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SURFING THE EDGE OF CHAOS: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTS OF SENIOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES LEADERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AGENCY-STRUCTURE NEXUS

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores and examines how local authority Directors of Children's Services (DCSs) experience and make sense of their professional identity as senior public leaders. Through extended in-depth interviews with fourteen DCSs from a northern region of the UK, it focuses on perceptions and representations of how they construct, reconstruct and enact their identity in everyday practice and social encounters in a turbulent, complex and often uncertain organisational and policy context.

With occupational backgrounds largely in education or social work, DCSs are held 'professionally responsible' - under statute, for the leadership and effective delivery of children's services through thousands of multi-disciplinary practitioners and increasing numbers of organisations they do not directly manage. They are also accountable in law for safeguarding children: implementing and monitoring institutional systems and procedures which minimise risk, while meeting demanding performance standards.

As hybrid leaders, DCSs face the experience of straddling two professional identities - that of their original practitioner background and that of the senior leader-manager they have become. Despite the role being established in 2004, identity perceptions and identity work in this public sector leadership role do not appear to have been the focus of previous research. In this study, the findings are illuminative of, and illuminated by, sociological discussions of ambiguous occupational domains and insecurity in a fast-moving policy landscape; responding to questions about the precariousness of identity construction and notions of professionalism in a neo-liberal knowledge economy.

Drawing on Critical Management Studies, this interpretive study is guided by a philosophy that treats the notion of identity as 'struggle' and as enduring and recursive processes of *becoming*, rather than ever arriving at a fixed identity: refracting what can be seen as a "permanent dialectic" between the self and social structures (Ybema, 2009). Reaching beyond simply telling the story, the critical interpretivist approach informing the research design interrogates new empirical data on identity perceptions of children's services leaders in the context of agency-structure dynamics and concerns. Social Domains Theory (Layder, 1997) which is concerned with the different, yet inter-related social and structural domains that constitute social reality, is utilised as a sensitising device. Methodologically, this provides an analytic frame to reveal, connect and disrupt the rich narrative emerging from the empirical research in relation to prevailing discourses and theories of identity, emotion and professionalism which are often left unchallenged in traditional interpretivist studies and literature.

The contribution of this study is three-fold. First, it offers new insights into how senior leaders experience and perceive their identity work and struggle. Here identities are shaped and reshaped along a continuum between participants' original occupational values-base, and new discourses of the professional public manager role and its enactment in contemporary organisations. Second, the application of Social Domains Theory to aid critical interrogation of the data adds to, and advances, current understandings in identity studies. Third, the dominant narrative presented by DCSs of their everyday experiences, emotion work and leadership practices is refracted through a 'touchstone' of espoused child-centred values - as they bend and angle in searches for identity. This image is conceptualised in the study as a new identity construct: the Refracted Professional Leader.

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DEDICATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to my family. To my boys Steve and Scott for supporting me in your own inimitable ways; I am inspired by you both. Steve, your patience and love has really kept me going at times, and Scott, "*Aut viam inveniam aut faciam*". Kelly and my little Ollie bear, thank you for helping to remind me of the most important things in life. A steadfast, truly special Mam and Dad, my lovely brothers and sisters, caring Dad-in-Law and wonderful Mum-in-Law (I miss you); you kept the faith when it must have seemed like a long time in the making. I hope I have made you all proud.

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We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time

T.S. Eliot *Little Gidding*, 1942

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Research Focus

Notions of identity are fundamental to considering what it means to be human; occupying the minds of philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in the fourth and fifth century BC, it continues to be of great interest to scholars today. As Gioia (1998) observes:

> What other issue is quite so important as answering the nebulous question, Who am I? What other concern is quite as captivating as dealing with the ongoing, lifelong project of assessing identity and figuring out how one relates to others and the surrounding world? (p.17)

Many scholars view issues of identity as potentially leading to significant theoretical and practical advances in the study of almost every aspect of social and organisational life, in any number of disciplines (Alvesson, 2010; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). However, precisely because there is so much interest, with so many possibilities – and identity such a 'slippery notion' - the field is often seen as over consumed and underspecified (Bauman, 2005; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Pratt, 2006; Thomas, 2008).

Within identity studies and the broader theoretical literature, two related dimensions tend to define differences in epistemological and methodological orientation and perspectives. First, the extent to which identity is: "*something enduring and central to each of us, or temporary, malleable and context-sensitive*" (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012, P.131). Differences here are often depicted at the extremes as traditional essentialist views of a robust, anchored self (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000; Sims, 2003), versus post-modern conceptualisations of the self and identity as precarious and in constant flux (Elliott & du Gay, 2009; Gergen, 2000). The second, and an underlying key dimension, represents one of the prevailing theatres of social theory: the agency-structure question. The extent to which personal agency is privileged in seeking to understand constructs of self and identity, and how we account for influences of structure and social forces on identity formation, offers an obvious analytic focus and different theoretical starting points for articulating the nature of relationships between the individual and society.

Much has been done to reconcile polarised humanist or interpretivist, and institutionalist-structuralist positions to offer new frameworks for exploring sociological problems (Archer, 1995; Berger & Luckmann, 1991, 1966; Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1991, 1984; Habermas, 1987; Mouzelis, 1995). While a diverse range of perspectives is still very much evident in the literature, the pervasive view of agency-structure, individual–society concerns is one that accepts in contemporary society and organisational life:

> The notion of 'identity' may be regarded as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society. Its potential mediating quality lies in its dual character – it refracts what can be seen as a 'permanent dialectic' between the self and social structure. (Ybema, et al., 2009, p. 300)

There are of course differences in how this dialectic is perceived and addressed: indicated by whether theorists and researchers start from micro (Blumer, 1969; Todres, 2007; van Mannen, 2007) or macro (Ely & Padavic, 2007; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Foucault 1980) perspectives, attempt to synthesise or transcend both domains (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Bourdieu 1990; Elias 1982; Giddens, 1984), or propose an interrelated, relationship between them, which accounts for distinct features (Archer; 1995; Layder, 1997, 2004; Mouzelis 1995). It would be an indolent and inaccurate over-simplification to suggest these are unified theoretical perspectives in themselves. Rather, it illustrates three broad paradigmatic openings from which empirical research may begin.

Much has been written about notions of the professional manager in a range of domains in the post-industrial, globalised world (Mintzberg, 2004; Miszatal, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2007; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). Public sector based identity research involving managers tends to focus either on macro-perspectives and collective responses in a radically transforming environment, or on the subjective and inter-subjective micro-level interactions of situated individuals. Few studies are seen to consider both levels of analyses (Ford, 2010; Hotho, 2008; Rosenthal, 2001). In the last decade or so, concern with work identities, and attempts to define and frame what is understood to be professional identity and professionalism in a neo-liberal knowledge society, has offered new, contested, theoretical perspectives to the debates (Knights & Clarke, 2014).

With a burgeoning body of interpretive studies into how professional identity in the public sector may be examined and understood by social theorists, there has been a tendency to concentrate on experiences at practitioner level of teachers, nurses, social workers, and more recently, early years workers (Ball & Goodson, 2005; Beddoe, 2011; McGillivray, 2008; Rajan-Rankin, 2013; Woods & Carlyle, 2002). Yet what of the 'mixed-up professional' in present-day ambiguous public domains that Noordegraaf (2007) describes? The new *hybridised* professional public manager who may have an occupational background in one of these disciplines, but takes on management of inter-disciplinary settings and organisational contexts that cannot be easily controlled and are "*driven by cost and client-based managerialism [*which*] redefines public sector delivery*" (p.762).

There is no known evidence in the identities literature of empirical research which specifically captures and analyses insights from the most senior children's public services managers - Directors of Children's Services (DCSs), about how they bridge the complex dynamics of agency and structure in seeking ontological security (Archer, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Laing, 1961), and in making sense of their own professional identity (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014; Steigenberger, 2015; Weick, 1995). This study, located in a large Northern region of England, contributes previously uncharted, richly textured, empirical data which illuminates DCSs' perceptions about their professional self(ves), and their identity construction, revision and enactment (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in the context of the agency-structure dialectic. It is intended that this will add to a more nuanced understanding of the complex realities that shape and inform the identity constructs of those working as senior managers in public services today, but particularly those in the unique role of DCS.

DCSs face the experience of straddling two professional identities - that of their original practitioner background and that of the senior leader-manager they have become. The role is one of the most challenging leadership positions in the UK public sector – described as capable of being "*daunting and inspiring in equal measure*" (Leadbetter, 2010, p.4). There is no comparable leadership role in terms of their remit which involves them being 'professionally responsible' - as part of their contract of employment, for thousands of multi-disciplinary practitioners delivering services to children, young people and families in each local authority area – increasingly through agencies they

have no direct control over (Purcell, Frost & Christian, 2012) . Central to this is the need to demonstrate that externally and internally imposed performance standards and measures are being met, which subjects them to regular audit and inspection regimes. Significantly, those in the role are held 'statutorily accountable' for implementing institutional systems and procedures that prevent and minimise risk of harm or death to children in the government-defined boundary area under Section 18 of the Children Act, (2004). At its worst, the ramifications of this statutory accountability can be felt in very personal ways, as Sharon Shoesmith, former DCS of Haringey in North London, experienced in the aftermath of the tragic death from abuse of Peter Connelly in 2007.

> Being a Director of Children's Services is like no other senior public sector role. It's personal. When a child dies in 'your area' it is almost as if you are tainted as the murderer (Shoesmith, 2013).

Peter's was one of 268 serious case reviews into serious harm or deaths of children suspected, or known to have been, caused by abuse and neglect at the hands of their carers in England between 2007-2009 (DfE, 2013).

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate how DCSs - as the most senior leaders of children's services in each local authority in England, construct, reconstruct, enact and make sense of their professional identity in this unique role, with particular consideration of agency-structure dynamics and influences. The key research questions which frame this study are:

1. How do Directors of Children's Services seek to make sense of their professional identity in this unique role?

2. How is identity constructed, reconstructed, and enacted as a professional public leader in the context of agency-structure dynamics?

To help order and organise the research process, three aims were established:

I. Critically analyse relevant literature relating to the creation, evolution and experiences of this high-profile public sector leadership role, and examine broader literature and research concerned with identities work, emotion work and notions of professionalism.

II. Capture the perceptions and interpretations of DCSs [from a government defined regional area of local authorities] in relation to their experiences in the role, and how they construct, reconstruct and enact their identity as a professional public leader.

iii. Examine the findings in the context of agency-structure concerns and dynamics to add new critical understandings of leader identity work to the field and to suggest propositions for further investigation.

