

# **ISSUES IN MANAGING PERFORMANCE**

## **THE MANAGER'S TALE**

A thesis and institution focussed study submitted  
in partial fulfilment for the degree  
of  
Doctor of Education

By

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October 2000

## **A work in two parts**

**PART ONE: The Thesis**

**PART TWO: The Institution Focussed Study**

# PART ONE

## Abstract

This thesis builds on the first configuration model developed and expanded in the IFS. The model considers the factors that impact on managers as they undertake performance management of their staff. This thesis transforms the original model through a second and into a third and final configuration.

The questions that underpin this research are concerned with managers' experiences as they engage in managing performance and explore the triggers that enable managers to begin a process of, and sustain, managing underperformance within their team.

The methodology and research approach adopted is that of social construction which allows managers' worlds to be co-constructed. In undertaking this study, researcher reflexivity was developed, by engaging with colleagues and other interested individuals. The research discourse was not a neutral process and emotioning in research was explicitly recognised.

The research design and methods of data collection worked with senior managers across public and private sectors and also engaged with manager groups to provide situations where emerging constructions could be worked up. This continuing professional engagement gave a way of interacting with the emerging discourse to refine the constructions.

The research findings identify the significance of contextual factors within any manager's world and the increasing importance of external conditions such as Best Value.

The idea of potent and impotent organisations in sustaining a high performance culture is created and the characteristics of each identified. The concept of "*other*" emerged as managers described the individual who was underperforming and the level of fear and emotional impact on them as they engaged with the "*other*" in performance management. During the research managers described their feelings in different ways but there was a universal factor – managers do have feelings.

Performance management is a Wicked Problem and the rhetoric belies the level of complexity that this research has identified namely – There is no definitive Problem, there is no definitive Solution.

Finally the research recommends action for policy makers and managers in order to better develop the systems and processes needed to achieve super performance.

## Acknowledgements

To the men in my life, Bill, Adam and Alex, who gave me the space to just get on with it. To my muse, Chris Watkins, who never fails to encourage me, and the rest of the gang at the Institute of Education. To Nora, for always providing that 'je ne sais quoi' and endless Star Trek tapes. To colleagues at Brunel who prompted me to develop resolve, determination and tenacity.

Finally to all those friends and colleagues who supported and encouraged me, and most importantly shared.

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# Chapter One

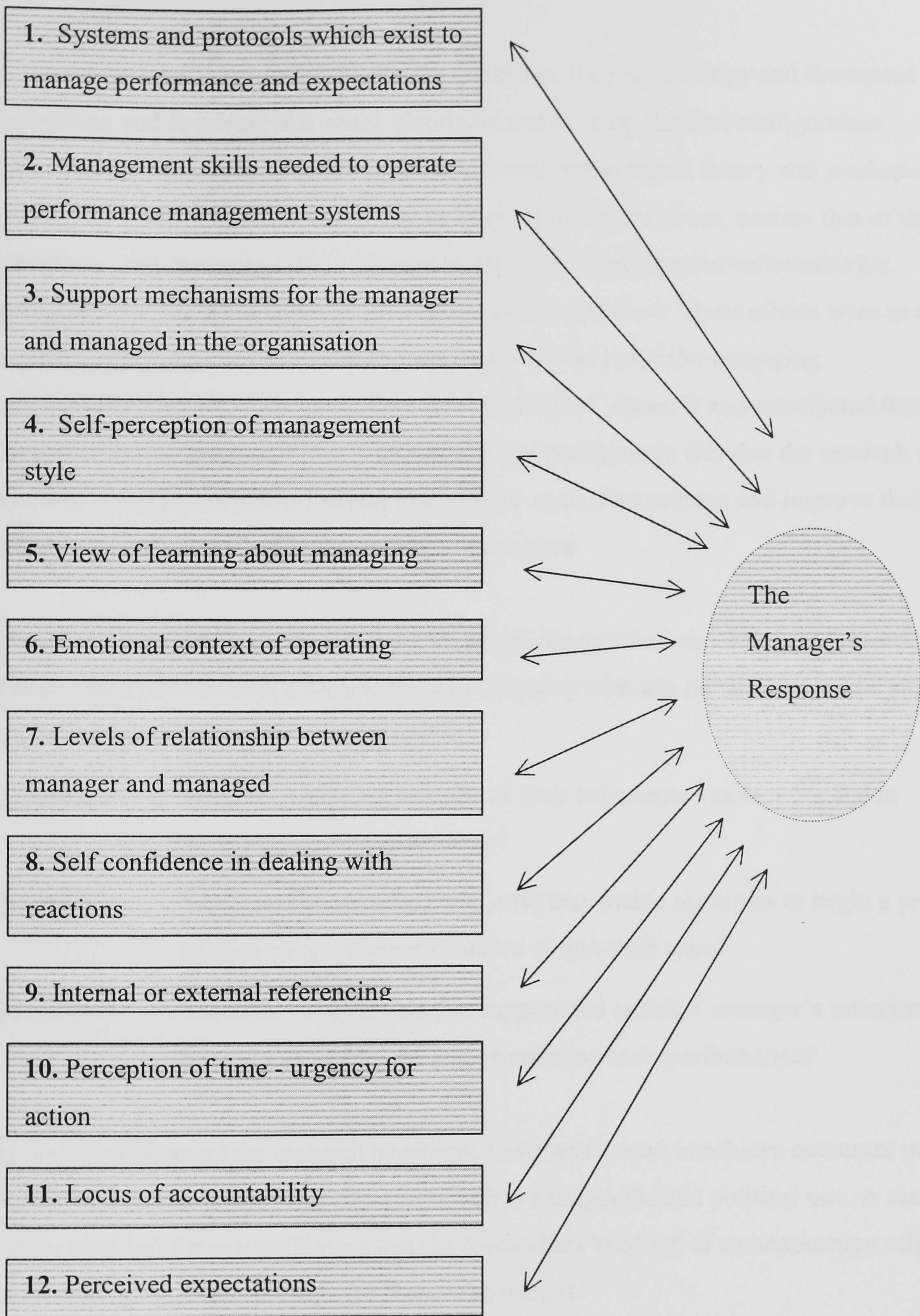
## *Introduction*

*There is merit in open-mindedness and the willingness to enter a research setting looking for questions as well as answers, but “it is impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for”.* Wolcott (1982, p. 156)

I began not with a research problem but with an interest in a substantive area, that of management. The original intention – which had been to look at how managers learn to manage – had raised my interest in non-positivist methodologies. This led onto teams and inner team workings and whether it would be possible to investigate whether teams can learn. The concept of the “weakest link” began to come to the forefront as I talked through ideas. It was becoming evident that it wasn’t so much what worked in relation to teams, but rather “*what happens when it doesn’t work*” that was the issue for many managers. Questions they were asking included “How do I get to grips with the person who is not engaging with their area of work?” and “Who is defining not getting to grips with?” The person or team member who was not performing to the expected standard was becoming more visible as organisations, including schools, were becoming more accountable through external inspection regimes.

These initial questions led to the research area of underperformance and the perceived behaviours associated with it began to take on form, through conversations and dialogue. A model emerged through that dialogue and was the subject of a literature search, which has been fully written up in the Institution Focussed Study. The initial model, restated over the page in Figure 1, was subsequently named a ‘first configuration’ and it became the background against which the research took place. Objectivist assumptions can hold researchers responsible and accountable for their modeling but any model can only pull together a story of the researcher and researched and cannot ever cover more than that.

Harre and Gillet (1994) suggest that any model is a representation of abstract forms of the phenomena under study – in other words a model is simply a metaphor for representations.



*Figure 1: A first configuration*

*The interplay of domains: a manager's response to underperformance*

As the research area developed, so did the questions, the methodology and the means of discovering and inquiring that could illuminate and develop the first configuration. It was evident from initial searching that traditional management theory was predisposed to omitting and rendering invisible a large territory of managers' lives, namely that of their interactions and emotions. These interactive and emotional domains reflected what managers were telling as their stories of their lived experience. These stories were as much about the experience of managing performance – and in particular managing underperformance – as those from the more “traditional” areas. It was anticipated that this research was important as it would eventually lead managers to feel that the research and its resulting accounts, would add to and extend their sum of knowledge and improve their ability to manage underperformance within their team.

I took as an ontological perspective, that of social construction and developed research methodology and methods which would be in keeping with this perspective whilst still addressing the following research questions:

- Question 1**      What do managers describe as their experiences as they engage in managing underperformance?
- Question 2**      What are the perceived trigger(s) that enable managers to begin a process of managing underperformance within their team?
- Question 3**      What are the elements that support and enable a manager's intention to pursue and sustain the management of underperformance?

As well as addressing the research questions, there was a need to achieve outcomes or as Burr (1995) relates to us, “The aim of research is a pragmatic and political one. A search not for truth but for any usefulness that the researchers 'reading' of a phenomenon might have in bringing about a change for those who need it.”

Chapter Two addresses the methodological considerations and includes a discussion on the merits of trait behaviour, sometimes called personality theory, and why this was discarded as an underlying ontological perspective and research methodology. Chapter Three describes the methods chosen which mirror the ontological perspective adopted. It

covers the sample of reciprocators chosen, stressing their commonality is of experience and not status or job function. A further dimension is gained by using professional groups of managers in an opportunistic way to develop model constructions.

Chapter Four describes the process of data analysis. Within a social construction paradigm this could be better described as a process of decomposing and synthesing data to move towards the constructions which are reported in Chapter Five. This chapter also describes how the synthesis and refining of the research data led to determining the significance – or not – of the original Domains within the managers stories. The formation of configurations and the way that the data supported their formation is an integral part of this synthesis.

Chapter Six discusses the findings and develops proposals from the research to assist policy makers who are working in the field of management development and practitioners who are simply trying to do their jobs even better.

## Chapter Two

### *Issues of methodology and aspects of research approach*

*Methodology is the discourse about the methods of scientific inquiry and enables decisions on whether, by which data and by which methods, a scientific problem is solvable and when a proposed solution is acceptable as such. Methodology assures that theories, data and methods constitute a consistent network of arguments and computations.*

*Krippendorff (1991, p.124, his emphasis)*

#### *The stance I took*

The choice of methodology and subsequent research methods had to enable the exploration of the events in the managers' world as they dealt with the performance issues of those they were managing. The dominant methodological approach in investigative management studies and the resultant research methods are those derived from psychology and social psychology. Specifically, trait behaviourism or personality theories, that encompass the idea that there is a pre-given content to a person. Examples of this approach include the work of Belbin (1981, p.20) who suggest that "individuals within any one occupation grouping naturally vary in personality." Marguerison and McGann (1990, p.23) similarly use the concept of assessment in their work on team functioning. This paradigm also encompasses the view that we independently construct our own versions of reality and that language is a precondition for thought. Traditional psychology looks for explanations of why people do what they do, forming hypotheses about the existence of elements within themselves such as motivations, cognitions and so on. This is the 'common' sense view (common in the sense that it is widely shared) within the management literature and the study of management practice.

In contrast, social construction has no one feature to define it but can best be described

through the basic tenets adapted from Burr (1995), which are as follows:

1. Adopting a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge which suggest challenging ways of understanding the world as well ourselves and being ever suspicious of how the world appears to be. This means that any categories which we as human beings might apprehend in the world do not necessarily refer to any real divisions.
2. Historical and cultural specificity, which suggest that the categories and concepts we use to understand the world are historically and culturally specific.
3. That knowledge is sustained by social process and that the 'goings on' between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which our shared versions of knowledge are constructed. Therefore we regard 'truth' (which of course varies historically and cross culturally) as a product of social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other, not in any objective observation of the world.
4. Knowledge and social action go together so that these negotiated understandings can take a wide variety of different forms and we can therefore talk of numerous possible 'social constructions' of the world.

Within a social constructionist paradigm, the constructing and organising processes are key, encompassing the idea that each interaction is the product of previous interactions and in turn is the producer of present and future interactions. A central principle, that of reflexivity is adopted. Reflexivity – a bending back on oneself – can refer to the way that any theory re-constitutes the role of those involved in the study and their relationship to the researcher: but it can also draw attention to the fact that any account is simultaneously a description of the event and part of the event itself. Social constructionism itself is not exempt from the critical stance it brings, it is just as much of a construction as any other way of accounting. Reflexivity is explained by Steier (1991) as follows:

*We are talking about a circular process , in which reflexivity is the guiding relationship allowing for the circularity. This looping back may ... unfold as spiralling [experience].* (Ibid. p.2)

We understand and become aware of our own research activities as if telling ourselves a



story about ourselves and our involvement, but, we must remind ourselves that we tell our stories through others. By examining how, as researchers, we are reflexively part of the system we are studying, we can also develop an awareness of how reflexivity gives us an understanding of what others are doing within that system. The development of research methods in order to undertake inquiries from a social constructionist standpoint had to take into account the concept of reflexivity.

Scientific positivism, exemplified by personality trait theory and psychological approaches towards motivation and resultant behaviours, has largely been accepted as producing the best or finest knowledge within the management literature. Taking a social constructionist stance as exemplified by Steedman (1991, p.58) is to recognise that “most of our knowing is concerned with trying to make sense of what it is to be human and to be situated as we are... This recognises that people are active rather than passive, acting in and on their worlds rather than ‘receiving’ knowledge”.

Taking a social constructionist position to undertake management research could be viewed as problematic, even deviant. What follows is the unraveling of the dominant series of discourses in the study of managers’ worlds to explicate the eventual chosen and adopted ontological perspective.

Harre and Gillett as social psychologists (1994, p.19) state: “Psychology is the science that attempts to explain behaviour.” At its most simplistic the research was attempting to understand managers’ behaviours. Personality theory presently sits within a positivist paradigm, and the psychologists who have adopted this position are now being exhorted to review their position as “new” psychological approaches towards research emerge.

The underlying ontological position in old psychology, which subsumes personality theory, was that of mind-body dualism – sometimes called Cartesian after Rene Descartes, the exponent of the theory. This position presupposes that humans are composed of two systems – one mental, one material – realised in two distinct and different substances. The early notion of different kinds of substance lost its appeal but the idea of inner mind versus

outer body lingered on.

In some areas of psychology now being defined as “new psychology” a shift is taking place, dissolving the Cartesian distinction between mind and body in favour of a discursive stance. This shift can be summarised as follows after Harre and Gillette (1994, p. 27):

1. Many psychological phenomena are to be interpreted as properties or features of a discourse, which may be public or private. As public it is behaviour, as private it is thought.
2. Individual and private uses of symbolic systems, which in this view constitute thinking, are derived from interpersonal discursive processes that are the main feature of the human environment.
3. The production of psychological phenomena in discourse, e.g. emotions, decisions, attitudes, personality displays and so on, depends on the skill of the actors, their relative moral standing in the community and the story lines that unfold.

Harre and Gillett suggest the change towards “new” psychology has come from two directions. Firstly, a shift is taking place in social psychology – people are taken as active beings using rules and other normative constraints to construct their social relations and the episodes in which they are involved. This presents the idea of the social world as discursive construction. The second shift occurs in the development of cognitive psychology over two phases. The first phase shared with the Cartesian paradigm, the sense of duality and a belief in inner mental processes. The second phase built on the work of Wittgenstein who linked behaviour to language and thought:

*We understand the behaviour of an individual when we grasp the meanings that are informing that individual's activities. ... Mental activity is a range of moves or techniques defined against a background of human activity and governed by informal rules.*

*Wittgenstein (quoted in Harre and Gillett, 1994, p. 21)*

These developments within “new” psychology introduce the concept of the experimenter or

observer entering a discourse with the people being studied and trying to appreciate the shape of the subject's world. The researcher, recognising that there is only co-participation in the research attempts to make sense of the world and their subject(s)' experience of it. The basis of thinking is expressed by words, and words are located in languages, which in turn are used to accomplish a huge variety of tasks. From this position we take a view of the mind not as a sealed unit – which would be the Cartesian view – but rather as a meeting point of different influences and discourses. As stated by Harre and Gillet (1994, p. 53)

*we must learn to see the mind as the meeting point of a wide range of structuring influences. ...The study of the mind is a way of understanding the phenomena that arise when different sociocultural discourses are integrated within an identifiable human individual situated in relation to those discourses.*

Runyan (1997) sees psychological research methodology as a continuum between hard research and soft research, where;

*the hard end is concerned with quantitative measurement, experimental control, objectivity and being scientific in a natural sense, whilst the soft end of the continuum is concerned with subjective experience, meaning and interpretation, socio-historical context and being scientific in a human sciences traditions. Runyan (1997, p. 59)*

He believes that integration of different areas of psychology with other disciplines into synthesised fields – for example, in cognitive sciences and neuroscience – has begun to take place, this would accord with the idea of “new” psychology after Harre and Gillet (1994). Hard methods, which would include personality instruments, have not yet undergone a similar synthesis and leave unaddressed an important set of questions about the understanding of persons and their lives, of inner subjective experiences and their meanings, and of relations with the social historical context (see Figure 2).

	Hard		Soft	
<b>Tradition</b>	Behaviourist Cognitive	psychoanalytic	study of lives	Phenomenological culture
<b>Objectives</b>	studying specific processes			understanding lives in a social-historical context
<b>Methods/ disciplines</b>	laboratory/experimental quasi experimental quantitative correlational	longitudinal prospective	interpretative symbolisation intentionality meaning	analysis case study psychobiographical cross - cultural

*Figure 2: A synthesis of methodologies (after Runyan, 1997)*

Runyan (1997) suggests that there is a change, a synthesis “which could fruitfully integrate a number of common concerns of personality, social, developmental, and clinical psychology. At its best such a synthesis might identify shared issues at the soft end, clarify research methods and criteria, provide fresh energy and optimism for soft psychology and lead to integrative theoretical and empirical work cutting across separate areas.”

The dilemma for this research into managers’ worlds, is that the emerging synthesis at the “soft” end of psychology has not yet taken place. The timing of this research has overtaken any possible synthesis and the notion of conceptual and measurement issues in personality theory – including the concept of traits, still forms the content of the dominant discourse. Whilst difficulties are recognised, the “hard end” psychologists still retain their view that personality can be predicted, as typified in the following quote:

*There may be unresolved questions concerning the extent to which persons engage in predictive behaviours in ordinary life, but there is little question that prediction is the major professional activity of the applied personality assessment psychologist.*

*Wiggins (1997, p. 109)*

Personality trait theorists speak of traits as “hypothetical constructs” inferred from patterns of past conduct and used to predict future behaviour, with people seen as having “certain dispositions”. Lamiell (1997) explains how it is believed that advancement of personality theory through individual difference research can take place:-

*Thesis 1* Any theory of personality is a conceptual framework designed to provide explanation for, and an understanding of, individual behaviour and psychological functioning.

A social constructionist perspective would contrast with this view, suggesting and expecting that human interaction would vary in relation to individuals and their contextual positions. “Whatever we humans beings do arises in our operations, in our domains of experiences, through continuous braiding of our languaging and emotioning that is in all that we human beings do” (Maturana, 1991, p.41).

*Thesis 2* Except under hypothetical conditions which are never realised in practice...the reliability and validity coefficients and other statistical indices *bear no legitimate interpretation of any kind whatsoever at the level of the individual.*  
(Lamiel, 1997, p.118, my italics).

This quote would suggest that personality trait theorists recognise the deficiency of their position, but nevertheless continue to operate their systems.

Here then, lies a paradox that personality theory has not yet addressed; knowledge about individual differences is not knowledge about individuals.

*One either recognises that knowledge about individual difference variables is neither equivalent to, nor substitutable for, knowledge about individuals, or one violates logic. There are no other choices even where there seem to be.* Lamiell (1997, p.121)

Nomothetic research is the type of research that attempts to discover general laws by comparing many individuals and it is this approach that underpins the concept of personality theory. What nomothetic research cannot do is to reveal, find, or discover, that uniqueness that is the individual as encapsulated in the following comment from Lamiell.

*It is logically possible that each measured individual would be found to take up a position occupied by no other measured individual within the multidimensional space; it is clear that in this view there is at least one sense in which uniqueness – and individuality if that just means uniqueness – is a phenomenon that cannot be accommodated by traditional “nomotheticism.”* (Ibid. p. 126)

‘Personal-ity’ in a social construction view of the world, would suggest that versions of ‘you’ are a product of relationship with others. “Each ‘you’ is constructed socially out of social encounters that make up relationships” (Shotter, 1993, p.71). This leads to a view that we constantly create ourselves rather than discover ourselves and other people.

Adopting a social constructionist position, gives a means of generating constructions and recognises that an individual person could act in ways which might be regarded as their history, framed by all manner of personal circumstances such as religion, gender and class. This position is taken by Steedman as follows:

*Meaning ascription occurs only in acts of interpretation and since individual persons who make such interpretations come to them constituted with very different contexts of interpretation available to them there can be no single objective (or perhaps superpersonal) truth that can be the product of acts of observation and states of knowing.... individual persons are persons at all in virtue of their membership within human communities or cultures.* Steedman (1991, p.55)

Fineman (1994) draws from the work of Weber to suggest that emotions are something that usual organisational and administrative discourse suppresses or marginalises. This thesis intended to accommodate any existence of emotions and ‘irrational elements,’ in order to illuminate this aspect of the manager’s world.

Emotions play a central role in most theories of personality yet personality theorists and psychologists alike have shown a remarkable tolerance for ambiguity with regard to the nature of emotions per se. “A fuller appreciation of the variety, organisation and principles of emotion is necessary for the advancement and possible integration of personality theory”

states Averill (1997, p. 537). Psychologists, have attempted to use categorical approaches, assuming that emotions can be grouped into homogenous categories, as in the case of Storm and Storm (1987). They determined four levels of a taxonomic tree and then acknowledged that theirs was a taxonomy of emotional words and concepts – the language of the emotions, not the experience of emotions themselves. Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989) suggested that emotions are biologically based, and independent of language; they go on to suggest that emotions are not divisible into discrete units. Averill (1997, p. 515) acknowledged that as psychologists “we have yet to map the internal structure of the emotional domain”.

A social constructionist perspective towards the emotions treats them as constructions, which are also subject to reconstruction and change. The emergence of emotions is legitimated through the shared language-in-use, or languaging, about emotions within – in this case – the relevant community of managers. The emphasis is on interdependence through relationships rather than independent understanding. The position is summarised by the following quotes:

*the social construction of emotions, persons, interpersonal relationships, etc. in the language used by individuals; that is in their discourse. ... Feeling and experiencing are part of knowing and are regarded as a process of continuous construction.*

*Krippendorf (1991, pp.115-116)*

The acknowledgement of emotioning leads to an invitation to the investigator to go outwards into the fuller realm of shared languages:

*The reflexive attempt is then relational, emphasising the expansion of languages of understanding.*

*Gergen and Gergen (1991, p.79)*

How do these social worlds, these management worlds appear real to us? A transmission model of communication would suggest that the world exists outside of our world – making dualistic assumptions that we have to choose between physical and mental elements of our world. In contrast to this, from a social constructionist position we are telling a story. Language becomes the means for doing things, for coordinating actions and for living life

(Shotter, 1993).

Steier explains that through paying attention to language activities or stories, we create our worlds:

*I submit that we create our research worlds through stories as experiences that are, fictive or factive, ways that guide us toward marking some 'streams of life' as described by Wittgenstein (1953) as noticeable while leaving others as background.*

*These stories enmesh themselves in our histories and through which we see, are often not admissible within our research communities as evidence for how we claim what we claim. They through their omission force the very constructing activity that should be so important to a constructionist researcher, to be unacknowledged. I am arguing for the constructing activity to be understood as any part of generated research we might consider this to be part of a re- search process the stories through which we see.*

*Steier (1991, p. 164)*

When we research, we ourselves are part of that social world, the system we are researching: “researchers are moral agents in a world comprised of multiple, sometimes contradictory, discourse; their personalities are always plural and mutable; they are inconsistent and flexible, adapting to changing circumstances” (Harre and Gillet, 1994, p.41). Social constructionist inquiry has to concern itself with a process that is embedded in a reflexive loop, which includes the inquirer who is at once an active observer. Reflexivity or turning back onto a self, is a way in which circularity and self - reference appear in the inquiry. This enables us to recognise the various mutual relationships in which our research activities are embedded. Steier (1991, p. 163) suggests that “these include for example, a relationship between language and experience that allows us to see ‘individual’ experience as socially constructed, rooted in languaging activities whose possibilities for becoming our experience provides.”

Methods used in any research need to be in keeping with the ontological perspective and the methodological position already taken. Taking a social constructionist position should give the flexibility in approach, to be able to explore managers’ worlds.



In undertaking the research, the following positions were recognised:-

- Data collection and analysis were interrelated and continuous constructions.
- Analysis construction was incorporated reflexively, leading into the next dialogue, notes, memos and observations formed part of the constructions.
- All relevant issues were to be reflexively incorporated into the next set of dialogue, exchanges and observations.
- The Domains would form the basic framework for the constructions to be elaborated.
- Domain constructions were to be developed or dismantled. Hypothesis and story telling would form the basis of the construction. Comparisons and contrasts would be identified along with similarities and differences which made up the discourse.
- Writing memos and diaries would be an integral part of the reflexivity of this research.
- Hypotheses about relationships among domains would be developed and elaborated in the findings.
- Research reflexivity would be developed, by engaging with colleagues and other interested individuals.
- Broader structural conditions, the wider setting and broader trends would form an integral part of this research.
- Sampling would not draw on specific groups of individuals, or be about units of time but would recognise the stories of all contributors including managers and the researcher who would be an integral part of forming any construction.

My research itself will be a construction. I am proposing to use the methodological principles of social construction to determine the methods and research approach in order to gain the insights, construct meaning and seek to 'know'. Krippendorff (1991) suggests we can know about things in two ways. Firstly 'to know about them', i.e. comprehending facts about the case and secondly, to know them as human beings – i.e. to *give them meaning* as well as *extract meaning from them*. This sort of meaning he argues, does not reside within the text or in reader of the text but in the interplay that takes place between them – the

emphasis is on interpersonal relationship and the language used by individuals, in their discourse about their knowing. He explains that social construction

*insists that all knowledge is self reflexive in the sense that the knower always is a constitutive part of his or her own process of knowing and moreover, that much of it is negotiated with others, the result of social accounting practices (Shotter 1984) by speakers of a language and an intrinsic part of their discourse. ...*

*... Hence knowing is seen as a process of continuous construction that maintains itself in the presence of (enabling or frustrating) perturbations from the medium in which it resides. Discourse constitutes such a medium.*

*Krippendorf (1991, pp. 115–116)*

What social construction research methodology will not do is

- provide accurate representations of an underlying reality
- treat knowledge as constructing in static forms
- assume that social life exists in predetermined social structures
- assume that language exists in code for linking psychological events
- separate our talk from the conversational contexts
- claim one true view

*adapted from Shotter (1993)*

*A constructionist researcher is faced with the dilemma of wanting to understand 'how others construct meaning or make happenings' (in their 'language'), while recognising that he or she is a member of a community of researchers who have a particular language with which they demand to be addressed, and that these two languages are not the same.*

*Steier (1991, p.175)*

This movement across the language of the community in which the research is taking place, to the language of the research community, is a key element in seriously linking reflexivity to the fieldwork methods. It requires that research is looked upon as a translation process and needs to be recognised as such. Our conversations with those engaged in our research,

their conversations among themselves, and our conversations with our colleagues are different conversations, or in Wittgenstein's (1968) terms different language games. Steier (1991) suggests that an awareness of this translation forces a de-privileging of researcher views, links and connections. He suggests that we try to understand the activities our professional language carries with it, but also allow ourselves to relax some of the distinctions, and presuppositions of our professional community and become "defamiliarised" as we converse with our co-respondents. What follows is the search for research methods that will reflect the ontological position taken. There is not a particular set of methods, "Social constructionists may validly use qualitative or even quantitative methods in their research" (Burr, 1995, p. 147), although discourse analysis and content analysis are often employed.

### *Discovering worlds through discourse – the ~~interview~~*

~~Interview~~ in the title is struck through (after De Shazer, 1994). The strike through is used as a device, a reminder to the reader that the word as it is being read does not necessarily connote the meaning that may be automatically ascribed to it. In striking through ~~interview~~ there is an explicit intention to engage the reader into recognising that the word 'interview' is a construction and does not, in itself, denote the exchange of meaning which takes place in the research process. Discourse will be used to describe this process as undertaken in this research. On any occasion in this thesis, where the word interview is used the above caveats remain in place.

Social construction gives a perspective on communication and requires us to think in terms of interactive patterns for gathering stories, engaging in discourse rather interviewing respondents or subjects in atomistic units. Language is social phenomenon and

*produces and constructs our experience of ourselves and each other, and is not the simple reflecting mirror belonging to our traditional (western) humanist philosophy. A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events.*

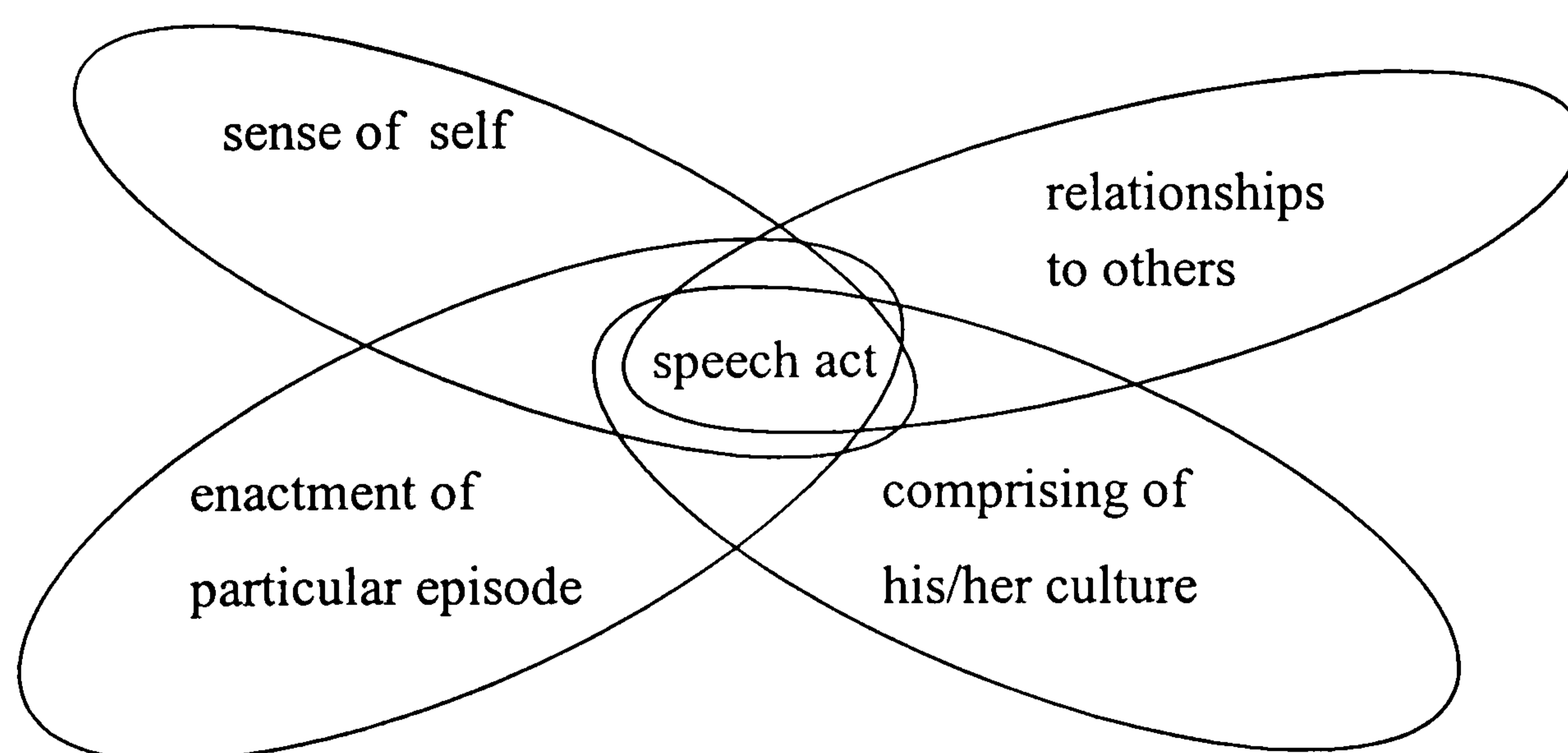
*Burr (1995, p.44)*

Each discourse can claim to say what the object really is, that is, claims to be the truth, the

reality. “There is virtually no aspect of human life that is exempt from meaning, everything around us can be considered as ‘textual’ and ‘life as text’ could be said to be the underlying metaphor of the discourse approach” (Burr, 1995, p.181).

