Personal & Professional Impact Statement


Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 2
2. Qualifications & Professional Background ......................................................................................... 2
3. The Public Service Ethic ..................................................................................................................... 3
4. The Public Service Ethic & The Discipline of Public Administration .................................................. 4
5. Academic and Professional Influences in Public Administration .................................................... 4
6. Five Observations ............................................................................................................................... 5
7. Thoughts on Action-Learning and the Benefits of the Process ............................................................ 11
8. Critical Incident 1 (using Rolfe model) Local authority in north west of England. This was a newly created unitary authority that was in varying states of crisis ......................................................................................... 12
9. Critical Incident 2 - (Rolfe) Very small district Local Authority - Midlands - very well run .................. 13
10. Conclusion & Next Steps ................................................................................................................. 14
Bibliography ........................................................................................................................................... 15

ALEX STRICKLAND, FRSA.

17 MARCH 2015
1. Introduction
This statement was devised to act as a chronicle of personal educational and professional development, with the intention of developing longer term insight through developing and sharpening skills around reflection and reflective practice. The statement (which has been built up over a period of four years between 2011 and 2015) draws in part upon a reflective journal which has been kept. This statement sets out what is in essence a personal journey, which is primarily educational in focus but also draws upon professional development. It describes personal motivations and captures experiences which have been significant along the way. The intention is to facilitate reflection upon these with a view to sharpening awareness of motivations, strengths and weaknesses. The primary purpose of the statement is to aid this reflection, although it is possible that readers both within and outside the public service (particularly those seeking to engage in work based learning) may find some elements of it useful and informative, in raising questions about reflections on their own particular ‘journey’, although this carries the crucial caveat that any such reflections are heavily shaped by the personal, educational and professional contexts in which particular experiences arise.

2. Qualifications & Professional Background
Academic Qualifications
I was registered in 1989 as an undergraduate student at Liverpool University politics department in and was awarded the Bibby Undergraduate Scholarship for the best performance in the Politics Department. I completed my BA (Hons) degree in Political Theory & Institutions (1st Class) in 1992. I then taught myself Local Government Law and acquired the (external) Diploma in Local Government Law & Practice with Distinction in the mid 1990’s. It was at this point that I decided to follow professional qualifications to become a lawyer (see below). I later studied as an external student at the University of London, taking the LLM Degree. In 2008, I enrolled at York University as an external student, acquiring my Masters in Public Administration (MPA) in the Summer of 2011 before enrolling on the DPA programme at Huddersfield in the Autumn of that year.

Professional Background
Having decided to qualify and practice as a professional lawyer within public service, I undertook professional courses at the College of Law in Chester and

---

1 This was the first time that Liverpool University Department of Political Theory & Institutions had awarded as first class degree for ten years.

2 I have worked in over 25 local authorities in England & Wales within the legal sector, in a variety of fee earning and legal management posts specialising in town planning, urban regeneration, regulatory matters and local authority governance. I have assisted in all types of local authorities, sometimes managing small
Manchester Metropolitan University. I qualified as a Barrister, being Called to the Bar by Grays Inn in 2001 and was then admitted as a Solicitor in England & Wales in June 2006 and later that year I was admitted in Northern Ireland.

3. The Public Service Ethic

Upon reflection, it has become clear that my motivations have arisen from two key sources. First it stems from my strong belief in public duty which arises from my religious faith. I am a keen advocate of the reformist Christian theologians, in particular John Calvin and John Knox. Their writings taught me the central importance of public duty and that it is important to act in accordance with ones calling – and I have no doubt that my calling is to engage in public service. Second, I would make reference to the enormous influence that the American Political Scientist Dwight Waldo (1913-2000) has had upon my thinking in this area. I read what is now a classic ‘The Administrative State’ (1948)\(^3\) in my undergraduate studies and the ideas expounded in that, have remained with me to this day. In particular the supreme importance of the public service, the idea that the public service carries with it a distinctive ‘ethic’ which is different to that found in other market ‘spheres; of operation, the idea that the state cannot be run as a business and the notion that public servants have a legitimate role and quite probably a duty in safeguarding the public service ethic and the principles that underpin that. This in part links to the wider motivation for my thesis – not least because over recent decades the driving force within local government through New Public Management,\(^4\) has been aimed at improving the efficiency of service delivery rather than ensuring activities are accountable to the wider ‘demos’.\(^5\)