1.3 Background and Rationale

The DCS role was created following the murder of eight year old Victoria Climbie by her 'aunt' in 2000 in Haringey, North London - despite the involvement of twelve separate agencies. A Public Inquiry by Lord Laming (2001-2002) produced a report which concluded Victoria's death represented: "*a gross failure of the system of public agencies responsible for protecting vulnerable children from deliberate harm [and] that failure was primarily due to widespread organisational malaise*" (Laming, 2003). The report contained 108 recommendations for fundamental changes to the way social care, education, healthcare and police child protection services were organised and managed at national and local level, in order to establish more integrated working and a 'clear line of accountability'.

Part of that clear line was a recommendation for a distinct Director of Children's Services (DCS) post in every local authority area in England: professionally accountable for the well-being and safety of all children and young people in the area. Statutory responsibility was enshrined in the role as part of new legislation set out a year later in the Children Act (2004). It holds that even if something 'goes wrong' such as the non-accidental death of a child in a service that a DCS does not manage or have direct responsibility for (children's hospital wards or academy schools, for example), they are still deemed 'professionally accountable'.

> A DCS is professionally responsible for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services ... [including] statutory accountability for promoting the well-being of children and ensuring that there are

clear and effective arrangements to protect children and young people from harm. (Statutory Guidance DfE, April 2013)

It is not an exaggeration to claim that no other executive leadership post in the UK public sector has encountered such a spotlight of scrutiny, 'trial by media' and politically accountable attention (Jones, 2014b; Parton, 2014a). Many 'heads have rolled' (Cf. Shoesmith in Haringey 2008; Baker in Salford 2009; Tucker in Birmingham 2010; Vahey in Derby 2011; Donaldson in Calderdale 2011; Pyper in Slough, 2012; Christensen in Norfolk; Green in Coventry, 2013; Lewis in Somerset 2014; Thacker in Rotherham 2014, and McHale in Leicester 2015). In the period 2013-14, one in three Directors' of Children's Services left the role either voluntarily or through dismissal (Wiggins, 2014).

Even before the Climbie case, the New Labour administration elected in 1997 had already been proactive in beginning to restructure children and young people's service delivery: promoting the perceived benefits of joint working. Some of the policy developments and state mechanisms for more targeted provision included generously funded initiatives such as Sure Start (1999), Connexions (2000) and The Children's Fund (2001). However, the Every Child Matters (ECM, 2003) policy agenda emerging from the Laming Inquiry (2003), gave impetus to a radical transformation programme - bringing integrated working through teams of practitioners from different occupational disciplines and agencies into the mainstream (Frost & Parton, 2009). Largely drawn from education management, or children's social care backgrounds, Directors of Children's Services have strategic and operational, leadership responsibility, for these multi-disciplinary (and often multi-agency) teams representing diverse stratums of occupational fields across health, social care, education, and well-being (McKimm & Phillips, 2009).

Pascale, Millemann and Gioja (2000) describe the experience of leaders working in such complex-adaptive environments as '*surfing the edge of chaos*' (p.6) because their actions are seen to change the pattern of how things are done and give new meaning, creativity and productivity to people's worlds - including their own - as they get pushed up against tension filled boundaries.

It is surprising that despite the role being established in statute in 2004, self-perceptions about identity in such a singular public sector management post have not specifically been previously explored. Studies have tended to concentrate on investigating leadership challenges in the role and identifying approaches and qualities seen to best equip the DCS leader - which are of course germane to issues of identity (Deloitte, 2011; Ghate, Lewis & Welbourn, 2013; Hulme et al., 2014; Lewis, Ghate & Welbourn, 2013; NCLSCS, 2011a; NCLSCS, 2011b; Purcell, 2009). The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (a government body which supported, and was aligned with the work of DCSs from 2009-2011), also undertook some interesting studies into the 'nature of successful leadership' amongst DCSs. In February 2010, they published a conceptual framework identifying eight 'core behaviours'. The report concluded that to be an effective senior leader in this sector, one needed to practice these behaviours.

Other commentators (Booker 2012; Daniels & Edwards, 2012; Oliver, 2008) have explored leadership experiences in integrated services. While Frost (2009) examined some of the issues and challenges peculiar to leading children's services in England, following the introduction of integrated working approaches. A later study by Purcell, Christian & Frost (2012), captured the 'shifting nature' of these challenges, following the Coalition Government's election in 2010, highlighting the skills and capabilities needed by senior leaders to operate effectively through further reform and funding cuts. Hulme, McKay and Cracknell, (2014) also investigated some of the recent economic austerity pressures on local authorities and potential consequences for DCSs. The Munro Review of Child Protection in England (Final Report, 2011a) strongly recommended to Government that in light of their public service reform plans, there was a need for:

> Protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of a Director of Children's Services … [to] allow sufficient focus and attention to be paid to the nation's most vulnerable children, before allocating any additional functions to individuals occupying such roles (Munro, 2011a)

However, there is clear evidence that local authorities are increasingly requiring those in a DCS role to also take on executive management of additional local authority directorates - especially adult services, but also areas as diverse as highways and environmental services. *"More than half of DCSs are now twin, or triple-hatters"* (CYPN,

2015). Others put it at closer to 80% (Hill, 2015). What implications this might have on constructs of identity for those in a DCS role, is of interest in this study.

My own experiences as a senior manager in children's services through the initial years of structural reform and embedding of integrated working practices - just prior to, and following ECM policy implementation - is the genesis for this study. There is a part of me that acknowledges if I had not made a career change into Higher Education, I may well have become an Assistant Director, or Director of Children's Services. As a course leader for an MA in Leadership in Education and Public Service, I continued to work closely with practitioners and managers in children's services, and became involved in leadership development programmes for 'aspiring Directors of Children's Services' (National College). This kept me in touch with the field and made me increasingly consider the challenges of senior leadership in such a complex environment. However, the dimension of greatest interest lay in exploring influences of agency and structure on how DCSs might construct and make sense of their professional identity, especially in light of the risk and vulnerability of such an exposed role. I was also interested in the possible influences of their different original practitioner routes, which brought distinct occupational learning, practice models, craft knowledge (Higgs & Titchen, 1995) and professional philosophies to the role. When the role was first conceived I heard some working in children's services saying with pessimism that DCS stood for 'Dead Child Scapegoat'. Indeed, this early perception from some in the workforce is part of what interested me so much in how those in the role might make sense of their professional identity.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The extent to which individuals and organisations have been affected by the integrated working agenda has been of considerable interest over the last decade (Anning et al., 2010; Frost, 2009; Hussain & Brownhill, 2014; McKimm & Phillips, 2009). Evident in the rich body of empirical research and theoretical perspectives in the literature is a curiosity with examining what characterises 'a professional' in post-industrial knowledge societies, and notions of the rise of new professionalism (rooted in the work of observers such as Wilensky, 1964 and Larson, 1977). There are many more occupations defined today as professions than the 'original classical' three: divinity,

medicine and law. Seeking definitive explanations for what constitutes professional is plagued with epistemological and ontological challenges (Evetts, 2003, 2012; Noordegraaf, 2007).

Contemporary sociological discourse reveals ongoing concern with the idea that traditional professions are weakened and new professions are created as occupational domains 'rush to professionalise' (Farrell & Morris, 2003) and legitimise themselves in contemporary, neo-liberal organisational domains of market-driven managerialism and performativity (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Floyd & Morrison, 2013; Fournier, 2000). In the contested arena of what constitutes professional, the emergence of the professional public manager is an example of what Noordegraaf (2007) describes as a 'mixed-up, hybridised professional', rather than a 'pure' professional:

> For these managers, professionalization represents the most developed form of legitimation, resting as it does upon ideologies of integrity, independence, service and expertise........ New searches for identities are fuelled; the search for professional control is a search for managerial and occupational identities (Noordegraaf, p.779)

Salient to how searches for identity may be understood is an awareness of the ontological differences rooted in theories of identity represented in the literature. While identity theory (Prentice, 2001; Serpe, 1994; Stryker, 1980, 2000) is generally viewed as a sociological concept and social identity theory (Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003; Reynolds & Turner, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1978) more of a psychological discipline, both address the structure and function of the socially constructed self and the dynamic interplay between social structure and individual social behaviour.

Identity theory offers ideas about role identities and a commitment to these and what they may mean in a social category, while social identity theory suggests self-categorisation and alignment with a particular group will lead to internalisation of group norms and prototype behaviours to evaluate and reflect a view of 'self'. What often separates these perspectives is the tradition of methodological conventions (Harrington, 2005; Shilling, 1992), as studies tend to concentrate on either sociological or psychological based analyses. Is the basis for my identity in the social world 'Who I am'

or is the basis my role, 'what I do'? Stets and Burke (2009) maintain that *being* and *doing* are both central features of one's identity, along with the idiosyncratic characteristics already extant in our person identity. Person identity relates to a sense of individual autonomy, rather than communal involvement; experienced by individuals as *core* or *unique* to themselves (Hitlin, 2003) and informs essentialist dimensions of identity concerns.

My study is informed by the need to rethink established theories of identity (Evetts, 2012). Finding space for a more nuanced examination of professional identity, in the context of macro and micro level processes, is more easily realised when the social world is viewed as multi-dimensional in a way that reaches beyond a simple dualism of agency and structure. Layder's Theory of Social Domains (1997; 2006), offers a framework to investigate identity in the context of the agency-structure dialectic. He articulates a model with four 'social domains'*:* Psychobiography and Situated Activity (largely concerned with human agency); Social Settings and Contextual Resources (largely concerned with structure). These take account of power relations and are considered across time and space to provide a social analytic device within which to explore and understand the ways in which DCSs seek to make sense of their professional identity, and the extent to which influences of structure, and of human agency, are seen by them to contribute to how identity can be shaped, re-shaped and enacted in the role.

In trying to make sense of "what *it is to become professional in modern times*" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.775) there is a shared acknowledgment that contemporary organisational contexts are not particularly stable, consistent or reassuring environments for identity security (Alvesson, 2010; Collinson, 2003; Evetts, 2012; Sennet, 2006; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). This has an emotional impact on human beings in their work lives, not least on leaders, who: "*perform unseen yet significant emotion work as part of their role*" (Clarke et al., 2007, p.92). Therefore exploring some key theoretical concepts and research relating to the emotion work of leaders forms an important element of the study.