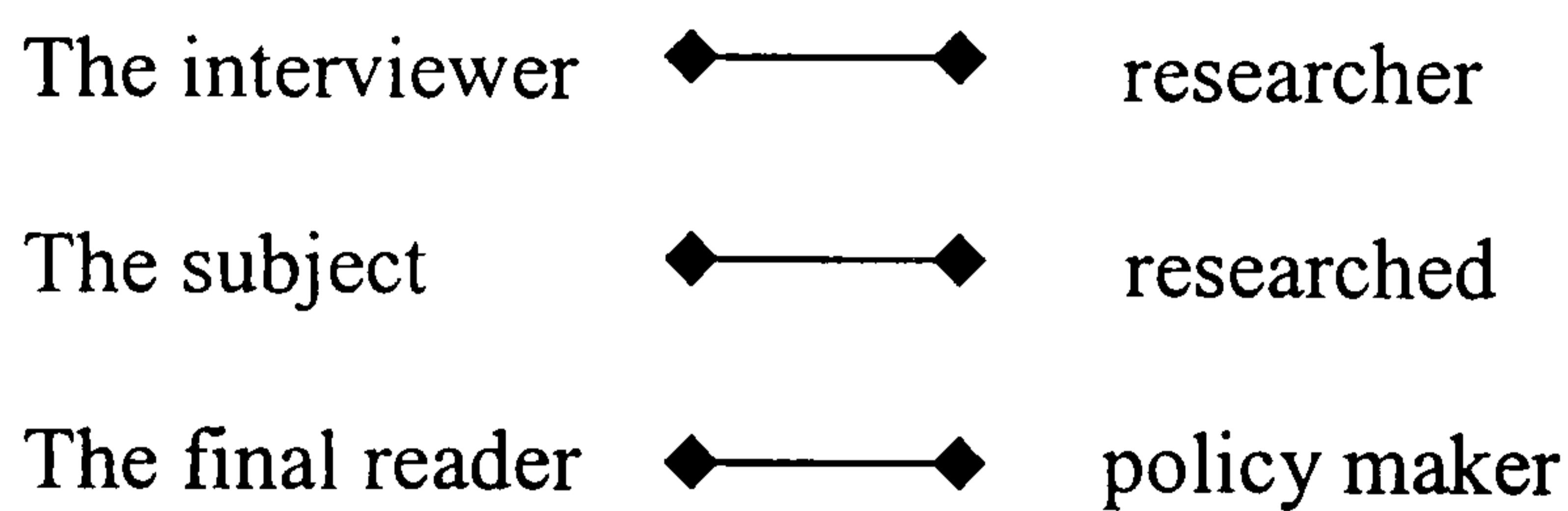
The use of the word “interview” in a social construction paradigm can be seen as problematic since there could be constraint through “linguistic tyranny” (Barnet Pearce, 1994). Linguistic tyranny insists on the use of specific language and can be found within cultures and epistemologies. Research has its own body of knowledge, its own language, which may in itself exert an influence on a researcher, the research and its ultimate interpretation.

The concept of discourse can be extended further. In his work on making social worlds, Barnett Pearce (1994, p. 33) takes the idea of specific conversations and places them within a much larger system where he says “a reductionist path identifies the smallest unit and then makes assumptions that this tells us about the whole. We must see conversations as systems in which the whole is different from the sum of the parts.” The following model in Figure 3 attempts to recognise the influences on any speech act as a part of discourse within a conversation.



*Figure 3: Atom model to encompass conversation systems (from Barnett Pearce, 1994)*

If we recognise the existence of these subsets and levels, it follows that all these identified interactions will form discourse(s). They are all conversations within discourse, which are polysemic – that is, they have “many meanings”. Words and phrases will have multiple meanings, such that no utterance or action will ever have only one meaning. Meaning depends on the context and perspective from which it is interpreted, and that interpretation will be undertaken at different levels. These identified, only represent some of the possible permutations and possibilities:



### *Reciprocators*

Deciding what to name those people who interact to make research possible is not a given. People engaged with the researcher in research are variously called respondents, informants, reciprocators and subjects.

Steier (1991, p. 165) suggests that as such language “bind[s] us to modes of discourse that place the participative role of others in more of an input-output mode rather than recognising a mutual process.” He goes on: “To call attention to what I would like to see as a more relational language of constructionist research while still embedding such discourse in reflexive dialogue, I would like, following Ortega y Gasset (1957), to call those participating with me *reciprocators*, for it is only in their hearing me and answering me that a ‘me’ can emerge as an I who does research” (Ibid.). This research process will draw on Steier’s work and use the concept of conversational learning. The metaphor of conversational learning can give a way of seeing the evolving course of the thesis. “The idea of conversation becomes important and productive as it encourages us as researchers to make our own action experiments in search of the emergence of new meaning, new features, new structures” (Bamberger and Schon, 1991, p. 191). Making meaning itself is a process of making reference structures – *internalised mental structures* – that guide our meaning making. In interacting with others it becomes difficult to avoid reflecting on our

personal relationship to the research process or to ignore our role in the construction of the facts we seek to collect. Jorgenson (1991) points to identity fashioning, where the interviewer identity is constructed for the interviewer by the reciprocators, in other words the person to whom the reciprocator speaks is not necessarily the person whom the researcher thinks they are.

This raises the idea of intersection of discourses, as they come to intersect when researchers and reciprocators meet. Interviewers embody multiple identities in the research context and bring to the process of 'reality' construction routines, interactions and social exchange. Translation across the intersection will always be an issue and in this translating across from conversation to conversation a researcher becomes in Becker's (1981) terms, a pontificator - a bridge builder.

### *Stories lived and stories told...*

A further dimension to any discourse is the stories that are told. There is a tension between the stories lived and stories told. In the stories we tell, we can be like superpeople, subject only to the limits of our imagination; for example, managers can relate their imaginings of "empowering others" or "being a good manager" by the management style they purport to have adopted. The stories we live, however, are performed in concert with other people who will also have a view and insight into our reality. Conversations are a fluid interpenetration of these worlds, these realities; we are at best co-authors of our experience.

*We are born into clusters of conversations already in progress, we are born into clusters of conversation of gender, race, economic processes, classes, religion and identity; we find our place in these conversations by understanding their terms.*

*Barnett Pearce (1994, p. 45)*

Research discourse takes place as a series of episodes sitting within each conversation or interaction. If we attempt to define an episode formally it can be misleading because episodes are constantly being made or are in the process of being made, they interleave and intertwine as discourse unfolds. At best we can understand episodes as functioning as frames that define what is inside or outside them. It is therefore useful to treat episodes as if they are organised in terms of time as a means of defining what may be inside or outside of

them. For the purposes of this research we will assume that discourse is a series of episodes following each other in time.

The prominence of particular language or knowledge may arise in the research discourse with reciprocators and be influential. 'Voice' and the messages or stories transmitted through particular voices, can be influenced by how skilful an individual reciprocator is, at using the conventions and language belonging to his or her particular society, in this research, this would be the language of the society of managers.

### *Mindreader or researcher?*

Watzlawick (1974) talks of the confusion in interpersonal relationships where "mind reading" takes place in an attempt to predict what the "other" is feeling or thinking. He introduces the notion of "high power position", which he suggests may demand a perception different from reality, further suggesting that significant others may introduce a power dynamic. This concept can usefully be transferred into the researching context, where the person taking part in the research, may perceive the researcher as more powerful.

There is always a tendency for those in positions of power to legitimate and endorse constructions or discourses which maintain and justify that position of power. The agency and affiliation of human beings is in their ability to manipulate discourse in order to put themselves in the driving seat. Researchers are no different they "are also human beings and like everyone else are located inside a value system from which their questions about the world arise" (Burr, 1995 p.103).

### *Discourse or inquisition?*

Methods for engaging in discourse, within a social constructionist paradigm are not prescribed and can be developmental. Circular questioning has been predominantly used in the field of family therapy, though circular questions as a strategy for discerning the social structures around and in the manager's world may offer a new perspective. Bateson (1973) describes communication as a matter of difference, which is the starting point for circular questions which focus on: -

1. difference in the information in the system
2. individuals in relation to others
3. posing alternatives
4. how things are made in the system

When working in this way the metaphors of weaving as well as juggling can be useful and remind us, as researchers, of the nature of our research as conversations and discourse always remembering the hierarchy of contexts namely :culture, self, relationship, episode, speech act ; within which conversations exist, which can also remind us of and assist us towards reflexivity (Barnett Pearce,1994).

In an interview one person will do most of the asking, and the other most of the answering; one person (the researcher) is likely to be the more skilled or practiced of the interlocutors and usually has a specific idea in mind. Within a social construction paradigm the researcher is part of the system and is fully engaged in the discourse with the reciprocator, the ideas ‘in mind’ are an integral part of the construction.

### *Reality revisited...*

It is worth noting that, whichever methods are chosen for engaging in discourse; the final rendering of data will need to reflect the ontological position of the research and the researcher. In constructing the manager’s interpretation of their world there is a recognition that all language helps to create a picture or as Wittgenstein (1975, quoted in Shotter, 1993, p. 17) states “We judge an action according to its background within human life...The background is the bustle of life. The whole hurly burly is the background against which we see an action and it determines our judgement, our concepts and our reactions.” Or to paraphrase – different people in different positions at different moments will live in different realities. Shotter (1993) raises interesting questions about the nature of human accountability as well as the ability to recount.



*If one is to be seen as a morally autonomous, socially competent person in the giving or stating of one's accounts, to have one's account taken seriously there is the question of one's immediate relation to one's audience. A part of what is to be seen as offering a worthwhile account, is to be seen as offering something that is fitting... The accounts are "given" a character, an imaginary character – about which many true facts may be established – but which they do not in themselves in fact have.*

*Shotter (1993, p. 94)*

Shotter's position would suggest that reciprocators will translate their reality to ensure that their accounts are worthwhile for the researcher. Donald Spence (1986) alerts us to the probability of interpretation as the subject of the re-search, re-collects, re-members and re-constructs the past. In the thoughts that take place from a position of detachment towards a position of interaction, any biographical fragments as a practical block of knowledge, are likely to be subjected to "narrative smoothing." The subject of the research will remove disjointed pieces and ensure that the story runs in a way that is understood. This narrative smoothing should be noted in research and in this research construction, because "a nice coherent well-organised narrative with everything in its place *prevents* the appearance of alternative or *circumstantial* possibilities" (Spence, 1986, p. 51).

The interpretation of words can be described as meaning-making, yet the meaning, and hence the research findings, is always going to be based on translation. There is an inherent difficulty with translating meaning from any messages given during discourse and then translating that meaning again into a knowledge construction. Shotter describes this as follows:

*Even the best translation entails a loss – perhaps not so much of objective information as of intangible essence of language, its beauty, imagery, metaphors for which there is no one-to-one translation.*

*Shotter (1993, p. 146)*

Linguists and communicators are familiar with the term paranomastic, from paranomasia: a slight change of words, a play on words that is 'a correct translation but not what it means'. Potter and Wetherall (1987) draw attention to the concept of interpretative repertoire, which they suggest arises as reciprocators construct their accounts for the researcher.

They suggest that these repertoires “do not belong to individual people and are not located inside their head but that they are a social resource specific to their context.” They identified this repertoire as belonging to the discourse patterns of respondents when answering questions. It appeared as if the respondents were channelling particular responses towards the researcher. This resulted in the reflection of dominant discourse patterns as they made their accounts. This concept has major implications in any interpretation leading towards a construction for managing underperformance. Managers may well be resorting to reiterating ideas and concepts that they feel are expected of them as ‘good managers’ within their responses and dialogues.

## Chapter Three

### *Research design and methods of data collection*

#### *...Exploring worlds*

The issues of methodology and how this influenced research design has already been discussed in Chapter Two, which also addresses the broad questions of epistemology and ontology. The methods of the research had to sit comfortably within the methodological framework chosen.

*Social constructionism as a loose collection of theoretical perspectives and discourse analysis as an approach to doing social research do not map on to each other in a one to one fashion.*

*Burr (1995, p.159)*

Social constructionists, as has already been suggested, may use other qualitative and even quantitative methods in their research. This research process was planned to be manageable, informative to the researchers day to day role, but also to make a contribution to the field of management studies. The research was placed as central to the researchers day to day world and all opportunities were used, in the work situation or in conversations with colleagues and friends – to engage in discourse and to construct meaning from these interactions with others. This process was very different from engaging in data collecting as a mechanistic process.

#### *Whose worlds? – Defining the case*

##### **Sampling and evidence base**

This research was bounded by manageability, and a recognition that any “formal” sample of reciprocators was going to be small. In all cases whether public or private sector, and whatever their level of seniority, the common denominator which ran across all

reciprocators was that they were managers of people, with direct experience of managing underperformance. Miles and Huberman (1990) suggest that working with a small sample does not invalidate qualitative research. Sampling was purposive and driven by the emerging theoretical stories and the conceptual framework already developed in the Institution Focussed Study. The “thought through” choices regarding the individuals’ and groups was driven by self-questioning or self reflexivity, the participation in the process of knowing, as well as the need to know more about the research area, rather than any concern for how representative the sample might prove to be. The selection was also determined by the access that was possible, to both individuals and groups within their existing or previous job roles

The sampling was both progressive and opportunistic as interaction with the data and with colleagues occurred. The reciprocators were “collected” where their discourse and stories would further inform the research. Kuzel (1992) added a label to this method of “selection” in his typology of sampling strategies he describes “opportunistic sampling” as following new leads and taking advantage of the unexpected. This was an engaging way of working and a tape recorder was taken to any venue or meeting that might offer an opportunity to engage in discourse. In adopting this non-deterministic “sampling” approach, the outcome and breadth of the research was enhanced and discovered over time, the search was lead by cases of interest and conversations with people and groups who might want to engage in the discourse of managing underperformance. Headteacher groups and forums for managers provided instances where emerging constructions could be fruitfully worked on. There was always the search for other ways of constructing and hypothesising around the discourse.

The choice of individual reciprocators had to take into account that not all people are available or indeed want to engage in discourse. This raised pragmatic concerns such as:

- whether access to the potential reciprocator was possible
- the level of relationship that might exist between the researcher with the reciprocator
- whether the researcher felt they could cope with discourse at the time

- whether the reciprocator felt they could cope with interaction at the time
- knowledge of the reciprocator's context and whether they were likely to have knowledge of the field of the research

The conversations with the reciprocators were set up via telephone when the purpose of the research was explained and permission was requested to record all dialogues and exchanges. The process of engaging in discourse has already been described in Chapter Two, against this background reciprocators were engaged in discourse to illuminate knowledge around the research questions.

The following table lays out the thirteen recorded one-to-one conversations that were carried out:

<b>Date of Conversation</b>	<b>Significator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Reciprocator's Role Position</b>
January 1999	MM	45 minutes	Assistant Director of Education
January 1999	MM2	55 minutes	Assistant Director of Education
Febru 1999	GW1	1 hour	Human Resource Director of a private company
Febru 1999	GW2	55 minutes	Business Manager of a private company
Febru 1999	GW3	1 hour 5 mins	Business Manager of a private company
March 1999	CD	40 minutes	Corporate Director of a local authority
March 1999	JK	45 minutes	Chief Inspector
March 1999	RJ	55 minutes	Chief Inspector
April 1999	JJ	1 hour 10 mins	Headteacher
April 1999	HA	50 minutes	Headteacher
May 1999	CW	55 minutes	Principal Educational Psychologist
May 1999	BR	1 hour	Head of a Pupil Referral Unit
June 1999	CE	40 minutes	Chief Executive of a local authority

What follows below the research questions is a sample of the questions – some of them questions – from the interview conversations.

***What do managers describe as their experience as they engage in managing underperformance?***

Tell me about your experiences of managing underperformance.

How is your relationship different now as compared to before the process started with your team member/colleague?

What happened in relation to you..... and the rest of the team?

In light of your experience(s) describe any new ways of working.

Describe the responses of team members as you managed their performance.

***What are the perceived trigger(s) that enable managers to begin a process of managing underperformance within their team?***

Describe what you noticed when you were going to make the decision to act.

Describe what you noticed before/around the time of managing underperformance.

What happened next?

When you were on track how do you describe what happened?

***What are the elements that support and enable a manager's intention to pursue and sustain the management of underperformance?***

What made a difference to you as you undertook the process of performance management?

Was anything helpful, useful, beneficial, invaluable in contributing to the process?

Was anything unhelpful, salutary, in undertaking/engaging with the process?

The one to one consultations were held in private enclosed areas and lasted from 40 minutes in the shortest case to one hour and ten minutes. No notes were taken during the interview conversation so that full attention could be given to the reciprocator, but immediately afterwards the researcher made diary notes of their memories. All interactions were tape-recorded at the time and then fully transcribed by a paid administrative assistant as soon as possible after the exchange.

In addition to pre- arranged conversations the researchers' work role allowed for engagement with a range of professional groups. The sample of direct reciprocators was small but an additional dimension was added by working with groups of managers within the common theme of managing underperformance. These groups were used to engage in discourse and identify and validate areas of dominant discourse for them.

*Headteacher induction group 1998:* 11 new and acting headteachers worked on their experiences of managing performance in two separate 3 hour sessions. A note taker in each group recorded their agreed notes at the end of the session that could be used as part of the data.

*Learning through Leadership Group 1998 into 1999:* this group, comprised of twenty-two local authority senior managers drawn from all services across the local authority. (Social Services, Housing, Finance, Environmental Services and Education) These managers were undertaking a year long management development programme. During one three hour session they worked in 5 groups of 4-5 individuals to identify "What makes you address underperforming staff?" and "What enables you to follow up afterwards and continue to manage them?" Data was collected from the individual group work and subsequent discussions were recorded by notetakers to be included in the constructions.

*Top Managers Programme in July 1999.* A national leadership development programme for 13 Chief Executives and Directors who manage all areas of local government services. They undertook a 2 ½ hour group work session to identify their issues in managing performance. Flipcharts were used to record comments.

The use of these sources was an important and pragmatic part of the part-time research process. It gave explicit recognition that working and researching is inextricably interlinked. The strength in adding this dimension to the data set was in explicitly using different people, different managers, with different posts of responsibility in different roles. A social construction perspective would always acknowledge difference even where there were apparent similarities or a “common” sample had been formally selected.

Validating these sources may be regarded as problematic by some, but within a social construction paradigm all data sources can be recognised as being part of a continuing process to make meaning and develop knowledge through interaction. It could be argued, from this perspective, that the emergent construction had greater validity as a result of these additional interactions, since the nature of managing performance was constantly being tested by groups of professionals across a variety of situational contexts. Krippendorf (1991, p. 115) suggests that for researchers

*to be socially accountable for their ‘understanding’ of what is mediated in public requires content analysis to explicate the researcher’s own construction of reality, their own conceptual framework within which their data are anticipated, to make sense not just for themselves but for peers as well. It means that such reality constructions be reliably communicable at least within the analyst’s own scientific community.*

The researchers scientific community is that of management and management development.

### *Collecting details, information, knowledge & ideas*

Data in this study was collected from its inception in 1997/8 through the intervening stages and into the writing and conclusion. It took many forms, including tapes, notes, diary, field notes and observations, memorandum, conversations, transcripts, interactive group work flipcharts and contact summary sheets.

In addition, the recording, storage and coding of data occurred throughout the study. Names were kept and a full description of contexts, the event or contacts. The significance of documents from library and internet searches were noted and a brief summary kept of



contents in the bibliography software. The technique adopted for working over and across time was one of comparison of data with existing data, comparison of data with emerging constructions as they developed, and testing any of the developed constructions. All of this took place against the previously developed conceptual framework already described in the institution focussed study. Wherever possible any synthesis was discussed with other colleagues.

The transcripts were dealt with in different ways. One set of the transcriptions were annotated by the researcher setting out additional information points, the contextual setting and adding in from diary notes. A clean second copy was read through whilst listening to the transcription tapes and annotated for any additional points. A third copy was coded by the researcher.

Coding is an interaction between the transcribed data and the researcher. The interpretation of data, and the consequent generation of meaning, occurs as the coding progresses, when links and connections are refined. Social construction does not determine a specific approach to analysis and analysis is not described “in recipe-type terms” (Burr, 1995). The coding method used was line by line, where the transcribed text, additional data notes and any other responses were coded, since “all relevant data can be brought to bear on a point” (Becker and Geer, 1960). Post-its were then used to note the coded text details and subsequently the post -its could be grouped to pull together any emerging themes or reflect dissonance against the analysis of the first configuration model. Diagrams were drawn up to help keep track of emerging themes and to assist in the synthesis of the data.

This analysis was not a simple linear process and depended on reflexive exchanges and interactions. It lasted several months from the first look at the first transcripts and data sets, through to final synthesis and writing up. There was much movement during this analysis between levels of understanding and into new understandings and constructions. The coding and diagramming helped to generate new storying around the ideas and patterns. There was constant shifting and review, often in discussion with colleagues to find out more about the inter-linking properties of emerging hypotheses.

### *Using conversations and opportunistic groups to collect information.*

Conversations were used along with focussed group work in a number of ways: -

1. formally as a method of engaging in conversations and discourse when carrying out the research.
2. formatively to lead me as researcher into other areas and to assist in developing the construction of theory
3. as a way of being reflexive and interacting with the discourse, data and further research constructions;
4. in conversation, when asking and inquiring in the day to day with colleagues whose area of work brought them into contact with performance management issues;
5. in discourse and interactions with groups of managers in training or working alongside them as peers;
6. at meetings arranged for the purpose of checking against the constructions and gaining more information from an individual, for example in tutorials.

It was useful to reflect on the conversations and the part they played in data collection which raised issues for the role as researcher and continued to add to the dynamic interactions throughout the research process.

#### **Researcher engagement**

Scott and Usher (1998) argue that there is a need to think about the research process itself rather than be silent about it. This was a direct challenge to the initial months of working where an attempt had been made to remain “on the outside” “different from” reciprocators. Although the research was being undertaken from a particular stance, former training as a scientist was difficult to throw off. The challenge as researcher was not that of following the right procedures and mechanisms, but came to be a recognition that research is a social process and not a technology. Reflexivity is finding out about the connection between conversations and their relationships, how meanings – including the meanings given by reciprocators – are discursively constructed within the research process. Learning how to

develop reflexive processing, to become a reflexive researcher was an important part of the process. Research discourse was not a neutral process and it was through reflection, during the research process that the following dynamics became clearer.

### **Emotioning in research**

Scott and Usher (1998) argue that power is central to the research act and we cannot dismiss it from our research endeavours. However constructed there is a need to take on an understanding of ‘another’s’ point of view. This could be uncomfortable as a researcher, particularly in cases where there was disagreement with the action taken, position adopted or sentiment expressed in the reciprocators story. Talking about managing underperformance was emotionally charged for some reciprocators who experienced a level of emotional revivification, as they were talking through their case stories. It was tempting to curtail their stories and intervene in order to make their position and that of the researcher more comfortable. Steier describes the idea of emotioning in research, stating that “a reflexive researcher recognises the valence of emotioning and includes those processes as underlying our languaging or as pre-disposing us to certain kinds of values” (Steier 1991, p. 180). This view would support research activities that involve emotioning, this position admits certain values and allows us to like certain stories or get surprised by certain reciprocations. It also recognises that our ‘I’s that attempt to write as standard observers do so by losing other stories, losing that ‘other’ in the translation. We must guard against this loss for how we choose to lose these ‘others’ need not be a rational process. Rather than eliminate emotioning from our research “we should seek to understand *how* it *does* enter and interact with that emotion” (Steier 1991, p181).

### **Relational ‘I’**

The perspective of other voices is an important one. Michelle Fine (1994), a researcher in women’s studies, entreats us to recognise that the voices we ask and therefore hear are likely to be embedded in dominant groups. The question she raises is about engagement with the silent voices, those present and often unheard. She argues that to take an unadulterated voice and to transcribe it would be to fail to examine critically the constructions which are “real” to reciprocators and inherent in their stories. In undertaking the process as a construction, we have to recognise that any voice transcribed is then an interpretation and the researcher additionally inserts their interpretation into the discourse.

This act of interpretation and insertion is power-full and Fine argues that issues of power are never absent from the interviewing and research process. She takes the view that all researchers are epistemic agents who choose political and epistemological stances. Denial of this state she characterises as the 'ventriloquay' stance, arguing that ventriloquay researchers never say 'I' in their text and therefore can deny 'self' and deny all politics within their research.

In writing up this research the choice was made *up to this point* to explicitly remove 'I', *not* to deny politics or personal position but to recognise the conventions most usually adopted in a research thesis. English does not invite the distinction of different 'I's for different relationships and the search for knowledge and knowledge claims are inherently subjective, this is equally so for the researcher and researched. Writing with a relational 'I' must always be understood as just a participant in a conversation; this is the positional 'I' I now adopt.

### **Research as invention or intervention**

Whether our observation is intended to be participatory or unobtrusive, the social construction position states that it will be an intervention into the system under scrutiny, in other words, our position as researcher simply points to our location for inventing the story. Taking this point further, questioning in a social construction paradigm, is an intervention into a system of 'other' in so far as the questions can create a possibility for change in that system. If we undertake research and recognise intervention, then ethical issues are raised including concern for the culture one is studying. One way of reconciling research as both invention and intervention is to see the research explicitly as a co-constructing process and embrace the mutuality that inevitably exists between the stories of the reciprocators and researcher stories. This is the position adopted in this study.

## Chapter Four

### *Methods of data analysis*

*Let us question the positivist/empiricist conception of knowledge and challenge the assumptions that: -*

- observation is value neutral and atheoretical*
- experience is a given*
- a universal and transparent language is possible*
- data are independent of their interpretations*
- there are universal conditions of knowledge and criteria for deciding between theories.*

*Scott and Usher (1998, p. 29)*

### *Accounting, writing*

*A text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the authors meaning) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.*

*Barthes (1977, p. 67)*

Academic texts are not innocent. Shotter (1990) draws our attention to their dimensions:

- con-text*     with the text, which might be the account or story which as researcher we are within;
- pre-text*     which the thesaurus describes as pre-owned or decided;
- sub-text*     which is constituted by power relations between researcher and researched; and

*inner text* the search for meaning within the text.

The search for knowledge is always an interaction between known language, language-in-use, recording, writing, and text-making. This perturbation highlights the constructed and contested nature of all cultural accounts, which re-present our world to us. Texts themselves impose meaning as they register, encode and inscribe from the first fieldwork jottings to transcriptions. Texts can function as a device to systematically exclude the very possibility of a truth. Stronach and Maclure (1997) suggest that research texts do not simply record truth, they are not simply a written record of what went on in the research process and what was found out about the world, but are implicated in ethnocentric economies of the truth.

Stronach and Maclure go on to suggest that we should think of research as interrupting and disrupting rather than accepting it as a methodological will towards clarity and certainty. Patti Lather (1991) accepts that truth is positioned within human activities, and “it is writing that makes the realism possible.” Gadamer (1975) argues that knowledge cannot be objective but necessarily must include a “*subjective*” element. This stance would suggest that understanding something is always prejudiced, that is pre-judged, in the sense that it is a process requiring that any subject is located and a standpoint is taken. The process of meaning-making and negotiation over meaning is always a practical matter located in our personal context and social practices – “the lifeworld of individuals” Gadamer (1975). It is impossible to separate oneself as researcher since the subject and object of the research are located in our pre-understood worlds and our interpretative frames are located within the background of all our beliefs and practices. These frames cannot be fully and definitively specified in the present, since this is beyond our present knowing and therefore indeterminate.

In order to recognise this interpretive position as researcher, I worked wherever possible with another person – often a different person – whose role might be to check my reading of transcripts, critique the assumptions made, code “clean” transcripts or talk through emerging themes. In addition I used my professional role to work with groups who were

invited to test my assumptions and constructions. This way of working was to be continuously subjected to a critical self, as well as peer scrutiny and to constantly challenge. Lather (1994) describes a stance where “in our action is our knowing;” this is a powerful position to adopt as researcher and one I came to feel more comfortable with. I began to identify my reflexive understandings – my learning – as a resource rather than as a source of bias, I was beginning to put myself into the picture. Research starts and concludes with something “in mind,” the space in between is my interactive reality.

### *The analysis of discourse*

There is not unified agreement about whether analytical methods are appropriate to the generation of meaning within a social construction paradigm, though there is recognition that discourse or content analysis is one possible way of approaching analysis. Burr (1995) describes this as follows, “one need not necessarily have to do a ‘discourse analysis’ in order to recognise that powerful images are being invoked...to see how they are used for particular ends and to grasp their implications.”

Content, meaning and inferences are part of the researcher position in interacting with their data within a wider system. There will be a requirement at some stage to engage in a wider treatise with that community of people for which the research should bring greater meaning – a mutual anticipation of understanding each other. It is for this reason that analysis through coding of transcripts occurred; however the understanding was always that content analysis can only ever be about telling part of different stories. Krippendorf (1991, p. 118) explains that

*to construct contexts, content analysts need to generalise from incomplete and complex interdependencies within their reality constructions those that provide relevant implicative paths and explicate them into a workable analytical construct. Or what one may call an operational model of the stable pattern, linking available data to the uncertain variables in these constructions.*

## *Decomposing and synthesising data*

Gergen and Gergen (1991) write of decomposing data as the analysis and synthesising the data as the model construction. These words are useful to help understand the processes of transforming raw data in all its forms into a conceptual framework, a construction of understandings. A conceptual framework draws together the main dimensions, the dominant stories, that arise and the connections and relationships in and between the stories into the hypotheses that are made. This synthesis can only happen after much time is spent decomposing stories.

The process of decomposition and synthesis was continuous throughout the research there was no one point at which I began to write and theorise. The decomposition ranged from coding scripts to draw forth meaning, drawing diagrams to create possible links and, in the final stages, drawing together to create the summative configurations. Throughout the whole research process, I used to write up the beginning of conceptualisations,

There was a point of analysis where coding of transcripts was needed to draw forth and then distil their meaning. Coding was a practical process.

The transcripts were printed double typed spaced with wide side margins for annotations and remarks to be written. Each interview conversation reciprocator was allocated a code initial as signifier and the transcript read and annotated. Literal words were highlighted and numbered sequentially on each transcript alongside their occurrence then transferred onto post-it notes, one for each coded piece of information as shown in Figures 4 and 5. A second experienced coder and myself undertook this work independently. Each

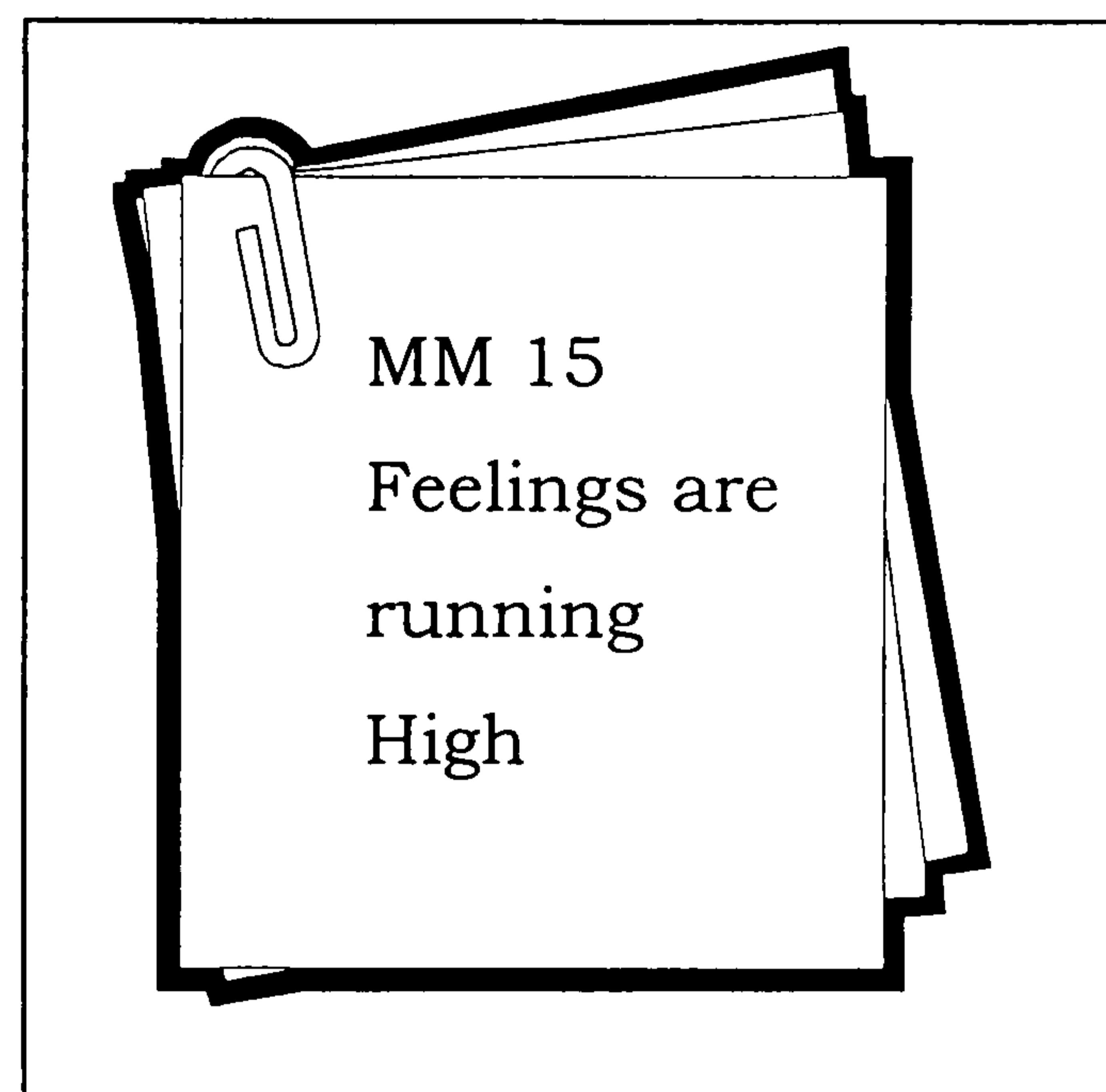
JJ19	position to monitor <u>performance</u> usually through the
JJ20	fortnightly meetings with <u>managers</u> . The
JJ21	<u>starting point</u> of our meetings are always about how the
JJ22	<u>activity</u> is matching up to the planning and <u>where</u>
JJ23	<u>adjustments are needed</u> as a vital point of the discussion which gradually can be less and less quantifiable

*Figure 4: Coding transcripts*



post-it note carried its referenced source of information relating to each transcript, e.g. MM 16. This line by line coding led to more questions and memos, which captured any thinking.