In an era when it has become fashionable to expound the virtues of what the public service can learn from the commercial sector, I tend to agree with Dunsire (Dunsire, 1999)\(^6\) who in many ways echoed the sentiments of Waldo, in considering it of

---


\(^4\) See the journal article submitted in partial satisfaction of the degree requirements that deals with the role NPM has played in local government.

\(^5\) Dwight Waldo drew attention to the tension between efficiency and accountability, which is relevant to my wider thesis. It may be observed that efficiency tends to be stressed by the political right and accountability by the political left. The focus on the New Right/NPM period (and to some extent the advocates of the Third Way’ GIDDENS: 1998) (See GIDDENS, A. (1998) ‘The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy’ (CAMBRIDGE: Polity)) who followed it was on efficiency whereas accountability issues were largely ignored.

crucial importance that theorists and practitioners expound upon and defend a corpus of public service values which may be termed 'the public service ethic.

4. The Public Service Ethic & The Discipline of Public Administration
In considering the prime importance of the public service ethic, I am inclined to support the arguments advanced by David Marquand (Marquand, 2004) who saw the academic discipline of Public Administration in a broader civic context rather than the increasingly professionalised and narrow context it has come to assume in recent decades Having taken a keen interest in the history and development of Public Administration over the last 25 years, it seems to me that the discipline has become increasingly ‘professional’ in nature. The founding fathers of the discipline Bill Mackenzie, William Robson and Norman Chester had all engaged in political or public service administrative activities outside of teaching and research. This lends credence to the idea that Public Administration has a civic character which is itself an expansion of the Public Service ethic. It is my estimation however that the increasingly professionalised nature of the discipline tends to encourage specialism and increasingly narrow agendas at the expense of wider civic engagement and practical experience that was so prized by its founding fathers.

5. Academic and Professional Influences in Public Administration
Overall, my primary academic influences arise from Dwight Waldo (1913-2000) who stressed the importance of Public Service), Bernard Crick (1929-2008) who cautioned against a Positivist reading of Public Administration, fellow barrister William Robson (1895-1980) who posed the ‘Robson question’ linking theory and practice, Rod Rhodes, who needs no introduction and has developed a range of academic ideas which have been influential on my thinking including the Core

---

7 Public Administration may itself be regarded as a sub-discipline of Political Science along with Public Policy, Political Theory, Political Behaviour, Comparative Politics, Political Economy and Area Studies (GAMBLE: 1990). It is however multi-disciplinary in character drawing upon sociology, management theory (particularly in terms of organisation and leadership theory), economics, politics, philosophy and law.

8 For example, Robson was a member of London County Council, Chester taught local government officials in Manchester and Mackenzie had done work with central civil service ministries. Others such as Earnest Barker (Cambridge University) had war time service within Whitehall whilst others were active political figures such as Sydney & Beatrice Webb in the Fabian Movement and GDH Cole/Harold Laski in the syndicalist/socialist labour movement. The point to note here is that these leading academics had practical experience of public administration either as politicians or officials in addition to their academic endeavours. Indeed it may be noted in passing that President Woodrow Wilson (former US President) was himself a leading Public Administration academic and along with Frank Goodnow is widely regarded as the founder of the discipline.


Executive\(^{11}\) (at central level which I contend also applies to local governance), Differentiated Polity\(^{12}\), the hollowed out state\(^{13}\) and Network Governance.\(^{14}\) Mark Bevir joined with Rod Rhodes to develop the Interpretive Turn and emphasised the importance of developing compelling narratives.\(^{15}\) Sorensen & Torfing pioneered ideas about Democratic Anchorage\(^{16}\) so as to ensure that local elected members can exercise meta governance functions over unelected bodies/persons.