1.5 Research Methodology

Research in the social sciences is concerned with individuals and their life worlds, which are complex and unpredictable, unlike the logical positivism associated with research in the natural sciences (Delamont, 2011). Following C. Wright Mills' (1959) extension of Kantian philosophy in 'The Sociological Imagination' - which makes a plea for empirical research to engage with essential theoretical issues, and for a connection to be made by theory to practical research to enrich ontological understandings - I take the epistemological position from the beginning of this study that:

> Society, organizations and individuals are constructed in a continuous interplay between externalizations and internalizations … Identity formation involves processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present. (Ybema et al., 2009 p. 303)

Examining theoretical perspectives concerned with the contested nature of agency-structure issues, and considering theories of identity in this context, naturally engages me in key theoretical issues and debates. It informs this study and it influences my research strategy; revealing some of the subjective assumptions and ways of seeing the world that I bring to the process as researcher (Bryman, 2012).

Layder's Theory of Social Domains (1997; 2006), has a related methodology - 'Adaptive Theory' (1998). The term 'adaptive' is used to imply how theory may adapt to and be shaped by empirical evidence, just as the data itself is filtered through and considered in relation to existing theories. Brought together they offer a sensitising social analytic framework, rather than imposition of theory. As a methodology, this privileges the voices of participants in my study while "*avoiding conflating or compacting elements of agency and structure into a one-dimensional view of social reality*" (Layder, 2006, p. 293). Similar in some respects to Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the Adaptive Theory methodology encourages an actively reflexive dynamic in the researcher, which is supported by adopting Template Analysis (King, 2004) as my data analysis framework. In recognising the influence of my own values and epistemology on the research design, data gathering and indeed analysis process, I am acknowledging that I bring subjectivity to the process and there is a need to be critically self-reflective at each stage of the research. There are different approaches and understandings in the

literature relating to reflection and reflexivity, emphasising: "*The complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer*" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p.8). For the fourteen participants in this study who took part in extended in-depth interviews, I have a responsibility to handle the interpretation and representation of their experiences as senior public leaders and their perceptions around identity constructs with integrity.

Through this research I seek to add new insights, and to advance current understandings, of how senior leaders in the complex, fluid and ambiguous organisational domains of children's services, construct, reconstruct and enact their professional identity in the context of agency-structure concerns.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The internal features of this thesis are structured to provide a coherent framework as I set out to provide answers to the research questions. This first **Chapter One** includes a brief introduction to the study, its rationale and research focus. **Chapter Two** sets the scene for understanding and critically analysing some of the historical policy developments and more recent government interventions leading to current children's services provision and the conditions and social forces which steered the creation of the statutory Director of Children's Services (DCS) role, and its status and context today. In **Chapter Three** Two broad areas of interconnected substantive literatures are examined. The first is concerned with theories of identity and leader-identity construction in the context of contested notions of professions and professionalism. The second involves examining contemporary concepts around emotion work, security and the 'emotional practice' of leadership. **Chapter Four** qualifies the purpose and value of conducting the research and reiterates the research questions and aims. The choice of Adaptive Theory (Layder, 1998) as methodology is articulated, along with the choice of extended in-depth interviews as the data-gathering method. I also explain my sample selection and discuss important research concepts and dilemmas including bias, ethics, validity and emotions in research. **Chapter Five** acts as a short linking device to introduce the approach to presenting and analysing the findings Chapters.

The four data Chapters include **Chapter Six** which explores the DCSs' narrative on becoming a children's services senior leader, including early career pathways and critical life points. In **Chapter Seven** the identity struggles of the DCSs and notions of an idealised self are considered, along with the importance of professional values and some of the harsh realities encountered through public and media hostility. Significant themes of status and credibility are also explored in this chapter. **Chapter Eight** investigates how the DCSs are seeking to make sense of their professional selves in ambiguous organisational domains. **Chapter Nine** 'the lonely posting' is the final data chapter and this considers insights into the emotional dimensions of the role, and feelings about vulnerability and resilience by those involved in the study.

The study concludes with **Chapter Ten** which offers a synopsis of the key themes and issues emerging in the data, reviews analytical conclusions drawn from examination of how DCSs seek to make sense of their professional selves in the agency-structure nexus and considers the implications of the study's findings, including messages for policy development and some thoughts on the possible future of the DCS role. Areas for future research are identified, along with methodological contribution, limitations of the study and a brief reflection on scholarly writing as identity. The contribution to knowledge in an under-explored and under-theorised space in the field of identities studies is also articulated.

2. LEADING CHILDREN'S SERVICES: POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 Background and Purpose: A Review of the Literature

This chapter sets the scene for understanding and analysing some of the historical policy developments and more recent government interventions leading to current children's services provision and the conditions and social forces which steered the creation of the statutory Director of Children's Services (DCS) role, and its status and context today. A fast-changing policy landscape and considerable political, socio-cultural, economic and legislative developments over the past decade or so, has very distinctly shaped the operating environment and institutional structures for senior leadership of children's services in England's 152 local authorities.

Following some historical contextualisation, there is an analysis of the aftermath of a 'perceived crisis' (Hulme, McKay & Cracknell, 2014; Rowlands, 2011) in children's services and children's social care following the tragic death of Victoria Climbie in 2000. The establishment of a DCS role with statutory accountability for safeguarding and well-being in the Children Act (2004), and the accompanying Every Child Matters (ECM) policy agenda, formed the most visible structural and ideological manifestations of New Labour's drive for integrated services. Challenges of leading children's services in this way, and notions of a new type of hybrid public manager (Noordegraaf, 2007) are examined as momentum grew for a contemporary public management approach. Intense performance targets, inspection regimes, outcomes measurements and 'transparent accountability' for services, practitioners and their managers characterised emerging policy agendas and discourse (Frost, 2011a; Jones, 2014a).

Just as this major transformation programme was becoming fully embedded - with the DCSs leading local strategic partnerships through Children's Trusts, the murder of 17-month old Peter Connelly (referred to as Baby P due to reporting restrictions), in the same London borough where Victoria Climbie had died, was met with a ferocious and emotionally-charged media reaction (Warner, 2013). There is an examination mid-chapter of how wrath was turned particularly towards the DCS and social workers involved, and on the apparent failings of post-Climbie New Labour policy. Parton

observes that the intensity and scale of anger and politicisation of the tragedy seemed deeper and more prolonged than anything seen in the UK before:

> Marking a watershed that not only had an impact on day-to-day policy and practice, [but was…] a case that quickly came to represent all that was wrong with contemporary managerial and professional decision making. (Parton, 2014a, p. 87).

Attention is then turned to how the related narrative of inexcusable practitioner and institutional failure in the face of Britain's *'broken society'* (Cameron, 2008) continued to flourish as more high profile cases reinforced the view that what was needed was an authoritative intervention in children's services and child protection; particularly through increased Ofsted inspections and, where necessary, sending in Government-appointed commissioners to 'sort out' management failure (Hulme et al., 2014; Purcell, Christian & Frost, 2012). The election of a conservative-led coalition in 2010 saw a discernible ideological shift as the DCS role moved from leading the integrated services policy agenda under New Labour, to presiding over an imperative for localism and commissioned individual service providers in local authority areas. This has been accompanied by severe post-economic crisis funding cuts of up to 40% in some provision, especially early intervention and youth work (Davies, 2015; Hopwood, Pharoah & Hannon, 2012). Throughout it all, the statutory duty on DCSs for safeguarding children and young people has remained.

Since its inception just over ten years ago, the DCS role has been lauded, pilloried, questioned, reaffirmed and questioned again (Gurrey & Brazil, 2014; Hill, 2015; Hulme, et al., 2014; Munro, 2011a). There have been recent calls for the post to be abolished altogether by the local authorities Chief Executives' group Solace (May, 2014). In a report titled Reclaiming Children's Services, they argue that having a 'single line' of sight for all children's issues invested in the statutory DCS role, has had serious and unintended consequences in some areas (although what these consequences are, is arguably not articulated very clearly). In a more 'austere and more localist climate', they want local authorities to be allowed flexibility to put in place what is: "*Locally, the most effective leadership of children and families issues, and to prevent the hampering of efforts to define the wider corporate and organisational role in children's issues*" (Solace, 2014, p.15).

This was met with a rallying response from the Assistant President of the Association of DCSs to fight for, and protect the role (Hill, 2015), amid growing belief that conversely a 'single line' DCS post in each local authority area is critical for sustaining a more thoughtful and focused commitment to the broader child well-being remit. For the Association of DCSs, the reclaiming needs to be concerned with this, rather than what it has largely become: that being a DCS simply means you offer Ministers, and the popular media - intent on fuelling a 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011; Parton 2014a; Warner, 2015), a convenient sacrificial lamb each time a child dies from abuse or neglect. An ever more alarming proposition to reconcile in the day-to-day working life - and indeed personal life, of children's services leaders as the government seeks to extend the criminal offence of Wilful Neglect to teachers, social workers and managers under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act (2015). If proven, this would carry up to five years imprisonment (Wintour, 2015). There is much scope and merit in seeking to understand how DCSs experience and make sense of their identity as a senior professional public manager, and how they grapple with ontological security (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1991; Laing, 1961; Layder, 2006) in the complex policy and institutional world they inhabit.

The final part of this chapter discusses attempts in the field to identify and define the constituents for leadership efficacy and 'success' in the role: particularly focusing on the challenges of leading children's services during radical changes in policy priorities, intense media interest, and the pressures of austerity measures applied by central government to local authority budgets (Booker, 2012; Hulme et al., 2014; Purcell et al., 2012). Dominant models and concepts, and some of the distinct discourse that accompanies children's services leadership in the literature (Welbourn, 2015) is also briefly examined. Concise mapping and analysis of such phenomena is germane because capacity-building and leadership development programmes have been devised for incumbent DCSs and aspirant senior children's services leaders based on some of these empirical findings and recommendations. In doing so, they are drawing on internal conceptions of what skills and qualities are seen to be needed to be an effective DCS by those already in the role, while also influencing and informing externally-constructed scripts for the professional identity of Directors of Children's Services.

2.2 Early Children's Policy Development

Public service provision for children and families has been characterised by constant change since the creation of the post-war welfare state in the UK and gradual recognition of children's rights. Ben-Arieh and Goerge (2010) comment that 'state of the child' reports were being produced as far back as the 1940s; here measuring indicators were already being linked to social progress. Even towards the end of the 19th century, children had begun to attain some of their own social and political identity through widespread reform (Hendrick, 2007, 2011). Policy had started to focus on a more complex notion and practice of welfare; moving away from the Poor Law institutions towards the creation of Societies (such as the London Society and NSPCC) which helped to establish that children had rights.

