate entrepreneurial values and import dynamic styles of leadership*'. However, the global crisis in corporate sector has meant that the wheel has come full circle and private corporate sector is no more a model for emulation with ready-made answers for *wicked* problems of the public world.

In recent times other changes have been visible, accompanying the prominence to good governance and training public managers in the skills and techniques of leadership as a significant part of public human resource efforts (Ink, 2000; Day, 2000; Sims, 2002; Pynes, 2003; Fairholm, 2004). It is now legitimate for public managers to need and exert leadership complementing their earlier traditional functions of organisational management and policy implementation (Fairholm, 2004). In the field of local public sector leadership where leadership is driven by policy, leadership is considered crucial for good governance and meeting local needs (Newman, 2001; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2003; Storey, 2004; Koch and Dixon, 2007; Bovaird and Loffler, 2009; Raffel *et al.*, 2009).

Though there is much that can be borrowed and adapted, it is pertinent to recall the uniqueness of the public realm, where *'leadership (is) for the public good, where challenges are complex, stakeholders are many, values are conflicting, and resources are limited'* (Getha-Taylor, *et al.*, 2011: i83). This requires *'studying public leadership specifically, rather than trying to retrofit existing concepts of leadership ...'* (Getha-Taylor, 2011: i83). Finally, I locate my research in this gap – the absence of theoretical and empirical research looking at the political and managerial interface.

### **3.7 Conclusion: Situating the research in the gaps**

This literature review highlights, the various typologies of leadership relevant to the research (Section 3.4), the dual dimensions of leadership including the political and managerial interface (section 3.5), the lack of generalisability across the public sector to suit particular contexts despite a voluminous collection of writings in the field (section

3.6.1), the limitation of ignoring the follower voice in local authority despite the legitimacy of followers to the study of leadership (section 3.6.2) and the strengths of borrowing from the strategic, processual, relational and contextual focus of mainstream studies. The nature of leadership in the public sector emerges as a multi-dimensional, multi-level and complex phenomena rooted in the democratic governance of the times. Leadership is hence a kaleidoscope, a fractal designed by many facets and constituent elements. This requires studying it in its own context, in the voices and narratives of the main players at the apex including the elected officials and the appointed officers. This research forges a pathway to reframe the study of leadership at the apex of local authority. The next Chapter explores leadership in the unique context of local authority in England.

The aim of this Chapter is to highlight the inadequacies of any one dominant existing public leadership theory; rather it adapts and improvises theoretical perspectives for use. Hence, bureaucratic, executive, political, collaborative and democratic leadership each have explanatory potential but are by themselves not able to clarify and explain the whole process and practice of leadership in the context of local authority. This research defines leadership as a social phenomenon with strong roots in the context in which it is situated which is coloured by exciting force fields of the bureaucratic, strategic, political and democratic with a relational, processual, shared and discursive nature. The next Chapter situates the public context of leadership with both its challenges and constraints in the context of local authority.



## CHAPTER 4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 4.1 Introduction

This Chapter will explore understanding of the context and leadership of a local authority by carrying out a review of the relevant literature underpinned by existing research both conceptual and empirical. It aims to explore meanings and understandings in order to conceptualise, contextualise and problematise leadership as a dynamic phenomenon within local authority. It will critically analyse the evolving nature of the context and the challenges facing local leadership including the spate of reform and modernisation which has to be implemented for the improved delivery of local public services. While such a review of literature will undoubtedly enhance scholarship, insights and reflection, it will also serve to create boundaries by framing the scope and limits of the research.

I begin with a discussion of what is meant by local authority, its leadership and the local government context. Finally, the developments in the literature are explored. The earlier Chapter 2 looked at leadership generally while Chapter 3 focused on public leadership specifically. This Chapter embeds leadership in the local authority context exploring the *flavour* it gives to leadership processes and practices. It explores how local authority is *run*. The next Chapter explores the philosophical issues that underpin the research, integral to the empirical research that unfolds in the thesis.

### 4.2 What is a local authority

The terms local authority and local government have popularly been used interchangeably. Historically, the current local authorities in England have evolved over time and through developments at the legislative-statutory and regional-local levels. In

this historical evolution, the centre and the local have provided opposing ends of the discourse involving power, authority and responsibility. At various times the centre has successfully imposed alternative ways of governing and there has been an ebb and flow within the remit of local authorities (See Stewart, 2000/03; Stoker, 2004; Massey and Pyper, 2005; Wilson and Game, 2006; John, 2010 for a deeper overview). Many of the functions formerly delivered by local authorities are provided for by a host of public funded agencies operating at the local levels usually led by appointees rather than elected representatives despite the much publicised war on quangos and the like. The five important distinguishing features of local authorities which Greenwood and Stewart (1986) identify is described in Table 4.1.

**Table 4-1: Distinguishing features of local authorities in England**

<b>1.</b>	Geographical remit over which the local authority has some degree of control and responsibility;
<b>2.</b>	Statutory framework set by central government which defines their scope;
<b>3.</b>	Legitimate right to determine and collect local taxes;
<b>4.</b>	Political mandate received through local electoral cycles; and,
<b>5.</b>	Work with other local agencies (like health and police) to ensure the effective well-being of their communities.

Source: Greenwood and Stewart, 1986

The above five features distinguishes the local authority from both the private sector and other local public agencies. In this research, local authority refers to organisations which fit the above remit while local government more generally refers to the level of local governance with several other important players/actors like the police, health, charities, and educational institutions among others, which are key within the Local Strategic Partnerships (herein after LSPs).

The type and form of local authority in western democracies ranges variously from weak mayor-council to strong mayor-council, or council-manager, to leader-Cabinet and imposes different leadership and management roles on both the elected and appointed officials: mayors, council leaders, council members, chief executive officers and other senior corporate officers in local authority. The complexities of urban, as well as rural issues, in the twenty-first century have challenged the traditional concepts of leadership (and management) in local government. Leadership processes are crucial for communities today: while styles and forms of local authority may differ, how they work in partnership, mobilise resources to take advantage of opportunities to meet the goals of the organisation and the communities they serve, is crucial.

### **4.3 The local authority context**

This section presents the context<sup>12</sup> of governance in which local authority is a preeminent player. In many democratic countries including England where this research is located, local authority is subject to challenges by macro factors like globalisation, Europeanisation and urbanisation, the emergence of an informed and vocal citizenry, socio demographic changes and increasing complexity of communities, budgetary pressures, localism and place dynamics and the presence of *wicked* issues which raises crucial questions about the role of local authority, their purpose and capacity (Stewart, 2000/03; Skelcher, 2004; Denters and Rose, 2005; Wilson and Game, 2006; Brookes, 2010). The rich picture that emerges is of both macro and micro factors looming over the horizon for the local authority. These numerous factors in a globalised world with localism and regionalism on the ascendant have served to challenge local authority leadership. Working within and across their organisations, in partnership with civil society, markets and other agencies, local authority leadership requires to mobilise

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<sup>12</sup> Context like in the previous Chapter can be distinguished into internal or the *organisational* context and external or the *environment*; for the sake of consistency and brevity, I have used context generically for both the internal as well as external environment.

resources, build capacity to design and deliver services; this is crucial for sustainable communities and the future (DCLG, 2006; Lyons Report, 2007; BIS, 2010; DCLG, 2010; Liddle, 2012). *‘The Coalition discourse on localism thus links ideas about a reduced state and an increased role for markets to community involvement and local democracy, the so-called ‘Big Society’* (Hodgson and Spours, 2012: 200. Also see Conservative Party, 2009; Liberal Democrats, 2009; Cameron, 2010; Clegg, 2010; BIS, 2010; House of Commons, 2010). The Localism Act 2011 despite the hype, builds upon Labours *empowering communities* and *place shaping* agendas but has been criticised for the absence of any new freedoms for local government and communities which in the light of severe public expenditure reductions allows the centre play a decisive role by devolving responsibilities without resourcing it (Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Crowe, 2011 a,b). The Act of 2011 is summarised as devolving greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and giving local communities more control over housing and planning decisions (House of Commons, 2010).

Local government interacts and engages with the lives of its citizens and communities directly and daily; the activities of the police, fire, emergency and other social services responses, conditions of the street including the homeless, the provision of care to all including the less advantaged are some of the ways in which local governments impacts upon them. In most European countries local government reforms have been driven by a demand for the strengthening of political and administrative local leadership (Wollmann, 2008:290) motivated by two main deficits:

1. Democratic deficit: the lack of transparency and accountability in local decision-making structure, which has been reflected in falling voter turnouts; and,
2. Performance deficit: local government appears to become less capable of coping with evermore complex and wicked social, economic and environmental issues and challenges (Wollmann, 2008).

Historically the English local government system, premised on the monistic competence and the uniform task model, had come to exemplify government by committee (Wollmann, 2008; Stewart, 2000/03). Over time, particularly since the 1960s, the traditional committee system came under attack, as it was said to augment the *sectoralisation* of local government activities and was lacking in holistic local leadership (see Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001: 60).

Following the 1998 White Paper, *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* (DETR, 1998), the Labour government passed the Local Government Act, 2000 (LGA, 2000; see Stewart, 2000/03; Rao, 2005 a,b). Tantamount ‘*almost to a revolution*’ (Wilson & Game, 2006: 92), it instituted a parting of ways from the old by 1) completely abolishing the earlier committees which were replaced by an executive committee or Cabinet system, and, 2) making available new leadership forms to local authorities. The LGA 2000 and its subsequent amendments required all local authorities in England to choose from among the four models or legislative options<sup>13</sup>; these options were:

1. Cabinet with leader wherein the leader is elected by the council majority while the (executive) councillors are either also elected by the council majority or appointed by the leader;
2. Directly elected mayor and Cabinet wherein the mayor is elected by the local population and appoints a small Cabinet of councillors, each covering a major policy area;
3. Directly elected mayor with council manager wherein the mayor is elected by the local population. The council appoints a council manager and possibly other chief officers, too; and,
4. Modified committee system for Councils with a population of less than 85,000.

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<sup>13</sup> One exception was the introduction by way of referendum, of a directly elected Mayor of Greater London in May 1998. For more description see Wilson & Game (2006), Rao (2005 a,b) and Lowndes and Leach (2004).

The Local Government Act of 2000, 2003 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007<sup>14</sup> have prompted changes for both members and officers in the vast majority of councils. Entwistle *et al.*, (2005:542) conclude that these developments have both ‘*increased the risk of overlap and conflict in the area of corporate leadership*’. For members, the change meant that the political leadership was focussed on a small executive with the intention of promoting a ‘*strong, visible and more individualised form of leadership with an associated heightening of accountability*’ (Lowndes and Leach, 2004: 557. Also see Crowe, 2011 a). Officers have come under increased pressure to improve performance and provide effective leadership of their authorities with an emphasis on the ‘Big Society’ and Localism – agendas being pursued by the coalition government at the centre since it came to power. The relationship between the officers and members have been rendered more complex by the spread of partnership working and public consultation (Stoker and Wilson, 2004; Wilson and Game, 2006). Concession to local conditions and context is built-in by allowing each local authority to draw up its own constitution and formally adopt it which brings in variations according to local flavours.

It is in this changing and dynamic context in which decisions are made; it is within this broader context that the leadership phenomena unfold. This changing landscape creates both challenges as well as opportunities. In all this change, the pre-eminent place of local authority among other local service providers however remains incontestable.

#### **4.4 The Case in this research**

Each case is a complex, historical and contextual entity: its context is complex with a ‘*concatenation of domains*’ that can at best only be sampled (Stake, 2000: 440). Stake (*ibid.*:436) identifies a case through the following characteristics: being ‘*one among*

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<sup>14</sup> The 2007 Local Government Act extended powers to all council leaders what was earlier enjoyed by elected mayors only, namely selection of cabinet colleagues and allocation of portfolios (Leach, 2010:324) along with a four-year security of tenure.

*others*', '*specific one*', '*bounded system*', and a '*functioning specific*' with '*behaviour (that) is patterned*', coherent and sequential, and some features are within the boundary, while other features are outside. Though I explore *case* in Chapter 6, briefly I touch upon the specific case here without infringing ethical issues around anonymity and confidentiality.

The *Nagar* local authority is located in the South West of England; it is a unitary authority progressing from the District to the Unitary. The *Nagar* constitution and webpage describes it as a '*Cabinet with leader model*'. It is mainly a two party council with the majority stake shifting between the two main parties. It has a strong maritime and regional historical presence. Though aptly described as urban it is surrounded by rural hinterland and is a considerable and a desirable place to live because of the quality of life experience to be had here.

The Cabinet with a leader form is based on the executive committee, with a leader who is elected (and can hence be made to resign) by the council majority. The Cabinet constitutes executive councillors who are appointed by the leader and have assigned functional responsibilities – their portfolios. The Cabinet members work on a full-time salaried basis. It naturally brings to mind the prevailing Westminster national government by Cabinet system in a parliament: the Cabinet with its leader resembles a '*parliamentary (Cabinet) government system*' with local '*ministers*' and a '*prime minister*' (Wollmann, 2008: 284).

#### **4.5 Understanding local authority leadership**

As with other terms associated with leadership of public agencies, there are several terms used in literature to denote leadership of local areas. These include local leadership, local authority leadership and local government leadership, all of them indicative of some geographical jurisdiction over which control is exercised. Leadership

in local government has been defined as *'the ability to overcome resistance to particular courses of action, notably to cause others to agree to something they were not necessarily initially predisposed to'* (Leach and Wilson, 2000: 49). It entails blending and using available resources to effect change or to prevent action involving both persuasion and dissuasion. Entrenched in the local arena, leadership needs to identify community needs and create a path through contradictory and conflicting requirements to facilitate collaboration across the organisation and beyond to the partners in achieving goals (Hambleton and Sweeting, 2004; Brookes, 2010; Goss and Tarplett, 2010; Martin, 2010). Historically, the development of new forms of local leadership is associated with the introduction and subsequent modification of a strengthened political executive leadership, either in the body of a directly or indirectly elected mayor or more commonly through a leader-in-council. Community leadership has been a feature of English local government since the mid-nineteenth century and continues to remain a strong driver in the roles played by the political executive (Sullivan, 2007). The 1998 White Paper considers community leadership as being *'at the heart of the role of modern local government'*, marking a shift from inward- to outward-looking local government, from controller to partner, and from *'knowing best'* to *'learning from'* communities' (DETR, 1998: 8.1). From an administrative perspective local authority is charged with the responsibility for leadership of place and local governance and the regeneration of local communities, within the context of modernisation and reform. It is amongst the largest employers in many regions of England including the South West where the case study is situated. From the finance perspective, local authority is both a significant employer with substantial financial outlays.

Local leadership can be regarded as a political institution, unlike institution understood as an *'organisation or a building'*, it has *'formal and informal rules of the game that*

*shape actors' behaviour'* (Leach and Lowndes, 2007: 184; See also Lowndes, 2002). Local leadership in this sense *'provides the framework of understandings within which actors identify, compare and select courses of action'* (Leach and Lowndes, 2007: 184). Institutions in the organisational sense provide a relatively systematic and stable set of opportunities and constraints (*ibid.*, 184-5). The institution of a local authority has been the target of government reforms under successive national governments. The formal democratic institutional frameworks within which local authority leadership is situated has been transformed since the LGA 2000 and subsequent amendments<sup>15</sup> by other acts, new arrangements for executive decision-making under various statutes, the performance regimes instituted by the centre, emphasis on partnership working and public consultations (Stoker and Wilson, 2004; Wilson and Game, 2006). Byatt and Lyons (2001:11) emphasise that *'an important factor in performance in particular service areas is the quality of leadership and corporate governance of the authority as a whole'*.

For Mouritzen and Svava (2002: 5), the form of government makes a difference to the leadership process at the apex; they develop a typology of four forms of government applicable to the local government level:

1. The strong-mayor form is based on an elected executive as the central figure of government;
2. The committee-leader form is based on the sharing of executive powers between a political leader and standing committees;
3. The collective form features the collective leadership of the executive committee of the council; and,
4. The council-manager form has a council headed by a non-executive mayor and an appointed executive-the city manager.

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<sup>15</sup> Including the Local Government Act of 2003 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The changing context of the local authority is within networked public governance, policy driven agendas, legislative changes, modernisation and reforms, effectiveness and performance focus, enhanced customer expectations and active citizen engagement (Koch and Dixon, 2007; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Brookes, 2010; Osborne, 2010; Liddle, 2010, 2012). This was expressed by the strategy document *Vibrant Local Leadership*, published in 2005:

*'elected councillors and council officers' charged with providing leadership are absolutely vital to the quality of life enjoyed by our citizens'* (ODPM, 2005a:7).

Similar sentiments are expressed by the more recent 'Big Society' and Localism agendas of the Coalition government (Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Conservative Party, 2009; Crowe, 2011a,b). The Localism Act 2011 proposes:

1. giving councils a general power of competence;
2. allowing councils to choose to return to the committee system of governance and allowing for referendums for elected mayors in certain authorities;
3. abolishing the Standards Board regime and the model code of conduct, and introducing local accountability and a criminal offence of deliberate failure to declare a personal interest in a matter;
4. giving residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases;
5. allowing councils more discretion over business rate relief; and,
6. providing new powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and giving voluntary and community groups the right to challenge local authorities over their services (House of Commons, 2010).

Although the Coalition Government's localism perspective is still far from being implemented, its constituent elements include reduction in the role of central government and the size of the state; focus on institutional autonomy; increased competition through more provision by private and third sector agencies; freedom from

bureaucratic controls; empowering citizens and communities as consumers and encouraging their active participation in public services and the promotion of *local markets* in, for example, the areas of health and education (Hodgson & Spours, 2012; Conservative Party, 2009). The 2010 White Paper, *Local growth: Realizing every place's potential* (BIS, 2010) included proposals for the replacement of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) '*equipped to promote private sector growth and create jobs locally*' (Clegg, 2010: 3). The Localism Bill (House of Commons, 2010, 2011) which received Royal Assent in November 2011 enshrines community groups including voluntary organisations and social enterprises with the right to express an interest in taking over council-run services. The Localism Act 2011 proposes referenda on council tax rises beyond the levels set by central government with provision for directly elected mayors in 12 English cities (House of Commons, 2010, 2011). It is a double edged sword, so if enacted it would provide councils with greater freedom to determine how to spend monies, but it also reduces drastically the grants from central government.

Local leadership can hence be conceived as a process of influence, involving both officers and members, of persuading and dissuading that occurs at the apex of local government, with the aim of designing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating public services for the common good. The impact of its actions reverberate outside the organisational arena into the wider local public domain including the private and the non-profit sectors as well among groups, communities, and individuals in the local area.

#### **4.5.1 Dual conception of leadership: Political and managerial**

Though local authority leadership can be distributed among many players, groups, and organisational units etc., the two important categories of political leadership by the elected politicians and managerial leadership by the appointed officers continue to be significant for local service delivery. Between these two types of leadership there is

extensive exchange and mutual impact, although factors like the governmental structure, culture, nature of leadership and the characteristics of local communities all play a vital part (Self, 1972; Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). These intensive interactions between the managerial and political leadership at the apex of the governmental process in local authority is the special focus of this research. Entwistle *et al.*, (2005) emphasised the significance of both officers and members for providing effective local leadership and refer to it as the two strands of officer and member leadership which can be differentiated into corporate or strategic and community or neighbourhood leadership. As a result, the relationship between the officers and members is uniquely important for local leadership and the way the relationship is operated, enacted, negotiated and shared is of significance. They point out:

*‘Both the character of the new institutional arrangements put in place by the 2000 Local Government Act , and the rhetoric of the Government’s policy statements imply that elected members should take a predominant role in community leadership, while senior managers should focus their efforts on corporate leadership’* (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005: 542).

In the light of the significance of this dual strand of leadership, the literature narrates their operation as *dual elite* with *shared agenda* or a *relationship of dynamic dependency* where differences of perspectives are resolved through negotiation and exchange on a case by case basis between the two groups (Gains, 2004, 2009; Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; Leach and Lowndes, 2007).

#### **4.5.2 Relationship between managerial and political leadership**

Though some scholars have conceptualised local leadership as consisting of two strands as that of officers and members (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002; Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; Gains, 2004, 2009; Leach and Lowndes, 2007; Brookes and Grint, 2010), more prominent in literature is the focus on local political leadership (Svara, 1990; Leach and

Wilson, 2000; 2002; Elcock, 2001; Borraz and John, 2004; Leach *et al.*, 2005; Hartley and Benington, 2011) while fewer are the references to officer leadership (Klausen and Magnier, 1998; Wood and Vilkinas, 2003; Gains, 2004; Van Wart, 2005; Also section 3.5.1 this thesis). Morrell and Hartley (2006a) refer to the attempts to differentiate between political and managerial leadership which makes difficult the application of the major contemporary theories of leadership (Fiedler, 1967; Bass, 1985) to the field of politics and by extension to local authority leadership.

Milner and Joyce (2005) elaborate on case studies of public leadership at the local level that emphasise how managerial leaders achieve change with the support of elected politicians as well as the necessity of managerial leaders having political skills; for managerial leaders support from politicians is as crucial as possessing political skills. Politicians require effective managerial leaders for the delivery of policies; political visions based on ideological convictions and the national political reality have to be translated into plans for implementation at the local level. There is a '*state of interdependence between elected politicians and managerial leaders*' (Milner and Joyce, 2005: 96). Entwistle *et al.*'s (2005) research on the other hand report '*scant evidence of a shared officer-member approach to improvement and little evidence therefore of the operation of a 'dual elite'. The most likely outcome of the intermingling of the roles of officers and members might appear to be confusion and tension*' (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005: 551) However, a remarkable point that emerged from the '*detailed analysis of the views of different officer groups*' is that '*although members disagreed with chief officers and service managers about a series of key issues, they were by contrast, in agreement with corporate officers on nearly all points*' (*ibid.*, 2005: 551). Hence, they conclude that '*there are two parallel sets of officer-member relationships*' and this '*apparent divergence between service and corporate agendas is nonetheless important and represents a key challenge for all authorities*' (Entwistle *et*

*al.*, 2005: 552). Resolving the tensions between service (or functional) and whole authority (or strategic interests), as well as focusing on the relationship between officers and members who do not necessarily see eye to eye despite the concentration of power in a small political executive ‘*remains a pressing issue for research*’ (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005: 552).

The roles and rules that emerge out of the relationship between officers and members differ according to the four models of relationships described in literature (Svara, 1990, 2002; Mouritzen and Svara, 2002; Gains, 2004, 2009; Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; Morrell and Hartley, 2006a; Leach and Lowndes, 2007). Due to the complex reality of local government, leadership roles are not as neatly compartmentalised as government has suggested (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005: 543); there are considerable overlaps. The statutory changes including those under the Localism Act 2011 and the earlier emphasis on performance have surely enlarged the interest elected members take in corporate and operational matters, making them adopt a far more *hands on* approach. Since politicians will be judged by not merely policy statements but actual performance, their ‘*task accomplishment*’ on operational matters becomes legitimate concern (Leach and Wilson, 2002: 684) for which they are accountable to the voting public. Improved remuneration on the backs of modernisation has also enabled the *professional* political leadership to devote more time to such matters. As increasingly officers and members become more active in the same corporate sphere, the nature and quality of their relationship begins to entangle, overlap, and blur and hence the focus of this thesis is validated by the literature review.

In the words of Entwistle *et al.*, (2005: 543) ‘*community leadership is a slippery concept*’; it is similarly portrayed by other scholars (Martin, 1997, 2010; Sullivan and Sweeting, 2005). Government policy documents are inspired by the concepts of community governance with its varying connotations (Clarke and Stewart, 1994;

Newman, 2001; Haus, *et al.*, 2005; Denters and Rose, 2005) including networked community governance (Stoker, 1998, 2004). Mirroring the 1998 White Paper (DETR, 1998), the 2005 paper *Vibrant Local Leadership* (ODPM, 2005a) makes the point about the councils as having a ‘*key role in leading their communities, focusing on networking, influencing, and working through partnerships, building on the governance arrangements for LSPs and approaches for Local Area Agreements*’ (ODPMa, 2005: 31). The high level leadership roles were reserved for executive members, the non-executive councillors are expected to ‘*look downwards to wards and neighbourhoods*’ (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005: 543; ODPM, 2005a). Neighbourhood leadership must become ‘*a central element of every ward councillor’s role*’ and the non-executive members should play the leading role in ‘*stimulating the local voice, listening to it, and representing it at council level*’ (ODPM, 2005b:16).

Strategic or corporate leadership in contrast to community and neighbourhood leadership is inward focused, grappling with the organisational performance of an authority and its operations but with a strategic outlook. It involves working in partnership with other local service providers.

#### **4.5.3 Local authority and the political executive**

The proper functioning of the political executive requires both officers and members to work together in the design and delivery of local public services. There is extensive research on how legislative change has transformed political leadership at the local level (Leach, 2006; Rao, 2005a,b). The LGA 2000 and subsequent amendments have clearly shifted the monistic decision-making power and concentrated them on a group of executive councillors forming the Cabinet while the non-executive councillors, sometimes referred to as the backbench councillors echoing parliamentary parlance, have been essentially reduced to a scrutinising function. As members of the scrutiny and oversight committees, the non-executive councillors are meant to oversee the Cabinet

and its executive councillors. In practice, the scrutiny committees largely fail to exercise effective scrutiny; chiefly because of what has been called the '*extreme (party) politicisation of British local government*' (Rao, 2005a: 54). This is specifically evidenced in councils with a single party executive and two strong political parties: the ruling council majority is hardly likely to be interested or willing to undertake scrutiny work to control the executive under such circumstances (*cf.* Ashworth and Snape, 2004).

The new local government forms have strengthened local political and administrative leadership by introducing a '*strong and individualised form of leadership*' (Lowndes and Leach, 2004: 557). But they have significantly diminished the influence of the full council, and the ordinary councillors outside the Cabinet have lost influence in that their function is reduced to that of a scrutiny role. As opined by Rao (2005a: 54) the changes instituted due to new local government forms have aggravated the '*power imbalance within local government*'.

#### **4.5.4 Local governance and leadership**

Leadership in local governance is intrinsically related to place, local communities, partnerships (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002) and network governance (Kickert *et al.*, 1997; Rhodes, 1997, 2007; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). Such an emphasis is considered useful for finding solutions to the *wicked* problems of policy (like regeneration, housing etc. *Cf.* Mullins and Rhodes, 2007; van Bortel and Mullin, 2009; van Bortel *et al.*, 2009; Mullins and van Bortel, 2010), for '*good, socially relevant outcomes*' (Klijn, 2008:14) and for the effectiveness of service delivery. A *place shaping* and joining up role is envisaged by recent policy documents like the Lyon's report (2007) for local government. Unlike traditional hierarchies, local government has significant responsibility for cross-boundary working, community engagement and a

focus on outcomes (Gibney and Murie, 2008; Loffler and Bovaird, 2009; Gibney *et al.*, 2009).

#### **4.6 The gaps in the literature**

Local authority literature is under theorised and under researched (Gains, 2009) with a significant gap represented by a lack of studies which investigate the officer and member relationships and shared leadership narratives. The policy process and the legislative changes exacerbate the local vs. the national relationship in the English context. The insights from institutional interpretivism (Leach and Lowndes, 2007; Gains, 2004) do to some extent explore the roles and rules that guide the member officer relationship which ranges from the passive to the active, with members dominating by virtue of the democratic electoral process while officers dominate due to their knowledge and expertise. This has caused a focus on *dual elites* and the concept of *dynamic dependency* (Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; Gains, 2004; 2009; Leach and Lowndes, 2007). Despite all this research at the conceptual and empirical levels, there are significant gaps, and local authority leadership with a joint focus on both politicians and managers represents one such gap (Gains, 2004; Brookes and Grint, 2010). A systematic review of papers published in the Local Government Studies journal revealed a similar picture. Entwistle *et al.*, (2005) and others have sounded clarion calls for deeper study into member officer relationships at local government level. This thesis would contribute to leadership discourses at the local level including the debates around localism, devolution, decentralisation and growing democratisation around the world, as well as concerns regarding good governance which has come centre stage within the current policy context in UK, as well as political developments and the Arab Spring in the Middle East.

## 4.7 Conclusion

At local government level, leadership emerges as a force for positive change driven by policy as well as the broader need for effectiveness and entails energising and bringing together, rallying and supporting consensual, best options, challenging other ways and adapting and using available resources to effect change, improve performance or to prevent action. Election of the members of the council by the local electorate provides local authority with a unique unmatched legitimacy by representing local choice and voice. It creates a dualism – this professional and political divide manifests as a competitive effort to influence policy design and delivery. Hence, local authority is both a strongly political and highly professionalized institution at the apex of which the political and managerial logics and agendas converge or collide and these results in an intensive interaction between the officers and councillors, which is the focus of this research. The aim is to understand the leadership of a local authority through the perceptions and experiences of officers and councillors at the apex of a local authority; to explore the nature and pattern of their interactions through a framework of context, processes and practices, the shared nature of leadership including the narratives, stories and talk and their interpretations.

One of the most significant changes to local government was the movement towards local executive government which underwent iterative changes with each successive national election. There is a corresponding emphasis in various national White Papers, and other policy documents<sup>16</sup>, on the value of *strong leadership* within local authorities, although there is considerable disparity about what it means in operational terms. Another important change was the introduction of scrutiny of executive action and decision making. The research therefore explores *their* i.e. officers' and members'

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<sup>16</sup> including publications of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Audit Commission.

subjective understandings of these changes, and how they make sense of their leadership in their daily routine and through strategic interactions. The meaning of local leadership and the recent and emerging developments in local government are explored in this Chapter situating the research in the gaps in literature. The next Chapter presents the research philosophy and explores it in the context of the ontology and epistemology which leads on to the research design (Chapter 6).



## **CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter seeks to make explicit the philosophical assumptions underlying the research process as understood through the world view of the researcher. It captures the essence of what the researcher seeks to undertake. By seeking to understand the underlying ontological, epistemological, methodological, axiological and rhetorical assumptions which undergird the research, it enables the researcher to opt for a robust strategy and method for data collection and analysis.

The research explores understandings and meanings around leadership, its contextual, shared-relational nature, the processes and practices, the narratives and stories that constitute leadership in the voices of officers and members of local authority and the stakeholders that interact with them. It adopts a perspective that is interpretivist and grounded in social constructivism. It specifically looks at how the actors make sense of the relational dynamics of leadership of a local authority through the interactions between elected members and senior officers and key stakeholders. The research uses a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm leading to a case study using ethnographic and exploratory strategy which is detailed in the next Chapter along with the research design.

### **5.2 Research philosophy**

The research philosophy is intrinsically linked to the world view of the researcher and how they perceive the phenomenon of leadership, more specifically of the leadership of local authority. These paradigmatic issues can best be understood in terms of the philosophical assumptions or foundations of thought made by the researcher in undertaking the research. These assumptions are composed of the ontological, epistemological and methodological axiological and rhetorical or discursive issues that

underpin the research. This philosophical focus enables the researcher to develop insights, wisdom and reflection that forms the basic core on which the research builds up and hence it remains a continuous refrain through the thesis.

There is considerable discrepancy in how these philosophical foundations or paradigms are discussed by scholars (Merriam, 2009) with reference to traditions and theoretical underpinnings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) and world views (Creswell, 2007). Famously scholars have called for shifts in paradigms in leadership research, as well as a greater need for qualitative studies (Bresnen, 1995; Tierney, 1996; Bryman, 2004). Paradigm have also been more recently conceptualized as a transitional space or setting to explore and construct other options of looking at realities and relationships in leadership where this space includes the notions of various and different paradigms (Kuhn, 1962), discourses (Deetz, 2000) or intelligibility nuclei ((Gergen, 1994). Cf. Bouwen and Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2006). The quest for the research philosophy begins with an understanding of the philosophy of science which refers to the conceptual roots of knowledge.

### **5.2.1 Philosophy of Science**

Science is broadly understood as a systematic quest for knowledge and the philosophy of science as the conceptual blocks underpinning this quest for knowledge (Kuhn, 1962). Subsumed within this understanding of the philosophy of science are beliefs or assumptions regarding five elements: 1) ontology: briefly the nature of reality and being, 2) epistemology: the study of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, and the relationship between the research participants and the researcher, 3) methodology: the process and procedures of research, 4) axiology: the role and place of values and ethics in the research process, and 5) rhetorical structure: the language and presentation of the research (see Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Kuhn (1962) famously differentiates between the natural and

social sciences by the extent to which they have a developed paradigm or shared theoretical structures and methodological approaches about which there is a high level of consensus.

### **5.3 Research paradigms**

Research paradigms underpin the research philosophy. A paradigm is defined as '*the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator*' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 195), and acts as a map for researchers in '*negotiating the subject area*' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:24). A paradigm is a basic set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how this set of interrelated assumptions provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for research and understanding of phenomena under study in the social world (Filstead, 1979; Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; 2005; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). These loose set of interrelated assumptions and concepts guide and orient thinking and ultimately research (Bogdan and Bilken, 1982).

Kuhn (1962, 1970 a and b, 1974) in his classical interpretation regarded paradigm as basic belief about what constitutes reality and counts as knowledge. Paradigm encapsulates the researcher's premises, his world view that guides action in inquiry or research (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Bettis and Gregson, 2001). Over time, as thinking about reality and nature of knowledge changes, new research paradigms inevitably emerge in response to perceived weaknesses of earlier paradigms (Kuhn, 1962; Collis and Hussey, 2009).

In marked contrast to positivism's naive philosophical realism of a single objective external reality based on the hypothetico-deductive method (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), constructivism adheres to a relativist position that assumes multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities (Schwandt, 1994). Essentially, constructivists hold that reality is

constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being *out there*, it is constructed by human beings in relation to each other (Guba, 1990; Lincoln, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). The constructivist position adopts a hermeneutical approach that meaning is hidden and must be exposed through deep reflection (Schwandt, 2000). This reflection can be stimulated by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue. The researcher and the participant are interactively linked; as the research proceeds, findings emerge with newer understandings which alter the traditional distinctions between ontology and epistemology (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Thus, a distinguishing characteristic of constructivism (see section 2.5 this thesis) is the centrality of the dynamic interaction between the researcher and the objects/phenomenon of research which creates and uncovers deeper meaning (Bettis and Gregson, 2001). This joint co-construction of meaning between researcher and the participants builds through interactive dialogue and interpretation.

The goals of constructivism-interpretivism are both idiographic and emic. Reality emerges and is manifested from the meaning people have created for themselves based on their experiences and interactions with the environment (von Glasersfeld, 1995). This reality is also shared across and among many individuals and cultures and changes over time (Guba and Lincoln 1998). Thus, reality or knowledge is always a human construction and never value free.

The roots of qualitative research and the seeds of constructivism-interpretivism can be traced to Kant's (1781/ 1965) *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hamilton (1994: 63) clarified Kant's position regarding human perception as deriving '*not only from evidence of the senses but also from the mental apparatus that serves to organize the incoming sense impressions*' and that '*human claims about nature cannot be independent of inside-the-head processes of the knowing subject*'. Central to constructivist thinking is the lack of

separation between the subjective reality and the research participants who are experiencing, processing, and labelling the reality. In other words, reality is constructed by the research participant acting alone or in groups. This ontological distinction lies at the heart of the basic difference between positivism and postpositivism (and chiefly quantitative methods) and constructivism (chiefly qualitative methods). Dilthey (1894/1977) was another prominent philosopher in the development of constructivism who distinguished between *naturwissenschaft* (natural science) and *geisteswissenschaft* (human science) to help differentiate between the positivistic and constructivistic stances (see Hamilton, 1994; Schwandt, 2000). The *naturwissenschaft* hopes to attain a scientific explanation (*erklaren*), whereas the *geisteswissenschaft* hopes to understand the *meaning* of social phenomena (*verstehen*) (Schwandt, 1994, 2000). Proponents of constructivism-interpretivism emphasise the understanding of the *lived experiences* (*erlebnis*) of those who live it day to day (Schwandt, 1994, 2000) within a particular historical social reality (Dilthey, 1977). The constructivist–interpretivist paradigm provides the anchor and the foundation for qualitative research strategies and methods.

Positivist paradigm claims that there is but one true reality that is apprehendable, identifiable, and measurable – a position that has also been called naive realism. Postpositivists too accept a true reality, but contend that it can only be apprehended and measured imperfectly - a position categorized as critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975, 1979; Collier, 1994). Constructivists–interpretivists believe in the existence of multiple, constructed realities – referred to as the relativist position, rather than a single true reality. Reality, according to the constructivist position, is hence subjective and influenced by the context or the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the participants and the researcher. The critical paradigm posits a reality shaped by ethnic, cultural, gender, social, and political values – the realities are mediated by power relations that are social and historical.

Constructivists-interpretivists propose a subjectivist stance that maintains that reality is socially constructed; the dynamic interaction between researcher and participant is crucial for capturing and describing the lived experience (*erlebnis*) of leadership.

### **5.3.1 Paradigms of Inquiry**

The fundamental questioning of the research assumptions are the basic blocks, the starting point for research and determine what the inquiry is and how it is to be practised: They determine the various forms of the '*paradigms of inquiry*' (Guba 1990: 18). As Schon (1983: 163) opines a researcher's '*stance towards inquiry is his attitude to the reality with which he deals*' (*cf. ibid*, 1991) The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm of this inquiry enables the social reality of leadership to be viewed as a social construction in which the dynamic relationship between the elected officers and the members at the apex of local government assumes critical importance and meanings and understandings are crucially framed within this relational reality within the context of local authority. The search for deeper levels of meanings leads to a qualitative case study strategy relying on the subjective experiential (the lived experience) *erlebnis* of participants interacting with the researcher and the specific context.

### **5.3.2 Typology of paradigms**

Different scholars have elaborated several different paradigms as existing in research. Lincoln and Guba (1994/2000) moved from a four paradigm typology which includes positivism, postpositivism, critical theory *et al.* and constructivism, to which they added a fifth namely participatory in 2000. Crotty's (1998) more detailed typology includes a seven paradigm framework namely: positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry, feminism, and postmodernism (Crotty, 1998; Bettis and Gregson, 2001).

For Guba and Lincoln (1994), the typology of paradigms included positivism, post-positivism, constructivism and critical realism. For Morgan and Smircich (1980), objective-subjective continuum ranges along six core assumptions ranging from reality as: 1) concrete structure, 2) concrete process, 3) contextual field of information, 4) symbolic discourse, 5) social construction and finally, as 6) projection of human imagination. More recently Merriam (2009: 8) based on a) Prasad's (2005) discussion on interpretive, critical and post as in postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism, b) Carr and Kemmis's (1995) typology of positivist, interpretive and critical and c) Lather's (1992; 2006) poststructural and postmodern additions has elucidated four epistemological perspectives (rather than using the term paradigm) namely positivist/postpositivist, interpretive/constructivist, critical and postmodern/poststructural.

Terminologically paradigms have been used inconsistently in literature, having different meanings not only over time but also across disciplines, language, countries (Collis and Hussey, 2009) and among researchers (Merriam, 2009). It is most useful to view the typologies along a continuum as proposed by, among others Collis and Hussey (2009), Morgan and Smircich (1980) with positivism (or allied terms like quantitative, objective, scientific and traditionalist) at one extreme end and interpretivism (or allied terms like qualitative, subjective, humanist, phenomenological) at the other end. Movement along the continuum witnesses the gradual relaxation of the features and assumptions of one paradigm which are then replaced by those of the next (Morgan and Smircich 1980). The table 5.1 elucidates the typology of paradigms along a continuum which is relevant for this research with its focus on constructivism-interpretivism.

**Table 5-1: Typology of assumptions on a continuum of paradigms**

<b>Positivism</b>		—————→					<b>Interpretivism/Phenomenology</b>	
	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical Theory	Participatory	Constructivism-interpretivism	Post genre <sup>17</sup>		
<b>Ontological assumption</b>	Reality as a concrete structure	Reality as a concrete process	Reality as a contextual field of information	Reality as participative process of co-creation	Reality as social construction	Reality as a projection of human questioning		
	Naive realism	Critical realism	Historical realism	Participative/ Shared realism	Relativist realism	Questioning realism		
<b>Epistemological stance</b>	To construct a positivist science	To construct systems, process, change	To map contexts, political, social, cultural and understand patterns of privilege	To map, reflect and share and become - understanding through critical reflexivity and subjectivity	To understand how social reality is created	To understand multiple realities, multiple perspectives, multiple voices and multiple interpretations		
	Investigator is objective, external and 'out	Investigator is not totally objective,	Link between investigator and investigated of	Link between investigator and investigated	Link between investigator and investigated of	Link between investigator and investigated in a		

<sup>17</sup> including post structuralism, post modern, post colonial, post feminine genres

	there'	probabilistic knowledge	multiple realities situated in political, social, cultural contexts (one reality is privileged)	involving critical reflexivity and subjectivity	context bound multiple realities	diverse and plural world where the investigator deconstructs, problematises, questions and interrupts
<b>Methodological options</b>	Experiments, surveys, multivariate techniques	Survey, structural equation modelling, instrumental case research	Interpretive contextual analysis	Action inquiry, collaboration and sharing of theory and practice	Case study, Grounded theory, Interviewing, participant observation, discourse analysis	Narratives, field notes, creative formats like poetry and drama.

Adapted from Morgan and Smircich (1980); Howell, 2004, 2012; Collis and Hussey (2009:61); Merriam 2009: 11;

The primary purpose of the research is to understand the subjective, multiple, relational, contextual, processual and discursive reality of leadership of a local authority through the perceptions and experiences of officers and councillors at the apex of local authority and the nature and pattern of their interaction. *How do officers and councillors at the apex of a local authority understand leadership of a local authority? How do the officers and councillors at the apex of local authority interact and the pattern of interaction or relationships between them? What is the nature of their roles particularly their interdependence?* The research hence explores *their* understandings of leadership of local authority. So not only are there multiple, local and specific constructed realities, the subjective findings are literally created and interpreted as data generation and analysis occur. In this process of creation and interpretation, the participants and the researcher both play a part. This PhD research is hence located in the constructivist-interpretivist ontology of multiple local specific realities and subjective interpretive epistemology where subjective findings are created and interpreted. The researcher plays a part albeit one among other actors, the participants.

#### **5.4 Constructivism-interpretivism**

Constructivism-interpretivism research paradigm underpins this research and provides a road map to negotiate, understand and interpret leadership at the apex of local authority. The underlying assumptions are laid out in table 5.2.

**Table 5-2: Paradigmatic position of the research**

<b>Paradigmatic position</b>	<b>Constructivism-interpretivism of leadership phenomena at apex of local authority</b>
<b>Ontological assumption</b>	Phenomena of leadership as social construction and reconstruction  Process and practice of leadership in interactions, embedded within

	a specific local context Relational, relativist realism
<b>Epistemological stance</b>	To understand how leadership is created /constructed in social interactions  Link between researcher and participants in context bound multiple realities
<b>Methodological Choice</b>	Case study - qualitative study of interactions between officers and members and its implications for leadership
<b>Axiological premise</b>	Close, interpersonal contact where researcher understands but cannot eliminate values
<b>Rhetoric</b>	Interpretivist, personalised descriptions, all participants have unique validity

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Not only is the field of leadership widely contested across disciplines, and time periods (see Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis) but also based on ontology and epistemology. Research from a constructivist-interpretivist perspective would tend to define leadership as a subjective process and relationship which is created and co-created such that the *reality* of leadership is developed through creation and interpretation. Leadership is viewed not only as a '*denial of essences*' (Kezar, 2004: 117), but also as a social construction between officers and members, not an idealised process which is laid out in theories and books. In the telling and retelling of the stories and their interpretations, a greater understanding of, and making sense about, leadership emerges. Though leadership reality is subjective, based on unique interactions within the world, it is also social, based on the interaction between officers and members and other stakeholders. Through the use of hermeneutic phenomenology, the interpretive nature of experience, identity, and awareness (Cunliffe, 2009) could be used to draw in intersubjective relation between internal and external phenomena and experience. Within a

constructive-interpretive perspective, leadership and its understandings are co-created and there is no objective absolute truth or reality with which the findings of the research can be compared.