My professional influences have come from a range of Local Government officers at a host of levels in different local authorities who are clear that their duty is one of wider public service, have placed honesty and integrity at the heart of their public service mission and have swept away hierarchical baggage to deliver servant leadership in selfless and vigorous pursuit of wider goals.

6. Five Observations
In terms of preliminary observations, five themes stand out and are worth remarking upon:-

(1) **A Commitment to Lifelong Learning** My decision to embark upon the DPA at Huddersfield represents a belief that learning (whether formal or informal) is seldom complete.\(^{17}\) I have long realised the attractiveness and benefits of a commitment to lifelong learning, ever since my reading of the English educator and Christian Socialist R.H. Tawney (1880-1962) 25 years ago.\(^{18}\) That said, I consider that the

\(^{11}\) See Rhodes, R & Duleavy, P (eds) 'Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive' (London: Macmillan) (1995).


\(^{13}\) See Rhodes, R (1994) 'The Hollowing out of the state: The Changing Nature of the Public Service in Britain', Political Quarterly, 65(2) pp.138-151


\(^{17}\) See Kolb, D & Fry, R. 'Towards an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning' (1975)

\(^{18}\) Richard Henry Tawney (1880-1962) who was Professor of Economic History at the LSE between 1931-1949, an English Christian Socialist and a professional educator who was committed to expanding knowledge as well as skills amongst the industrial working class throughout the north of England. He was deeply involved with the Workers Education Association from its commencement in 1905. He had a hectic schedule and used to lecture to workers at venues such as Longston Stoke on Trent and Rochdale, fitting these engagements around his university duties. He has been regarded as 'the patron saint' of adult education (see Elsey, B. (1987) 'R.H.
purposes of and motivation behind learning may change. My studies at Huddersfield represent both continuity and change with what I have done in the past. Continuity in the sense that I am building upon academic knowledge/skills from my previous undergraduate studies in Political Science at Liverpool University and graduate studies in Public Administration at York. I see the DPA as the next step in building knowledge and skills in Public Administration.\textsuperscript{19} The change comes through the fact that this has involved the development of research skills and has presented the opportunity to carry out an original piece of research which has a practical relevance to my work context in the local government sector.

\textbf{(2) A Belief in the Value of Knowledge for its own sake.} I contend that building of knowledge and development of research skills are useful ends in themselves, rather than just as part of a plan for career advancement.\textsuperscript{20} This links with my motivation to undertake the DPA at Huddersfield.

\textbf{(3) My Motivation to undertake the DPA at Huddersfield.} My motivation for acquiring professional qualifications, was quite different from my motivation to follow the DPA. I gained my professional qualifications (see below) as a lawyer for the purposes of career advancement. This is not to say that there was not also intrinsic satisfaction in conducting academic legal studies, because there was, but the primary motivation was to qualify as a solicitor/barrister in order to work in public service (which is and remains my overarching purpose in life). In contrast, my motivation for studying Political Science as an undergraduate twenty years ago was to build upon my enthusiasm and interest in all things political. My first academic introduction to Political Science (of which I still see Public Administration as a part) came when I was fortunate enough to be taught an A Level course in `British Government &

\begin{flushleft}
\textit{Tawney – Patron Saint of Adult Education', in P. Jarvis (ed.) 'Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education} \small{BECKENHAM: Croom Helm} and he His most famous works are 'The Acquisitive Society' (1920) 'Religion and the Rise of Capitalism' (1926) and 'Equality' (1931).
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{19} I consider what qualifies as knowledge within the discipline of Public Administration has quite probably changed from what it was in the days of Frank Goodnow and Woodrow Wilson and for that matter in the days of Dwight Waldo. William Robson, Bill Mackenzie and Norman Chester. Traditionally it has been considered to cover Central Government, Local Government and Public Corporations. But today it would also include Field Administration, (Scotland/Wales, Stormont, EU) and even within those traditional spheres the boundaries have changed. Central Government for instance has been influenced by the idea of the `Core Executive' in which politicians/officials exercise power jointly replacing debates about PM/departmental power. Local Government has altered from covering just elected local government to including networks of local and national bodies operating in the locality that interface with the infrastructure of elective politics, together with Public Corporations which are now few in number and would also be likely to encompass privatisation and the regulation of core activities such as water, rail and energy.