The next stage was to scan through each post-it note and to “sense” or identify whether any patterns were emerging, and to allow the formation of impressions and development of levels of understanding to be built up from the open coding. A slower process then began. The post-its were stuck onto a cleared wall headed up by initial categories from the first configuration of the model. The choice of post-its as a medium for analysis was deliberate and intended to allow free association and connections to be made. Post-its could be moved around and restuck.



*Figure 5: Post-it analysis*

The connections made between the post-it categories were drawn up using different coloured embroidery thread and so sub categories and connections were developed. This stage of coding was then recorded through diagrams. Diagrams were used throughout:

to show the process in its summative stages

to depict lines of actions between ideas and by inference non actions

to integrate the relationships between emerging concepts

Figure 6 shows the process of inter-relating the post-it data into one possible synthesis.

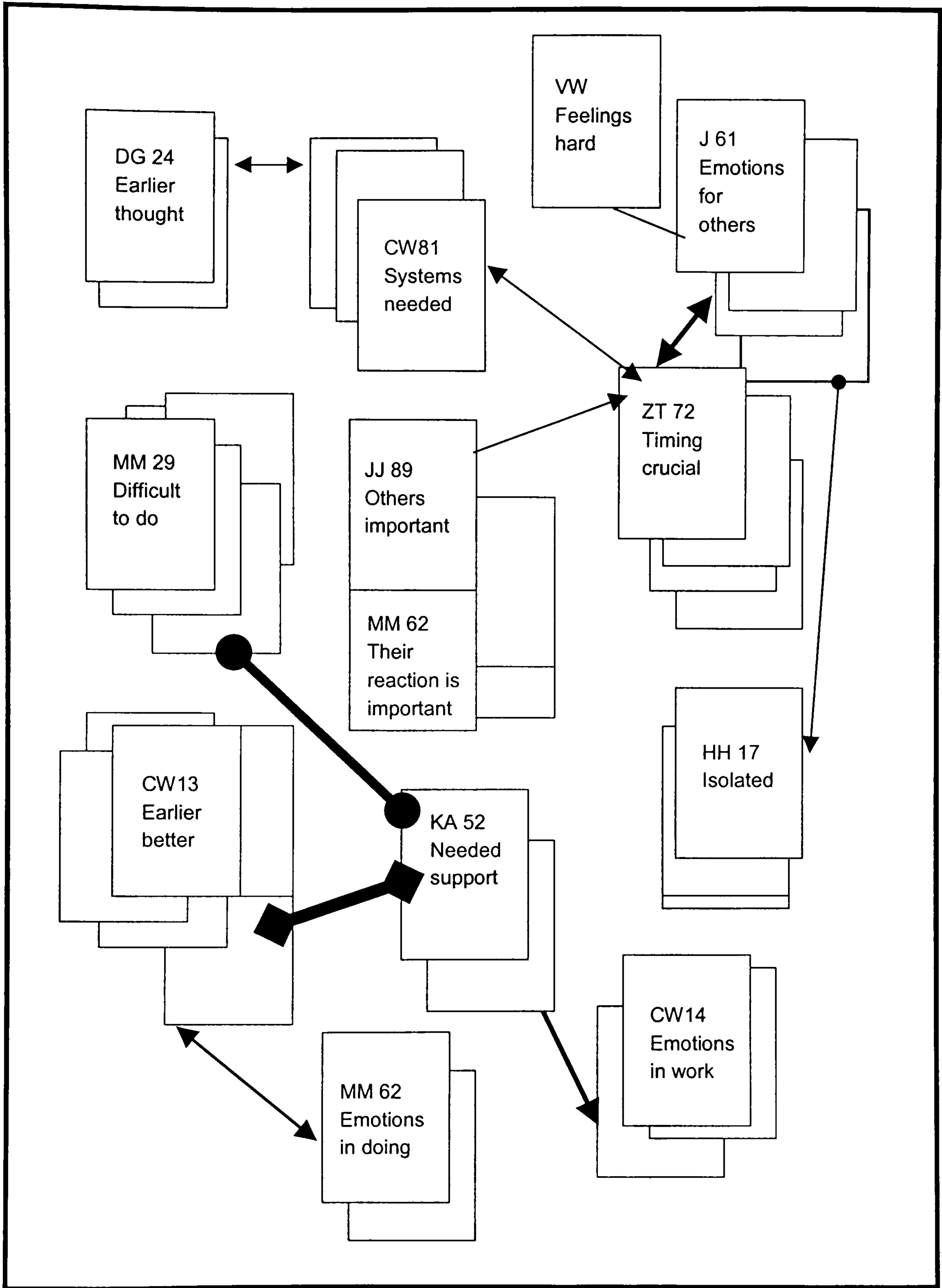


Figure 6: Generating meaning from data sets

There was a constant interplay between understanding of the context of the interview conversation, the influence of intuitions and the creativity that was brought from additional data such as the contextual information recorded and researcher knowledge and learning. This was not a linear process but a recursive one. Analysis would begin and then I would return to the transcripts, start again and return to my notes and memos. The frustration as “part-time” researcher with “full time” commitments could be intense in the early stages, as a disturbance could occur when in the middle of an area of work, insight or translation. Ultimately, though, the real joy of this process became the forced interruptions, which often gave more time for other ideas to come to the forefront. This processing over time explicitly recognises what Krippendorf (1991) has suggested, i.e. “*Data does not exist outside of the discourse* within which the relevant theories are constructed.”

### *Generating meaning*

*We explicate a social analogue of individual cognition by constructing for them a possible and communicable world.* *Krippendorf (1991, p.125)*

There were a number of paths I used in order to distill the meaning out of the data I had collected; these included drawing up mental maps, drawing up meaning webs and overlaying bits of data in order to give them shape. The source book of Miles and Huberman (1984) had been suggested as a starting point for analysis methods, some of them were simplistic, and others were out of “sync” with my methodological stance and thinking. My critique and adaptation of their suggested techniques gives a sense of the process which was done unconsciously in the first instance and is now written up below.

1. **Counting**, for example 62 % of all respondents mentioned pressure. I rejected this method. Counting does not allow for contextual placement or new ideas from minority voices, it also assumes a common language of understanding. The attributes that one reciprocator attached to a word in their languaging would not necessarily be the same as attributed by another.
2. **Noting patterns**, i.e. something “jumps out at you.” The initial filtering of post-it

notes, memos and notes made this a feasible starting point that was substantiated in follow up conversations and data. The need to keep reflexivity to the forefront challenged any dominant patterns that emerged.

3. **Seeing plausibility**, i.e. something “makes good sense” or “fits.” This is a level of interaction that could only take place after several levels of data had been worked through and the constructions were then mediated through groups of managers.
4. **Clustering**. This enables the researcher to group the data at more complex levels. “Clustering can also be seen as moving to a higher level of abstraction” (Miles and Huberman, 1984). This could be understood as subsuming specific particulars into a general category or moving from large amounts of information into groups with a theme, meaning can be lost through refinement and care was taken when clustering, to check back on meanings and recognise the sources.
5. **Metaphors and other language tools**. “Real world” researchers should write and think metaphorically because the language that reciprocators use is “often figurative and connotative rather than solely literal and denotative” (Ibid.). I recognised that my research interview conversations were built on the use of analogies, symbols and metaphors; as such they could always introduce a new way of viewing information. The use of embellishing language often enriched and introduced a different perspective into my research. Morgan (1993) explains that metaphors can be empty vessels which give us a way of carrying meaning. Language tools, like metaphors, introduce breadth and possibility into the translation of data by the researcher and therefore offer a way of connecting different perspectives.

### *Issues of validity or co-constructing a communicable world.*

*The implication of foregrounding reflexivity and discursive construction, is the recognition that academic and literary genres interpenetrate and this itself has implications for epistemological questions of validity.*

*Schou and Hewison (1994, p.46)*

### **Valid inferencing**

The model in Figure 7 builds on Krippendorff’s (1991, p. 120) work and describes the interrelationship between the methodologies that have been adopted in a research process

because of the initial theorising and the subsequent data analysis that is then synthesised into models and constructions.

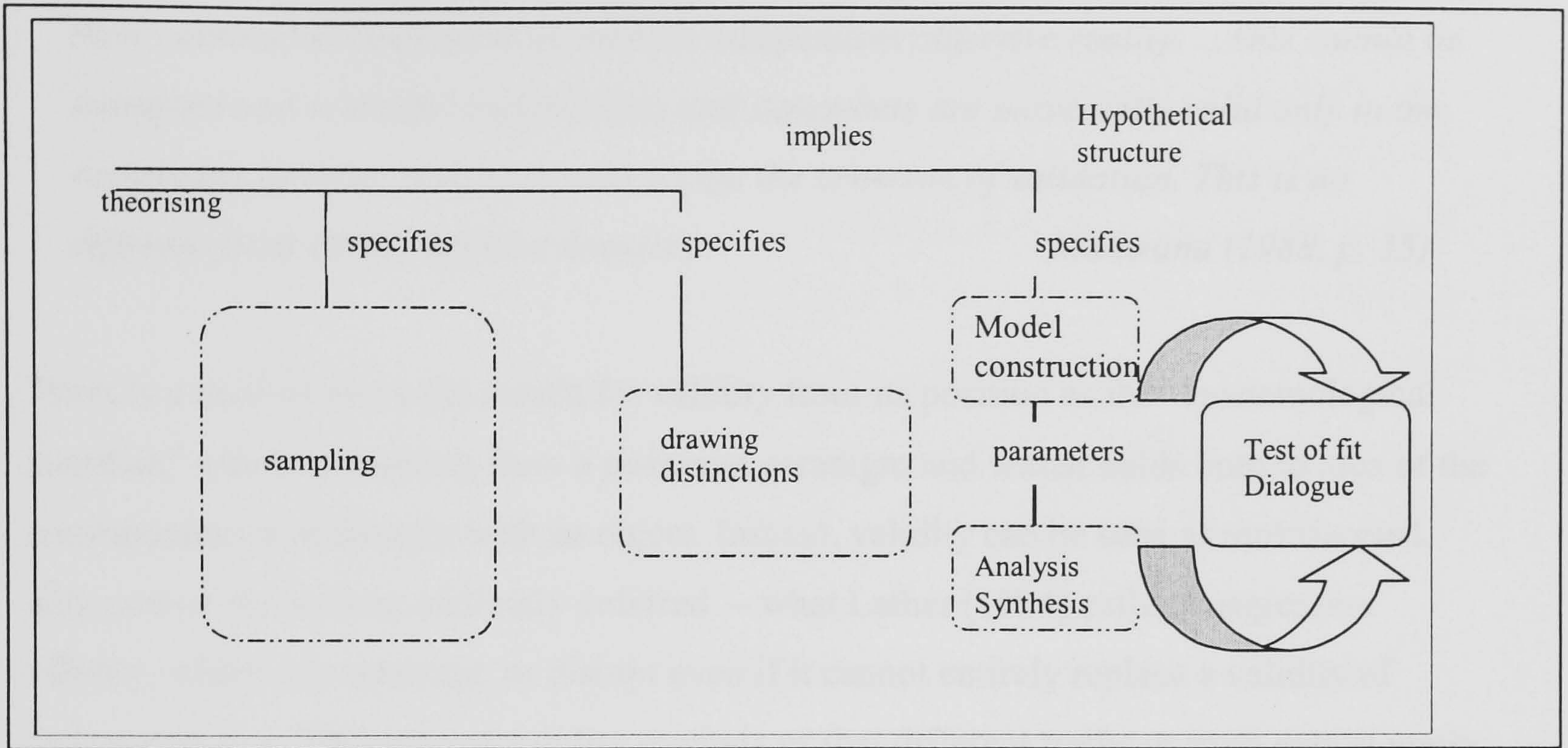


Figure 7: Research making (after Krippendorf, 1991)

Apparent in this model is the interrelationship between the theorising or story telling about the initial research question, leading to what Krippendorf (1991) describes as the “operationalisation of the process of making sense.” The objects of the research inquiry cannot be found external to the system, the research process itself, becomes part of the creation of the data.

A positivist paradigm would suggest that research should be reproducible and variables identified, so that bias can be considered. Within a social construction paradigm the ‘objectivity’ talk of positivists becomes just part of the discourse through which a particular version (and vision) of human life is constructed. Researchers within a social construction paradigm view their research as co-production between themselves and the people they are researching. Further, they recognise that the research process itself is a construction and the results are one translation from many possible variations. Maturana (1988) suggests that validity can only be a part of the wider research context and the community to which it is relating.

*It is frequently claimed that scientific knowledge has to be accepted as universally valid because the explanations and statements that belong to it are validated through their continuous confrontation with an independent objective reality. ... This cannot be sustained and scientific explanations and statements are universally valid only in the community of those observers who accept the criterion of validation. This is no different from other cognitive domains.*

*Maturana (1988, p. 35)*

There is a need to move the search for validity from its position as the “epistemological guardian” which is thinking from a positivist paradigm and which holds onto to idea of the correspondence of thought with its object. Instead, validity can be seen as multifaceted, only part of the picture, endlessly deferred – what Lather (1994) calls transgressive validity, which can interrupt, or disrupt even if it cannot entirely replace a validity of correspondence. This type of validity reminds us that different truths or truth games imply different relations between peoples and that establishing truth always involves a power struggle. Furthermore this view places at the forefront the limits and boundary making of disciplinary knowledge and causes us to continually question the notion of integrity of “self as researcher” – seeing this “self” not as a free standing individual but as a player or subject located in a representational world. As researchers we are there to present and re-present. Within this epistemological view of re-search and re-searching, a different perspective does not disprove an earlier one, rather it contributes to the continuing conversation between versions that is “knowledge in process” (Reason and Rowan, 1987).

This use of a metaphor of conversations is compatible with a sense of transferability rather than generalisable knowledge. Valid and useful research within an interpretivist paradigm should produce versions of the social world or worlds under investigation that can “speak” to others in similar contexts, inform them, enable them to proactively interpret their worlds. The researched account should operate as a catalyst for further discussion and debate, open up new ways of seeing in a specific context and provide workable explanations that can then be used critically and dynamically with other co-joined explanations in the area of practice. In this research the question is “Will managers feel

that this research and its account add to their sum of knowledge about their ability to manage underperformance of their team members?”

Working in a phenomenographic research paradigm, Booth (1992) also struggles with this clash between positivism and interpretivism. He seeks to overlay positivist ideas of methodological validity which arise because the researcher *must* be carrying out research using specific agreed principles and practices and subsequently analyses the data in an agreed way. He does however expand possibilities in the area of validity by bringing into the frame communicative validity and content related validity. Communicative validity, he suggests, happens when the results and conclusions of a study are capable of understanding and discussion by “actors” in the field. The “actors” should be able to recognise the results and findings; in this case managers should recognise that this research adds to their understanding of managing underperformance.

### *Reliability*

Morgan (1993) suggests that research as ongoing conversation produced by different researchers with differing perspectives is a useful thought when thinking about replicability in the interpretive paradigm.

Reliability is not the same thing as consensus but reliability should encompass a meaning that enables any constructions be reliably communicable within the researcher’s own scientific community. In explicating my reality and my conceptual framework, my data and modeling should make sense for peers within my community.

Saljo (1996), from a phenomenographic paradigm, argued for interjudge reliability, where teams of researchers read the same data as the original researcher but with access to the original researcher’s categories, in order to render them judged across the community. The concept of interjudge is a useful one, but the premise is formulated on a positivist epistemology; in contrast, social construction is based on a view of “shared systems of intelligibility. “Accounts of the world take place within shared intelligibility -usually a spoken or written language” (Gergen and Gergen, 1991, p. 78). The accounts, as described

here, are not viewed as an external expression of the speakers internal processes – for example cognition or intention – but are understood as an expression of relationships among people. From this social construction viewpoint it is within social interaction that language is generated, sustained and abandoned. The emphasis is on the meaning that people generate as they collectively create descriptions and explanations in language. Categories and constructions are intentionally re-constituted through individuals' understandings of reality. My research took a construction and recognised that testing took place by working alongside colleagues in the interpretive process; in this way my individual pre-definitions could be challenged. Krippendorf (1991) would describe this use of intervention as causing a perturbation in order to challenge assumptions:

peturbations do indeed enter a scientific procedure *and have the potential to challenge theory that would otherwise be fait accompli of its very statement in the circularity of a discourse.* *Krippendorf (1991, p.134)*



## Chapter Five

### *Creating worlds – the findings*

*As inquirers and researchers we create worlds through the questions we ask coupled with what we and others regard as reasonable responses to our questions. That we as researchers construct that which we claim to 'find' is a theme ...it is the constructing and organising process that is seen as the key. That is, the research process must be seen as socially constructing a world or worlds with the researcher included in rather than outside the body of their own research. Steier (1991, p. 4)*

### *The data transformed – honouring stories creating knowledge...*

In elucidating the constructions I hoped to develop the first configuration model. I explicitly recognised that my pre-knowledge would be an integral part of the analysis and findings. I would inevitably weave in my own background and management stories; these in turn would be developed with others' stories. Bernstein (1994) argues that in writing we are searching for coherence and that in the very act of writing “we tend to see our lives as moving toward a predetermined fate.” He calls this phenomenon “foreshadowing” and suggests that it can demean the variety, the richness, and especially the unpredictability of everyday life. At the point we take up a position through our interpretation and writing, we also deny any other choice available. In other words, the very act of writing itself is a statement that can only capture that moment, that perspective. Strauss and Corbin (1997) suggest that whatever “truth” might exist lies at the intersection of multiple perspectives on a given phenomenon. Another way of putting this might be to suggest that truth is relative to perspective.

As I write up my findings now, I am aware that I am making choices. These choices are about what to include and exclude, whose voices are being heard and emphasised and

whose voices are denied. Choices are made around significance, emphasis and focus. Acknowledging this position is to understand that the meaning-making from decomposition of my data does not stop at that point of analysis or even writing, but can continue to unfold into the future in different ways.

### *The search for more*

I used the model developed through the Institution Focussed Study already referred to in Chapter One as a basis to analyse the data. I looked for similarities and differences, themes and ideas which would challenge or support the assertions made. There was a sense of interweaving across the domains, as the original model stood up to analysis in some areas but not in others. It is probably worth at this stage reminding ourselves of the domains which were being investigated within the first configuration of the model:

1. Systems & protocols which exist to manage performance
2. Management skills required to operate performance management
3. Support mechanisms for the manager & managed in the organisation
4. Self perception of management
5. View of learning about managing
6. Emotional context of operating
7. Levels of relationship between manager & managed
8. Self confidence in dealing with reactions
9. Internal or external referencing
10. Perception of time – urgency for action
11. Locus of accountability
12. Perceived expectations

### *Towards a second configuration*

The first configuration of the model (Figure 1, p. 3) did not address all of the dilemmas and complexities which managers were describing in their interview conversations. I returned to my first configuration which had been drawn up from my ideas, initial conversations with managers and a literature search and began to move into a second configuration of the model. The major shift which occurred whilst working through the data, was a realisation

that the model had not accounted for one significant area, an area that embraced all of the domains identified – the wider concept was that of context.

### *The realm of context: beyond domains*

At whatever level in their organisation, the managers I engaged with raised a continuing theme: that of “the wider context” or “the bigger picture” or the “culture I am working in.” In each case context made a difference to the individual manager’s perceptions of accountability both within their service and beyond. It also made a difference to expectations, as to how they would – or were expected to – manage performance issues. A local authority officer very clearly described a dichotomy between their individual context and that of the wider system, that of the local authority.

*I personally have a real problem when we are talking about equalities, social justice, gender and race issues. I cannot compromise on that and yet I am sure I unwittingly do at times, because of the culture I am working in I sometimes do, to avoid conflict with people.*

(unless otherwise identified, all quotes are anonymised and come from data)

A senior manager in a local authority talked broadly of competing political and service expectations:

*I am working within a bigger picture, trying to get Local Services, Education Services and others to understand that we should all be working up to the same level, I’m promoting something they are not delivering.*

The wider context in one conversation with a Head Teacher was summed up as follows:

*It is all very well in the wider context, Chris Woodhead saying – tackle this and that, all that is, is accountability without any teeth.*

Common to managers at all levels, was a description of their differing contexts which encompassed differing expectations and accountabilities. They identified that they were having to balance all of these contexts and the arising expectations when they were making a decision to act on performance issues.

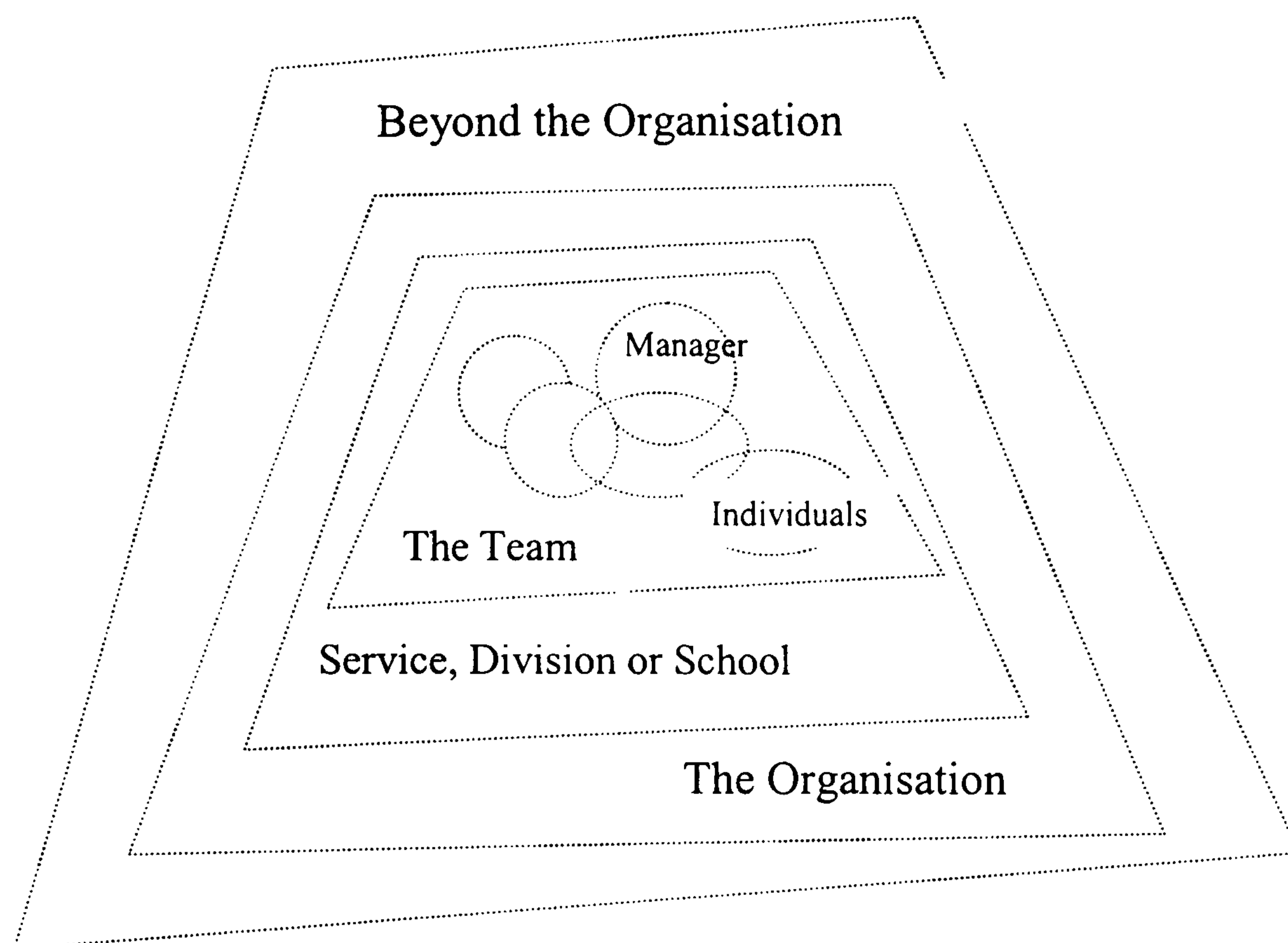
### **Nested contexts**

Managers described the difference between what they perceived as their context and “other contexts”. The overall impression was one of contexts sitting, or nested, within other contexts. I would suggest that this inference supports Dervin’s (1996) view that each context is a carrier of meaning and understanding in its own right and that each context is able to make an impression on and influence other contexts. I have acknowledged and delineated these contexts in Figure 8, which represents visually the contexts that were most commonly referred to in this study:

- The self as Manager
- The Individual whose performance was in focus
- The Team whom the manager managed
- The Service, which could also be a school or division
- The Organisation
- Beyond the Organisation

These contexts each placed demands on all of the managers interviewed and in turn placed these individual managers at a converging point of continuous interaction with their respective contextual positions. The research data points to an intersection of contexts and contextual factors within any manager’s world. The manager has to develop a way of interfacing with these contexts in order to determine and balance their level of management response in any situation. This moment in time for them could substantiate what Altman (1986) cites as “spatial and temporal confluence.” This position gives managers only partial and temporary knowledge, which is going to be bound into their individual perception of their contextual position.

For each participant in this study there was a different spatial and temporal confluence and therefore a different interpretation and understanding of their management contexts. A query for this research is to determine whether any similarities can be identified in and across managers’ worlds, by identifying the use of strategies towards preferred courses of action.



*Figure 8: Nested contexts – worlds within managers' worlds*

When individual managers spoke of “the organisation” it was to draw a boundary between the context of where they worked, which I choose now to describe as “The Organisation”, and a context beyond the organisation and external to it now called “Beyond the Organisation.” There was a recognition that ‘beyond the organisation’ “things have changed”, “the public deserves better”. One public service manager stated this position as follows:

*a change in focus away from bureaucracy and covering backs, towards meeting outputs and creating a ‘Best Value’ service.*

Accountability to a ‘beyond the organisation’ audience was evident in all the interviews and at the forefront of the interviewed managers’ thinking, along with a desire and accepted responsibility to provide quality services. Accountability for both private and public sector organisations has been fully described in the institution focussed study and comes from a drive towards managerialism through wider international forces and the resultant national government policy.

Accountability in the private sector was largely customer driven, whereas accountability in

the public sector also a response to customers and service delivery but also a response to an inspection regime to support Best Value which was evident across all local government sectors and services.

Accountability in the managers' stories was synonymous with inspection. Inspection regimes were perceived as growing and becoming harsher to the receiving managers and yet were not encouraging or enabling them to improve services. A paradox began to emerge through the analysis. For the government policy makers, inspection would be regarded as a means of ensuring that outputs and performance indicators are met. This created a collision of understandings for managers who were recognising that their own situation was in direct contrast to central government expectations. Far from being more measurable, containable and output driven, their service context was that it was becoming less so. Managers talked about that which is beyond the organisation as the "big picture", the "wider context" and the need for them to develop ways of managing this interface. They recognised that there were greater demands being placed on their team members and that concepts such as knowledge management and information flow would have to be built into the skill sets of job descriptions in order to manage it. These comments encapsulate the position:

*Information isn't enough anymore. Colleagues need to be able to capture, share and use knowledge when they are performing their jobs.*

*Information is only there to be consumed, and once 'digested', is turned into knowledge or it's of no use.*

This finding is the antithesis of more procedural inspection work, which is predicated upon consistency of method and a view that output that can be easily inspected. Managers' worlds were full of diverse patterns and 'ad hocery,' which was contingent on changing contexts. The managers described communication networks forming and disbanding across a lunch break or a day and that their content and work could be highly variable:

*It is difficult to pin down what needs to happen – How do you explain to someone what they should be doing when only they can know?*

*The structure and job titles on any of my organisational charts don't tell you a*

*thing, they are out of date as soon as I write them and as to what someone does, job descriptions are worse than useless.*

This paints a larger picture of continual flux, as teams form and reform. There is an expectation of mobility of employees within and between organisations in order to develop a “joined-up,” multi-agency and interdisciplinary agenda. This led managers towards a feeling of fragmentation rather than coherence and a recognition that keeping track of performance in this context becomes difficult both to articulate as well as manage. Expectation in this world is towards substantial autonomy, high trust and interdependent working; it was apparent that performance expectation is meaningless outside of the context in which it is being determined. The inclusion of ‘beyond the organisation’ into the stories would suggest that managers are having to juggle even more factors when they make the decision as to whether performance is an issue with a particular individual.

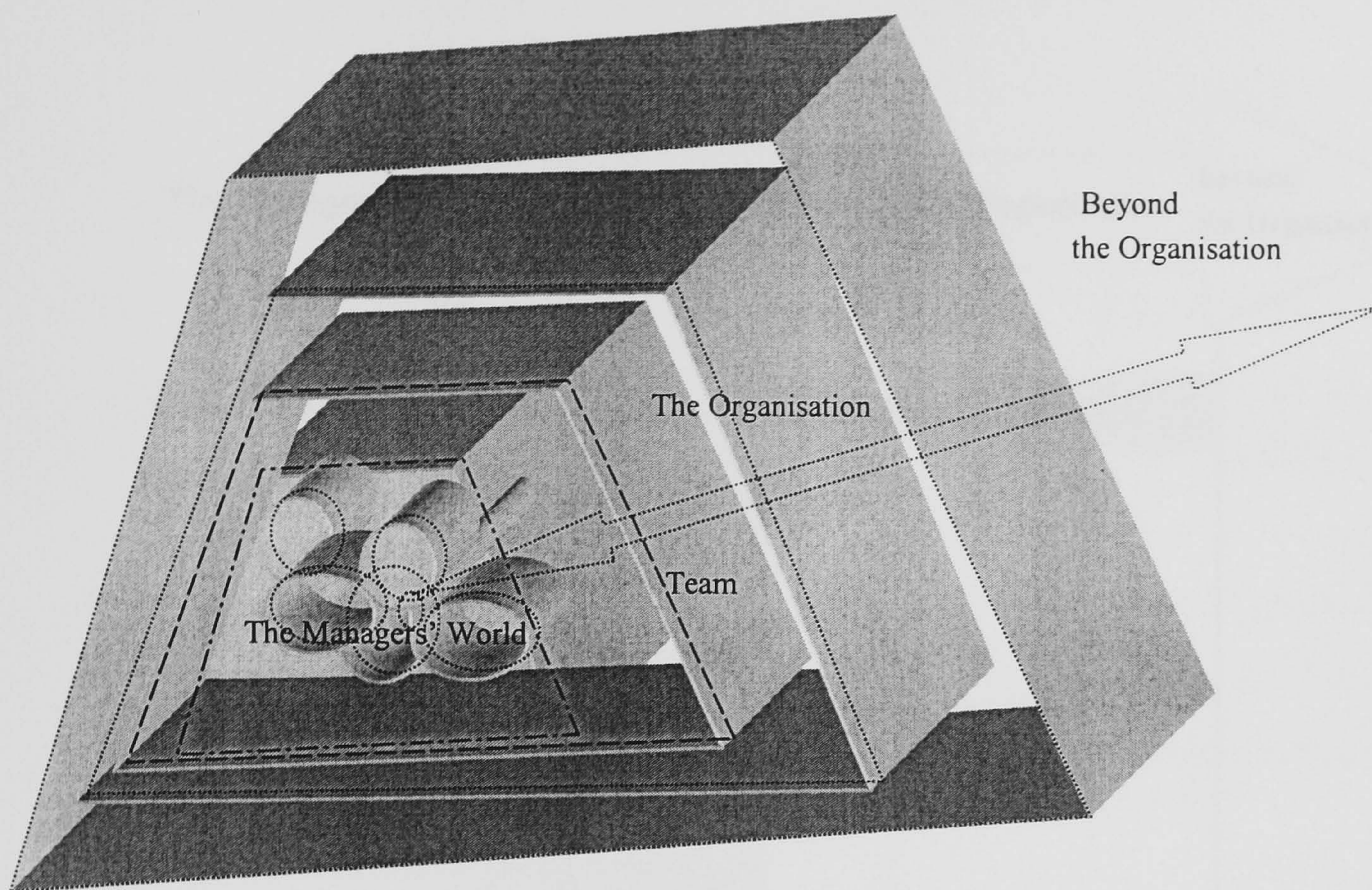
The managers identified a prevailing culture in the world ‘beyond the organisation’ which was leading towards inspection and performance management. It was evident that they felt an increasing expectation to undertake this work:

*It is supposed to be much easier to manage performance now than previously. It is expected now that you get on and do it, though no-one is interested in high performers, they want you to manage the others...*

Along with this view was a level of frustration with how managers were supposed to undertake performance management:

*Performance management has now been hijacked by the audit commission indicators so what do you call it when people don't do their job!*

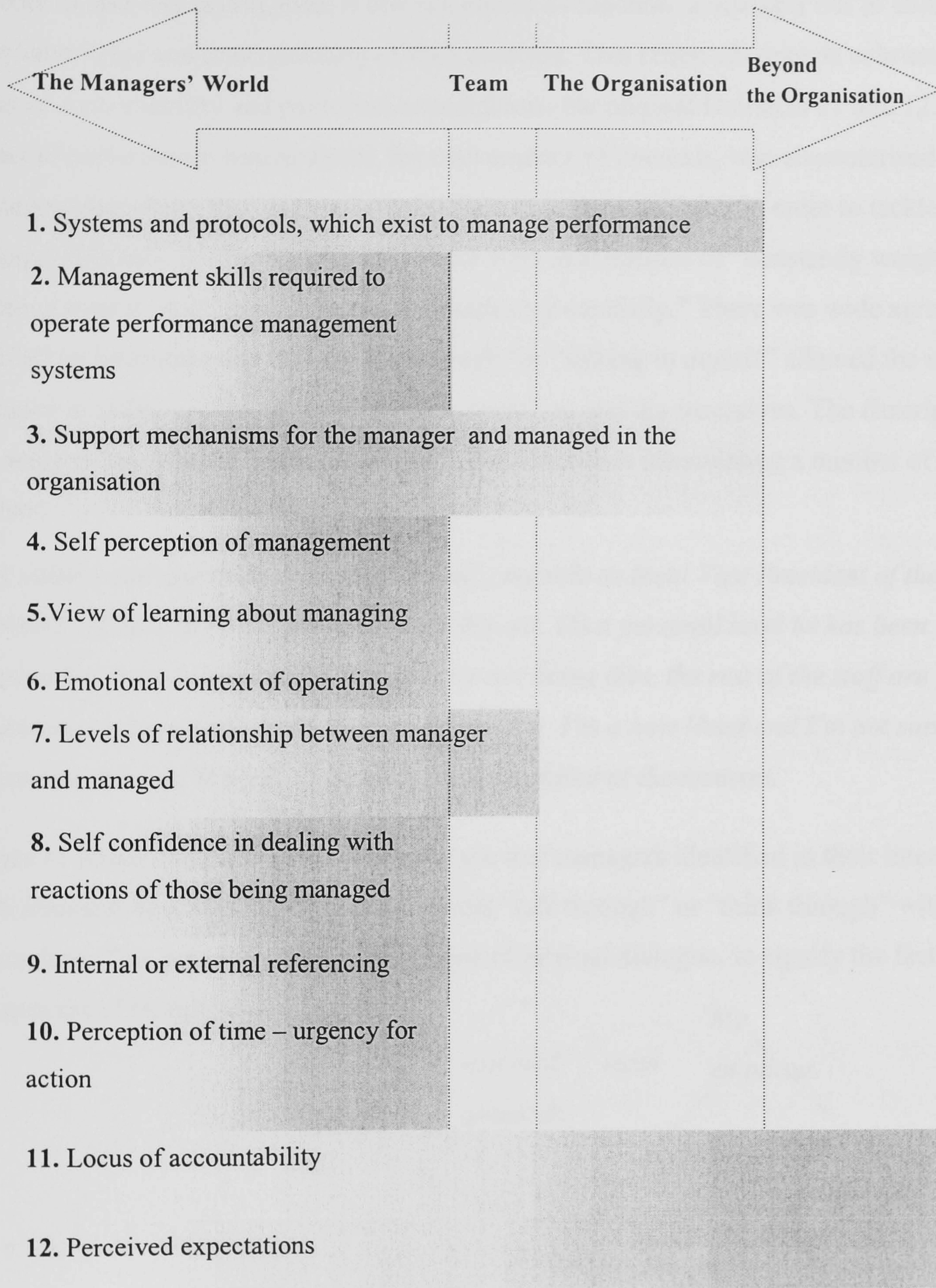
In order to make the connections of contexts in the manager’s world, with that of their team, into the organisation and beyond the organisation, the original model was taken into its second configuration. The reader has to visualise three dimensions, where a line can be taken through the nested worlds:



*Figure 9: Through nested worlds*

Taking this section through Figure 9 above gives a way of analysing the first configuration of the model framed against the contexts, which emerged from analysis of the data. The second configuration arises by placing the original model within the continuum of contexts already described. At this stage in reconfiguration, the domains retain their identifying number and remain the same. The model is redrafted to show the continuum of contexts to which they may relate. Any manager, at any point in time, is always working within their contexts of outer as well as inner worlds. Against this background of different contexts it became evident that, at this first point of analysis, domains of the first configuration of the model related in different ways to each of the defined contexts. The overall sense from the stories was of a continuum across contexts, of competing demands placed upon the manager at the point of any decision-making.