#### **5.4.1 Ontological considerations**

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality: the social world, its reality and what can be known. *What could research in leadership be?* This philosophical question relates to what is the social world in which leadership is situated; this then depends on the disciplinary orientation of the researcher and what is capable of being known and researched. The ontological question is *what is the real social world of leadership?* The ontological assumption for this research is relational and relative reality. A strategic ontology focuses on leadership at the apex; a process and relational ontology focuses on leadership processes and practices and their relationship as constructed in every day and strategic interactions embedded in a particular context. The focus of the study is the interactive nature of leadership as being exercised by formal position holders, officers and members at the top of the local authority hierarchy, which requires both the managerial and political interface to work in a complex relationship to achieve effective leadership. This represents the ontological position for this research. This interpretive reality is not in any concrete sense but emerges out of subjective and inter-subjective experiences of social actors (Morgan, 1980) and hence represents but one of the many ways of knowing the nature of leadership.

#### **5.4.2 Epistemological considerations**

Epistemology involves the assumptions that can be made about the ‘*grounds of knowledge*’ how it can be acquired and the relationship between the ‘*researcher and the researched*’ (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:1; Guba and Lincoln, 1994:108; Bettis and Gregson, 2001:3). The epistemological perspective here is transactional and subjectivist,

the researcher and the participants are assumed to be interacting so that the relative findings are literally created as the research proceeds (see Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The acquisition of knowledge about local leadership relies on the meanings and experiences constructed and refined through interactions between and among the participants and the researcher.

These ontological, epistemological and methodological viewpoints raise pertinent questions about the reason for studying leadership and the process through which it can be done. These are elaborated in the table 5-3 below.

**Table 5-3: Ontological, epistemological and methodological questions based on the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm**

<b>Constructivism-interpretivism paradigmatic position on leadership</b>
<p><b>Ontological questions:</b></p> <p>What could research in leadership be?</p> <p>What is knowable, what is capable of being researched?</p> <p>What is the real world of leadership?</p>
<p><b>Epistemological questions:</b></p> <p>Why study leadership?</p> <p>How leadership is created /constructed in social interactions?</p> <p>What is the link between researcher and research participants?</p>
<p><b>Methodological questions:</b></p> <p>How to do research on leadership?</p> <p>What strategy would be most suitable for doing the research?</p>

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### **5.4.3 Methodological considerations**

Methodology is the approach to the process of research (Collis and Hussey, 2009) the best way to gain knowledge based on the philosophical disposition of the researcher.

There are several prevalent methodologies or strategies encompassing a body of methods (or the techniques of conducting research). It follows from the research philosophy or the position of the researcher on ontology, epistemology, and the role of values and language in the research process.

Positivists and postpositivists use strict scientific methods and procedures to control variables carefully and attempt to simulate, as closely as possible the methods of natural science in the hope of uncovering and explaining relationships among variables, with the intention of establishing universal or etic laws that become the basis of predicting and controlling phenomena. Phenomenologists or interpretivists focus on the intense researcher-participant interaction and feel the need to be immersed over longer periods of time in the participants' world, hence they embrace naturalistic designs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which often sees the researcher as living in the community and interacting in the day-to-day life of their participants leading to the use of methods like in-depth face-to-face interviewing and participant observation. Methodologies traditionally associated with positivists support a deductive process where generalisations can lead to prediction, explanations and understanding while methodologies associated with interpretivism, support an inductive process where patterns and/or theories are developed to understand phenomena (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Finally, *how might the research be done* is a methodological question. The constructive-interpretive paradigm is characterised by a relativist ontology – multiple realities exist as social and personal constructions, and a subjectivist epistemology – the researcher is involved. As a result, the methodology is qualitative-interpretive and discursive using rigorous and systematic research process which explores in great detail, the thick description (Geertz, 1973 a) which reviews and informs the emerging analysis and interpretations of the findings; the search for interpretive meanings and understandings is a crucial driver. The strategy would involve triangulations through semi-structured

interviews with a range of officers, members of the local authority and stakeholders engaging with them.

#### **5.4.4 Axiological issues**

Axiology concerns the role of values in the research process. Positivists and postpositivists grant no place for values in the research process and the researcher, like the scientist in the laboratory, remains emotionally detached from the research inquiry. There is no place for values, hopes, expectations, and feelings in the research inquiry. The use of standardised, systematic investigative methods eliminates or strictly controls any influence the researcher might have on the participants or on the research process. Though positivist and postpositivist researchers may carefully contain their value biases during an investigation, values are invariably reflected in the choice of topic. For example, a researcher's decision to study leadership may reflect a sense of social commitment and understanding with a goal of making a difference to society or doing good.

Constructivists-interpretivists argue that the researcher's values and lived experience cannot be divorced from the research process. The researcher acknowledges, describes, and limits their values, but cannot eliminate them. The epistemological stance underlying constructivism posits close, prolonged interpersonal contact with the participants necessary to facilitate the construction and understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, eliminating value biases in such an interdependent researcher-participant interaction is not possible and is borne out by the research design for this research.

#### **5.4.5 Rhetorical considerations**

Rhetoric concerns the language used to present the procedures and results of research to the intended audience. It is a reflection of the researcher's epistemological and

axiological stance. In the positivist and postpositivist positions, in which objective, detached, emotionally neutral research is conducted, the language is precise, scientific and objective. In the constructivist and criticalist research, subjectivity and interactive roles of the researcher are relevant. The rhetoric of the final research report is hence in the first person and is personalised. In Chapter 11, the findings in relation to leadership narratives are explored in detail.

## **5.5 Paradigmatic considerations in leadership research**

Paradigmatic considerations in leadership research have oscillated between the essentialistic or universal stances versus the non-universalistic or non-essentialistic perspectives (Grint, 1997; Barker, 2001; Kezar, 2004) with the former focussing on core traits, behaviours, styles *et al.*, while the latter favours the emphasis on subjectivity, plurality, context and culture (*cf.* Fielder, 1964, 1971; Greenleaf, 1977; Burns, 1978; Heifetz, 1994; Hunt, 1996; Grint, 1997; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999; Barker, 2001; Yukl, 2009; Northouse, 2010; Bryman *et al.*, 2011). This dichotomy or tension is described as one '*between the one best way and subjective interpretation*' (Kezar, 2004 emphasis in original) although Grint (1997) describes it as a continuum each with legitimate assumptions.

The essentialistic studies dominate the field of leadership: positivist/post-positivist study on leadership process or on leader behaviour would aim to manipulate carefully one variable (e.g., leadership style) while holding all other variables constant (e.g., similar organisations) or, through the use of semi-structured interviews attempt to identify a single reality from collective experiences. The goal of such a study is *etic* in that it attempts to identify one set of results (one true reality) that can be generalisable to a larger population. A constructivist–interpretivist study on the other hand may interview fewer leaders/ managers/ officers/ councillors for longer periods of time; the absence of clearly defined or identified themes which conceptualise the revealed reality

of leadership is not a concern. The study recognises that there are multiple meanings of the leadership process in the minds of people who experience it along with multiple interpretations of the data i.e. multiple realities. This research does not favour uncovering a single *truth* from the realities of participants nor try to achieve outside verification of analysis. Thus, it is acceptable to have different researchers look at the same typed interview transcripts and arrive at different themes. Both are real and correct, and the rigour of the study rests on its thick description and interpretive understandings (Geertz, 1973 a; Denzin, 1989; Creswell and Miller, 2000). The essentialistic and non essentialistic concepts were explored earlier in Chapter 2 which also forms the basis of the critique of theories of leadership.

Paradigms in leadership studies have often taken on a theoretical flavour with not many studies exploring the philosophical ramifications of ontology, epistemology or methodology (exceptions are Creswell, 1998, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). For example, Avery's (2004) excellent book on leadership elaborates on the paradigms as classical, transformational, visionary and organic without reference to their ontological and epistemological considerations. Similarly, public value is contrasted with NPM and represents a paradigmatic break by moving away from bureaucratic paradigm (see O'Flynn, 2007; Benington and Moore, 2010). These much more pragmatic usages of the term paradigm are undoubtedly based on more philosophical considerations which are not explicated in the texts.

A number of researchers have called for paradigmatic shifts in leadership research (Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Bryman, 1996; Morley and Hosking, 2003; Hosking, 2006, 2007) with Bryman (1996; Hosking, 2006) even taking the opportunity provided by the duality of modern-post-modern to call for more work that problematises the nature of leadership, that views leadership settings or cultures as fragmented and ambiguous, and this departs from *modernist* assumptions about the rationality of such settings. Similarly

the need for qualitative research has also been stressed (Alvesson, 1996; Conger, 1998; Bryman, 2004).

## **5.6 Case study as methodology**

Methodology and case study are discussed in great detail in Chapter 6, however some clarification is essential here. In this research, case study as a research methodology or strategy is all-encompassing and the best way of gaining knowledge and examining the research question. It is closely based on the ontological and epistemological beliefs. Case study for this research is a methodology or a *strategy of inquiry* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, 2000, 2003) rather than a method (Yin, 2009) or choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 1995, 2000)

### **5.6.1 Ethical considerations**

Inherent in the philosophical disposition are ethical considerations which form a crucial part of the research process, dealt with in the next Chapter.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This Chapter elaborates the philosophical position of the research, commencing with the research paradigm and the underlying ontological, epistemological, methodological, axiological and rhetorical assumptions. This leads to the next Chapter on research design explicating both methodology and methods. This discussion begins with the various research paradigms and contextualise them for this research on leadership. The paradigmatic implications for research on leadership of a local authority through an empirical qualitative case study are suggested. The paradigm remains a thread running through the research providing a skeletal frame for the research. The selection of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and case study methodology is hence central to the research. The Chapter concludes by summarising the rationale for this philosophy and its significance.

An examination of the positions of the research in terms of the philosophical anchors of ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology, and rhetoric leads to the research design. The choice of the research paradigm guides the researcher in philosophical questions about the research and in the selection of tools, methodology and methods, as well as the *who*, *what* and *why* of the study. The answers to the what, why and how questions pertaining to leadership are essentially rooted in the philosophical understanding of the nature of reality and knowledge, of what is *knowable*, the relationship between the knower and the known, and finally, about the methodological considerations. Methodology is therefore exploratory and emergent looking for thick descriptions and deeper meanings as a consequence of ontology and epistemology. The choice and use of research methods is no doubt secondary to that of paradigms, but a good fit between paradigms and methods is absolutely crucial.

This research explores understandings and meanings of leadership as perceived by the leaders at the apex of local authority including both the elected councillors and senior appointed officers and the stakeholders who interact closely with the elected councillors and senior appointed officers in the provision of local services. It adopts a perspective that is interpretivist and grounded in social constructivism. It specifically looks at how the participants make sense of the relational dynamics of leadership at local government through the interactions between councillors and officers at the apex of local government who have specific roles. The research uses a case study approach to explore leadership and relational dynamism between councillors and officers at the apex.

The use of insight, wisdom and reflection based upon the philosophy underpins the research, as well as the selection of paradigm, methodology and methods. It frames the research in both its conceptual and operational stages. As researcher, I am both aware and humbled by the responsibility of interpreting meaningfully and constructing the research; '*building a convincing case*' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007: 1279) through a

process using empirical material, interpretive repertoire and elements of reflexivity (ibid)  
including attention to the design, quality and ethical issues.

## CHAPTER 6 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

### 6.1 Introduction

This Chapter elaborates the process of designing research, commencing with the research focus and leading up to the implementation of the research design. The philosophical considerations in the previous Chapter constitute the skeleton of the research and lead to the research design which operationalizes the research. The focus is on the execution of the research process using methods, especially interviews. These methods are selected in view of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and case study methodology. The methods of *generation of empirical material*<sup>18</sup> rather than the collection of data are fully explained and justified. The Chapter concludes with discussion of the ethical and the quality issues surrounding the research.

### 6.2 Research aim and contextualisation of the research questions

When dealing with research questions that are complex, both judgement and the use of experience, wisdom and inventiveness are required (Gummesson, 2003: 482). Though Gummesson (2003) was speaking of business to business marketing, the same can be said for leadership of local authority, situated within complex, ambiguous, chaotic and uncertain context with *fuzzy* role boundaries and dynamic relationships between officers and councillors in a shared universe prone to various interpretations. Participating actors *play* games within this space and both officers and councillors change frequently so that the rules and relationships between officers and councillors are negotiated anew. The broader context within which the local authority is situated, for instance, the policy, partnership and political context is fluid and disposed to change as well (see Chapter 4 this thesis). The purpose of the research is to understand leadership of local authority.

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<sup>18</sup> Following Gummesson (2003) and Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), I use the terms generation rather than collection in recognition that data are not present *a priori* in the field waiting to be collected, but are created by the researcher through observation of an event or through interaction with participant/s in the course of an interview. This shows the '*researcher is treading the path of analysis*' (Gummesson 2003:486).

### 6.2.1 Research questions

The aim of this research is to understand the leadership of a local authority through: 1) the perceptions and experiences of officers and councillors at the apex of local authority and, 2) the nature and pattern of their interaction through a framework of roles, inter-related relationships and leadership processes. The key overall research question is to understand: *how officers and councillors at the apex of local authority perceive leadership of local authority?* Of specific interest is the interface between officers and councillors, the relationship between the political and managerial leadership in local authority. Hence, this main question can be broken down into smaller components and two related questions emerge pertaining to the interplay between the officers and the councillors and the roles and relationships between them. *How do officers and councillors at the apex of local authority perceive their roles? How do officers and councillors engage and interact?*

The framing of research questions is an iterative process what King and Horrocks (2010: 27) label as ‘*shifting research question*’. During the course of the research, these research questions were redefined and reframed upto the stage of generating empirical material. These linked processes are framed within an constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative case study methodology using semi-structured interviews, observation, and documents. Table 6.1 illustrates this process.

**Table 6-1: Linkages in the research process**

<p><b>CONSTRUCTIVIST-INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM</b></p> <p><b>Multiple constructed versions of leadership</b></p>
<p><b>Aim to understand leadership of a local authority through:</b></p> <p><b>The perception and experiences of officers and councillors at the apex of local authority</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might officers and councillors at apex of local authority perceive leadership?</li> <li>• How is their perception of leadership different from management?</li> </ul>

- In their perception, how does officer leadership differ from councillor leadership?(Differences and similarities)
- In their experience, what part does leadership play if any, in any critical incidents or change activity?
- How do officers and councillors describe their generic roles?
- How do officers and councillors engage with each other?
- How do their roles and relationships influence leadership of local authority?

**The perceptions and experiences of stakeholders who interact with officers and councillors at the apex of local authority**

- How might stakeholders interacting closely with officers and councillors at apex of local authority perceive leadership?
- How is their perception of leadership different from management?
- In their perception, how does officer leadership differ from councillor leadership?(Differences and similarities)
- In their experience, what part does leadership play in any critical incidents or change activity?
- How do they analyse the roles and relationships between officers and councillors?

**Proposed method of data collection:**

- Semi-structured interviews with officers and councillors at the apex aiming to enable the participants to present their individual understandings and experiences regarding leadership of a local authority and the roles and relationships between them
- Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders who interact closely with officers and councillors at the apex of local authority aiming to enable the participants to present their individual understandings and experiences regarding leadership of a local authority and the roles and relationships between officers and councillors
- Observations of interactions between officers and councillors at the apex aiming to observe the relationships between them at meetings
- Analysis and interpretation of interviews, documents and archival material that throw light on the leadership of a local authority and the roles and relationships between officers and councillors

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The interview questions were adapted for interviewing the three different categories of officers, councillors and stakeholders. Annexure 1 presents the actual interview questions.

### **6.2.2 Research questions in the context of local government in England**

The context of local government has been explored in Chapter 4. The research questions were framed for the different categories of officers, members and stakeholders who held strategic or key positions in the local authority and/ or contributed to local governance. The questions were framed with the perception that these key position holders engaged in leadership and their activities were strategic; even the mundane, impromptu and adhoc acts like listening or communicating had strategic intent or strategic implications. This research explores understandings and meanings of leadership as perceived by the leaders at the apex of local authority including both the elected councillors and senior appointed officers and the stakeholders who interact closely with each other in the delivery of local services. It adopts a perspective that is grounded in social constructivism and interpretivism. It specifically looks at how the participants make sense of the relational dynamics of leadership at local government, which plays out through the interactions between councillors and officers at the apex of local government.

### **6.3 Research design**

Any research involves crucial choices. A research design<sup>19</sup> specifies how the researcher will address crucial choices which require to be made throughout the research journey till the very end, by deciding how the research is presented and interpreted, legitimising both the findings and the analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003 a,b,c,d). These choices are hence intrinsically linked to the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the world view of the researcher as illustrated in Annexure 2.

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<sup>19</sup> A research design '*situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 36). In a similar sense, Gummesson (2003) talks about the research edifice in the image of an elevator with the basement equated to the researcher's paradigms and pre-understandings. The middle floors are visualized as data generation and analysis/interpretation while the penthouse represents the outcome.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003d: 31-38) in their introduction to the *Landscape of Qualitative Research* elaborate the research process in terms of five phases, which are adapted for this research: the first phase begins with the researcher. The second phase is represented by the choice of philosophical paradigms, the third phase is marked by research strategies, the fourth by methods of data generation and analysis and the final phase is the ‘*art, practice, and politics of interpretation and presentation*’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 32). By designing research with an awareness of all five stages and their coherence and linkages, an in-depth study with consistency and rigor through all the stages of the research is ensured.

**Table 6-2: The research design: Explicating the research process**

<p><b>Phase 1: The situated researcher and the researched</b></p> <p>Experience and history</p> <p>Research rationale and interest</p> <p>Conception of self and the other</p> <p>Ethics and politics of research</p>
<p><b>Phase 2: Philosophical paradigms and perspectives</b></p> <p>Identification and analysis through constructivism-interpretivism</p>
<p><b>Phase 3: Research methodology</b></p> <p>Case study</p> <p>Design, location and justification as well as limitations</p>
<p><b>Phase 4: Methods of empirical material generation and analysis</b></p> <p>Interviewing, Observing and Documents analysis</p> <p>Transcription</p> <p>Making sense</p>
<p><b>Phase 5: The art, practices and politics of interpretation and presentation of thesis</b></p> <p>Writing and presenting the thesis</p> <p>The PhD process, examination and viva voce: Appraisal of quality (limitations)</p> <p>Reflection on contribution to knowledge: theory, methodology, practice</p> <p>Future research propositions</p>

(Adapted from Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 32)

The situated researcher is a useful starting point with their experience, research, work and life experiences, their conceptions of *self and the other* and their ethics and politics is the basic core for the dwelling of the research (using analogy of Heideggerian dwelling mode) within which understandings and meanings around leadership are created and interpreted, evolving over time. The situated knowledge, consciousness, understanding, location, and positioning (Haraway, 1991) of the researcher underpins the research in the interpretations that follow. '*Showing the human side of the researcher .....has taken new forms in deconstructionism*' (Fontana and Frey, 2000:661; Derrida, 1976) which is used to scrutinise the influence of the researcher. The researcher's narrative is '*deconstructed*' by exposing the biases and taken-for-granted notions of the researcher (Fontana and Frey, 2000: 661).

Hence, a research design which describes a '*flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical material*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 36) is adopted for this research. The research design hence forms a *bridge* linking the philosophy to the methods of executing the research, through the person of the researcher while contextualising the research in the empirical world of the democratically elected local authority in the South West of England.

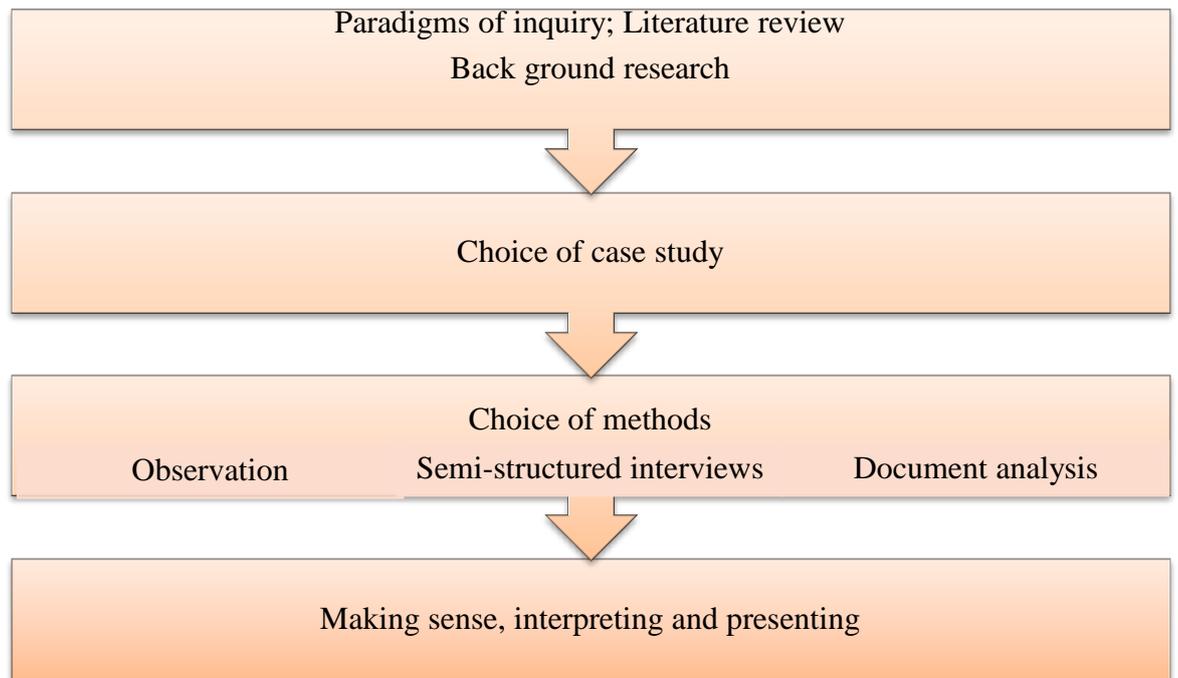
### **6.3.1 Strategies of inquiry**

Strategies of inquiry include a '*bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that the researcher employs as she or he moves from paradigm to the empirical world*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 36). They bring '*paradigms of interpretation into motion*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 36) by connecting the researcher to selected methods of generating and analysing empirical materials. For example, the case study relies on interviewing, observing, and document analysis. Previous experience in the use of such methods as well as the skills for executing them stood the researcher in good stead. The skills

included talking with people and listening to them, observing organisational life including leadership in the FE sector, managing and leading change initiative in previous jobs as a project manager and a civil servant. The ability to gain trust of participants such that they will disclose information openly, as well as the need to be sensitive to the confidential nature of disclosures as participants talked about their experiences and perceptions, interactions and relationships was useful.

### **6.3.2 The research methods**

The study of organisation through empirical exploration of '*attitudes, behaviours, experiences, artifacts, symbols, documents, texts, feelings, beliefs, meanings, facts ....*' (Stablein, 2006: 347) is complex. The choice of methods is as crucial as the manner in which research is done. Since the aim of the research was to look at leadership of a local authority particularly the officer and councillor interface, attitudes, behaviours, experience, perceptions of officers and councillors as they *did* leadership and interacted with each other was of specific interest. For the purpose of this research, the selection of qualitative methods namely semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis appeared most appropriate for accessing the rich data that would be required to understand the complex phenomena of leadership of a local authority. To observe the interaction of officers and councillors, there was a choice of *public* and *confidential* meetings. For the former no permission was required and immediately after the event, contact was established with the principal actors like the party whips, Cabinet members, and opposition members to *delve deeper into the happenings*. Permission was also sought for attending two types of confidential meetings namely the party group meetings and the pre-Cabinet meetings of the Cabinet and the CMT. However, access to them was denied. Interviews therefore became the prime method used for



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**Figure 6-1: Research Methods**

*generating empirical material*<sup>20</sup> and a large section of what follows elaborates the actual process of designing and executing the interviews including the safeguards and protocols that were borne in mind to maintain quality and ethical standards. The emphasis on the qualitative as opposed to quantitative is the focus of the next section.

### 6.3.3 A qualitative focus

Qualitative focus on design intends research to be holistic with a search for understanding the whole, which demands that the world be viewed such that nothing is mundane or trivial and everything has the potential to unlock understanding about what is being studied (Janesick, 1994, 2000). The goal is to obtain a clearer understanding of human behaviour and experience (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). To learn about a particular phenomenon in this case leadership, the researcher asks the

<sup>20</sup> The choices of methods were in keeping with the paradigm of inquiry guiding the research in *generating rich empirical material*. I use the phrase *generating rich empirical material* deliberately in preference to data collection as clarified earlier. Both the usage of *generation* and *material* highlight that the researcher must actively do something with it.

participants broad and general questions and looks for emerging themes from the words and shared experience of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This highlights the reliance on the researcher as the instrument which has been a theme in the literature both as a weakness (for e.g. Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) and as strength (for e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative research is '*endlessly creative and interpretive*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 37). Qualitative interpretations are '*constructed*' and '*co-constructed*' by the participants and the researcher, each of them making sense of the phenomenon of leadership. Qualitative research design is '*like choreography*' using both, '*precisely set piece*' and '*improvisation*' (Janesick, 2000: 379). Expressing a similar ethos, Flick (2009) emphasises that good qualitative research design uses a set of procedures that are simultaneously open-ended and rigorous, suiting the complexity of topic under study.

Qualitative research is deemed justified due to the complexity of the dynamic and multi-level phenomena of leadership, the existing gaps in literature and the '*symbolic and subjective component*' (Conger, 1998: 110) in leadership (Chapters 2, 3, 4 this thesis). The meaning of qualitative research is complex<sup>21</sup>: perhaps it is easier to clarify *what it is not* – it is neither paradigm nor methodology. Following Guba, Lincoln and Denzin (various), the term *qualitative* is reserved to indicate *methods of generating empirical material* rather than in a sense of paradigm or methodology. Qualitative methods have been defined as the procedures for '*coming to terms with the meaning, not the frequency*' of a phenomenon by researching it in its social context (Van Maanen, 1979/1983:9). The focus is on description and interpretation of the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). This PhD research focuses on a particular local authority as *the case* seeking to understand leadership of local authority – as perceived by officers and councillors at the apex, and stakeholders who interact with these officers and councillors. It uncovers leadership as social interactions

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<sup>21</sup> Reflecting this Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to their Chapter as *the discipline and practice of qualitative research*.

that are contextual, shared and relational, processes and practices, and narratives between officers and members – hence uncovering *thick description* (Geertz, 1973 a; Stake, 1995) which is distinct and not chosen for its representativeness amongst councils in England. The case study has the stated intention to study in great detail a particular local authority (see Stake, 1995). ‘*Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting*’ (Creswell, 2007: 15). In this research, qualitative represents the manner of *doing* research; it frames the methods determining how they will be implemented.

#### **6.4 Case study**

Yin (2003/09) has conceptualised case study as a research method, one of several ways of doing social science research. It covers the ‘*logic of design, the data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis*’ (Yin 2003: 14). The case study has both advantages and disadvantages and Yin (2003:8) describes a matrix to enable the researcher to select the case study method depending on three conditions: 1) the ‘*type of research question*’, 2) the ‘*control an investigator has over actual behavioral events*’, and 3) the ‘*focus on contemporary as opposed to historical*’ phenomena. For Stake (1995, 2000), case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of object: ‘*what is to be studied*’ like a child or a classroom (*ibid.* 2000: 435).

In this research, case study as a research methodology or strategy is all-encompassing and best way of gaining knowledge and examining the research question. It is closely linked to the ontological and epistemological beliefs, discussed in the previous Chapter 5. The previous Chapter dealt with the research philosophy. ‘*Research strategies implement and anchor paradigms in specific empirical sites, or in specific methodological practices, such as making a case an object of study*’ (Denzin and

Lincoln, 2003d: 36). The choice of strategy is hence crucial since ‘*each of these strategies is connected to (a) complex literature, and each has a separate history, exemplary of works, and preferred ways for putting the strategy into motion*’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003d: 36-37).

The research is an instrumental<sup>22</sup> case study with purposive choice of sample; the intention unabashedly is to glean ‘*insights*’ (Stake, 2000: 437) into the phenomenon of leadership at the apex of local authority and the roles and relationships between officers and councillors. The instrumental case study can take advantage of or draw upon already developed theories and conceptions. The case i.e. the local authority is of secondary interest, it supports or facilitates (Stake, 2000: 437), and the primary interest is the understanding of leadership at the apex and the interaction between councillors and officers.

#### **6.4.1 Selection of site or location**

The selection of the local authority as the case was purposeful (Stake, 1985, 2000) and practical considerations prompted this decision within the time and resource constraints of a three-year funded PhD, as a full time mature researcher. The engagement with the local authority was envisaged over a one year period (it was actually around fifteen months) and it was necessary to adequately resource this. Extended periods were spent on the site, personally observing what was happening, the relationships and issues, seeking both the ordinary and the particular. Reflection on recordings, revising meanings, and interpretations were simultaneously on-going.

#### **6.4.2 Access**

I gained initial access to the case study local authority through a retired officer of the council who was also active in the community after retirement and *moved in the right*

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<sup>22</sup> Stake (1995, 2000) identifies three kinds of cases: intrinsic, instrumental and collective.

*circles*. Through this officer, I met the leader and explained the purpose and nature of my research and formally requested permission to access the organisation to conduct my research. The project brief detailed the purpose, goals, timeline, my expectations and its implication for the organisation (Annexure 3). An important aspect was reassurance in relation to the ethical issues around anonymity and confidentiality. Though the interviewee could be quoted, they would not be identified. The access to the recording and the transcript would be severely restricted. The transcripts would be returned for interviewee checking and clarifications. The Council Leader hence acted as the *gatekeeper* who had the authority to grant or deny permission to access potential participants and to facilitate such access (King and Horrocks, 2010). The leader appointed a *liaison* officer with whom I discussed the project at greater length. Finally, access was approved and I got a formal letter informing me of the same. Annexure 4 provides details of the engagement with the local authority.

#### **6.4.3 Case study as narrative inquiry and story-telling**

Case study serves to draw the attention not only to ordinary experiences but also to '*language and understandings*' (Stake, 2000: 440). It is associated with the epistemology of the particular; a focus on and development of its '*own issues, contexts and interpretations, its thick description*' is hence recommended (Stake, 2000, 439). In order to ensure quality, a case study protocol was formulated (Annexure 5).

In describing case study as story telling, Stake (2000: 441) fears that letting the case tell its own story may not always work, but the '*ethos of interpretive study, seeking out emic meanings held by the people within the case*', is an enduring influence on the researcher. Like any other research, the thesis was evolving '*even in the last phases of writing*' (Stake, 2000: 441). I have attempted to narrate and write the story of leadership of a particular local authority within the standards of a doctoral / PhD research (Dunleavy, 2003; QAA, Code of Practice, 2004; Phillips and Pugh, 2005). Yet, I am reminded of

the futility of telling the whole story; *'the whole story exceeds anyone's telling'* (Stake, 2000: 441). Hence, there are subjective choices that I exercise and reflect upon (Van Maanen, 1988), in the process *'winnow(ing) and consolidate (ing)'*, moving satisfactorily along the continuum of *'telling nothing'* to *'telling lots'* (Stake, 2000: 441). The narrative story-telling (Boje, 1991, 2001; Boal and Schulz, 2007) and writing up the case study requires some key choices, the decisions around choice calls for *'major stylistic options'* (Stake, 2000: 448) which includes the following:

- How much to make the report a story;
- How much to compare with other cases;
- How much to formalise generalizations or leave that to the readers;
- How much to include descriptions in the report of the researcher interacting; &
- Whether or not and how much to anonymise.

In this telling both *propositional and experiential knowledge* is enhanced (Geertz, 1973 a; Stake, 2000) while certain experiences, meaning and interpretations are elaborated and asserted through their narrative while others are *'modified and reinforced by repeated encounter'* (Stake, 2000: 442). Constantly moving between analysis and interpretation, I tease out three kinds of meanings: local meanings, foreshadowed meanings and readers' consequential meanings (Stake, 2000: 445). The final stage of story-telling and narration included going through numerous drafts, making sense and analysing through a process alternating between theory and empirical findings, and reflection. The presenting to colleagues and peer at conferences and through journal articles enabled the *'readers' consequential meanings'* (Stake, 2000: 445) to emerge, as well as guiding the future direction of further research. This process of thinking and reflecting aided the emergence of contributions to knowledge, theory and practice (elaborated in the final Chapter 12).

Narrative analysis lends itself to a range of methodologies (Boje, 1991; 2001), one of which is the case study which I have used in order to understand the construction and

interpretation of leadership of local authority. Case studies are an '*invaluable tool in the field, not only as a source*' but also as '*a means of applying substantive knowledge to concrete situations*' (Somers, 1955 cited in Ospina and Dodge, 2005a: 418). Ospina and Dodge (2005a: 418) argue that '*stories about practice contain useful knowledge for building theory and informing practice*' (Ospina and Dodge, 2005a: 418). Narrative as knowing leadership, the knowledge, expression and metaphors about leadership by leaders within a case study highlight their stories and accounts. This enables the building of theory or theoretical constructs – the four themes that frame the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. These theoretical constructs in turn have the potential for informing practice, in this case leadership and management development at local authority level.

## **6.5 Pilot Study**

For testing ideas, interview questions and methods, a pilot study is recommended (Maxwell, 2005). Such a study was conducted for fine-tuning the research questions and ensuring that the answers they elicited addressed what was of particular interest in the research. Care was taken to ensure that the questions had a sufficiently broad nature so as not to stifle the emergence of *puzzling* or interesting material. Yet the scope should not be so broad as to result in the research questions remaining unanswerable (King and Horrocks, 2010). The pilot study was hence a crucial stage. Five one-hour pilot interviews were carried out with three senior officers and two councillors.

## **6.6 The interview**

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. This format ensured that all interviewees were asked the same basic sets of questions however, there was considerable flexibility to allow interesting ideas to emerge and for the participants to explore these in greater

detail. If a particular thread of conversation appeared to provide meaningful insights, that aspect was probed in greater detail.

The research questions were formulated to focus on meaning and experience of particular group of participants rather than on establishing causal relationships or generalised patterns of behaviour (King and Horrocks, 2010). Yet the research should seek to capture how participants differ as much as what they have in common. In deciding the scope, it was crucial to keep in mind the available resources including time.

A semi-structured interview protocol or check list was formulated: first general questions were asked, for instance, regarding conceptual understandings of leadership, leadership of local government (designed to generate unprompted spontaneous responses). I used certain prompts to get the participants to elaborate if their first responses were very brief. I also probed by asking the participants to clarify, elaborate or provide examples for instance, asking how they would differentiate between leadership and management, or the roles of officers and councillors by providing examples. Kvale's (1996) proposes a list of ten criteria for a successful interviewer. Based on these ten criteria, a checklist for the interviews was prepared which served as a guide for the interview questions (Annexure 6).

The interview questions are directly linked to the research questions and clearly follow from them. The scope of the interview is limited to senior officers and councillors at the apex and stakeholders who interact with these officers and councillors. Thus, one of the limitations of the research results from framing the scope which led to the missing voices of *junior* officers and staff that have been excluded along with stakeholders like customers, communities, and others.

The interview started with introductory questions: *Please tell me about your association with the local authority?* I also thought of it as 'breaking the ice' question. These were

followed by opinion questions: *What is your understanding of..., in your perception what is...?* There after, I probed their experience by posing questions around major change or critical incident. I also used knowledge questions to probe their responses, sought clarification on some factual detail or reference, probing decision making process etc. : *What do you know about....? Can you clarify ...?* I got the participants to confirm, elaborate, expand on their responses, through follow-up questions, such as *'Could you say something more about...'*; *'What do you mean by that?'*; *'Can you provide some examples?'* or even a simple, *'Yeeees?'* Probe questions too followed on from what was said earlier, *'Could you elaborate on X?'* To move on to another issue, I used structured statements: *'Now I would like to move to a different topic. This is...'* I allowed silences to give the participants an opportunity to elaborate, reflect and amplify without leading them down any particular direction.

There is always the concern that interviewers can *lead* participants to answer the questions in a particular way which enables the interviewer to make *comfortable* conclusions. However, the act of interviewing is leading in the sense that questions are framed and discussion constrained by the research focus, or the questions, the context and the researcher's interest. I used full questions rather than a key point format to avoid leading questions (King and Horrocks, 2010) and to keep the interview from getting too conversational (Willig, 2008). Yet I was careful to keep it flexible and open, to allow a fairly wide range of responses to come through. Both probes and prompts as recommended by King and Horrocks<sup>23</sup> (2010: 40) were used. The full question schedule (Annexure 1) included some probes and prompts as well as others, which I phrased, as the interview progressed.

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<sup>23</sup> King and Horrocks (2010: 40) make a distinction between probes and prompts: probes were used to follow-up to enable the participants to expand upon their initial answers seeking clarification, completion, elaboration (ibid., 2010: 53) while prompts were used as interventions that seek to clarify through examples.

### **6.6.1 Presentation**

I gave thought on how to *present oneself* (see Fontana and Frey, 2000: 655), and highlighted certain parts of my own identity in different contexts. For instance, I highlighted my association with the University, I was hence ‘*representing academia interested in research on leadership and public management*’. I also emphasised my public sector background as a civil servant in India, I was hence an ‘*insider*’ familiar with the ‘*language and culture of the participants*’ (Fontana and Frey, 2000:654) yet, a *relative outsider* because my presence in the UK was relatively recent since I had come here in 2002. I realised that I played up one aspect of my background and under-emphasised other aspects in response to the identity of the participant or cues from their own introduction. It was sometimes useful to emphasise my relative ignorance as a relative outsider and a humble learner (Wax, 1960 quoted in Fontana and Frey, 2000) and to seek further clarification. At other times, I could *reveal my knowledge* through the use of local government jargon. I also dressed smartly in keeping with academic career orientation when interviewing officers and councillors in the political executive. I was very careful to avoid using any academic terms or jargons so as not to inhibit the participants and sometimes emphasised my third sector experience in this country to gain trust and minimise *suspicion*. It led me to wonder and reflect upon this two-way conversation whether participants were also playing similar games of revealing and concealing.

### **6.6.2 Interview statistics**

The background and demographic details had been collected through the presage which they were asked to complete (Annexure 7). All the officers of the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> tier and all the councillors were invited to participate in the research project through postal correspondence followed by email. All members of the LSP Executive Board were similarly invited to participate. This ensured a multiplicity of perspectives in keeping

with qualitative research methods which require that *‘multiple perspectives be systematically sought during the research inquiry’* (Strauss and Corbin, 1994: 280). Since the participants had agreed to the interviews they were what Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 195) label *‘politically conscious’* who had *‘exercised intentionality, reflexivity and even caution’* (Carrol, et al., 2008: 369). Once I started the process of interviews, I also asked people individually if they would be happy to participate but no more than once as I did not want to appear intrusive or pushy. The interview engagement is elaborated in Annexure 4.

In total 34 interviews were completed with as many participants. The main purpose was to understand the leadership of a local authority and the roles and relationships played by officers and councillors in this leadership. *‘The qualitative researcher attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meanings of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations’* (Kvale, 1996: 1). Interviews ranging from 90-120 minutes<sup>24</sup> were carried out with a broad group of senior officers and elected councillors, and with external stakeholders in local government to capture multiple perspectives and voices (Table 6.4 and Annexure 8 provide more details). Vigorous attempt was made to ensure that all types of officers and councillors were included as participants.

**Table 6-3: Details of participants**

Leader	Affiliation	Profile	N=34	
			Male	Female
Officer (N=15)	Local Authority	Top Tier (including Chief Executive)	4	2
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Tier	5	1

<sup>24</sup> There was one exception where a cabinet member had to cut short their interview after 60 minutes due to an emergency; the participant was willing to clarify further over email and telephone.

		3 <sup>rd</sup> Tier	3	0
<b>Councillors</b> (N=13)	Majority Party	Executive (including Council Leader	1	2
		Other responsibility	3	0
		Non-executive	2	0
	Minority Party	Shadow Leader/Cabinet	1	2
		others	1	1
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Other agencies	Top executive	4	2

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All interviews were electronically recorded through a digital voice recorder to enable the researcher to visit the data in its original form as often as necessary (Silverman, 2000a,b). Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible. During the interviews, I made handwritten notes as well. The interviews were a precious opportunity not likely to be repeated and hence making notes while interviewing was a good idea and aided retrospective analysis and interpretation.

## 6.7 Other methods

Observations are the *'fundamental base of all research methods'* in the social and behavioural sciences (Adler and Adler, 1994:389 cited in Angrosino and Perez, 2000: 673). Even in direct interviewing, observation of body language and gestural and vocal cues lend meaning to what is being said. Since the researcher was denied permission to attend leadership in action meetings, observations were secondary to interviews. The list of meetings observed is elaborated in Annexure 9. In terms of documents, the strategic plans and documents of the local authority were useful to triangulate along with local newspaper and practitioner magazines.

## **6.8 Ethical issues**

Ethical issue was not considered a box to be ticked and was guided by the proposition that ethics are ingrained in the actions of the researcher. It sensitised me to the context and the individuals within it, interacting with other participants. It involved paying attention to the participant-researcher relationship and building it upon trust, openness, honesty, and respect. This required making the research process visible and auditable, laying it open for comments and criticism. It is pertinent to note that those whose lives, experiences and meanings are being probed and recorded '*risk exposure and embarrassment*' and may be subjected to '*loss of standing, employment and self-esteem*' (Stake, 2000: 445). It justifies an informal covenant between the researcher and the researcher participant (section 6.8.2).

### **6.8.1 Ethical clearance from the University**

Research on leadership has the potential to embarrass, destabilise or even cause harm through '*disclosure of private knowledge*' (Reiss, 1979: 73 quoted in Christians, 2003: 218). Organisational and social research involves human participation. The University's Faculty Research Ethical Approval Committee (Ethical Approval Application No: FREAC0910.03 is attached as Annexure 10) considered the ethical application regarding the research and gave approval after being fully satisfied that the project complies with the ethical standards of Plymouth University for research involving human participants.

### **6.8.2 The ethical Code**

Ethical issues embrace four key areas: 1) protection from harm to participants, 2) informed consent, 3) privacy and confidentiality and 4) lack of deception (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Fontana and Frey, 2000; Rossman and Ralis, 2003; Christians, 2003). A strategy was hence developed and put in place prior to data collection taking into

account all these concerns (Bell and Bryman, 2003; Babbie, 2007; Berg, 2004). This resulted in the consent form and the ethical protocol agreement being entered into with each participant (Annexure 11). This agreement had the following elements: informed consent, openness and honesty, right to withdraw, security, confidentiality and anonymity, debriefing and ethical guidelines which bound the researcher. This enabled the integration of ethics into the research process. Inherent in this code is voluntary participation without any coercion based on full and open information. Informed consent was emphasised and explained to the participants both verbally and in writing (e-mail and hard copy) through the stages of engagement, including their right to withdraw from the research process at any stage. A project brief was also prepared and widely circulated both at the time of initial access as well as subsequent correspondence. Once participants had agreed to be interviewed, project brief and consent form (Annexure 3 and 11) were sent to them.

### 6.8.3 The local authority Nom de plume

In the light of the ethical concerns, a *nom de plume*, Nagar or Sanskrit<sup>25</sup> for city was considered appropriate. Since the research would be publicly disseminated: presented as a doctoral thesis and articles published in peer reviewed journals, it was imperative to anonymise the name of the local authority and participants with coding. In keeping with this, website of the local authority is not specified; for instance, the webpage dealing with council and democracy is mentioned as <http://www.nagar.gov.uk/homepage/councilanddemocracy.htm> (accessed on 27th March 2009). Specific details like the description of the place or council, including its history and organisational timeline have deliberately been kept vague to prevent identification of the place and the local authority.

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<sup>25</sup> Sanskrit is an ancient language of India rivalling Greek and Latin in antiquity. It shared some similarities in grammar with the other two. The earliest cities in India date back to 3000 BC by conservative estimates and so using the Sanskrit name for city was a deliberate move.