\textsuperscript{20} This is not to say that career advancement cannot arise as a result of knowledge/skills development. The point to note here is that this is not any part of the motivation behind embarking upon this Doctorate.
Politics’ by Dr D. Ben Rees.\textsuperscript{21} For better or worse, this interest continues unabated to this day.\textsuperscript{22} My decision to study Public Administration at York (2008-2011), (where I completed my MPA thesis on the New Public Management and the impact it had upon democracy, service delivery and citizenship) was also for academic purposes and my decision to study the DPA at Huddersfield had the same motivation and was largely seen as an extension of my studies at York. That said, this is not in any way to be considered as being a selfish goal to acquire knowledge for no wider purpose – on the contrary, the overarching purpose is to spread knowledge and best practice amongst colleagues in performance of my duties as a Public Servant. My career goals have been largely met (see point 4 below) and as such my decision to study the DPA was not taken to develop career goals in any way. That said, I consider that there was a particular benefit to studying at Huddersfield – namely the use of the action learning approach (see below) and that my studies at Huddersfield do have an impact upon professional practice,\textsuperscript{23} even if that was not my personal motivation for conducting them.

(4) Career Advancement Issues

As indicated (‘Professional Qualifications and Experience to Date’) I have around 15 years experience working as a lawyer at all levels in the Local Government sector. I tend to work on a temporary basis providing legal services to particular local authorities on a short/ fixed term basis that can be anything from one month to several years, depending on the particular requirement. My specialism is in compulsory purchase/urban regeneration schemes, but I provide advice in all aspects of Local Government Law\textsuperscript{24} including town planning, licensing, housing,

\textsuperscript{21} I would take this opportunity to pay tribute to Professor D. Ben Rees. Professor Rees who is an acknowledged scholar in theology (now of the Greenwich School of Theology), an ordained minister of the church and a leading member of the Welsh community on Merseyside. A sociologist by training, his knowledge of political science was broad and deep and he was always enthusiastic and kind enough to share such knowledge with his students. I owe not only my success on that A Level course largely to him, but my decision to study Political Science and Public Administration at Liverpool, York and Huddersfield Universities subsequently was in no small part due to his original encouragement which to this day remains an inspiration.

\textsuperscript{22} This is in part due to what I consider to be my calling to perform public service duties which I have outlined earlier in this statement.

\textsuperscript{23} The importance of the link between Public Administration theory and practice was outlined by William Robson. In my thesis, learning points are likely to arise from conclusions as to how complex governance is seen by practitioners within the local government community, together with subsidiary speculations on issues of leadership and management as part of that, and conclusions on how outsourcing and partnerships are viewed and how scrutiny works and may be improved.

\textsuperscript{24} Except for Education and Social Services.
contracts, economic development, property law and local authority governance. I have worked in well over 20 different local authorities of all different types (Metropolitan Borough, London Borough, Unitary Authority, County and District) and at all different levels ranging from fee earning roles with the focus upon providing legal advice/assistance, to project management roles with the focus upon delivering a particular project, to Head of Service/Head of Department roles which have a responsibility for delivering council legal services overall and bears the statutory responsibility of Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer for that particular authority. I enjoy the challenge and variety that arises from my chosen modus operandi to work on a temporary basis. It has enabled me to witness a whole range of different organisational and managerial cultures and to learn the benefits and pitfalls that arise from each of them. It has also allowed me to develop the broadest range of professional experience in the local government legal sector.