*Figure 10: A second configuration: adding a continuum of contexts*

### The convergence of contexts

In order to take any action, even if this is a choice of inaction, a manager has to balance their knowledge and understanding of their contexts. This realm of contexts subsumes both locus of accountability and perceived expectations: the original Domains 11 and 12. This aspect of performance management, the convergence of contexts, was characterised by Managers describing their internal mental fight to make a decision in order to tackle the underperformance they had identified. There were descriptions of “constantly weighing up” “battling over it” and “have to think it through very carefully.” There was wide agreement from all reciprocators that “thinking it through “or “talking to myself” allowed the manager a chance to reflect on the balance between incentives and dis-incentives. The description of one reciprocator was of “trails of thought”, these thoughts interrelating a number of factors for her:

*A million and one things are affecting me...my role as local Vice President of the NAHT – I have to be the person to sort this out. On a personal level he has been great but there is his work as deputy he is not doing that, the rest of the staff are looking to me to deal with a long-term problem. I’m a new Head and I’m not sure how much help I’ll need ...I just feel pretty muddled at the moment.*

Figure 11 illustrates some of the thought trails that managers identified in their interviews. Each manager described how he or she would “talk through” or “think through” with themselves. This process could be called one of internal dialogue, to signify the fact that it is a process of thought conversations.

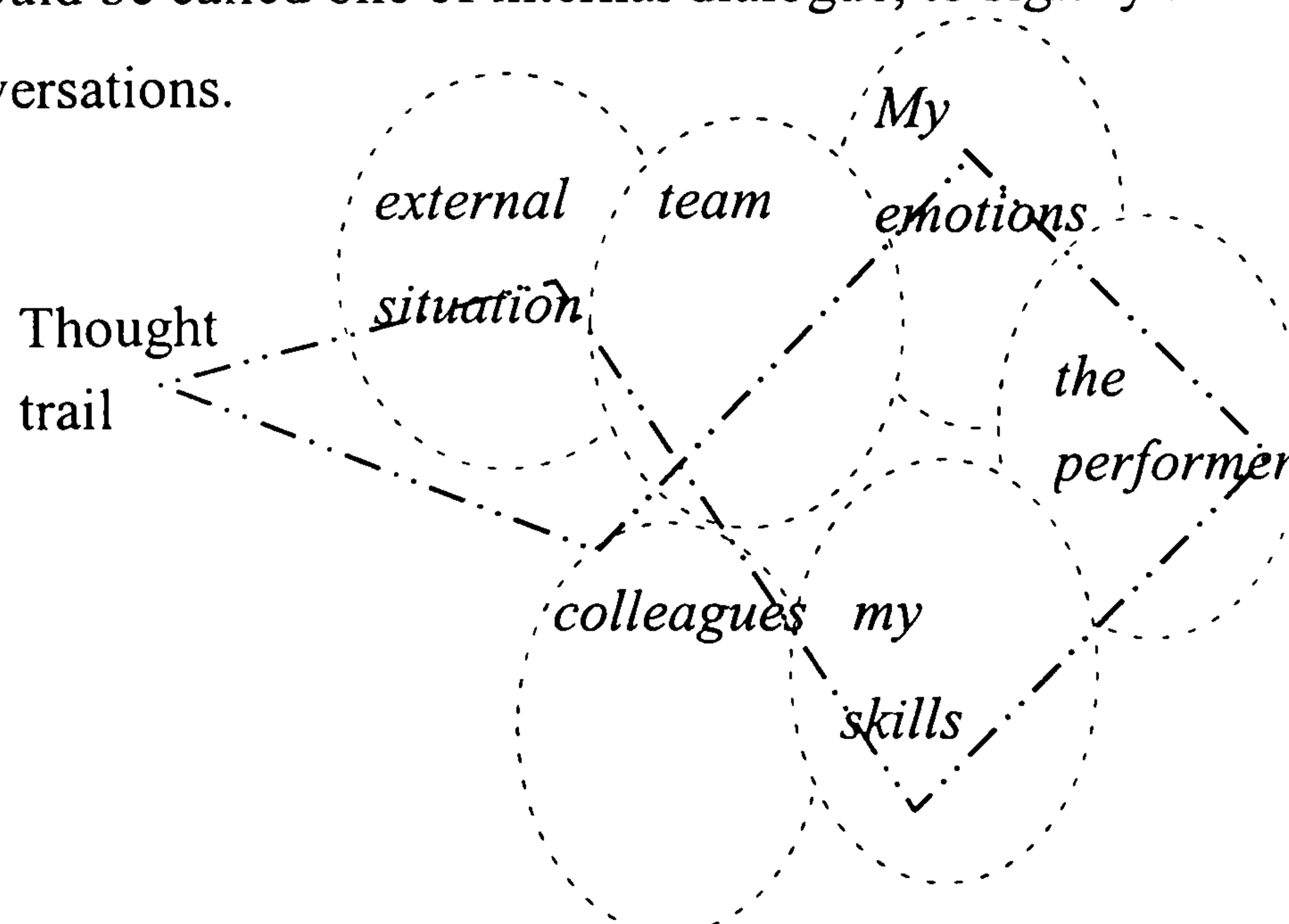


Figure 11: Trail of thoughts

Continuing synthesis and refining of the research data led to determining the significance – or not – of the original domains within the managers stories. For ease of analysis and to enable the reader to follow the modeling as domains merge and develop, each domain is revisited in turn. Any links and connections are made where they came into existence and any connecting strands or omissions are confirmed.

### ***Domain 1: Systems and protocols which exist to manage performance***

A major finding that emerged during analysis of data was a recognition that Domain 1 had to contain the concept of identifying and defining as well as managing performance issues. There was a continuing theme of definitional uncertainty through all conversations about what constituted underperformance and yet paradoxically, all managers also suggested that they “knew.” Typical phrases from interviews in both local government and school settings would be:

*In my bones I know it, they are just not hacking it.*

*I have my own personal performance standards and I expect my team to work to them.*

*I just know when someone is swinging it.*

#### ***Defining underperformance?***

It was clear that, in order to begin to manage underperformance, a definition which made sense and was particular to each manager had to be in place. This definition would give them the benchmark against which to make management decisions and take any related actions. The defining point was not fixed:

*The other information I get is a history of everything. When I get to the end of that I am looking for proposals and solutions, if I don't get that I go back to what I have said before – is it something you can't cope with? and then I would start to look at what the issues for not coping were. It could be a skills gap or that they're in the wrong job, it could be that they are not performing well generally or its just that that*

*task didn't work.*

One manager in this case weighs up possibilities that are connected to their individual team member and their contextual positions. There was recognition that explicit as well as implicit factors played a part in any defining of performance. One manager described the search for this definition as:

*My subjective judgement searching for an objectively defined state.*

The significant identifying factors associated with underperformance were readily put forward by all levels of managers interviewed, for example the following were common strands:

*...they are capable of doing a better job...*

*...they detach themselves which is noticeable at team meetings ...*

*...they are struggling to do the job ...*

*...they are not pulling their weight ...*

*...they are not able to think strategically ...*

*...they are in the wrong job ...*

*...they are just a pedestrian performer*

All of these comments were descriptions of “them” from the managers’ point of view.

These are the managers’ perceptions of underperforming behaviour. A director, attempting a definition for underperformance, mentioned the “person in the post whose competence is out of balance with the needs of their job.”

This was not a view shared by all. One manager suggested that to adopt this view would be addressing capability rather than underperformance.

*If I try and clarify a bit and said to you by underperformance I mean someone who*

*is operating below their level of capability – I'm looking at underperformance as where people are basically not cutting it because they are choosing not to. Otherwise I would say it is a capability issue and that is different.*

Underperformance from this position, could be defined as *the individuals' choice to perform below a level expected of them by the organisation.*

In an attempt to classify levels of performance and associated behaviours, all organisations had some form of appraisal system in place. In the case of the private sector company this was an elaborate 5 scale system, with A = exceptional, E = poor, and B, C and D filling in the scale in between. These gradings attempted to match output from each team member to the organisational and managers' expectation, their own capability and future action where required. These systems could deal with underperformance where there were explicitly defined indicators, for example sales targets and attendance. However when moving from easily defined outputs the managers recognised that away from a clarity that quantitative figures could offer, other areas became more difficult to define. Yet these more muddled characteristics still had to be dealt with:

*More tricky in the office – where do you get data from? Much easier to define figures than the complex jobs.*

*I have tried targets but if someone was to say they would come in and shadow him in his role as deputy that's a different matter. He can just about cope with a Year Six class but is not leading up on anything, I'm the one who always feels as if what I am saying is negative – it needs someone else to give a different view...*

Managers recognised that any system was always linked to what one person described as “individual latitude.” This latitude directly relates to the contextual positions already identified:

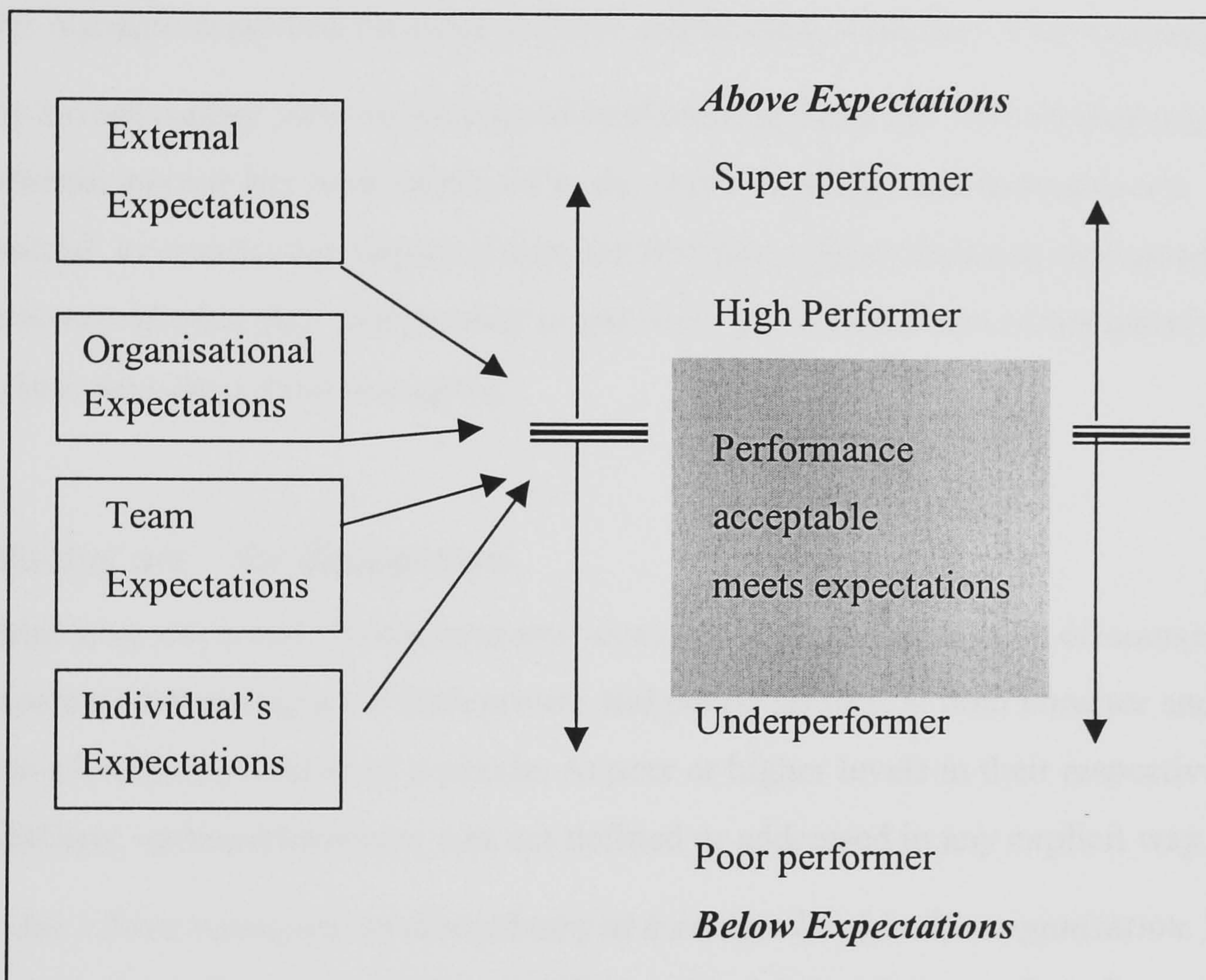
*I always think about who I am dealing with and what the other things are that are going on for them.*

Where change in job and job role had occurred or someone had moved into a team, the

managers' perception of their performance was crucial:

*It is easy to set up someone to fail especially when there is a history, you know when someone has already marked their card.*

Overall it was felt by managers to be much easier to deal with high performance and super performance where output matches capability or goes beyond it. It is useful at this point to remind ourselves of the development work undertaken in the Institution Focussed Study.



*Figure 12: Expectations determine performance*

The model already developed in the IFS which pulls together different expectations was supported by the research synthesis. It goes some way to giving us a means of identifying performance, however it is based on the need for clarity in terms of the expectations at all levels. It is this aspect of identifying expectations that is problematic in attempting to fix an individual's performance level. Those managers who described managing the process of performance successfully, firstly derived expectations from an analysis and then communicated these expectations clearly to the person they were managing:

*First of all I would think – am I asking them to do something which I am confident is necessary and at their working level? Then, I check they have understood what I have asked of them and the deadline and wait and see what I get back... Then I test. Are they utilising the people they've got and delegating? Are they empowering people below them? How are they operating generally in themselves? All this I actually think about before I decide it's a performance issue.*

Another manager described the need to know and be clear what they were looking for.

*...by having a clear view on what good performance looks like, by knowing what that particular person has been employed to do, understanding what outcomes are expected, by monitoring outputs if they are frontline staff or ensuring that managers are aware of what their end product is and don't get diverted into issues which take up their time away from managing.*

### *The vanishing act – the disappeared*

One surprising and unanticipated outcome arose as I worked through the discourse. In conversation with managers in both private and public sectors, at both Director and Chief Executive level, they described a puzzle. At peer or higher levels in their respective organisations, underperformance was not defined or addressed in any explicit way.

*We don't have managers on disciplinary at a certain level in this organisation. I don't know maybe we should go on and investigate it, but its not a disciplinary procedure any more, you disappear, get a severance or some sort of deal its all down to individual negotiation so we have no policy.*

The response noted by respondents was that the organisation “rewarded” with a severance sum of money and then released their senior managers. The result in the organisation was one of mystery, leaving others in the organisation to attempt to hypothesise and conclude as to why their managers had disappeared.

*...the organisation is not right for them, thing have moved on.*

The impact of this organisational behaviour was varied. To some there was a real annoyance at the fact that it seemed so unfair:

*...rewarded for their incompetence*

*... It's not going to be that way for me if I cock up.*

For other managers there was a sadness at a real missed opportunity to get to grips with the concept of developing a high performance culture by role modeling performance management at the highest possible level.

*We should be doing this right the way through, everyone has a responsibility to deliver, everyone in this council.*

### *Identifying underperformance – the determinant factors or triggers*

There were a number of determinant factors which managers described as tipping the balance into them taking action to manage underperformance. These factors did not readily sit within the formal systems and protocols of their respective organisations.

#### **Significant others**

Managers would speak of the importance of other people thinking that, “I am doing my best”, it is “very important what people think of me I couldn't ignore it, it reflects on me.” “How will I be viewed if I don't do it?”

Managers identified external demands that directly linked to the wider context and for them in particular, connecting with “other” loci of accountability covered by Domain 11 and perceived expectations Domain 12.

*Ofsted will be in soon and they will ask me straight away, what have you done to tackle this?*

*Where is the criticism coming from? All over the place, schools, other teams. No action is just not an option since the performance issue is now beginning to destroy*



*good things that are happening in my service.*

### **Internal markers**

In working through their thoughts, part of the process was one of defining a baseline for themselves and measuring the circumstances they found against it. In other words the actions were instigated by “self” in response to an internalised marker system. This is similar to the individual latitude position already discussed on Page 60.

*Hang on a minute this is unacceptable. I am getting used to it (the underperformance) and therefore I am not acting this is unacceptable.*

*If I don't act now this behaviour will become normalised...*

In all of these cases the decision to act was chosen by the manager as being more preferable than not to act; in other words to stay in the same place was likely to be more uncomfortable. The situation described was one of discomfort and increasing irritability a need to get “it” into the open, “it” being the underperformance issues. One manager described how they felt:

*you know, it's rather like wearing an itchy woollen jumper that eventually chafes and so you have to do something about it.*

### **Acting on behalf of others**

In some cases the action taken to combat underperformance was perceived as acting “for others,” who were unlikely to have direct influence on the underperformer and could be easily ignored by the poor performer. These “for other” groups included external customers, pupils and in some cases the rest of the team. In order to act, the managers took the role of advocate on “the others” behalf:

*I can't have that in classrooms, I can't cope with the children being unhappy. ...*

*I think it is important for them, as for a long time the staff have had to carry him. ...*

*Oh yes, because not only are you managing that one member of staff, all the rest of the staff are looking to how you manage that person as well and if you lose the*

*confidence of the other staff then you are not managing the situation very well and you will lose the rest of them right across the team.*

### **Into the future**

Visualising circumstances into the future was introduced by managers as a means of motivating themselves to act on underperformance. Managers identified how they imagined moving forward in time to discern what might happen if the issue was not managed. They then visualised the unacceptable future picture they saw, this motivated them, and they were more determined to act. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Bandura (1977) where a representation of future outcomes can generate current motivators. Typical comments of managers to illustrate this position are as follows:

*If I were to drop down dead tomorrow or have to go off on long term sick could they run this? They couldn't do the job if I wasn't there.*

*If this carries on it will reflect badly on me, the team the Service. Our reputation is at stake and that is not acceptable, I will have to act.*

### **Secondary gains**

The idea of secondary gains arises from a counseling context. The explicit behaviour(s) can be described as primary and in addition benefits may accrue and can be described as secondary gains to the initial behaviour. One manager cited the secondary gains that might accrue, from managing the performance situation positively:

*... it would give me the respect of my colleagues which include my team members as well as my peers.*

### **Managing the reputation of a team or many teams**

The managers all had a role as a team member as well as team manager in some cases they were managers of multiple teams. As a team member they had a role which intersected with the team as a whole and the external environment. Managing the reputation of the team or teams in all these respects was regarded as crucial especially in the highly visible, accountable wider context already elaborated on.

This was emphasised by other responses that highlighted the interrelated nature of team and individual manager:

*The whole team is never wrong, they have begun to speak to me “off the record.” ...*

*The performance of my team reflects on me.*

Many managers recognised that poor performance would prevent the team from delivering the best service and this reasoning influenced their decision-making. “I have to act or it reflects on me as their manager.” It “brings down my reputation as a manager.” “I will be perceived as weak as a manager.” Another overriding factor was one of the impact on others in the team if any inaction were noted; the attitude of other staff to the underperformer was described as one of frustration and “dragging others down.”

*They get fed-up, morale will become an issue if this [underperformance] is not tackled, it is clearly detrimental.*

Two managers did describe a “Catch 22” or “factor x” which had to be borne in mind. When a manager intervenes and begins to manage performance, the team may become more engaged and motivated but they can also split or divide. The team members outside of any performance procedures may feel like survivors and affiliate with the team member whose performance is an issue even where they as team members have noted and in some cases reported ‘off the record’ about their team mate’s performance.

*I have my own personal performance standards, I know where my managers should be, I know my teams capabilities, I know my team, yet there is always factor x and my misjudgement, the whole thing can split wide open.*

### *What helps managers to manage performance?*

Managers described the need to feel secure, clear that what they were intending to do was expected of them in their role as managers.

*I have to be sure that the culture is supportive of tackling performance issues, otherwise how can I do it?*

Managers suggested that an organisation that wants to be high performing has to communicate its intentions clearly, identifying its objectives. The common points identified were:

*... we have to know why are we are here*

*... it (the organisation) has to motivate managers towards achieving a quality service*

*...stories around performance management in the organisation, have to be successful ones*

Managers at all levels and across all sectors said that they found they had been able to address underperformance successfully, where systems for managing performance were clear and they had help and guidance. There was a clear link between Domain 1 – the systems – and Domain 3 – the supporting structures. One of the headteachers in their second headship talked at length of the need for systems to include support:

*I had a very good grounding, when I took on two members of staff it had been left for two years: when it first came up I had super personnel, we tackled the situations as they came up and they trained me, trialled interviews, practising around what the unions would say. This initial training as a new head was really important. I feel confident enough to do it now.*

The private sector company was very clear in both systems and training for managers in using in their systems.

*There isn't one stock answer as to dealing with underperformance – we have a range of things from an operational point of view that could be used. There are our disciplinary procedures and guidance notes to managers. We have disciplinary workshops, as well.*

*... we pair people up to help them gain experience, they get to observe a disciplinary, a challenging appraisal, a good coaching session. We call it “buddying” ...*

*I want a clear view on what good performance looks like, it should get easier to do*

*when managers know what is expected of them.*

The evidence was just as clear in a contrary way: in other words what did not help managers to get to grips with underperformance.

*I would feel more confident with more support. The LEA inspector role in schools is different now. Monitoring yourself, when you have this element of confrontation in the job is different now.*

One of the headteachers identified the support they needed as:

*Somebody else to hold your hand.*

In the private organisation this level of development and support was recognised and learning sets were set up across their middle management structure for the purposes of explicitly addressing performance issues. This was a recognition that there is no one way of dealing with underperforming staff and the learning sets gave a forum where thinking could be challenged and new ways of operating introduced.

*We can turn the issue around look at it in a different way, get more ideas.*

In addition supervision and counselling were also on offer for managers. The company had decided that this was cost effective in terms of manager support and increased performance.

*There is a need for personnel involvement beyond systems, knowing people are there to support you is important when you start any process people ask straight away - where is my support?*

A further implicit point was that putting in this additional provision sends a signal to managers that there is an expectation that they will manage performance and will be supported in doing so. There is legitimacy given to the performance management process.

*...we call this high support, its what the organisation is doing to support people as they are working in a challenging environment. It gives legitimacy to Occupational Health Services, Career Counselling and self-development workshops.*

The private organisation legitimised feedback on an individual's performance. There was

an expectation that feedback would be sought from a wide range of sources and that managers would develop skills in feedback.

*We actively promote feedback skills as part of our development programme.*

The expectation was one of taking a responsibility to receive feedback and make a response to it in order to improve performance.

*We don't legitimise feedback which is not open to the individual so anything we have is copied to the individual.*

This all pointed to managers feeling able to undertake performance management in those organisations that I am now intending to define as **potent** organisations. In these organisations the following was in place: -

- systems including definition and feedback are well developed and established for performance management;
- advice and endorsement for the managers is explicit;
- the organisation has robust and clear systems and procedures which are written up and easy to follow;
- quantifiable indicators are explained, that let an individual know what is expected of them;
- knowledge and learning is passed on through manager networks and matrices;
- professional associations and trade unions are an engaged part of the system.

Further commitment by the organisation can be demonstrated by such quotes as:

*We have planning cycles that create explicit expectations of service planning and delivery, everyone is clear how they fit in.*

*The financing and resourcing of the system is built into the way this company works with an acknowledgement that managing performance is a legitimate management function and takes time.*

*The political context of board and committees are managed so that performance is a*

*continuing theme throughout all of our planning.*

Relationships with trade unions and professional associations were confederated in these organisations; there was an explicit assumption that everyone had a role to play – “local difficulties are discussed.” All parties recognised that continuing poor performance did not benefit any case.

In order that this culture is carried across the organisation and over time, there is continuous training for managers.

*My job is to keep managers up to date and to listen to what they need to help them.*

*New staff need to be inducted into procedures from both the dimensions of the manager and managed.*

### *What constrains managers in their management of performance*

In contrast, there were organisations that wanted high performance and stated this explicitly in their policy statements and aims. The reality was very different. They were unable to achieve this level of management function. I called these *impotent* organisations; no-one seemed to be responsible and no-one took responsibility. Managers talked of “*others*” as if the organisation was an entity separate from them. In these organisations managers were left feeling isolated and debilitated. Values and expectations were confused, resultant policy, supporting documentation; training and support either did not exist or was unclear or underdeveloped. At best in these organisations managers did what they could with the support of informal networks, at worst they did not know how to undertake performance management.

*I was just plain confused, and angry, I had exhausted all my legitimate routes, now what?*

In these organisations, collusion can occur through inaction,

*There is just brain damage and sleepless nights in this for me so why should I bother.*

Underperformance is not talked about, so there can be a tendency to keep it invisible.

*I don't know whether its me – am I making a fuss? Should I just leave it alone?*

Managing performance is not to be talked about since the implication may be that the manager themselves is at fault:

*... the feeling I have is that its me, a better manager would not have ended up in this position, this is confidential isn't it?*

These impotent organisations are characterised by an immaturity that supports the view of “every man for himself.” Where feedback can be characterised as “talking in whispers”. Where knowledge and systems are not developed to assist the manager. “How should I know how to do it?” Knowledge and learning is not passed on, or across the organisation, through manager networks and meetings. Communications with trade unions are defensive and barren, described as not taking place at all or as talking to someone with separate interests “speaking to them”. As a consequence, trade unions actively pursue outcomes for their members, irrespective of the wider need of their associations, to maintain professional integrity.

Training and induction as a means of carrying policy forward is not endorsed and planned, leaving both experienced and new colleagues to find out for themselves what is expected of them or to form their own views and independent ways of managing.

*...turnover of staff is not recognised and validated, therefore the systems can fall down ...new people may have to face resistance*

Figure 13 pulls together these findings and suggests that the connections between Domain 1 (Systems and protocols which exist to manage performance), Domain 2 (Management skills needed to operate performance management systems) and Domain 3 (Support mechanisms for the manager and managed in the organisation) are significantly bound together.



<b>Potent Organisation</b>	<b>Impotent Organisation</b>
Ambitious towards achieving super performance	What is under-performance? Colluding atmosphere
Performance is everyone's concern	Performance is the fault of a poor manager
Coherent, consistent, well managed performance systems in all teams	Fragmented, autonomous team systems.
Mature organisation with well developed manager networks and matrices	Immature organisation, everyone for themselves.
Trade union relationships are confederated	Trade union relationships are sterile.
Performance culture is carried through strong induction for manager and managed	Inconsistent induction for any staff member.
Learning is integral to all training and development	Training and development takes place as discreet unconnected activities.

*Figure 13: Characterising performance management systems in organisations*

Organisations both in the public and private sector that are seeking to improve their services and provision recognise the important role their managers and employees will play in this improvement. These organisations will explicitly and positively develop protocols, systems, development and support mechanisms for their managers to ensure that performance is actively managed throughout the organisation.

### ***Domain 2: Management skills required to manage performance***

This domain was integrated with Domains 1 and 3.

### ***Domain 3: Support mechanisms for the manager and managed in the organisation***

This domain was integrated into Domains 1 and 2.

## ***Domain 4: Self perception of management style***

*Common to all if not most of us, is the assumption that in the natural course of our lives, individuals can freely choose to be in certain situations and avoid others.*

*Ickes, Snyder and Garcia (1997, p.166)*

This domain was originally intended to identify any leadership characteristics or views that managers might identify to enable them to undertake performance management. In the event what became more evident through analysis of data, was a search for a role.

### **Congruence and correspondence**

The notion of “fit” or “congruence” within the role of manager was identified. This concept requires us to somehow begin to define “self” and relates directly to Domain 8 (Self confidence in dealing with reactions). Sociological approaches to self and other issues of congruence with self, emphasise that from the perspective of social construction, self image does not exist outside of the minds who behold it. Self image arises out of ongoing social interaction between a person and his or her social world. This research noted that individual managers interact dynamically with their world and have a tendency to enter and participate in those situations that they perceive to be the most conducive to them. They enter, where possible congruent situations, those situations that support their view of themselves ‘as individuals.’ This research would suggest that managers generally dislike the process of performance management particularly where underperformance is an issue and we could describe this as seeking to avoid an incongruent situation.

*It is tiring, if I was a confrontational person I would sort it out but I find it hard to. Personally it is very important to me what other people think and nothing to do with the job.*

*I like to think I get on with most people, if I feel that this is going to be difficult then I find it very hard.*

*It's a feeling inside very personal, something inside me. I can hardly bear it.*

Individual managers deal with this incongruence and general dislike of performance management by behaving in different ways as identified in Figure 14 (see p. 75).

**Type One** recognised that they deliberately chose not to act. This enabled them to avoid entering and spending time in a dispositionally incongruent setting by deliberately avoiding it. “*it’s just not me*” “*I find all that sort of thing difficult*” and explicitly “*I don’t like putting myself in an uncomfortable position.*” Oblas (1978) defined a concept which he called ‘rampant passivity’ which he suggested

*represents the failure of people to take responsibility for themselves in one or more developmental areas of life or in various life situations that call for action.*

*Oblas (1978, p.550)*

These managers learn to remain passive even in the face of the need for action.

**Type Two** talked of inadvertently entering performance management settings, or being confronted by a situation that they just had to get on with. These managers appeared to react negatively to the incongruent situation they found themselves in:

*It has been a real source of stress to me and I am having to think very carefully about my future here.*

This would typify the response of what I defined as a reluctant manager.

**Type Three** sought to change some aspect(s) of their situation in a search for congruence. For example aligning their role as a manager in relation to themselves

*It is now the expectation of my job...*

or by aligning their role in relation to others

*I am being watched by others and so am setting the example of individual professionalism.*

These managers I classed as aligning managers, as they sought to re-define the role and their expectations of it but still regarded the change as separate from them.

**Type Four** chose to enter the underperformance management setting because, in their definition of their role as a manager, they recognised that it encompassed performance management:

*It is part of my brief as a manager to manage.*

Some of these managers felt driven – “God I’ve got to do this!” These managers recognised that performance management was part of the ongoing experience of managing and may often bring about change in themselves through gaining new experiences.

*I will be stronger in my role when I have gone through this one.*

*I go home and I get on with my life. Yes I do take work home but I try not to...*

The strategy that this group of managers adopted was that of engaging actively with their own role as manager and they developed and intended to learn from their experiences. This was further developed in some cases, as managers’ defined their sense of “self” as being different from that of their job role. This would be characterised by phrases such as “its not me it’s the job.” This finding is an important one, for it identifies at least one strategy that managers who successfully address performance management issues adopt.