## 6.9 Quality issues

Terms like validity, reliability, credibility, trustworthiness and rigour reveal the fundamental concern for *good* quality research by posing the following questions: 1) *How can the quality of the research be judged?*; 2) *Can the same criteria be applied to judge all research?*; 3) *Should there be different criteria or any criteria at all?* These questions have been much debated historically in social science research. For the current research, these questions need to be framed within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative case study methodology which assumes that the reality of leadership phenomenon is relative, multiple and constructed through a process of interactive interpretation between officers, councillors and stakeholders, rooted in the particular context of local governance. It enables the researcher to use the first person narrative as it locates the researcher as a crucial actor in the research who has a story to tell of leadership in the *Nagar* local authority. It also follows that the phenomenon of leadership, the findings and the analysis move back and forth between relevant literature and new knowledge and experience, which is intertwined in its interpretation by the participants and the researcher. The process of peer review was considered crucial and built into the process of research by identifying journals and conferences by prior research and building it into the PhD timeline.

Quality considerations draw attention to the debate whether a universal set of quality criteria is desirable or even required and whether research can be classified into the qualitative-quantitative divide and whether this divide exists at the level of paradigm or methodology. But at the heart of all such discussion is the unspoken desire to improve or simply judge the quality of the research. However, this discussion does get mired in controversy because of the value-ladenness of the terms and criteria used to judge quality and whether these terms are paradigmatically or methodologically construed. These issues are more significant in certain disciplines like medical or nursing research

(Rolfe, 2006) for obvious reasons. It is nevertheless necessary to clarify what is meant by these terms for maintaining the quality of the research (Please see Annexures 12-16 for additional details). The emergence of quality criteria is crucial not for a slavish following of the rules but as a guideline to be followed with intelligence, knowledge, experience, and reflection. In a similar vein, Tracy (2010) conceptualises her big-tent criteria for qualitative quality. In keeping with the above ethos and the adopted paradigm of constructivism-interpretivism, the traditional criteria of reliability, validity, trustworthiness and generalisability are understood in the context of this research rather than their historical roots within a quantitative (Seale, 1999) or positivist tradition (Howell, 2012). Research into the complex phenomenon of leadership, which is by its very nature subject to change or itself inherently inconsistent (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) cannot have standardised criteria. Hence, quality concerns have to be grounded within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research case study.

### **6.9.1 Reliability**

In this research, reliability is interpreted in terms of being not only thorough, transparent, careful and honest in carrying out the research, but being able to demonstrate this process (Annexure 12). Yin (2003: 67) has recommended the use of what he calls '*case study protocol*' and rather than slavish adherence to a case study protocol as he suggested, I developed protocols for smaller elements of the research process including the interview, interview questions and observations. Hence, the process of explicating the research was important not for repeatability but to enable others including researchers and practitioners to evaluate the validity of the process which leads to the next section.

### **6.9.2 Validity**

Within this research, validity refers to *meaningfulness* (Cf. Creswell, 2000). Annexure 13 refers to its various meanings and ways to ensure validity. The factual accuracy of what is said in the interview is easy to verify through the process of ‘*member checks*’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:314). This gave the participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what were perceived as wrong interpretations and volunteer additional information. Validity is an on-going process through presentation to peers and practitioners in class and conferences and through post-doctoral research.

### **6.9.3 Trustworthiness**

Validity in this research is closely linked to *trustworthiness* rather than to *truth* or *value*, which required making the research process *visible* and *auditable* where others can track and verify the decision trail. In this research, auditing is integral to reflexivity, which involves ‘*the provision of a methodologically self-critical account of how the research was done*’ (Rolfe, 2006: 468). Within the interpretive paradigm, trustworthiness is not an absolute term but ‘*is negotiable and open ended*’ through interaction between the reader and the research account (Seale, 2003: 172) and is by no means the final proof whereby readers are compelled to accept an account (Rolfe, 2006). (Annexure 14 for more details). Trustworthiness is enhanced through the use of insider-outsider lens (Bartunek and Louis, 1996) such that active collaboration between researcher and research participants enabled incorporation of differences in interpretive frames.

### **6.9.4 Transferability**

In this research transferability is more in keeping with the view that theoretical constructs and analysis of the findings are transferable to other settings. Clearly research findings from this study cannot be taken as ‘*representative of local authority in general*’ but ‘*rather, they provide examples from which broader lessons can be drawn*’

(Leach and Lowndes, 2007: 186). However, the theoretical framework around which findings are organised and analysed might be useful in understanding other local authority leadership or leadership in other settings and contexts. A single case study is no doubt a '*poor representation of the population*' and does not aid '*grand generalisation*' but as '*more than one theoretical notion may be guiding an analysis, confirmation, fuller specification, and contradiction all may result from one case study*' (Vaughan, 1992: 175 cited in Stake, 2000: 448). The case study is '*of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability*' (Stake, 2000: 448). Case study research after all aims at theoretical or analytical generalisation rather than statistical generalisation and the emergent meta-theory of the fractal kaleidoscope of leadership has application beyond the limits of the local authority researched (more in Chapter 12. Annexure 15 for further details on transferability).

#### **6.9.5 Authenticity or fairness**

Recognising that the constructivist paradigm with a belief in '*multiple constructed realities*' rather than a '*single tangible reality*' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:295) is not in line with the idea of a fixed criteria for judging trustworthiness, they (*ibid.*,1985) added a fifth criterion, authenticity or fairness. This criterion is demonstrated by representing a range of different realities, *fairness* to a range of voices that the researcher can show have been represented. Voices of followers and middle managers and frontline staff were excluded and remain one of the methodological weaknesses. (Also refer to Annexure 16).

#### **6.9.6 Subjectivity: Researcher bias and positionality**

Writing in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Weber (1946, 1947) distinguished between value free and value relevant and famously exhorted professors to leave their

values out along with their coats. This debate can be linked to the existential one going on in Business Schools regarding theory and practice and the question of *praxis*. Weber's insistence on social sciences being value-free in their reporting seemed to prevent findings being judged on their '*moral or political character*' (Weber, 1949; Christians, 2003: 213). This debate also brings the researcher centre stage in the research process; not only is the researcher situated in a particular context in the research process but the values espoused in terms of locationality and positionality has a bearing on the research process. The knowledge, experience, interests and values of the researcher affect the crucial choices regarding the research and are themselves evolving all the time within the research process. Positionality cannot be wished away as it is '*impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or any stage of the research process*' (Wellington *et al.*, 2005:21). Since qualitative case study depends partly upon the creative insights and conceptualisations of the researcher (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), the acknowledgement and reflection on positionality and adoption of a reflective and critical stance through the process of research can minimise bias and sustain the quality of the process.

Hence, underlying this discussion on the quality of research is the issue of rigour within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm which strives for staying faithful to empirical material, keeping it meaningful and alive with richly textured and nuanced details and interpretive critical analysis, as well as reflexivity. A balance has to be reached between objectivity and subjectivity which is viewed along a continuum rather than the single minded focus on eliminating subjectivity. For instance, interviewing is a social interaction and as such is a shared communication requiring not only exchange of information but also interpretation both ways between participants and researcher. This requires engagement with the participants and having their trust within a framework of anonymity and confidentiality while keeping in mind their attributes of being human,

interactive and unique, within the case study and the unfolding of the research process. The tension between objective-subjective is interpreted in the context of the '*situated*' researcher (following from Haraway's (1991) concept of '*situated knowledges*'). The '*situated knowledges*' produces '*maps of consciousness*' reflecting locationality and positionality (Haraway, 1991:111). The question of where is the researcher coming from is discussed in terms of their philosophical, ontological and epistemological positions in the earlier Chapter. While the researcher has to contend with their own prejudices and biases, critical reflection and reflexivity at all stages of the research process produces informed criticality.

Reflexivity aims at capturing a more immediate dynamic self-awareness (Finlay and Gough, 2003; Finlay, 2003 b<sup>26</sup>) while reflection is thinking upon and about something. Reflexivity draws upon judgement, wisdom and keen insight and reflection on research. It is therefore subjective rather than being based upon explicitly set predetermined criteria (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2002; Rolfe 2006: 308). It is difficult to separate the research from the researcher's frameworks and knowledge: ***this is what I bring to bear upon the research.*** The empirical material and the researcher's experience, skill and knowledge enables critical reflection and '*our ability to challenge, rethink, and illustrate theory*' (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007: 1265). This process intrinsically recognises the constructed nature of findings, the evidence and their interpretation (Shotter, 1993; Alvesson and Karreman, 2007) what Alvesson and Karreman call *proofs* (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007: 1265). In this research both the construction and the interpretation of leadership at the apex of local authority is hence highlighted.

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<sup>26</sup> Finlay (2003b: 108) distinguishes reflection and reflexivity thus: *the concepts are perhaps best viewed on a continuum. Reflection can be understood as 'thinking about' something (an object). The process is a more distanced one and takes place after the event. Reflexivity, by contrast, involves a more immediate, continuing, dynamic and subjective self-awareness.*

### 6.9.7 Triangulation

Historically, the idea of triangulation traces its origins to surveying or navigation practice which was extended to discussions of measurement validity by quantitative methodologists. In later stages, it incorporated calls for using several methods at the same time to reduce or eliminate bias within any one method. It assumes a single fixed reality that can be known objectively through the use of multiple methods of social research (Blaikie, 1991). Many social science scholars popularised its use in qualitative methodology. Triangulation moves away from convergence on a fixed reality to a '*view of research as revealing multiple constructed realities*' exposing differences (Seale, 1999:474). For Flick, it is '*less a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation.....which increases scope, depth and consistency*' (Flick, 1998: 230). Seale (1999:472) views it as a '*set of techniques*' or, still more appreciatively as '*valuable craft skill*' associated initially with crude realism but which should be considered '*autonomous*' of any paradigm.

To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, researchers employ procedures like triangulation. '*Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation*' (Stake, 2000: 443), like other quality concerns it comes with its own critique (Blaikie, 1991). Further, it serves to clarify meaning, by identifying different ways of seeing the phenomenon (Flick, 2009; Silverman, 2000; Stake, 2000) of leadership. Triangulation for this research has been interpreted as findings from different layers of the local authority apex, both by primary and secondary sources, as well as the use of prior literature and empirical works. The Chapters on findings (Chapters 8-11) use triangulation continuously to arrive at their understanding of leadership.

## 6.10 Conclusion

This section looks at all aspects that go into enhancing the qualitative case study research by explicating, revealing and reflecting on the design, ethical and quality issues within the research process. These concerns have to be grounded in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm where reality is relative, contextual and constructed and co-constructed with the participants and researcher offering interpretations of the subjective reality. In interpretive and reflexive research, data is viewed as constructions, created through interaction between the researcher and the participants under study. So a universal set of quality criteria is neither desirable nor required within a qualitative and ethnographic case study methodology underpinned by the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. So rather than a rigorous set of criteria, I advocate the use of debate and discussion, critical reflection and reflexivity around the issues of design, quality and ethics relevant to the selected paradigm and methodology. As researcher, I am both aware and humbled by the responsibility of interpreting meaningfully and constructing the research; '*building a convincing case*' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007: 1279) through a process using empirical material, interpretive repertoire and elements of reflexivity (*ibid.*) including attention to the design, quality and ethical issues.



## CHAPTER 7 MAKING SENSE OF THE FINDINGS

### 7.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the process of making sense of the empirical findings generated by the research. It begins by discussing the process of transcription, thereafter the analysis proceeds through a twin phase which is drawn out and explicated using Heidegger's illustration of the door (Heidegger, 1962; Mulhall, 2005; Chia and Holt, 2006). The first stage is represented by the non-reflective immersion into the data. The *puzzlement* of leadership however, draws the self into a more ordered, nuanced, reflective mode culminating in the four key thematic groups through which the data is analysed and organised. In the succeeding four Chapters, 8-11 each of these four themes is analysed in greater detail. The Chapter highlights the journey through the sense making process which results in the thematic organisation of the findings. Through the use of qualitative statements mostly from the interviews, I keep close to the rich data generated. The Chapter concludes with a meta-theory of the fractal kaleidoscope of local authority leadership with its four thematic lenses, which provide a fluid yet dynamic frame to interpret and conceptualise the complex phenomenon of leadership.

### 7.2 Making sense of the transcription

The process of making sense of the data commences with transcriptions which have suffered from inadequate attention in qualitative research (Tilley, 2003; Oliver, *et al.*, 2005; Davidson, 2009). Giving the matter some thought, I realised that transcribing audio recordings to text involved both selection and interpretation for which rules needed to be formalised. Transcription involves translation (Slembrouck, 2007; ten Have, 2007) or the transformation of sound/image from recordings to text (Duranti, 2007). Selection begins with transcribing certain phenomena or features of talk and interaction as not everything could be recorded. Selectivity is hence not a hurdle to

cross but something that needs to be understood and appreciated as a practical and theoretical necessity (Cook, 1990; Duranti, 1997). ‘*A more useful transcript is a more selective one*’ (Ochs, 1979: 44)

Oliver *et al.* (2005) posited a continuum with naturalism at one end and denaturalism at the other: rather than as much detail as possible, I opted for denaturalism where ‘*idiosyncratic elements of speech* (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalizations) *are removed*’ (*ibid.* 1273-1274). At the pilot stage the feedback from the member checking had included comments that extraneous information like huh, oh, etc. made the transcript difficult to read (3 out of 5 participants). The interviews from audio recordings and observations, field journals from handwritten notes were transcribed into electronic files and stored. I thoroughly checked each transcription and compared them with my written note both for accuracy and to note any significant overt emphasis or emotional expression. I found the incorporation of punctuation marks difficult and revisited the audio tapes many times to check this out. Thereafter, I sent the transcripts to participants for member checking (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) which was a useful validation. The participants received these within two months.

The Ethical Code determined the editing out of specificities, which included proper names and references within the transcripts but also specific details like vision statements or particular issues and decisions which would enable the reader to identify the local authority or the participants. Since anonymity and confidentiality were at the heart of the ethical contract with the participants, this was perceived as a necessity. The ethical issues are discussed in the previous Chapter (Section 6.8).

### **7.3 Making sense through immersion and reflection**

Once feedback was received from the participants, the making sense of the data proceeded through a twin process explicated through Heidegger’s interpretation of

doors (Heidegger, 1962; Mulhall, 2005; Chia and Holt, 2006). Heidegger describes everyday activities in *Being and Time* (1962) as everyday behaviour taking place without any explicit mental states associated with it at all. For example, when opening a door or driving a car, the user does not form any explicit mental representations that guide their actions. The passing in and out of doors, many doors during the course of a day, makes the process non-conscious and unreflective. The act of turning door handles or passing through the door is an unconscious one, which is confined to the periphery of attention. There is no thought or awareness around turning the door knob. This reflects what Heidegger calls ‘*availableness*’ or a ‘*non-thematic circumspective absorption*’ (Chia & Holt, 2006: 640) which is indicative of being fully immersed in the findings. In this phase I heard the recordings numerous times and read the transcripts as well as the original audio and textual sources i.e. the notes, journals, and the other written findings. This engagement and immersion with the data was useful for writing up the Chapters (8-11) and the extensive use of quotes.

Initial coding as free nodes resulted in 91 codes which are represented in the table below as a wordle™ word cloud, a web of words, random and illustrative of my first thoughts and attempts at organising data into codes as I repeatedly went through the audios and the transcripts, the accompanying notes, diary entries and the subsequent clarifications etc. This was the phase of immersing and non-consciously absorbing the data which lasted several weeks.

The process of organising data into broader codes and themes went through several stages but was not leading anywhere till I thought of conceptualising leadership of local authority as a ‘puzzle’ or ‘problematic’. The Heideggerian insight now made the whole journey of interpretation and analysis more meaningful by moving from the dwelling to the building mode through the puzzlement of leadership. The ‘puzzle’ or ‘problematic’ (Carroll, et al., 2008; Alvesson and Karreman, 2007) of leadership like the doorknob



**Figure 7-1: Wordle™ word cloud<sup>27</sup>: initial coding**

which is broken, absent, or stuck forces the unconscious into conscious: it draws attention, kicking into motion the next phase of reflection and analysis. Some sort of a breakdown in the normally smooth flow of activities causes active and alert engagement, developing meanings and patterns through a process of explicit deliberation about what should be done.

The use of *problematic* here follows Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) usage in the sense of something that causes puzzlement to the researcher: the puzzlement in this research is regarding the political and managerial interface, the parts played by councillors and officers in the leadership of local authority. *What is interesting* (Weick, 1989:525) and

<sup>27</sup> Wordle™ was created by Jonathan Feinberg at IBM Research.

*surprising* (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007: 1270) *with respect to this interplay between officers and councillors in local authority?* The emergent four themes represent how leadership was articulated by the participants and more crucially then made sense of by the researcher. These four lenses were a problematic series of empirical clustering emerging from encountering the broken or missing door handle (Carroll, *et al.*, 2008; Alvesson and Karreman, 2007).

#### **7.4 Making sense through NVivo8**

A huge amount of empirical findings were generated from observations, documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. The analysis and coding of over 1000 pages of transcripts from the 34 semi-structured interviews ranging between 90 to 120 minutes (with one exception) presented a challenge. A decision to use specialised computer-based qualitative software programme seemed justified to facilitate effective management of the data for intensive search, scrutiny and analysis (for example, Babbie (2007) recommends NUD\*IST which was a precursor to NVivo). This tool was the available version of the qualitative data software NVivo8. The NVivo8 software offers flexibility in coding and speedy data retrieval and can effectively manage and link ideas as they emerge from the data (Richards, 2002). The software facilitates the traditional coding and categorising large amounts of data (Bazeley and Richards, 2000).

All of the collected data was transcribed and converted to electronic files which were imported into NVivo8. Coding in NVivo involves sorting data into categories which are called nodes. Some nodes can be independent and not linked to any other data and these are termed *free nodes* within the software. The programme also enables the linking of categories of data into *tree nodes* with a parent node indicating the category or theme and the branches or child nodes within the set. The *tree nodes* are effective to link coded categories of data and identify themes and connections within the data. The software enables the researcher to move swiftly between the coded segments and the original

source documents. Segments of coded text can also encapsulate the surrounding paragraph to capture supporting contextual material. Although *free nodes* and *tree nodes* were used to manage the data, in the interests of simplicity and clarity, I will discuss data groups using the terms themes or lenses.

Although the software offers the function of coding, I did not use it. Foremost of the reasons was that I wanted to *stay in control* and feared that engagement with the data would be hampered. So I went through the electronic scripts coding at the same time while combing through the hard copies of the transcripts which I continued to read over and over again. The browsing, immersing, and coding went on as I moved between the electronic and the paper scripts. I found it useful to record comments and thoughts as memos in NVivo and linked the data segments. Within traditional paper coding there is a finite number of linkages one can make before losing coherence unless one is able to cut and paste. I found it easier to do this through NVivo. Therefore a high degree of engagement with the data was essential along with deep reflection and meticulous and rigorous scrutiny. Researcher input is hence what made the process meaningful – the making sense was a function of the researcher's cognition and understandings grounded in the empirical material generated.

Coding is the main analysis strategy within qualitative research: this process involves categorising and organising data into themes and issues (Silverman, 2000 a & b; Maxwell, 2005). Coding may hence reveal repeating ideas which different participants express in the same or similar words, phrases and manner (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). The initial stages of coding generated a larger number of categories which through iterative process of categorising and re-categorising is organised into larger categories or themes. For me the '*puzzlement*' or '*problematic*' scheme linked the issues and categories with the focus steadily becoming narrower. With this deeper, conscious

analysis and reflection began the process of establishing *tree nodes* from the *free nodes* finally crystallising into the four key thematic groups.

### 7.5 The emergence of the four themes

A deeper analysis of the leadership puzzle brought the revelation that the puzzlement of leadership could be separated into four different elements: the context, nature, action, and language. The context of leadership highlights the nested competing contexts within which leadership is situated. The nature of leadership refers to the shared and relational dynamics between officers and councillors along a continuum shared-not shared. The

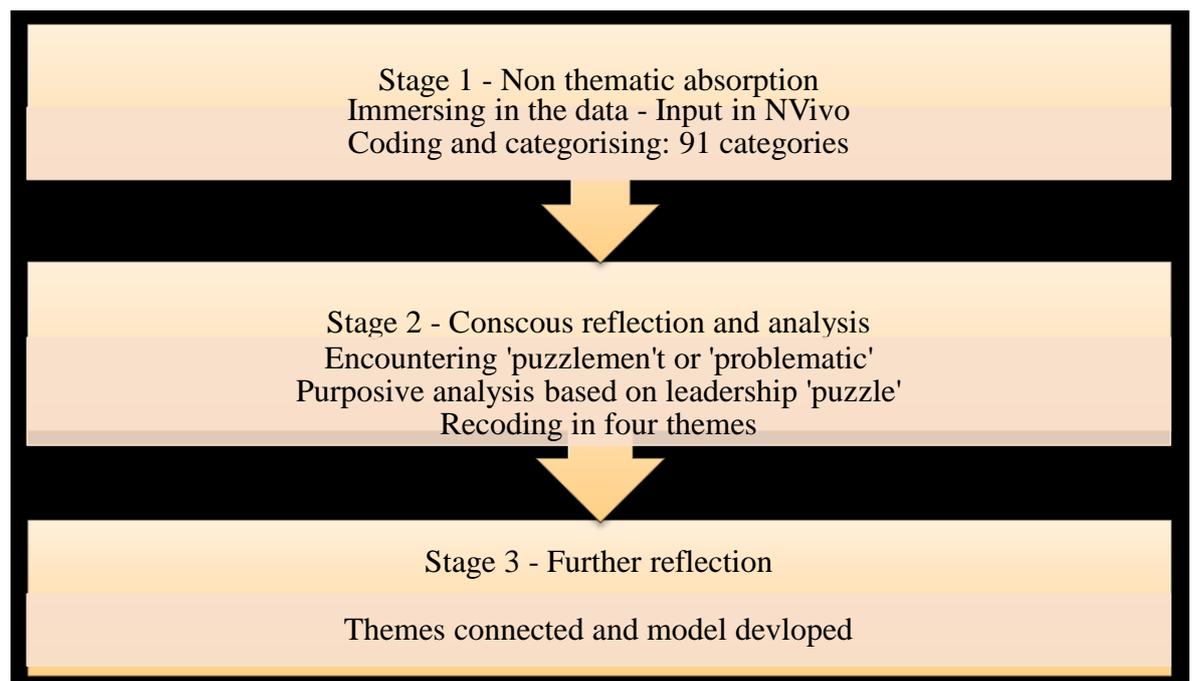
**Table 7-1: Connecting the puzzle to the themes**

<b>PUZZLE</b>	<b>BROAD THEMES</b>
Context of leadership	Nested competing: place, partnership, policy, political, public
Nature of leadership	Shared – not shared; relational interface between officers & councillors
Doing of leadership	Processes and practices of leadership leading to outcomes: vision, plans, priorities, decisions
Language of leadership	Narratives and language of leadership through stories, images, metaphors, phrases, settings, ceremonies and symbols

Tripathi, 2013

action of leadership highlights the process and practice of leadership leading to the outcomes like vision, priorities, plans, decisions etc. The language of leadership refers to the narratives like stories, images, metaphors, ceremonies and symbols. These four elements are elaborated in the table. Based on the elements of the puzzle, my findings are organised into four themes. The four themes represent the *modus operandi* of leadership. They are based on how leadership is articulated by the participants and more crucially then made sense of by the researcher. These broad themes represent the mode of dwelling of leadership.

I shall clarify what is meant by dwelling. The Heideggerian perspective makes a distinction between dwelling and building modes (Chia and Holt, 2006; Carroll, *et al.*, 2008). Dwelling, for Heidegger, is mindless – not because it lacks sense and value, but because it must ‘*follow an internalised predisposition: a modus operandi rather than any deliberate conscious intent*’ (Chia & MacKay, 2007: 236; Carroll, *et al.*, 2008). While the building mode is purposeful in that it involves a predefined outcome, the dwelling mode is purposive in that it ‘*gives consistency, stability and ultimately, identity to the agent, be it individual or organization, as a locus of action*’ (Chia & Holt, 2006: 650; Carroll, *et al.*, 2008: 367). Applying this insight to leadership the following emerges: in the dwelling mode action is inseparable from the identity unfolding through understanding, feelings, responding, coping, negotiating; while the building mode is



Tripathi, 2013

**Figure 7-2: Stages in the process of making sense**

manifested through the unitary command model of leadership relying on the agency of a leader to motivate and influence followers to achieve specific objectives and ends (Chia

and Holt, 2006; Carroll, et al., 2008;). These iterative stages of making sense of the findings are modelled in the figure 7.2.

The first empirical clustering is around the complex competing organisational and external context within which leadership emerges and is exercised. These include the policy and the political contexts, the partnership and place context and the public context within which public sectors generally operate with statutory, legal, regulatory provisions. These form a nested and dynamic context which frames leadership of local authority in which the leadership is situated.

The second theme is the shared and relational dynamics, the interface between officers & councillors. It sought to answer the following questions: how is leadership shared or not shared between various individuals?; Is there a collective understanding?; What does *shared* mean? The relational and shared nature of leadership is examined through team based working involving senior officers and councillors in various combinations/configurations.

The third theme is around practice and process: the multitude of actions, reactions and interactions that make up the *everyday* of leadership which ultimately produce the leadership outcomes like vision, priorities, decisions etc. These bundles of practice are around specific tasks, teams and decisions.

Finally, the fourth theme looks at leadership as language of communication by analysing the stories, metaphors, anecdotes, settings and ceremonies that are used to assert or drive leadership. These leadership narratives both reveal as much as they conceal and by getting internalised in organisational culture or aligned within organisational priorities effect change. All these four themes are summarised in Table 7.2.

**Table 7-2: Summarising the themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Summary of the perspective</b>
Complex context	Dynamic and competing contexts with different logics, agendas & priorities which requires alignment, coping with messiness or complexity and includes the organisational, policy, political, place, partnership and public contexts.
Shared and relational	Shared and relational interface between officers & councillors resulting in close, intense relationships with varying degree of shared understanding and action. Shared – not shared is a continuum where consensuality is positive and diverging and conflicting brings dysfunctionality or negative impact on performance.
Process and practice	Process and practice of leadership involving specific tasks & decisions. ‘Everyday’ activities that lead to outcomes around strategic direction, alignment and commitment. including external engagement, change management, decision making
Language game	Narratives and language of leadership including the settings, stories, anecdotes, images, phrases, metaphors, ceremonies and symbols

Tripathi, 2013

The next four Chapters 8-11 will elaborate the four themes using qualitative statements which are sourced from semi-structured interviews and discussions with participants. Data presented in each of these Chapters is an illustration of the different ways in which participants articulated leadership which was made meaningful by the researcher.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The Chapter highlights the journey through this sense making process which results in the thematic organisation of the findings. The stages of this process are explicated in terms of non-thematic immersion which resulted in 91 categories. This was followed by the second stage arising out of conscious reflection and making sense on encountering the *puzzlement* or *kaleidoscope* of leadership. The final stage emerged from serious reflection which connected the themes and sub-themes and from this emerges the model of leadership.



**Figure 7-3: Model of local authority**

The Chapter concludes with a meta-theoretical framework comprising of the four lenses which are explicated in terms of: nested competing context in which leadership is situated, shared nature of leadership, process and practice of leadership and the narratives of leadership. This conceptual framework based on empirical findings is the *modus operandi* of leadership of local authority, a fluid and dynamic fractal kaleidoscope with moving, whirling constitutive elements and iterative patterns. This mode of dwelling of leadership can throw valuable insights into leadership in other public sector contexts. From these findings a model of leadership of local authority is explicated. These four lenses explore and analyse the social construction of leadership in the voices of strategic officers, councillors and other stakeholders in local authority. In the four succeeding Chapters, 8-11, I will explore each of these lenses in detail, grounding the empirical findings related to each lens in theory and previous research. By using data extracted from the interviews, field notes, discussions and documentary evidence, I keep close to the data which results in rich and illustrative descriptions.



## CHAPTER 8 MAKING SENSE OF THE CONTEXT

### 8.1 Introduction

This Chapter analyses the first of the four themes, namely the context of local authority which emerged through coding, interpretation and reflection explained in the previous Chapter. This phase of making sense is marked by interpretation: drawing from theory and analysing the findings. Theory enables this process of interpretation, organisation and analysis. The Chapter highlights the findings while drawing upon theoretical aspects bringing together *new* knowledge and earlier theory around context facing local authority specifically, and public sector more generally.

Local authority is surrounded by a complex rapidly changing organisational or *internal* context and the environment or *external* context. The leadership of local authority is occasioned in these contexts. Though scholars have made the distinction between context and environment in terms of the internal and external (*cf.* Rainey, *et al.*, 1976; Boyne, 2002; Porter and McLaughlin, 2006; Hogget, 2006; Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis), this research has looked at the overall picture and uses the term context generally. The next three Chapters will analyse the remaining three themes followed by the concluding Chapter.

### 8.2 The context of leadership of local authority

Despite the brevity of empirical research which focuses on context of leadership (Section 2.3 and 4.3 of this thesis: Blair and Hunt, 1986; Bryman *et al.*, 1996; Pawar and Eastman, 1997; Johns, 2001, 2006; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001; Rousseau and Fried, 2001; Osborn *et al.*, 2002; Porter and McLaughlin, 2006; Fairhurst, 2009; Liden and Antonakis, 2009), the milieu in which leadership emerges and is constructed, in turn is critical for leadership research. The context enables and constrains leadership and influences the design and delivery of public services generally, as well as more

specifically, locally. It also critically frames the exercise of leadership, manifested through the shared nature, the process and practice (including the roles and relationships between officers and councillors) and the narratives of leadership such that the context impacts upon leadership and is in turn shaped by it. The sheer quantity of stakeholders and diversity of client needs (Bingham, *et al.*, 2005; Bovaird, 2005; Andrews, 2010) renders more complex the goals and priorities, direction and strategy as well as decision making of the public arena, in which both officers and councillors at the apex participate (*cf.* Peters and Pierre, 2001, 2004; Mouritzen and Svava, 2002; Leach and Lowndes, 2007). Scholars have explored determinants of public service improvement in terms of its environment, chiefly the political and managerial variables (Andrews, *et al.*, 2006; Meier and O'Toole, 2008). Andrews (2010) has recently isolated environmental and contextual factors that enable improvement in performance of public services. In the current policy environment emphasis is placed on evidence based policy<sup>28</sup> (Pawson, 2006; Head, 2008, 2010; Boaz and Nutley, 2009). The public domain, of public debate, public opinion, civic awareness and popular culture, is highly contested and politicised. The varied context in which local authority is situated is visualised as a '*collection of force-fields*' that are constantly changing and never remain static' (McCormack *et al.*, 2002:96) akin to Lewin's (1951) force field analysis with the ability to drive or stall leadership.

Participants referred indirectly to the distinction between the public and private sector and the demands that are posed on leadership of local authority due to the nature of the public sector. Their focus, goals, agendas, and priorities are complex and multi-layered, their stakeholders and partners varied when contrasted with the private sector, with its much more singular focus (*cf.* Allison, 1983; Rainey and Bozeman, 2000; Currie *et al.*,

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<sup>28</sup> Head (2008) has further assessed evidence base in terms of the three lenses of knowledge: political judgement, professional practices and scientific research. Head's (2008) assessment is really useful in understanding both the juxtaposition of the political and the managerial in local government but also the more fundamental issue of the interplay between theory and practice.

2008); *'It's certainly more complicated, I think leadership in the public sector. And the benefit that the private sector has is a very singular focus'* (T 18). The stakeholders (including users or citizens) are both varied and complex and have diverse needs requirements, expectations and standards as well. Echoing this, *'managing in the public sector because of the interface with a wide group of communities and indeed a wide group of stakeholders, those are not necessarily the same thing....stakeholders of various interests and that political democratic engagement, I suppose does make it more complex. ....That would be the key distinction I would say'* (T26). The findings from the interviews and observations revealed 6 crucial sub-systems or force fields that are significant and which are explored in the next sections. Some of these like the policy and the political contexts, the political and the Big P are closely interrelated and it is difficult to sustain the divide with any accuracy however, they are important in the analysis and interpretation and hence I treat them as different sub-headings.

### **8.2.1 National vs. local**

The relationship of the local authority with the centre was complex; governed by the reality that local government depended on the centre for resources, despite an emphasis on strong local leadership in national policy documents. The significance of the complex politics between the *centre* and the *local*<sup>29</sup> determines which side dominates the public arena, is denied access and whose interests may be privileged (Corry and Stoker, 2002; Ling, 2002; Stoker and Wilson, 2004; Massey, 2005; Hutton and Massey, 2006). The public arena witnesses the debates between the twin forces of centralisation and localisation often pulling in contradictory directions. Local leadership has the responsibility of reconciling, contending and coping with these dynamic forces, as historically resources and funding are stacked up such that they strengthen the hands of

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<sup>29</sup> The *local* is *'where residents live, businesses operate and many public services are delivered, that policy interventions to transform governance arrangements have been particularly marked'* (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002: 212).

the centre as opposed to the local. In the memorable words of one participant, *'I feel we're on tram lines most of the time, set by the national government .... We're on tram lines and almost the only thing we can decide to do is how quickly to go along the tramline already set ...'* (T12). Central government priorities loom large on the agendas of local authority (Leach, 2010) or as one participant opined, *'(y)es you could almost say that local government is the whipping boy of national government'* (T 17). The stranglehold of the centre on local council finances was considered particularly irksome<sup>30</sup>. In the words of participant, *'(f)or example the council could arguably choose to go in one direction, it's very clear that the various government ministries could choose to deliver things in a very different way.... The freezing of council tax was a ..... national decision, not a local one. Now the people .... may actually want to spend more on council tax to have better public services .... we may want to choose to centralise some things around IT, so that we end up with economies of scale..... but then the various government departments may well grant funds for very different activities .....*' (T18).

Role of leadership, as a participant opined, *'.... is ultimately about shaping the way that local government responds to national government changes....'* (T25). The dictating nature of the centre was often in the firing line, with the relative powerlessness of the local vs. the centre being highlighted: *'(t)he financial problems are probably the symptom.... of the lack of comparative power of local government compared to the centre'* (T1). *'My view is there should be a tension between local and central government albeit it helps, if it's a healthy tension'* (T19). Through legislation by the centre, many comprehensive changes were introduced in local and centre relations

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<sup>30</sup> In the financial arrangement (upto May 2010) between central and local government, 75 per cent of the latter's current expenditure is financed by the centre through a formula which makes it extremely difficult for local authorities to raise resources locally (a 1 per cent increase in revenue requires a 4 per cent increase in council tax) (Leach, 2010:327). This makes burdensome the way local authorities operate as community leaders and fund innovative local projects.

including strengthening the hands of a political executive, followed by legislation to enhance the power of the leader vis. a vis. the Cabinet. (These changes have been dealt with in detail in Chapter 4). A different, more cooperative type of relationship between central and local government has been on the policy agenda of subsequent governments, as manifested through the LGA 2000 (LGA, 2000), the Lyons Report of 2004 (Lyons, 2004) and the current Coalition's (Cameron, 2010; Conservative Party, 2009; Clegg, 2010) focus on localism, total place and 'Big Society'. However, scholars and policy makers alike have been quick to point out that such moves could not by itself shift the balance of power until local government finance is rebalanced and central government forsakes its hundred *per cent* control over all tax sources in the UK<sup>31</sup> (Cipha/Pmpa, 2011).

It was widely perceived that the legislative, statutory and regulatory provisions directly impacts on the functioning of local authority and the way it designs, delivers, regulates and monitors local services. This context is often imposed by *higher* level bodies. It however, requires to be interpreted and made sense of by officers and councillors at the apex of local authority who in turn design and ensure implementation of policy by providing details: focus, objectives, plans, and projects which are then implemented in the local areas. Successive national governments had created what can be referred to as a pyramid of regulations to monitor and improve performance. The centre through setting up '*a raft of targets*' ..... *It actually gave people, the ability through these negotiated targets to actually have some agreed aims across the city which they all knew in order to get certain resources, monies, efficiencies that they had to hit. Having those agreed targets was not unhelpful*' (T33). Though it brought focus, resources and

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<sup>31</sup> '*Local government finance must be rebalanced so that local authorities, instead of receiving the bulk of their revenue from central grant, obtain it from taxes levied on their local voters and where the rate of tax is determined by the council. Without this fundamental rebalancing, local government will remain dependent on the whims of central government*' (Cipha/PMPA 2011).

pressure to improve, the fact that it was externally determined was criticised as well. There was concern expressed that in the absence of the Audit regime manifested through CPA and CAA, the organisational may not be able to sustain its improvement journey.

### **8.2.1.1 The concept of *ultra vires* and discretion**

The concept of *ultra vires*, Latin for *beyond powers*, defined by parliamentary decisions as contrasted with power of general competence, prescribes the scope and functions of what local authorities may or may not do. The quote below sums up the attitude of politicians new to the local government context on hearing about the concept in local government: *'I was tickled pink when I first heard it (ultra vires), I thought 'How can anybody, how can anybody in this world, could I say, exceed their power?' (T17)*. This was inevitably followed by a more frustrated feeling regarding the legislative, statutory and regulatory environment, *'what power, we haven't got any power, it's not real power, we haven't got any power! Because everything is sort of preordained. We work within government statute; practically everything we do is determined by the national government, practically everything. We have a little bit of leeway and discrimination to do other things but by and large we work within the statute. We've got to provide this range of services; we haven't got any choice....'*(T 17). Officer participants were however more confident about its purpose and did not hence shy of using it (T 20, T24 others).

### **8.2.2 Recession and budgetary pressures**

In keeping with the Cipa/PMPA report that asserts: *'large-scale and unarguable problems can be remarkably liberating'* and provide *'once in a generation' opportunities for public service leaders to deliver public good'* (Cipa / PMPA, 2011:1), participants, in the political executive tended to view it positively, reflecting the absence

of alternatives they faced in these extraordinary times. *'For me, in the current climate with twenty eight per cent coming out of the budget, success would be, we still have an organisation which we can recognise as the local authority, it is still financially viable, we have changed its shape, we have got fewer people, but the people we have got are still good and still doing the basic thing that we want. So for the next 3 years, it is almost as if the objective is survival. That is reality actually'* (T 34). There was much debate and uncertainty about **how** they would do it. One of the participants emphasising the value of strategic planning painted three scenarios: *'so we're looking at 3 options at the moment: We've got options of what a fifteen per cent cut would look like, what a twenty five per cent cut would look like and what a forty per cent cut would look like?'* (T27). Another participant voicing a bleak future prognosis warned of the pain of staff redundancies, *'So people are going to be feeling it at every level and not forgetting that twenty five per cent over three years is one-fourth of the work force. That is a big, big impact'* (T30). This positive attribution to the current challenge facing public services generally and the local government in particular, as an opportunity to bring in systemic, transformational change was echoed by most of the participants both in the formal interviews and the discussions with the researcher.

The responses of the participants to the challenges of the recession and resultant changes embraced 1) how they made sense of the problems, and 2) how they were going to handle it. The *making sense of* the situation required personal cognition and assimilation of facts and information, debate and discussion resulting in some kind of shared understanding and action, which is explored further in Chapter 9 and 10. The responses around *how to handle the situation* included: need to be strategic, including managing staff recruitments and redundancies; service discontinuance and redefining the service provided by local authority; doing things differently; stretching people (staff as well as leaders by demanding more from them) and resources; ensuring standards of

services and service improvements; among others. Leadership was hence perceived crucial in implementing these changes: *'Leadership I think shows itself particularly critical and relevant at times like this where we're going through the economic downturn ....'* (T18). Regeneration in downturn is a complex issue (Liddle, 2009, 2010). For staff the current context requires *'stretching people beyond where they're comfortable'* (T18). In the same vein, another participant clarified, *'I think it will be incredibly tough .... Because it is just difficult, making people redundant and stopping service. That is not what any one of us came into this for. ....The sheer weight of negative decisions that we will need to make, around stopping things, making people redundant, not doing as much is more than we have ever had before, so it will just be that relentless pressure, this relentless grind for a couple of years till we get (over) the worst of it'*(T 30).

The extraordinary changes<sup>32</sup> facing local authority would have an impact on services that are delivered by them, especially affecting a range of vulnerable people, for example those under adult social care services. Participants were worried about the impact of these changes and their speed, especially of how it would influence communities: *'....it will mean more people on the dole, that'll mean inevitably anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder, will rise. It will mean health inequalities will grow. It will mean worklessness will begin to become a problem for the future...'* (T 11). As a corollary, there was some scepticism whether the leadership would be able to rise to the current challenges facing local government, *'.....where actually we are going to have to make decisions in a completely different way than maybe we've done in the past. So in the past we've been fairly measured, fairly incremental in our approach....'*(T 18). This was attributable to mostly the enormity of the crisis and the

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<sup>32</sup> Though local authorities have been implementing cuts since 2008 at the onset of the global financial crisis and recession, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition governments have plans which are unprecedented – with plans to cut over £ 6 billion in 2010 (Richardson, 2010: 89).

prevailing uncertainty and the pace of change warranted by the extraordinary times. Though the leadership had proved that it had the capacity to drive major improvements, evidenced by the local authority moving up the league tables, some wondered at its capacity to continue to do so without an externally determined performance agenda and in a drastically changed milieu of budgetary cuts. *‘I think the danger is we will continue to make progress at an incremental rate but that won’t be sufficient for us to avoid the cliff edge or turn the tank around before the ice, you know, yes we’re turning but just not quick enough....’* (T 18).

#### **8.2.2.1 Focussing on the core**

The scale of the cuts was provoking a fundamental questioning among officers, councillors and stakeholders regarding the purpose of local authority as to which services should a council deliver, stop delivering or get someone else to deliver. *‘I mean clearly the scale of what’s going to happen..... is an opportunity perhaps to reflect on .... ‘What’s the local council for?’ ‘What services should it be providing?’ ‘How should it be providing them?’ So I think that the scale of what’s going to come is going to lead to those sorts of fundamental questions...What are the services we want to provide and how are we going to provide them within that different context?’* (T 26).

This fundamental questioning regarding core business or redefining the purpose of local authority would also require moving away from direct provision of services to commissioning services or outsourcing the services. *‘The biggest challenge is moving from a direct provider of services to a commissioner of services, that’s absolutely the number 1 and that’s not just a matter of saying ‘ok we’re not going to do that anymore, we’re going to challenge someone else to provide it’, there’s a whole culture to be got through of how that works for the city and wider...’* (T25). There was doubt expressed whether the capacity, skills and culture for this envisaged state was present:

*‘ .... a very new role for members here. They have got to understand that they are setting the quality and the service criteria, so that your grass will be cut these many times a year, on these days. So whatever criteria they set, then give it a budget, and that is it. I don’t think they will be able to resist interfering, in the day to day management of that. .... They like that little bit of management they get into. They like saying, ‘Oh just go and sort that out’ ...They like the fact that we can be very reactive, they like the fact that they can command and manage the allocation of services..... If we are going to drive the costs down, which we need to do, which they have understood. I am not so sure they have understood that means you don’t get to interfere. Because your costs will go back up. ....’*  
(T30).

### **8.2.3 Policy context**

The policy cycle and process is complex: the lag between its design, implementation and evaluation, and its evolutionary nature with ever-present potential for further reform and improvements makes it dynamic and critical (see Chapter 4, this thesis). Policy creates politics (Lowi, 1979; Mettler and Soss, 2004; Kane, 2007; Schneider and Sidney, 2009). Policy has been used to drive reform and modernisation of services especially to improve performance by bringing in more competition, ushering in greater centralisation, an emphasis on *strong* leadership, however that may be defined, and a shift towards a flexible and responsive consumer culture. The delivery of national policy at the local level presents enormous opportunities as well as challenges, providing endless scope for interpretation by both officers and councillors. Due to the overlapping policy and political context, there is a hierarchy of goals and objectives, starting from the broad national policy agendas to those much more rooted in practical implementational realities. Policy trends like those promoting transparency, accountability and democracy (Finkelstein, 2000; Hood and Heald, 2006; Bovaird and Loffler, 2009; Greener, 2009; Osborne, 2010; Jung, 2010) are a strong influence on how local public services are managed, regulated and controlled. Policy design and delivery

is a complex process involving many institutions and actors, at national, regional and local levels (Bovaird and Loffler, 2009; Boaz and Nutley, 2009; Jung, 2010). This involves not only interpretation but also ownership at multiple levels, resulting in some contest between these various levels and fields. One participant explained it as, *'so it's smoke and mirror stuff ...'* (T19).