Campaigners and activists including Thomas Barnado, Lord Shaftsbury and Jane Nassau Senior, did much to highlight the plight of Victorian-era children and agitate against their oppression and exploitation. Many philanthropists and reformers sought to avoid threatening the conservative principles of privacy of family life, or undermining the hierarchy of the class system, by manipulatively representing 'poor children' and parents to legitimate state intervention (Murdoch, 2006). While questionably executed by some, such movements did lead to an increase in child protection monitoring and legislation, with the formation of the 1889 Child Cruelty Act, and the first Children Act in 1908, marking a seminal change in the relationship between the state and family life (Fox-Harding, 1997).

In the mid to latter parts of the 20th Century, policy enactment in the UK saw a discernible shift away from the limited focus on physical survival and basic needs, towards seeking greater understanding of what constitutes childhood and child well-being. Literature and research in the Western hemisphere increasingly reflected constructs of childhood as a distinct, developmental life-stage, especially following the work of Aries (1962, 1979) who was the first to fully document that in previous centuries the idea of childhood did not really exist. Despite a conceptual and societal shift to a more agentic focus on children as individuals in their own right - including the UK signing up to the International Children's Rights Treaty (UNCRC) in 1990, much policy development and service provision still only tokenistically places children and young

people at its centre. While children themselves, and those who work with them have been instrumental in moving forward a children's rights and welfare agenda, it is helpful to be mindful that the relationship between childhoods, families and the state, and its intersection with policy and practice is complex. It is ill-served by over-simplistic explanations (Frost, 2011a, p. 7) and in reality is frequently driven by political imperatives (James & James, 2004; Jones, 2014b; Frost & Parton, 2009; Rowlands, 2011). Indeed, as Canella (2005) argues, similar to other marginalised or vulnerable groups, children have been, and still are, often 'shamefully' used to further political agendas.

2.3 The Children Acts and Shaping of Children's Services

It is not necessary to map an in-depth historical account of the policy and legislative developments relating to children's services in great detail. However, it is useful to note that building on the second Children Act in 1948 - which particularly focused on meeting the needs of children in care through establishing children's departments within local councils - the 1963 Children and Young Persons Act gave Local Authorities a duty to promote the welfare of *all children* through preventative work with families for the first time (Fox-Harding, 1997; Frost & Parton, 2009). This paved the way for children's departments to be merged into social services as part of wider family support provision under the 1970 Local Authority Social Services Act. Informed by the Seebohm Report (1968) which had recommended bringing together disparate services to offer more of a family and community level response, and proactive preventative work beginning to take place in many localities, the next few years witnessed what has been described as the high point of optimism and confidence in social work (Frost, 2011a; Parton, 2014a). It marked a newly negotiated relationship between provision of family-oriented support and child protection by the state, and the delicate sphere of families' rights to privacy; with social workers tasked to use their skills and training to achieve an effective balance.

This period of optimism did not last long. Seven year old Maria Colwell was killed in East Sussex, by her step-father in 1973. She was one of 34 children 'known' to social services who died from abuse and severe neglect during 1972-1987. Each case was subject to a Public Inquiry, but Maria's is regarded as the Inquiry report that established

child abuse as a major 'social problem' in a climate of increasing anxiety about society's traditional values and institutions being threatened and destabilised. As Critcher (2003) and Garland (2008) have observed, in a succession of moral panics (Cohen, 1972) throughout the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, the focus was almost exclusively on concerns for children and childhood which cast social workers, in particular, as the inept and politically-correct 'folk devils of the piece'. The Colwell case marked a watershed because it had attracted the first large scale media coverage of a child death in these circumstances in the UK. Scrutiny began to fall on the failure of authorities to act to prevent her death (Butler & Drakeford, 2011; Jones, 2012).

The Chair of the Colwell Inquiry, Thomas Field Fisher, found that there were missed opportunities by agencies and professionals to prevent Maria's abuse and subsequent death. His report identified three main contributory factors: lack of communication between the agencies who were aware of her vulnerable situation; inadequate training for social workers assigned to children at risk; and changes in the make-up of society (Committee of Inquiry Report, 1974). While Parton and Franklin (1991) acknowledged the first two, they argued Field's implication - that there was a permissive and dangerous liberalism in society that threatened the 'British way of life' was sowing the roots for modern moral panics. Parton and other commentators including Gelles (1979) and Kempe and Kempe (1978) presented some new perspectives drawn from the sociology of deviance. They argued that child abuse should not be seen just through the lens of individual pathology of the abuser; rather it should be understood through a social structural analysis where inequalities and poverty in society played an integral role in the experiences of children. While Fox-Harding, (1991) cautioned for the need to guard against this perspective offering too much of a defence to birth families and actual perpetrators of abuse, Parton and colleagues had stimulated debates about the complexity of child well-being and protection during a time of considerable social, cultural, economic and political change.

Along with the first noticeable public and media demonisation of social workers and their managers - both the key worker and team manager had to have 'police protection from baying crowds' outside the Inquiry hearings (Butler & Drakeford, 2011), the Colwell Inquiry brought criticism of policies which had led to practices by family support workers that favoured maintaining the birth family and blood ties, rather than focus on the child.

Maria Colwell was removed at the age of five from a safe foster care environment, where she was thriving, back to her 'natural' family where she was killed. Her death and the subsequent Inquiry recommendations were seen to halt this policy; replaced by state paternalism with a greater emphasis on protecting children from their families. The 1975 Children Act was underpinned with sentiments that a child's welfare had to be the first consideration.

In the intervening years before the next Children Act of 1989, Public Inquiries into non-accidental child deaths continued to attract strong media attention. More tragic cases such as Jasmine Beckford (1985), and Tyra Henry, and Kimberley Carlile (both 1987) led to Inquiry findings similar to those in Maria's case. A pattern was beginning to emerge of poor inter-disciplinary communication, not enough focus on the needs of the actual child, inadequate supervision, and a lack of trained, experienced children's workers. This served to reinforce the view that institutions and children's workers were incompetent; still failing to step in to protect children when they needed it. Conversely, around the same time, events in Cleveland, North East England led to accusations that social workers and others had over-reacted when courts ordered the removal of over one-hundred and twenty children from their homes on suspicion of sexual abuse as part of ritual satanic abuse. Later cases of removal of children in Ayrshire (1990), Rochdale (1990) and Orkney (1991) were similarly based on allegations of satanic ritual abuse, with traumatised children returned to their families sometimes years later, and legal action taken against local authorities. Now social workers and agencies were finding themselves caught in a cleft of failing to intervene, or over-reacting on behalf of the state: "*damned if they do and damned if they don't*" (Braun & Robb, 2010, p. 129). As Hendrick (2011) observes:

> The 1980s was the decade when long-established tensions between childcare policy, parental responsibility and rights, and the jurisdiction of the state finally snapped. The problem was generally perceived as one of a lack of proper balance between too much and too little intervention by social workers. The new Children Act 1989 still retained defence of the birth family [....but] it introduced new language around parental responsibility. (Hendrick, 2011, p.48).

The 1989 Children Act attempted to strike a fresh balance which responded to concerns and criticisms about children's social care and health practices, but also drew on research and reviews which suggested that working towards a *negotiated partnership*

between practitioners, parents and children, would be the most effective approach to child welfare. This elevated the concept of preventative work and emphasised a philosophy of services striving to support children within their family-setting. It also gave some clearer definitions of what could be determined as a 'child in need' and what could constitute an intervention threshold, before the state could take necessary formal actions. While Rowlands (2011) notes some frustration at the lack of direction for institutional structures to facilitate this new, wide-reaching approach, Frost and Parton (2009) conclude that the 1989 Act was generally welcomed on all sides as a progressive piece of legislation. This was despite it being introduced in a hostile environment (in terms of how social workers and other children's workers were being perceived and portrayed) and being 'out of step' with most of the other social and economic policies of the Conservative administration at the time (Frost & Parton, 2009, p. 15).

In the period up to New Labour's successful election in 1997, the social, political and economic conditions - including a deep recession in the early 90s, were not particularly conducive to comfortable conditions for many families in the UK. It also coincided with a time of growing concern and rhetoric about criminality amongst the young; the need to identify and respond early to 'risk factors'; and demands for more authoritative intervention by the state (Farrington, 2000; Utting, 1995). Scraton, (1997) highlighted that, once again, childhood was seen to be in crisis and the abduction and murder of two-year old James Bulger by two ten-year old boys in Liverpool in 2003, emboldened sensationalist media coverage and political responses calling for the relationship between the state, children and families to be revisited. Under the Conservative administrations of the Eighties and Nineties:

> Thatcher's 1980s return to 'Victorian values' was superseded by Major's 'back to basics initiative' which was his rallying call in the war on 'Yob culture'. Not to be overshadowed, New Labour's Tony Blair called for "an awakening of the sleeping conscience of the country" to guard against "the potential of the moral chaos to engulf us all" (Scraton, 1997 p. Viii)

In this context, there was also a wider sense from both government-funded research studies and less partisan sources (National Children's Bureau, Joseph Rowntree Foundation), that a significant part of the partnership philosophy and family and child

welfare priorities of the Children Act (1989), was getting rather lost. Structural re-organisations in local authorities and health had actually reinforced separate specialist service delivery and narrowed the focus away from a community-family based vision of working together, to one where: "*forensically focused child protection investigations dominated policy and practice*" (Parton, 2014a, p.25).

There is a pervasive view (Casey, 1995; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Howe, 1996; Parton, 1998) that one other notable, and actually related dynamic during the Nineties, was the growth of a performativity culture. This was seen to move those working with children away from seeking 'depth explanations' or applying professional judgement and discretion. It began to close down openness and flexibility to the complexity and uncertainty of working with children and families, and brought a colder, more technical appraisal process to practice. Now information was not being sought to understand, or to build a relationship and work with a family, or draw on professional wisdom and expertise, but to evaluate and manage risk. Here lies the roots of what Wastell et al., (2010) describe as a move towards new public managerialism that began to: "*Catch practitioners in an iron cage of performance management*" (p. 311) as procedure, process and standardisation became the new watchwords.

As the 1997 national elections drew near, debates continued to surface about how children's social care and general children's services provision could be more effectively organised and delivered. The climate was particularly receptive to New Labour's policy and practice direction, which saw the newly elected administration enthusiastically embrace a responsibilities agenda, along with more joined-up government, early intervention and prevention initiatives, and a contemporary interpretation of new public managerialism; based on accountability by practitioners and service providers for outputs and outcomes. A raft of new policies increasingly suggested that young people (often in policy responses marginalising them as continued threats to social cohesion, Pitts, 2007), children, and their parents were a central focus in New Labour's attempts to remodel the welfare state (Frost, 2011a; Jones, 2014b; McAnulla, 2007; Parton, 2014a).