<b>Type</b>	<b>Characteristic behaviour</b>
Type One	Rampant passivity
Type Two	Reluctant
Type Three	Aligning
Type Four	Engaged and learning

*Figure 14: A typology of manager behaviour when managing performance*

The research also found that this typology can be mediated. Where managers are sure that they will receive a high level of support and the organisations they work in are well-disposed to achieving super or high performance, managers are able to act. As an example, a manager who would have been described as reluctant explains how faced with these feelings they were able to nevertheless tackle a performance issue.

*It was difficult but my LEA gave good advice, not that the Chair of Governors was much good, I kept ringing the LEA personnel, they were very patient and also visited. I couldn't have started or carried on without that.*

This finding closely connected to that of potent and impotent organisations already described in Figure 13 (see above, page 72). There is evidence from the conversations and subsequent group focus sessions to suggest that in potent organisations managers feel compelled to align with the wider expectations and address performance issues in their teams.

**Positioning self – self positioning**

Many managers described a process that was subsequently classed as positioning self. They would question, query and reflect; they were posing counterpoints and gently challenging suppositions with themselves. The following is pulled from across all interviews and gives a flavour of these internal thought processes:

*Does this fit with me, is it ecological?*

*Doesn't fit my mind yet...*

*Confrontation is difficult for me...*

*I am not a confrontational person...*

*I do not like confrontation...*

*I could just die on the spot...*

*So-called colleagues think I am like Adolph Hitler and I have to live with that...*

*I am different to their previous manager...*

In all of these internal worlds there seems to be a desperate need to position who “I” is. This leads to a search for a position, of self definition of role – a role position that the individual manager can live with. It felt in interviews as if the manager was stating a point of view and was then attempting to “internally talk” with that point of view. This internal dialogue could also lead to a redefinition of what they felt was required of them and assist them to move through the typology already discussed.

### **Management as function**

The findings showed that those interviewed used “management” to incorporate leadership characteristics. Management was recognised to be a continuous process, comprising of beliefs and values, capabilities, skills as well as behaviours and style.

*You know, “Good Managers” are expected to have a knowledge of their craft what they have to do and lead their teams towards high performance.*

*The manager is there to make performance happen...*

*A good manager should be able to create a high performing team...*

Performance management skills were valued by many interviewed:

*At the highest managerial level there needs to be role modelling, especially where dealing with colleagues who are not performing.*

*There needs to be a demonstration that you will deal with this issue [performance] monitor and evaluate performance...*

Managers who were confident in their role as manager also had a clear understanding of their management function:

*I see it [managing underperformance] as part of the remit – there is no contradiction... .. Managers will monitor performance and have a right to do so.*

*If you take the credit for good management and high performance, then you have to accept the need to manage any previous bad management and existing low performance...*

Managers described the need to develop their service:

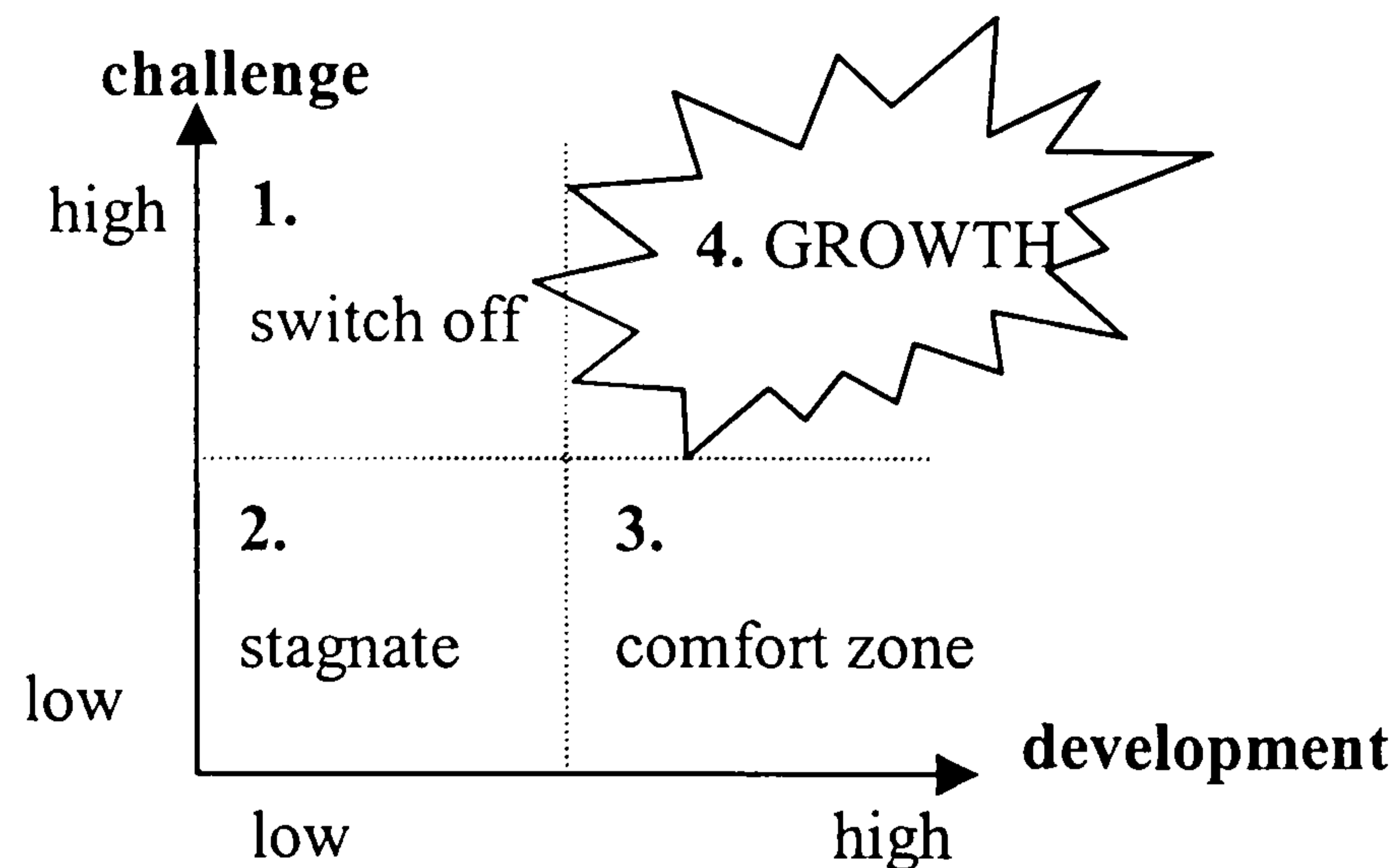
*The point is not to get people out of the organisation but to improve their performance.*

The connections between Domain 2 (management skills) and Domain 4 (self-perception of management style) became more evident as analysis progressed. The managers who were

prepared to manage performance described themselves as taking a positive approach towards the process, recognising its importance. They had confidence in handling the procedures and identified key areas that were helpful to them in managing performance identified as follows:

- Having the management skills required to operate performance management or being able to learn and practice them
- Having a knowledge of the processes, protocols and the systems and/or understanding and becoming conversant with them.
- Timing, knowing when to do any interview on the performance issue and knowing when to hold back
- Setting up evidence by gaining “hard evidence” against performance defined and expected criteria.
- Knowing or being able to learn how to set targets
- Knowing or being able to learn how to set up a continuous monitoring system
- Maintaining if possible the professional relationship between manager and managed
- Engaging in an open and understood feedback process

They described their view as preferring to empower and give active support and training to the member of staff who was underperforming. In these cases the underlying belief adopted was that the underperformance can improve but requires assistance to do so. The assumption was that underperformance occurred because the challenge to new or continuing situations was too great and that challenge without the necessary levels of support and development does not help people to perform. Figure 15 pulls together this concept of support and challenge together. This position had also been articulated in those organisations already described as potent, where the approach was recognised as leading to a high performance culture.



Segment	Impact on performance
1	Relates to challenge which is too high and development which is too low the result is <i>switch off</i> by the employee resulting in underperformance.
2	Relates to challenge which is low and development which is low the result is <i>stagnation</i> by the employee which may lead to underperformance.
3	Relates to challenge which is low and development which is high the result is <i>comfort zone</i> by the employee and possible underperformance.
4	Relates to challenge which is high and development which is high the result is <i>growth</i> by the employee and continued engagement.

Figure 15: Understanding underperformance

The managers who strove to keep staff engaged, had conversations that were of “maximising capabilities” “improving through mentoring procedures or coaching” and encouraging team members to “develop their strengths and have their weaknesses managed.”

The recognition of underperformance and the activities needed to address the issues only became possible where both parties, both the manager and managed recognised that there was a performance issue. The conversations suggested that many staff defined by managers



as underperforming did not themselves recognise that there was an issue, irrespective of the stance taken by their manager. This area is covered in more detail in Domain 7, when the concept of “other” is addressed.

### ***Domain 5: View of learning about managing***

This Domain was integrated as an aspect of learning about managing into Domain 4 (Self perception of management style).

### ***Domain 6: Emotional context of operating***

#### ***Emotions and feelings. The X factor – the felt realm***

This domain was intended to investigate further the qualities of spirit, temperament, outlook, instincts, intuitions, motives, dispositions, personal goals, passions and general emotional life of the managers. The difficulty was in attempting to disaggregate the information about emotions contained in conversations and draw out any inferences. The areas that made up this domain formed during the analysis and did not frame into easy, distinct categories but shaded imperceptibly into each other. It was clear that Domain 7 – that of relationship between the manager and managed – had a great impact on the day to day emotional response of the manager.

#### **Manager know thyself**

From the managers who contributed, it seemed that those with the greater awareness of their emotional domain were likely to recognise the impact of this part of themselves on their day to day management. These managers were emotionally proficient, they understood the requirements that managing performance would make. They regarded the process of performance management as explicit and were clear about what they wanted to achieve. There was a surety that before embarking on the process of managing they had to be “clear;” the following quotes give a flavour of the way they positioned themselves:

*My overriding goal is to ensure that service quality is maintained...*

*I have a vision and a larger goal...*

*The standards I want to be achieved are clear to me...*

*Keeping in mind the consequences of the underperformance makes it easier for me to deal with it ...*

*My team appreciate a clear sense of direction...*

In one case a manager described great control and knowledge of their emotional indicators and explained that this worked as a barometer to determine whether they were managing in a particular way and then kept them “on track”.

*My internal emotional indicators are linked to my overall goal, I remember why I am here, what I am doing this for, they help me, help me in keep touch with wider issues... on track really.*

Another manager talking about the process of managing underperformance describing a feeling rather like

*...a rush, you know a buzz, it feels exciting, I wouldn't say that I dislike it, [managing underperformance] in its entirety.*

These managers were also clear, in relation to Domain 10, about undertaking performance management with a sense of urgency for action. They took on the responsibility and proactively chose the moment for action. These managers explained that they had gained experience of doing this and were more able to do it again as a result. They stated that they knew what it would feel like and were not afraid of what might happen.

*I had been down the road before. Yes its really horrid but so are the consequences if I don't do anything, anyway it will get worse if I do nothing.”*

The conversations also suggested that some managers felt uncertain when expected to manage performance and just knew that they would somehow have to “get on and do it.” Comments such as “I started to get tougher”, “My sense of strength had to grow”, “I have had to struggle with my confidence to do it” were common. These managers described changes in

themselves. This suggested that some individual managers had to explicitly change their behaviour, they had to deal with their emotional response to change part of themselves if only temporarily, in order to progress performance management.

This finding challenges the idea that a person is their “personality” and is somehow constant. The notion of stability is contrary to the findings of this study and counter-intuitive to many of those interviewed. Some of those interviewed who found performance management difficult would point to inner incongruity – “I am not that sort of person” “I think it is your personality” –and yet seek to manage the situation by recognising their position and managing their emotions. This would further corroborate the stories already described around congruence and correspondence consolidated in Figure 14.

### **Body and mind**

Many managers worried about their emotional reaction and the physical impact on them:

*I can describe it inside, it makes my stomach turn over when I have to meet her...*

*I have found it very hard; I have really hated it especially the business with targets, you just never know what will happen what they'll say. Sometimes it seems OK, other times it's really tough. Whatever happens it still gets you beforehand.*

The connection between the physical effects and feelings was recorded frequently; comments made would relate to feelings of tiredness, fatigue and weariness.

*This has all felt physically draining ...*

*It has been uncomfortable...*

*wears me out...*

*the whole thing is emotionally difficult ...*

*I have found it very hard, tiring ...*

Also described was an ineffectiveness which arose because of the level of feelings involved and the resultant stress.

*I handled the thing with immense difficulty. In the early stages I felt sympathetic, I said to myself “give her a couple of weeks and it will be alright” then she got really nasty and my ability to manage her underperformance just went.*

*I was so stressed out by it, asked for a re-location into a different team.*

### **Fear and apprehension**

Fear and the level of fear that managers experienced were recurring themes. There was a continuing motif of the fear, fear of not being able to manage the process towards an acceptable outcome. Fear that the underperforming staff member would turn on them, be unpleasant. A fear and deep concern at the impact managing one person’s performance could have on the team as a whole. The biggest fear was that it would all go badly wrong “ and “I’m the one left hanging out to dry.”

Reference to trade unions was raised as the comment “tread carefully with trade unions.” The managers felt that they would inevitably be involved in the later stages, which caused a high level of anxiety. The next level beyond that, the possibility of an employment tribunal, was always in the background of managers’ minds and was common across both private and public sectors. The message that has been sent out to managers was encapsulated by one comment:

*case law in this country mitigates against employers*

This is a message that national policy makers need to be aware of. These overarching circumstances can be a severe demotivator in asking managers within organisations to manage performance.

### **Solitary confinement**

Managers described real concerns about the impact that managing performance could have upon their feelings of isolation. “Vulnerable” and “open” were words frequently used by managers to describe their feelings.

*I just don’t know how to combat the isolation, I can’t talk to my team properly or my managers...*

*The Manager manages it on their own, it forces people to become very isolated...*

*The culture here allows people to become very isolated and personnel think that a lot of people suffer in this organisation but I don't think they know what to do about it.*

The private company had put in place systems for managers to gain feedback and hear messages from other managers who had successfully managed the process; this was felt to be helpful, nevertheless managers still felt on their own.

*There is support but I am the one confronting the issue and it is hugely isolating.*

The overwhelming sense from the conversations was that managers who were dealing with underperformance had nowhere to turn and no-one to affiliate with. The question of affiliation is an important one in relation to perceived levels of stress by managers, most managers described intense feelings of loneliness the following comments were typical:

*I would be the one dealing with this on my own ALONE!! ...*

*I am on my own, not totally in control of everything, that's stress. ...*

*I wish others in my team would come and tell me. Some days I can manage this other days I just feel lonely, it isn't a pleasant experience.*

The sense in impotent organisations was that managers were “fair game.” That their role in managing underperformance was not validated and that there was an experience of receiving “snide and nasty comments”, of “ganging up on managers. One manager described a feeling of “the impostor syndrome – not feeling secure in myself”.

### *The strategies managers use for dealing with their emotions*

In an attempt to deal with their emotions managers described how they had developed strategies which allowed them to continue to engage with the process of managing underperformance yet maintain their equilibrium. The requirement in every case was for an initial analysis by the manager of their position in relation to themselves, their context and “Other.” “Other” refers to the other person involved in the performance management

system, the managed.

The following selection gives a range of strategies managers employed.

### **Detachment**

The ability to create a level of detachment, to “disengage my emotions” was a recurring theme of managers who appeared to be able to progress performance management with teams and individuals. This was described in the conversations as follows:

*I was able to deal on a much more detached level in the emotional struggle that ensued...*

*I was not emotionally invested in the same way that I was when I have dealt with underperformance before. ...*

One manager described adopting emotional and interactive detachment as a strategy for managing performance.

*I probably become more detached emotionally than I would when I manage usually, I usually speak to people or send emails and deliberately seek out personal contact with staff. The first thing I do when I am going to manage performance is to have less personal contact and then I manage it at a distance.*

Managers in two cases described how they maintained detachment by analysing their responses, in these cases who was playing what role – adult, parent, child.

*I think I have learnt to be more emotionally detached so that I can treat it for what it is and I think it was some sort of ‘parent –child’ thing. ...*

*I think I’m much more able to deal with me more as an adult. Adult to adult helped me to do it.*

### **Clarity of management function**

Clarity of purpose occurred where managers were sure about what they wanted to achieve and were working towards a higher order position beyond their needs and that of their team. For example: “making sure that children in a school get the very best,” or “the rest of my

team deserve me to manage this one,” then managers seemed able to rise above their own emotional wants and needs as follows:

*The core of my job is to make sure that highly paid staff are performing up to their capability. It is part of my remit – there is no contradiction. The issues of how I might feel as a person is totally counterbalanced against service needs and that’s what keeps me going.*

Similarly headteachers who had clarity about their direction had the motivation to engage

*...because at the end of the day I want the best for the children. I know the direction I want this school to go in.*

Where managers were clear about their required function as manager they appeared able to maintain equilibrium between their needs and those of managing performance.

*The issues I feel as a person are counterbalanced by service needs, I have to get on with it.*

### **Context leading emotions**

Several managers described how different reasons for underperformance raised different feelings for them. Where there was a straightforward issue for example absenteeism and punctuality, managers did not find this as emotionally distressing. Indeed in these cases successful managers appeared to treat the process more as a puzzle to be solved:

*One of my cases was based on absenteeism, I didn’t find that emotionally difficult at all. The person was trying to do as little as possible and being pretty clever in the process really. It’s a pleasure to see that one through. At the other end of the scale and hard to handle was the person who had been doing a job for years but whose competencies were now out of balance. They’d been allowed to carry on, that’s difficult even trying to know where to start.*

### **Boundaries and compartments**

Words used to define this state would be those such as “cocooned” and “compartmentalised”. The concept of *definite compartments* was a strategy that was used.

*I have definite compartments. I have my work, my family, my leisure and social*

*compartments. They all have their right place and when I am in that box they get 100% and when I'm in one box I can't be in the other and that's juggling the many hats I've got to wear. ...*

### **Psyching up**

It was found that where managers were not generally pre-disposed to undertaking performance management they had to go through a process, which one described as “psyching up”. This usually involved internal dialogue, or talking themselves into it.

*I can deal with underperformance some days better than others but I always have to psych myself up, talk myself into it.*

Or it might involve the choice of specific clothes that would engender a feeling of safety:

*some days when I know can't cope I put on specific clothes like my red jacket, it makes me feel better, able to get on with it.*

This “psyching up” process appears to link into the typology of managers behaviour in Figure 14 (see p. 75). It gives a further dimension as to how managers who are not initially disposed to undertake performance management, begin to find the personal resources to undertake it.

### *Sustaining momentum*

Memos written during the time of the interviews record that, once embarked upon, the motivation to maintain the process of performance management can be difficult to sustain. The lived reality of managers can be very different from the described management process. The memos record as follows:

- all the flow charts seek to clinicalise the process and suggest that it is straightforward, in fact it is very unpredictable.
- entering performance management is to enter an unpredictable process – a can of worms.

Sustaining the momentum and keeping the motivation to continue, was an area that had not



been included in the original configuration of the model, but emerged as the interviews progressed. It was evident that those managers embarking on the process had not always realised how they might keep going. One manager described what happened when they took action on a performance issue:

*this type of action is rather like toothpaste in a tube once its out it just won't go back in.*

The type of comments associated with keeping going were as follows:

*I won't let go, I have to find the tenacity to keep going ...*

*I was determined I was going to sort "it" out I am not going to be beaten ...*

*I made a commitment in the beginning to see this through, I have to hold my ground.*

A further memo written at the time notes that 'battle' metaphors – of "holding ground," "not being beaten" – were common in the language of those being interviewed. There was a common belief, an assumption about the inevitability of conflict during the process of performance management. This finding has real implications for any organisation and should lead to a discussion of responsibility of all parties, both manager and managed in relation to the performance management process.

The managers identified strongly with the idea of "I" and "self", talking, for instance, about "self motivation towards my overall goal and vision", having "to believe in my own judgement", being "in a judging position." One manager described "hosting" the process:

*I keep "it" going as if it is something inside of me.*

A fuller appreciation of the variety and principles of the emotional domain has been made visible through this research. Continuing work to integrate the emotional domain into management practice will be necessary for the advancement of management theory and subsequent practice.

## ***Domain 7: Levels of relationship between manager and managed***

This domain came into being following discussions with managers, in which they described the difficulties they found when managing individuals, especially when they had a long standing working relationships that had developed over time. The research did not illuminate this position; instead what emerged more powerfully was a concept of “them” or “other.” That managers do not manage in isolation would appear to be a truism. That there is an interaction with those they are managing would also appear obvious, yet management texts describe linear, flow chart type processes, when describing appraisal or performance management systems as if “other” did not exist.

This finding seemed most obvious once identified and yet the first configuration had not taken “other” into account at all. From conversations these responses dealing with other” were extracted.

*Hope there won't be a row.*

*When you come down heavy on someone you have to be prepared to take the flack. ...*

*Not sure how they will take it, my response is different depending on their response.*

It became evident that the underperformer was going to respond once a performance management process began and the worry for the manager was that this response was unpredictable.

*“Other” attitude, “Other” response, “Other” bites back.*

The manager’s own feelings and world are intertwined with “other’s” world.

Underperformance is complex and is always placed in a situational context and there is rarely just one reason for the underperformance or one set of consequences or one set of circumstances. Once performance management is underway, “Other” will respond. The managers identified a range of responses that they had encountered from “Other” that are categorised below.

**Categorisation 1: Responsive** A belief that underperformance can be turned round. An ability to review themselves and identify areas for improvement. Willing to listen and

wanting to succeed.

*They have the insight to accept personal responsibility to review their working and see where there is truth in my point of view.*

**Categorisation 2: Overadaption** Uncritical accepting of the goals and solutions suggested by managers. They are unlikely to learn and respond positively to improve their performance. They are more likely just to go through the motions and will not be self motivating in terms of improving. This category requires continuous support and monitoring to keep them on track.

*They said yes but I got the impression it hadn't been thought about.*

*I knew it was only being said to get out of the situation, compliance really, it won't really make any difference longer term.*

**Categorisation 3: Denial** Blames their circumstances and anyone and everyone else. These "Others" hold a belief that underperformance only arises because of circumstances external to themselves or someone else's inadequacy.

*He is anti-learning, just becomes defensive – emotive language, I'm talking rubbish - there have been lots of times when this hasn't been the case, just went on and on. It was really difficult to keep focussed on the business, on what I was trying to achieve.*

*Taking responsibility for her performance she generally finds difficult, certainly everything else was wrong, me, the team, the clients she has to deal with.*

**Categorisation 4: Oppositional** Took an opposite stance irrespective of the merits of the evidence base. This category is often associated with perjorative behaviour, shutting down in terms of relationship or blowing up in an angry way..

*He became very angry with me, said that I am a malicious, vicious and hateful manager.*

*Didn't even get a chance to go through the issues, went for me, stormed off, I had a real problem, a real problem of what to do, I just wrote it all down afterwards and*

*took it all to personnel, they tried to help but it's difficult, they're impartial or supposed to be, nowhere for me then...*

This group is likely to be predictable and act in a hostile way, usual descriptions of response were “took out an immediate grievance” or “took off as sick” These responses take up more time to address without addressing the issues associated with the performance that had been raised.

Magargee (1997) introduced the concept of internal inhibitions and controls, exploring what people do *not* do and why they do *not* do it. Usual management theory would take a view that managers who are aiming to elicit high performance would identify the reasons for any underperformance and then remove them. There is no recognition of the “Other” response. This research would suggest that “Other” and their response to the process of performance management is a critical factor in achieving a successful outcome.

The responses that managers identified more usually related to the categories described as denial and oppositional identified above. The “Other” usually responded negatively, most often by going off on long term sick leave.

*They decided to deal with it by breaking down, taking time off...stress is another ploy used*

Almost as frequent and often taken together was a complaint brought against the manager, usually in the form of a grievance.

*As soon as I started it [i.e. performance management] there was a complaint against me.*

### *Powerplay*

All managers described at some point in the interview the concept of power either in terms of power games that they felt “Other” was playing with them, or a power struggle where managers felt unable to manage the process with “Other” towards a successful outcome.

*It felt more like a power struggle than trying to make a real difference to the*

*outcomes of this team.*

*The level of power struggle here for me is an entirely emotional process I wish I had known what I was taking on*

The power interplay also connected directly to the battle metaphors already described more usually as a “battle of wills.”

### *Concordat on the performance issues*

Developing an agreement that can be accepted by both parties is crucial if performance is to be managed. Communicating the level of expectation – “knowing what I expect” – and ensuring that the message had been heard was recognised as being difficult.

*I thought my message was absolutely plain and being delivered in a nice way, easy to understand and easy to receive actually they didn't hear my message.*

A memo at the time of this conversation noted: The message of underperformance is frequently not heard.

There has to be an understanding of what standard is required and requirements can be linked to development.

*We don't start from a blank page we have to establish what levels of support are needed what performance is acceptable this can't happen without the second party being involved.*

The manager, through the statements of the organisation may have an expectation of high output; this can then be discussed so that there is a “clear view on what good performance looks like and a clarity of what needs to change.” Managers generally recognised that they could improve their management of this aspect of the process through practice. They noted points on how to be more explicit, ensuring that clarity and understanding had been achieved with “other” and that confirmation in writing was a sensible follow up.

### *Maintaining the professional relationship*

The relational interface between manager and managed when performance is an issue can be extremely difficult, both in terms of contact on a day to day basis as well as maintaining the momentum of the process. Managers typically described these circumstances as follows:

*The relationship shifted totally, we had got on before, I am really trying to keep it together now but not much chance I think...*

*I try to keep it on a friendly basis...*

*They think it is a personal thing it is not a personal thing...*

A stark reminder of how disturbing these circumstances can be, is encompassed in the following quotes; “I feel stripped bare”, “exposed”, “It feels like it is too close, too personal”, “I like to think I get on well with most people but this is just horrible, you can’t.”

These findings reinforce the need for organisations to recognise the intense circumstances that managers are operating in once performance management is underway. Support structures become of paramount importance when the emotional domain is seen to be part of the operational context for managers.

### ***Domain 8: Self confidence in dealing with reactions***

This Domain was integrated within Domain 4.

### ***Domain 9: Internal or external referencing***

This idea was integrated into the internal dialogue which has threaded through many of the Domains. There was no direct data which related to this Domain.

### ***Domain 10: Perception of time – urgency for action***

The following remarks typified managers’ responses to the concept of time, often perceived as being too fast or too slow:

*I ignored it, let time go by, should have tackled it earlier, wish I had.*

*The timescale was much slower than I expected, it just seemed to go on and on.*

What was evident in the conversations was the connection to the idea of bridging the present and future as a motivator to act, this had been identified in Domain 1. Individual managers determined the origin and continuation of their goals and used the visualisation of the future to give a motivational underpinning in order to continue the performance management process towards a desired future. In the desired future the issues of performance management have been addressed and have been resolved. It is using time in this way by visualising a more preferred and desired future that appears to offer managers a strategy for continuing with the process of performance management.

### ***Domain 11: Locus of accountability***

This domain was integrated into the discussion of context.

### ***Domain 12: Perceived expectations***

This domain was integrated into the discussion of context.

### ***Into the third configuration***

After decomposition and synthesis of all of the data, the original domains were refined to produce the interim model seen in Figure 16. The domains which were carried forward are represented in the diagram by shaded boxes, those domains which have been integrated through the research process are represented visually by the use of hashed lines. The remodeling – and the refining of areas – leads into the space on the right hand side of the vertical bars which develops into the third and final configuration.

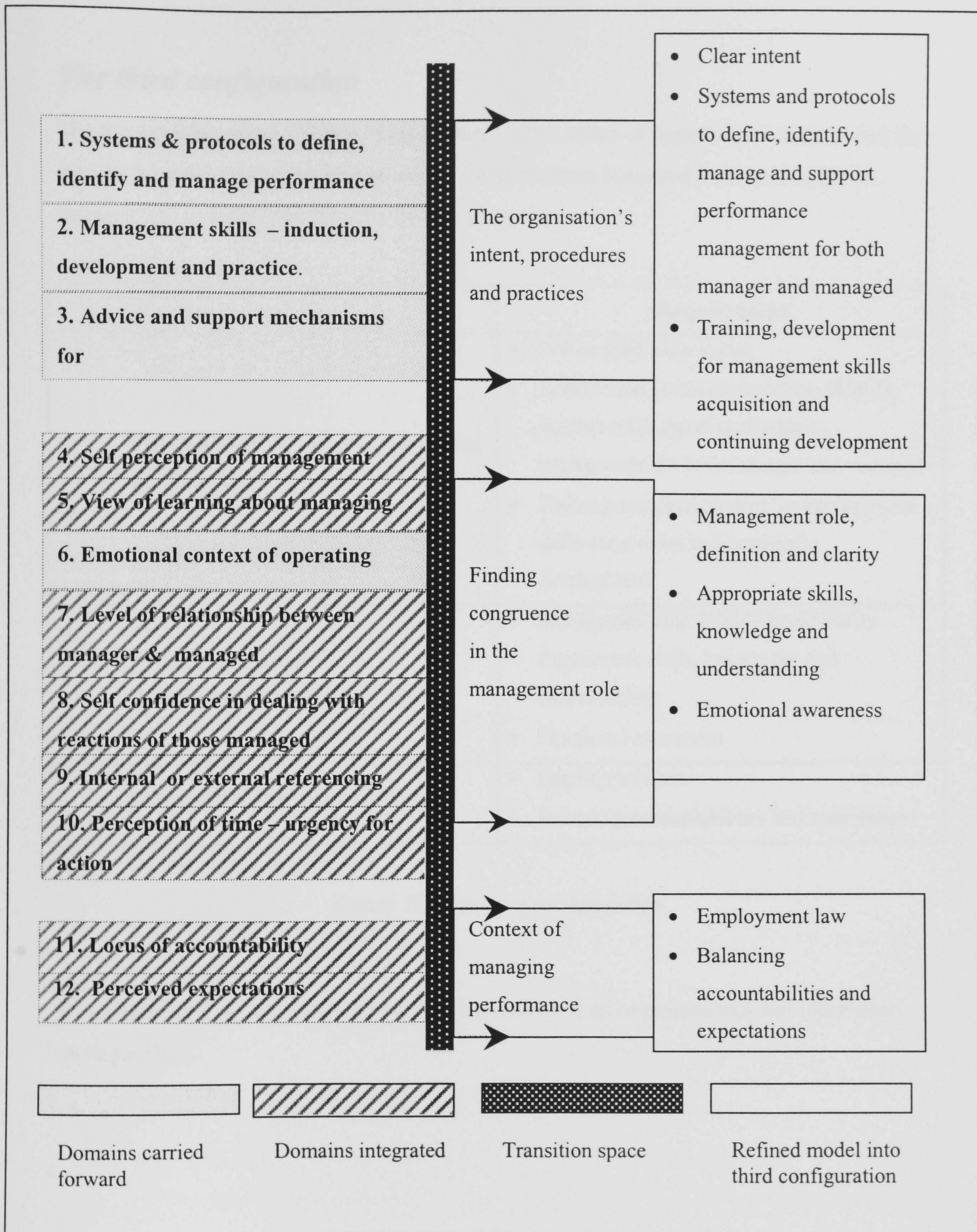


Figure 16: Towards the third configuration



### *The third configuration*

The third configuration (Figure 17) is formed from a series of hypothetical abstractions that lead us from the original work outlined in the Institution Focussed Study, through the research and is developed into this final construction.

	<b>Requirement</b>
<b>The organisation's intent, procedures and practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate clear intent</li> <li>• Systems and protocols to define, identify, manage and support performance management for both manager and managed</li> <li>• Training and development for management skills acquisition and continuing development.</li> </ul>
<b>Finding congruence in the management role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management role definition and clarity</li> <li>• Appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding</li> <li>• Emotional awareness</li> </ul>
<b>Context of managing performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment law</li> <li>• Balancing accountabilities and expectations</li> </ul>

*Figure 17: The third configuration*

This model will give a direction to the action needed at an organisational and individual manager level.

## *Performance management – as a wicked problem*

*Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.* Rittel and Webber (1973, p. 157)

Managing performance has wider ramifications than would be suggested by the rhetoric which often accompanies it. “Can’t you get rid of them” is a phrase that is not unusual when a manager tries to explain a performance issue to someone outside of their context.

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector said in a radio interview following a series of local authority inspections that:

*there is poor political leadership and an evident failure within local authorities to tackle the poor performance of officers. This should be a matter for urgent attention.* Chris Woodhead, June 14<sup>th</sup> 2000, Today Programme, Radio 4

The pressure on the manager to get on with the business and take responsibility for ensuring a level of performance in those they manage, belies the level of complexity that this research has identified.

*The wicked problem is an evolving set of interlocking issues and constraints. Indeed, there is no definitive statement of the problem. You don't understand the problem until you have developed a solution.* Conklin and Weil (1997, website)

The analogy of wicked problems can be useful to draw together some of the findings that this research has identified.

### **Characteristics of managing performance**

The characteristics of wicked problems can help to draw up those attributes found through this research to be attached to performance management.

1. There is no definitive Problem, there is no definitive Solution.
2. There are many *stakeholders* – people who care about or have something at stake in how the problem is resolved. Getting the right answer is not as important as having stakeholders accept whatever solution emerges. The process of performance management is fundamentally a social one.