Corporate officer's job was clearly perceived as interpreting policy: *'and my job has often been about interpreting, being a bit of an interpreter both to the elected members themselves but also to the staff inside the City Council and (with partners) in health and police for example or probation, interpreting the change of political steer for them'* (T23). Another participant opined, *'I see myself as one of the senior advisers to elected members in terms of carrying out the city's policies'* (T25). For councillors, their job was to provide strategic direction and clarity around that. *'In the context of local government, well I suppose political leadership ultimately is the, is setting out a clear policy direction, it's setting the policy'* (T 26). It was a moot point, largely unspoken but widely understood that councillors would need advice and information from officers in setting out a clear policy direction in addition to the capacity and skills to build support and consensus around the decision. In the words of participant, *'where political leadership is concerned, it is much more about building a policy, building a consensus. Those are usually not the skills you need in a management role'* (T33).

Managing complex problems like *'...(n)arrowing the attainment gap has been crucial. Recognising the agenda and then working to narrow this gap for our customers within the Every Child Matters framework has been a priority. We have been guided by this policy framework and have been become better and better at measuring the outcomes'* (T2). Based around the national policy framework, local authority explores options – what will deliver the best services within the parameters and constraints set by the centre including resources and other means available to them. Leaders both officers and

councillors between themselves decide which programme, project, or initiative will deliver improvement, improve value for money and be more customers focussed and responsive. In the words of one participant, *'(i)n the context of local government, ... political leadership ultimately ... is setting out a clear policy direction.... At whatever level whether you were chief executive or a director or an assistant director or a middle tier manager, you're effectively managing the implementation of that policy. Now it's slightly more complex than that in reality.....officers are effectively implementing that policy and indeed advising on the advantages, disadvantages of that policy direction or indeed advising on possible options for other policy directions and that obviously in reality happens as a churn every single day of every single week of every single month'* (T26).

Policy is only as effective as its delivery: *'It (policy) becomes effective if you can deliver those outcomes. It's alright having outcomes but you've got to deliver them. They've got to be effective and people need to see the difference of how that's affected their lives'* (T10). The local effectiveness for nationally set policies is closely dependent on evaluation of the policy after its implementation and feedback loops. This evaluation should ideally result in redesign or changes in the policy. As explained by the participant, *'(c)ertainly as far as the XXXX (name of political party) group, our main thing has been looking at the policies that are coming in and actually always doing that back checking, seeing how it is working out on the ground ....actually using that .... very local knowledge that you have as a ward councillor to actually track and see if there is a problem, flagging it up. And, I actually think that is the strength in opposition (as well).....If you are in control as ward councillor that kind of tracking .... is a really important role .....(to) get a handle on what is happening and track the repercussions so that you can stop bad decision (and policy) making'* (T33). For participants both officers and councillors, their roles extended to observing and feeding up the policy

hierarchy in what is often called '*feed-forward*' effects (Schneider and Sidney, 2009: 103) or simply policy feedback (Skocpol, 1992; Mettler and Soss, 2004; Massey, 2009). Both set of participants mentioned the need to pay attention to policy consequences and on feeding the evidence into the policy cycle: As opined by one participant, leadership is about providing '*clear direction*' and understanding of issues through a '*strong evidence base*' which is persuasive (T30). This enthusiasm for *evidence-based policy* was readily apparent for officers as well as councillors who viewed it not so much as a challenge but as an opportunity to improve policy implementation through service delivery and well-informed debate around options within the constraints of nationally set policy, resources and funding (*cf.* Head, 2008, 2010; Boaz *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Boaz and Nutley, 2009; Jung, 2010).

#### **8.2.4 Political context**

Elsewhere (Chapters 3 and 4 this thesis), the political dimensions of public management have been explored in great detail, including the political and organisational implications of certain policy initiatives: The policy and political contexts are closely linked. The political is '*diffuse, highly fluid, and heavily contested owing to its partisan and adversarial context*' and '*policy, seen through the political lens, is about persuasion and support rather than about objective veracity*' (Head, 2008: 5) which was reflected in the participants' statements. Leadership is a skilful and critical political phenomenon '*in terms of being able to carry people with you, having the confidence to make decisions, perhaps managing risk in a particular way in terms of trying to pull together a coherent picture and a vision and a direction and having the courage of the convictions to get there (and carry people with you)*' (T18). There was an overwhelming explicit emphasis on being consultative, democratic, engaging and building a consensus (More in Chapter 9, this thesis).

The Big P and small p of politics came together making for an additional layer of complexity: *'much of it is unsaid but again it's about slowly making yourself aware of the political situation ..... There are always corporate games, there are always politics, with a small 'p' to be played out in any business .... but you have got this added complexity surrounding....with the 'P' of the politicians .... So there is that extra complex layer'* (T 18).

The political context is obviously contested with its ideological debates and arguments, assertions and counter-claims; often a *'selection of convenient 'facts' may be harnessed to an argument; and large areas of other information are then either ignored, dismissed as tainted, or otherwise deemed irrelevant'* (Head, 2008: 5). The content of policy is closely linked to the political: how policy is resourced and implemented so that it actually does what it seeks to do is a complex, vexatious question with no *right* answers and shows the complex relationship between the policy and the political context especially at local government level. The political is driven by myriad needs and rationales that are both complementary as well as contradictory and their impact is also more likely to be contested. This creates tensions and makes it difficult to design policy that is coherent and consistent. Delivery of this policy further gets mired in the politics of implementation.

Councillors are involved in the recruitment of senior officers, for instance, in the appointment panel of the Chief Executive, both the leader and the shadow leader were present. Support from both parties was highlighted by the chief executive as being crucial for performing their Chief Executive role and personally was upheld as an essential precondition for Chief Executive post holder. The move towards a political executive (Chapter 4) enhanced the role of Council Leader and the Cabinet. As one participant put it, *'(m)ost power is delegated, certainly in the political context, is delegated to the Cabinet'* (T1). Within the political executive, the councillors were

expected to make tough decisions, irrespective of the perceived popularity of such decisions. There were instances when councillors championed a cause irrespective of its popularity or even if it went against the political grain because it was perceived as a fair and ultimately a good decision for the place or community. Examples that were cited frequently included location of gypsy and travellers' site, sustainable strategy for disposal of waste, economic development and job creation etc. *'The issues about gypsy sites, obviously that's a controversial thing ....one of the Cabinet members was very robust in going against what public opinion might be saying which is 'don't want one in my backyard' and saying 'we have to have them, we are going to have one' ...'* (T2).

#### **8.2.4.1 Big P politics**

The 'Big P' of politics within the political context means taking a narrower view of politics, treating it as institutional politics of political parties and ideologies (Brookes and Grint, 2010). For councillors and officers, the Big P holds different connotation and means quite different things with serious implications for their interaction and relationship. Simply put, for councillors, the focus was on doing the things that would ensure their re-election at the end of the current term whereas for officers, it was far more ambiguous and subtle; it required them to be highly aware and attuned to party politics but at the same time keep politics at arm's length maintain neutrality. As one officer put it, understanding politics was akin to driving, for which you needed to know the *'rules of the road'* (T20).

Councillors fostered political fealty, allegiance and loyalty with the object of being re-elected at the end of their current term with different stakeholders including party groups, party organisations and electors. *'The political objective rather crudely put is, politics is about the attaining of power, one definition is about the achieving and retention of power. That can be a very cynical view but actually it is quite a pure view. I*

*think, in many ways, if you believe in what you are trying to do then you need power to achieve that. So that is quite a pure thing...'* (T 34)

Officers were expected to provide support to both parties, satisfying their need for information, data, procedures etc. while remaining neutral. The closer working relationship which inevitably developed between the majority party group, especially the Cabinet and the senior officers however, sometimes made suspect, especially to the opposition group, the officers neutrality. *'Obviously they (officers) have a close relationship both in terms of time and confidentiality with the majority group and following that with the Cabinet. So, but having said that, they still have responsibility to inform non Cabinet members as to what is going on. Always of course allowing for confidentiality issues and so forth. Their work is to ultimately implement the will of the council, which 99% of the time would be the will of the controlling group that is XXX Party policies at the moment. But they also have to be helpful to the opposition when needs be. What they cannot do obviously is endorse XXX(Party) policy or attack XXX (Party) policy. Nor I would argue should they be drawn in and this is the responsibility that councillors have...(to not) draw them into the party political world. If things go wrong we cannot say to the officer, well that is because the XXX have got the wrong policy isn't it? It is wrong for us to tempt them down that road and it is wrong for them to venture down that road at all'* (T1).

Elcock (2006: 24) refers to the informal<sup>33</sup> political mechanisms, including ruling party groups and their executive committees, which collectively review the Cabinet plans and how they play a significant part in policy development and coordinating the activities of the authority. The Party Groups and their executive committees exerted informal pressures on councillors and officers too opined that they needed to influence the Party Groups and especially the more vocal members within it. Despite wide powers to the

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<sup>33</sup> informal in the sense that they are not provided for in the law or the Council's Standing Orders.

ruling party leader vis. a vis. their Cabinet, the Council Leader expressed the need to convince and persuade the party groups before embarking on a policy direction. The dynamic interplay between the political leadership, political parties (particularly as manifested through election manifestoes) and the officers is an interesting one, *'Political leadership, you have a manifesto on which you are elected, a vision about how you could get to a better city.....and the difference between the two political parties is the methodology and how you do that. Now with council officers they are basically there to bring those plans to action and into fruition and .... because no political leader or politician can have that level of expertise, to know the ins and outs of everything, so I would say the officer core is really about having that expertise and being able to advice and be able to produce the back up and research, bring those plans forward to actually put those political ideas into action'* (T 33).

Some concern was also expressed regarding the diminishing interest in political parties and elections making elected councillors far less representative than in an ideal democracy with hundred per cent voter turnout. The national scandal around pay and perks by MPs and the ethical issues it raised was mentioned and how this disrepute made working more difficult for councillors at the ground level. As one participant put it, *'most people really hate party politics and they see it as being completely counterproductive and why on earth do we waste so much time and energy on it and I kind of instinctively agree with that. I'm not particularly party political although I accept the fact completely, we need parties, you do need to group around a set of ideas otherwise you have chaos and sometimes you have independent councillors and councillors for examples, you know and if they're in a majority you don't know what the council's going to do from one day to the next. So parties get a sense of coherence but too much party political back biting and slagging each other off, so alienates the population and is counterproductive'* (T22).

Senior officers should have an awareness of what the pressures on political leaders are and what their concerns are. Coupled with this wisdom is the judgement of making political decisions. Some things need immediate attention and cannot be put on hold whereas for other decisions, their effectiveness rests on acquiring broad support. So having a time period of leading up to that decision is crucial. *'You got to be aware of what political leaders are trying to achieve and what the pressures are on them. I think timing is really important. You got to recognise that some things you cannot do now but in six month's time you might be able to do it. And you have got to accept that. So I have heard officers say, 'we have got to do it, and we have got to do it now'. Well the answer is 'you are not going to (be able to) do it', you know. And they fail. If you have got to do it, when is the earliest we can do it? You know, in political terms, in 6 months time it might be possible, then you have got a way through.....At other times, I might say (to the leader), 'you know we can't just ignore this .... we just can't ignore it. We have got to do it. We have got to do it and we have got to do it now. And we have no choice'* (T34). And, a convincing and persuasive case would be put up.

It was considered crucial for effectiveness that Cabinet members functioned on a full time rather than part time basis: *'we are as near to having full time portfolio holders running services. In the district (where I worked before) it was a much more part time venture. So less professional with a small p. That is the biggest difference'* (T 30).

#### **8.2.4.2 The party divide**

Head (2008:5) refers to resistance or blindness with respect to policy initiatives: *'some policy positions are 'data-proof' or 'evidence-proof' in the sense that their evidence 'base' has been narrowed and buttressed by political commitments, perhaps closely linked to the values and ideological positions of political leaders or parties'*. Councillors of both parties seemed to allude to this kind of thinking: grounded in their political ideology and manifestoes and not truly open to debate; while officers gave the

sense that they were initiating issues and couching arguments such that it was more likely to be approved by a certain political party ideology. So they used one set of arguments for Conservative Party, another for Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. This political awareness and knowledge was considered crucial for senior officers. One participant referred to *'many kind of either pet projects or sacred cows'* (T2) clarifying political ideology as one of the drivers for decision making, *'in ways that tend to privilege some evidence as relevant and to rule out other evidence as irrelevant or merely ideological'* (Head, 2008: 5).

Presence of the Big P of politics intervenes in the relationship between officers and councillors and especially the relationship between the opposition councillors and officers. To be effective in opposition councillors need the support of officers for their informational and scrutiny needs, and that often brings in conflict in its wake. *'Members need officers in the same way as ministers need civil servants, you need to have a pool of people who can advise and who will not simply rubber stamp the political ideas that you bring forward, who are intelligently critical.... The challenges actually come in when you are in opposition ... because you actually still have quite genuine enquiries, actual enquiries which need to be answered and you need support in that because otherwise you cannot oppose well. And any democracy in my view needs to have a strong opposition as well as a strong government...(in) some local authorities....the officers will not do that or the lead political party will discourage officers from supplying factual support to minority councillors of all parties'* (T32). The party divide was perceived by all the participants. For councillors of both parties their leadership was provided from within the party – the pecking order was with the local party MP at the top, the party leaders, the whip, and the senior leaders of the council who had more experience. Surprisingly even the newer members merited a place in the hierarchy because they had something new or innovative to bring into the debate and discussion.

Both the leader, the shadow leader in the opposition and the Cabinet members, as well as the shadow Cabinet members tended to assert the importance of their political ideology as reflected in their manifestoes. The need for Chief Executive especially and officers generally to seek and gain cooperation and support of the political members requires active intervention to influence a range of political attitudes (*cf.* Leach, 2010:332) which was specifically emphasised by corporate officers.

It was imperative that within this atmosphere, senior officers remain unbiased and principled. As in the words of one participant, *'I think where politics also comes into play is in the implementation, so whilst different political parties might be able to sign up to a set of aims and goals, they might have quite different views about how you best deliver on those and again I think my role as a corporate director is to steer a steady a path as we can ...and my job has often been about interpreting, being a bit of an interpreter both to the elected members themselves but also to the staff inside the city council and in health and police and hospital trust for example or probation, interpreting the change of political steer for them providing continuity through interpretation'* (T 23).

#### **8.2.4.3 Leadership by being the insignificant other**

There was a general feeling that while in opposition, leadership role was limited especially within the political executive framework, as opined by one councillor, *'when you were in opposition you don't do much work even though we have a shadow Cabinet.... certainly the structure being Cabinet.....'* (T33). As member of the full council, councillors had the voting right which they exercised largely in line with party position. Their most important role was feedback on the policy, after evaluating its efficacy at the local level. Both party councillors recognised that sometimes being in the opposition meant opposing for the sake of it, which meant that sometimes the other party did not bother to really hear it if even if you were saying something very valid.

Being in the opposition also brought out the adversarial nature of the political context: ‘(w)ell in the opposition some people will stand up and talk sense.... you can see the sense in that argument. Other people just oppose or rubbish you because you’ve stood up to say something .... not attacking it just for the sake of attacking it, (but).....because I .... think it is right to change and eliminate (this) .....’ (T19). So legitimacy of the oppositional leadership role came from being the insignificant other by being in the minority or outside the political executive – either as a ward councillor or in a scrutiny role. I label this interesting construct *leadership of the insignificant other*, where legitimacy rests on being outside the power wielding group. There was however, an underlying potential: that such individuals could, under certain circumstances, become the tipping point and achieve more than what they appeared to be capable of at first glance. Though scrutiny role had the potential to be powerful, for holding the executive to account but also for policy design or arriving at the best option to fulfil a particular policy goal, the overall opinion was that it was being underutilised and not very productive. The latent power of this group was only realised occasionally. At first glance this type of oppositional leadership does not formally feature in commercial organisational life but their working resembles that of the *lone maverick* (Bass, 1990).

As a formal space for exercising democratically mandated power, the full council inspired awe. It was a space, the Chamber, which was imbued with a symbolic presence. The historical legacy of local authority bestowed upon it splendour and pageantry with procedures rich in tradition. It was grand. Yet, its highly politicised environment coloured it with party politics, flavours which at its extremes was universally condemned and which debased its glory and shine. It evoked mixed feelings amongst the participants. It was democratically imbued with symbolic significance: of representing the power of the elected representatives of the people, a space where the

formal business of the council was conducted, with its characteristic pomp and show. But the lofty ideals and power of the ballot boxes did not check the highly politicised interaction between different party groups. Often within this arena what was '*worst in terms of party politics*' (T20) came to the fore. All participants confidentially agreed that the airing of vicious political views was unnecessary and yet lamented its occurrence as an inevitable evil.

The general public was neither enthused by the activities and processes or were largely apathetic to what transpired in the chamber of the full council. Rueing the fact that full power of all the councillors was not put to the best use, one participant said, '*So I think having an opportunity to set aside some of the time .... resources of the council to doing what we want to do, we, the council and, I don't mean the Cabinet, I mean, all the X (number deleted) councillors .... what we want to do is something that you expect to happen. But I have not seen as much of that happening as I would have wanted to*' (T12).

Remarking on the petty party politics, the comments of one participant was: '*(In full council) that is when you get for want of a better word high politics We all sit there, that is our chamber, our mini parliament, we have all got our microphones, our own places and we feel awfully grand about things and we get up and have the set piece arguments. And, the confrontational nature of the chamber is conducive to arguments and rancour. So that is where tempers fray and things sometimes get heated and occasionally go over the top*' (T1). In the words of another '*I don't mind the nastiness to some extent in the chamber because it's highly stylised, it's a circus and it's in the public gaze and you, I tend to, I tend to say things quietly because I'm not on the front bench and somebody in the front bench will shout it out so and then I don't get the blame for it....*' (T 19). This symbolic performativity of the officers and members playing a part on the stage of the full council: '*It's a bear pit, full council it's a bear pit. And you know I don't think it*

*puts the council in a good light to be honest because it is, you know I suppose it's a chance the opposition have to hold the leadership or the leading group to account. But it's not a very pretty thing to see and it's not particularly effective and you know at the end of the day,.... whatever happens (due to the ruling party's majority)it's a foregone conclusion but we do spend a lot of time getting to that foregone conclusion...it can be a bit petty and it's a bit bitter and there are things said that should not be said. So it's not a good thing to watch or to be there....' (T27).*

### **Elections and purdah**

Elections for the council are held in three years out of four, with a third of the total seats being up for re-election each year so there are elections every year for three years with no election in the fourth year of the election cycle. This system of working including the purdah, it was felt, wasted a lot of time and resulted in short termism.

#### **8.2.5 Local place**

Participants referred to the culture of dependence in the South West on the public sector and that because of this dependence, the cuts would have a huge impact rendering the recovery process more difficult. Spending cuts, decreasing public sector budgets, diminishing resources for partnerships, community initiatives etc., staff redundancies and bar on new vacancies wouldacerbate the already depressed economy of the South West. In addition, lower consumer spending, tourism, unemployment would hit the economy really hard. It was leading to questions round the core business of the local authority and which services should be discontinued and how to manage quality and standards in the face of big cuts while expectations regarding service delivery remained high. All the participants did realise that the cuts were not restricted to one authority but were both widespread and long term phenomena but its impact on the South West would be worse. Echoing Pollitt (2010), there was the unanimous feeling that there were

no quick fixes or magic bullets for the current crisis and the long hard road to recovery was going to be torturous, as well as likely to bring some or even many casualties.

The place shaping agenda (BIS, 2010; Lyons Report; DCLG & HMT, 2010) promotes the local arena as a space not only for democratic renewal but for new forms of public engagement and deliberation – referendums, citizens’ juries and panels, youth councils, neighbourhood forums, interactive websites, and so on. As one participant summed up, *‘So this city, there is an energy of regeneration about it, not just in education ... we’ve got new schools, we’ve got new buildings going up. We’ve got a real sense (of the place). I think that Nagar is not only located in a beautiful place but could be something very special in terms of its xxxxx (deleted to protect anonymity) heritage...’* (T 25). Several participants referred to raising community issues as ward councillors, particularly formally through *‘Councillor Call for Action’* and solving them locally through partnership work.

The local partnerships tended to involve local authority and other public service organisations, community groups, voluntary and third sector organisations and the private sector. *‘Partnership is always a challenge, particularly when different institutions or different partners have competing interests or (rather) competing priorities’* (T 25). The positive spirit of collaboration could at times make partnership work easier: *‘It’s easier where you have a climate of collaboration’* (T25). At its simplest, *‘partnership working means sharing information, understanding others ways of doing and the pressures on them and spotting opportunities for each other’* (T31). Referring to the complexity, it was recognised that different partners had different capacities and required different types of engagement (Diamond, 2006). The individual case work undertaken by councillors on a daily basis revealed frustration with services that were *‘inadequate’, ‘piecemeal’ or ‘inappropriate’* in tackling the needs of citizens and customers. There was quite a groundswell of angst and the attempt was of *‘looking*

*at the client and provid(ed) ing) joined up services to satisfy all his needs rather than piecemeal' (T31).*

The LSP vision and strategy was repeatedly highlighted as being crucial in focussing the priority to four elements on which all the partners could readily agree upon. '*...there are four things the city, families, businesses need (to be) .....healthy, wealthy, safe and wise' (T20).* These strategic mantras provided '*absolute clarity*', enabling the partners to line up and identify how they would contribute to these. This gave a shared focus and clarity and a hierarchy of strategic objectives emerged for their effective implementation (Section 9.3 this thesis as well).

There was a consensus that both officer as well as political leadership was in the game '*because they want to help people' (T33)* or genuinely do good because of the love for the city '*every leader was driven by the need, hunger to drive Nagar forward' (T31).* The emphasis was always on, '*Can we genuinely genuinely (emphasis) understand what matters to local residents? Can we genuinely get that democratic voice through and can we then in the sense of the officers there react to resource allocation to make sure that we are delivering on those things that matter' (T31).* Further, '*If you truly believe in localism you truly need to have those local debates. And you need to allow people whether on the council or actually off the council to have quite a public debate. You want the public to be interested in politics, interested in how the city is run, you are almost required to take that brave step and engage them much more fully and openly in debate' (T 32).*

#### **8.2.6 Within the organisation context**

The within organisation context stemmed from the structure, culture, processes and the role and relationships that officers and councillors performed including the inward management of resources, people and inputs and outcomes and the external engagement

and working with partners, communities, groups and individuals. There was feeling amongst participants that the resource cuts and redundancies, especially the loss of good, experienced workers would cost the local authority dearly. Participants expressed concern for its impact on morale and responsiveness at a time of enormous challenges facing the organisation. A small proportion also expressed fear regarding their own jobs in an economic context where finding jobs would be bad enough, finding jobs in the South West would be worst. *'I also think that will be a challenge on the personal level. ....you have fewer opportunities, your job (is) getting more difficult and less certain, feels like quite an uncomfortable place to be in really. Then people turn around and say, 'show a bit of leadership' and oh all right but actually I am feeling it myself as well..... I think it is going to be really, really difficult.'* (T 30). So not only were the officers challenged by the enormity of the crisis and fearful of the axe falling on their heads, but the threat of redundancies pitted them against each other and they were trying to play the game by trying to win their bosses pleasure.

#### **8.2.6.1 Bureaucratic**

The organisation was universally perceived to be bureaucratic and huge, complex and slow moving with decision making sometimes far slower than it should be. The democratic and informed decision making process meant getting things done by mutual agreement and the emergence of consensus through a long drawn out process with several iterations and positive criticism and the exhausting of alternatives/options.. Council businesses involved a lot of routine procedures and emphasis on due process, taking an inordinate amount of time. *"... council business; it can take a long time. Two and a half years for a relatively simple problem'* (T17). *And sometimes a room full of councillors will sit around talking about unutterable trivia and you wonder why you're wasting your life on it...'* (T12).

There was also reference to the enormous amount of information and documents that they were expected to go through: *'(T)here's endless documents, glossy documents full of bumph.... Platitudes strung together with a lot of nice photographs produced at public expense by huge civil service bureaucracies..... the devil is always in the detail and they don't tell you the detail... So you're not much the wiser. However, the bean counters that there are in the system and they can be politicians or officers of one sort or another....will insist that you have to do things by the most restricted way possible I think....'* (T12). Boring, routine, mundane tasks around missed bins, yellow lines, anti-social behaviour, these were the tasks perceived crucial by councillors. These bread and butter tasks were those on which they depended for their re-election, while for the officers these were not the reasons why they joined the local government or which motivated and made them enthusiastic about their work. Instead their commitment was to the more strategic tasks like *designing policy, removing inequalities, getting efficiencies of scale*, making improvements in services and procedures generally, managing data effectively, managing resources, ICT performance etc.

Hierarchy matters even in local government leadership and underpinned their roles and relationships between the leaders and manifested in the processes and procedures both formal and informal, either at the planning or implementation stages within the organisation. The level or position of managers-leaders within local authority impacts upon their interactions and behaviour patterns. There are several layers of leadership usually in the form of nested and hierarchical teams, with one participant describing it as a *'chain of leadership'* while another speaking about the *'many teams in an organisation of this size'* while clearly describing/ establishing a hierarchy of teams.

#### **8.2.6.2 Democratic**

Local authority had a unique governance and community leadership role due to the elected nature of the council. Power through the ballot boxes gave the councillors a

unique status, theirs was the voice of the people. Local council had hence a pre-eminent status amongst other local agencies. This sentiment was echoed by all the participants. Democratic accountability and responsibility flow within this hierarchical structure and the norms around transparency re bounded by it. ‘... *(councillor’s democratic mandate) is their trump card at all times, to say, ‘very interesting, but it was me that got voted in on this’ you know. Yes, yes and of course that is what makes local government different: because we are the only elected body ....and that gives us the power over others, really’* (T27). Although there was a small section pointing out the low voter turnout and hence questioning the representativeness of the councillors. Officers were also charged with the responsibility of managing the politics and ensuring smooth and seamless democratic transitions of power. The significance of a historical legacy wherein the council has traditionally flipped flopped between two major political parties cannot be missed. After elections, ‘*the job of officers is to manage those transferences of democratic power as seamlessly as you can manage to do so and I think that’s where the leadership of senior officers is absolutely crucial...*’(T 25). Aptly one participant summed up the democratic legitimacy of the local council in the following words, ‘*the council plays a role because it is the democratic entity*’ (T26).

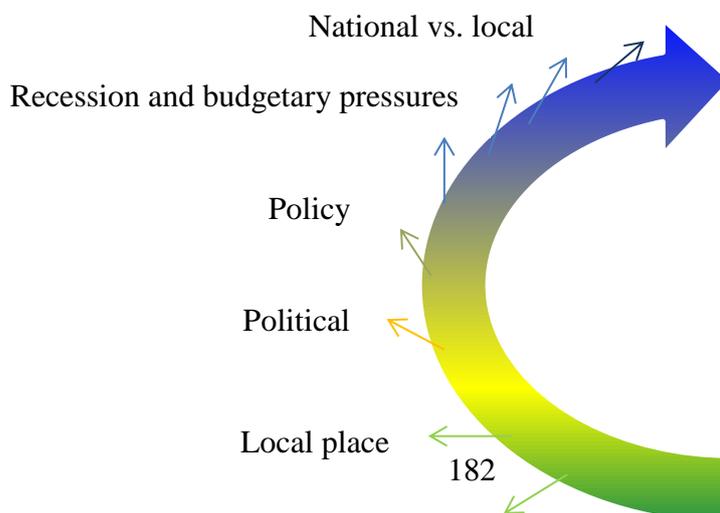
### **8.3 Conclusion**

Leadership of local authority does not occur in a vacuum but is situated in a context which partially stems from the unique nature of the public sector where the co-production and construction of leadership involves both senior officers and councillors. The context surrounding local authority is crucial in understanding its nature and the constraints it faces; it is the backdrop against which local service delivery strategies and plans are made and implemented and it frames the relationship between officers and members who make sense of its complexity in their daily interactions and operations. It both enables and constrains the exercise of leadership of local authority as is evidenced

through the empirical material generated. All the participants referred to it in terms of its influence on the exercise of leadership although they tended to emphasise different aspects of it depending on their role in the construction of leadership.

The context in which local authority operates is both diverse and fragmented as it takes place in a variety of settings, which could be variously emphasised by the ruling political group, the communities it serves and by the internal working culture of the local authority as well as being influenced by wider economic, social, political, fiscal, historical and local factors. In its most simplistic form, the term context here refers to the physical environment in which the local authority operates. The term inherently implies the existence of boundaries, structures and cultures that together shape the environment in which leadership operates. This complex dynamic context exercises differential pressures on the cadre of officers and councillors.

The political context is closely linked to the policy context as well as the organisational or within organisation context. Within the public sphere it is analytically useful to see the political and organisational as a continuum with separate priorities, goals and drivers. However, equally significant is the overlap between them which pleads for clarity which is often negotiated between officers and councillors. Hence, this dual characteristic of the public within democratic systems possesses both the seeds of collaboration and consensus as well as conflict and tensions.



Within organisation



**Figure 8-1: Dynamic model of leadership context of local authority**

This Chapter highlights the analysis of the context surrounding local authority through the voices of the participants. The findings from both the semi-structured interviews, the observations and the informal discussions with participants are further grounded and embedded in theory and previous research, the analysis proceeds through moving back and forth between theory and empirical materials. The findings are analysed through the following prisms: 1) the national vs. the local, 2) challenging times, 3) policy, 4) political, 5) local place and, finally, 6) within the organisation context. These form a nested and dynamic context which frames leadership of local authority or in which leadership is situated. This Chapter situates local authority in this context and concludes that the relationship between context and the leadership of local authority is a dynamic two-way interaction whereby local authority influences and is influenced by the context. The turbulent environment with nested multiples pressures and competing sub-systems are a collection of complex and dynamic *force-fields* that influence and are influenced by leadership of local authority.

## CHAPTER 9 MAKING SENSE OF THE *SHARED*

### 9.1 Introduction

This Chapter analyses the second of the four themes, namely the shared nature of leadership between officers and councillors at the apex of local authority. This phase of making sense is marked by interpretation, the analysis proceeds through moving back and forth between theory and empirical materials generated. The Chapter brings together *new* knowledge and findings and existing theory around the *shared* and relational nature of leadership between officers and councillors generally in the public services and particularly in local authority.

This Chapter situates the shared nature of leadership within the *publicness* of local authority, rooted in the unique context (which was analysed in the previous Chapter) and emerging from the duality of appointed and elected officials. The nature of local authority is partly governed by the bigger debates and tensions in public administration around the bureaucracy-democracy twin values, the friction between constancy and change and the rational and public good arguments (Koch and Dixon, 2007; 't Hart, and Uhr, 2008; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Getha-Taylor *et al.*, 2011). It is these bigger tensions that endow the nature of the local authority with a piquant flavour which is analysed in terms of the lens of its shared character within what is a hierarchical, multi-faceted and multi-layered organisation where leaders, officers and members at the top are in positions of designated authority. Even though their formal authority is exercised within a unique context which prescribes and proscribes the influence of leaders at the apex, an understanding of the meaning and nuances of *shared* is relevant to this understanding and the behaviours which follow. The next three Chapters will analyse the remaining three themes followed by the concluding Chapter.

## 9.2 The nature of *shared* in the leadership of local authority

*Shared*<sup>34</sup> is analysed in terms of its meaning and scope closely linked to process ontology and entity and relational perspectives of leadership. As explored in the literature review (section 2.6 and 3.4.5 this thesis), some kind of collective or shared leadership, for example, co-leadership has been used as an organisational alternative to improve leadership effectiveness (*cf.* Heenan and Bennis, 1999; Sally, 2002; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; Alvarez and Svejnova, 2005). Upper Echelon Theory (*cf.* Hambrick and Mason, 1984) explored the reasons for such leadership patterns which emerge as complexity of organisations makes it difficult for one leader in an individual capacity to fulfil the tasks and exercise influence over external and internal stakeholders. Co-leadership, top team leadership etc. make it more likely. This lens of shared nature of leadership is analysed in terms of a continuum with *shared* at one end and not *shared* at the other. *Shared* is conceptualised in terms of: collective as opposed to individual understanding and behaviour; the *rationale* of vision and strategy behind it; commitment to place; shared accountability and responsibility; multi-directional, and reciprocal influence process; collaborative interaction; clarity and continuity in the face of complexity; and, underpinned by differences (i.e. they are not the same).

## 9.3 Shared leadership

In the literature review Chapter, the concept of *shared* (Kotter, 1996; Heifetz, 1997; Collins, 2001; Weick, 2001; Pearce and Conger, 2003) and relational leadership (Hosking *et al.*, 1995; Murrell, 1997; Brower *et al.*, 2000; Drath, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2003, 2005, 2006; Hosking, 2006, 2007) has been explored. Shared leadership in local authority are social constructions that emerge from the rich connections and interdependencies between officers and councillors at the apex, rooted or ground in

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<sup>34</sup> *Shared* is a part participle, a verbal that functions as an adjective. In this research the term *shared* is regarded as an adjective that modifies or defines the nature of leadership owing to its unique characteristic as something that is shared between officers and members.

complex (organisational and external) context of local authority. The nature of *shared* and the meanings that officers and councillors attribute to it are wide ranging and contested in the sense that they are constantly negotiable rather than fixed. Its collective constructions are continuously being negotiated, constructed and deconstructed within a context that is both multiple and diverse within which the differences are acknowledged as well as taken for granted. It encompasses reciprocity and mutual benefits or advantages and yet has the potential to destabilise, create ambiguities and paradoxes. Within this fragmented local authority, there are many divides between officers and councillors. For example, among councillors, there is the party divide and those between the haves – i.e. those in the political executive – and have-nots – i.e. those outside the political executive. This sense of *shared* is a purposive act, something which actors have to strive in order to bring it about. The effort of constructing and affirming has advantages but these can easily be lost in endless details, processes and minutiae. The rewards that a sense of *shared* would bring about is universally recognised, it has an intuitive appeal rooted in the democratic politicised environment of local governments. At times the presence of an emotive issue like perceived terrorist threat or closure of some major employer would coalesce bringing the sense of *shared* while subduing the stridency of the different platforms and voices. The shared nature of leadership can be positive and complementary resulting in win-win outcomes or as a destructive force in organisational life. This sense of *shared* makes officers and councillors at the top ‘*a very powerful combination but if you can’t get that then it can be a destructive combination I guess at the worst (T2)*’. The conceptualisation of *shared* with its range of meanings and dynamics will be revealed in the sections that follow.

### 9.3.1 Shared relationship between officers and members

A shared relationship or a partnership between officers and members at the apex was almost taken for granted to the extent that it was at first not explicitly mentioned and only came up when specifically probed. ). One participant graphically elaborated thus:

*'So leadership generally I think it comes in 2 forms in local government. 1) The first stage of it is what happens amongst the officers.....the position we (officers) take within the organisation to describe the strategic direction, to describe the behaviours we're expecting. 2) Alongside that is the political leadership and what we're looking for there is first of all clarity around a policy direction, an interpretation of a national policy on a local level but also the local policies that are particularly important for the local politicians. We're looking then for a direction from them around their key priorities. They are the people who are in contact with the public on a very regular basis, so part of that leadership is understanding what they're receiving from the public, how they're interpreting it and then how they expect us to manage that interface. But for me the leadership only comes when you actually get both groups working together and where you can get the synergy between bringing together the policy requirements, the demands and then taking an organisation with you' (T24).*

In this sense shared was a very dynamic conceptualisation: within the organisations it embraced officers and councillors but extended outside the organisation including the stakeholders or partners. *'I think having a shared agenda is the overriding factor. I think there has to be a really close alignment in what the politicians want to achieve and what the officers want to achieve' (T 23).*

Shared relationship underpinned positive working between the leader and the Chief Executive and between the Cabinet and the corporate management team and the individuals within in it and required a lot of honesty and trust: *'Some very strong and challenging conversations both ways; An ability to describe what can and can't be achieved, what the financial circumstances are and then trying to mould that together to come out with something that everybody can sign up to and then deliver' (T24).* This

sense of shared is something that transpires between teams and groups and is a negotiated interactional reality ‘.....whilst we’d all like to think in a perfect world, members set the policy and officers implement it, that’s really (in reality), the line is not a straight line, it’s a very jagged line and they cross over, very much so. So sometimes officers will go into policy making and sometimes members will go into operational work. So it’s not a clear demarcation between members and officers, particularly at a more senior level’ (T27).

Shared understanding and purpose, it was felt, needed to percolate down to the layers and different units of such a vast and complex organisation delivering over 300 different types of services (official website). Within this, the fact that dustbin collectors and recycling workers were able to clarify and refer to both the vision for the city and how they were contributing to it was often cited by participants as something that made them and the council distinguished. The leadership was vocally proud of this achievement which was also referred to in the external performance evaluations reports.

### **9.3.2 Role of vision and strategy in bringing in the shared**

Clearly evident was the role of vision and strategy in bringing about shared understanding and behaviours. Often participants explicitly extended the shared dynamics to include partners and other stakeholders in local public service delivery. Purpose was clarified as including vision, goals aims, plans, strategy and underpinned by values, norms and ethos fundamental to doing good, being committed and making a difference. In the words of one participant, ‘*I think people have been able to understand better the need for a clear vision, a very focused set of planning and the need for us to really get our act together in targeting our effort, people and money, a shared set of goals and activity*’ (T23). Shared understandings invariably brought in commitment and impacted upon the behaviour. For instance, as voiced by one participant:

*‘(l)eadership is about setting a clear direction and then aligning the people – staff and politicians behind it. It is based on the purpose that the organisation needs to serve and then clear action plans to follow that through all the time convincing and building people's capacity to deliver it through evidence based persuasion, convincing people all the time of their ability to deliver. It then requires organisational support through budgets, resources, time people etc. and then the actual delivery. There are elements both of command and control (in the part of getting the budget through) but issues like changing the way of delivery requires cultural change and is much more relationship, people based - 'softer'.....’ (T 30).*

A shared understanding and vision of the place was on the whole considered desirable but the need for a shared vision for *‘what the council is’* was only slowly beginning to emerge and it still required a lot of work: *‘Yes I still think we haven’t cracked (it) yet, I’m having an argument with a CMT colleague ... we have the vision for the city about (being the....).... what we don’t yet have here is a vision for what Nagar City Council should be like...And we haven’t got that yet. We’ve got the vision for this city externally but not internally. .... and I find that frustrating...’ (T 27).*

### **9.3.3 Commitment to place**

The sense of shared emerged from a shared conception of belonging, a place conceived variously as a geographical area, or a travel to work area. The lack of exactness of meaning was not a deterring factor – the idea of being in it together, of a shared common destiny forging commitment and motivation through a shared sense of commitment to place. In the words of one participant:

*‘I think it’s a lot easier to define (sense of place) when you have what is principally one travel to learn or travel to work area, so the city .... itself in its geographic location, being the major conurbation for 40 miles or so makes it easier to develop a sense of identity for the city without a shadow of doubt, helped of course by the unique geography....a splendid coastal position backed by the moor land, it’s got to have a significant influence’ (T25).*

At any point of time, local authority is following a mix of strategies and agendas that are chaotic and complex (Boyne and Walker, 2004; Diamond *et al.*, 2006; Meier *et al.*, 2007; Liddle, 2010, 2012) and hence bringing about a sense of shared is rendered still more difficult especially as positive outcome for a place is most likely to engage not just the local authority but its partners in local public service delivery. Not surprisingly, one participant elaborated:

*'LSP was key in getting the focus really. When I came in, we had strategies all over the place, ...Nobody understood them and I thought, 'well I'm going to have quite a lot of difficulty binning most of these' and they were poorly written, they were just awful and so what we did with them in the end, was I stood up in the LSP and said 'look this is the way we should do it, you know 'we should.....' and it was totally undemocratic and I thought I'd get crucified. I did the sort of, 'I think my role, part of my role is to provide leadership, I am now going to provide leadership, happy for you to shoot me down in flames but this is my view of where we should go on the LSP and I think there are 4 things the city needs ....'. All partners in local governance should aim at those (which) were linked to 8 strategic objectives – which defined the detailed objectives for each organisation and which in turn linked to service/department objectives, actions plans and projects – this hierarchy of strategies went from the broad to the more detailed and provided simplicity and yet focus and clarity: '(s)o what we're doing here is ... getting back to something really simple. And, what we got (the response) was, 'Thank God somebody has provided some clarity!'' (T 20).*

Political manifestoes and the corporate plans have to come together get aligned to deliver a cohesive strategy; *'I don't think it's as simple as the politicians set the policy direction and that's the direction we go and as if the corporate management team role is a passive one, it clearly isn't? I mean ultimately you could say that what is the document that is the statement of what the politicians want to do? The answer of course is 'the manifesto upon which they won the election'. What is the document that reflects what the council is going to do? Answer 'corporate plan'. Well clearly it just would not*

*happen that a corporate plan would be agreed but clearly did not deliver the direction of that manifesto' (T 26).*

The sense of shared was manifested as commitment to certain broad policy in order to achieve certain laudable outcomes for place. This broader commitment to policy also enabled continuity of policy enabling better and timely implementation: *'(w)hat to (do to) get to be a performing well council....in opposition, I think it was agreeing that we would work with the XXX(other) party to pull us out of being a failing council. That was one of the first things and then when (we came to power)....it was continuing what we were doing. It was well and truly supporting all the staff who were working extremely hard, it was supporting the chief exec and the senior management team on all what they wanted to do. It was changing the whole way of working.....' (T 14).* Being a local authority also included community leadership aspects, described thus: *'And when you're a city council because we've got a community leadership role it's much wider than just taking our own staff with us. So we've got to be able to paint the picture for staff about what it is we're expecting on behalf of the politicians who are in control but we've also got to help all of our partners understand where the democratic interface comes and how that fits in with the demands they've got from their own very often government department saying what they're expecting. So it's a very complicated interface in local government' (T24).*

#### **9.3.4 Shared responsibility and accountability**

Accountability for public servants in the public services includes bureaucratic accountability to elected officials and elected officials' accountability to the public (OECD, 1998; Blair, 1999; Hughes, 2003; Kluvers, 2003; Flynn, 2007). NPM has broadened the concept of accountability from the fiduciary and financial to include accountability for performance and results; it goes beyond rendering an account of the resources used to include the efficient use of those resources and the effectiveness of

policy decisions (Hood, 1995; Kluvers, 2003; Hughes, 2003; Hays, and Sowa, 2006; Flynn, 2007).

The ways in which officers and councillors exercise authority and make decisions is a result mostly of their designated positions which describe their responsibility. Responsibility is shared between them and framed within external constraints, transparency requirements and diffuse goals. Murrell's (1997: 35) understanding of leadership as shared responsibility where leadership is seen as '*a social act, a construction of a 'ship' as a collective vehicle to help take us where we as a group, organization or society desire to go*' is useful to understand the shared nature of responsibility between officers and councillors which is negotiated between them. Within the preordained boundaries of formal responsibility there is space for negotiation as well as for ambiguity and misunderstandings. Competing demands for accountability complicate the shared nature of local authority leadership. As elucidated:

*'I was always very clear that (as an officer) I offer advice, as a politician, you can either take that advice or leave it. That's up to you. You make that decision. But the minute you don't take my advice, you take on responsibility for that decision. If you take my advice, you actually leave some of that responsibility with me. And so it is a much safer place for a politician to take advice, it is quite a dangerous, scary place for a politician not to take advice, particularly on complex issues.... Yes you are on your own. You have gone against that advice.... but there will be consequences...'* (T34).