During New Labour's second term, the introduction of a major piece of legislation in the 2004 Children Act - and its associated ECM policy agenda, was framed as the

government's response to a Public Inquiry Report (Laming, 2003) into the brutal death of eight-year old Victoria Climbie in 2000 at the hands of her 'aunt' and the aunt's partner. While some key aspects did flow directly from the Inquiry recommendations, it gave impetus for major restructuring and integration of children's services that had, in fact, already been well underway as part of New Labour's modernisation and 'positive welfare' drive. Informed by a political philosophy, characterised as the '*Third Way*' (Blair, 1998; Giddens, 1998), large-scale policy initiatives and sweeping reforms sought to reconcile the seemingly incompatible goals of combining individualism with a communitarianism that brought fairness and equality to all, through both more choice and opportunity, and more responsibility - with increased stewardship by the state of the latter.

A significant shift of funding and service provision to early intervention and prevention reflected notions of a social investment state where investing in children as the citizens of tomorrow, would pay dividends in the future. These citizens would benefit from being adequately equipped to draw on their human capital as educated, healthy and productive members of society. This period heralded an unprecedented level of state intervention in childhood and a re-structured relationship between children, families and the state (Frost, 2011a; Langan, 2010; Rowlands, 2011). At the heart of these changes was an overt performance management focus, where the performance of practitioners and parents was to be managed and monitored:

> A tide of increased regulation, micromanagement and audit spread across public sector organisations [and …] nowhere were these developments more evident than in the changes to children's services (Parton, 2014a p. 43).

While concern has been expressed by the increase in state surveillance and monitoring during this period, what is recognised are the merits of a policy agenda which brought an integrated approach to working with children and families. This moved practice away from what was once again becoming a narrowly-defined child protection focus, to one that advocated 'team around the child' approaches and a broader concern with child well-being through the five Every Child Matters Outcomes (Anning & Ball, 2008; Frost, 2011a; Hawker, 2006).

2.4 Leading Integrated Working: Hybrid Professional Public Managers

In 2008, Action for Children noted that in the previous six years there had been over 200 initiatives, strategies, funding streams, legislative acts and structural changes to services affecting children and young people. Amongst this policy and structural 'churn' the creation of a Director of Children's Services (DCS) role and a corresponding Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS), in local councils, was established in statute through the Children Act (2004). The DCS post in particular looks rather different today from how the original advocate Lord Laming may have envisaged it in 2003. In the beginning the remit for a DCS was fairly clear, albeit highly complex and potentially daunting: lead on the implementation of the Every Child Matters Policy agenda in the local authority area through building and steering arrangements for Children's Trusts. Under newly-formed governance arrangements, these Trusts would establish integrated teams; comprising of partners from a range of agencies and disciplines whose practices and frontline service delivery would be underpinned by transparent, joined-up structures, processes and systems.

Much was modelled on the earlier Sure Start (1998) initiative which had been rolled out when New Labour first came to power. Concentrating on local programmes providing multi-agency, integrated services in health, early education, play, and family support for children and families in the 20% most 'disadvantaged' wards in England (Hawker, 2006), it was extended in 2005 into an ambitious plan for a national network of over 3,500 Children's Centres – with services available to parents in every neighbourhood by 2010. This signalled significant ongoing financial investment and a strong political commitment to supporting the integrated services model. However, as Anning, Cottrell, Frost, Green and Robinson (2010) comment, it was a policy diversion - reflecting in part, rather short-sighted reactions to early findings from impact studies (Belsky et al., 2006; NESS Evaluation, 2005; Omerod, 2005) which were showing little benefits for children from local Sure Start programmes. The Children's Centres provision replaced the original Sure Start initiative, bringing in new targets and outcomes, rendering any meaningful evaluation of longitudinal effects from local Sure Start programmes in 'improving children's life chances' through indicators like educational performance, avoidance of the criminal justice system and employability in adulthood, unmeasurable.

Despite criticisms about lack of impact, programmes that had successfully integrated multi-agency and multi-disciplinary hubs were deemed to have offered better service provision for families (Melhuish, et al. 2007). So, as Parton, (2014a) argues, it was an obvious step to use the Sure Start template for beginning to roll out ECM policy. Rather than integrated children's services, or specialist provision only being available in some areas, or to some children, emphasis was now placed on *every* child mattering. Local authorities were under a statutory duty in the Children Act (2004) to make arrangements for universal services to cooperate in promoting children's positive experiences of childhood and potential for improved life chances through strong educational attainment, and good health and well-being.

Early intervention and better communication and information sharing by practitioners and agencies (poor practices in both were a consistent weakness reported in many Serious Case Reviews into child deaths and significant harm) was intended to prevent children in need being missed, and for issues to be addressed earlier to help avert escalation into deeper or more acute problems. It was expected that there would be reliable access to targeted and specialist services where necessary. The ECM outcome of children 'staying safe' was bound into a strong accountability model, with a 'single direct line' to the Director of Children's Services (DCS), and to a lesser extent the elected lead member (LM) with a portfolio for children and families in each local authority. In Sections 18 and 19 of the Children Act (2004), the Director of Children's Services is responsible (as a minimum) for all children and young people receiving education or children's social care services in their area and all children looked after by the local authority or in custody (regardless of where they are placed).

Between 2005 and 2006, new departments of children and young people's services were created through merging children's social care and education, along with a range of other provision including youth work and early years. These newly formed services brought together several thousand staff and had budgets running at millions per annum. DCSs were quickly appointed in each upper-tier local authority area as required by the Children Act (2004). Largely drawn from education management, or children's social care backgrounds, in their new role they could be described as a new form of hybrid leader- manager (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Farrell & Morris, 2003; Gronn, 2008; Noordegraaf, 2007) with the challenging task of straddling two professional identities:

their original practitioner background - often as a social worker or education manager, and the 'professional public manager' (Noordegraaf, 2007), they have become. As Booker observes:

> These senior post-holders are likely to have progressed through a single disciplinary structure where the opportunities for deep level understanding of other disciplines and their culture have been limited; similarly their experience of the complexity of an integrated service will often be narrow. (Booker, 2012, p.402).

While many may have been coping with their own adjustment and destabilisation of identity (Davis & Smith, 2012) as they took the strategic and operational lead across agencies, professional boundaries, cultures and practices to deliver the integrated children's services agenda, they were also leading others propelled into multi-professional and multi-agency teamwork. For frontline workers in particular, the emotional aspects of coping with changes in their working lives had been underestimated (Anning et al., 2006, 2010). Studies beginning to emerge during the first few years of Children's Trusts arrangements, suggested the most challenging impact for practitioners of reformed service delivery, was the uncertainty and anxiety brought about through perceived loss, or 'blurring' of professional identity (Anning et al., 2010; Atkinson, Jones & Lamont, 2007; Foley & Rixon, 2008; Moran et al., 2007).

Even in the earlier move towards joined up-working as part of Sure Start, Connexions and Children's Fund, Frost (2005) drew attention to a paradox: practitioners were trained and valued for their distinctive professional expertise and knowledge - as health visitors, social workers or youth workers for example, but were then being expected to 'speak a common language', overcome their different models of practice and diverse perceptions and value-bases about how to view and respond to client needs/problems, and mitigate variations in information systems and processes. In fact, there was no common 'language': there were a number of discourses at work. Challenges around identity are nuanced, with the literature reflecting a continuum of views from those who believe loss and blurring of distinct professional identity is inevitable and a common identity is beneficial for integrated working (Fitzgerald & Kay; 2008; Hill, Lorentz, Dent & Lutzkendorf 2013), to others who argue it is neither desirable or necessary to 'give up identities'. Indeed, creating spaces to work within such difference is actually better and

more empowering for children and families (Davis & Smith, 2012; Frost & Stein, 2009; Lawler & Bilson, 2010).

In the context of this intense integrated services policy drive, the DCSs were faced with a profound tension: they were expected to overcome often entrenched 'silo-ways' of working to deliver dynamic, innovative and cross-cutting services, while balancing the high risk and exposure of their statutory accountability for the safety and protection of all children in their area. As Matt Dunkley a former President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) observed in 2011: "*In this role you at the very frontline of risk in local government personally and professionally because you are only your own individual [child protection] tragedy away from losing your job.*"

As momentum grew around the integrated children's services agenda, a change in leader from Tony Blair to Gordon Brown in 2007 saw New Labour launch The Children's Plan in the same year. The plan set ambitious child anti-poverty targets, expanded early intervention and prevention projects and renewed commitment to dealing with anti-social behaviour - some were already alarmed by the state's shift over the previous few years to more muscular interventions with 'hard to reach problem' families (Welshman, 2007) and a growing narrative about a moral underclass (Levitas, 2005). Significantly the plan placed schools and children's centres at its core, with a framework to achieve priorities by 2020. It also moved away from a Department for Education and Skills; establishing a more wide-reaching central Government administrative centre in the new Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

While barely a mention was made about child protection and child abuse concerns within the new order, it was the earlier promise by New Labour that the Every Child Matters policy agenda and the measures taken in the Children Act (2004) would avoid tragic deaths like Victoria Climbie's happening again, that came to haunt the government and revealed the full implications of what carrying the statutory role for children's safety and welfare really meant for a DCS. There was no framework left in place for a Public Inquiry (New Labour had declared there would be no need under the new reforms), and other than embryonic Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (often chaired by the DCS), there was no agreed process between central and local

government to 'handle' the reactions and ramifications when, child deaths, tragically - yet inevitably, happened again (Jones 2012; Parton, 2014a; Purcell et al., 2012).

2.5 "Blood on Their Hands": Media and Political Representations of Children's Services Leaders and Social Work

Contrary perhaps to popular perception, children's services provision and child protection systems in the UK are thought to be some of the most effective in the world (Blyth, 2014; Munro, 2011b). Since the Peter Connelly case in Haringey in 2007, there has been an increasingly intense focus on child deaths, serious harm, abuse and risk - including cases of endemic sexual exploitation of young people in particular areas (including Havering, Oxford, Rochdale and Rotherham). A seemingly never-ending litany of reported failures in children's services, and by social workers and others, to have protected children is regularly accompanied by the oft repeated and ever more hollow-sounding phrase, 'lessons will be learned'.