3. Performance management is challenging and no one stakeholder can be safely ignored.
4. Progress in solving performance management is, for the most part, *qualitative*. It has to do with what we are *learning* about both the issue and the solution.
5. There are always constraints on the solution, such as the context, political ramifications, change over time and role change.
6. The performance management problem can be generated by many who may come and go, fail to communicate, or otherwise change the rules by which the issue must be solved.
7. No manager is brilliant enough or experienced enough to go off and solve performance management alone.
8. There is no way to prevent the introduction of new constraints to a performance management system; it will continuously evolve.
9. It is not possible to reach an ideal solution for performance management. Since there is no definitive Problem, there is also no definitive Solution.

When dealing with performance management you stop when you have a solution that is “good enough” or “satisfying.” The best solution is likely to be obtained by shifting expectations about the kind of solution that is possible.

## Chapter Six

### *Discussion and the proposals*

The research questions:

What do managers describe as their experiences as they engage in managing underperformance?

What are the perceived the trigger(s) that enable managers to begin a process of managing underperformance within their team?

What are the elements that support and enable a manager's intention to pursue and sustain the management of underperformance?

were posed in the introductory chapter and have been addressed through the synthesis described in Chapter Five. Just as important was an underlying aim of this research endeavour:

***“Will managers feel that this research and its resulting account adds to their sum of knowledge and extends their ability to manage underperformance of their team members?”***

In order to address the issue of the application of the constructions to management contexts, I have structured this chapter in two parts. The first part is a discussion followed in the second part with a reference point for practitioners and policy makers which pulls together the proposals for action.

This research has emphasised how reality and perceptions of reality are not easily separated if they are separable at all. Taking this point of view focuses on the way judgements can be made and how judgements can vary according to a particular point of focus. Psychological perspectives including personality psychology were included in order to contrast that view of self and self as manager with an emergent social construction as a process which comes

about through the phenomena of interest and pays little attention to what might be fixed in personality.

The findings would support the view that managers are enabled to pursue performance management where there is a clear articulated intent from their organisation and that these intentions are backed up with adequate systems, procedures and protocols. Skill acquisition and advice as procedures are actioned will further ensure that managers will start and persevere with procedures.

Managers describe their feelings in different ways but there is a universal factor – managers do have feelings. Strong potent organisational indicators already described above can alleviate these feelings. Where organisations had counselling, mentoring and peer support in place, managers described themselves as able to commence and continue with performance management of staff.

There were many drivers that managers identified as triggering the performance management process. These triggers were internal and related to the organisation, the manager themselves, or their team. Where external triggers occurred these were likely to be as a result of the growing number of inspection regimes or accountability derived from a greater emphasis on customer care.

The extent to which managers are finding the external inspection regimes a trigger was noted. What was not evident from the research was whether this trigger was helpful to the manager or a hindrance.

Battle metaphors of “holding ground,” “not being beaten” were common in the language of those being interviewed. There was a common belief, an assumption about the inevitability of conflict during the process of performance management. This finding has real implications for any organisation and should lead to a discussion of responsibility of all parties, both manager and managed in relation to managing performance. Only the private-sector company had any resources devoted to mediation and conflict resolution, which could be used to support this process.

Organisations for themselves cannot dream but those individuals within any organisation can. In defining what the organisation is and creating that reality for the teams and individuals many managers interviewed were positive about such values as

“Caring for staff”

“Aiming for a higher level of performance”

There should be directly managed opportunities for communication and exchange which allows for these positive values to permeate as these dreams into values are important to managers working in the organisation.

Recruitment, induction and development of staff was not directly researched but emerged as an important adjunct through the application of management skills as well as the emotional state, reactions and growth in confidence of managers as they undertake their work.

Other factors emerged as extremely significant and yet were not identified within early domains. The “Other” or the “Underperformer” and their response, relationship and interactions made a difference to how a manager felt in being able to tackle and persevere with performance management. The reaction of “Other” could be a real deterrent in embarking on any process. This underlies the importance of everyone in an organisation taking responsibility for super performance.

One concern for managers, and one area that could be investigated further, beyond this research, is whether some expectation and accountability sources carry more import and prominence than others in influencing a manager’s actions. The importance arises from the level of confusion and discord that a manager could be subjected to by being unclear as to which accountabilities and expectations to pursue.

Ways of making sense of learning to manage and developing different ways of assisting managers to learn from others was not specifically identified. This area should be pursued in order to best learn from others’ views of the world and their ways of working. The

question of recognising “better” or more effective practice in relation to the individual managing of performance is important and yet identifying and modeling this still remains difficult. More accessible through this research were the more generalised areas of overall structures and principles. Potent organisations were an important factor in ensuring successful application of performance management principles. Those organisations which viewed learning at individual, team and organisational levels as important, also developed frameworks to support their managers in all aspects of their role. Learning and development drivers and learning support mechanisms, together with management commitment, stimulate the application of effective performance management systems.

For many managers in this study the fear of power and issues of power and non-power continued to be identified. The study did not pursue this area, but power might well be seen as the capacity to implement performance management systems and may well be an unexplored factor for individuals in the application of performance management.

A key focus of the study was to explore the domain of emotionality, both in relation to the manager’s world and their ability to operate in it effectively. Relationships at work make a difference to any manager’s capacity to manage performance. The importance of emotional awareness as a development area for managers was evident. People’s ability to manage their emotions, the expectations they have of themselves including the confidence they have in themselves to cope with difficulties, has everything to do with their willingness to pursue performance management.

### *Towards super performance – learning through the first to the third configuration.*

In working through the configurations over time, it has been possible to form the ideas against the wider political agenda that has also been developing. There is presently an even greater political imperative for those senior managers in the public sector to achieve super performance in their organisations. They have to create the frameworks to encourage new ways of working in order to achieve that super performance.

At a national level there is a need to underpin the seeking of Best Value with super

performance aspirations, by addressing the areas which seek to undermine the progress towards it. These areas are enshrined in employment law and organisational practices that can act as a barrier to managers addressing performance issues.

The investment needed to achieve super performance in local authorities is an imperative if best value services are to become a reality. Senior managers will need to accept and support the use of alternative methodologies as well as working across boundaries, to achieve the reality of super performance. The resistance of some managers and the difficulties of others to tackle performance management needs to be recognised and addressed. Managers' roles should be re-defined to incorporate a performance management function which casts them as developers of their staff.

Imagining how the future may look in a high performing country, organisation, service or team is to develop a vision that embraces rather than alienates individuals. Developing people-management skills which motivate and develop combined with emotional awareness will identify successful managers of the future.

The following proposals derive from the research and set a direction for policy makers and developers at all levels:

**At national level**

- The exhortation for super performance must be accompanied by a recognition and the removal of deterrents which prevent its achievement.
- Messages received by organisations and their senior managers through mechanisms such as employment tribunals presently mitigate against actively pursuing super performance and should be reviewed.
- Evaluate the impact of Employment Law and case studies on achieving super performance

**At corporate level**

any performance management framework must provide

- Leadership that articulates that super performance is a desired outcome for the organisation and corporate working.



- Improved communication across all service groups to ensure consistency in the application of performance management frameworks.
- Improved problem solving across service groups to address and remove the barriers that prevent the achievement of super performance at service and team levels.
- Continuous monitoring of its impact and an evaluation which will bring about continuing improvement.

#### **At service management level**

senior managers must

- Display leadership which reflects, articulates and lives the organisation's vision to achieve super performance.
- Plan for systems and structures which reflect the performance imperative through clarity of standards for the service, team working and the individual.
- Have a broad understanding of the barriers, which will influence the achievement of super performance and seek to remove them.
- Empower and support middle managers to work within a super performance framework recognising that emotional awareness has importance.
- Ensure that structures and systems support individual development towards super performance.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the systems on team performance.

#### **At the team level**

middle managers must

- Function as a two way channel to keep senior managers informed.
- Reflect the aims and values of the organisation to achieve super performance.
- Have a broad understanding of the implications and benefits of performance management working methods.
- Compile a knowledge and understanding of competence standards including the emotional domain and their application in performance management systems.
- Deliver on improved influencing, problem solving and decision-making capacities to achieve super performance.
- Develop skills of supporting and coaching, emphasising and encouraging individual and team development.

- Identify environmental conditions which support or detract from super performance.
- Monitor and evaluate the provision for managing performance.

#### **At an individual level**

team members must

- Have a clear understanding of the part they play in achieving super performance within the organisations wider goals.
- Familiarise themselves with performance management frameworks and actively engage with them.
- Identify and challenge barriers which support or detract from an individual's development of super performance.
- Participate to identify their strengths and weaknesses to define development areas.
- Focus on developing specific and increased areas of competence including those of emotional awareness.
- Be involved in self development and their own learning to develop both individual and team roles.
- Monitor and evaluate one's own performance.

The next section builds on these areas as desirable actions and suggests what is required to instigate performance management systems through key processes.

### *Developing performance management systems*

#### **Key processes**

1. Take a strategic view that is predicated on the basis of achieving super performance within a national and international context.
2. Develop a vision in line with the strategic view that is communicated through all levels of the organisation.
3. Ensure that all planning frameworks and target setting, throughout the organisation, incorporates super performance as a central goal.
4. Develop operational procedures that assist managers to engage with performance management. These are likely to include adequate provision for absence management, occupational health as well as undertaking grievance and disciplinary processes.

5. Enable review of existing practices so that any implementation programme can build on what managers already know and can do, including the emotional domain.
6. Redefine the boundaries for implementing performance management systems beyond training packages. Include a range of activities which demonstrate a commitment to the support of managers to undertake performance management.
7. Ensure that any staff development programme recognises individual responsibility as pivotal to achieving super performance. That any programme is broad based and offers “on the job” as well as “close to” and “off the job” learning activities. That any programme, regards learning and review as a central tenet of all activities.
8. Continuously pursue super performance as a fundamental aim.

## ***Conclusion***

*Underperformance can be defined as an individual operating below their level of capability - because they make a choice not to.*

This thesis has focussed on an aspect of the management role that of performance management and through its inferences has assisted us to learn from others' views of the world and their ways of working.

By researching in both public and private sectors it has been possible to identify best practice strategies that work for some individual's and some organisations. It is now possible to use these constructions to advance suggestions for different ways of managing, and in particular of managing underperformance.

In addition to the constructions there have been undercurrent themes of emotionality, relationship and power that have been permeating this study and are not yet fully developed though have strengthened the significance of the constructions.

The premise of this research has been that we share worlds because we circumscribe them together in our actions and in our languaging, whether we are managing, being managed or participating in a different way. Where resonance and interaction occur at any interface, new knowing and constructions can continue to be co-created.

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# **PART TWO**

## **Abstract**

This Institution Focussed Study (IFS) provides the backdrop for the ensuing research thesis which takes as its focus the management of performance from a manager's point of view.

This IFS contextualises performance management in an international and national setting and covers the development of a first configuration model. The model divides into twelve domains that were brought into existence as a way of describing the impact on a manager's point of choice, when dealing with performance, including underperformance of their team members. The IFS explores, through a literature search, the twelve domains of the model and of their interplay, convergence and divergence.

From the initial literature search it was evident that some of the areas covered by domains were not represented within traditional management texts. These omissions themselves provided the impetus to research further; initially into more peripheral epistemological areas and where this proved futile, to formulate the research questions on which to base the thesis.

Much of the work on appraisal and performance management relies on an assessment of individual performance which is defined through standards of performance. The assumptions on which assessments are founded can be flawed when arrayed against national, organisational, team and the individual's own expectations.

The management repertoire needed to operate performance management systems are extended in this review, moving beyond those usually recognised such as target setting and feedback to begin to identify and address areas of relationship and emotion.

This original work has been used as source material to develop the Job Performance Scheme in one local authority and to develop a training programme for the Civil Aviation Authority in Ghana.

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## Literature review, or developing the possibility space

### *The starting point*

When I began to think about my doctorate in 1996 I was interested in the world of the managers. My professional role was to support the management development of managers and all aspiring managers both in and out of schools in my local authority. At the time I was interested in managers' learning. How do managers learn to do what they do? Can management be "learnt"? This work would validate my work role at that time, which was "Management Development Manager."

The current wide ranging knowledge base and accompanying literature on the theory of management centres on what management is, and the styles and methods of managing. This knowledge base and its associated literature generally focus on types and functions of management work and related skills. Bush explains this as

*Theory in educational management comprises of a series of perspectives rather than an all-embracing "scientific truth" ...each theory has something to offer in explaining behaviour and events.*

*Bush (1989, p.3)*

Drucker (1973, p. 408), who has had some influence on educational management theorists and their thinking, divided management into two specific tasks. "The manager has the task of creating a true whole that is larger than the sum of the parts, a productive entity that turns out more than the sum of resources put into it. ... The second specific task of the manager is to harmonise in every decision and action the requirements of immediate and long-term future. He cannot sacrifice either, without endangering the enterprise. ... He must, so to speak, keep his nose to the grindstone while lifting his eyes to the hills." In summary, Drucker's belief is that the manager is there to create synergy and strategy. Everard and Morris (1990), writing as practitioners of management and management training, describe management as: -

- setting direction aims and objectives,
- planning how progress will be made or a goal achieved,
- organising available resources (people, time, materials) so that goals can be economically achieved in the planned way,
- controlling the processes, i.e. measuring the achievement against the plan and taking corrective action where appropriate,
- setting and improving organisational standards.

Managers are expected by the organisation to: -

- integrate resources and pursue its goals,
- be effective agents of change,
- maintain and develop its resources.

Central to all of these views of management is the idea that management somehow can exist outside of the process of managing. While holding this view it has been possible to construct management training to fit existing and developing theories, and so reinforce a view that it is possible to be trained to “be a manager”. In other words, I can learn to be a manager by remembering the theory of management which applies to particular situations and contexts.

As with many studies that are researched when undertaking fulltime work, I had to expediently narrow the area of management learning to a specific area. I decided to focus on the need for managers to manage performance of colleagues. This area emerged as I worked with the new Headteachers in my authority and their induction. In 1997 the authority appointed eleven Headteachers, amounting to a turnover rate across the whole authority at that time of 15%; the average nationally from TTA figures was 10%. The high turnover existed for two external reasons. Early retirement, which until then had existed for Headteachers within their terms and conditions of service, was ending, and many Heads wanted to leave before enhancements were curtailed. Secondly, Ofsted inspection was proving extremely stressful to some Headteachers. In two cases Ofsted was a contributing

factor in stress-related release prior to the inspection taking place; in some other cases, the inspection identified schools with weaknesses, including poor management practice, and the incumbent Heads were given the opportunity to “retire” and the school was left with a vacancy.

In 1997 I was running the induction programme for new Heads and the first session the new Heads requested was “Guidance on Disciplinary Procedures”; capability was clearly a very real issue. In some cases the new Heads were facing what they perceived to be entrenched deputies and staff, at its worst this was recognised as incompetence. In all cases they felt that nothing had been done by the departed Headteacher. The new Heads were feeling very vulnerable, taking on schools either where there had already been an external inspection which identified management issues, or where there was an inspection shortly to take place which would inevitably identify management issues. The new Heads required immediate support in dealing with all levels of performance, and in particular, staff whose performance was a cause for concern. This is where my professional interest began, with the question of how best to support them in their new role. It was with the following questions in mind that I began to read and broaden my knowledge.

*What is underperformance?*

and

Why was underperformance not addressed in some of these cases, where to have done so would have really made a difference in the school and in pupils’ learning?

A year on in 1998, and a role shift later within the same authority, I was Head of Advice, Inspection and Management Support Services (Acting); this was an assistant director level post. I carried forward my previous duties and also had a wider remit to manage a team of 22 inspectors and advisers. Along with other senior officers I was managing underperformance within my teams in the local authority, as well as supporting those senior staff in schools who were having to deal with issues around performance.

I began asking some questions:

- How do managers manage underperformance?
- What factors are present such that some managers seem to be able to manage the issues concerning underperformance and others leave well enough alone?
- Why do some managers seem to be able to intervene where they feel performance needs addressing and other managers cannot?
- What is the trigger or action point – at what point do they reach their limit of tolerance?
- When do managers start to act in relation to underperformance?

The starting point of my approach was conversations and observations. Conversations with my new Heads, going into their schools – talking to them about partnership with their deputy; conversations with officers about their frustration in taking initiatives forward and their perceptions of blockages around people in their teams. All of these interactions began to make a difference; I started to bring forward ideas, and a model began to emerge.

The construction of this model brought together factors affecting a manager's response to underperformance that had been identified in first conversations; after that I began further research. I extended my thinking by explicitly describing my work to others, and the need I felt to support people in their management role when dealing with underperformance. I intended that the model and the insights that would emerge as I developed my thinking further would have the potential to help the people I work with and others to manage underperformance in a more systematic and supported way.

### *Rationale for the study - why is performance even an issue?*

In schools and local education authorities we are often sold the view that “in industry things are different” – read for different “better”. I decided to bring into the frame a comparative element and find out about the managers' world in industry – do they really fare any better at dealing with performance issues? And are the questions I posed earlier relevant in an industrial context?

The context in which such managers are located has been characterised by Davies and Ellison (1997) as: -

- intensified global competition
- more power to customers
- changes through new technology
- availability of more information
- pressure for profit and short termism
- turbulence

What has become known as “the new managerialism” is seen as a determined effort to implement the three Es of *economy*, *efficiency* and *effectiveness*; a fourth – *equity* – is still being debated. New managerialism is a global shift and is happening irrespective of the wider political colour. Policies previously pursued in England under a Conservative government are now being pursued under a Labour one in the way that public management is perceived and implemented.

Rhodes (1991) summarises this as follows: -

1. a focus on management not policy sometimes referred to as “hands on management”
2. performance appraisal and efficiency through explicit standards of performance
3. disaggregation of public bureaucracies into agencies which deal with each other on a pay/user basis; ultimately this will be noted as a break up of larger entities into smaller ones
4. use of quasi markets and contracting out to foster competition – introduction of competition; this was previously known as CCT (Compulsory Competitive

Tendering), and now will be the pursuit of Best Value (see below)

5. cost cutting and a style of management which emphasises output targets, rewards and performance
6. limited term contracts recognised as a more commercial style of management
7. monetary incentives and freedom to manage
8. greater efficiency in use of resources

Taylor-Gooby and Lawson (1993) explain how new managerialism has impacted on England. They describe four considerations which have shaped the particular ways in which state organisation and administration have been reformed: -

1. antipathy to large bureaucracies and the planning of services
2. an ideological commitment to privatisation and extension of the market systems
3. endorsement of monetarist economic theory
4. determination to cut taxation for the electorate

The achievement of pre-determined outcomes is a measure of an organisation's success. Accountability, in terms of who has achieved the success or who has not, has become increasingly important in this context. The central government consultation paper issued in February 1998, "Modernising Local Government – Involving Local Communities – Increased Participation in Debate and Decision Making", is already leading into the concept of Best Value which cuts across all local government actions. Best Value is concerned with accountability in all services at local level.

*We have to find the means to engage people in local democracy to facilitate modern local government ... We must find out what excites people in participation in local government.*

*Hilary Armstrong, Local Government Minister (1997)*

There is an increasing belief for services to become user led. The question I would pose for educationalists is: Who in schools are the users?

*Government, in its pursuit of its objective of making public sector more dynamically performance orientated, has played a major role ... creating the Audit Commission and the requirement to publish information about services such as schools and housing.*

*Rogers (1994, chapter 4 p. 2)*

Publishing information is only part of the story. The Audit Commission, perceived as an arm of government and a change agent for policy making, is a strong advocate of performance management: the inspection of LEAs will be undertaken by teams made up of 15% Audit Commission personnel and 85% HMI.

In schools we have external accountability through the mechanism of Ofsted, whose teams may identify schools in special measures or schools with serious weaknesses. A school with serious weaknesses is one that has shortcomings in one or more of the following areas (Ofsted update 1998):

- the quality of education provided by the school
- ineffective management
- unsatisfactory standards in four or more subjects across the whole school or across a key stage, with particular emphasis on Maths, English and Science
- the educational standards achieved by the school
- unsatisfactory or poor quality of teaching and learning in more than 25% of lessons
- the management of financial resources made available to the school

- the school does not give value for money
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school
- level of attendance is below 90%
- there are more than 5 exclusions (primary, 25 for secondary schools)

There has been an increasing use of specific outcome data, for example the SATs (Standard Assessment Test) and examination results and their publication. Information technology has assisted the move towards national collation and comparison of outcome data, and increased the visibility of standards in respective schools. National, local and school trends can now be identified; in addition, specific schools, Headteachers, and teachers can be identified, and their performance in relation to pupil attainment and standards scrutinised.

Stephen Byers, Minister of State for Education, wrote in July 1997 to the Chairman of the National Employers Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST) requesting that a more efficient capability procedure be developed, enabling fast track dismissal within four weeks in the most serious of cases (ACAS 1998).

*It may be uncomfortable, it may be distressing, but your commitment to your pupils means you have to deal with less than adequate teachers. Thomas (1998, p. 38)*

Given this context, high or even super performance becomes the required norm. There is no space in times of high visibility and high accountability to afford the dubious luxury of people who are not performing to the expected standard in their respective organisations. This is of course not as simple as it would at first appear. Underperformance is not readily defined or easy to identify and certainly not easy to deal with. My research and this literature review intend to illuminate the key issues and identify some possible areas for further research. These will then impact on management training in the future.

My research focus will be on the nature of underperformance in both public and private organisations. I intend to find out about the range of factors which make up “the moment”



on the manager's part when they decide to act on underperformance. What lies at their point of choice to take action or not – to intervene or to do nothing. My continuing research beyond this study will focus on this point of action: “the moment.”

*First configuration: the beginnings of a model*

The following model in Figure 1 was born from first thoughts, initial discussions and interviews with colleague managers and Headteachers in schools. It identifies twelve domains which interplay and impact on a manager's point of choice of management options when dealing with performance, including underperformance. I have used the concept of domains to encompass the sense of “more than” and “expansion of possibilities”, as I am sure that the domains and the concepts they attempt to define will continue to evolve, altering and developing with my further research.

The literature search has covered national and international sources, including internet searches, and has enabled me to begin to define the ideas and principles the model encompasses. Conversations, discussions and initial interviews with colleagues who are managing performance in schools, local government and industry have helped to extend my ideas and concepts even further.

I recognise that this is a continuing study and a continuing enquiry, yet I have chosen this point in time to “freeze frame” and write up my findings from the literature search and initial conversations, as my institution focussed study. This forms the basis of my work from 1997 into 1998. By holding at this point and writing up my findings to date, I can formulate the next section of my research, which will ultimately become my thesis.

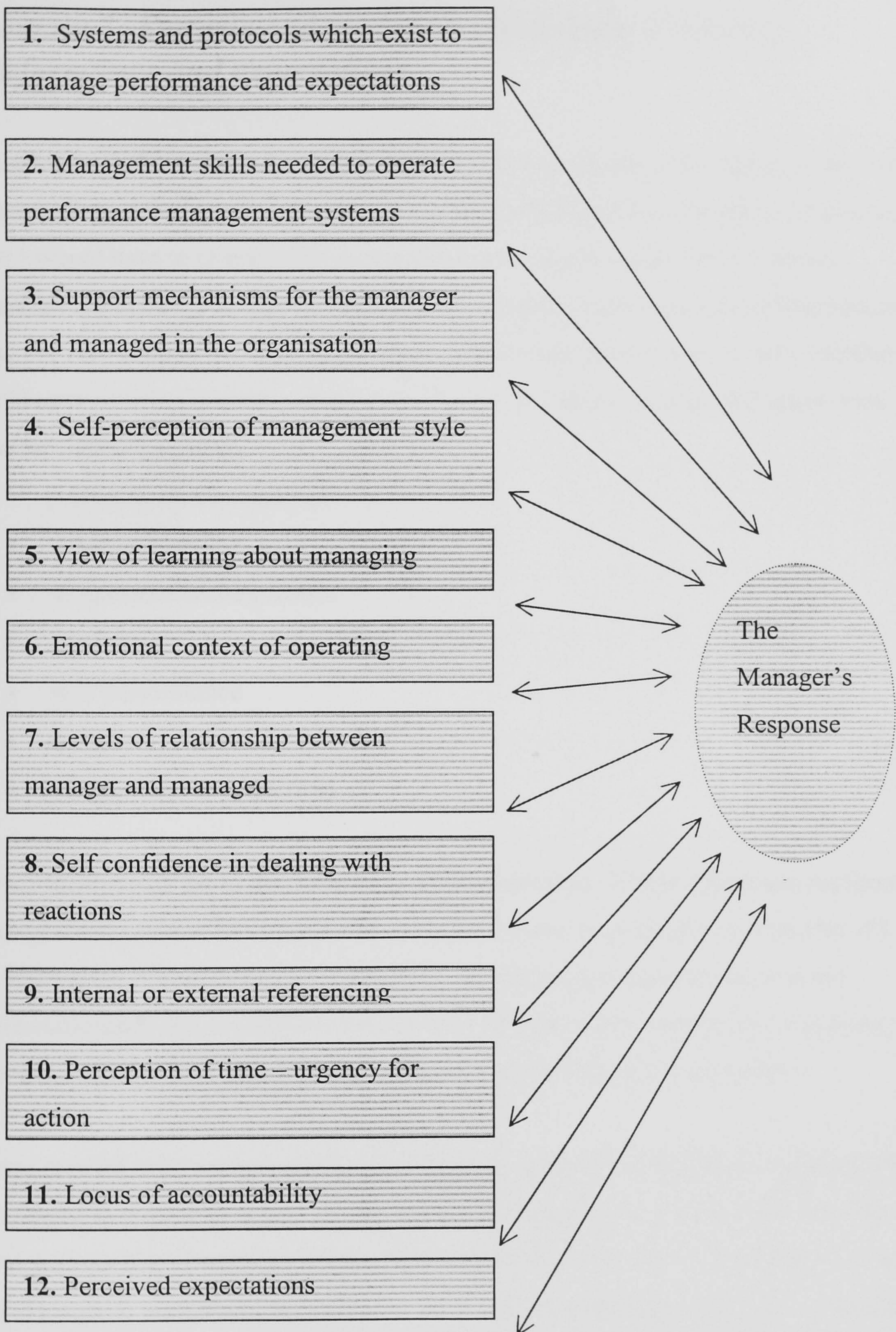


Figure 1: The interplay of domains – a manager's response to underperformance

## ***Domain 1: Systems and protocols which exist to manage performance and expectations***

I wanted to find out about the manager's world and the factors that impact on the manager when making a decision to intervene in a perceived performance situation. It became clear that I would have to characterise underperformance in some way, but the phrase "underperformance", though becoming more common in the body of teaching literature, was not very evident in management texts. I had to cast the net more widely in order to build upon existing literature stored as hard copy and electronically. My search took me into the following areas: -

- performance management
- underperformance
- competence/incompetence
- capability
- poor performance
- appraisal
- management by objectives

All of these topics led to the unearthing of large amounts of information and performance management systems from across the world. It became increasingly obvious that if I wanted to make sense of my findings, I would have to create a structure that showed the interrelationship and connections between the various existing performance systems, their content, and how they could be used to manage an individual's performance.

There seemed to be no connections, just different systems that different organisations had developed to meet their needs. As my search progressed it was evident that this area of work had not been attempted before. There were no connections in the literature to enable the manager to understand the difference between an appraisal system and a performance management system, or whether they were one and the same thing. It was evident that this area had not been categorised and evaluated; the question then arose – How could an

organisation choose the most effective means of ensuring that its staff meet the outcomes expected of them?

The framework that was developed from this review is shown in Figure 2, which draws together the areas from this part of the literature review and the connections that were discovered.

There are caveats. Common difficulties that were found with all methods of performance management were as follows: -

- the perceptions of performance may be inaccurate or formed in part or whole from informal knowledge, anecdote and gossip;
- standards may be compromised to fit in with an individual team members limitations;
- expectations may be set at an unrealistic level and the team member may be unable to match them;
- there may be minimum compliance with targets but no real commitment to them.

The developed model in Figure 2 shows the interrelationship that was identified in the processes which organisations use to assess and manage individual performance. The “procedures” (A) are the systems used over a length of time, and more usually consist of interviews and reports. The ways of measuring performance could be described as standards (B), and the two together, (C), give the performance management system used. When the manager uses the organisation’s agreed procedures (A), assessment measures (B) and management procedures (C) to assess the individual’s performance, the outcome (D) is reached. Expectations of performance are likely to be formed from sources that are external as well as internal to the organisation.

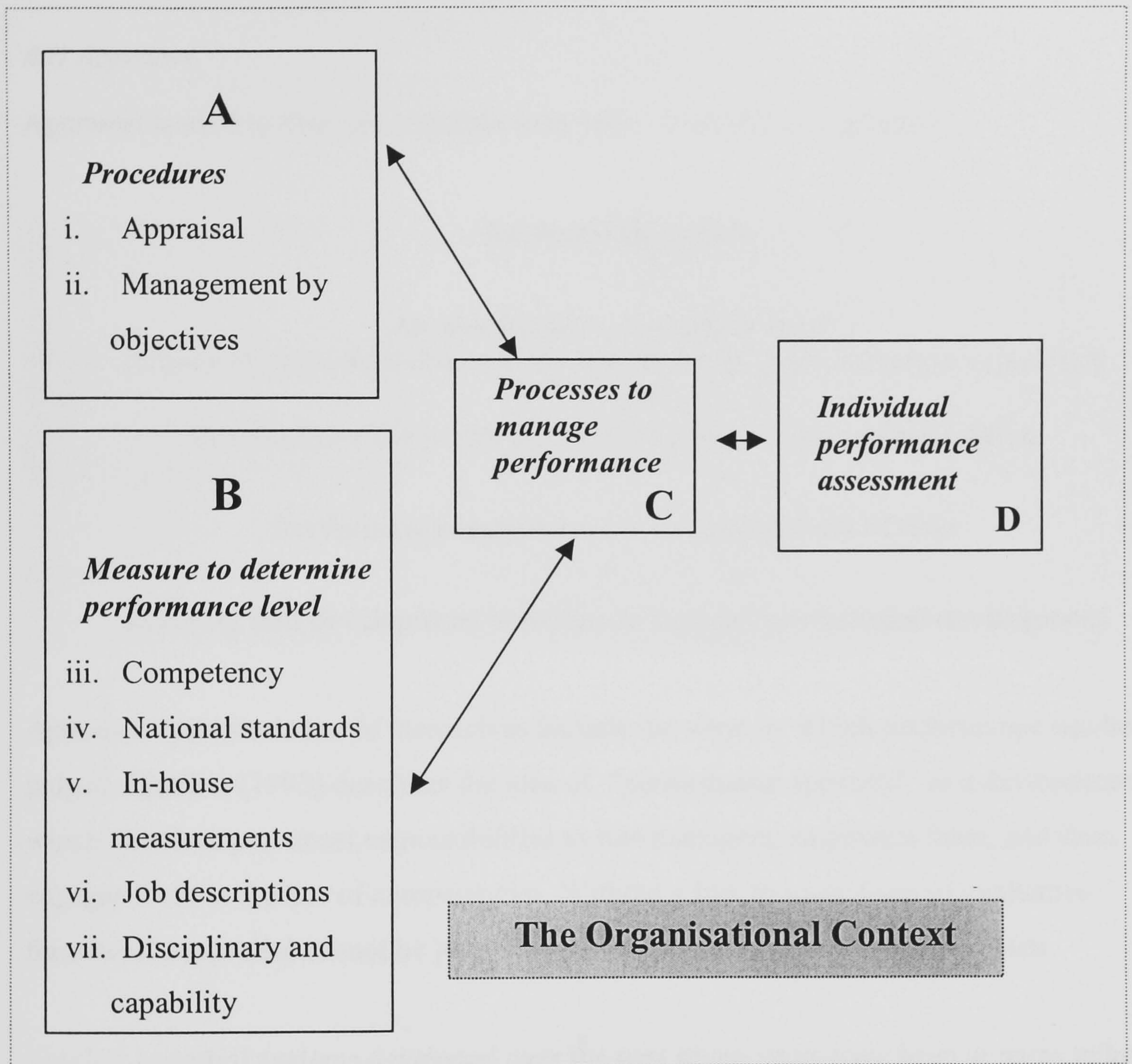


Figure 2: Assessing individual performance

## **A. Procedures**

### *A(i) Appraisal*

Appraisal is used to describe a system over time. It usually comprises of:

**An initial interview**

**An observation of a task or event**

**(1 hour of classroom observation is a statutory part of teacher appraisal)**

**Feedback on the performance of the task, event or observation**

**Performance targets set for the next period of time**

**Training and development activities to support professional development**

Appraisal systems do not of themselves include the ways by which performance can be judged. Fletcher (1993) describes the idea of “performance appraisal” as a development which devolves personnel responsibilities to line managers, empowers them, and then engages them in the use of competencies. Without a link to some form of evaluative framework, appraisal cannot be judged to be a performance management system.

Teacher appraisal systems developed over the past seven years have been at pains to keep themselves separate from any pay or performance issues. Teacher and Headteacher appraisal has been a statutory instrument since 1992. Its implementation was supported by central government funding, which enabled substantial training to take place. Many LEAs appointed an appraisal manager or inspector to oversee and monitor the process. In all authorities the appraisal process was “sold” as a means of professional development; at this stage there was no clear link to performance or to the contribution that could be made to organisational effectiveness. Teacher and Headteacher associations were slow to recognise that the process could be beneficial, and negotiated for a system which was a cumbersome

two year cycle and 180 degrees, top down. The expectation was that appraisal would be done to the person being appraised, sometimes called the “appraisee”. Evaluation of teacher and Headteacher appraisal systems have noted that:

*The impact on teaching and learning has not been substantial...it has remained too isolated from school development and training.* Barber (1997, p. 8)

It could also be argued from Barber’s (1997) evaluation study, that appraisal has remained separate from school improvement and school effectiveness initiatives.