### **9.3.5 Collaboration**

Increasingly within the public debate of complexity and change, there is an emergent argument that views leadership in terms of collaboration between two or more actors; within complex organisations, the complex tasks are better shared to enhance effectiveness (Yang and Shao, 1996; Denis, *et al.*, 2001; O'Toole, *et al.*, 2002; Pearce and Sims, 2002; Sally, 2002; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Crevani, *et al.*, 2007; Miles and Watkins, 2007). Though collaboration has been emphasised in the

leadership agendas in contrast to hierarchical decision-making, Kellerman and Webster (2001: 493) warn against this overemphasis. Locke (2003) similarly espouses guarding against overestimating the degree to which transformational leadership is shared between members of a team (Locke, 2003). While the importance of hierarchical authority cannot be negated, collaboration efforts and groups may enable better decision making (Elkin *et al.*, 2004; Jackson and Parry, 2008:85).

Leadership emerges as processes of interaction between several actors and these collective collaborative processes enable decisions to evolve and emerge in response to the dynamic organisational and external environments (Huxham, 1996; 2005; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; 2005; Vangen and Huxham, 2003, 2010). The idea of collaborative partnership between people and groups – due both to formal positions as well as due to networking, within organisations as well as with partners was a recurrent theme in the interviews and evident in the observations at public meetings. As spelled out by one, *'(f)or me leadership is a collaborative activity anyway and therefore it's not dependent on one individual who happens to be enormously charismatic or articulate. I think people's understanding of leadership is much broader than that now and as I say I talk about clarity of leadership, a lot of us play a part in that leadership' (T 23)*. Collaboration hence forged together diverse interests and people, achieving a shared and common sense of purpose through interactions, information sharing and coordination of activities (Bartunek and Louis, 1996; Amabile *et al.*, 2001; Agranoff and McGuire, 2003). Amabile *et al.*, 2001 talking about academic-practitioner collaborations refer to 3 distinctions which could be kept in mind while analysing officer and councillor collaboration: they involve people who are members of different professions - 1) officers come from distinctive professions like legal, planning, social work etc. and working in management/administration (generalist) and councillors come from different backgrounds and professions and are often affiliated with political parties with different

ideologies who are elected on a political platform not because of their organisational capacity; 2) they are collaborations between individuals or teams, not between firms; and, 3) the collaborators are not all strictly members of the same organisation, though councillors steer and govern they are not employees of the local authority unlike the officers who are employees as well as being paid staff. Hence, the cross-professional collaborative arrangement between officers and councillors is quite complex. The officer councillor relationship in terms of collaboration forms a complex study in its own right which has been little studied and I shall not venture into it other than as a concept to throw light on the meaning of shared relationship between officers and councillors.

With regards to some matters concerning children and young people for instance, collaboration was easier to acquire. A consensus was more likely to emerge across party lines in strategy and implementation of such matters. A strong sense of commitment to place and partnership working between local authority and its strategic partners was also more likely to bring about collaborative planning and action. Within the city:

*‘there’s a real culture of collaboration. We also have, certainly in my area what’s called a children’s trust which is a coming together, not just of the council but of the different agencies who work with young people, whether it be the police, health, the voluntary sector – who come together around a shared unified agenda for children and I think that’s been really helpful in breaking through the separate working entities of different establishments. It’s not complete, the journey never is but we’re in a stronger position because of the multi-agency approach to strategic leadership that this city has put in place and that’s not always the case in other places that I’ve worked’ (T25).*

*‘there’s a lot of good work going in partnership working in the city. We can’t do it alone; there’s no way the council or local authority can do it alone. We have to rely on our partners and we do. It might be better if it had been more co-ordinated. I think sometimes we go off in different tangents....’ (T10).*

Frequently the notion of collaboration extended beyond organisational boundaries embracing partners mostly within the LSP. As officers, their *'job is about influencing a range of partners to share a collective vision for what we want for the city'* (T 25). This collaboration between partners was also instrumental in acquiring a focus in strategic planning and action.

### **9.3.6 Clarity and continuity**

In the light of the uncertainty surrounding local authority and its fragmented nature due to the numerous prevailing divides (discussed earlier), clarity and continuity was both earmarked as crucial in sustaining as well as bringing about improvements in performance which finds some parallels in the literature (Roscoe, 1995; Boyne, 2003; Boxall and Purcell, 2003; Sadler-Smith, 2006; Meier *et al.*, 2007). Clarity made possible a shared and collective understanding as to why a particular decision was being made i.e. the rationale and evidence base for its support creating *'a groundswell of awareness'* (T20). Clarity of purpose aided informed and decisive action, ensuring its acceptance and implementation within the complex structure and layers of local authority. *'We knew strategically why we were doing each one of those (major tasks)... So if somebody said 'why are you doing that', we know (exactly) why we're doing that.... It fits our corporate objectives, it fits this, it fits that, you know'* (T 20). *'Clarity is really important I think, and then also keep it simple. You know keep it simple. What we are trying to do is relatively simple, we are trying to provide the best services that we can for the people we serve, full stop. And, we have a big organisation trying to do that. But the aims are very clear'* (T34).

Continuity of direction and strategy was another factor which was considered crucial by participants for sustainability of strategy and for ensuring the support of diverse stakeholders in achieving multiple goals with varying implications for each. Officers, it was purported could crucially provide the continuity through the five year electoral

cycles. For continuity, it was also felt necessary to work across the party divide, engaging not only the party in power but also the party in opposition as well as other parties in the fray in strategic planning and action. Within a legacy of *political flip flopping* (T 23) between the two large national parties, *'the job of officers is to manage those transferences of democratic power as seamlessly as you can manage to do so and I think that's where the leadership of senior officer is absolutely crucial. If you haven't got strong leadership of senior officers then you are more likely to be impeded in the city's progress by that (political flip flopping) and I've seen that happen in other places'* (T25).

*'With both sides signing up to the big plans and strategies, the advantage of that is if you then get a change, there's continuity. So we were able to get continuity but to get to that you've got to do an awful lot of work with the politicians, with the senior managers, you've got to talk to your partners about what you're concentrating on'* (T24).

It was highlighted as unequivocally vital to have clarity and focus within a big organisation as it generated shared understandings and action. It was a prerequisite for effective change and in practice enabled leadership and management to be two sides of a coin.

### **9.3.7 Collective and multi actor phenomena yet individualised**

The shared conception moves beyond that of heroic personal or interpersonal relationship to one that focuses on collective and group understandings regarding the purpose and the direction of the local authority. The purpose, agenda and priority, strategy and plan and direction is something that does not exist *a priori* but is constructed and made meaningful by officers and councillors as a collective within multiple and embedded contexts which was analysed in the previous Chapter. Shared understandings were around *'what we do and why we do it and all that sort of stuff'* and resulted in *'we were like singing from the same hymn sheet'* (T2).

Leadership responsibility lies with the collective and not just the individual leader (Brown and Hosking, 1986; Murrell, 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2003; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Fletcher, 2004; Brookes and Grint, 2010; Liddle, 2010, 2012; Getha-Taylor *et al.*, 2011). One of the biggest challenges for leadership of local authority is to balance the collective and the individual conceptions of leadership: to effectively reconcile leadership as a collective or group phenomena rather than leadership as the hallmark of powerful individuals in positions of formal authority. ‘Individualism vs. collectivism as a problem in leadership’ (Crevani *et al.*, 2007: 53) emerges due to expectation of leaders being single outstanding individuals with responsibility even though most of the decision making is collective and their implementation requires collective commitment and engagement. Despite a striving to consult and represent, involve and engage, not only members and councillors but a much larger group of stakeholders including partners, customers, regulators etc., individuals leaders as entities with formal authority continue to make their presence felt within the structures, hierarchies and processes of local service delivery. As referred to by Crevani *et al.*, (2007: 61), *‘the unitary command perspective is both confirmed and reconstructed....It is confirmed in the sense that unitary command norms of single-person leadership are maintained as necessary and natural features of the managerial structures, but it is also deconstructed ..... as (they) strive to find leadership procedures that involve many people and make use of the diverse competences that exist .....’*. So leadership despite being an individualised conception, needed essentially, to get that larger support, consensus, collective engagement to succeed and be effective:

*‘Leadership is a collective approach in some ways. And sometimes leader is a figure head and somebody (who) needs to take a decision and if it’s a, if you’re in a public meeting and I often sit at the back, someone will say, ‘there’s a councillor there, what does she think’ and then you have to stand up and take a*

*balanced view or a strong view depending on what the situation is and an honest view' (T 19).*

*'(t)he key is probably that ability to inspire, set that direction and then stick to it and feel able that you know where you're trying to get to and you're going to take people with you' (T 24).*

*'...leadership in that broader sense (is) not the leadership of any one person but the collective leadership of a set of people who've got a shared understanding and vision for where we're going as a city....to deliver it all you need that greater sum of parts' (T25).*

*Moreover, 'the leadership only comes when you actually get both groups (of officers and members) working together and where you can get the synergy between bringing together the policy requirements, the demands and then taking an organisation with you. And when you're a city council because we've got a community leadership role it's much wider than just taking our own staff with us' (T24).*

The meaning of 'shared' embraces being consultative, representative and inclusive such that *'deal(ing) with consultative time frames or behaviours, you're trying to be democratic in your approach, you're trying to bring people with you, you're trying to make everybody feel warm and fuzzy about some of the stuff...'* (T 18). The emphasis on the relational shifts the focus from the leader or the follower to the relation as the unit of analysis (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Wood, 2005; Hosking, 2007; Section 2.6 and page 178 this thesis). As a theme, this is explored through the web of roles and corresponding relationships that emerge between officers and members in Chapter 10.

### **9.3.8 Appreciating the similarity and differences**

There are many differences between officers and councillors which were explicitly highlighted both in the formal interviews and the informal conversations with the participants. There is no denying that officers and councillors differed; the basis of this distinction was among other things due to the knowledge, skills, educational background, salary, remuneration and rewards, cultures and values, drivers and

motivation, interests and career differences. These differences were spoken of as the professional vs. politician divide. All of these differences influenced their individual and mutual understandings, actions and behaviour and hence the organisational plans, goals, objectives and other outcomes. It also required working together based on sharing understanding, discussion and challenges, persuading, negotiating, building consensus and resolving problems and issues which is explored in Chapter 10. In the words of one participant, *'officers have built their careers around specific professional areas and are therefore skilled and knowledgeable about those areas and therefore use their skills to do that. Members can come in, again perhaps with a view of where they want to get to but no necessary skills on how it might be achieved so there has to be a quite a strong synergy....It was put to me once that a local authority is like a 2 horse chariot, you have to have the members and the officers but you know and they have to work in synergy .... so there's always a view that some authorities are member led, some authorities are officer led. I think you'll find most authorities move between the two subtly at certain points.... whereas sometimes it's appropriate. I mean I could say I was driving an office centralisation project which had a lot of public opposition and it was actually easier for me to do it than members do it because it was a practical thing, we knew it needed to be done and it's easier for me to drive than them and other areas I am thinking of SureStart they took the lead, so I think it did transfer'* (T 27).

The distinction between officers and councillors was acknowledged by participants in various ways. They each have different values, drivers and rationales as well as different legitimacy, motivations for doing their work as well as organisational functions. As clarified by one participant, *'members are the public face of the organisation. First of all they are the democratically elected body that leads the city and I see that distinction quite clearly. As an officer our job is to provide the members with the advice, with the necessary guidance within which the policy framework for the*

*city can be developed. ....you take budget as an example, whether it's budgetary growth, whether it's budgetary restraint, whether it's balancing budgets which is the key of course ....The elected member ultimately is responsible for explaining the spend, the job of the officers is to manage the spend' (T25).* Despite some givens like political leaders democratic mandate, the roles and relationships between senior officers and members was neither clear-cut nor written in stone but was often negotiated between themselves. As spelled out by a senior corporate officer '*....there is that tension between the day to day service delivery and the bigger strategic stuff....*'.

There were also similarities with frequent references to motivations in terms of '*doing good*' and '*making a positive difference*' how so ever defined (basis of difference) that underpinned their choice of career whether as officer or politician.

*'I don't think there is much difference in the aspirations for the city between me and a member of the Cabinet or any other member for that fact. .... Members will have a stronger sense of place about them. But when it comes down to it, this is just the right thing to do, slightly differing in our approach to how we might achieve it by being elected or being an officer. I don't think there would be much of a difference between XXXX (Chief Executive) and XXXX (Council Leader), me and a portfolio holder about 10 of the most important things to do, we would have lots of similarities. There would be different pressures and we might be watching out for different things (but) there will be a lot of shared stuff on that list' (T30).*

Differences of opinion and viewpoints are acknowledged and accepted in varying degrees, they are indicative of a healthy democracy. Differences of opinion are worthy of respect and make possible lively evidence based debate and discussion ultimately leading to informed decision making with positive outcomes within budgets and resources. '*I mean because everybody's different and part of what you do is making sure ... you bring the best out of your team..... Because everybody's got something to contribute...*' (T 11).

These differences also emerge due to different career patterns and experience, skills and qualifications which make individual personalities matter within their location and positionality (Haraway, 1991).

*'We don't do politics as officers, that's very clear, we don't do politics. As I said earlier we are specialists in our own fields and the overlap comes when the difficult decisions are made because ultimately there will be some decisions which have a political impact. Our job is to provide the advice to elected members as to what the implications may be of those political decisions'* (T 25).

*'It is very, very different depending on who your portfolio holder is. So if I can put it kindly there are no formal qualifications required to be elected as a councillor (or)..... a portfolio holder. Therefore the individual you're dealing with may or may not be interested in your topic. Because the leader may have just said 'Oh I want you to do it because I like you, or I trust you'. They may or may not have any knowledge of the area. There may be a complete clash of personality which absolutely undermines respect both ways ... so it can be a very difficult relationship. I can think of good ones and bad ones ...'* (T18).

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

In analysis the meaning of *shared* and how it was perceived by officers, members and stakeholders was complex and layered/nuanced, there were subtleties that needed to be worked out within individual relationships.. This sense in many instances appeared as a normative and desirable or aspirational state. In conclusion, its understanding and impact on behavioural interaction was as significant as the process of bringing it about. The process of creating shared purpose and understanding was in itself a powerful leadership narrative. Through the process of reaching the shared state, the cognition and behaviour underpinning it took seed, was reaffirmed and benefited the local authority. Shared leadership helped to fill the gaps between top tier leaders and the rest of the organisation creating the '*chain of leadership*' (T25) down the length and breadth of the organisation. An analysis of *shared* furthers the research as it describes and determines the nature of leadership of local authority - how leadership is exercised and understood

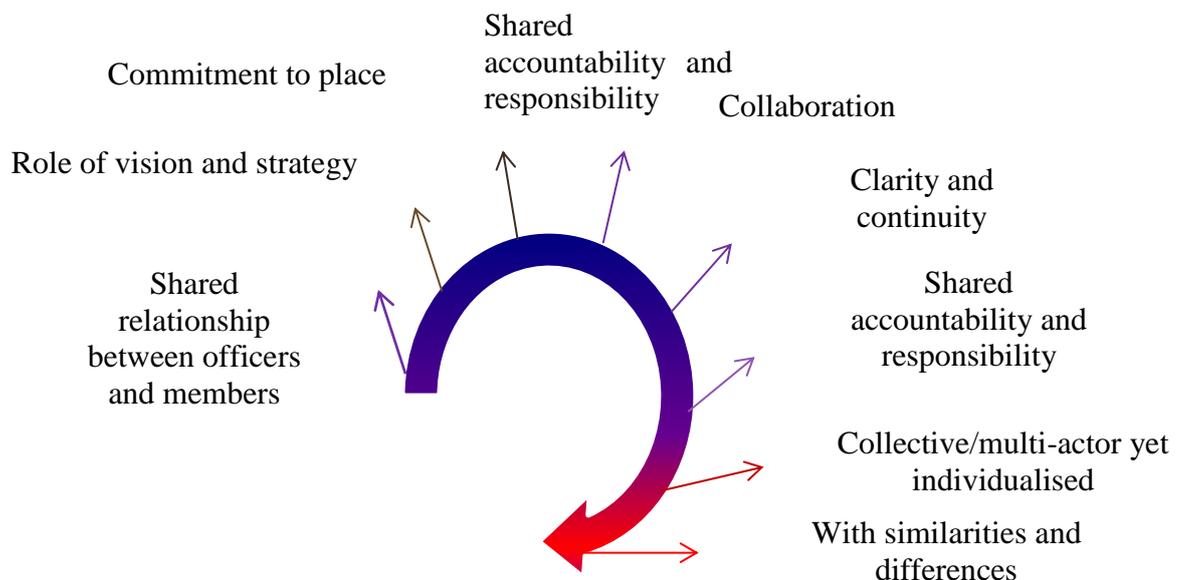
by officers and members and what are the challenges of bringing it about in local authority.

This perspective is a critical one as it challenges or turns on its head the traditional command and control and leader centric perspective with a leader being in charge and leading the followers. This traditional picture is replaced by one in which all the followers have the potential and opportunity for leadership (Meindl *et al.*, 1985; Meindl, 1990; Kelley, 1992, 2008; Hosking, 2007; Shamir, 2007; Rost, 2008; Jackson and Parry, 2008; Bligh, 2011). Within the local authority, there are reservations due to the formal leadership positions occupied by senior officers and councillors, historical legacy and statutory and constitutional provisions within hierarchically organised structure and culture. The nuanced picture that emerges is one with a chain of leadership with the Council Leader and Chief Executive sitting on the top of this hierarchy; they exercise leadership by persuasion and dissuasion – influencing teams including those of senior officers and councillors in various combinations and extending to partners outside the organisation. The *shared* forged patterns of alignment between diverse people and groups by focusing on collective understanding, purpose and behaviour. The idea of a shared and common future allowed partnership and collaboration between officers and councillors, leaders and followers, leaders and partners. The prospect of mutual benefits led to relational complementarity creating interdependence among diverse asymmetries. Shared leadership increased the possibility of including minority and divergent views backed by evidence and information into managerial problem solving and decision making increasing the legitimacy of leadership and inculcated positive attitudes to work.

The shared understanding – cognition, behaviour and action emerged through the rich connections and interdependences between officers and councillors, and involved partners in local governance. In contrast to a more traditional leadership which

considers leadership from the standpoint of individuals as independent, discrete entities, a shared orientation explores shared meanings, understandings and purpose and how leaders can individually and in teams make sense of this and its linkage to action and behaviour.

The nature of *shared* from empirical material generated embraced a range, with an emphasis on shared and reciprocal relationship with multi-way influencing pathways traces of the entity centred perspective with elements of command and control still remaining. The *wicked* problems like ‘*health inequalities, the issue about aspirations, the growth agenda*’ (T 30) have no easy solutions that instantly or intuitively leap to mind with everyone agreeing to them. They require working upon and convincing: sharing, persuading and dissuading framed within the overall vision and strategy or ‘*helicopter view*’ (T 26) of the place. This making sense of the *shared* through reciprocal interaction, interdependence and inter-subjectivity leads the research on to a process and practice orientation (Chapter 10) and finally, the narrative of leadership (Chapter 11).



**Figure 9-1: Dynamic model of the shared nature of leadership**

## CHAPTER 10 MAKING SENSE OF THE LEADERSHIP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

### 10.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, the focus is on the third of the four key themes, namely the leadership process and practice, as expressed by the participants at the apex of local authority. This phase of analysis and making sense is marked by interpretation of the leadership process and practices, moving back and forth between theory and empirical materials generated. The Chapter brings together new knowledge and earlier theory around the process and practice approaches to leadership.

This Chapter situates leadership within process and practice of leadership stemming from ‘*immanent*’ (Chia and Holt, 2006: 637) actions of leadership: the modus operandi of leadership that unfolds ‘*through feeling, responding, coping and negotiating with the day-to-day*’ (Carroll *et al.*, 2008: 367) and the extraordinary and the strategic. This balance between the routine and every day and the more challenging and the contested produced outcomes like vision, plans, priorities, decisions or just keeps the organisation ticking through its journey, sometimes in accelerated mode, sometimes more slowly. The next Chapter will analyse the remaining theme of narrative followed by the concluding Chapter.

### 10.2 Leadership on the move: its processes and practices

The process and practice orientation captures *leadership on the move* expressed by the participants as reflections on leadership. The analytical focus on leadership process and practice examines leadership *as it is* in daily life and interactions what Chia (2004: 30) refers to as ‘*the scene of everyday action*’, for this research situated within the local authority. It contributes to the critical understanding of leadership phenomena as it is unfolding, emerging and happening. Such an emphasis also draws away from the actor

or entitative perspective by recalling the lived experience of the leadership landscape (Carroll *et al.*, 2008) and engaging with what Whittington (2004: 62) terms ‘*managers’ real problems*’. Ultimately the spotlight is on the *doing* of leadership – how leaders ‘*get on*’ (Chia and Holt, 2006: 647) with the work of leadership, which mainstream leadership research has thrown little light on.

This process and practice perspective (*cf.* Section 2.6 this thesis; Grint, 2005 b; Wood, 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Kelly *et al.*, 2006; Koivunen, 2007; Hosking, 2007, 2011; Carroll *et al.*, 2008) enables a focus on *what is going on in organisations* rather than its abstract or ideal conceptualisation. It highlights both the micro and the macro aspects of organising and moving away from the microscopic scrutiny of a few individuals (Crevani *et al.*, 2010). A process perspective emphasises the dynamic interplay of practices, the performance over time amongst this unique cadre of leaders at the top. This perspective views leadership as performative<sup>35</sup> (Koivunen, 2007; Spicer *et al.*, 2009). The leadership performative discourse suffuses the organising process with ideals, identities, and expectations as well as notions of hierarchy, control, power with directive as well as collective collaboration and participation; it is accompanied by a baggage of tools and tricks, a narrative that is used to direct and influence behaviour and actions including challenging the ordinary and the everyday (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Karreman and Alvesson, 2004; Holmberg and Strannegård, 2005; Ford, 2006; Carroll and Levy, 2008; Crevani *et al.*, 2010; Holmberg and Tyrstrup, 2010). This is what may be described as a process of construction in which act and supplement follow closely, where the text and subtext intertwine and entangle in the creative process of *becoming* (Wood, 2005). Leadership performative discourse ‘*create spaces*’ which allow ‘*rework*’ through ‘*ongoing process of acting and enacting ... in different ways*’

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<sup>35</sup> It is pertinent to remember that for Butler, ‘*performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act” but, rather, as the reiterative practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names*’ (Butler, 1993: 2; Spicer *et al.*, 2009: 544). It hence embraces the routine and the mundane as well as the strategic and the challenging.

(Spicer *et al.*, 2009: 544). This perspective highlights the dynamic interplay of processes, practices, and performance over time amongst this unique cadre of leaders at the top hence catching '*reality in flight, to explore the dynamic qualities of human conduct and organizational life and to embed such dynamics over time in the various layers of context in which streams of activity occur*' (Pettigrew, 1997: 347).

This powerful societal discourse assumes that leadership makes significant and positive contribution to action processes within organisations; it is credited with making, initiating, developing, embedding and promoting continuity of values and norms, goals and directions, in motivating and ensuring commitment, which has been a repeated refrain of charismatic, effective, visionary and transformational leadership perspectives (Bass, 1985, 1990; Storey, 2004a,b; Yukl, 2008; Walumbwa, Avolio, and Zhu, 2008; Jackson and Parry, 2011).

Process thought in leadership views leadership as a dynamic phenomenon and focuses on the active and transformational nature of leading (*cf.* Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Ropo *et al.*, 1997; Wood, 2002, 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Hernes, 2007; Rehn *et al.*, 2007). It links to the philosophical tradition which can be traced to Hindu (*cf.* Radhakrishnan and Moore, 1967), pre-Socratic tradition (Osborn *et al.*, 2002; Wood, 2005) as well as to eminent modern intellectual giants like Whitehead, Bergson, Jones and Deleuze (Wood, 2005) of continuity and inter-relatedness where the continuous flow emphasises the reality of becoming rather than being.

Research focus is on the process and practice of leadership in daily interactions emerging through social interactions which is continuously renewed through on-going construction and reconstruction. It is the making sense of leadership in and through social interactions and social situations. This construction and reconstruction assumes within it an element of subversion, of contesting and challenging the process by drawing on alternative sources of inspiration and action.

A relational hierarchical chain of leadership extending through the organisation even reaching partners was commonly alluded to. Good leadership fostered leaders in other parts of the organisation and among partner organisations. Facilitative and supportive leadership was like the *'oil that seeps into everywhere really and just helps to raise everybody's game and grow leadership'* (T23). Or in the words of another participant, *'so there is I guess a chain of leadership that exists.... getting the best out of them (the staff) and at the same time enabling them to feel part of the whole,...(like) a seamless thread throughout the organisation'* (T25). Similarly the image of a *'conductor of an orchestra'* charged with the responsibility of *'galvanise (ing) the effort of large numbers of people towards a particular vision and goal'* (T23).

### **10.2.1 Interaction between officers and members**

Interaction between officers and members contributed to embedding leadership practices in a system of interdependencies (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003) at different levels within the local authority. The ability of individuals to exert their will on an organisation's decisions is defined by their power (Pfeffer, 1981). It includes their formal managerial position, critical functional expertise, experience and education (Finkelstein, 1992). The dominance of an individual member in decision-making, in this case of either the Chief Executive or the Council Leader is almost always a possibility and can reduce other members' input, which can have an adverse effect on decision quality (Halebian and Finkelstein, 1993). But it also had the impact of focusing and providing clear direction to a big bureaucratic organisation and its many stakeholders.

There were both formal as well as informal rules which guided the interaction and behaviour of officers and members. The unwritten rules *'none of them are written down'* and they are *'mostly unsaid'* makes the interaction an *'interesting'* one especially for those *'coming in from the outside ... you're expected to know what you can and can't say and how to act politically and to be this politically savvy animal. ....you're*

*supposed to know how every councillor is perceived by everyone else and how you warm them up or keep them calm or whatever, so it is quite interesting..... There are always corporate games, there are always politics, with a small 'p' to be played out in any business.....but you have got this added complexity surrounding that with the 'p' of the politicians both big and small adding to that. So there is that extra complex layer'* (T18).

There was overlapping and blurring of the roles which required rules and norms to be established and reiterated. Clarity and focus around shared agendas and priorities backed by a strategy of communication was fundamental to this interface. *'....you've got to take people with you and then its having a clear distinction between the officer role and member role, even though you work together'* (T20). *'So one would expect a certain code of behaviour from, actually from both officers and from members as well'* (T25) which guides their relationships. Their shared agendas and communication was underpinned by passion for and commitment to the city as well as the democratic legitimacy that members have.

The roles of officers and members appeared well defined but in reality there were overlaps and blurring: *'In local government however, you have politicians who set policy within a certain loose set of guidelines. You've got local government officers that have to interpret that policy within very rigid guidelines and there has got to be a lot of room there for disagreement, for disharmony...'* (T 17).

*'....member leadership has to provide a political direction and strategy and clarity and officer leadership provides the means of achieving that. So officers are leading.....the department. So if you take development, so once the strategy has been set up for transport, employment, housing etc within the city, then the director of development has to lead the officers to deliver on that strategy. ....the strategy is determined by officer and member level, because there is a discussion and interaction, so the political direction is actually not only a function of the*

*politicians but is actually a function of politicians interacting with officers at the senior level. So there is an overlapping of leadership. I'd like to think of it more as .... a Venn diagram and there is an overlapping...they are not the same....their objectives are different. The political objective rather crudely put is... about the attaining of power, one definition is about the achieving and retention of power.....if you take those two circles and the venn, there is an overlap, I think if you take the politicians and the officers, I think they are going in the same direction and that is where the discussion take place and how we can do it. There might be a political idea that is totally impractical, it might be illegal.... so I think the politicians provide the direction and the officers more generally provide delivery, but in brackets under politicians you would have the word delivery and in brackets under the word officers you would have direction. (The participant drew a Venn diagram with direction and delivery). So there is a constant overlap and it is not straight forward...'* (T 34).

While commenting upon the member officer interface, *'whilst we'd all like to think in a perfect world, members set the policy and officers implement it, that's really, the line is not a straight line. It's a very jagged line and they cross over very much so. So sometimes officers will go into policy making and sometimes members will go into operational work. So it's not a clear demarcation between members and officers, particularly at a more senior level...'* (T 29). Elaborating further, one Cabinet member clarified, *'the member's role, the lead member's role is a strategic role. You have to have confidence in the officers you're working with. You have to have confidence in their integrity that they will give you the full picture, that you know when you want information and advice, it's genuine and it's good quality information and advice. So I think it's important to build a relationship that is trusting but nonetheless one whereby you can still challenge. And I think you know hopefully you'll also build a relationship that respects what you both do and the roles that you have and that's not easy. That's not easy, especially if you find yourself challenging on a number of issues at any one time...'* (T 27).

Portfolio holder and corporate officers between them negotiate their separate rules of interaction as to how much control and micro management is done by one or the other and this is once more dependent on the mutual relationship and the chemistry between them. *'(I)t does depend a bit on the style of the person as to the nature of the relationship they want with you. Some elected members are just happy to have informal as and when contact, others are seeking more regular meetings and we've had a number of portfolio holders and shadows over the years and it very much depends on their personal style as to how they want to operate, so in a sense we have to be guided by them really as to how exactly they want us to do business with them'* (T2).

Between officers and members, there is a distinction around what each considers a priority. Members had intuitive appeal for those issues which had mass following, they liked to take the lead on those issues which were perceived as important by the people or media and hence had the ability to improve their chances of re-election. Whereas it was the long term strategic *wicked* issues like health inequalities that require a longer time horizon to deliver, are driven forward by the officers. So there is demarcation on what officers and members take the lead on depending on the time horizon required for delivery and the kinds of issues that will be perceived instantly as appealing to their electorates. Issues that concern politicians were usually of practical importance to its citizens like yellow lines, street cleaning, noise etc. while officers were far more interested in strategic and long term matters.

The best model for officer member relationship is the one that compliments one another yet recognises that they have distinct roles. There should be no role confusion; both are separate roles that work together. As elaborated bluntly by the Chief Executive, *'because what they've done in Nagar was say confuse the two. So members would say to officers 'we want you to do this, so write a report saying that'. So very early on I had to make it clear 'we won't be doing that, what we want to do is listen to what you want*

*as politicians because of democratic accountability and then we have to develop a strategy that we think delivers close to that and we will make recommendation on what is best' . Hopefully those two things will coincide but if they don't coincide we will still recommend what's best' (T 20).*

### **10.3 Processes for leading change**

All the participants highlighted the changing context and reality of local authority and the organisational journey, which was a recurrent theme in the interviews. Here the acts, routines and processes of leadership are explored further. An oft emphasised aspect of the process included communicating by presenting a consistent story and picture and then demonstrating progress: *'... we cascaded information down all the channels, we had a management team who said 'this is doable, let's get on and do it'. We've celebrated successes quite a lot ... We stopped doing some crackers things like .....which would have crucified us. So we binned that. We got out to the business community ....the opposition.... the media... we've got to say where we are. And then we'll show progress and when you show progress, it's better'* (T 20). Sharing and communicating across organisation and within the different layers and hierarchies including that of the stakeholders like media and community groups was recognised as positive that drive direction and the pace of change. The process of change and reform was closely linked to changing the old notions and ways of working and replacing them, keeping pace with the demands and needs of customers, and rational and evidence based decision making.

#### **10.3.1 Long term vs. the short term**

For bold and innovative action, shared perspectives and understandings were essential and this had to be worked on and brought about as not everyone involved in the decision making process had the same interests, mind-sets and thinking. Often the

building up of consensus, though critical, was a stressful and painstaking process requiring months of effort. An emphasis on delivering results and measuring performance would at times usher ambiguity by favouring a short-term over a long-term perspective. It was difficult for members to take long term, tough decisions within the smaller term electoral cycles. The more mundane issues like bins, yellow lines, street cleaning *etc.* that is important to the politician as also to the electorate while the more strategic long term issues like health inequalities *etc.* matter to officers.

Officers mentioned that members were averse to such decision making especially if the public opinion and the media were against them: such antipathy was specific to resource intensive decisions whose impact could only be felt ten years down the line. This was highlighted in terms of '*issue around the horizon*' (T30). The Chief Executive as well as Council Leader working as a team set a new precedent in this area which is further discussed in section 10.5.3.

Two major milestone events in the organisational journey were often elaborated: the shift from district to unitary and the improvement in performance, reflected in league tables in which the authority moved from a poor to a very good standard. Both these features brought in resources and were used by top teams to drive performance and an accompanying shift in culture. This journey was recalled as not easy and fraught with organisational and individual pain, but since it had occurred sometime in the past, the benefits of the process were being reaped, so most participants retrospectively reflected upon it. To begin with it required an extreme focus and clarity (section 10.4.1) accompanied by commitment, sorting out resource issues including *getting rid of the deadwood*, changing the culture to a *can-do* culture, aligning the direction for members and officers, building consensus and keeping all levels and even partners involved and engaged. As expressed by a corporate officer, '*So getting more confident, getting a clear agenda and then tackling some poor(ly performing) areas successfully and then*

*learning how to present that good picture is all part of the package. Getting the right skills in as well. Then there has been a bit of healthy recruitment (and retention) ... you can see a ripple effect now of changes, the restructuring which has taken place...'* (T30).

### **10.3.2 Setting vision and direction**

The Chief Executive and the Council Leader had a strong vision for the local authority and communicated it effectively and persistently to the organisation, partners and communities; their decisions and actions were framed by that vision (*Cf.* Robbins and Duncan, 1988, Hambrick, 1989; Pearce and Ensley, 2004; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2005; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2009; Crosby, *et al.*, 2010). Peripheral issues tended to get couched in words and in terms of this vision. Public leaders effectiveness has been associated with a natural sense of vision for society and their organisation which includes a mission and priorities for their organisation (what ought the organisation to deliver for the local people) rather than those only with personal issues, agendas and goals (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002; Milner and Joyce, 2005; Morse, *et al.*, 2007; Crosby, *et al.*, 2010) 'Leading Across Frontiers: How Visionary Leaders Integrate People, Processes, Structures and Resources'. in Osborne, S.P. (ed.) *The new public governance? : Emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance.* London: Routledge.). The vision for the city which was strategically rolled out through the LSP was not only driven by personal commitment but a vision for the place and community. It was '*...partly about setting direction but also perhaps more importantly ... setting a goal. Actually direction ....sometimes comes later. So I think it's a vision thing and ...work(ing) at describing .... an end game where you want to get to and then to some extent persuading others that is the right thing to do... selling the vision, communicating the vision and getting people to buy into it... it can be logical and persuasive... a very powerful vision about ZZZZ ....'* (T27) (the participant narrated the vision and added that it was this vision which attracted him to work in this local authority). Although

there was a strong vision around which the LSP has rallied, some participants regretted there was not a vision for the organisation around, *'what it was like to be part of this organisation and which would unite its staff around it'*(T18), or as another participant said, *'a business model for the authority'* (T27).

Providing direction necessitated both strategy formulation and implementation and the strategic choices tended to be generated at the apex. Although the literature states that though strategies largely come from the top they also spread from below (Bower, 1970: Burgelman, 2002), in case of the local authority the bias was top down. Although the buying in and wider commitment was stressed as being crucial for implementation and successful delivery: *'you have to talk to people and keep talking and trying to convince them that this the best way forward. But that's mainly all what you can do, a tremendous amount of consultation...'* (T 14).

Setting the vision and direction included a constant battle for acquiring resources and being able to negotiate with the centre especially in the light of public sector cuts on spending. One strategy that the Chief Executive successfully adopted was forcing the Centre and Whitehall to realise that the local authority had a plan and a strategy and that the Chief Executive was *'actually on your side, you know. So until you start accepting I'm on your side and I'm part of the solution, not part of the problem I won't be coming to these meetings...'*. It was the ability to take bold measures and stance that convinced Whitehall but also sent a strong signal to various levels within the organisation and their partners.

It was also crucial to have a vision and get wide commitment to it; setting the expectations and managing the process was another process that was highlighted. *'So we've got to be able to paint the picture for staff about what it is we're expecting on behalf of the politicians who are in control but we've also got to help all of our partners understand where the democratic interface comes and how that fits in with the demands*

*they've got from their own very often government department saying what they're expecting...*(T 24).

### **10.3.3 Organising complex tasks**

Leaders at the apex are embedded in complexity, ambiguity and information overload (Lord and Maher, 1991; Mouritzen and Svava, 2002; Moynihan and Ingraham, 2004; Alvarez and Svejnova, 2005; Boal and Schultz, 2007; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2009; Liddle, 2012). They encounter far more informational stimuli that they can decipher, analyse and make sense of. These stimuli are generally vague, ill-informed and contradictory (March and Simon, 1958). The encountering of *weak situation* (Mischel, 1968) was a constant refrain in the interviews, expressed as a lack of clarity, difficult decisions, absence of real options, lack of resources, support *etc.* The living with complexity was a crucial part of the Chief Executive and Council Leader's job which required '*...ignoring a lot and be able to live with that discomfort*' (T34). One participant clarified it as '*... lots of stars in the sky and you say, 'what's the middle of that?' It is very hard to say where the middle is. You are looking at it in two dimensional, when in fact it is three dimensional. And if you look in there and then there, where is the middle then? So a city is quite complex, and it is a huge number of organisations, stars, little stars, big stars, they are in different places, they actually move, So I don't want to be too grand about it, it is like the planets, moving around, it is three dimensional all the time and it is moving and it is turning, so to say you are in the middle of it, it is far too simplistic. There is always a tendency, models make the world simple, and the city is not simple it is organic.... Reality is not like that (simple, model like). It helps to make sense of all this*' (T34). It was also the nature of the public sector- the many goals, stakeholders and drivers that came up in interviews and discussions, expressed by a senior manager as '*... it's those other stakeholders or those other areas where drivers can be conflicting that add to the complexity of being a leader in the public sector...*' (T22)

The *wicked* nature of some of the policy challenges facing local authority drove them towards partnership working transforming the inward-looking cultures and encouraging new forms of cooperation among the public, private, and voluntary sectors. The changing nature of the public sector and the local authority required big cultural shifts. As expressed, *'(t)he biggest challenge is moving from a direct provider of services to a commissioner of services....that's not just a matter of saying 'ok we're not going to do that anymore, we're going to challenge someone else to provide it. There's a whole culture to be got through of how that works for the city and wider...'* (T 25).

Another source of emerging complexity was due to managing people in times of acute budgetary distress. As spelled out by a corporate officer, *'I think it will be incredibly tough, the next 3 years will be difficult. Because it is just difficult making people redundant and stopping services. That is not what any one of us came into this for. So I just think personally it is going to be difficult for lots of people. .... as individuals we are going to feel it differently at different times. ... there are the priorities, there is the allocation of resources, it is perfectly rational, go and make some decisions based on that. The sheer weight of negative decisions that we will need to make around stopping things, making people redundant, not doing as much is more than we have ever had before, so it will just be that relentless pressure this relentless grind for a couple of years ... On the positive side, I think there is the opportunity for showing leadership that fundamentally changes some of our relationships, our relationship with communities, our relationship with suppliers, our relationship with partners I think there is a real opportunity to use this to really show some leadership ....'* (T30).

Setting, creating, maintaining and changing the organisational context and culture were alluded to as being a time consuming and iterative process. *'(P)eople don't like change ....to try to convince people that things have to change for the better but we don't like change. None of us do .....we're in our own little comfort zones .... but you*

*know there are big huge decisions (and) you have to make them...'* (T14). By instituting staffing changes, allocating resources, establishing reward and measurement systems, senior managers/ officers directly and councillors indirectly set, created and maintained the organisational context in which service design and implementation takes place. All these changes influenced organisational culture and shifted values and attitudes of understanding and doing work. In the words of the Council Leader, *'so they were bringing different skills into the council and it was changing... ....changing the culture of the council. When I first became a councillor and you'd go and say to an officer, 'Can we do this? Can we do that? Here's a good idea'. (The answer was) 'No we can't do it'. I say 'Why not'? 'Well we never have, we've always done it this way' and we gradually changed the culture. I don't have any officers saying to me 'We can't do it'. We can, if there's a problem we solve it. We don't have 'We can't do it'. We can, we can do anything we want...'*. Another participant spoke about the positive crisis management, *'council really comes together well in a crisis. So when things are really wrong and we've got that single focus, I think everybody can coalesce round it and there are a lot of really gifted talented people here and they care passionately about what they do. So in a crisis there's a lot of good people that you can draw on to see things through...'*(T18).

Owing to the complexity of the problems a multipronged many layered plan of action was required. One participant voiced it as a *'hierarchy of strategies'* while another described it as *'a mixture of, there's a whole mass of things ....so we had a corporate plan, we had service plans, we had departmental plans. So we are saying 'look this is your bit, this is the bit you're expected to do'. We introduced appraisal schemes'*(T20) to monitor and evaluate them. This involved process of identifying an issue and building up awareness and support for it was a long winded one taking time, effort,

commitment to slowly change the mind-set in favour of the action. I shall elaborate this more in the sections below.

#### **10.4 Processes for decision making**

Leadership has been linked to effective decision making (Heller, 1972; Lord *et al.*, 1999; Ensley, *et al.*, 2003; Springer 2007) and strategy (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Waldman *et al.*, 2004; Joyce, 2004, 2011). As Yukl (2006:81) suggests, '*making decisions is one of the most important functions performed by leaders*'. Decisions around structure, goals and direction, incentives and reward, technology, resources and staffing are determined by the top and are advanced by those at the departmental and operational levels. Hence, even though some decisions may be initiated elsewhere, strategic leaders at the top have an overwhelming influence. Politicians and officers bring different cognitive, social and political biases, filters and different motives to their decisions and indecisions. Senior members and top teams must decide which of many possible options should be accorded or deserve highest priority. Decision making is around improvement projects, reforms, corrective action, alternative options, risk minimisation, corrective choices, resource allocation, technology, staffing including placements and appointments, rewards, promotions and incentives, structure and goals, direction and mission, networking and partnerships.

The decision making process including both its design, the process through which it was brought about and the implementation of that decision was influenced by both the institutional arrangements specific to the local authority, the fundamental and specific distribution of roles between officers and members as well as the formal and informal networks and partnerships and the wider context in which the local authority is situated. These influences or drivers can both constrain or catalyse the decision making process. Within this system, individual leaders can be both catalysts and/or brokers, negotiating deals and ensuring the navigation of the various stages of the decision making process

and ensuring results or sometimes leading nowhere. Both the time taken for decision making as well as the poor or absence of outcomes were recognised as frustrating by both officers and members.

#### **10.4.1 Strong and difficult decision making**

Making decisions was integral to leadership and phrases like difficult decisions, strong decision making were peppered throughout the interviews. Having the strength to make unpleasant decisions, rock the boat and disturb the prevailing status quo, unwillingness to sit on the fence and prevaricate or take the softer option were normatively referred to as the worst case scenario for leadership. *‘Occasionally you do have to hold the line and do something’* (T32) or *‘...put their head on the line, make that decision. And have the capacity to carry people with them and where there are contentious issues they need to have the charisma the personality that can actually lead and take people with them...’* (T 33). When stating the need to make difficult decision or talking about the process, very often the discussion seemed to unconsciously take an individualised conception of a leader, an actor doing something, getting there. So, *‘how can we do that?... how can we get from A to B and we duck and dive to get there and we will make it’* (T 34).

On another occasion, it was the support for the controversial issue of finding a location for gypsies and travellers that was praised, *‘...Absolutely standing firm and saying, ‘I am going to be absolutely democratic about this and don’t care about the political consequences of this. This is right and I am going to stand here’ and he stood there and tried to fight that and ignored the political consequences. Now that is good leadership. Ya. And, I admired him for that...’* (T34).

Being a pragmatic realist and working in the best interests of the city was also elaborated frequently, *‘we’re all practical being politicians that we recognise that we’re never going to satisfy the wishes of everyone at any given point in time but as I said*

*earlier I think we have to just take a step back and say 'What is the right thing to do for Sangam (the city)' and I think most people even if they were not necessarily supportive of whatever decision we were proposing, if they felt that we had taken the decision in the best interests of the city, I think most people would recognise that point of view. And I think that's probably the best way that we can deal with these really difficult decisions'* (T 13). Both building consensus and team working was a necessary part of this strong decision making, these are explored further.