There is no single source for statistics on child death from abuse and neglect in England and Wales. According to the NSPCC, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) provides reliable data in its Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences Report, and in an annual Mortality Statistics Report. Both include the number of children who have died at the hands of another person. Coroners are also required to report all child deaths to one of the 148 Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) in England. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is then notified of any preventable child deaths following a Serious Case Review (SCR) by a Safeguarding Board. This SCR reporting process to Ofsted potentially provides the most accurate overall picture of children killed annually where abuse and neglect is known or suspected to have been involved. Between March 2006 and August 2008, 210 child deaths were directly attributable to abuse and neglect (Gilbert, 2008) equating to three each week. While the NSPCC believe that figure has reduced in recent years, at least one child is still dying every single week (NSPCC, March 2014) at the hands of a parent, carer or other adult.

A reality of the operating environment for a DCS - as the most senior, visible and statutorily accountable leader when a tragedy occurs, or cases of systemic abuse uncovered - is that there are two powerful external forces at play which have a

significant bearing on how the role may be experienced and shaped. The first is the often sensationalist reporting of child deaths through neglect and abuse in some parts of the media, and more recently, lurid use of Serious Case Review findings to legitimate a witch-hunt against practitioners and managers involved in cases. A number of respected child protection experts and child policy academics including Frost, (2011a), Jones (2012), Munro, (2011b), Parton, (2014a) and Sikes and Piper, (2010), feel this is fuelling a culture of blame; distracting attention away from the adults who actually abused and killed these children and having the perverse effect of creating a crisis in social work recruitment and retention.

Media treatment in the cases of Daniel Pelka killed in Coventry in 2012, Rio Smedley, also murdered in 2012, Hamzah Khan found dead in Bradford in 2011, the Edlington case near Doncaster in 2009 - where two young brothers left two other boys for dead after a prolonged attack, and Kyra Ishaq killed in Birmingham in 2008, are just some examples seized upon as representative of a 'violent underclass' that society was allowing to breed, while incompetent and lazy social workers and their managers allowed this to happen (Parton, 2014a, p.84). Such distorted perceptions shifts the weight of responsibility for these tragic deaths and serious injuries, and misrepresents the leverage and resources available to tackle issues, including complex child protection in a climate of increased workloads, lack of qualified, experienced social workers and severe funding cuts to early intervention and prevention services. Garboden (2011) highlights the demonisation of Sharon Shoesmith - the DCS in Haringey at the time of Peter Connelly's death, and social workers involved in his case, as a media frenzy, with a deeply personalised focus not really seen before. This episode epitomised what Greer and McLaughlin (2010; 2012), and Parton (2014a), have described as '*the politics of outrage*'. As The Sun newspaper launched its 'Justice for beautiful Baby P' crusade, the tabloid delivered over a million signatures from its readership to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, accompanied by the headlines "*Blood on their hands*: *A price must be paid for little Baby P's life. We will not rest until that price has been paid by those responsible*" (Mackenzie, The Sun, 13th November 2008) and "*The Sun demands all of this disgusting lot be fired*" (14th November, 2008). With no process in place to manage or temper the vacuum created without a Public Inquiry due to take place, the media were in a very powerful position to define how 'the story' was to be told.

While The Sun spearheaded a particularly vicious and personalised campaign against Shoesmith and the main Social Worker involved with Peter, Maria Ward, it was by no means alone. Publications including The Daily Mail, the London Evening Standard, News of the World, The Telegraph and the Daily Star, also led with editorials and storylines that were "*truly insensitive and unethical*" (Hudson, 2013, cited in Rowlands, p.187*).* Both Shoesmith and Ward have since reported the suicidal impact some of this coverage caused for them, which had also included death threats against their own children (Guardian, 2009; Sikes & Piper, 2010). Meanwhile The Sun's 'Baby P' coverage during 2008-09 was shortlisted for campaign of the year in the British Journalism Awards (Brody, 2009).

The second, and very much related external force encountered by DCSs, is the intense political scrutiny and direct intervention by government ministers, civil servants and inspectorates in children's services. While much of the first part of this chapter has explored the evolution of government policy and legislation in relation to the development of integrated children's services and the creation of a DCS post, the Peter Connelly case in 2007 is perceived to mark a seminal moment for enabling the conservative opposition to build its case for attacking New Labour as the architects of the failed post-Climbie Every Child Matters policy agenda. The policy was dropped within weeks of the Coalition Government's election in 2010 (Davies, 2013) and local authorities began to witness a significant change in their relationship with central government.

While the genesis for this sea-change had arguably started under the previous administration in the summary dismissal of Sharon Shoesmith as DCS for Haringey by a New Labour Secretary of State, and some placing of children's services into 'special measures' (Lambeth, 2005; Doncaster, 2009; Birmingham, 2009) the Coalition Government was much more robust in declaring children's services 'unfit for purpose' and 'disgraceful' subjecting them to intervention by appointed officials (Rotherham, 2015; Birmingham, 2014; Slough, 2014; Tower Hamlets, 2014). For many, Prime Minister David Cameron's rhetoric about "deplorable" practitioner and manager failure, and his "outrage" at a lack of professional responsibility in "broken Britain" (Jones, 2014b) - started in the days after the trial into Peter Connelly's death, has simply fed

and indeed legitimated a continuous 'trial by media' (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011; Thompson, 2011) of social workers and DCSs.

Parton (2014a) argues that: "*This new contemporary politics of child protection came to represent all that seemed to be wrong with managerial and professional decision making*". (p.87). It raised preoccupations to a new political level with the politics of outrage regularly played out in the media to "*sometimes hysterical and hostile levels not seen before*" (Jones, 2012, p.88) and in politicians responses to a cluster of reported child deaths and Serious Case Review findings (now more or less fully available to public scrutiny) from Baby P's in 2008, up to recent Child Sexual Exploitation Case Inquiries and Reviews (Derby, 2013; Oxford, 2015; Rotherham 2014). In an analysis of politicians 'moral talk' since the Baby P case, Warner (2015) argues that politicians from all sides - both with and through the press, have mobilised public anger against social workers and children's services managers so successfully, that there is deep distrust of their 'professional competencies' and a normative acceptance that children's services are failing institutions with weak, inept leadership. Gurrey and Brazil (2014) condemn the unrealistic expectations such media coverage and political discourse brings: It gives the impression that running children's services is straightforward and fuels a belief that child protection is not complex, or full of uncertainty and, that there are not adults in the world intent on abusing and killing children. The belief then grows that:

> All that is required is a little more application of common sense and a modicum of intelligence and care and empathy for others …if only they [those in children's services] had an ounce or two of common sense, a little less concern with political correctness and the ability to see and react to the blindingly obvious, children would not die or be seriously injured in the way that they repeatedly are. (Gurrey & Brazil, 2014, p.25-26)

Gurrey and Brazil are keen to stress that everything must be done to continuously improve children's services and agree that there are times when people get it wrong or there is systemic failure or poor leadership which needs addressing. What they would like to see is more informed and sophisticated responses from politicians, the media and other senior colleagues (especially Headteachers) in supporting a more positive climate. Jones (2014b) also feels that even though there have been incremental changes that have generally improved systems for promoting children's well-being and protection, the public:

> [A]re misled by the selective feeding of bad news stories by the right wing media, with very little attention given to the successes of joined-up working. It is possible to work with the press and other media on good news stories and there is evidence that coverage can be influenced to explain some of the realities and complexities of social work practice and management of children's services. (Jones, 2014b, p. 29)

Otherwise every time a child is hurt or killed at the hands of others, the blame will continue to be squarely laid at the door of the authorities. This, of course, leads to a 'perfect storm'*:* considerable problems around recruitment and retention in the children's workforce, escalating referrals and more children subject to care proceedings (as social workers, team managers and DCSs live in fear of not intervening and 'getting it wrong'), and increasing workloads given to less skilled and qualified practitioners. Negative media coverage only increases and exacerbates an ethos of blame, defensiveness and recruitment crises that do nothing to help deliver excellent services for children or protect them from harm (Graef, 2010; Green, 2012; Rawlings et al., 2014). In fact, Parton goes so far as to suggest that the cumulative effects of the politics of outrage, particularly since the election of a new government in 2010, gave impetus to the emergence of an authoritarian neo-liberal state (Parton, 2014a, p.12).

In a climate where 'reducing the deficit' now became the policy mantra, and where the majority-Conservative coalition partner wanted to shrink the state (yet still maintain control) and open up public services much more fully to the private sector and others, they were pushing at an 'open door'. Under previous Conservative administrations, and in some of the ideas and new public management practices embraced by New Labour from 1997-2010, paternal neo-liberalism (Soss et al., 2011; Wiggan, 2011) had begun to change the shape of citizen-state relationships. Market forces become the organising principle for all social, economic and political relations. In this context, with a little help from some powerful parts of the media, the narrative that failing children's services can only benefit from being opened up to the markets is fairly easy to peddle (Hulme et al., 2014; Jones, 2014b; Parton, 2014a). A warrant can also be constructed for ever more aggressive state intervention and welfare sanctions for 'the underclass' (Critcher, 2009), and senior leaders of children's services should expect to be vilified by the press and politicians and risk five years in prison if their incompetence or weak leadership amounts to 'Wilful Neglect'. A High Court Judge commented in one of several hearings

in the case brought by Haringey's former DCS, Sharon Shoesmith, against unfair and unlawful dismissal:

> The prospect of summary dismissal with no compensation and a good deal of public opprobrium is hardly likely to be an inducement for someone thinking of taking the job [DCS], or perhaps in some circumstances, continuing in it (Mr Justice Foskett, 2010, cited in Butler, 2010, p.4)

The operating environment has become ever more challenging for DCSs. Working with all the pressures and demands of what one DCS described in the Guardian Newspaper as '*the hardest public sector job in Britain"* (Thomas, 2014), they have been responsible for delivering a set of Coalition policy imperatives and funding cuts - of up to 40%, and greatest in the poorest areas of the North, the Midlands and some London boroughs (Ramesh, 2012), along with considerable structural changes. All of which, Parton (2014a) argues, is: "*far more wide-ranging, rapid, sweeping and coercive in nature than New Labour's …. or even the administrations of Thatcher or Major ever were*" (p.59). These transmute the very nature of the role from a senior leader of children's integrated services, to more of an 'executive corporate manager'.