I regard myself as incredibly lucky to be able to carry out any role within public service. I have a strong commitment to the public service ethos and I have no hesitation in saying that it is this that drives my career ambitions rather than any wish for advancement as a professional lawyer or ambition to climb the career ladder in a local authority. I knew that I wanted to work within public service (and specifically within local government) long before I decided to become a lawyer. If I was forced to make a choice between being a council official and being a lawyer, I would choose the former. Fortunately to date, I have been able to accommodate both. My ambitions are to continue to do more of the same. I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to make some small contribution whether it is through facilitating economic development through a town centre regeneration scheme or it is through improvement of housing conditions through replacement of sub-standard housing with modern housing accommodation. My DPA studies are not a requirement for professional or career advancement, hence my motivation for doing them is purely personal. This is not to say that it will not bring some benefits in the broadest sense. On the contrary, the key issues and challenges raised in my thesis such as partnership working, the management of networks and the role of elected members in securing accountability loom large in the local authority sector and it is submitted that the importance of these issues is unlikely to diminish anytime soon, particularly in the current climate of new governance structures such as the LEPS, Health & Wellbeing Boards and Combined Authorities that now dominate the local governance landscape. I am also keen to share and develop best practice with fellow public servants and to this end I shall be keen to disseminate the conclusions from my

---

25 I have no wish to climb the ladder of career advancement. My focus is on discharging my duty of public service and trying where appropriate to practice the ethics of Servant Leadership.

26 See chapter 4 of the thesis.
research to local authorities around the country, in the hope that they find the experience beneficial.

(5) Skills Development.

My work on the DPA has enabled me to develop practical skills in Time Management, producing/administering transcripts and interviewing. The latter was particularly useful as it allowed the opportunity to engage with elected members and paid officials within the local government sector, which facilitated discussions about the state of the local government sector as well as the specific research. During the course of the programme my knowledge/skills have developed as set out below:-

Philosophy of Research & Methods.

Year 1 – Developing an understanding of the philosophical approaches/paradigms in Social Science research (Positivism, Interpretivism and Critical Realism).

Year 2 – Shaping/developing the philosophical approach based upon Interpretivism. This involved acquiring knowledge of research methods which also saw the shaping of my own preferred ontological (anti-foundationalist) and epistemological (interpretivist) approach.

Developing Awareness of Learning Methods

Year 1 - Honey & Mumford - Learning Style

Upon studying these styles, it would appear that my learning style was a combination of Reflective and Pragmatic styles.

Year 1-3 The Notion of Reflection and the Rolfe Framework For Reflexive Practice

It has become clear that reflection can only be carried out and learning only advanced by internalising an experience and then dissecting it and taking time to reflect upon it. The Rolfe Model (What, So What, Now What) appeals because of its capacity to capture critical incidents with a simplicity that means it can be regularly used.

---


Literature Review

Year 1 - Carried out general reading/research build upon work from York MPA studies particularly around Politics, Public Administration and Organisation Theory.

Years 2/3 – Structured reading into key areas around Governance and Accountability). Further refined these areas so that Governance covered NPM/Overload, Outsourcing and Partnerships, whilst Accountability covered primarily Democratic Anchorage and Scrutiny.

Empirical (Interview) Stage

Years 3/4. - In many ways this proved to be the most enjoyable and educational aspect of the whole DPA programme. The interviews with practitioners (over 20 in all not all of them have been used due to space issues and some shall form the basis of further case study research in the future) were both interesting and enlightening. It was quite clear that there is a lot of interest in the research from within the local government sector, not least because governance and accountability are top of the policy agenda within the Local Government sector at the moment. This interest was also confirmed when extracts of the material on transport policy/governance which now forms part of Chapter 4 of the thesis was informally presented to the Future Cities conference in Sheffield at the end of 2014 and was well received. However this interest was not evident just a few months earlier in the Summer of 2014 when a whole two months was spent trying to gain interest in the project through the sending out of around 60 letters resulting in a 10% response rate from which the three case study authorities were selected.29 There was a lesson in this for linking theory and practice and it suggested to me that both the university sector and practitioners need to work harder at it. When participants were involved in the research it was evident that they were very positive about it, which is evidenced by the fact that there have been numerous requests for the research when completed and by the fact that even authorities which refused to participate in the research (which was probably due to understandable resource pressures) were keen to be appraised of the results of the process in any event. There were also other authorities that wished to take part later although the nature of the study meant that could not be accommodated – although it may offers scope for further research in the future.