#### **10.4.2 Democracy and decision making in stages**

Collective decision making in democracies involves a group or team, though not all of them are equally influential (Also refer to section 3.4.6 of this thesis; Haus and Sweeting, 2006; Berry, 2009). Not all this decision making process is done in formal meetings with formalised agendas. A lot of informal *wheeling and dealing* took place outside the formal and public meetings, including officers using informal occasions to convince and persuade senior councillors as well as listening and responding to their concerns and finding solutions to problems they raised.

Collective decision making by groups bequeathed legitimacy to exercise bold outgoing decisions. Councillors in Cabinet headed by the Council Leader or full council can be held to account as the decision is ultimately left to the councillors either in the Cabinet or the full council. At the same time having functional and role overlaps between officers and members and Chief Executive and Council Leader results in some element of buck passing especially with respect to those decisions which engage media and public attention. Referring to the in-private *'Cabinet planning process where members of the Cabinet meet with members of the corporate management team to discuss 'this is coming up' or 'that is coming up' and 'this is what we want to do' or 'this is what we think we should do'* (T 13).

All this rendered complex the process of decision making in the democratic arena of local authority where: *'... you can potentially make a decision but because of the political process you have to go through, whether it's Cabinet planning, through portfolio holders, through public consultation, whether it's full council or whatever, you can have an eminently sensible decision to be taken but it can still take weeks and months to go through the formalised process to get everybody agreed. So again timing is critical, getting people on board and making sure they're informed, making sure that a lot of the nuances around how people hear and understand things, is very much more required than a simple edict from the board as it were'* (T18).

The long drawn out phased process of decision making sometimes made it possible to iron out the differences through the discussions in the stages leading up to the final Cabinet meeting or the council meeting in the public domain. It allowed for making sure that a consensus or as close to a consensus was able to emerge; *'a workable alternative'* is how more than one participant described it. The average time for a *major* decision was nine months to one year, to go through the numerous stages before the full council. As elucidated in the voice of one jaded officer, it has already taken one year and has yet to get to full council but it's *'gone to Cabinet, it's been to scrutiny twice, four times sorry. It's been through every departmental management team, it's been to CMT, it's been on the go for at least a year....'* (Senior officer). These stages are also sometimes a bit of a mystery especially to relative newcomers: *'but I'm not very (clear). I mean, there are formal kind of rules about the democratic process which I'm never quite clear, I mean I always need to get guidance, '.... I don't find that very easy to get my head around to be honest. What's relevant for Cabinet, what's relevant for portfolio holder, what's something we do on our own, what should we go to scrutiny with? ...there are approaches to it but I'm not sure whether I'm very clear about what they are and whether they are very consistent to be honest...'* (Senior officer)'.

This complex process of decision making spanned several stages. The initial or first stage involves having an informal talk with the portfolio holder/s. The next stage would involve presenting a fairly brief paper at the closed door Cabinet planning meeting and getting the Cabinet's endorsement to go ahead for a more detailed analysis. The third stage involves working in the details working closely with the portfolio holder. The fourth stage is marked by a return to the Cabinet planning meeting with a committee report in detail. The final stage is that which happens in the public Cabinet meeting. It was explained in the words of one participant as follows:

*'The work on that probably starts nine months before and what we would do is talk to the portfolio holder fairly informally about what the issues would be ... go into one of the early Cabinet planning sessions and say, 'look this is an option we've got, it will provide a more modernised service, this is what we'll be able to deliver and this is the budget savings' and take in a fairly short paper and get a feel as to whether or not the Cabinet are thinking 'yes, this is something we could do'. Then that allows officers then to go away and work up the detail. During that period keep the portfolio holder regularly up to speed. Then when it comes back to the Cabinet planning in a committee report form, they're already fully aware of it, .....So when the committee paper comes in, other than probably a few questions around maybe the way some things are written or what the understanding is, that stage is much easier (because of what has happened in the earlier stages. Finally) And then it goes to the public Cabinet which is where the decision's ratified really... So actually when you then get the decision and you move into the implementation, it can go much smoother because you've done all your groundwork. So if you manage that first stage and get the right environment there, the second stage becomes much easier ....' (T24).*

The four year election cycle was spoken of as a *'real limiting factor in the decision making process within any year. ....So we have a four year cycle of which a third goes for every year for three years and then we have one year without any elections...'* (T 18). Then there was the period of purdah prior to an election (Section 8.2.4 this thesis).

*'We go through a period of adjustment following the elections because either we could have a complete change in party or a complete change of pool of people from which the Cabinet may be drawn or at least a third of them.... So the actual window of doing things and doing anything controversial ...is very limited and that's, that again drives this short termism...'* (T 6).

The acquiring and dissemination of information was perceived to be crucial for decision making and its management was considered a challenge due to the nature of local government, so communicating, sharing, making the best decision for the whole across a vast organisation with traditional pockets, historical silos and various naming conventions was rendered more complex. It created *'multiple systems to do fundamentally the same job. But each department's got its own way of slightly doing it differently. So in order to become one council or to become one entity... the public see Nagar City Council, they don't see the sort of naming conventions that we do ....The data that one part of the organisation has, maybe absolutely pertinent to another part of the organisation but either side may not know they've got it or they may not want to share it...'* (T18). Changing such a deeply entrenched culture was perceived as particularly difficult a challenge that had to be tackled.

### **10.5 Processes for Team working**

Given the prevailing ambiguity and complexity inherent in strategic decision making (Mintzberg, 1973), *'the formation of a coalition at the top is more plausible'* (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2009: 121). The local authority under study was no different. *'The council has several leadership layers (teams. So obviously you've got the Cabinet layer, the politic. So you've got the ruling party, in this case the XXXXX at the moment. Then you have Cabinet who sit as the governing body if you like for the council. Then within the officer structure you've got the CMT which is made up of the chief exec, the assistant chief exec and the directors and then you've got what they call SMT the senior*

*management team...*' (T18/senior manager). The members of the team at the apex of local authority analysed and made sense of a great deal of vague, paradoxical, ambiguous and often competing information from many different sources (Hambrick, 1989; Also section 2.4 of this thesis). They manage diverse external constituents (Ancona & Nadler, 1989; Hambrick, 1989; Nadler, 1996), from the heads of other agencies involved in local governance like the police, health, business and third sector to citizens and community groups. Developing a positive relation and interaction between teams was considered crucial: *'...if you get the right relationship between the leader and the Chief Executive and between the Cabinet and the corporate management team and the individuals within in that's when you start to see major improvements and things that are needing to be delivered happening and momentum building. That requires a lot of honesty and trust; Some very strong and challenging conversations both ways; An ability to describe what can and can't be achieved; What the financial circumstances are and then trying to mould that together to come out with something that everybody can sign up to and then deliver...'* (T 24).

Positive tension arises from *'crossing experientially and cognitively different standpoints'* (Bartunek and Louis, 1996:61). Tension and conflict resolution are kindred processes which are important for positive collaboration to flourish. Since differences are present between officers and members and within each cadre the processes of communication, coordination and cooperation have unique patterns integral to their interactions. Some differences can cause negative process conflict hence making conflict resolutions processes extremely significant within such groups. Different perspectives and task related conflicts gives rise to creative tension as borne out by Jehn's (1995, 1997) conflict theory and creativity and innovation literature (Amabile *et al.*, 2001). This was inevitable amongst officers and members. Sometimes differences made for a more effective team performance as they brought options, creative thinking,

different skills to the table. Such *creative tension* led to positive outcomes but also had the power to destabilise relationships. In another instance: *'...it has taken time, but we now get more challenge, which is really good. Between the teams and within the departments. So when we were setting the budgets, this year, you had some teams, looking at other people's budgets and their objectives and saying, 'hang on a moment, why are you spending so much on that, we could do better or we could do that together better'. So you are getting a tension which is quite a creative tension..... You have got to create that creative tension where people's views from other areas are totally legitimate and should be respected ..... we are getting that now, which is good..'* (T 34).

#### **10.5.1 Team working and its constituents**

Team constituency in terms of *who is in the team* was taken for granted and when participants spoke of teams they meant corporate management team, senior management team or teams lower in the hierarchy or the Cabinet/ party groups depending on whether they belonged to the officer or the member cadre. There was also a mention of the officers and the Cabinet as a bigger decision making group. An important influential team was of the Chief Executive and the Council Leader. Besides there were also core groups according to the functional responsibilities of the Cabinet members like finance, children and young people etc. In the words of the Chief Executive, *'the Cabinet is a team, we (corporate officers) are a team and then there is a bigger team, Cabinet and CMT working together. There is a series of team within an organisation this size and they overlap of course. ....We meet weekly. There is debate and discussion and we don't hold grudges, there is respect, clarity is important....'* (T 23). Once a decision was made it was considered crucial to have the full support and backing of teams to ensure successful implementation of policy and execution of decisions. CMT and SMT are hierarchical with distributed work expertise (Edmondson, *et al.*, 2003).

The traditional bureaucratic ideal is hierarchical (Weber, 1946, 1968; Kettl, 2000; Lynn, 2001; Hughes, 2003; Flynn, 2007) and senior officers and councillors exercise leadership within hierarchical operating structures by initiating, intervening or ignoring (inaction) partly on the basis of their position of power or influence (*cf.* Brown and Moshavi (2005) who analyse interpersonal understandings). Hierarchy and position have a direct bearing on the influencing force of leadership as well as determining the level of their understanding of issues. The higher the level of hierarchy and position of the officer and councillor, the more strategic their understanding of issues and decisions and the greater the resulting impact on place, community, different organisations involved in local governance. While resolving strategic problems, officers and members have to understand the overriding issues with their diverse short term as well as long term impact with different ramifications corresponding to the levels in the hierarchy.

Team working also included bigger teams like party groups and that of officers which included all managers from the middle level up. (Team Nagar): *‘That is the case, politically we meet as xxxx (name of political party deleted) group and we talk. We really do air everything. If somebody wants to say something, he says it. Then we discuss it. We are broadly in consensus with most of the things that are going on. We get the odd things that come up, we’ve got the odd one or two members that are a bit awkward... (T17)’.*

### **10.5.2 Positive relationships**

The basics of positive team working were in the words of the Chief Executive, *‘...(h)onesty, awareness, respect, don’t hold grudges, have a sense of humour and try and get clarity between yourselves...we will have rigorous debate and then have a laugh about it. That is the other thing you need, it is a sense of humour. Ya. The world is not going to end if you get something wrong but life might get more difficult and we may*

*be able to laugh about it and, humour is quite important and you have got to be able to laugh at each other and with each other and at yourself.'*

Another participant emphasised the *'(f)oster(ing) a climate of trust between the political leadership and the managerial leadership. I think it is a 2 way street, it's a partnership. It's a partnership approach that you need between the senior management team and the Cabinet. Absolutely fundamental and I know what I said earlier on about the leader and the Chief Executive and the most important relationship it is. But it is also important that the officer core, senior officer and senior members understand each other....'* (T11). Previous studies have also posited that within teams and amongst senior members if there is high *'interpersonal trust and mutual respect, members believe that the group will not rebuke, marginalize, or penalize them for speaking up or for challenging prevailing opinion'* (Edmondson *et al.*, 2003: 306). Relationship between corporate officers and Cabinet in the words of one participant was a *'very open relationship. Genuinely able to share points of views, whether on things irritating everybody or on the bigger issues. It has been very open. Support and challenge through difficult decisions built trust. Very open, very positive, very honest. Things tend not to sit and cause frustration but tend to get dealt with'* (T30). The participant went on to describe in great detail what he called housekeeping type of issues which took a lot of time and handling like invitations to the Cabinet, ensuring that they are well looked after and seated in the right places, the minutiae of social position and status. In his opinion this was time well spent as it then allowed the space and the time *'to have the difficult conversations'* (T30). Questioning and being challenging yet respectful was crucial to the ability *'... to challenge. Because I think challenge in order to achieve is very important. So it's about having a good understanding of issues. It's about being prepared to listen and to learn and to challenge ... Yes, we have some very good debate (and)... discussions. I think we are all prepared to listen; we're all given a voice. We*

*don't always agree but once a decision is made than even if I were not in agreement with that decision, my commitment and loyalty is such that I would not argue against that.....and I think it's right that my colleagues would look for support from me in the same way that I would look for support from them..'* (T15). Thus, a picture of respectful challenge was suspect especially in the light of refusal to let the researcher be party to confidential meetings (Section 6.3.2 this thesis).

A note of caution was struck by some participants who stressed that sometimes there were institutional barriers in placing team behaviour above individual behaviour: *'corporate (team) behaviour is very difficult to come by. And again it comes down to as much as anything what people get measured on. We still have that silo behaviour because ultimately people are measured about how successful.... individual is seen to be in safeguarding children. And that's obviously a critical activity but it doesn't necessarily breed corporate behaviour. It does breed a very specific protection about that sort of area and looking after your resource allocation to make sure you can do what actually you're measured upon'* (T18 senior manager).

### **10.5.3 Chief Executive and Council Leader**

The Chief Executive as well as the Council Leader set the tone for their team's interactions (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2009:137). By encouraging open discussion and challenge and giving importance to consensus they jointly and individually enhanced team processes through a broad consideration of alternatives, widespread information gathering and sharing followed by a strong commitment to the decisions made. *'...you know the leader of the council, the Chief Executive, they clearly play a very, very important part in driving and being the spearhead of all of that (organisational change and transformation) but to deliver it all you need that greater sum of parts...'* (T25). So though *'the leader and the Chief Executive ... (were) the most important relationship'* (T11), the officer core and the senior members also needed to have an understanding of

being in a team together. Both of them spoke highly about valuing and respecting each other, of having trust and humour and understanding between them. *‘...regular meetings with the leader of the council and the Chief Executive... crucial access and it’s both sharing information together both ways and brain storming one or two tricky issues ...’* (LSP stakeholder).

Chief Executive in local authority has limited ability to hire, fire, and set compensation for other corporate and senior team members. But the Chief Executive on his appointment flexed his muscles and made no bones about it after ensuring that his appointment was unanimous across both political parties. He established ground rules for political non-interference for instance, by keeping members out of disciplinary matters.

There were numerous descriptions of the Council Leader and Chief Executive which invoked images of powerful and dynamic leaders with participants highlighting different facets of their personality; but what was singularly interesting was their relationship. In the words of one participant: *‘they’re getting on well and I say they trust one another, there we are, it’s about leadership and it’s starting to work so they’re gradually weeding out the weaklings in the organisation, transforming culture...’* (T22).

The Chief Executive as well as Council Leader working as a team took responsibility for integrating internal and external longer term issues and worked closely to make decisions which had benefits over the longer term rather than the present. In the last one year several such significant landmark decisions were made. Ethical considerations prevent more details from being revealed. *‘in terms of political leadership I think you know there are some really tough decisions, particularly like the XXXXX and YYYYY (anonymised to preserve anonymity) (sale of City bus and the stock transfer) which was driven through by members who clearly, you know were looking over the horizon and to be honest there were no short term benefits for them in that... (T 27)’.*

As summed up by another councillor, '*... the leader and the Chief Executive at the highest level, they have to agree with each other in very broad terms on certain principles, they must have to otherwise they wouldn't be able to have a working relationship ....So no loose cannons if you like on the top deck; that really wouldn't work...*' (T 17).

The sharing of leadership between leader and Chief Executive and Cabinet and CMT manifests the explicit and implicit division of leadership roles which I analyse in greater detail in Chapter 11. Hennis and Bennis (1999: viii) very aptly summarise the advantages of this partnership, '*the shrewd leaders of the future are those who recognise the significance of creating alliances with others whose fates are correlated with their own*'; this perception of being aligned as if cycling in a tandem was shared by the Council Leader and the Chief Executive. The close working relationship between them, the top officer and councillors i.e. corporate officers and their portfolio holders was visibly observable at the public meetings I attended as well as frequently came up in the course of formal and informal conversations with participants. '*Their combination makes a better leadership than the sum of these two separately*' (T 31); '*When this partnership does well as currently.... it is great*' (T 22) and other comments like that praised their team work.

It was also observed that Council Leader, as the public face, receives the kudos and praise, basking in the limelight but very graciously and liberally sharing it with staff and partners in meetings. This genuine appreciation and praise for the contribution of staff and the unstintingly homage to their endeavours and efforts was also frequently remarked upon.

Often officers, especially the Chief Executive was perceived as receiving the flak; '*taking the blame*' was mentioned by senior officers/ Chief Executive as part of their duties even though the decisions were collectively arrived at or politically decided. In

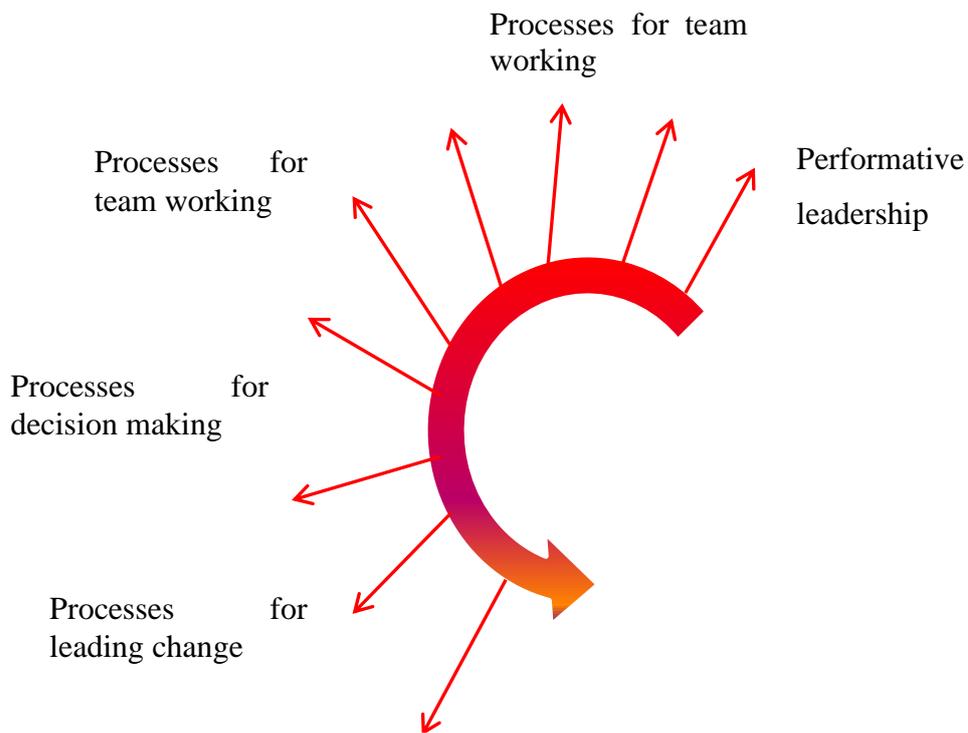
their perception despite the councillors being the public face and despite democratic decision making, officers were often put in the spotlight when things went wrong (T 22, T 27, T 34). They also referred to the pressures of working in a fishbowl syndrome and the adverse media publicity. Failure of decisions in the past was often correlated with breakdown in the relationship between Council Leader and Chief Executive and the Cabinet and the CMT. The belief in a shared destiny was intuitively recognised but it was also perceived by officers as something that requires constant working on as without positive relationships organisational performance falters and dysfunctionality creeps in. Shared leadership is unrelenting in requiring constant attention and working on based upon an explicit conviction that once respect and trust is broken it is difficult to rebuild it and that personality clashes were often quick to rise despite the professional ethos.

The emphasis on the shared also facilitated the role of both officers and councillors in leadership and management. Both officers and councillors have a role to play in leadership and management. They are different, but with overlaps and hence clarity is imperative which needs to be negotiated. Both leadership and management by officers and councillors are crucial in these kindred processes which are collective, shared and complementary based on negotiated interaction.

## **10.6 Conclusion**

This Chapter elaborates the findings related to the leadership processes and practices as elaborated by officers and members at the apex of the local authority and LSP stakeholders. It analysed this theme in terms of the *processes for joined up working, leading change, decision making and team working*. Applying the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, I analysed the findings generating rich contextual data from the semi-structured interviews and the observations carried out. These four processes

identified are crucial to leadership and organisations and characterise what is expected of and performed by leadership.



**Figure 10-1: Dynamic model of processes and practices of leadership**

The processes and practices of leadership enables the local authority to negotiate the complex context and environment by joined up working, leading change, decision making and team working. The organisation is hence empowered to take advantage of opportunities and resources and counter the risks and challenges. The working together enables creative ideas and diverse options to address complex issues and manage and minimise risks using the various skills, experiences and knowledge of the key members (Ancona & Nadler, 1989; Nadler, 1996; Bauman, *et al.*, 1997; Edmondson, *et al.*, 2003). At the same time, it presented challenges which needed to be managed (Nadler, 1996; Sheard *et al.*, 2006; Miles and Watkins, 2007).Support for managing turbulence and

complexity in the external environment is an essential part of top team's functions (Edmondson, *et al.*, 2003). Teamwork and participative group processes promotes diverse members of the team to bring their inputs to tackle complex problems, make decisions after robust discussions and build organisational and partnership wide commitment to their implementation. Decision making and strategies for organisational change within a turbulent environment as it is occurring in daily interactions and everyday action was observed and analysed. This lived experiences of the senior managers, officers and stakeholders revealed the action and doing of leadership, in how they get on through each day in the organisational journey.

The process and practice orientation emphasises the dynamic interplay of action and doing through on-going constructions which unfolded through the creative and the routine, the *modus operandi* of leadership happening through joined up working, managing and leading change, decision making and team working.

# CHAPTER 11 MAKING SENSE OF THE LEADERSHIP NARRATIVES

## 11.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, the focus is on the last of the four key themes, namely the leadership narratives expressed by the participants at the apex of local authority. The analysis of findings through the narrative lenses of leadership has the ability to draw in the other three themes linking them into an overarching leadership framework. The three themes including the context of local authority leadership, shared nature of leadership between officers and members, and process and practices of leadership underpin the narrative of leadership. This phase of analysis and making sense is marked by interpretation of the narrative: drawing upon relevant theoretical frameworks (Sections 2.6 and 6.4.3 of this thesis; Boje, 1991, 2001; Fairclough, 1995; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Oswick *et al.*, 2000; Schall, *et al.*, 2004; Dodge *et al.*, 2005; Ospina and Dodge, 2005, 2005 a; Harris and Barnes, 2006; Morrell, 2006, 2008; Parry and Hansen, 2007; Bolden *et al.*, 2008; Kerr, 2008; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2010) to interpret the findings. The Chapter brings together empirical findings and earlier perspectives to analyse leadership between officers and councillors generally in the public services and particularly in the local authority.

This Chapter situates leadership within leadership narratives of councillors and officers in the local authority stemming from their shared understanding and behaviours, their way of communicating and the use of rich imagery and story-telling, about their experiences and expectations of leadership, what the organisation is doing and where it is headed. The use of words and phrases, the language and content of communication highlighted the normative and best way to fuel change. It also indicated the power of individuals and reflected group dynamics. These stories and narratives foster what has been interpreted as *leadership moments* in organisational life. The next and final

Chapter will conclude the research, highlighting its unique contributions and proposing future research agendas.

## **11.2 Narratives and stories**

The leadership narratives promote certain forms of knowing and understanding, they facilitate reflection and may, or may not, lead to behavioural changes. *Who is* supporting and legitimising the narrative then determines the modes or ways in which it is *relayed* or *told*, finding acceptance in behaviour and culminating in organisational change. How much others can identify with it makes it an enduring part of organisational life, increasing its influence. Acceptance of the contents of the stories and narratives and their diffusion enables shared understandings and behaviour to emerge in ever widening circles spreading through the organisation. Narratives are hence perceived as social phenomena: what has been famously expressed as *language games* (Wittgenstein, 1953; Pondy, 1978; Rudrum, 2005). The way narratives are framed and how they unfold subsumes ethical considerations (Morrell, 2004) and normative understandings. Role of reflection and reflexivity comes centre-stage.

Following from Wittgenstein (1953) and Foucault (2002), narratives were shared activity involving both persuasion and dissuasion, being ultimately tools through which power is exercised. Language, the content of narratives and how it is communicated and interpreted, and translated into action is hence central to the *doing* of leadership.

In this research, narrative embraces shared meanings and themes, images, and metaphors and ways to communicate. The leadership narratives identified meanings intentions, expectations, beliefs, and values; ways of communicating drawing upon knowledge and experience; and rich imagery using metaphors, plots, images and symbols. These leadership narratives focussed on moving the organisation forward in particular ways or bringing a focus and clarity to diverging practices and differences.

Narratives and stories are an important part of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), and Boje describes story-telling in organisations as, ‘*the preferred sensemaking currency*’ (Boje, 1991: 106). Stories and narratives – telling, listening, interpreting, moulding and re-telling them are inherent parts of organisational life. Telling and constructing stories and narratives are integral to communicating, imparting meaning – illustrating and driving home a point, clarity and focus, accompanied by perhaps the possibility of unified action. It enables a drawing into the organisational culture and processes, conversations experiences, best practice, exemplars etc. ‘*(I)n the process of telling.... we create meaning for ourselves*’ (Dean, 1998:24). In this way, the process of sensemaking created understanding, meaning, interpretation and clarification. Stories and narratives assumed importance as they occurred in face to face interactions rather than through the faceless, bland electronic exchanges and become embedded in organisational culture of the *way we do things here*. They swirl within professional departments, across departments, across organisations and seep through the moral fabric of individuals and groups, becoming the warp and weft of organisational and group life.

Participants singled out imagery and metaphors to make sense of and influence a course of action. Stories, narratives and their language were used to shape the sensemaking capacity of staff to drive change in organisational performance (*cf.* Pye, 2004, 2005). The vivid, graphic and potent image of *a listing ship about to sink* depicted the vulnerable state of the organisation and the necessity of changing it as it was heading for disaster. This imagery became the focus for the organisation for a few years, it became a rallying cry to enthuse and motivate the staff.

By using both ‘*talk as well as texts*’, narrative allows more versatile and comprehensive coverage facilitating interactive communication and its easier distribution and channelling (Morrell, 2006: 371). For instance, Marnoch *et al.*, (2000: 977 – 8), using the framework of *stories, plots, characters* and *themes* examined how legitimacy is

created and managed in the NHS through interviews with 40 clinical directors. Similarly, I use a framework of talk, plots, and themes with meanings and images embedded in them which narrate the state of the local authority, in the past, present or the future. The themes are around place and community, organisational culture, political and policy narratives, change and the change journey. Thus, it would appear that narrative could be effectively leveraged to unite and coalesce a complex organisation operating in a multi-agency local governance context.

### **11.2.1 Narratives as knowledge and communication themes**

Leadership is intrinsically about communicating meanings and understandings, *'to describe the strategic direction, to describe the behaviours we're expecting, how we expect to communicate and how we communicate and how we describe the decision making and how we help other senior managers and their staff go through the process to make the necessary changes in the organisation'* (T24).

The shared nature of leadership highlights communication and language as a means of communication (Pierce and Conger, 2003; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006) and how it is used as rhetoric and made sense of, perhaps through stories. Communication and language facilitated the rhetoric of *shared* and was interesting to observe. So while the command and control, hierarchy and directive styles were visible in behaviour at the meetings under observation, it was the rhetoric of shared and consensus, of participation and engagement, and of partnerships and collaborations that was emphasised in speech and interviews. So *playing a part* in creating and developing the vision, *singing from the same hymn sheet*, such phrases were frequently heard. A relational hierarchical chain of leadership extending through the organisation and to partners was also common: *'It's got to be a combination of things where you have some good leaders dotted around an organisation or a city and then the leadership training and development can be kind of, like the kind of oil that seeps into everywhere really*

*and just helps to raise everybody's game and grow leadership'* (T23). Or in the words of another participant, *'...there is I guess a chain of leadership that exists. .... getting the best out of them and at the same time enabling them to feel part of the whole.... you might call a seamless thread throughout the organisation'* (T25). As explained by another corporate officer, *'I think it is about acting a bit like a conductor of an orchestra, in that I think that my role as a leader is to galvanise the effort of large numbers of people towards a particular vision and goal...'* As summed up by another councillor, *'...(l)eadership is one of those curious headings we give to people that describes ... what they do or how they do something. Leadership I think is more about communication and example than ... anything else'* (T 17). It was related to identity construction and legitimisation, *'...What makes a successful (leader) ..... is somebody that most people, the majority, will identify with. He has something in his make-up that people can say, 'I'm a bit like that, I like that'. That's what makes the connection. And that is because of his skill in putting as broad a message across to as broad a swathe of people as he can....'*(T17).

When leadership values, action and behaviour are aligned, the resulting ethical (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1995; Ciulla, 1998; Brown and Trevino, 2006; Ciulla, *et al.*, 2011) or authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner, *et al.*, 2005; Caza and Jackson, 2011) narratives were described as leading by example and from the front. Honest, open, transparent and ethical are the kinds of words that were used to describe it in the interviews. Values and ethical norms were embedded in the notion of *shared; commonalities* despite the differences were highlighted. Working together over time in local authority enabled the development of common language and understanding (Sally, 2002; Crevani *et al.*, 2007) which enables the sharing of leadership<sup>36</sup>. The effort and time invested in this development was also based upon experience in and knowledge of

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<sup>36</sup> The shared nature of leadership is dealt with in detail in Chapter 9.

local government context. The development of a common language is dependent upon the building up over time of shared experience and cannot be taken for granted. When leaders came from other backgrounds, from business or private sector they had to make an effort to learn the language and develop common local authority understandings (expressed alike by officer and member participants who had joined the local authority from other sectors). Councillors, who are from different walks of life emphasised the effort they needed to make in developing a common language and understanding with local authority officers.

By establishing and conveying organisational meaning (Barnard, 1968) leaders extended meaning beyond what is inherent or apparent, often conveying additional or vocalising the hidden meanings. Within the Council there was a strong emphasis on celebrating awards, successful performance and commemorating success and rewards at public events and civic functions. By the hosting of social events or appreciating effort, simple and powerful messages were communicated and reinforced. Both the leader and the Chief Executive played this role to the hilt. *'I think we got a lot better, both about telling our story and presenting the improvement journey and by presenting the Council and the city in the right light. Cynically, we got better at playing the game. Positively, we had the confidence to play the game and some information that demonstrated our direction of travel...'* (T30).

Both senior managers and councillors especially the Chief Executive and the Council Leader operate at the boundary between the organisation and the external environment (Cf. Thompson, 1967; Kettl, 2006; Morse, 2008; Finkelstein, *et al.*, 2009). Gathering and analysing information and conveying it (Daft and Weick, 1984; Lord and Maher, 1991) both internally and externally was what they did routinely and daily. Scanning the environment meant they were able to pick up (or ignore) signals, trends, news and developments taking actions to align the organisation to challenges while

communicating the associated expectations, tasks and risks. Thus, they spent time watching out for imperatives and opportunities as well as alerting against perceived threats and safeguarding the organisation by hedging risks. They exerted influence in garnering and obtaining resources and securing funding from higher level and central bodies. They legitimised and won support for their initiatives locally, regionally and at the centre, always seeking to modify and win support through interactions and networking. They became adept at identifying, aligning and negotiating interorganisational and local governance settings to generate collaborative advantage (Huxham, 1996, 2005; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Silvia, 2011 ).

### **11.2.2 Narrative as medium of expression**

Communicating the intention to change, the expectations, the milestones and the action plan and then evaluating the progress was deemed very crucial in the organisational journey. Cascading information to all levels and stakeholders was an ubiquitous task which was deemed crucial by participants. Taking on the union and removing poor performing managers to demonstrate and send the message that change was imminent was high on the list of the change agenda. Sending signals across the organisations, horizontally and vertically and externally to the partners about the seriousness of the problem and the intention to tackle it was emphasised. It was important to have had a track record and be seen to be credible, determined and authentic in pursuing the stated goals. In the words of the Chief Executive,

*'I had a track record for a start which was good ....I didn't use that too much. But it was there... In terms of the (building) confidence, you know I kept on saying 'it's doable, this is doable'. .... but it's going to be tough' .... 'If you don't want to come on this journey, get off', you know. And so it was this sort of carrot and stick approach. ....This is where we're going, Happy with that, good! Let's go'. And, then it is communicate, communicate, communicate, communicate, communicate, keep communicating down the organisation'.*

Communication was absolutely crucial to building understanding and boosting confidence to tackle poor performance and creating the groundswell for big changes. It was a skilled performative act requiring different styles, messages and content to suit different audience '*communicating about different things in different ways.....*' making '*it as compelling as possible...*' (T23).

So the Chief Executive described the numerous organisational strategies which were complex and huge and redundant in the following words, '*we had thousands of strategies, it was like mushrooms, it popped up behind you, every time you turned around you know. Nobody understood them ...*'. Going on to add that leadership was about providing clear direction: '*...about providing clarity and a direction and then providing commitment and enthusiasm to achieve that direction....Well I think management then falls in behind that (leadership). Management is once you've got the clarity of direction and you've got enthusiasm and commitment to deliver on that direction, and you have the organisation lined up to support that direction, then you divide the task down into smaller tasks which have got to be achieved and managed. Management is more about managing those tasks in order to achieve those objectives and that's the way I conceive it.....*' The member officer relationship had a big part to play in the organisational narrative and their roles overlapped and intersected. This was described as *intersecting circles, Venn diagrams*, interestingly it was also elaborated as: *a two horse chariot. 'It was put to me once that a local authority is like a two horse chariot, you have to have the members and the officers ... and they have to work in synergy and that's ... where authorities go wrong, it's that dysfunctionality between the two. ....As an officer I have a view about lots of things, but I don't have a democratic legitimacy. I have at other authorities driven projects through, sometimes if I could put it crudely despite members .... other times you know, members take the lead. So there is the view that some authorities are member led, some authorities are officer led. I think*

*you'll find most authorities move between the two subtly at certain points. Sometimes it's appropriate. ....Say I was driving an office centralisation project which had a lot of public opposition. And it was actually easier for me to do it than members do it because it was a practical thing. We knew it needed to be done and it's easier for me to drive it than them and other areas, I am thinking of SureStart they took the lead, so I think it did transfer....'* (T 27).

Communicating and empowering at all levels was repeatedly highlighted by all the participants including the need to be transparent, clear, focussed, and *'tell it as it is'*. This included being consistent or as expressed by one officer participant: *'you couldn't give different messages. You know it's no good telling the workforce one thing and the politicians another because they talk to each other....'* The same messages had to be consistently relayed to the media and political parties; so making sure *'we briefed both parties. ....So we would go into and they'd say 'well tell us' and you know you'd tell them, you know there's panic but then its 'what are we going to do about it? ' 'We're going to do this.'* And as long as you had a plan, then they were alright and you gradually build confidence with them ..... A lot of it is about communication, about networking and creating the right set of arrangements for people to feel that they can flourish and actually deliver. So a lot of it is about building confidence in people. Helping them understand what the boundaries of their responsibility are and then letting them get on with it within those boundaries and not constantly needing to be on their back'(Chief Executive).

### **11.2.3 Narratives as imagery through metaphors and analogies**

There were a number of visual images and metaphors which seem to have been so frequently used that they had become embedded in the organisation culture. One such powerful image that was used to drive change was that of *a listing, sinking ship with three big holes*. As elucidated by the Chief Executive, *'I have a picture in my head that*

*this organisation was like a vessel, like a boat, like a ship and it was lumbering, it was slow. It was probably, some of the engines were failing but most importantly of all it had three holes below the waterline which were going to sink it. How they were going to sink it clearly was that if we didn't get these things sorted the government was threatening that they would take over the running of the council..... So we were, you know we were that bad. We were sort of bottom local authority, we had the worse financial position of any local authority in the country, etc, etc. So there were 3 holes below the waterline. Those 3 holes below the waterline which I identified were budget, children's services and waste...'. This focus was also mentioned frequently in the interviews and discussions, sometimes as the 3 Bs, *Babies, Bins and Budgets* which for quite a long time became the operational focus of the organisation. Further, the Chief Executive added, 'If you weren't talking, if you weren't talking about one of those 3 things then I had the attention span of a toddler actually, in the sense that you know I lost interest immediately because that's what I was going to do'. 'This was essentially bins, budgets and babies, that is Children's services, where to put our rubbish and no control over our budgets, so a really strong forensic focus on those areas..' (T 30). This was a consistent refrain both among officers and councillors and even opined by the stakeholders.*

The Chief Executive described the member officer interface as '*a Venn diagram*' in which '*sometimes you're providing leadership, particularly on the political interface where you're providing leadership because you're saying 'this is the way we should be going'. You might have disagreed with the politics of it and so you actually end up managing those politics by seeing the appropriate people, convincing them of a situation, getting them to go in the right direction and making sure the political situation faces the same direction. That's why you know, the rather flippant response I had to 'what is the chief exec's job about'. Well a lot of it is about persuading people to*

*do what they otherwise wouldn't do and preventing them from doing what you don't want them to do. Now that sounds a bit Machiavellian. It's not actually, it's lining people up behind that agreed strategy....'.*

There was invocation of metaphors with a marine flavour due to the geographical and historical legacy of the city. There were numerous instances of transport or movement metaphors perhaps to bring home forcefully the need for change. So in the words of a senior officers, the organisation was like a ship or oil tanker turning albeit very slowly or compared to '*...oil that seeps into everywhere....*' (T23) or is akin to a precariously perched building hanging on the edge of the cliff and likely to topple any time (T18). . There was also frequent reference to a moving bus heading towards increased organisational performance with staff engaged and committed to the change agenda.

The opportunity thrown up by the curbs on local government spending was spoken of optimistically but there was concern as well: '*On the positive side.... I think there is a real opportunity to use this to really show some leadership. Whether we can get out of the day jobs enough to be able to do that*' was worrying the participant. '*So if we are looking at outsourcing of service delivery so that we reduce the costs of that. Positively that could be about changing our relationships with providers, ... market, ... people that receive the services and our workforce and there are lots of positives in there. It could just become about doing it cheaper. ....That will be the challenge, getting that balance right. Can we move forward, or will it just be for rancid cuts to the budget?*' (T30). The participants were concerned about the impact of changes, their speed and long term implications especially for the vulnerable sections of society. Earlier spates of reform had been accompanied by more resources. The fundamental re-thinking about service provision and the very nature of local authority presented a real challenge.

### 11.3 Narratives of place and community

A singular focus on the city and its community was used to build consensus among staff as well as partners with a mix of directive control and engagement. Helping people and communities is at the heart of politics and a dominating ethos for all leaders. It aligned goals and objectives, influencing strategic planning and action. But it still made for tensions as unanimity was difficult to achieve at all times. *'It is about the city, Nagar ... we are all doing the right thing because we all care passionately about Nagar and Nagar's future'* (T32). So an important task was persuading and dissuading people and trying to *'carrel and herd them all the time, in a direction that is good for the city'* (T34). To reach this focus both clarity and simplicity were significant factors (see section 9.3.6).

The special historical heritage and geographical legacy of the place was intertwined in this focus on the city (Diamond *et al.*, 2006) which currently was bequeathing it with *'an energy of regeneration'*. The legacy and location of place could be restrictive as well as liberating with the ability to exert both a *'positive and negative impact....(by helping) to set the direction. Obviously its location ..... will always be a strong part of its future. So I think that can be helpful because it can help you decide 'well who are we, what have we got on our plate here, where are we going'* (T 22). The *'unique geographic location'* and being *'principally one travel to learn or travel to work area'*, made it *'easier to develop a sense of identity for the city without a shadow of doubt'* (T25). This very clear focus contributed to a shared vision and direction: *'collective leadership of a set of people who've got a shared understanding and vision for where we're going as a city'* (T25) which also required taking on a multi-agency and partnership approach, *'the multi-agency approach to strategic leadership.....My job is about influencing a range of partners to share a collective vision for what we want for*

*the city*' (T25). This collective vision<sup>37</sup> was in effect aided by the degree to which the corporate team and Cabinet held a common mental model of the strategy of the organisation.

But such a legacy could also bind it to the past and prevent it from modernising and being forward looking. As elaborated by one senior manager, '*there is generally a sort of ... slow atmosphere ... And so there's a work life balance that sort of drives that .... It does seem very traditional... it doesn't want to put itself out on a limb, it's capable of doing some big things, it's done so with the xxxx (named a major decision which has been deleted to secure anonymity) .....that was obviously very political....*'(T 31). The negative was mentioned as being *stuck in a time and location warp* which prevented it from embracing the new and gave the place a *dependency culture* which manifested as low aspirations among young people and reliance on welfare measures of the state.

Narratives were around this understanding of community and place; as explained by one councillor: '*It is about the city, Nagar (name deleted). There were a number of things which came up during the course of that campaign which probably at another time I might have gone to the newspapers about but chose not to because at that time we really felt we needed to focus on the city and the battle we were having ....you don't want distractions, arguments, split between ruling party and opposition, it would not have helped and it would have been a distraction*' (T32). Dedication to the city's cause meant unity across party lines when confronted with a more powerful enemy. Commitment to place and community was clearly evidenced, in a particular issue where battle lines were drawn between the local and the centre. Yet at other times, the concept of place became a much more nebulous idea with no clear choices and articulation. The notion of place and community was not well defined; '*This notion of community, I think it's too often seen as homogenous and it makes certain assumptions .... And I do have*

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<sup>37</sup> Similar to Pearce & Ensley's (2000) collective vision for TMTs.

*concerns that we cannot round up the usual suspects and tick a box called consultation, that's not good enough.... is it a community of geography?, ....or of interest?..... ....(it) is about inclusiveness and for the many, not just the few. And a collectivist approach with choices that are not chimeras of choice but choices for individuals as well.....'* (T19). By being all things to all people, it had the potential to create problems by its lack of focus or priorities.

The narrative of place and community underpinned the ward councillor's role and gave it moral force, adding-value legitimacy to their routine, mundane tasks that was the bread and butter for the ward councillor role, as explicated '*...our residents are more concerned about parking, cars parked inappropriately on yellow lines, yellow lines rubbing out, potholes in the road, street lights not working, bins not being collected, teenagers causing noises, that's the sort of thing that most councillors get most of the time...*' (T 17). The narrative of place and community acerbated the argument around what is the core purpose of the local authority. This was hotly being debated within the Council and outside among its partners. The urgency was created due to the *big* budget curbs on local government spending. The example of whether the Council should provide and maintain public toilets and swimming pools were among two of the issues being hotly debated in the Local Authority. It fuelled the debate about the purpose of the council - what are the core services they should provide? Some of these services might symbolically capture the spirit of the place, so historical socio-cultural narratives become important within this debate of defining the core services that the local council should provide. For example the defence of an expensive facility because it is the '*focal point of the city*' and the city landscape or skyline would be incomplete without it was used to justify the cost of maintaining and running it.

#### 11.4 The political narrative and understanding

Understanding politics and yet being apolitical was crucial for officers. This non-political party orientation was considered desirable albeit involved difficult balancing acts at times associated with understanding politics and politicians (Also see section 8.2.4). The two frequently mentioned planks for being non-partisan was all party support for all senior appointments as well as briefing both parties. So senior appointments worked best when they enjoyed all party support, the senior officers briefed both/all parties within the constraints of imposed by a leader in council model.

Democratic accountability incorporated trust and partnership between officers and members (Sections 8.2.4, 9.3.8 and 10.5.2). Understanding of the organisational structure and *who is who* facilitated action for the politicians: *'You, very quickly, when you join an organisation find out who the people are that will get things done for you quickly..... The councillor represents the ward community and that's it...'* (T17). As elaborated by another senior officer despite some ground rules regarding what a political decision is as opposed to a service delivery one, there was enough fuzzy areas to bring tension into this crucial relationship. *'...Though there are no hard and fast rules, you just learn where those distinctions are ...'* (T30). As spelled out firmly by participants, it was crucial for senior officers to understand politics and politicians and be politically sensitised to their agendas, priorities, rationales and drivers. Different kinds of evidence would be used for getting support of politicians with varying political credos. In the same vein, the Chief Executive considered managing politics akin to driving a car, knowing the rules, *'that you stay on the left or the right or whatever and you stop at traffic lights...'*

Contested political context emerges due to the presence of the dual dimension or axis – political and organisational/managerial. As clarified by one participant,

*'you have got several axes there. You have the professional vs. the amateur, in a sense. So you have professional leaders and managers working with the amateurs and I am not saying it in a negative manner but you have that axis playing. So you have people who have genuine concerns about delivery at local level, coming through the political arm. They have a democratic mandate to do something rather than the executive position to do something and that is very powerful and that in some way compensates for their amateur stature. You have an executive arm that can often see the right thing to do in their perspective from an executive and professional wing but it may not be ordinarily endorsed by the democratic level of engagement. I think that creates a tension'* (T31).