2.6 Current Operating Environment: From Leading Integrated Services to 'Corporate Colleague'?

In the last days of the New Labour Government Ministers were prolific in pushing through further statutory guidance, regulations, targets and inspection regimes which the Conservative-led coalition government immediately began reforming following election in 2010. Tempered - at least in the early days, by *"the language of the 'Big Society' where power is transferred from Whitehall to local communities"* (Hulme et al., 2014, p. 81), there has been a significant shift towards localism and commissioned, individual service providers. This has been accompanied by some severe post-economic crisis funding cuts of approximately 2.7bn in children's services in England (Coote, 2010; Gallagher, 2013; Hulme et al., 2014; Lister & Bennett, 2010). The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the body set up alongside it to drive forward and equip the integrated workforce (Children's Workforce Development Council) were dismantled with almost immediate effect - replaced with the Department for Education. By February 2011, in an interview with the Telegraph Newspaper*,* Prime

Minister David Cameron had signalled his intention to "*abolish the state monopoly on public services by releasing the grip of state control of public services".* He added that *"competition should be opened up to a range of providers competing to offer a better service."* The Open Public Services White Paper published a few months later in July 2011, heralded the coalition government's radical reform programme for marketisation of public services. Both Farnsworth (2012) and Sinfield (2012) have emphasised the extent to which public service management has come to involve the 'balancing out' of social welfare in areas such as children's services with 'corporate welfare'; as private concerns, social enterprises and some parts of the voluntary sector, began delivering what had been provided by local government. Hulme et al. (2014) have argued that in this context, DCSs are facing increasing limits on their autonomy and disparagement of their professional leadership wisdom and expertise:

> The role of Director of Children's Services can increasingly be viewed as one of holding the ring, through the commissioning process, in this increasingly complex and privatised network of stakeholders. In this sense, the role is as crucial to the ideological goals of the Conservative-led coalition as the ECM was to New Labour's (Hulme et al., 2014, p.87)

DCSs are contending with reforms in education and health, including the expanding Academies and Free Schools programme which have devolved responsibility for delivering many public services to more commercial concerns (Jones, 2014a). Arguably this is marginalising broader agendas around children and young people's welfare and development, while still leaving DCSs with all the accountability for child protection across an increasing number of institutions and organisations they have no direct control over, and an ever-diminishing influence (Parton, 2014a; Purcell et al., 2012). The Academies Act (2010) and the Education Act (2011) did not rescind local councils' duties towards schools or school improvement. DCSs continue to have statutory duties with regard to standards in all educational settings and children's well-being and safety in them, regardless of whether they are maintained, academies, faith or free schools. These are not insignificant numbers: according to the government's own figures, 3,657 schools had been transferred to Academy status or newly opened in England by early 2014 (Open Public Services Policy Update Report, March 2014). In a pre-election press release in March 2015, David Cameron confirmed that over 400 Free Schools had been established since 2010 with another 49 approved for the next wave (DfE, March 9,

2015). Similarly, as GPs Commissioning Trusts take on more responsibilities for children's health care delivery, the children receiving services outside of local authority providers, continue to fall within the DCSs 'accountability remit'.

A survey of DCSs conducted by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services in 2011, found that 57% expected the organisation of children's services in their area to change, while an additional 34% reported that their services were already under active review. Respondents also commented widely on revised leadership structures being introduced and services being moved around the local authority, often across departmental boundaries. Growing expectations from their council Chief Executive and local councillors that they become 'more corporate and more strategic,' are often manifested in taking on additional services or even new directorate areas. While there is still a senior leader designated as a DCS, covering every local authority area: "*more than half are now twin, or triple-hatters*" (CYPN, 2015) while others put it at closer to 80% (Hill, 2015). This involves looking after service provision as disparate as highways, adult services, environmental services, and housing, in addition to their remit in children's services. An increasing number also cover the DCS role in more than one authority. The not insignificantly-sized London boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster for example, are led by one DCS under a Tri-borough children's services arrangement agreed in 2011.

It is likely that had the Coalition Government, not commissioned Professor Eileen Munro to conduct a review of child protection; including issues around corporate management and accountability following Peter Connelly's death, the DCS role would have been dissolved as quickly as the Department for Children, Schools and Families had been. In fact Hulme et al. (2014) comment it is remarkable the role has survived since 2004; especially as it is so symbolically linked to New Labour's centralised drive for integrated services. A speech at the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2012, by the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove had opened with the line: "*There has been a failure in leadership in children's services*" which gave some insight into the Government's view of DCSs performance and capability.

The full findings of the Munro review were published in May 2011, and specifically stated that the statutory responsibility and professionally accountable role of a Director of Children's Services should remain. Munro's view was that DCSs should only take on additional directorates in exceptional circumstances. The question of taking on additional roles and areas of responsibility remains a contentious one. In April 2011, the President of the Association of DCSs had called on government not to dilute accountability capacity by allowing councils to spread DCSs too thinly as a response to funding cuts and changes to the way public services were being commissioned. In July 2011, the Government accepted the Munro Report recommendation on this matter 'in principle' and proposed revision of legal guidance that maintains the statutory responsibility for DCSs to safeguard all children in a local authority area. The most recent version, updated in 2013, states:

> Local authorities must ensure that there is both a single officer and a single elected member (LMCS) each responsible for both education and children's social care. The DCS must ensure that the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are central to the local vision… [the] DCS and LMCS provide a clear and unambiguous line of local accountability. (Statutory Guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, April, 2013)

As the government moved to privatise significant parts of children's services and even children's social care, Jones (2014a) observed that the role was again coming under threat; proving an inconvenient layer to the Coalition government's plans for marketisation of public services. A policy agenda only likely to expand with the election of a fully Conservative Government in May 2015. In Jones' view, dissolution of the DCS role would leave no-one in the council at the top level with "*expertise, wisdom and responsibility for children's services and child protection*". He expresses concern that this may mean contracts with other organisations could be:

> Set up and managed by contract managers in a council's corporate centre whose experience may be in setting up contracts for traffic wardens, grass cutting and rubbish collecting and with no background and little knowledge of children's services or social work. (Jones, 2014a, p.56)

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), remain unequivocal in their stance that the DCS role and remit must be protected. This is despite an alarming

turnover of one in three DCSs leaving (or being removed from) their posts in 2013-14, and reports (Independent Newspaper, November 2013) that thirteen authorities have had four DCSs in the past five years, including Birmingham, Doncaster and Haringey. As Gallagher (2013) observes in The Independent, "*this merry-go round is not good for vulnerable children*". For those in the DCS role, they would like some stability and support to consolidate service delivery and systems, and more positive rhetoric in the current environment that recognises what the Assistant President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, Dave Hill describes as: "*a role I am hugely passionate about [and] one that has made a huge difference to many children and families. We really need to hear more about that*" (CYPN, 2015).

2.7 DCS Leadership Models and Development Programmes

So, what 'type' of person puts themselves forward for a leadership role that while potentially hugely rewarding, is clearly demanding, ever-changing and full of risk? The final part of this chapter discusses attempts to identify and define the constituents for leadership efficacy and 'success' in the role: particularly focusing on the challenges of leading children's services during radical changes in policy priorities, intense media interest, and the pressures of austerity measures applied by central government to local authority budgets in recent years (Booker, 2012; Hulme et al., 2014; Purcell et al., 2012). Notions of an idealised DCS are examined through considering the emphasis of dominant leadership models and discourse on the particular qualities, attributes and behaviours deemed necessary to be a high-performing, capable DCS leader who can survive, and indeed thrive, in such a complex organisational environment.

The most prevalent models and approaches for DCS leadership programmes and professional development draw on theories and concepts from wider leadership literature including: 'Authentic Leadership' (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), 'Distributed Leadership' (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004), 'Complex-Adaptive Leadership' (Heifetz, 1994; Uhl-bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007), and 'Systems Leadership' (Fullan, 2004; Senge, 2006; Welbourn, Warwick, Carnall & Fathers, 2012). The 'Resourceful Leader' model (Leslie et al., 2011), offers a further contribution, specifically grounded in children's services leadership development and thinking.

Together, these models and theories principally inform and shape current DCS leadership development provision.

Although empirical investigation has been limited (Ghate, Lewis & Welbourn, 2013; Hulme et al., 2014; Lewis, Ghate & Welbourn, 2013; National College & Deloitte, 2011; NCLSCS, 2011a; NCLSCS, 2011b; Purcell, 2009), efforts have focused on trying to understand and define what leadership skills and qualities those in a DCS role feel are needed to operate effectively in the multi-faceted, constantly changing environments of children's services. These insights into internally constructed - or at least subjectively expressed notions of DCS leader identity, have informed attempts at further theoretical understandings of leadership in this context. Studies and reviews by Booker, (2012), Daniels & Edwards, (2012), Frost, (2009a), Purcell et al. (2012) and Welbourn, (2015), have considered the potential of 'best fit' models and theories of leadership to underpin DCS development.

Purcell's (2009) wide-ranging scoping study for the government-funded National College for School Leadership (NCSL) was the first comprehensive attempt to define effective DCS leadership approaches and identify key skills needed in the role. Four DCSs were consulted as part of the study, which also reviewed a considerable body of literature, including grey publications. Since the inception of the role in 2005, the main leadership development provision for post-holders had come through the Association of Directors (ADCS) own training unit - the Virtual Staff College, working in partnership with a few universities to provide a small number of leadership programmes and action learning sets. Compared to other senior public sector leadership roles, the research identified three unique elements and challenges encountered by DCSs: the direct accountability of the post-holder to Government - including for some organisations and staff outside their line management; close working relationships with the political lead member for children's services and other elected members of the council; and, overseeing different service areas with their own distinct professional priorities, practices and cultures (Purcell, 2009, p. 3).

The study concluded that a hybrid model of leadership approaches and styles was likely to be most effective (Gronn, 2008), recognising that the operating environment is extremely complex and fluid, needing different responses and forms to be effective in

the diverse relational and organisational contexts of children's services. Purcell (2009) proposed that DCSs needed to draw on charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Stogdill, 1974) and transformational (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Burns 1978) leadership styles in setting the vision and communicating skilfully, while directive leadership (House, 1996) was required for driving this forward and robustly managing performance, overseeing commissioning processes and managing the complexity and risk of the frontline. Simultaneously, DCSs needed to be able to boundary-span as a networking leader (O'Leary & Bingham, 2009) and be open to participative leadership; enabling distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004) and effective inter-disciplinary and multi-agency working. The capacity and skill to adapt and perform as an effective leader was considered in terms of context: both structural and in the co-produced nature of social relationships. Situational leadership was therefore called upon; reflecting Gronn's (2008) notion of a hybrid model of leadership which principally embraces distributed and boundary-spanning leadership, but also needs to utilise elements from a range of styles and approaches. Recommendations were made for a coherent and more substantial programme of leadership development for DCSs which included specific skills-sets and covered this range of leadership styles.