29 Supporting interviews were also carried out with organisations like the LGA, NILGA, Centre For Public Scrutiny and others which form the basis for supporting conclusions in Chapter 10.
7. Thoughts on Action-Learning and the Benefits of the Process

The Action Learning model founded by Reginald Revans (1907-2003) sought to stress the importance of collective learning by means of using careful and directed questions.

The process was described by Reavans in his equation L=P+Q (L is Learning, P is Programming (which can be taken as prevailing culture/socialisation) and Q is Questions. This was later expanded by Michael Marquandt who made reference to the importance of useful questions provoking thoughtful reflection and therefore claimed that L=P+Q+R (R being reflection).

Revans was clear that participants had to be prepared to examine everything and admit gaps in knowledge with a willingness to explore opportunities for learning from others.

The intention of this is that there should be a 'learning loop' whereby practice is questioned and reflected upon leading to changes/improvements.

Although familiar with systems theory and the notion of the 'feedback loop' from political studies (Easton: 1965) the action learning method itself was new to me when I commenced studies at Huddersfield. But upon researching it and having taken part in action learning sets with fellow student colleagues, I started to appreciate the benefits of such an approach. The importance of unlearning underlines the fact that it is important to establish trust within the action learning set. I feel that the action learning set that I was part of (consisting of between 4 and 8) was able to do this quite quickly, so that by the second year everyone was comfortable and able and willing to contribute and benefit from the process.

In my own experience this had three consequences:-

(1) Importance of Questions (I was aware of the importance of questions both from my previous academic study of political philosophy, chiefly from the writings of Socrates but also Hegel and Marx. I was also aware of it on account of my profession as a practicing lawyer. But what I had not perhaps appreciated was the importance of learning from different sectors (public and private sectors - which clearly has relevance to my thesis topic of outsourcing local authority services) and the way that different professions can be facing similar challenges. For instance in the action learning set we had participants from the education sector, police, local

---


31 See Marquandt M, 'Action Learning in Action' (Palo Alto CA: Davies Black)


33 By unlearning – I mean unpacking and raising questions about assumptions. For instance there have been several discussions with colleagues on the nature of the public service and how it relates to the commercial sector. I have been particularly fortunate to benefit from discussions with a colleague whose research has focused upon employees who have shifted between public and private sectors.
government and private sector. It was clear that the current economic challenges were prevailing on all sectors. This was interesting to learn, as there is a tendency to think that it is only in one's own sector that changes are taking place.

(2) Organisational Culture. I have made reference to the fact that I have considered organisational culture is an important learning point generally. This is underlined by the fact that I worked in over 20 legal departments of local authorities and no two are the same. But the link to action learning is interesting - in particular the use of questions to unpick culture with a view to changing practice. This is also linked to intreporeneural spirit – implementing change is easier said than done - but I probably have sharper eye on it now as a result of coming across this method at Huddersfield.

(3) The importance of focusing upon Critical Incidents.\textsuperscript{34} The focus on critical incidents allows a situation to be analysed and brought to life and to provide opportunities for reflection and useful learning to develop as a result.