*'(T)he thing about local government which works well I think is that you've got 2 triangles at the same place, you have your political leadership and you have your local government official leadership and where those two work together well, so you've got a strong political leader and a strong official leader, you know, amongst the officials, you can have an incredibly effective team. Sometimes you see weak political leadership but strong leadership from the officials and that can work as well or it could have very strong political leadership and less strong official leadership and I guess that kind of, that can have its own strengths too. Where you have weak leadership on both triangles, you have a real problem and I'm afraid you do see that far too often'* (T22).

This dualism, overlap, tension was reflected by other participants. The political sphere is oriented to contest and conflict with endless possibilities for affinities and antagonisms – consensus, debate and challenge (Newman and Clarke, 2009). This created the spectre of *political interference* which was ever present and there were claims and counter claims regarding its scale and degree. *'So I can think of a number of examples where we've had some issues that have arisen where there's been a party divide and again our job is to provide the clear XXXX(technical or professional) advice against which any party politics can be played out. Largely speaking in this council, there's I think a kind of collective understanding that politics will not be played with young people and I think that's most helpful. So scrutiny will ask the right questions in terms of getting an understanding of what policies are but wouldn't go looking for*

*political point scoring around the children's agenda'* (T25). By maintaining neutrality in party politics but understanding the political imperatives and intricacies, officers could steer the authority without becoming embroiled in party political activities. There was however, ever present the danger of getting mired in political machinations. Skill and experience enabled them to steer a path through it all.

### **11.5 Narrative of change**

The theme of change (Section 10.3 this thesis) was a consistent thread in the warp and weft of organisational life. The leadership narratives around change enabled the emergence of clarity and extreme focus on what needed to be changed. The organisational journey of improvement started with a singular focus on *'bins, budgets and babies* which were perceived to be *real risk areas*. The image of a sinking ship with three gaping holes further embedded this narrative. This extreme focus and clarity of the change agenda and priorities within it sustained the momentum of change over time. *'So I sort of approached it in quite an extreme manner, it's almost like battle. Battle lines were drawn...'* (T20). Though the processes of leading change were on the whole spoken of as positively, there was some anxiety and concern at the pace and localised nature of change especially when so much was happening to local government: *'I think part of the problem within Nagar is the void between the vision and the tactical'* (T18). Change could also exercise a negative impact especially if it was likely to affect redundancies. This required communication which was honest, respectful and transparent. As worded by a participant, *'you've got to keep talking with them and answering their questions about what it means for them. .... You want them to feel they're having a say, that they're being heard, that .... all of their questions are being answered honestly. But also understanding that some of the answers you give may not be what they want to hear. ....and even when you're saying to them 'we're not going to be able to employ you in the future', I think what people want all the time is to know*

*exactly where they stand. And when there is a communication vacuum, it gets filled with rumour and innuendo' (T23).*

The narrative of change meant being frank to the political leadership, the opposition, media, external stakeholders, finding strategic solutions, celebrating success and demonstrating progress. Communicating and making sure that followers were engaged and committed was crucial. This was enabled by presenting a consistent story and picture of the current state to all stakeholders and then demonstrating progress (Section 10.3 this thesis).

The narrative of change painted a complex picture of change that was messy, adhoc, opportunistic and yet backed by a simplicity of intent, clarity and focus. It included defining and managing the expectations of staff but also partners within the LSP: *'So we've got to be able to paint the picture for staff about what it is we're expecting on behalf of the politicians who are in control but we've also got to help all of our partners understand where the democratic interface comes and how that fits in with the demands they've got from their own very often government department saying what they're expecting. So it's... very complicated ...'*(T 24). The narrative of the organisational journey was frequently elaborated with a stress on the extreme focus and clarity of the change agenda and the priorities.

There was also a strong sense that the present cuts, unlike ones in previous years were long lasting and here to stay. Participants concurred with scholars like Pollitt (2010) in their analysis that there are no quick fixes or magic bullets for the current crisis. So the long hard road to recovery was going to be torturous as well as having many casualties. It was unanimously perceived that the cuts would have a huge impact, spread over a longer period of time and required tough decision making and solutions. What these would mean in practical terms was rarely spelt out. The long term solutions were especially difficult to bring about as they needed investments over a longer term horizon

which was not forthcoming. like infrastructural investments in IT within short term election cycles posed a further problem. *‘We must show some leadership and certainty of direction and to be very clear about that. But we are also going to be engaging with people around that because some of the challenges will be very significant, both for individuals and communities and for people that work for the council. .... there is the right mixture of command and control and engagement and just recognising that people will be feeling it personally... we are asking them to do quite difficult things while their future is uncertain and that is quite a difficult balance to play’* (T 30).

The social and economic implications of the cuts on communities served by the local authority were perceived to be huge and unprecedented; it was also likely to be painful which would make them feel differently about it. In the words of one participant, the impact of the cuts *‘is going to be very, very huge. The response from the community is going to be interesting. Everyone says we have got to go through this, but when it affects them, then it is different. And, that will be a big issue politically. We have now a clear direction, where we need to be going, in fact in financial terms. But we are not so clear what the social or economic implications of that are. So how many people do we have to lose; what services do we have to stop doing, delivering; what communities does that hit; what are the implications of that; if we make savings it can end up costing us more - if you make savings and end up having more people in care, those savings actually end up costing you more not less, it is those sorts of tensions. They are going to be there, only the tensions are going to get greater, in the organisation, outside the organisation, everywhere’* (T34).

The narrative of change incorporated new and flexible ways of working including being responsive, interactive with more e-communications, being smarter and crisper, more flexible. This is described by a Cabinet member:

*'...we have to therefore change the way in which we work, we have to adopt a much more modern, more flexible, more mobile way of working, which responds to the needs of our customers because those needs are changing, so you know we've got to operate more, do more e communications, we have to make the website more interactive because I mean, we're all quite happy to sit at home and operate our bank account aren't we? ....in that case ....why don't we allow (people) ...to manage their own council tax account and that would save us having thousands of enquiries and phone calls and visits from people in the city to tell us things like I've changed my address....if we could make the website interactive ...then people would do that for us and they would actually think 'Wow that's (great), you know the council have really got that right' but actually they're doing our work for us really... '.*

Though generally, there was agreement that the organisation had undergone change. The perception about the pace of change was contested as some participants felt it was too rapid while others decried its incremental pace. The persistence of formulas that worked in the past was perceived as problematic; there was scepticism about how useful it would be in the future. Expressing these doubts, one participant described it thus:

*'we have improved dramatically over the past few years ... it is ....difficult... 'I think the danger is, we will continue to make progress at an incremental rate. But that won't be sufficient for us to avoid the cliff edge or turn the tank around before the ice.....We're turning. But just not quick enough... ... incremental improvement plateaus out at a point.... it's been an incredibly tough journey to get to here. But you don't know how to make that next grade up. .... and I think there is a real danger that once you have a formula that seems to work, you persist with that formula and I think the danger is you persist with that formula for too long...'(T18).*

The system of performance appraisal based on individual rather than collective measurement fosters silo behaviour as the individual was monitored on their performance of a special task or service which made them want to ensure or maintain resource allocation and hence did not really build corporate behaviour or team working

across delivery lines. A culture of risk aversion, of doing things as they have always been done was also described. As opined by one senior manager,

*'... one of the big problems is that corporate behaviour is very difficult to come by .... we still have that silo behaviour because ultimately people are measured about how successful the council is and individual is still seen by how well we do at safeguarding children and that's obviously a critical activity but it doesn't necessarily breed corporate behaviour, it does breed a very specific protection about that sort of area and looking after your resource allocation to make sure you can do what actually you're measured upon...(t)he risk averse nature of the organisation is definitely there I would say. I've got no doubt about that. ....there seems to be a lack of willingness to challenge back on some things'* (T18).

This complacency had seeped into the organisation and people's mind sets and required to be shifted (Section 8.2.6 this thesis).

### **11.6 Narrative of culture the way we do things here**

Communication, its language and usage including the narratives were steeped in values, beliefs, symbols, rituals and artefacts and are linked with organisational culture (Geertz, 1973; Schein, 1985; Kunda, 1992; Jones, 2005; Alvesson, 2012) or *ways of doing things* and include both common meanings and symbols, shared rules but material artefacts. There was general agreement that the organisational culture was changing rapidly, in the words of the Council Leader,

*'...( new staff by) bringing different skills into the council ..it was changing and I think, I'm still doing this actually, changing the culture of the council. When I first became a councillor and you'd go and say to an officer, 'can we do this? can we do that? here's a good idea. 'No we can't do it'. I say 'Why not', 'Well we never have, we've always done it this way' and we gradually changed the culture. I don't have any officers saying to me 'We can't do it'. We can, if there's a problem we solve it. We don't have 'We can't do it'. We can, we can do anything we want...'*

There was also a perception that changing culture in an organisation of this size and complexity was not going to be easy. It was referred to as a *mammoth task*, a *culture shock* where *'you know so you were pushing at all these doors which were closed to you...'*(T20). The organisation had clearly defined boundaries and segments, the silos. As pointed out by the Chief Executive,

*'the union said it to me, 'we've heard this all before' and 'chief execs generally last about twelve months at the maximum. So you'll come and go and nothing will happen'. You can imagine the conversation that followed.... 'and I will guarantee that if you don't work with me, life will be more painful than if you work with me'. So we had some tough conversations...'* The conversations with the staff were not much different, as the Chief Executive recalled, with *'individuals in the workforce, you got the most unbelievable responses. People were happy to say to the Chief Executive, 'we don't do that like that down here, you might have done that like where you were but we don't do it like that down here', would happily say that to a Chief Executive (with emphasis). I, 'what????!!!.You know I couldn't believe it. My answer was rather crude and forgive me, I said, 'I know you don't do it like that down here. The way you do it is crap, absolute crap. Excuse me and we're not going to do that anymore'. ...we're going to do it this way and we'll get better'*.

Though the dominant tendency was towards change, there was resistance to change as well. This contributed to a lack of uniformity across such a complex organisation, differences were pointed out in respect of speed, pockets of good or bad practice, drivers etc. *'I think there are pockets of leadership and decision making and things that we do that are good and I think are best practice, but it is pockets .... we don't seem to be able to roll out the learning from that across the organisation....'* (T18). As elaborated by a senior councillor, *'...because this Nagar City Council is full of dead wood and I don't mean that in a disparaging way. .... it means you are set in your ways. You're not willing to accept change, you're not willing to consider new ideas. .... so if you want me to go to college and get a new qualification, I want to be paid more money for it.... There were traces of a worrying refrain: some officers characteristically*

*considered 'the people of Nagar to be nuisances, who keep ringing them up, complaining all the time. Now that's not how all the officers are like...'* (T17). There was a perception that changes to a smarter more flexible way of working was required not only among the officers but also the members.

The bureaucratic culture was sometimes defined as *'9-5 culture'*, *'cultural perma-frost'*, *'that will do culture'*, *'that's not the way we do things here'*, *'that's not how it is done'*, that the citizens who receive services are a *'nuisance'*, among others. But there was general agreement that things were beginning to change although there was a lack of agreement regarding the pace of change, the spread of change and the depth of change. So elements of the bureaucratic culture and traditions that required to be changed and had changed included, having *'an attitude towards the population, an attitude towards public service...'*, treating citizens *'not as customers but as nuisance'*. There was also references to the *cultural perma-frost* which was a layer in the organisation below which it was difficult to change things, a *'that will do culture'* also described as a *'nine to five'* culture. Such criticisms were not related to this particular council but were associated with local government generally, as expressed in the voice of a senior councillor, *'...I mean one of the criticisms of local government ...they tend to do business in a rigid and formal and a prescribed way which .... has sort of evolved over many, many years and of course once you join an organisation who's culture is to operate in that way, you get sucked into it don't you and then sometimes you don't even see it and even though it's right in front of you because it is just the way, 'Well we've always done it that way haven't we...'*. Elaborating further on the need to get rid of a layer in the organisational hierarchy that was holding back change, the Chief Executive said, *'... the analogy I have in my head ... I remember as a kid picking up a bit of carpet that had been thrown out in the garden, and I picked it up and there was nothing growing under it and I was looking for insects and lizards and chucked it back. It*

*fascinated me that after about 3 days there were loads of things growing, loads of things and what I realised in management was that if you took, stripped down a layer that was holding people back, there was a lot of good people in the organisation that just started to bloom and blossom and people who had been written off because they're working below poor managers and they just started, the place started budding all over and that was really good because then you started getting peer pressure on other areas to improve you know and that was good... '.*

### **11.7 Narrative of the leader**

Narrative of the bold hero or top team performing swashbuckling kind of activity did emerge from time to time in the narratives (Cf. Edmondson *et al.*, 2003; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2006; Bolden *et al.*, 2008; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2010). This bold leader at the top however did need followers, staff, people, partners to buy in, through persuasion and convincing. So though the leader at the top had responsibility for change especially for the more transformative agendas, equally they had the responsibility of *getting people on the bus* with them. Their strategy incorporated a powerful yet simple focus and vision, employing command and control and engagement, motivation and communication. The narrative of change, decision making and team working were crucial and leaders at the apex were seen as the catalyst, the igniter, the initiator for the big changes. So in the words of the Chief Executive,

*'I think my role, part of my role is to provide leadership, I am now going to provide leadership, happy for you to shoot me down in flames but this is my view of where we should go on the LSP.... ...we did that presentation and I thought you know I would get 'who the hell are you coming into this city, you've been here five minutes and you're telling us what to do' .....people said 'what do you do with these strategies we've got'. I said you know 'there's a big green bag over there, you know I suggest we collect them in there and we just have these', because I could understand this. And I tell you what, I can't understand those strategies, I don't know how they link together and blah, blah, blah, you know.*

*...So what we're doing here is helping me because we're getting back to something really simple. And, what we got was, 'Thank God somebody has provided some clarity....' (Chief Executive).*

*So I had a very, very clear focus. Probably the most extreme focus I've ever had in my career and I made sure that all the directors had that focus. I gave the members that focus and I just focused the organisation to deal with those issues. So we dealt with those issues over the next 2 years and once we started getting a bit of success around dealing with them, people could see it could be done and then we gradually just worked our way down the agenda. There's a triangle, we had 3 issues at the top, the 3, I mentioned and then gradually we worked our way down the agenda and we'd increase it to you know, we had 8 strategic objectives next and we gradually worked down, so we got to a position where we were dealing with more and more things and you built confidence into the organisation because people realised you can do it. I could focus more away from those 3 things and say you know you're dealing with that and you're dealing with that. So you know we built an agenda going down the organisation....' .*

When talking about the strong leaders at the apex, historical figures with the leader-like characteristic were invoked: *'You know to me a leader, kings of the past would lead their armies from the front, by example, they were courageous, they were quick in thought, they thought on their feet, they were able to manoeuvre, out manoeuvre the enemy.... Being included, buying, getting them to buy into this vision is part of it. So communication comes into it ...' (T17).*

Though the vision was leader inspired, it owed its success to being leveraged into a collective vision and strategy with broad ownership and wide commitment. This buying-in from members, officers at all levels and even the partners, *'crea(ting) a groundswell of awareness' (Chief Executive).* Similarly, another corporate officer invoked the image of a conductor of an orchestra, their role being *'as a leader is to galvanise the effort of large numbers of people towards a particular vision and goal' (T23).*

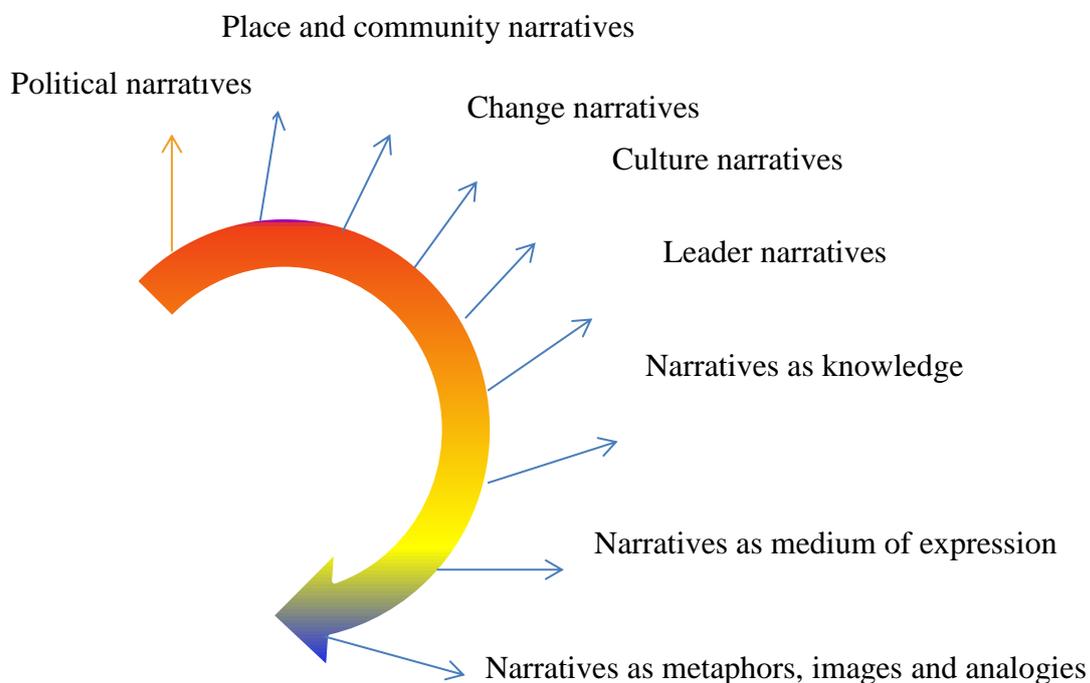
So the leader or leaders at the apex had a responsibility and accountability although how they made sense of it varied not only from person to person but varied also according to the situation. As pointed out by a corporate officer, *‘Good executives, they often have two characteristics, they are not restricted by rules, so they are happy to make their own rules, they don’t say, ‘well we can’t do that. They say, how can we do that?’, which is different. Oh how can we get from A to B and we duck and dive to get there and we will make it. And, they are quite happy to live with complexity, which they can’t always explain....’*

Leaders and leadership were intertwined concepts difficult to unwind and unravel into separate elements or constituent parts. In the words of a stakeholder, *‘But you cannot lead if you do not have followers. You just can’t; you are not a leader by definition. ‘If people aren’t following, you aren’t leading’. So for me leadership is about: create that vision, know that you have got to generate the followership, and act with humility. That is my T-shirt slogan’* ( T31). As elaborated by another participant, *‘someone who can lead from the front, someone who can think strategically. I think it is very important that the leader has the ability to see the wider picture and actually see and build a team who can actually fulfil the brief... It is about negotiations really. Strong leaders, if you look at LSP, for example, the only way that can work and you can make decisions about priorities in the city is by getting leaders in a room because they have a capacity to actually make those decisions....’* (T33).

## **11.8 Conclusion**

The recounting and listening of stories facilitated the development of critical reflexivity – it was integral to being leaders in leadership situations working with others – leaders and other people. While for me the researcher, it allowed a weaving of theory, practice and interpretation through reflection. These leadership narratives facilitated communication, useful in focussing attention and prioritising action and motivating the

staff in such a large and disparate organisation. Narratives enabled the participants to interweave and move between the past, present and future. The telling and retelling stories of lived leadership experience conveyed its complexities by the use of thick description. Narratives can hence be powerful means to foster legitimacy and prioritisation for a course of action and to bring focus and continuity of resources within different parts of the local authority and beyond its boundaries with its partners and other agencies.



**Figure 11-1: Dynamic model of narratives of leadership**

Narrative had a descriptive and analytical advantage; language is used as a resource or a tool to reach an outcome, often in the hands of leaders. Its resource value lies in its capacity to get aligned and embedded within the organisational routines, talk, processes and practices both in the individual as well as collective levels of consciousness.

In this Chapter I have identified the narratives of leadership which emerged from the discussions and interviews with the participants while describing the leadership of the

local authority and how these narratives were used and made sense of. Their influencing capacity is evidenced by the wide currency they gained in organisational life and working. Communication and language facilitated the rhetoric of the narratives. It was interesting to observe how they were entrenched and internalised in cognition and behaviour at the individual and group levels. So while the command and control and directive leadership went largely unremarked, though it was visible in behaviour at the meetings I attended, the rhetoric of shared, of consensus, of place and community, of politics and political understanding, of change and organisational culture was emphasised in talk and text, through speeches at the meetings as well as in conversation with me. So playing a part in it together, singing from the same hymn sheet were some of the phrases which emphasised collaboration and sharing and were used frequently. The narratives of the three holes in a sinking ship were used very effectively to drive change in performance and culture.

The leadership narratives identified and engaged with deeper organisational meaning and symbolism. Narrative and story is used as medium of expression and communication to express meanings, understandings, knowledge, explanations and learning.

In the process of telling and retelling stories of lived leadership experiences around the tasks of managing change, making improvements in performance, shifting organisational culture etc, there can be a coming together, a forging of a shared and ever deepening understanding of the complexities involved in taking effective action and in doing leadership. The identification of learning moments, the turnaround moments in the organisational journey of improvement were particularly engrossing - the telling of a journey shared, of critical reflexivity, introduced the possibility in the future of using these in workshops for a '*weaving of theory, practice and reflection*' (Crawford *et al.*, 2002: 170). The leadership narratives through this interweaving would enable shared

meanings, ways of communicating and the use of metaphors for making organisational journeys, of a coming together of diverse ends and elements in multilogues of deepening levels of understanding, behaviour and action. These narratives brought to the fore the complexities and challenges of leadership within the dynamic context of local authority.



## CHAPTER 12 CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND THE FUTURE

### 12.1 Introduction

This research has explored the phenomenon of leadership at the apex of a democratically elected local authority within the context of local government in England. This leadership is envisaged as a fluid fractal, a kaleidoscope with changing yet recurring, iterative patterns, continuously being and moving, composed of the four thematic lenses with their multivariate elements. These create myriad patterns like those on sand and make leadership a moving, ever changing and dynamic phenomena. The research has identified four themes which emerged from the empirical material generated as 1) the context of local authority leadership, 2) the shared-relational nature of leadership between officers and members, 3) processes and practices of leadership and 4) leadership narratives expressed and perceived at the apex of local authority. This Chapter brings together conclusions from the findings, drawing them into a coherent whole through the meta-theoretical framework of leadership with its four substantive lenses. This throws light upon leadership, between officers and members particularly in *the* local authority in the South West of England and more generally in the public services and extending possibly to leadership in other sectors as well.

This research brings together social constructivist and interpretive paradigms of inquiry to examine the emerging contextual, social, shared, relational, processual and practice based, and narrative understandings of leadership at the apex of local authority. It explores and analyses the social construction of leadership in the voices of the senior officers, members and key stakeholders – the voices from the apex and their understandings and interpretations of the social constructions of leadership. This leadership is analysed in terms of a kaleidoscope – a fluid forming, reforming, being

and changing, with new patterns emerging and collapsing and re-forming, ceaselessly, similar yet different. The analogy with a kaleidoscopic fractal enables a rich understanding of leadership rooted in a specific context yet with endless possibilities of leadership built from the permutations and combinations of the four themes. This Chapter presents the conclusions of the research, highlighting its unique contributions in terms of paradigm and methodology, theory framework of leadership and leadership practice and development. Finally, it proposes future research agendas building upon this research.

## **12.2 Strategic findings of the research**

The main findings are enumerated in terms of the four themes: context, shared nature, process and practice and the narratives of leadership research. The leaders at the apex can be either elected members or appointed officers or a dynamic yet flexible combination of these two. Within a context of democratically elected local authority, officers and members at the strategic apex work together within the democratically constituted local government process. Hence, their leadership imperative is to coexist as collective and interdependent, complementary and consensual, with shared understandings, duties, responsibilities and accountabilities. But ever present are the grains of tension accruing from this dualism which can and does flare its hydra head. It imposes upon the individuals at the apex the responsibility of managing these stresses and strains. As many institutional processes abet as well asacerbate this process. By emphasizing the top as a *team*, the leadership also glosses over the prevailing inequalities and power imbalances between groups of officers and members.

This research has explored how leadership is situated, shared and occasioned between officers and members, processed and deployed as narratives. Both officers and members are passionate about their commitment to the better or improved vision of delivery of services guided by their sense of what the core purpose of local authority is.

But there are differences in the ways they implement or seek to implement this vision and in how they define the improved state. Though alignment and working together is enabled because of their commitment and passion, there is additional effort, energy and investment required to bridge their differences and divergences specifically with respect to implementation. This makes this relationship between officers and members difficult and stressful at times. But it was widely acknowledged as something that almost came with the territory of leadership of local authority. Vital to the substantive meta-framework of leadership that evolves is the awareness that leadership is situated in a complex context with nested, interlinked variables which occasion and influence and are in turn influenced by the interactions, relationships, shared cognitions and behaviours between officers and members, the processes and practices of leadership and their narratives.

This Chapter seeks to bring together the exploration of leadership through the four lenses before mounting a challenge to the hegemony of the more dominant leadership theories. At this stage the discussion is meant to be suggestive rather than conclusive; its limited aim is to make a plausible case for the four themes in leadership research with the belief that these lenses can help to conceptually explain the dynamic phenomenon of leadership in local authority, the public sector and other sectors more generally.

### **12.2.1 Context of leadership**

The context in which local authority is situated can be seen as diverse and fragmented, composed of factors that are continuously moving, forming and re-forming (Chapter 8, this thesis). It is influenced by the wider historical, economic, social, political, and fiscal, as well as more local and organisational factors and issues.

From the empirical data generated, the classification of the context resulted in the categories represented in table 12.1.

**Table 12-1: Description of the typology of leadership context**

<b>Context typology</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>National vs. local</b>	The context arising out of the unitary and centralised nature of government in which the local level of government has a hierarchy superimposed upon it with the centre yielding considerable more power and influence such that the difference between the centre and the local was deeply pronounced and perceived
<b>Recession and budgetary pressures</b>	The context stemming from the global, economic and financial crisis and recession which has led to significantly reduced funding and resources for local authority. The crisis has led to major changes, including a fundamental re-thinking about the local authority
<b>Policy</b>	The policy context arising from development of public policy through all its various stages of design, implementation and evaluation, feedback and changes therein
<b>political including Big P and small p</b>	The political context arising out of political and democratic processes which accords local authority a pre-eminent place among other local agencies delivering local services as well as the political context arising out of party politics, political ideology and manifestoes which greatly engages and occupies councillors
<b>Local place</b>	The local context in which local authority operates with its own sustainable vision for the place, however defined, (which may or may not be clear) such that local groups and communities influence and in turn are influenced by what local authority does or does not do. Local issues included plans on which people, communities and the media had strong emotive feelings like the location of an incinerator and nationally prescribed scaling down of a public sector organisation
<b>Within organisation</b>	The internal task and organisational context with its organisational structure, culture, change initiatives, tasks, projects/programmes, teams, resources and people

Tripathi, 2013

By its very nature context inheres the presence of boundaries and differences that exert varying pressures on the cadre of officers and councillors and key stakeholders.

Participants referred directly and indirectly to the differences – the dividing walls as well as the spaces between them which were created, emphasised or deemphasised, enabling as well as constraining the leadership. These drivers, imperatives, and priorities, sometimes subtly, sometimes more directly and forcefully brought focus as well as a blurring through a range of complex and contradictory goals, agendas and pressures upon the local authority.

These nested, contested, competing and changing contexts frame the space or terrain in which the leadership is located or emerges, performed and made sense of. The linkage between context and the leadership of a local authority is a dynamic two-way interaction whereby local authority influences and is influenced by the context. These contexts convey meanings and are concerned with variations in understanding intentions, beliefs, values, and emotions that reflect the situated leadership reality rather than an objective reality *per se*. These various contexts are *constitutive*: becoming a medium of cognition, expression and behaviour to communicate and providing the space for interaction and relationships, where the processes and practices and the narratives of leadership are embedded. These contexts were largely multi-level, operating at the individual, group and multi-agency levels. They embraced and framed organisational change and vision, culture and politics. Knowledge and experience of these contexts impacted upon the ability to influence them, giving their owners explanatory and learning potential and power over. These contexts provided opportunities of learning from experience and practice. By being meaningful to individuals as well as groups/collectivities, the nested and constituted contexts have the force to change the world they occupy; they are hence crucial lenses to understand and explain the leadership of local authority.

### **12.2.2 Shared nature of leadership**

The concept of *shared* and relational leadership (Chapter 3, this thesis) is especially applicable to *public* leadership of local authority, due to the presence of the political and

the managerial interface. In other contexts it is meaningful owing to the complexity of organisations in an interrelated global world. The social constructions of leadership that emerge from the rich connections and interdependencies between officers and members at the apex are rooted in complex context of local authority (Chapter 3, 4 and 8, this thesis). The nature of *shared* and the meanings that officers and councillors attribute to it are wide ranging and contested, in the sense that they are constantly negotiated and fluid rather than fixed. Their approaches to sharing are continuously being renewed, the construction and deconstruction within a context that is both multiple and diverse and within which differences are both acknowledged and taken for granted. Within this vast, organisationally fragmented, and dispersed local authority, there are many divides with different locations and professions to name just two such splits. The coming about of a *shared* sense and understanding which lead to action are purposive acts, something which leaders have to strive to bring about. The *rewards* that a sense and action of *shared* brings about is universally valued by the participants, it has an intuitive appeal rooted in the democratic and politicised environment of local authority. At times the presence of an emotive issue like perceived terrorist threat or closure of a major regional employer had the potential to coalesce or forge understandings and behaviours, bringing in a sense of the *shared* while subduing the stridency of the fissiparous platforms and voices. The *shared* nature of leadership can be positive and complementary resulting in *win-win* outcomes and its absence can be a destructive force in organisational life. This sense of *shared* and the action it enables makes the officers and councillors at the top ‘*a very powerful combination. But if you can’t get that, then it can be a destructive combination, I guess, at the worst (T2)*’. This conceptualisation of *shared* with its range of meanings and dynamics is explored in all its nuances in Chapter 9.

The shared nature of leadership recognises differences and boundaries which create spaces for collaboration and consensus but also for tensions and conflict. The meaning

of *shared* is analysed in terms of 6 types of categories which are illustrated in table 12.2.

**Table 12-2: Description of typology of *shared* leadership**

<b><i>Shared</i> constitutive elements</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><i>Shared</i> as collective as opposed to individualised</b>	The collective nature of the <i>shared</i> leadership along a continuum with collective and individualised as the two analytical extremes
<b><i>Shared</i> cognition and behaviour</b>	Purpose, vision, direction and strategy which underpins the action taken
<b><i>Shared</i> accountability and responsibility</b>	Accountability and responsibility which is <i>shared</i> between officers and members both formally and informally
<b><i>Shared</i> nature of the influence process</b>	Multi-directional, and reciprocal influence process which are shared in the sense of interactions which are reciprocal, collaborative, complementary and provide benefits/advantages
<b><i>Shared</i> in terms of acknowledging differences and similarities</b>	The sense and action of <i>shared</i> is underpinned by differences within the similarities (i.e. they are not the same)
<b><i>Shared</i> as commitment to place</b>	The emergence of <i>shared</i> from a commitment to place – as a geographical entity or travel to work area

Tripathi, 2013

In analysis, the meaning of *shared* and how it was perceived by officers, members and stakeholders was complex with layers and nuances: there were subtleties that needed to be worked out within individual relationships and specific situations and issues. The sense of *shared* in many instances appeared as a normative and desirable or aspirational state. In conclusion its understanding and impact on behavioural interaction was as significant as the process of bringing it about. The process of creating *shared* purpose

and understanding was in itself a powerful leadership narrative. It was through the process of reaching the *shared* state that the cognitive and behavioural took seed and benefited the local authority. *Shared* leadership helped to fill the gaps between top tier leaders and the rest of the organisation creating the ‘*chain of leadership*’ (T25) down the length and breadth of the organisation extending its roots in local partnerships. It fostered clarity, simplicity and continuity of policy and made efforts at being consultative fostering client/customer participation as well. An analysis of the *shared* is significant for the research as it describes and determines the nature of leadership of a local authority- how leadership emerges from interactions between officers and members and the challenges of bringing the *shared* about in local authority. *Shared* leadership meant appreciating that formal leaders are supported and support leadership throughout the hierarchical levels – crucial is the relational and collaborative subtext where leading and following become ‘*two sides of the same set of relational skills ..... in a context of interdependence*’ (Fletcher, 2004: 648). The *shared* nature of leadership hence entwines the leading and the following manifested through various actors and processes.

The *shared* is a critical perspective as it challenges or turns on its head the traditional command and control and leader centric perspective. The leader in charge of the flagship of leadership, while the followership follow on – this traditional picture is replaced by one in which all the followers have the potential and opportunity for leadership . Within the local authority, there are reservations to every one joining in due to the formal leadership positions occupied by senior officers and councillors, historical legacy and statutory and constitutional provisions within hierarchically organised structures and cultures. The *shared* and nuanced picture that emerges is one with a chain of leadership with the Council Leader and Chief Executive at the top of this hierarchy; they exercise leadership by persuasion and dissuasion – influencing teams including

those of senior officers and councillors in various combinations and extending to partners outside the organisation. The *shared* ushers and forges patterns of alignment between diverse people and groups linking understanding, purpose and behaviour. The idea of a *shared* and common future allows partnership and collaboration between officers and councillors, leaders and followers, leaders and partners. The prospect of mutual benefits leads to relational complementarity creating interdependence among diverse asymmetries. *Shared* leadership increases the possibility of including minority and divergent views backed by evidence and information into managerial problem solving and decision making, increasing the legitimacy of leadership and inculcating positive attitudes to work. Leadership is intrinsically about communicating meanings and understandings to lead the organisation by providing strategic direction and clarifying the milestones, journey path, direction and the time scales. Authentic leadership where speech and text are aligned with behaviour is desirable; honest, open, transparent and ethical are the kinds of words that were used to describe it in the interviews

Communication, language, stories, symbols *etc.* facilitated the narrative of *shared* and was interesting to observe. So while the command and control, hierarchy and directive styles were visible in behaviour at the meetings under observation, it was the rhetoric of *shared* and consensus, of participation and engagement, and of partnerships and collaborations that was emphasised in speech and interviews. So *playing a part in creating and developing the vision, singing from the same hymn sheet*, such phrases were frequently heard.

### **12.2.3 Process and practice of leadership**

This theme focuses on the process and practice of leadership in daily interactions emerging through social interactions which are continuously renewed through on-going construction and reconstruction of leadership. It is the making sense of leadership *in* and

*through* social interactions and social situations. This construction and reconstruction assumes within it an element of subversion, of contesting and challenging the process by drawing on alternative sources of inspiration and action.

Referring to the actions, reactions and interactions that constitute the leadership processes and practices of leadership, participants highlighted the shaping and intervening, in setting priorities and directions, managing and leading change, joined up working, decision making, and team working. Leadership is performative, ‘*evolutionary, revelatory, experimental and interdependent*’ (Carroll *et al.*, 2008: 371), it is always being created. Within the process and practice of leadership, behaviours, expectations, decision making and roles and relationships are continuously negotiated and reformulated. The process and practice narratives capture leadership on the move expressed by the participants as reflections on leadership. It contributes to the critical understanding of leadership phenomena as it is unfolding. Such an emphasis also draws away from the individual leader perspective. The focus is on action of leadership, the doing of leadership – how leaders ‘*get on*’ (Chia and Holt, 2006: 647) with the work of leadership which mainstream leadership research has thrown little light on.

This process and practice perspective permits a focus on what is going on in organisations rather than its abstract or ideal conceptualisation, highlighting both the micro and the macro aspects of organising and moves away from a spotlight on a few individuals. This view of leadership as doing or performative inheres the organisational discourse between the haves and the have-nots, bringing with it notions of hierarchy, control, power with directive as well as collective collaboration and participation. It is accompanied by a baggage of ways of directing and influencing behaviour and actions including challenging the ordinary and the everyday (Chapter 10, this thesis).

**Table 12-3: Description of typology of leadership processes and practices**

Constitutive elements	Description
<b>Joined up working</b>	Joined up working is crucial for facilitating a working together to solve local issues and ensure effective delivery and included not only officers and councillors, but manifested across the organisation and to partners for delivery of local public services
<b>Leading and managing change</b>	Process of change is largely around organisational improvements, making a difference to the place and the people, transforming culture and ensuring keeping pace with <i>big</i> changes in the external context including those around resources, budgets, strategic plans and their implementation and improvements
<b>Decision making</b>	Decision making is around improvement projects, reforms, corrective action, alternative options, risk minimisation, corrective choices, resource allocation, technology, staffing including placements and appointments, rewards, promotions and incentives, structure and goals, direction and mission, networking and partnerships
<b>Team working</b>	Team working moderates the relationships between officers and councillors in a hierarchy of teams and is instrumental in establishing consensus and engagement, support for decision implementation, driving performance and making transformational change

Tripathi, 2013

From the empirical data generated, the classification of the process and practice resulted in the categories, illustrated in Table 12.3.

In analysis process and practice of leadership enables the local authority through joined up working, leading change, decision making and team working. The organisation is hence empowered to take advantage of opportunities and resources and counter the risks

and challenges. The working together enables creative ideas and diverse options to address complex issues, and manage and minimise risks using the various skills, experiences and knowledge of the key members. Support for managing turbulence and complexity in the external environment is an essential part of the apex functions. Teamwork and participative group processes promote diverse members of the team to bring their inputs to tackle complex problems and *wicked* issues. Decisions are made and implemented after robust discussions that build commitment to their implementation, and their absence marks downward slide for local authority performance. Decision making and strategies for organisational change within a turbulent environment as it is occurring in daily interactions and everyday action was observed and analysed. This lived experiences of the senior managers, officers and stakeholders revealed the action and doing of leadership, in how they get on through each day in the organisational journey.

The process and practice findings highlight the dynamic interplay of action and doing through on-going constructions which unfolded through the creative and the routine, the problematic and the mundane, the *modus operandi* of leadership unfolding through joined up working, managing and leading change, decision making and team working.

#### **12.2.4 Narrative of leadership**

The leadership narratives are analysed to understand the leadership of the local authority in the voices of the leaders at the apex, the officers, members and the key stakeholders in the LSP. Through these narratives expressed by the participants at the apex of local authority, I analyse the context, relational, processual, and *shared* nature of leadership of apex of local authority. Use of the narrative lenses has the ability to draw in the other three themes including the context of local authority leadership, *shared* nature of leadership between officers and members, process and practices of leadership including their roles and relationships that are continuously being constructed and reconstructed.

The leadership narratives promote certain forms of knowing and understanding depending on who is supporting and legitimising the narrative which then determines the modes or ways in which it is relayed or *told*, embedding partly or wholly in organisational culture. Acceptance of the contents of the stories and narratives and their diffusion enables *shared* understandings and behaviour to emerge. Narratives are hence understood as social phenomena or as *language games* (Chapter 11, this thesis) or as ethical and normative barometers. Participants used imagery and narrative to understand, communicate and make sense of and influence a course of action. The use of language to shape the sensemaking capacity of staff was potently used to drive change for improved organisational performance. The vivid image of a listing ship about to sink depicts the state of the organisation and the necessity of changing it as it was heading for disaster; it became the focus for the organisation for a few years, a rallying cry to enthuse and motivate the staff and its partners in the LSP. Hence, images and phrases became crucial in the vocabulary and communication of structural and cultural change to improve performance.

The leadership narrative embraces *shared* meanings and themes: as knowledge themes, as medium of expression and imagery. The narratives identified meanings and intentions, beliefs, values; ways of communicating drawing upon knowledge and experience; and rich imagery using metaphors. They focussed on moving the organisation in particular ways. Telling and constructing stories and narrations are integral to communicating, imparting meaning - this sensemaking involves telling, listening, and re-telling in the process creating understanding, meaning, interpretation and clarification. These leadership narratives enabled communication; they became a rallying cry to focus and prioritise action and motivate the staff. Narratives enabled the participants to interweave and move between reflexive links joining the past, present and future, bringing together cognition and actions through reflection (*Cf.* Cunliffe,

2009). The telling and retelling stories of lived leadership experience conveyed its complexities by the use of *thick description*. The member-officer relationship had a big part to play in the leadership narratives and apart from being described as *intersecting circles*, *venn diagrams*, it was also couched as existing with inherent tensions as well as alignment and similarity.

From the empirical data generated by the lens of leadership narratives, the categories revealed are illustrated in Table 12.4 (they are analysed in detail in Chapter 11, this thesis).

**Table 12-4: Description of typology of leadership narratives**

<b>Constitutive elements</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>As knowledge themes</b>	Narratives around place and community, politics and the political, change and culture which are largely based upon cognitive, practical and experiential knowledge that individuals or groups have gained
<b>As medium of expression</b>	Narratives convey meanings, intentions, beliefs, values, and emotions that reflect and interpret the situated social reality rather than objective reality
<b>As imagery and metaphor</b>	Narratives reveal and constitute meaning as they are shaped by individuals for their own purposes with images and metaphors, but which shape human beings and give meaning to their social contexts.

Tripathi, 2013

These narratives offer a window into local authority working and reveal how and why the organisation is changing over time. These narratives connect the organisation with the larger environment and at the same time are microcosms of the organisation. They provide insights about both the local authority and about organisational processes within it. These leadership narratives moderate and bring about consensus, performance,

decision making, and support for a course of action within the local authority and outside. They influence and are influenced by strategic actions.

This research has taken forward the plea of using language, discourse and narrative in the social sciences (Chapter 11, this thesis) and effectively analysed leadership narrative providing a rich tapestry of leadership. Narratives interweave reflexive links joining the past, present and future, bringing together cognition and actions through reflection and reflexivity. The telling and retelling of stories and other narratives around the tasks and experiences of managing change, making improvements in performance, shifting organisational culture *etc.*, forges *shared* and ever deepening understanding of the complexities involved in taking effective action and in doing leadership. The identification of learning moments, the turn-around moments in the organisational journey of improvement were particularly engrossing. The recounting of a journey *shared*, of critical reflexivity, introduced the possibility in the future of using these in leadership workshops for a '*weaving of theory, practice and reflection*' (Crawford *et al.*, 2002: 170).

Though leadership research using narrative, reflection and reflexivity is still in its infancy, it enjoys several advantages by promoting them as *shared* activity through which certain issues are reinforced and kept alive in organisational memory. The use and practice of language distinguishes leadership research and practice. The value of narrative, reflection and reflexivity lies in their capacity to align and embed leadership within the organisational routines, talk, processes and practices both at the individual as well as collective levels, thus facilitating multilevel understandings of leadership (*cf.* Chen *et al.*, 2007).

In the final analysis, the leadership narratives through this interweaving enable *shared* meanings, communication patterns and stories and metaphors to emerge which make organisational journeys meaningful and legitimate, bringing together understanding and

behaviour of diverse people. They bring about a coalescing of different issues and elements in swirling multilogues of ever deepening levels of understanding, behaviour and action. The narrative findings from this research brought to the fore the complexities and challenges of leadership within the dynamic context of English local authority.

### **12.3 Contributions of research**

This research has made a number of original contributions to the state of existing knowledge of leadership in terms of theory, methodology and practice. The theme of leadership has been a consistent thread in the warp and weft of organisational and management thinking and behaviour. But the verbosity and sheer numbers of theories make it necessary to provide clarity and focus to the literature review which has been dealt in Chapters 2-4.

This research builds upon existing literature and challenges it as well by presenting an exploratory meta-theory in terms of a conceptual framework comprising of the four lenses to draw a rich sensory picture of prevailing leadership in the local authority under study. The revealed picture of the reality of leadership can never be complete and is always in the process of being and happening, a multi-faceted kaleidoscope, a whirling, moving fractal. The analogy of a fractal is hence useful not least as a testimony to the infinite variations in doing, experiencing and being part of leadership and can be usefully extended to leadership in other contexts, sectors and situations, perhaps even to democratically elected world of local governments worldwide. The incremental and emergent nature of leadership of a specific English local authority is conceptualised and made sense of, this is analytically generalisable through the four thematic lenses to other local authorities across the UK, and generally to other public sector contexts.