More recently appraisal has been moving towards the idea of self-managed appraisal (Bell, 1994). Other companies – British Airways and WH Smith among them – have developed the system of appraisal further so that it could give an insight into the ways their managers worked. This process is called “360 degree appraisal”, or sometimes “360 feedback”. This describes the “all-the-way-round” review and the expectation that “subordinates” take an active part in the process. It is interesting to note that whilst the NPQH is prescriptive and centrally driven, the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) developed by consultants uses this process to determine future learning targets for experienced Headteachers. John (1995) found that this type of appraisal can be an organisational development strategy when linked to management development programmes.

In summary, appraisal systems are now beginning to move:

*away from managed towards self managed systems.* Baruch (1996) describes the concept of using self performance appraisal as against the more usual direct-managers appraisal;

*away from distinct individual outcomes towards developing the organisation* (Abbott and Lonsdale, 1991);

*away from isolated outcomes towards using outcomes to make an impact on the organisation as a whole, including the connections within the organisation.*

Teacher and Headteacher appraisal is currently under review; new regulations were expected in September 1999, but have been delayed until September 2000.

### *A (ii) Management by Objectives*

The procedures for Managing by Objectives (MBO) in order to improve performance are underpinned by a similar management philosophy and methodology to appraisal.

Sometimes the MBO system is known as “performance appraisal”. It is viewed as a major role of supervisors and noted as “a necessary evil”. More recent reports compare the results of two studies in the UK and Israel which indicate a considerable match between self performance objectives and direct manager appraisal (Bentley, 1995). This would lead to a view that individuals are capable of identifying objectives for themselves which would broadly be in line with areas chosen by their managers or supervisors. This system still carries an assumption of being “done unto” and the question could still be asked: How far does this motivate and accord with the new management philosophy of self determination and empowerment?

### **B. Measure to determine performance level**

Understanding the methods used is only part of the story. In any performance management system measures are also necessary. Rogers (1994) identifies these parameters: -

- Why do you want to measure?
- What are the purposes of measurement?
- Who are the measures for? Who is meant to use them?
- What do you want to measure? What characteristics of performance are important?
- How are you going to measure?
- What methods for collecting, analysing, and presenting data will be used?

In developing a framework, the Audit Commission’s three Es – Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness (refer to page 5) – are now given

*a primacy and importance which they had not achieved before. Local authorities have presently what they see as an incomplete set of measures probably due to unrealistic expectations that a set of performance measures were there waiting to be discovered.*

*Rogers (1994, chapter 4, p. 6)*



The main problems that local authority councillors and officers face can be set out in the following categories (Rogers, 1990):

needs indicator	classification of user needs	consumer criteria	output indicator	consumer agreement	measure of outcome
community needs professional standards	user needs	service specification quality and quantity	production process services provided	services received	outcomes
political objectives	inputs resources				
<i>Economy</i>		<i>Efficiency</i>		<i>Effectiveness</i>	

The dilemmas still faced by organisations arise from:

*definitional problems* – the difficulty in defining the three Es;

*data availability*, which, if it exists at all according to Rogers, is based on internal systems rather than external indicators;

*validity of measurement*, where there may be multiple outcomes relating to a particular measure.

#### *B (i) Competency*

Davies and Ellison (1997) explain that competence has two meanings, firstly, the ability to do a task, and secondly, as defined in the Oxford dictionary, having the qualifications required by law to do some particular work. They further clarify that competence is about working to a specified minimum standard, whereas competencies are about inputs that people bring to the job resulting in superior performance.

<b>Competence</b>	<b>Competency</b>
outputs for minimum standards	inputs for superior performance
concern for what the job requires	concern for what people bring
sociological focus	psychological focus
reductionist	holistic

Criticisms of a *competence* approach can be summarised as: -

- it assumes a static job role;
- it aims at minimum standards;
- it is often undertaken in conjunction with task functional analysis which can be fragmenting;
- it requires too much assessment and has incomplete acceptance by employers.

Using a *competency* approach also has difficulties in that:-

- competency does not always fully match management work;
- competency approaches can produce clone-like, imitative behaviour;
- competency for individuals can by implication undervalue the collective competency found within teams.

The implications for managing underperformance become clearer when grappling with these intricacies, since clarity of assessment is crucial in order to make a judgement as to whether there is an individual performance issue.

#### *B (ii) National standards*

Local Government Management Board (LGMB, 1994) defines a competent workforce as “a workforce able to work to the standards expected of it.” Using this as a standard we can suggest that a competent employee is one who can work to the standard expected of them. Nevertheless there are still issues concerning the components of competence. These are used to determine the standard expected of an employee whatever the context; for example, Mansfield and Matthews (LGMB, 1994) use:

*technical or task skills* – those skills and knowledge which enable the job holder to deliver the key purpose or outcome of the role;

*contingency management* – skills needed to manage variance and unpredictability in the job role and the wider environment;

*task management* – skills which are overarching and which integrate the various technical and task components into the overall work role;

*role or job environment* – skills which are used to integrate the work role within the context of the wider organisational economic market and social environment.

Management Charter Initiatives (MCI, 1998) define competence as “the ability to perform job requirements to a specified standard and to be able to transfer the skills and knowledge to new situations.” MCI structure their competences along a continuum which presupposes grades of gain depending on level of management from level 3 up to level 5, where level 5 can be compared to an MBA.

The Teacher Training Agency has developed a framework of competences for continuous professional development (CPD) which passes from

- initial teacher training competences into
- national professional competences for subject leaders and SENCO’s advanced skills teachers into
- national professional qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) and on into
- leadership programme for serving Headteachers (LPSH).

The other side of this CPD framework is the possibility for these competences to be used to identify performance issues within the teaching profession. As yet, these connections are not explicit, but as the pressure for increased performance builds up and as new appraisal proposals come on line, we might predict increasing use of these frameworks to determine base levels for performance.

#### *B (iii) In-house measurements*

There are some very interesting ways in which companies have organised themselves so that assessment can be undertaken. Zeneca (previously ICI pharmaceuticals) assess themselves against the following set of competences: -

- thinking
- self management
- influencing
- achieving

GlaxoWellcome use a self development system against in-house competences in five key areas:-

- personal qualities
- planning to achieve
- business and customer focus
- supportive leadership
- working with others

*B (iv) Job description and job profiles*

In both private and public sector organisations one way of defining the targets or objectives for an individual to achieve is by referring to their job description or job profile. The difficulty with this method is that it is only as useful as the document itself. Where the job description or profile is out of date then it is less effective. Another criticism I would make is that the job description or job profile is not able to draw upon the subtle dimensions of underperformance. In particular, Headteachers have referred to the “attitude” of a coordinator or deputy, e.g. “I know I can set targets, like plan the parents’ evening for Year 3, but what about the moods I have to put up with?”

*B (v) Disciplinary and capability*

Disciplinary procedures are underwritten in employment law. The procedures cover neglect of duty, and cases where an employee’s negligent, careless or wilfully inadequate standards of work provide for action on the manager’s part.

Capability is a subset of disciplinary action:

*It may however happen that through neither carelessness nor willful neglect an employee cannot achieve an adequate standard. In such case management will need to demonstrate the support and/or training given to the individual to enable him/her to achieve a satisfactory level before considering alternative work or dismissal.*

*Hillingdon Policy (1996, p. 12)*

Headteachers and teachers fall under the ACAS agreements and are subject, just as other employees, to employment law. In 1998 Stephen Byers, then Secretary of State for Education, reported that he wanted “fast track” dismissal procedures put into place to make removal of inadequate and underperforming teachers easier. He instigated a review, which was published in 1998 as the “Report of ACAS working group to consider an outline capability procedure for teachers.” The group’s remit was to distinguish between conduct, competence and capability. Their recommendations suggested that clear job descriptions and clearly defined expectations assist in making standards of performance explicit.

The actions from ACAS were clear:

- The support roles of all staff were to be clarified.
- The importance of schools’ self-monitoring and review procedures had to be emphasised in compliance with Ofsted requirements (e.g. quality of teaching provision and standards reached).
- Induction frameworks for newly appointed or promoted staff were to be put into place.
- There were to be clear job descriptions as well as defined and understood expectations.
- There should be details of support measures that could be provided (e.g. courses, individual employee support).
- There should be consistency in approach.

From the point of view of governors and Headteachers this was to be no easy fast track. Figure 3 outlines the procedures from the identification of poor performance followed by the actions needed to manage the process.

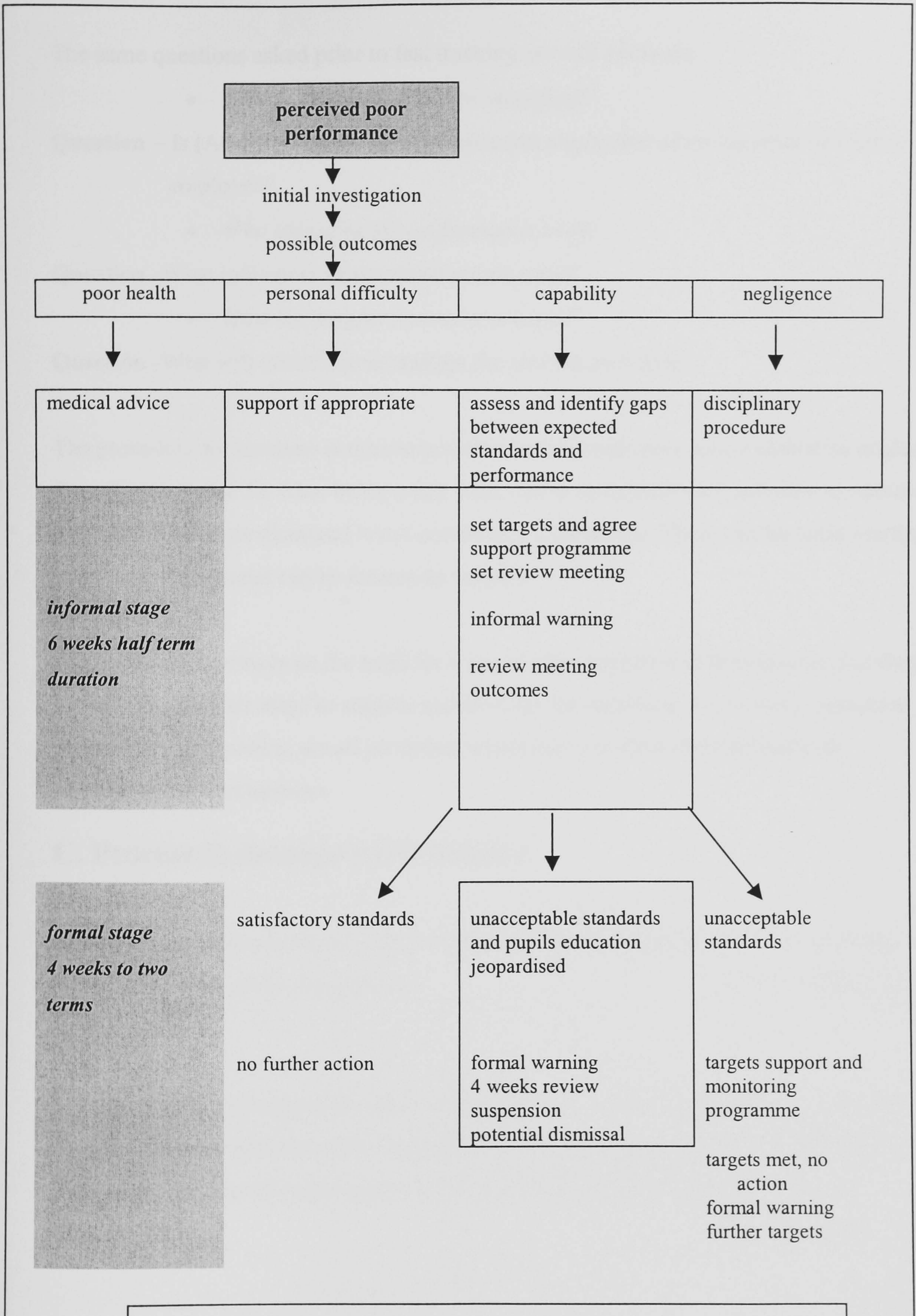


Figure 3: Fast tracking - capability procedures for staff in schools

The same questions asked prior to fast tracking are still pertinent:

- *How is poor performance identified?*

**Question** – Is (Are) the expectation(s) demanded reasonable of the member of staff or employee?

- *Who identifies the performance level?*

**Question** -What indicators or standards are required?

- *How are targets set and monitored?*

**Question** -Who will undertake to manage the process over time?

The procedure for teachers is the same as that for all employees, and it should be evident from Figure 3, that far from being a fast track that is straightforward and easy to operate, the route to ultimate dismissal is not necessarily a linear one. There can be many starting points and the process can be extremely lengthy.

The emphasis is always on the need for a responsible employer to demonstrate that they have taken adequate steps to support and develop the employee. As a result, induction, mentoring and coaching are all processes which now are often incorporated into organisational development.

## **C. Process to manage performance**

*Performance Management is the process that links people and jobs to the strategy and objectives of the organisation.* *NAHT (1994, p. 11)*

*Performance Management is the combination of a range of management techniques including measurement and review which when collectively and effectively used will improve the overall performance of the organisation and individuals within it.*

*Urwin (1992, p. 2)*

When the chosen systems link to the chosen methods of determining standards and both are used to feed back into the improvement of the organisation, then we have a potentially successful performance management process. A performance management system at its worst: -

- doesn't exist
- has low status
- focuses on criticism, not achievements
- takes place infrequently, for example once a year
- is not a developmental process
- is not business led
- is frequently a source of resentment and confusion
- is one way, usually top-down
- has little objectivity

In contrast an effective performance management system should: -

- identify what objectives people need to achieve in relation to business plan
- define and make standards to achieve explicit
- create and nurture the conditions needed for people to achieve
- assess performance against the standard
- recognise and reward achievement
- identify and implement improvements
  - for the individual
  - for the team

*(Adapted from Urwin, 1992)*

The processes that connect performance management across any organisation need to take into account the purpose of the organisation and the intended outcomes. The purpose of



management is then to ensure that activity creates the outcomes that are needed. Underpinning this is a process that allows for constructive negotiation as well as feedback. Fisher (1996, p.186) introduces the idea of benchmarking in relation to performance management, for “without comparison how do you continue to keep a leading edge?”

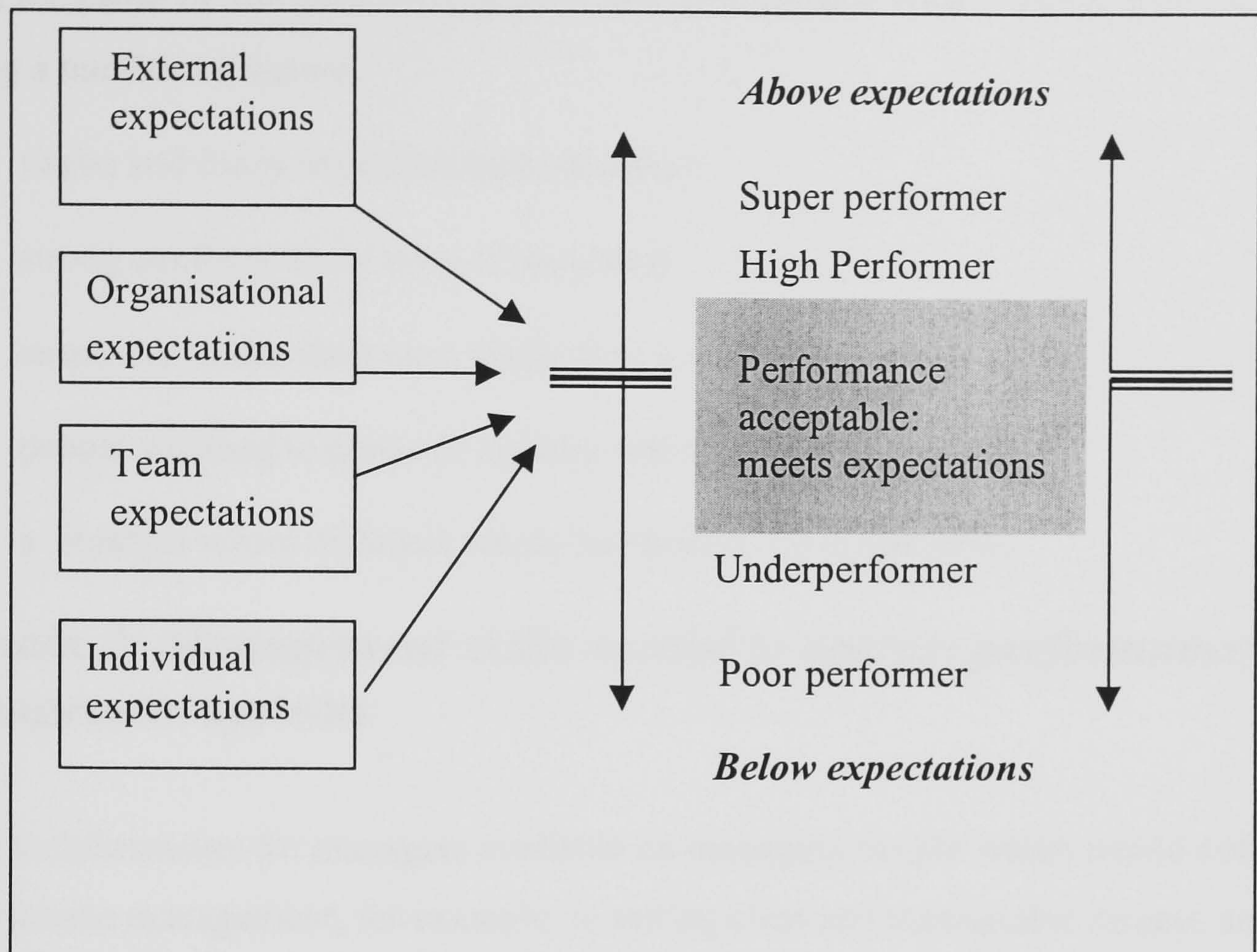
There is presently enshrined in employment law procedures for identifying ways of determining performance. The systems in law to support the organisational procedures are not necessarily brought into line. This would also be the case with existing arrangements for Teacher and Headteacher appraisal.

## **D. Assessing individual performance**

The expected performance demands on any individual can be from one or more areas. Figure 4 pulls together this merging of expectations. External expectations can arise from outside of the organisation in the form of generic competencies from professional bodies, for example the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) frameworks, or national frameworks such as those published in the Ofsted Inspection Framework, the Management Charter Initiative (MCI) or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). Organisational expectations can arise from national expectations determined from sources already described above, or from the organisation’s cultural norms, in-house performance indicators or role definition through job descriptions and person specifications. Team expectations can arise from a combination of the above, that is national frameworks as well as norms within the organisation and the operational context. Finally there are the individual’s own expectations and determination to achieve and perform to underpin the other expectations already described above.

Figure 4 demonstrates in diagrammatic form the merging of expectations and the judgment of performance in light of this. Where expectations are met then performance is deemed satisfactory. High or super performance is identified where the expected expectations are exceeded. Underperformance can be identified as the sum of all the expectations not being met. The difficulty in defining underperformance still remains; expectations – their source

and validity – have to be defined and made explicit in any process which attempts to manage the performance of an individual.



*Figure 4: Expectations define performance*

The model developed and pictured above demonstrates that the complex backdrop against which managers find themselves operating includes:

- external expectations
- organisational expectations
- team expectations
- individual expectations

These provide the basis which determines the overall level of expectations. One concern for managers, and one area which should now be investigated within this research, is whether some expectation sources carry more import and prominence than others in influencing a manager's actions.

An emphasis on expectations runs throughout the work of Jones et al. (1996), in which they locate the cause of low performance as a “low performance virus”, which they identify as having a number of factors:

- vague and fuzzy organisational intentions
- strong conflicts about what is important
- emphasis on the short term rather than a sustainable future
- people working to personal agendas which are not discussed
- a situation where different values and beliefs are in operation

### ***Domain 2: Management skills needed to operate performance management systems***

There is information for managers available on managing people which would assist in performance management, for example, in setting clear and manageable targets, sustaining support over time, and ensuring that support is commensurate with an individual’s needs. The Management Charter Initiative (MCI) framework defines a standard as a precise description of what is required (sometimes called a specification). In MCI terms, competence is linked to standards, which can be determined by assessment, and learning can take place where competence is not yet in place. MCI defines competence as: -

*...the ability to perform job requirements to a specified standard and to be able to transfer the skills and knowledge to new situations.* *MCI (1998, p. 3)*

The MCI framework covers many aspects of best practice management competences, among them “dealing with poor performance in your team.” When managing performance, the managers’ needs are prescribed as the necessary management skills, personal competences and knowledge. Figure 5 draws together the MCI competences.

Skills	Personal Competences	Knowledge needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ support team members who have problems affecting their performance</li> <li>▪ implement disciplinary and grievance procedures</li> <li>▪ dismiss team members whose performance is unsatisfactory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ act assertively</li> <li>▪ behave ethically</li> <li>▪ build teams</li> <li>▪ communicate well</li> <li>▪ focus on results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ communication skills</li> <li>▪ information handling</li> <li>▪ providing support</li> <li>▪ monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>▪ maintaining the working relationships</li> </ul>

*Figure 5: Managing performance required MCI skills, knowledge and personal competences*

The actions expected of the manager within this framework are to: -

- hold prompt discussions to bring the matter to the attention of poor performers;
- provide an opportunity to discuss any problems;
- ensure discussion is at an appropriate time and place related to the seriousness and complexity of the problem;
- gather and check information relating to the problem;
- agree with the team member the appropriate course of action;
- refer the team member to support services where needed;
- plan and agree follow up action to ensure positive outcomes.

Above all else managers must make sure that

*The way [managers] respond to team members' problems maintains respect for the individual and the need for confidentiality and that [managers] promptly inform relevant people of problems beyond [their] level of competence or responsibility.*

*MCI (1998, unit C.16 a & b)*

It is evident from this analysis of “best practice” that there is little here in the way of supporting the managers themselves or any recognition of the emotional domains which will be investigated later.

In Australia the policy framework relating to managing underperformance is very similar and is set out in the Public Service Act of 1922 and the Public Service Regulations (Australian Public Service, 1996). This provides a range of formal and informal mechanisms for addressing underperformance: “Where informal mechanisms are not successful in restoring performance, the inefficiency provisions provide a formal mechanism for managers to deal with poor performers quickly and effectively, while protecting people against arbitrary or unfair action. Where it is considered that a person’s underperformance results from deliberate acts, the use of the misconduct provisions may be considered” (Ibid. p.3). The Australian Public Service approach is based on broad objectives and elements of competence in order to manage problems with work performance.

The parallels are obvious between MCI and the APS: “Managing underperformance should be addressed in the overall context which recognises that individuals are ultimately responsible for their own performance. Stressing a positive approach by managers to managing people’s performance, which includes effective dialogue between supervisors and their people and regular feedback and counselling, is important in identifying and resolving any problems or weaknesses in work performance” (Ibid. p. 4).

In both cases the assumption is that if there is a range of strategies which provide an integrated and effective approach to managing performance and which stresses that the achievement of organisational goals is dependent on individual contributions, then most performance issues can be managed. The onus is on the *manager* to promote effective performance. Performance is seen as dependent on the commitment and willingness of managers to actively manage the performance of their people and seriously address problems once they arise: early intervention and positive support can result in improved performance, poor handling can lead to intractable and complex problems. Effective performance is regarded as the outcome of a number of factors including effective appointment, promotion and transfer, the responsible use of induction and probation, access to training and development, and appropriate supervision and performance feedback.

Managers need to be highly skilled in all personnel aspects to be able to promote the best performance from their team members.

The underlying principles of MCI and APS and their performance systems are founded on the core principles of equity, efficiency, effectiveness, and ethical conduct. It is interesting to note the similarities between these principles and those of the 3 Es already outlined on page 5 of this study.

Successful performance management in the APS and MCI framework depends on the responsible use by managers of established procedures and arrangements such as induction and orientation, staff counselling, probation and performance appraisal. Integral to these processes are clear articulation of work expectations by supervisors, regular reviews of achievement, including those relating to probation and increments in which people can participate, willingness by managers and supervisors to discuss the strengths and weaknesses with their people and to plan ways to overcome identified weaknesses. Openness to change on the part of both management and individuals is important. In some cases, adjustment of management style will also be an effective strategy to overcome problems.

*Quest for high performance has to be built on the platform of goals, outcomes and feedback.*

*Davies and Ellison (1997, p. 38)*

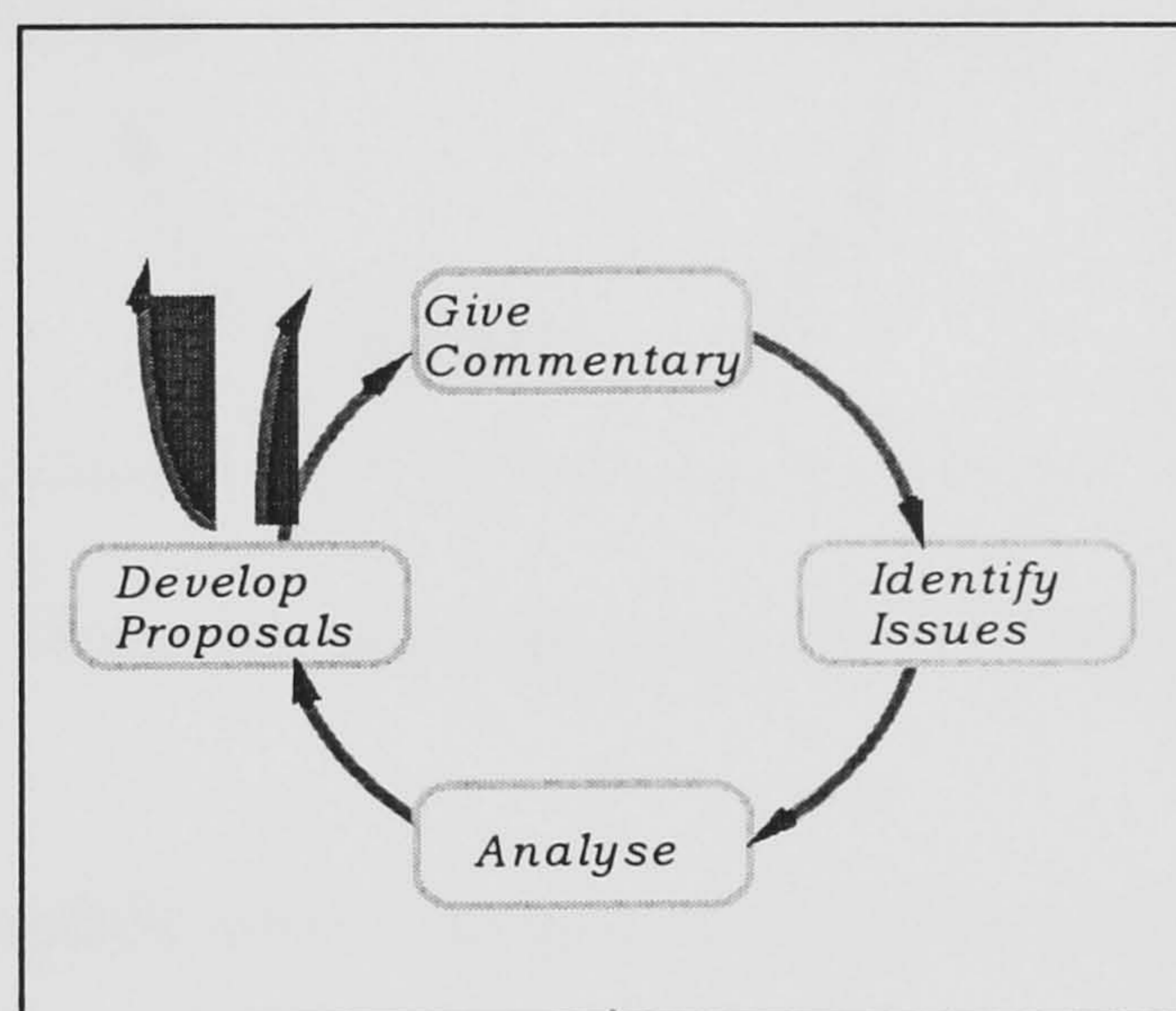
One of the areas of difference between private and public sector organisations that I have already examined is the area of feedback. GlaxoWellcome has spent considerable time and resources on taking forward “open feedback”. Customers as well as work contacts are expected to give performance statements on employees. I have not found a similar system in local government or in the three LEAs I approached for performance information. Anecdotes and suspicion do exist about these methods of gaining additional feedback, exemplified by such comments as: “we use appraisal”, “no I don’t take information from anywhere else” and “ I try to ignore the gossip...”

The usual feedback model is sometimes called the “feedback sandwich” approach. According to this way of giving or donating feedback, it should not be personality driven, but rather, it should be rooted in factual evidence which can be substantiated and should focus on what can be changed:

**say something positive,  
say something negative and  
finish with a positive**

Hence the sandwich analogy.

In Figure 6, giving feedback for learning is being developed alongside methods for improving teaching at the Institute of Education:



*Figure 6: Developmental feedback model (Watkins and Whalley, 1999)*

Using a model such as this raises a number of issues:

- it casts the first stage in feedback as commentary and as such gives a perspective additional to that of the learner's;
- it requires that the issues identified develop directly from the commentary or the observations, and that these have to be explicit;

- it demands that analysis is explicit, rather than based on personal preference;
- the responsibility to be able to suggest realistic change proposals is clear and belongs to all parties.

This model is predicated upon assumptions that feedback is only as effective as the dialogue taking place at each stage. The onus is no longer on the donor or manager to “be the expert”, “make things alright”, “offer solutions” or “reassure”. What is suggested mirrors the stages of the action learning cycle in Figure 7, i.e. that the focus of the feedback should be to support the learning of the receiver.

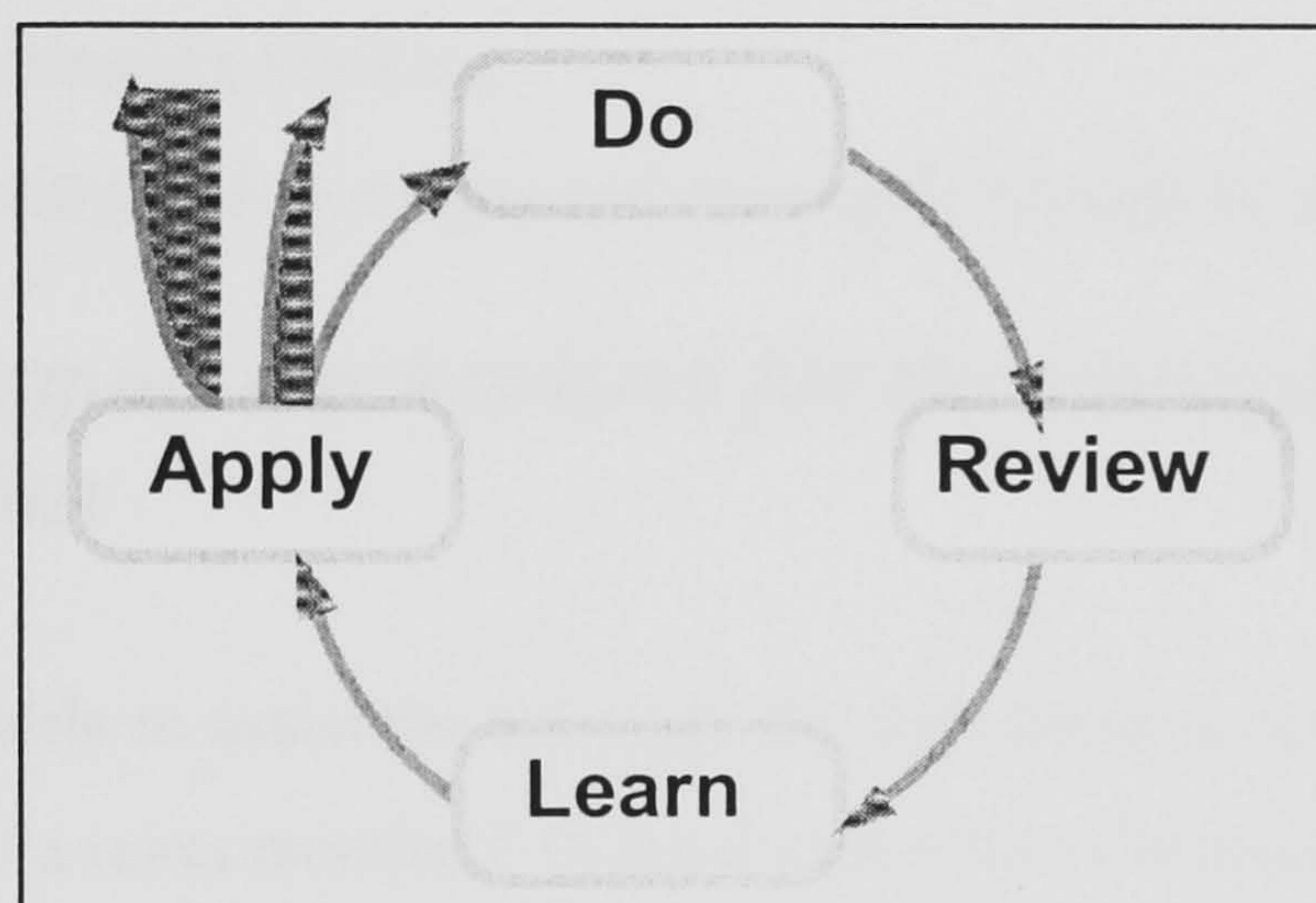


Figure 7: The action learning cycle (Dennison and Kirk, 1990)

In this model there are explicit roles and skills for both receiver and giver, which can be developed and extended.