\textbf{Action Learning/Insight Gained/ Value of Reflection}

Below are a list of broader lessons learned (listed as 5 points) which which are linked to critical incidents:-

1. Importance of Questions (Socrates, Revans, Professional links),
2. Importance of Reflection (Revans, Lewin)
3. Importance of Organisational/Professional Cultures (Handy)
4. Importance of Communication/soft skills (Kent CC)\textsuperscript{35}
5. Reflection on nature of organisation/management (Aston, Hawthorne Studies)

\textbf{8. Critical Incident 1 (using Rolfe model) Local authority in north west of England. This was a newly created unitary authority that was in varying states of crisis.}

\textbf{What}
This was a large new authority with various problems being evident - clear crisis of resources in both support and frontline services, very cold climate in terms of organisational culture and a crisis of leadership at various levels resulting in declining morale amongst staff, poor service standards and an inability to attract and retain staff.


\textsuperscript{35} This has been emphasised in the context of developing legal shared services in Local Government by Geoff Wild Director of Legal Services at Kent CC and in my professional experience in delivering public services, these skills are considered to be of vital importance.
So What?

Point 3 - Problem with organisational culture. It is possible that this was due at least in part to the chronic resourcing situation, as in my experience this was by far the worst in terms of workloads on legal staff. Either way it caused a problem for staff morale and staff recruitment and retention and these issues appeared to go right to the top.

Point 5 - There was questions about how leadership could be provided in this organisation. There were several local authorities in a large geographical area which had joined together and integration was clearly a problem, even years later causing difficulties for quality of service delivery.

Now What?

A number of lessons arise from this - first is the importance of leadership and organisational culture in setting the 'tone', second that this is heavily impacted upon by resource issue and third that achieving integration and synergy can take many years achieve if at all. In the current climate towards shared services this is worth remembering.

9. Critical Incident 2 - (Rolfe) Very small district Local Authority - Midlands - very well run.

What - This authority was small - around 400 employees and appeared to be very well run. I worked at this authority twice and on both occasions was very impressed.

So What

Point 5 - The top management team had changed slightly in the two times that I was there but on both occasions were committed to achieving results with a clear community focus. The size of the organisation meant that it was manageable, suggesting that the Astor studies were right. The staff felt valued suggesting the Hawthorne studies were on the right lines too.

Point 4 - This underlay the importance of developing soft skills - empathy and communication both with the public and between support departments and client departments.

Now What?

It is clear that strong leadership, positive organisational culture, valued staff, small organisation size and well developed soft skills together go some way to explaining the success of this authority - which was the best I have worked at in 15 years.
10. Conclusion & Next Steps

Although the motivation for undertaking this thesis was not job connected, it is clear that it has widened my understanding of environmental factors connected with my public service work. For instance, I now have a much wider appreciation of the interconnected nature of the policy agenda and the pressures that both elected members and officials are subject to when delivering policy in an era of growing demand and restricted resources.

The research which looked at governance and accountability in two local authorities has produced a governance model indicating how local authority governance looks to local government practitioners. It contends that there are three strands (place shaping, service delivery and community representation) which operate in tandem. The long term work is done on place shaping whilst service delivery typically has a focus on quality with community representation being based on the centrality of politics, local connections and civic pride.

This statement has focused upon the benefit that has accrued to the researcher from doing this research. This focus is justified because the motivation for undertaking the research was not for career advancement. That said there are benefits to local government for understanding how governance is understood and how it can be better scrutinised, and the researcher has had interest expressed in the research from organisations such as the LGA, NILGA as well as individual local authorities. As for the benefit to the researcher, it is contended that advantages for the sector arises through better understanding the complex environment in which local authorities operate.

There are clearly future lines of research that would benefit from consideration. In addition to analysing data already collected from one case study authority not used, research into areas such as the link between civic pride and place shaping and the relationship between citizenship, co-design of services and public value are likely to be needed. I should like to be involved in this at least to some degree - even though it is likely that I shall also resume my public service local government career, which I suspended in Autumn 2014 to facilitate completion of the thesis. I shall be pleased to resume my public service in whatever guise I am called to do it – it remains after all, a calling, a duty and a privilege.

Alex Strickland, FRSA.
17 March 2015.
Bibliography