### 12.3.1 Paradigmatic and methodological contributions

A number of researchers have called for paradigmatic shifts in leadership research (Section 5.5 this thesis) with a focus on post-modernist qualitative approaches where narratives and discourses are seen as having powerful explanatory potential. Critical studies in management and leadership have challenged some of the more dominant strains in the complex and nuanced relations between leaders, managers and followers (Collinson, 2011). There is also the no less strident call for bringing theory and praxis closer such that they feed one another.

Within this theoretical and empirical uproar there are serious ethical concerns which cannot be wished away. In this research anonymity and confidentiality have been taken most seriously and have had an impact on what has been revealed and interpreted. The focus on the fragmented and colourful setting of local authority has been a fascinating research journey which has for the researcher and the supervisory team raised challenging questions on many fronts. My focus on the political and *shared* character of leadership in terms of its usage in relations to people, groups and political parties invokes Spicer *et al.*'s (2009: 539) splendid picturisation that '*contradictions and clashing power relations plague organizations*'. In the local authority and possibly the domain of democratic local government working in any part of the world, there is an extra complexity due to the presence of democratically elected politicians, the Big P of politics with serious implications for the four themes reflected in the findings of this research.

Paradigms are the transitional space or road map for negotiating the research process, enabling the researcher to explore and construct options of looking at realities and relationships in leadership (Chapters 5, 8 -11, this thesis). By choosing the interpretive constructivist paradigm, I examine the puzzle or enigma of leadership at the apex of a local authority in terms of the social construction of leadership in the voices of senior

officers and members and key stakeholders – the voices from the apex which are then interpreted and made sense of by the participants and the researcher through a process which has been elaborated in Chapter 7.

The qualitative case study research exploration had a descriptive and analytical advantage by calling attention to the context, nature, process and practice and the narratives of leadership and enables an exploration of leadership as a multi-level phenomena. Its value addition lies in its capacity to interpret leadership and capture how it comes about – how it is aligned and embedded within the organisational routines, talk, processes and practices both at the individual as well as collective and group levels within the organisation and among partners and communities outside. The research adopts a constructivist interpretivist paradigm (Chapter 5, this thesis) and a case study methodology with a qualitative focus primarily using semi-structured interviews with officers and councillors and stakeholders. The focus is on top-level executive and political leadership at the apex including councillors and officers as well as stakeholders and understanding their leadership perceptions and experience – thus, interpreting and constructing their perceptions and realities of leadership.

A constructivist-interpretivist approach recognises that leadership is a social phenomenon, the social construction of leadership is a starting point and hence a mindful issue. As a more general conceptualisation, the *reflective turn* (Schön, 1991) acknowledges the more dynamic relationship between theory and practice, one that precedes not only in a linear and deductive way but also that feeds from one another. In this way it rejects positivism and absolute truth moving along the continuum to the phenomenological end. It affirms interconnected and experiential ways of knowing the world which can be partial, nuanced, layered, contextual rather than whole or absolute. Bauman (1992) assertion of residing in ‘*the postmodern habitat*’ with ‘*no clear options and strategies that can even be imagined to be uncontroversially correct*’ (1992: 185) is

useful. The acceptance of living in a multiple even if connected realities posits diverse social ways of being in the world and knowing it. Leadership of a local authority is unpredictable, with layers of meanings and narratives which co-exist and are constantly being constructed and deconstructed within a context that is dynamic while being fragmented and different, yet *shared* with differences and similarities through which relational, interactional processes and practices are revealed as narratives of leadership. There are many layers of meanings and ways of understanding and of doing in which leading and following are interchangeable and patterned. This research captures one way of doing it, based upon the complex phenomena of leadership within the particular case study of *the* local authority in the South West of England. No doubt there are other equally legitimate ways of knowing and understanding leadership. However, this specific case contains the seeds of analytical or theoretical generalisation resulting in the emergence of a meta-theoretical framework for studying leadership in contexts and sectors other than local authority.

### **12.3.2 Leadership research and case study**

Leadership research has lent itself to a range of paradigms and methodologies with the post positivistic and the quantitative dominating, although narrative, discursive, qualitative orientations are fast embedding themselves in the emergent field of leadership. Case study has been singled out to understand the construction and interpretation of leadership of a local authority.

Through the thick descriptive case study, I have attempted to explore the qualitative-contextual, *shared*, relational, processual narratives and reality of leadership. Relying on a multi-level analysis of leadership at individual, relational and institutional and multi-agency levels, the social construction of leadership through the voices of officers, members and stakeholders is made sense of and interpreted. By visualising leadership as a puzzle, problematic or a conundrum following Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), those

facets of leadership which were puzzling led to the four lenses or themes of leadership. *What is interesting and surprising with respect to the interplay of leadership between officers and members at the apex of local authority?* The analysis of the semi structured interviews, observations and discussions enabled rich kaleidoscopic vistas of leadership to emerge. The richness and depth of *knowing* and *making sense of* through a case study of the local authority enabled the building of substantive meta-theory through accretions of interweaving knowledge and empirical research. The four lenses acquired explanatory power legitimised through the constructions and interpretations from the field. These four themes frame the analysis and interpretation of the research findings and in turn have the potential for informing practice of leadership at local authority level.

### **12.3.3 Towards theory building**

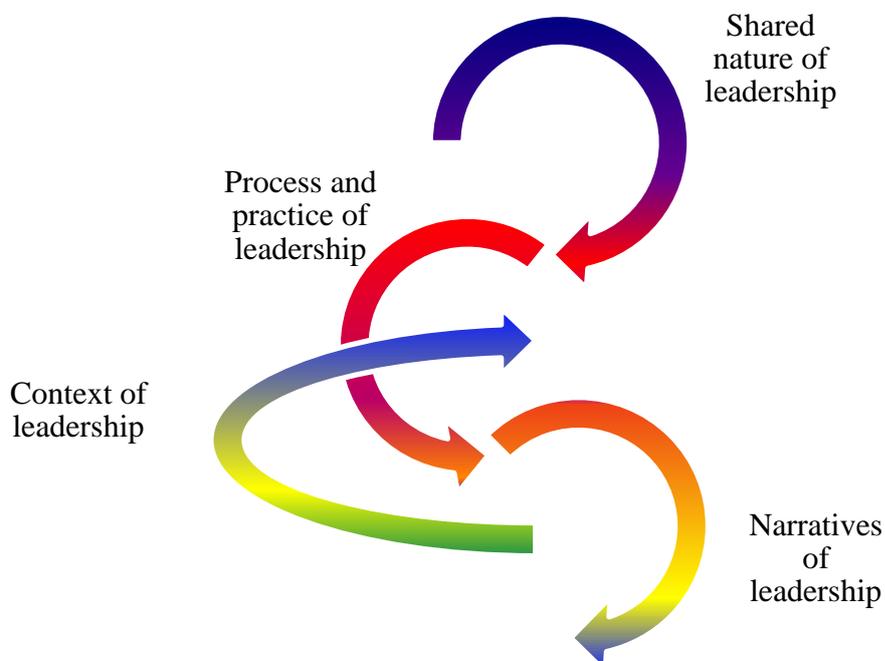
Before I embark on defining the substantive themes or frameworks that constitute an attempt at framing a meta-theory of leadership, the existing state of leadership literature has to be acknowledged with both traditional and alternative perspectives with a '*much richer, more diverse and increasingly pluralistic field of theoretically-informed research on which leadership studies is now being established*' (Bryman, *et al.*, 2011: ix).

The literature review filters and builds pathways through the three sources of mainstream, public leadership and local government leadership (Chapters 2 to 4 of this thesis). From the mid-1980s, the field of leadership studies moved away from supervisory to strategic leadership, focussing on the role of the strategic leader and distinguishing between *leadership in* and *leadership of* (Section 2.4 of this thesis). The strong focus on the person of the leader is to the detriment of the context in which leadership is exercised, the *shared* and relational nature of leadership processes and practices, and the narratives of leadership are some of the biggest gaps in the leadership

literature. The current research focuses on the political and organisational leadership interface at the apex of a local authority (Mouritzen and Svava, 2002; Entwistle *et al.*, 2005; Morrell and Hartley, 2006; Leach and Lowndes, 2007; Gains, 2009) using the *missing, puzzling links as building blocks for an integrated meta-theory of leadership.*

### 12.3.3.1 The four themes as lenses of leadership

These four leadership themes – context, *shared*, relational, and processual nature of leadership interactions and their narratives are the lenses to analyse the leadership of a local authority. Through the narratives expressed by the participants at the apex of local authority, a rich dynamic model of local authority leadership emerges. Use of these lenses has the capacity to generate rich, analytical and conceptual descriptions of the context of local authority leadership, the *shared* nature of leadership between officers and members, the process and practices of leadership and the narratives that are constructed through speech, text, stories and cognitive and interactive experiences.



**Figure 12-1: The integrated model of leadership**

The leadership themes promote certain forms of knowing and understanding, engaging in and doing leadership. The *what, who* and *how* of leadership is supported, legitimised and embedded in organisational life through the context, *shared* interactions and spaces, processes and practices and narratives of leadership at the apex of a local authority. Thus, an attempt to explore the multi-level realities of leadership is made. There are *leaderful* moments at the apex of a local authority. It is through the diffusion, acceptance and the development of consensus and *shared* cognitions and understandings upon which behaviour is based that makes leadership effective and instrumental. Leadership is hence understood as social phenomena which subsumes normative and ethical considerations and understandings which underpin it.

The four leadership lenses emerge as sensemaking interpretive devices. All four contribute to the production of a coherent *modus operandi* of *what, who* and *how* leadership is constructed and interpreted in local authority. These facets in the kaleidoscope of leadership represent the changing or quicksilver quality (ephemeral nature) of leadership that are constantly changing and reveal inherent variations, coming together and diverging in unique, dynamic patterns grounded in differently defined situations. Though the four lenses operate in relation to one another, make sense in relation to one another, and build upon one another, their infinite variations bequeath leadership with a chimera like quality and explain the enduring fascination with the phenomena of leadership.

#### **12.3.4 Leadership as practice**

The sustained interest in leadership research and the prolificity of leadership literature would benefit from the four theme framework generally and the contextual, *shared* and relational, process and practice based, and narrative and reflective approach to leadership. The knowledge and practice of leadership, especially the leadership-in-

action: the thinking what they are doing while they are leading encapsulates the *how* of leadership, integral to its practice in concrete contexts. The social phenomena of leadership of local authorities as revealed by these four lenses focussed on moving the organisation forward in particular ways. Leadership enabled communication, rallying organisational focus and prioritising action and motivating staff, communities, people and partners. The recounting and listening, interpreting of leadership talk and discussion facilitated the development of critical reflexivity – it was integral to being leaders in leadership situations working with others – leaders and other people. While for me the researcher, it allowed a weaving of theory, practice and interpretation through reflection. Reflection and reflexivity upon leadership by the leaders makes them dwell on their experience and can make them examine their knowledge and practice, enable them to make sense of the complexity and challenges but also crucially facilitate a relational and *shared* working. It can lead to collaborative learning based on identified needs of the leaders. This continuing interrogation and challenge of their own and others or even group behaviours is crucial for leadership development in these current times and can lead to leadership workshops through meaningfully weaving together theory and practice.

### **12.1 Future research propositions: the end and the beginning**

Though this research was empirically focussed on one local authority in the South West of England, the four theme framework can possibly be extended to other contexts in the public, not for profit and corporate sectors. This will form the focus of my post-doctoral research.

The main objectives of the research were to explore the constructions of leadership of a local authority through: 1) the perceptions and experiences of officers and councillors at the apex of a local authority and the key stakeholders and make sense of 2) the nature and pattern of their interactions and relationships. A substantive four lenses framework

emerges to investigate *how officers and councillors at the apex of local authority construct leadership of a local authority*. These four lenses can provide a useful meta-theoretical framework to analyse leadership in other contexts and spaces and over time.

The current research explores leadership at the apex of a local authority and challenges the traditional conception of local authority functioning. The conclusions are suggestive in their generalisation and applicability to other local authorities rather than the final and conclusive word. Overall it hopes to build up credible conceptualisation of the complex phenomena of leadership of a local authority and the complex challenges facing it. This research seeks to avoid the '*generalization trap*' (Crevani *et al.*, 2010: 80) so the attempt is to research leadership of a particular local authority through the voices of those officers and members who function at its apex. So leadership practices and interactions are contextual, local-cultural, relational, and rooted in *shared* processes that are continuously being created and recreated; the emerging or becoming known through interconnecting roles and relationships are voiced and interpreted through varied leadership narratives.

Where the four lenses of leadership are concerned, I hope that the suggested framework may contribute to critical leadership perspectives where heroic leaders and their skills and competencies can be replaced by less individualistic and more critical constructs through the four lenses coming together in the fractal or kaleidoscope of leadership. This moving, forming and reforming dynamic model highlights: i) the context in which leadership is situated and performs, ii) the *shared* and relational nature of leadership in interactions and continuous happenings and the web of roles and relationships between powerful agents which are perpetually evolving and contextualising, iii) the doing of leadership with its focus on interactive processes and practices, and iv) the narratives of leadership including the language games, the rhetoric, the metaphors and symbols which can challenge as well as reinforce the existing patterns of leadership as they

emerge and mould and are moulded in diverse patterns. Such insights from, and critical reflection on, leadership at the apex of a local authority can become part of future leadership studies and research. Though the findings themselves cannot always be generalised in other contexts the four frames of the kaleidoscope provide theoretical perspectives for studying leadership in other contexts. By challenging the dominating mainstream and public leadership theories, the four frame leadership framework allows for the incorporation of dynamic lenses to study the complex social phenomena of leadership.

The ideal of critical performativity (Spicer, *et al.*, 2009), wherein the theoretical drive to create in-depth understandings of leadership phenomena through the four lenses or frames is aligned within theoretical praxis that engages in ‘*critical dialogue*’ and encourages ‘*reflection, even on one’s own certainties*’ (*ibid.*, 2009: 545) is a prime driver for such critical explorations of leadership. ‘*Critical interventions — critiques, concepts, thick descriptions — then are pragmatic. They involve asking questions about what works, what is feasible, and what those we address perceive as relevant. But critical pragmatism also seeks to stretch the consciousness, vocabularies and practices...*’ (Spicer *et al.*, 2009: 545). This attempt to be critical and pragmatic about leadership research has been an enduring emphasis in this research.

Akin to the bricoleur’s doing (Levi-Strauss, 1966; Kinchelo, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003a) which has myriad facets, through this research, the diverse patterns of the kaleidoscope of leadership of a local authority emerge and are made visible; embedded in organisational life, they are given meaning and their patterns are interpreted in complex ways. But the *totality* of the phenomenon of leadership can never be quite captured.

## ANNEXURES

## **Annexure 1: Interview questions**

### **Conceptual Understanding of Leadership generally and leadership of a local authority in particular**

Question 1: What is your understanding of leadership generally?

Question 2: Is leadership similar or different from management? Please can you elaborate how leadership is similar or different from management?

Probe:

If similar, how is leadership similar to management?

If different, how is leadership different to management?

Question 3: What is your understanding of leadership of local authority?

Question 4: In your perception, how do appointed officers provide leadership of local authority?

Question 5: In your perception, how do elected councillors provide leadership of local authority?

Probe: Do both officers and councillors provide leadership of local authority?

Probe: Is officer leadership and councillor leadership similar or different?

If similar, how are they similar?

If different, how are they different?

Question 6: Does the context in which local authority operates influence leadership of local authority?

Prompt: For example political, policy, place, partnership, central–local relationship, regulatory/funding? Explore each one in turn?

### **Roles and Relationship**

Question 7: In your perception, what are the roles that officers generally perform?

Prompt:

Question 8: In your perception what are the roles that councillors generally perform?

Probe: Do officer and members perform same roles or do their roles differ?

Is their clarity in their roles?

Do their roles overlap?

Do their roles complement each other?

Question 9: In your perception how would you describe the interaction between elected members and appointed officers at the top of local authority?

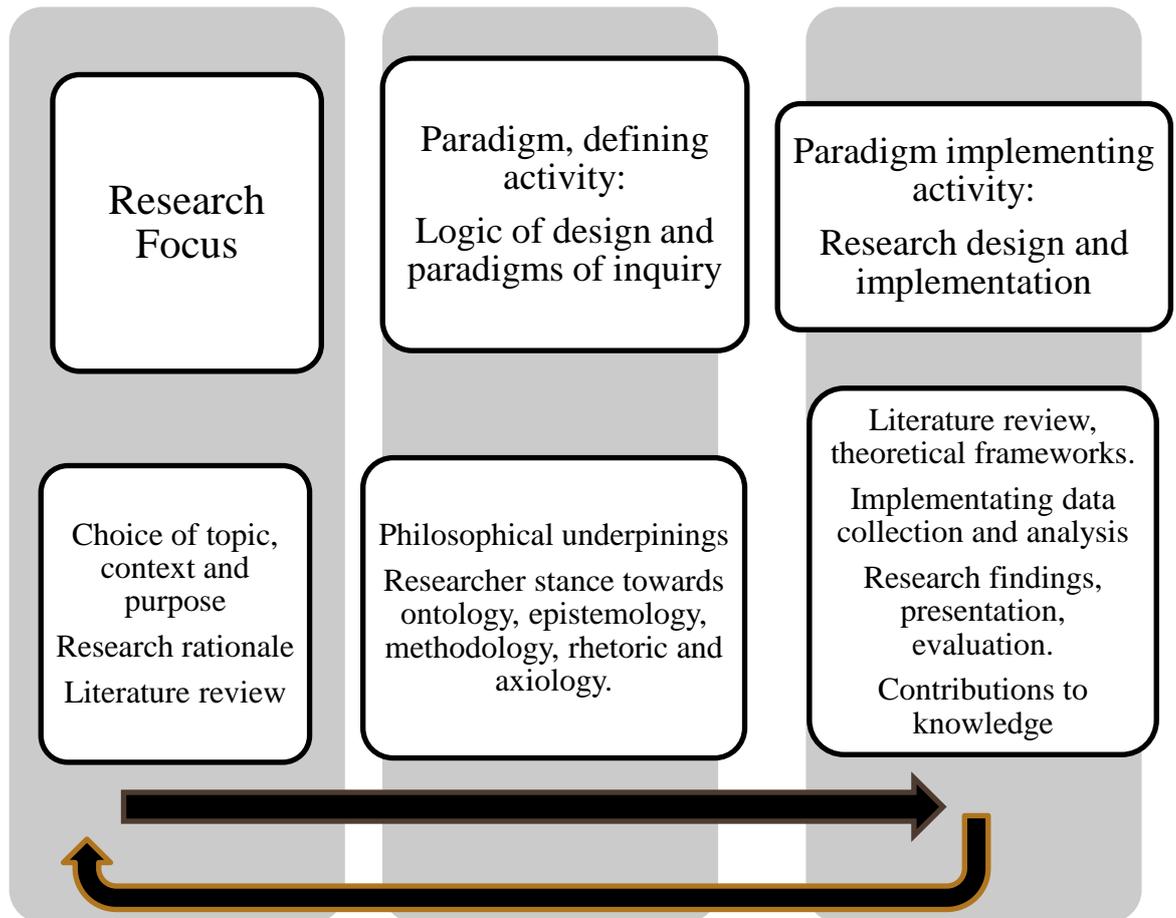
Probe: Can you elaborate upon this relationship?

Are there any rules, formal or informal that guide this relationship?

Can you describe the strengths and weaknesses of this relationship? Can you provide some significant examples – critical incidents, major change initiatives or significant decisions to elaborate this relationship? Can you give some examples?

Question 10: Organisations change over time. Can you elaborate on any aspect of this change journey?

## Annexure 2: Research Road Map



### The research process: Stages and inter-linkages

Adapted from Hallebone and Priest, 2009

The research design is a contextual, iterative process as understandings and interpretations move towards the last phase of critical analysis, reflection and the writing up of the PhD. Any research involves choices around 1) topic and the research focus, 2) philosophical underpinnings and paradigms of inquiry and, 3) the research design and its implementation, analysis and interpretation leading to the outcome, in this case the PhD. It is essential that these choices are internally and mutually consistent with each choice being built upon the next (Hallebone and Priest, 2009).

The research design is the road map for implementing the case study methodology and it also explicates the research process. The research process leading up to the PhD award is rather like a *performance* of developing ideas (phrase used by Denzin and

Lincoln in the context of qualitative research) and work. Thus, the designing of this process is crucial for the quality of research. Research design, based on Yin's (2009: 21) colloquial explanation as a *logical plan or path way from getting here to there* where *here* signifies the research interest and tentative research questions and *there* indicates the PhD in three-four years. Similar to the architect or engineer's blue print (Yin, 2009), it focuses attention on the four key issues: questions to study, the material relevant to answering those, the material to be generated, and the process of analysing the results (Yin 2009, although he uses the terms data and collection). The tasks crucial in the research design are elaborated below (adapted from Yin, 2009: 21):

### **Tasks in the Research Design**

<b>1. Revisiting and finalising the research questions</b>
<b>2. Decisions around the unit of analysis and the strategy – selection, access, modality, timeline, risks, limitations</b>
<b>3. Methods of generating data or empirical material</b>
<b>4. Making sense of the data (linking the empirical material to research questions and literature and analysing the findings).</b>
<b>5. Further critical analysis and interpretation and presentation of the research.</b>

Adapted from Yin, 2009: 21

Chapter 6 explicates the first three task components, while the fourth one is considered in the Chapter 7 and the fifth element is the subject of Chapters 8-12.

### **Annexure 3: Project brief distributed to the participants**

#### **RESEARCH TITLE: LEADERSHIP AT THE APEX OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Smita Tripathi**

**[Smita.tripathi@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:Smita.tripathi@plymouth.ac.uk)**

#### **Introducing Smita Tripathi**

I have been teaching in the Business School at the University of Plymouth since 2003. I am currently pursuing doctoral research titled: 'Leadership at the apex of local government. My research interest lies in leadership and change in the public sector.

#### **What is this research about?**

This is a doctoral Research leading to a PhD. I have a scholarship from the Business School.

I am interested in local government as I have an intuitive understanding of the complexities and difficulties of leadership in this sector. The academic books on leadership are largely written from the view point of the private sector where maximising efficiency and profit are the main motivators. Those books written with the public sector in mind largely ignore the role and relationship between appointed officers and elected members in the exercise of leadership.

In the governance arena of local authorities both officers and members and their relationship plays a crucial part in leading local government. With this research I hope to understand leadership of local government, the relationship between officers and members and how 'they' provide leadership to local government and work with stakeholders in health, police, education etc.

#### **What is the research method?**

Because I am trying to uncover the roles, rules and relationship between officers and members, I am adopting a qualitative approach and will be interviewing a range of officers, members and other stakeholders of local government along with observing them and conducting a focus group.

#### **Commitment to ethical considerations**

The research would be totally confidential and anonymous. The University has stringent ethical requirements, I am bound by them. I will be open and honest regarding the purpose, aims and objectives of the research and seek informed consent which gives the rights to the participants to withdraw.

**Smita Tripathi**

#### **Annexure 4: Engagement with the local authority after negotiating formal access**

Once formal access had been granted, I viewed interaction with the officers and councillors as crucial in building up trust and rapport. Frequent communication with the liaison officer was essential to initiate networking, so I kept him abreast of the research process. Meeting and talking with senior officers and councillors at every available opportunity enabled me to break down barriers and build a relationship, akin to being in the *range of the radar*. I began to attend the public meetings of the council as observer, like a *wallflower*, showing my face, being visible and friendly, yet reserved with comments and opinions, which served to reinforce my neutrality, preserve my interest and allowed me to gain confidence and become known among officers as well as councillors. Building rapport is a key ingredient for trust and I attempted to do this by my silent observational presence at public meetings where I was visible, yet talking neutrally to as many people as possible and keenly interested in what was happening.

The process of gaining trust and establishing rapport are both essential and paramount (Fontana and Frey, 2000:655) and I gave it considerable thought and effort. Unlike Paul Rasmussen (in Fontana and Frey, 2000) I didn't spend months as a *wallflower* before collecting data, I did make sure that I was visible and recognised by attending public meetings. Establishing rapport was a win-win situation as it opened door to *more informed research* and presented no danger as I was not likely to *go native* or become a spokesperson of any side! At one time, I became wary as I got the feeling that I was being perceived as majority party sympathiser and moved quickly to dissuade this impression by networking and meeting the other party group leaders. It was important to be seen as not having allegiance to any political party and this *neutrality* was a crucial element if I wanted multi-party perspective. Another danger was presented when the local newspaper seeing my frequent presence made certain enquiries and came up to see whether I was interested in being 'interviewed' for the local newspaper. I turned the

suggestion down claiming both a lack of time and ethical considerations as my reasons. As it can be imagined, it gave me a few sleepless nights and thereafter, I was careful to smile and keep him at a distance.

To build up trust and how to make them comfortable to *reveal* organisational and relationship information was always uppermost in my mind. I made sure that information was not passed on. For example, when someone asked me at a public meeting which I was observing, who I had interviewed or whether I had spoken to so-and-so, I informed them that information was private and confidential.

I identified the local election in May 2010 as a major risk factor which could have the potential to destabilise the research. I devised a strategy to manage this risk by purposive networking, speaking to key officers and councillors, emphasising my interest in the research and also convincing them of ethical aspects. Meanwhile, I also communicated and approached another neighbouring local authority as a fall back if things went really *pear shaped* after the elections. The practice of *pardah* and the inability of officers and councillors to find time for my research prior to or immediately after the elections were other factors that had to be taken into consideration in the research design. Hence, I carefully designed my interview schedule and negotiated to make sure to get dates into participant's diaries three to four months in advance.

With the help of the liaison officers and other insiders, I was able to identify the sample and shortlist the *categories* to ensure representation from a broad range of types of participants to be interviewed. I was, thus, careful to ensure that list of interviewees included people from all categories amongst both senior officers and councillors. Thereafter, if some category was un-represented or under-represented in my interview schedule, I went out of my way to request that those categories be included in the research.

Along with the access, I negotiated a room at the interview location which I had the right to use for the course of the day. I was able to organise this space and was seen to be in control of this space. It was crucial as I was interviewing people who were *leaders*, had position and power and were used to getting their own way. This room accorded privacy as it was away from prying eyes. Within this space I arranged how and where we sat, where the recording device was positioned and how I could make sure of the acoustics, minimise distractions and other noise. Most of the interviews were conducted in this room. Not only did I organise the room for practical considerations, but I was clearly in control of this space and hence of the process of interviewing. The remaining interviews were in the offices of the participants, constraint of time being the most important consideration. I gave thought to how these interviews would be conducted. The office of the participants was not neutral, but represented the territory of the participants. I had to make effort to take ownership of the interview process, ensure that participants dissociated themselves from their work, were free from ordinary disturbances and the power dynamics of the environment did not favour the participants unduly. Since physical separation was not possible, I had to make it happen through other means: hence, at the start, I arranged my stuff, commandeering the space and establishing my presence.

Recording equipment has meaning for the participants, this became apparent as when I turned it off, the participants immediately opened up with some highly relevant material. I at once asked them if they were willing to repeat them on tape and in most cases they were happy to!

One week prior to the interview, I reminded participants about the interview, thanking their engagement with the research, repeating the project details, reassuring them about anonymity and confidentiality. I also attached the two forms which they were expected to fill prior to the interview, one form sought some personal details (the presage:

Annexure 7) while the other was the ethical consent form (Annexure 11). I also made myself available in case of any concerns or clarifications.

After the interview, I promptly wrote another email, thanking them and re-assuring them of ethical issues and informing them that I would send the transcripts to them for approval. I sent transcripts back to the participants for member checking. I also took the opportunity to seek any clarification and further probing of some aspect which was mentioned during the interview about which I was unsure or I needed more information. This follow-up was done mostly by email. Occasionally I received a call from the participants regarding the clarification and made notes of the telephonic conversation. To ensure and maintain quality, I kept meticulous paper trails, memos and journals, dairy and field notes.

### **Pilot Study details**

After the pilot questions were asked, I asked them specific questions about the pilot interview process: on the wording of the questions, their clarity and appropriateness, whether the questions made them uncomfortable or distressed and whether they recommended making any changes. This discussion along with their responses to the pilot questions were recorded and later transcribed. After listening to them and reflecting on their responses, I made minor changes to the interview questions and crucially included a supplementary list of questions as probes and prompts if the participants were not very forthcoming and hesitant. I also made prompts to stop participants from meandering and stick to the knitting. This was considered necessary as the participants were either not very forthcoming or went off down a completely different track. Overall the pilot interviews demonstrated that the interview instrument was a valid tool for exploring the phenomenon of leadership at local government level, particularly the interface between officers and councillors.

## **Annexure 5: Case study protocol**

I adapted the major conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative case researcher (Stake, 2000: 448) in terms of a case study protocol which is delineated as follows:

- Bounding the case, conceptualising the object of study;
- Selecting phenomena, themes, or issues – i.e. the research questions – to emphasise;
- Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;
- Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;
- Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue; and,
- Developing assertions or generalisations about the case.

## **Annexure 6: Checklist for interviews**

Based on Kvale's (1996) list of ten criteria for a successful interviewer, I prepared a checklist of nine criteria which served as a guide for the interview questions. The first step was to prepare for the interview – building knowledge and familiarity with the place, the local authority and its working: direction including strategic plans, strategies and crucial documents like constitution; organisational structures, processes and who-is-who; history including that of the place, local authority and the democratic process; the political parties and their issues and manifestoes; presence and local history, wards, issues of importance to local communities, etc.; The second step which went along with the first rather than following it consisted of preparing the interview questions. This required being: 1) clear – clarity of the questions with minimal use of jargon; 2) clear regarding structure – by laying down the purpose, rounding off and thanking them and asking whether they had any questions or concerns; 3) gentle – by letting people complete, giving them time to think and reflect and being comfortable with silences/pauses; 4) sensitive – by listening attentively and being empathic; 5) open – being responsive and flexible; 6) steering – being aware of what one is seeking to find; 7) critical – being prepared to challenge for example inconsistencies and contradictions; 8) remembering – being attentive and able to remember and recall what has been said earlier; and, 9) finally, interpreting – seeking clarification and extending meanings of the responses without imposing meaning on them. This proved to be a useful checklist and reminder that acted as an *aide memoire*.

## **Annexure 7: Presage for participants' demographical details**

1. Your age group. Please tick.  
20-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, 61 + years
2. Your gender: Please Tick  
Male/ Female
3. How long have you been at the Council? Pl print.
4. Your educational background:
5. What is your highest educational qualification and when was it obtained?
6. Do you identify with a particular professional background? Pl name it.
7. Employment history  
What was your job before this one?  
Which previous job experience best equipped you for this job?
8. Your role  
How would you describe your role? What are the 5 most important things that you do in your role? Can you rank them, please?
9. What are the key challenges facing the City Council in the next 5-10 years?
10. Whom do you work with most closely in your role? Name the 3 most important.

## **Annexure 8: Details of the interviewees**

Sample size of the participants is a crucial consideration as it should be large enough to capture diverse perceptions and experience yet be narrow enough to be a finite research doctoral project. Officers in the first, second and third tier along with all councillors were invited to participate the research. It was important to interview officers from all departments and sections. Similarly it was important to interview councillors from all the identified categories: those formally in power as Cabinet members including the Council Leader and the party whip, those in the shadow Cabinet especially the shadow leader and the shadow party whip, those having scrutiny and other specific responsibilities and finally, the backbench councillors. With respect to the stakeholders, this was a more varied, and difficult to define group, hence identification and access presented itself as a more contentious issue. By keeping it simple and within the limits of time and available resources, I decided to invite members of the LSP Board members were invited to participate in the research. These included heads of local public agencies like police, health, fire and rescue services as well as representatives of the other major interest groups like the chamber of commerce, third sector consortium, small and medium size enterprises, arts etc. It meant that the sample was composed of the strategic players rather than incorporating all the stakeholder hence leaving out the voices of the less powerful in favour of the vocal and more visible stakeholders. The emphasis is on the particular rather than the general ‘to err on the side of narrowing the scope’ rather than otherwise (King and Horrocks, 2010: 27).

## **Annexure 9: Observations and list of meetings observed**

I assumed that the observations of public meetings would not really affect what I was observing as these were meetings formally organised and held for public consumption. The meeting of the LSP was quite different being more nuanced and interesting, their outcomes were not pre-decided and there were elements of interesting emergence of ideas, processes and dynamics between different stakeholders.

Werner and Schoepfle (1987: 262-264 cited in Angrosino and Perez, 2000: 677-8) suggested a typology of observation undertaken in naturalistic settings focussing on process rather than the role of the observer representing increasingly deep understanding of the social group. An understanding of this typology was useful to winnow and filter the findings from the observations. First is the '*descriptive observations*' which including observing and noting '*everything*' with a '*childlike attitude*'; in this stage the observer knows nothing and can take nothing for granted leading to a '*morass of irrelevant minutiae*' (ibid., 677). At this point, the second stage begins, known as '*focussed observations*' when what is labelled as '*irrelevant*' can be ignored. This entails speaking to and interviewing some of the observed both formally and informally as the insights of those interviewed can inform about what is more or less important, enabling weeding out of the latter. Focussed observations concentrate on well-defined types of group activity which in my case included the relationship or interaction between officers and members and the decision making process. Finally, and most systematically there is '*selective observation*' where the observer, i.e. the researcher concentrates on the attributes of different types of activities including their differences and similarities. During this final stage, these meetings were reframed forming the context for the nature of interaction between officers and councillors. This involved observing and focusing on the relationship between officers and councillors

within these meetings and interviewing the participants to clarify and elaborate on this relationship.

I observed ‘*public*’ meetings including the full council, the scrutiny and accountability meetings and the neighbourhood committee meetings. List of key meetings observed as table in the annexure 9. Besides, I attended LSP executive board meetings over a 6 month period.

I framed a guide or protocol to enable me to record my observations which witnessed successive iterations as I moved along the typology. As I observed more meetings, a pattern definitely emerged of the formal and routine interactions between councillors and officers due to the process of decision making (which I discuss in greater detail in the Chapter 10).

The table which follows shows the categories along with their operational elements used to record selective observations of meetings.

### **Categories for observations**

Nature of meeting/activity Actual nature of activity that is on the agenda – formal or not, type of work i.e. decision making, licensing, accountability etc.
Who is in charge Identifying the chair, vice chair, assisted by which officers and councillors, who appears to be in charge as opposed to who is formally in charge? Who are in attendance Officer, councillors, others including members of the public, press?
Presence of teams Can any teams be identified? Who constitutes its members? Who is excluded? Can team working be observed? Role configurations, role conflicts, role consensus?
Seating plan/arrangement Formal seating arrangement: who is sitting where and how is this determined?
Rituals and protocols Can any rituals and protocols be observed? Are these purely formal? How do attendees come in and going out?
Roles What are the roles of officers and councillors? What part do they play?
Interaction What is the nature of interaction between attendees, especially between councillors and officers? Is there any interaction before and after the meetings?

Is there any instances of humour, banter, laughter or crisis, anger, unpleasantness?
Outcomes The nature of outcomes: whether in keeping with the agenda or anything unexpected?

**Public Committee Meetings attended for observations, learning and networking**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Number of meetings attended</b>
1	City Council - Council Chamber	6
2	Cabinet - Cabinet Room	3
3	Overview & Scrutiny Management Board	4
4	Planning Committee	3
5	Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny	2
6	Customer & Communities Overview & Scrutiny	3
7	Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny	4

## Annexure 10: Ethical approval from the University

----- Page 1-----

Smita Tripathi

Plymouth Business School  
University of Plymouth  
Drake Circus  
Plymouth  
Devon PL4 8AA  
United Kingdom  
tel +44 (0) 1752 585 540  
fax +44 (0) 1752 585 679  
[www.plymouth.ac.uk](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk)

Ref: PBS.UPC/FREAC/FREAC0910.03

Date: 25 February, 2010

Dear Smita

Ethical Approval Application No: FREAC0910.03

Title: Leadership at the Apex of Local Government: The Challenges and the Opportunities

The Faculty Research Ethical Approval Committee has considered the revised ethical approval form and is now fully satisfied that the project complies with the University of Plymouth's ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Approval is for the duration of the project. Should you wish to extend the project, you would need to seek further ethical approval.

We would like to wish you good luck with your research project.

Yours sincerely

(Sent as email attachment)

Dr Patrick Holden

Chair

Faculty Research Ethics Approval Committee, Plymouth Business School

## Annexure 11: Consent Form

Participants Name, Designation, Place:

Date:

### Consent Form and Ethical Protocol Agreement between Researcher and the Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview which is integral to my doctoral research titled: 'Leadership at the apex of local government' at the University. This interview will help me to understand the relationship between officers and members and how they provide leadership to local government i.e. XXX City Council.

Local government includes both political and administrative processes and the relationship between appointed officers and elected members is crucial in providing leadership to it.

This research conforms with each clause of the University of Plymouth's ethical principles for '*research involving human participants*'.

- (a) **Informed Consent:** The participant has the right to participate or withdraw engagement from the research.
- (b) **Openness and Honesty:** Clarity regarding the enclosed research purpose as explained in the enclosed research brief.
- (c) **Right to Withdraw:** The participant is informed of the right to withdraw. If the participant chooses to withdraw, their data will be destroyed.
- (d) All collected data is ensured **security and confidentiality**.
- (e) **Debriefing:** In addition to the summary, participants will be provided with a typed transcript of their interviews.
- (f) **Confidentiality:** Full confidentiality is assured of all data collected from the interviews. All data is collected for academic purposes leading to a PhD and would be used for the stated purpose. Data will be held securely and the names and identities will be anonymised in the PhD and the publications resulting from the research.
- (g) **Professional Bodies Whose Ethical Policies Apply to this Research:** The researcher has read and understood the ethical guidelines laid down by the **Social Research Association (2003)** and would abide by them unequivocally.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The researcher will, with your permission make notes and records of the interviews.

The participant has read the information ( Research Brief) presented about the research being conducted by Smita Tripathi of the University of Plymouth for the doctoral research titled 'Leadership at the apex of local government'.

The participant gives/does not give (delete what is not relevant) permission to record the interview.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, the participant agrees to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Annexure 12: Reliability**

Posing the question whether other researchers will reach similar interpretations from the findings is not straightforward. It encapsulates the ideas of both consistency and representativeness followed closely by replicability in the sense of repeatedly. Consciousness and reflection on this aspect of the research prompted an emphasis on making the research dependable and consistent by invoking transparency and clarity at every stage of the research process. I interpreted reliability in terms of being not only thorough, transparent, careful and honest in carrying out the research, but being able to demonstrate this process. Yin (2003: 67) has recommended the use of what he calls '*case study protocol*' where the protocol is a plan of data collection instruments and the procedures for using them which another researcher can follow. I found Yin's approach far too prescriptive and rather than slavish adherence to a case study protocol as he suggested, I developed protocols for smaller elements of the research process including for the interview, interview questions and observations. The explicating of the process and decision trail creates opportunities for the auditing and appraisal of the research. However, an emphasis in increased reliability presents a danger by bringing on a '*forced or artificial consensus*' at the expense of meaningfulness of the research (Rolfe, 2006:305).

Reliability in the sense of '*repeatability*' is neither desirable nor sufficient (Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski, 1993) within this research as within multiple constructed reality of leadership within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the search for *single* acceptable reality is meaningless. Hence, the process of explicating the research was important not for the repeatability but to enable others including researchers and practitioners to evaluate the validity of the process.

### **Annexure 13: Validity**

Answering the question, *how valid is the research and its findings* are a crucial aspect of the research not least because it impacts upon the wider relevance of the research itself. Within this research, validity in terms of *meaningfulness* is explored. The factual accuracy of what is said in the interview is easy to verify through the process of ‘*member checks*’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:314). This gave the participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what were perceived as wrong interpretations and volunteer additional information. Interpretive validity involves making sense and meaning of what was said by the participants in the interviews or what was observed; ascertaining the same was time consuming but crucial. Theoretical validity is an essential aspect of the research; it was aided by triangulation, through various literary and empirical sources so as to develop linkages between the findings and the relevant literature, and keeping the sensemaking process transparent. Leaving the research open to the criticism of subjectivity, researcher bias or impressionism in findings and discussion is another threat to quality issues. To counter subjectivity, not only were the emerging constructs grounded in literature while closeness to the excerpts allowed the narrative to speak for itself. Validity through peer review or checking uses a panel of experts, academics or experienced colleagues or practitioners to re-analyse some of the data. This was another strategy fruitfully employed: papers have been presented at conferences and to peer-reviewed journals. This process was built this into the process of research by identifying journals and conferences by prior research and building it into the PhD timeline.

#### **Annexure 14: Trustworthiness**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) substituted validity and reliability with a parallel concept of *trustworthiness* which goes to the crux of such quality considerations. They linked validity to trustworthiness rather than to *truth* or *value*, which required making the research process *visible* and *auditable* where others can track and verify the decision trail. Clearly this criteria and process is useful for nursing or medical research where auditing would establish confirmability in lieu of the conventional criterion of neutrality or objectivity. In this research, auditing is integral to reflexivity, which involves ‘*the provision of a methodologically self-critical account of how the research was done*’ (Rolfe, 2006: 468). Within the interpretive paradigm, trustworthiness is not an absolute term but ‘*is negotiable and open ended*’ through interaction between the reader and the research account (Seale, 2003: 172) and is by no means the final proof whereby readers are compelled to accept an account (Rolfe, 2006).

Trustworthiness has been further divided into 1) credibility, which corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal validity; 2) dependability, which relates more to consistency and reliability; 3) transferability, which is a form of applicability or external validity; and 4) confirmability, which is largely an issue of presentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or a criterion designed to replace neutrality or objectivity.

## **Annexure 15: Transferability**

Generalisability or external validity is the view that findings and theory generated will be applicable generally to other settings. It deals with whether a study's findings are generalisable beyond the immediate case study and is '*one of the most problematic issues faced by the case study approach*' (Gray, 2009: 261). In this research I prefer to use transferability more in keeping with the view that theoretical constructs and analysis of the findings are transferable to other settings. Clearly research findings from this study cannot be taken as '*representative of local authority in general*' but '*rather, they provide examples from which broader lessons can be drawn*' (Leach and Lowndes, 2007: 186). However, the construct framework around which findings are organised and analysed might be useful in understanding other local authority leadership or leadership in other settings and contexts. Single case study is no doubt a '*poor representation of the population*' and does not aid '*grand generalisation*' but as '*more than one theoretical notion may be guiding an analysis, confirmation, fuller specification, and contradiction all may result from one case study*' (Vaughan, 1992: 175 cited in Stake, 2000: 448). Case study is '*of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability*' (Stake, 2000: 448). Case study research after all aims at theoretical or analytical generalisation rather than statistical generalisation and the emergent meta-theory of the kaleidoscope of leadership has application beyond the limits of the local authority researched (more in Chapter 12).

## **Annexure 16: Authenticity or Fairness**

Recognising that the constructivist paradigm with a belief in '*multiple constructed realities*' rather than a '*single tangible reality*' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:295) is not in line with the idea of a fixed criteria for judging trustworthiness, they (*ibid.*,1985) added a fifth criterion, authenticity. This criterion is embedded in the basic belief system of constructivism itself. Fairness is closely linked to authenticity. Authenticity for Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1994) is demonstrated by representing a range of different realities, *fairness* to a range of voices that the researcher can show have been represented.

Fairness 'the extent to which different constructions and their underlying value structures are solicited and honoured within the evaluation process' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:245). Hence, a commitment to fairness required identifying all potential participants operating at the strategic level in local authority including senior officers, councillors and stakeholders. The voices of followers and middle managers and frontline staff were excluded and remain one of the methodological weaknesses. Since the focus was on leadership at the apex of local authority especially the interplay between officers and councillors, a view from the top, in the voices of the actors who were leaders exercising leadership was crucial.

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