Receiver is	Giver is
	learning
	linking to other ideas and concepts
	evaluating
making plans	commentating
making sense of their experience	challenging
comparing creating strategies	exploring



Using feedback challenges managers to develop their skills as well as questioning the purpose of feedback in giving an indication of performance. The suggestion would be that feedback helps both the manager and managed to develop and learn by: -

- gaining different perspectives
- reflecting on new insights
- exploring ideas, possibilities, capabilities and competence
- developing further management skills repertoire
- developing analysis and problem solving skills
- challenging thinking
- moving both manager and managed through an action learning cycle

### ***Domain 3: Support mechanisms for the manager and managed in the organisation***

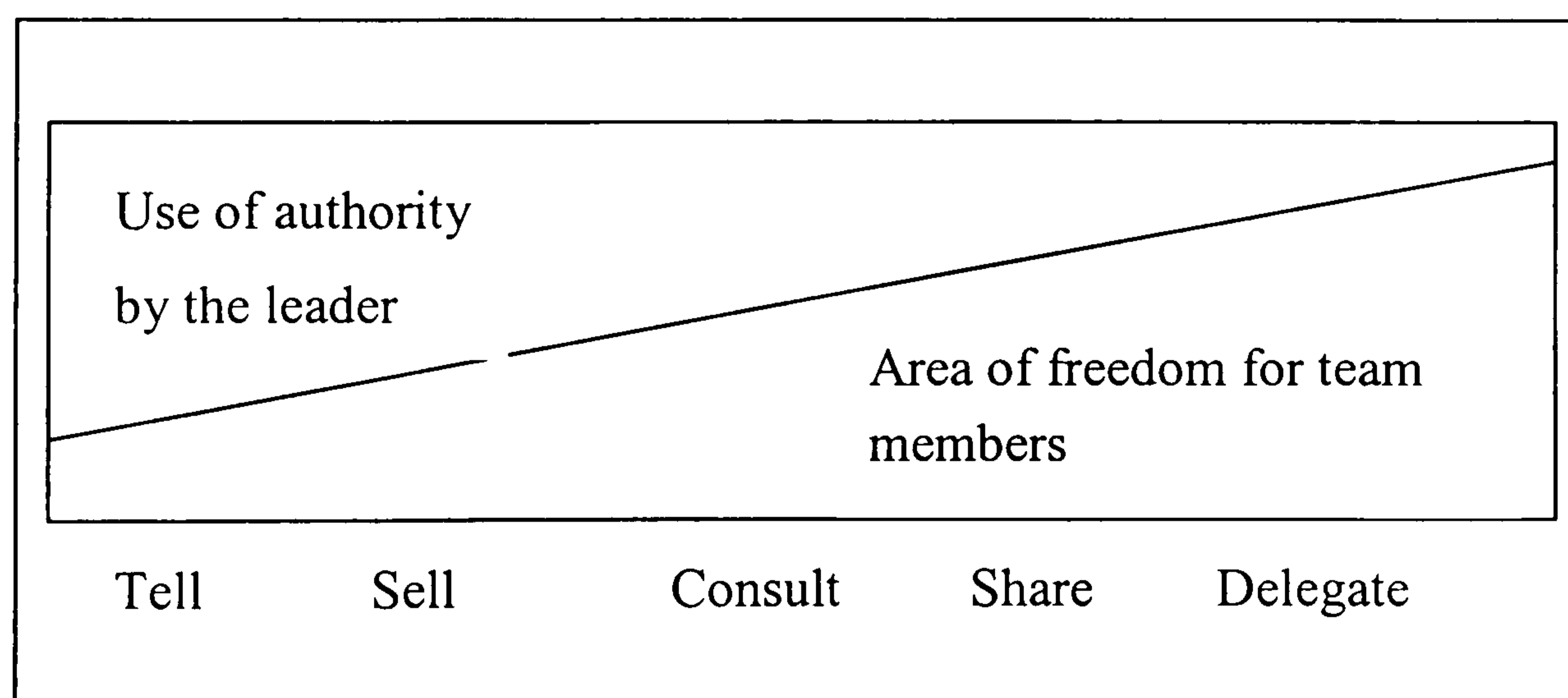
What help is available to assist the manager through the process when they are managing the performance of a team member? In local authorities the main source of help is the procedures, systems and one-off training mornings which take a manager through the stages of performance management. Very little else is on offer, yet the managers in the study who were in conversation with me stated that managing performance can be extremely isolating.

This isolation is further compounded by local authority protocols which insist that a manager taking an employee through disciplinary and capability procedures must not divulge specific information or discuss the case, even with their own line manager. My initial research has shown that in private sector companies, where performance is a key area for the organisation to address, the isolation is recognised, and wider support networks exist. For example, in GlaxoWellcome, management meetings can be used as a forum for discussing particular performance issues, and managers are actively supported via this network.

Headteachers of LEA schools rely on the personnel department of their local authority for help and advice. In the case of the grant maintained sector, advice is dependent on the support that the Headteacher has purchased. The professional associations also have a role to play in advising and supporting managers through performance procedures. In all cases that were examined, poor or slow personnel advice was regarded as problematic and a source of considerable additional pressure for managers.

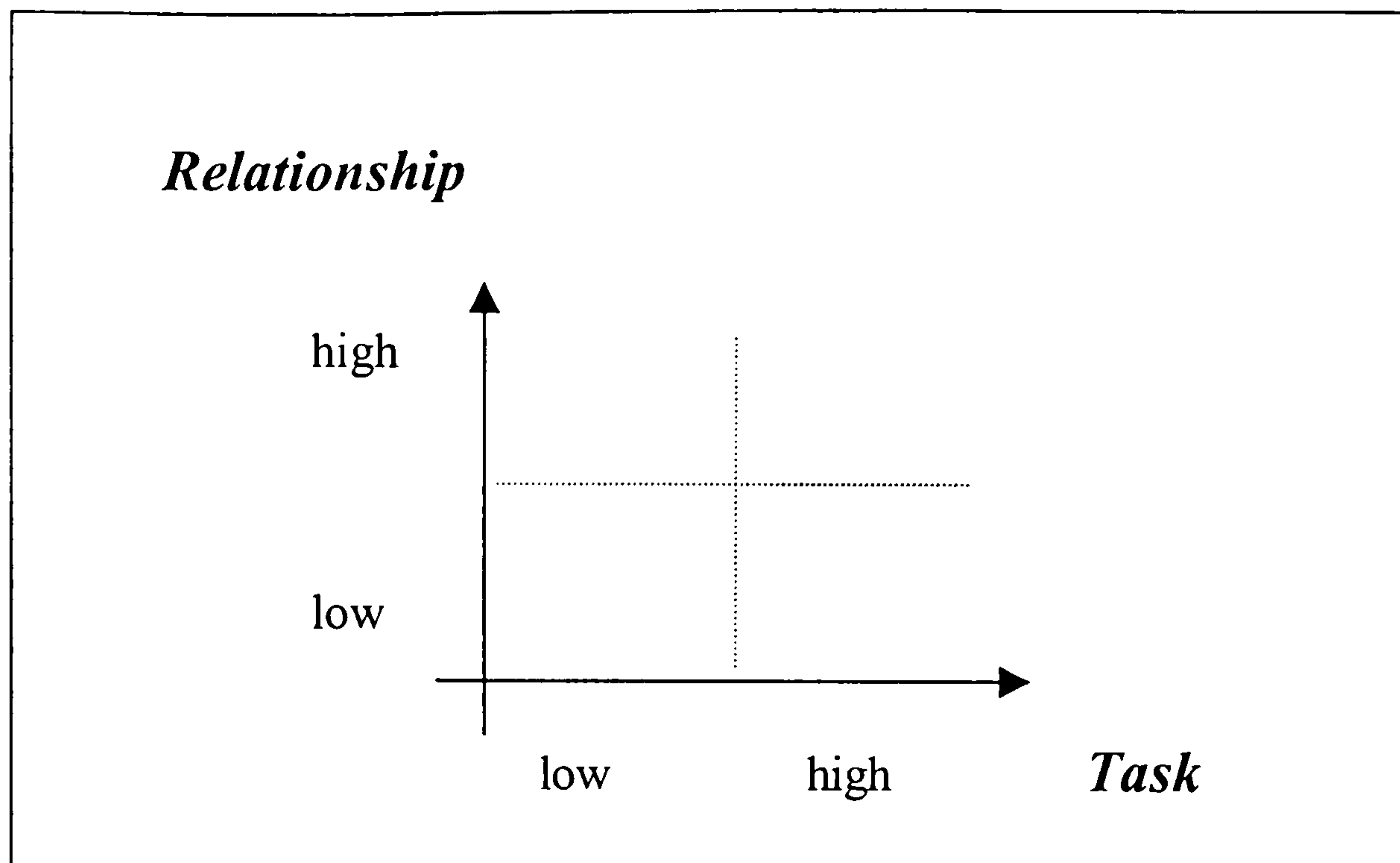
#### ***Domain 4: Self-perception of management style***

There has been a shift in management expectations and the role of the manager in relation to their managed staff over the last 80 years. The formalising of “management” and its subset of leadership was first developed after the First World War. Initial models were militaristic, in the sense of usually defining roles in relation to power dynamics. The approach of Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) in Figure 8 is an example of such a model.



*Figure 8: Leadership pattern (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973)*

The evolution of management style began to develop into two dimensions when relationship was referenced against task achievement. The most well known of these models was that of situational leadership, which was based on the work of Blake and Mouton but popularised by Hershey and Blanchard in the early eighties and is shown in Figure 9.



*Figure 9: Situational leadership (Blake and Mouton, 1964)*

In the model in Figure 9, the manager analyses the situation and decides whether they are operating in a high or low relationship to task environment; their action is then determined according to their analysis of their situation. For this reason, this leadership style became known as *situational* leadership, i.e. the situation determined the style adopted.

By the middle of the eighties three dimensional models were beginning to develop which moved beyond the relationship of manager and managed and began to note the context in which the events were happening. Evolution of the models continued and towards the end of the eighties and into the nineties these models were beginning to be described as *transactional* management models. Transactional managers keep the organisation going in the same direction. To further develop organisations, a new style of leadership was needed, one that could encapsulate the new mood of leadership rather than management. At the beginning of the nineties the notion of the *transformational* leader emerged: transformational leaders do things that change the organisation.

Leaders in this paradigm are:

- continually learning
- service orientated

- radiate positive energy
- believe in other people
- lead balanced lives
- see life as an adventure
- are synergistic
- exercise for self renewal
- believe in themselves
- believe in their abilities
- communicate realistic expectations
- believe in their staff

*(adapted from Covey, 1992)*

Block (1993) describes this type of transformational thinking as stewardship and suggests that leadership should be about creating a desired future for all. This could also be described as ethical leadership, or the type of management presently being proposed within the government white paper on improving local government and the new managerialist thinking which I described earlier.

The interesting point about all of these models is that they are exactly that: models – an interpretation – a way of describing “reality”. Here lies the dilemma for the managers who, managing performance, find themselves taking a position. Their position will be based on their particular understanding and exposure to the models, some of which have been described already. Shotter (1993, p.148) explains that “we still do not understand the nature of the essential core ability to do with what it is that makes a manager a *good* manager. It is not to do with finding and applying theory, but something to do with a complex of issues centred on intelligible formulation of a welter of impressions. Managers are involved ‘in the making of the story’.” Winograd and Flores (1986, p.151) go on to describe the most essential responsibilities for managers as those that “can be characterised as participation in conversations for possibilities that open new backgrounds for the conversations for action.”

All of this background helps to set up the medium for determining how any manager in this research perceives themselves in relation to their management style and whether their management style impacts in any way on their role as they manage underperformance.

## *The bridge*

At this point in my research I identified a difference between preceding and continuing domains. I called this point 'the bridge' to differentiate it as a point of transition. The domains across this bridge beyond this point are also about managing performance – but in particular, they occur when a manager begins to manage underperformance.

It was obvious through the literature search that all previous domains had been covered in traditional management texts, though not necessarily to the same degree. The domains that follow have a sketchy content; this is because they are largely invisible within the existing body of management literature. My interchange with the literature now had to extend into non-traditional management areas and bodies of knowledge.

At this time I began to frame up some possible research questions which would give me a direction to take, my focus of research now almost entirely linked to the managing of underperformance.

- What supports and enables one manager's intention to pursue underperformance and prevents another from engaging with any performance procedures?
- How do managers describe their feelings as they realise that they are likely to have to address the issue of underperformance within their team?
- What are the factors that help the managers to make a decision about tackling underperformance?
- How do managers perceive the trigger(s) or starting point that begins a process of managing underperformance within their team?
- What are the motivators or drivers that keep managers on track in managing underperformance within their team?
- What is/are the element(s) that supports those managers as they undertake the procedures to managing underperformance within their team?

- What feelings emerge as managers undertake procedures to manage underperformance within their team?

These questions, subsequently refined, were carried into the thesis.

## ***Domain 5: View of learning about managing***

How do we gain knowledge about the world?

How do we gain knowledge about managing?

We can use some of the work which Marton and Booth (1997) draw upon as they describe Meno's paradox: *How can we search for what we don't yet know?*

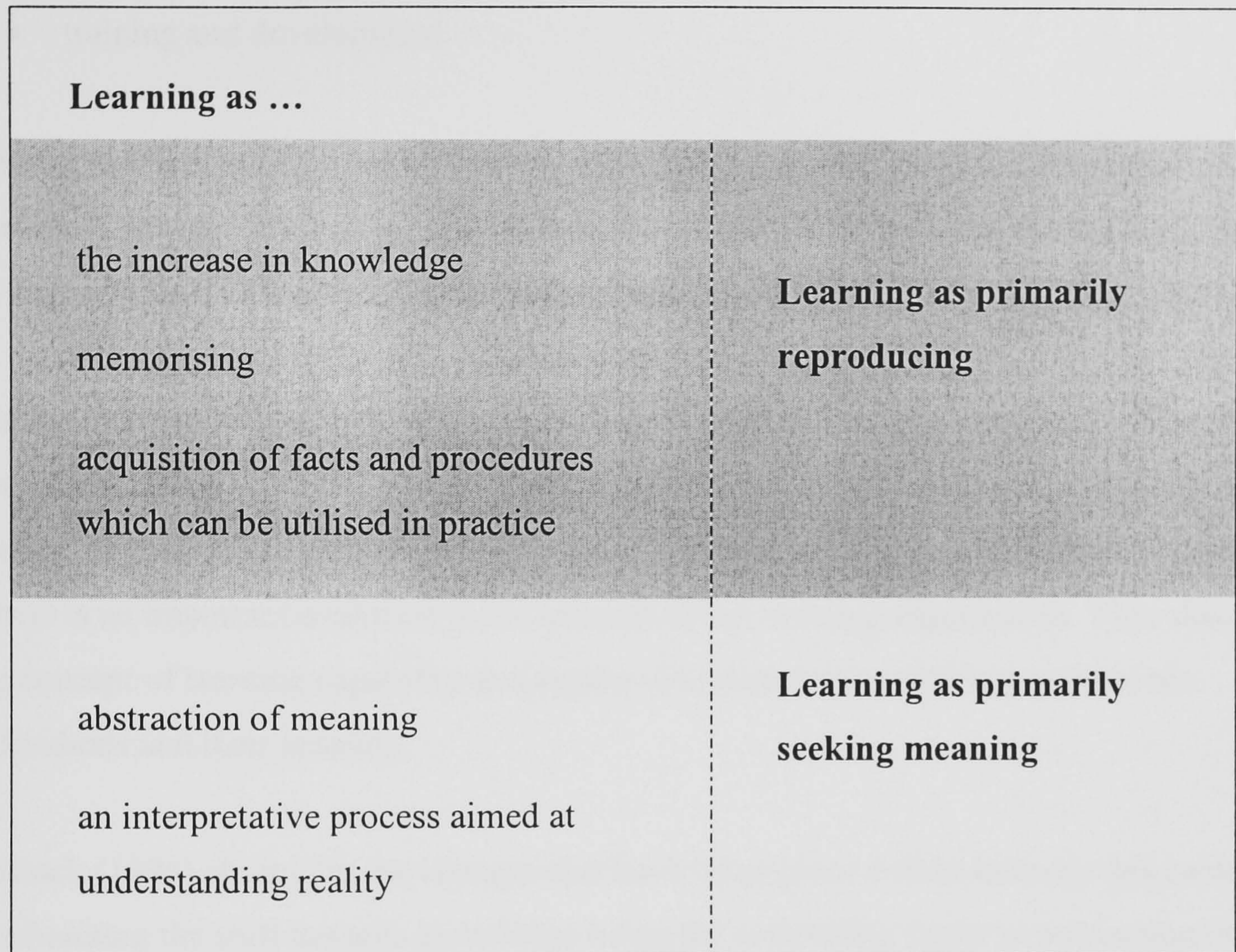
*Viewpoint One* Knowledge comes from within, as characterised by Plato, Descartes, Piaget and Chomsky among others.

*Viewpoint Two* Social constructivism can be described as an umbrella to order what encompasses an individual, asking: How do the fields of knowledge surrounding them make it possible to act and be in particular ways?

*Viewpoint Three* The world is neither constructed by the learner nor is it imposed, it is constituted as an internal relation between them – there is only one world but it is a world which we experience, a world in which we live, a world which is ours.

In their work Beaty and Dall'Alba (1990) found five ways in which learning was described by individuals, which was further developed by Marton (1993) and is illustrated in Figure 10. These ways of making sense of learning are likely to impact on any manager's view of learning. The questions then arise: How can we develop different ways of managing, and in particular of managing underperformance? How can we learn from others' views of the world and their ways of working? How do we recognise "better" or more effective practice? How do we ensure that best practice can be used to develop the managers of the future? Is there a difference between managers who are able to seek meaning, as well as

increase their skills and knowledge, and those who view learning as a reproduction process?



*Figure 10: Conceptions of learning (Beatty and Dall'Alba, 1990)*

A further dimension to be developed will be the way in which the organisation in which managers are operating view learning at individual, team and organisational levels.

Karagozoglu's research (Karagozoglu, 1996) summarises the concepts that underpin organisational learning, highlighting the difficulties in translating theory into organisational practice. He suggests a framework for developing a learning organisation, discussing the relationship between assimilating knowledge and using it. The framework identifies learning *drivers*, for example:

- communication
- employee involvement
- mentoring



and learning *support mechanisms* which also need to exist, for example:

- total quality programs
- training and development

He suggests that learning drivers and learning support mechanisms, together with management commitment, can stimulate the search for, and the use of, knowledge, enabling an organisation to become a learning organisation and to build up competitive performance.

Ulrich, Jick and Blinow (1993) suggest that by extending learning across organisational boundaries and by generating a large number of learning opportunities, learning can be generalised beyond the individual. The building of the desire and opportunity to learn from others is an important evolution in the concept of the learning organisation. They discuss the concept of learning capability as a means of understanding differences between individuals and their learning.

Bostock (1996) chronicles the changes that have taken place within industry this century, emphasising the shift towards knowledge being the controlling factor in production rather than capital or labour. He stresses the need to develop a new relationship with employees, suppliers and other stakeholders to develop structures compatible with the learning organisation. Goh and Richards (1997) propose that by identifying and measuring the essential organisational characteristics and management practices that promote organisational learning, a benchmark of learning capability could be developed that would enable managers to design interventions to overcome barriers in a learning organisation. All of these concepts have the potential to be applied within an organisation to the area of performance management.

## ***Domain 6: The emotional context of operating***

Traditional management texts either recognise the domain of emotions as something to be overcome, an impediment to management practice, or perhaps worse, do not recognise the emotional context at all. In other words, emotions are invisible and not validated.

Grove (1985, p. 181) is one of the only references in management literature that identifies some of the feelings that may occur during performance appraisal. He describes the whole process of performance appraisal as “emotionally charged”, and giving performance reviews as “a very complicated and difficult business.” Some of the feelings that he identifies in his study are pride, anger, anxiety, discomfort, empathy, concern, embarrassment, frustration, enjoyment and a high.

In the mid-nineties Goleman (1995) identified a concept he called emotional intelligence, which he extends to encompass intra- and inter- personal intelligence. He defines *interpersonal* intelligence as “the ability to understand other people, what motivates them, how they work, how to work co-operatively with them” (Ibid. p. 39).

<b>Components of interpersonal intelligence</b>	
organising groups	initiating and co-ordinating groups of people
negotiating solutions	mediation, conflict resolution, arbitration
personal connection	recognise and respond to peoples’ feelings, the art of relationship
social analysis	detection and insights into people’s feelings about motives and concerns.

*Figure 11: Goleman’s components of interpersonal intelligence*

*Intrapersonal* intelligence he defines as

*a correlative ability turned inward. It is a capacity to form an accurate veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life.*

*(Ibid. p. 39)*

In other words, there should be recognition of self, and any sense of rapport with others should be balanced with one's own needs and feelings. This dimension to the emotional domain would accord with the sort of descriptors that colleagues were using to describe themselves as they were managing, e.g. "engulfed", "need to be sensitive", "need to be present or with myself", "need to be friend to me".

Baker Miller (1976), in her search for a new psychology of women, describes a tradition of trying to dispense with emotions. She centres on the concept of relational contexts and relational modes which foster psychological development and asks

*What do people do when they encounter those who are different to themselves... The feelings of vulnerability and weakness are common to all but the question is who feels them?*

*Baker Miller (1976, p. 38)*

She identifies a dichotomy, i.e. that if emotions are regarded as being womanly, this can reinforce the idea that to be feeling is unmanly. There is a need to move away from the idea that knowledge of our emotions is a weakness, towards a path that acknowledges our feelings and vulnerability as original and holding potential. It is the very act of exposure that can strengthen our role as managers, allowing us to redefine the world in relation to our understanding of our emotionality.

Baker Miller entices us to define our sense of self and become organised around being able to make, and then maintain, affiliations and relationships. Her recognition that the threat of disruption of a relationship can be perceived as loss of self is crucial in our goal of bringing meaning into the manager's world, particularly in managing performance, where relationships may become strained.

Connection with others is the means by which we proceed with our individual development. Affiliation with 'other' is that search for attachment. Baker Miller (1976) suggests a question that all human beings need to ask, i.e. "Will I feel secure if I take responsibility for determining the direction and development of my life?" This question could equally apply to managers and it raises the issue of being one's self, being one's "authentic self." For many managers in this study the fear of power and issues of power and non-power realms continued to be identified. Could power be seen as the capacity to implement performance management?

Seligman (1976) identifies a concept which he called "learned helplessness", suggesting that learned helplessness happens when an organism discovers that it can do little or nothing to escape or ward off a particular circumstance. He states that

*ultimately people will not be motivated to initiate responses that would ward off undesirable outcomes.* (Ibid. p. 7)

Learned helplessness is constructed from three components, namely: emotional disruption, reduced motivation and cognitive deficit; these factors interfere with an individual's capacity to perceive the relationship between their response and the reinforcement of their behaviour. Learned helplessness links to stress and depression and creates pessimism within the individual which arises from their failure to understand about the effects of their own skills and actions on a situation.

A further dimension that may be identified within the emotional domain is that "ability to purposefully defer immediate gratification for the sake of delayed contingent but more desired future outcomes" identified by Mischel (1984a). The delay of gratification is likely to be important in the context of managing performance, where the immediate situation of performance managing another is inclined to be uncomfortable and has to be balanced with the optimism of a better future position for all concerned. This notion of delayed gratification connects to the idea of motivation (Bandura, 1977). Motivation is defined as a cognitive construct derived from two sources. The first representation is that future outcomes can generate current motivators of behaviour and the second representation is that

by setting goals or desired levels of performance, people are motivated to perform at particular levels by evaluating their performance (Bandura and Schunk, 1981).

A key focus of the study will be to explore this domain of emotionality further, both in relation to the manager's world and their ability to operate in it effectively as they manage performance.

### ***Domain 7: Levels of relationship between manager and managed***

*The literature on trust in close relationships is a fairly new one, but trust as a relational variable is not new. Jones, Couch and Scott (1997, p. 471)*

The concepts of both trust and betrayal are likely to permeate the process of performance management. The relationship research that has been undertaken in the area of trust is based on a study of couples by Rempel et al. (see Jones, Couch and Scott, 1997). Their relational model of trust is based on four assumptions:

1. Trust is seen to have derived from past experience and develops with the relationship.
2. The 'other' must be seen as trustworthy.
3. It involves accepting the risk of relying on the other's word through disclosure and by sacrificing present rewards for future gains.
4. It can be interpreted as having confidence in the other's caring.

That all of these assumptions can be transposed to the organisational environment is verified by the research of Scott (see Jones, Couch and Scott, 1997), which supports the proposition that trust is an essential ingredient in the process of organisational effectiveness. For our purposes there is a need to find out whether the relationships – and

the trust within relationships at work – make a difference to managers’ capacity to manage performance.

*Interpersonal trust is an expectancy of a person or group regarding the likelihood that a promise will be kept.* Jones, Couch and Scott (1997, p. 473)

Betrayal and rejection are factors identified within personal relationships.

*Betrayal can be conceptualised as any violation of trust and allegiance as well as other forms of intrigue, treachery and harm doing in the context of established and ongoing relationships.* (Ibid. p. 475)

It remains to be discovered whether these same factors apply to work relationships, including those of manager and team, manager and employee, and others.

### ***Domain 8: Self confidence in dealing with reactions***

This domain was created following conversations with managers where they would suggest that they themselves were making a decision to undertake a performance management process, based on their confidence to deal with outcomes arising from their intervention. The literature search led to a surprising finding: identifying the source of the concept of self-confidence, and where the meaning of self-confidence is derived from itself, is problematic. There is a “common sense” assumption of equivalence of meaning in the use of self-confidence, as if there is a universal understanding of its meaning by all. The use of language and the assumptions of “common sense” will be elucidated within the thesis but at this point it is worth noting that self-confidence is used without further explanation as if there is a common understanding of its meaning. For example, White, de Santis and Crino (1981) identify achievement leadership based on the self-confidence of the leaders they worked with, yet do not define self-confidence at any time through their work.

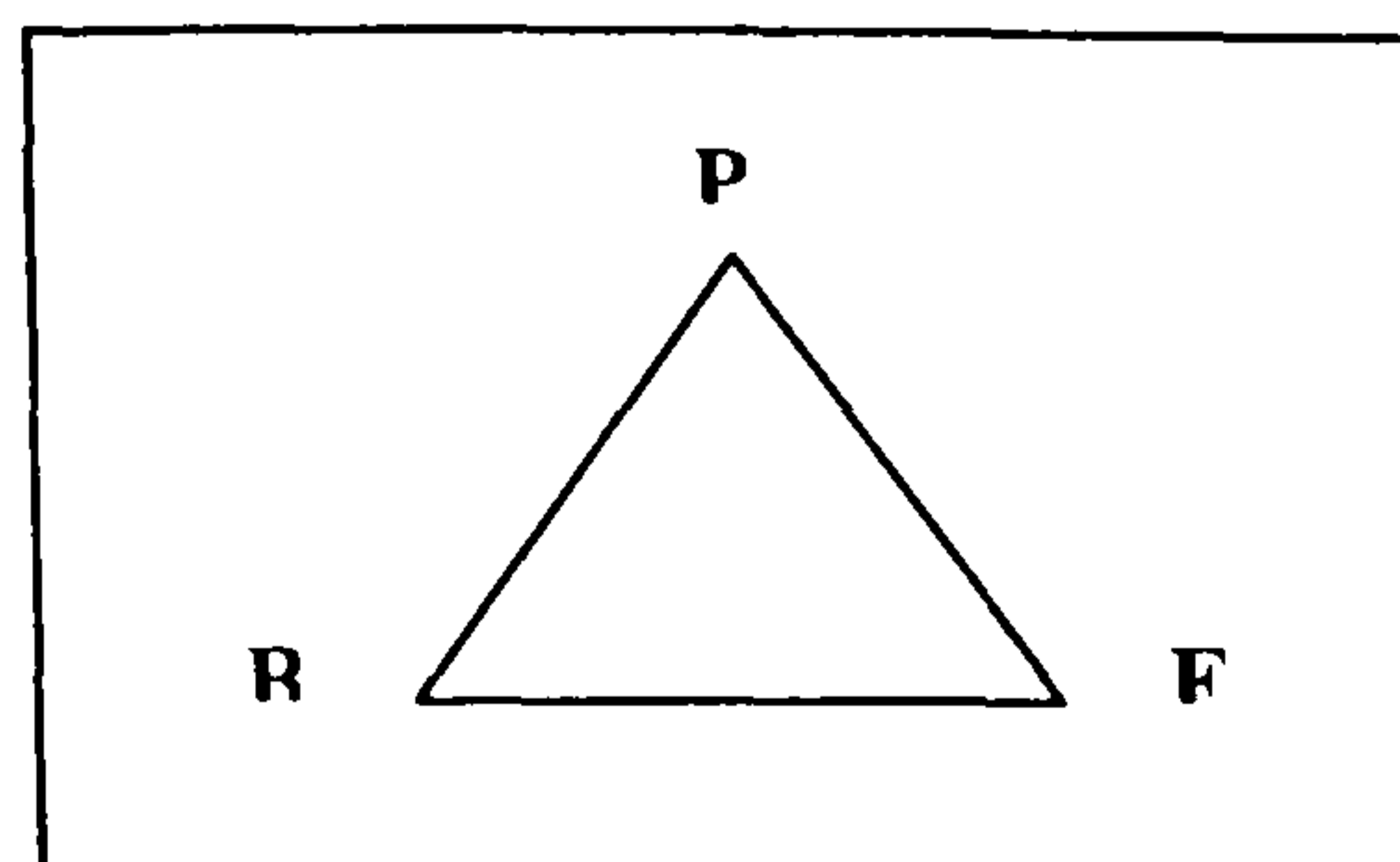
A further incongruity found was that ‘self confidence’ was used interchangeably and with an assumption of equivalence with ‘self esteem’, ‘self image’ and ‘self concept’ in the literature researched. The following section gives examples found.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1999) discuss the nature of the affective dimensions, where the affective dimensions are described as feelings, emotions, and self-esteem. They note that what we learn to do as individuals is influenced and organized by emotions and mind sets based on expectancy, personal biases and prejudices, degree of self-esteem, and the need for social interaction. Self-esteem is related to the affective domain and how we feel about ourselves. Bandura (1980) suggests that people's expectations of themselves, including the confidence they have in themselves, have everything to do with their willingness to put forth effort to cope with difficulties. There is a link between the amount of effort people will expend and their persistence in the face of obstacles. People tend to take action if two conditions are fulfilled:

1. they see certain behaviours will most likely lead to certain desirable results (outcome expectations)
2. they are reasonably sure that they can engage in such behaviour (self efficacy expectations)

The first point connects with ideas described in Domain 6, and elaborates further through the idea of outcome expectations. Outcome expectations can be described in this context, as a manager making a decision based on their assumption that the management of performance will have a desired outcome, which will be of benefit to them. The second point recognises that the manager questions whether they themselves are able to successfully engage in the performance management activities.

Bandura (1978, p. 348) argues that "the self system" is the centre "of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants" which then gives rise to a triangle of interaction:



where B is behaviour, P is the person and E is the environment.

A key component of the self system is self efficacy, which Bandura defines as

*our self perception of how well we can function in a given situation. (Ibid. p. 351)*

Self efficacy leads on to two types of expectation. The first, that we can successfully execute the behaviours required, producing a particular outcome and secondly, that our estimates of our given behaviours will lead to particular outcomes.

### ***Domain 9: Internal or external referencing***

*Given the fact that it is impossible to have an external reinforcer watching our every move, it is essential that we develop internal systems of control.*

*Megargee (1997, p. 503)*

The concepts of external and internal referencing are explained by Charvet (1997). She describes *internally referenced* individuals as people who

- provide their motivation to act from within themselves,
- base their decisions on internal standards, and
- make judgements based on their view of the world.

In contrast, *externally referenced* people

- need other opinions,
- need feedback from external sources and
- hold standards from expectations outside of themselves.

The research by Bandura (1977) already described in Domain 8 points to a similar concept which he terms self-efficacy, where individuals are able to reward themselves for doing well, in contrast to people who may punish themselves for doing wrong.

Peterson and Seligman (1984) summarised the characteristic manner in which people described events in their life. They identified three continua that may be relevant to this research:





### ***Domain 11: Locus of accountability***

The concept of accountability and its relationship to the management of underperformance has been explored fully in the beginning of this study. What is also of interest as a domain is the effect of the convergence of all the different accountabilities on the manager. The individual manager is at the point of accountability convergence. They have to make their management decisions based on their understanding of the importance of the various demands and accountabilities of groups.

### ***Domain 12: Perceived expectations***

*Managers not only have to manage people, they have to manage themselves too, they have all the frailties and anxieties of the other people they are seeking to influence yet higher expectations may be held with regard to them.           Watson (1996, p. 20)*

The literature search on expectations was covered fully in Domain 1 and identified external, organisational, team and individual expectations as influencing a manager's actions.

Analogous to Domain 11 is the idea that expectations converge on the manager, who will then have to determine which expectations to address to drive a particular course of action.

## **The next phase**

This institution focussed study provided the backdrop against which the subsequent research took place.

The temptation at this stage of researching was to delete those domains that appeared to be under-represented. Indeed colleagues who read through the review urged that these “small domains should be abandoned.” To have done so would have been to silence areas for research and restrict the breadth of the subsequent study.

There is undeniably an inconsistency of coverage across the domains, which relates both to the existing knowledge base and that of its epistemological roots. The next stage of research will extend this knowledge base in order to enable managers to have a better understanding of the field of performance management.

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