The scoping study (Purcell, 2009) had been commissioned just as the National College for Leadership of Schools (NCLS) formally took responsibility for the training and development of DCSs in late 2008, becoming the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, (NCLSCS). Findings of a further twelve month study for NCLSCS conducted from early 2010 to mid-2011 by Deloitte, involved twenty-two DCSs and covered a period described in the summary report as: "*a series of shocks for public sector managers unparalleled in modern times … putting them under continued stress*" (NCLSCS & Deloitte, 2011, p. 1). Around the same time, a study by Hansen et al. (2010) investigated senior children's services leadership in England, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Scotland and Canada. They found no similar level role had such a high degree of public scrutiny and accountability as the English DCS post and, with the exception of Scotland, none were responsible for leading complex, integrated structural arrangements across education, children's social care, health and other services for families. Importantly, the review sought to determine evidence of evaluations or empirical studies of the effectiveness of leadership development programmes and training for those in a senior children's services manager role. It found little had been

done in England, or the comparison countries. Commenting on the unique nature of DCS leadership demands, the researchers concluded that while England was ahead of other countries in the study in its leadership development provision: "*There is merit in exploring in more detail how different leadership models apply in the specific context of children's services in England.*" (Hansen et al., 2010, p.63).

When the first fully-developed leadership model for DCSs, the 'Resourceful Leader' was proposed in the Deloitte-led study for NCLSCS in 2011, that specific context included significant funding reductions, radical policy reform and a drive for localism from the newly elected Coalition Government. In the *'series of shocks'* being encountered by the DCSs during the study period (2010-2011), the authors claimed to have observed particular features and behaviours: "*underpinned by knowledge, skills and attributes which enabled successful DCSs to expand their internal and external resource pools during these challenging times*" (Leslie et al., 2011, p. 3). Eight core behaviours were judged as the strongest indicators of successful and effective leadership practice:

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Eight Core Behaviours of Resourceful Leaders in Children's Services

Openness to possibilities
Ability to collaborate
Demonstrating a belief in their team and people
Personal resilience and tenacity
Ability to create and sustain commitment across a system
Focusing on results and outcomes
Ability to simplify
Ability to learn continuously

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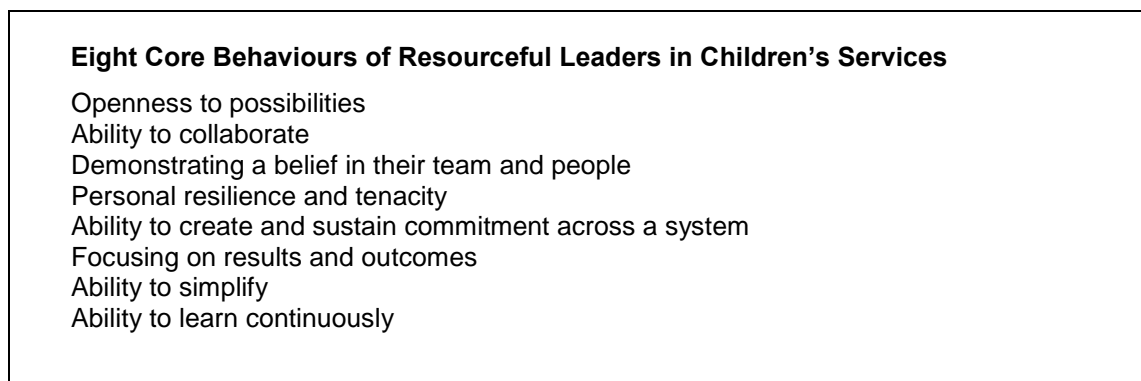
Figure 2.1 - The Eight Core Behaviours of Resourceful Leaders. Deloitte, (2011)

To accompany the Resourceful Leadership model, a National Leadership Qualities Framework (NLQF, 2011) was produced by the Virtual Staff College (ADCS training and development unit). It states that through: "*enacting the eight core resourceful behaviours, leaders will deliver excellence … [and] improved outcomes for children, young people and their families*" (NLQF, p.9). The qualities framework not only emphasises the importance of the core behaviours of a resourceful leader, but adds eight additional attributes of its own.

Figure 2.2 - National Leadership Qualities Framework, DCS Leadership Attributes. VSC (2011-Current)

Similarities between the list of behaviours and attributes in both documents can be seen. While there is more use of emotive language in the Leadership Qualities Framework such as "moral purpose", "integrity", "courage and passion" they both broadly align themselves with notions of the authentic leader (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Currently one of the most popular leadership models in Europe and North America (Northouse, 2015), authentic leadership is seen to be a response to the less positive side of transformational and charismatic leadership which had become associated with the immoral actions of powerful, big-vision business and political leaders of the Nineties and early part of the 21st Century. A more humble, ethical leader, seeking to be 'true to self' – naturally this self is morally good, self-regulating and genuinely collaborative (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Walumbwa, Peng, Peng, Schaubroek, & Avolio, 2010), was seen as the antidote to the archetypal narcissistic leader responsible for shameful corporate scandals and the global financial crisis of 2008 (Jackson & Parry, 2011, p.44).

In a thought-provoking study into leader identity struggles, Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014), observed that managers actively made being an authentic leader a core focus of their professional identity constructs. However, when they encountered organisational and social demands that conflicted with this self-image, they faced the paradox of having to suppress this true self in order to be seen as a 'good leader' within the prevailing discourse and conditions. Nyberg and Sveningsson make the point that original conceptions of authentic leadership, which grew from existentialist scholarship such as Sartre's seminal lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism' (1946) for example, never promoted the idea of an essential self. So, rather than an internal search for a 'true' self:

Authenticity is about continuously re-writing the script one is following. It is self-making, self-construction … we are always already situated, or thrown, into a socio-historical- context. Authenticity is a multi-faceted outward project of binding or 'crystallising' contrasting and fragmented identities into a coherent life story (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014, p.439)

However, an internally-focused perspective that reflects notions of a fully-realisable personal quest to 'know oneself, and to bring good moral character and strength to leadership practice, continues to permeate a significant amount of authentic leader literature (George, Sims, McLean & Mayer, 2007; Michie & Gooty, 2005). Here, agency is significantly privileged in assumptions about the essential 'true self' that, if authentically enacted will result in morally grounded, self-aware leadership excellence. One of the interesting aspects of the Deloitte-led study (2011) is the degree to which they suggest senior leaders in children's services can *choose* to behave and be successful in the role. In fact, in contrast to Purcell's (2009) study and indeed a further, more focused follow-up study on skills and qualities required by DCSs in the complex and rapidly shifting world of children's services by Purcell, Christian and Frost (2012), they argue that situations, conditions and structures need not constrain at all; resourceful leaders can shape the environment around themselves regardless of context.

Arguably, such conceptions flatten the complex and interrelated ontological terrain that DCSs actually operate in (Layder, 2006) with rather narrow essentialist assumptions that outstandingly skilful, authentic leaders can transcend conditions, environments and social encounters. In trying to measure up to prescribed sets of behaviours and idealised images (Schwartz, 1987) of the 'perfect' professional children's services leader - in possession of a prodigious range of talents, authentic motivations and high morals, DCSs may face anxiety and insecurity as they seek identity congruence with these leader schemas (Lord, 2001) while grappling with the impact of external forces and organisational dynamics. In circumstances where Purcell et al. (2012) suggest that "*current leaders are more vulnerable and exposed than ever before as organisational demands overshoot the limits of individual performance*" (p.92) there are questions about the degree to which normative leadership practices and prototypical leader identity constructs (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003) seen in these models and accompanying discourse, are reasonable or realistic. Some of these constructs are

informed through the empirical contributions of those currently in the DCS role; acutely tuned in to the demands of the job and keen to capture and highlight the special leadership skills and qualities needed. Yet together, these may serve to simply reinforce insecurity through performative pressures and ideal identities that can simply never be fully realised (Clarke, Kelliher & Schledlitzki; 2013; Knights & Clarke, 2014).

The current nature and content of leadership development provision for DCSs has moved distinctly to an approach that promotes an authentic, highly adaptive, systems-focused leader, able to operate a distributed model of leadership - in which leaders "*create an environment where everyone can feel genuinely empowered to lead within and beyond the organisation and teams work collectively to achieve results*" (Jackson & Parry, 2011, p.63). Meanwhile the DCS is expected to maintain overall control of complex organisational demands, bring about normative compliance (Etzioni, 1964) amongst professionals from a number of disciplines, and minimise risk. Ghate et al. (2013) and Welbourn (2015) suggests momentum for the 'authentic systems leader' in children's services has grown from recognition that it is not enough to be charismatic and visionary. It is not so easy to get a' helicopter' or 'balcony' view and find clear ground below because the reality of leadership in public services today means dealing with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (often reduced to the acronym VUCA to describe an increasingly turbulent and complex world, Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010). Systems leadership, based on systems thinking, is premised on the notion that the most potent response to help leaders navigate such times is to facilitate:

> The concerted effort of many people working together at different places in the system and at different levels, rather than of single leaders acting unilaterally. At the heart of systems leadership is shared values and intentions to improve outcomes for children […It] is a mind-set rather than a set of technical skills or competencies. (Ghate et al. 2013, p. 7)

As a form of highly complex-adaptive leadership (Heifetz, et al., 2009), systems leadership is seen to suit leaders "*surfing the edge of chaos*" (Pascale et al., 2000, p.6) who need to effect change across multi-layered and intersecting systems by responding to increasingly wicked problems (Grint, 2005; Rittel & Weber, 1973). These are organisational challenges that will not benefit from a technical response as they are complex, often intractable problems with no right or wrong answer, and are best

responded to through collective and creative approaches. Munro's (2011) review of child protection gave real focus to the fact that leading children's services and being responsible for child protection is complex and unpredictable; risks cannot be 'managed away' (Blyth, 2014). The argument was made that the majority of workers in UK public services are not favourably rewarded financially, or in terms of endearment and status in the public eye. Munro suggests they are chiefly motivated by altruism, so the new public managerialism tools of targets and performance indicators are actually counter-productive because they drive people away from their professional values, expertise and judgement towards prescribed procedural responses. When a child death reaches the media and the public, political reactions tend to lead to moral panic resulting in even more process-driven ways of working and defensive practices and leadership.

What is different about the systems leadership approach is the effort taken to see both people and organisational elements and structures, as integral parts of the same system. As Ghate et al. (2013) describe it, that involves leading with a mind-set which seeks to support everyone in children's services to make systems and processes work for the benefit of children and their families. In Munro's analysis, this approach should prevent diminishing professional responsibility for judgement. It gives permission to stop trying to control outcomes that can never be controlled and helps avoid "*driving practice in the wrong direction*" (DfE, Munro, 2011a, p.21).

One of the most influential concepts associated with enabling effective systems leadership is Moore's (1995) Strategic Triangle. Three elements need to be aligned: an established 'public value proposition' which states a clear and shared sense of purpose; an 'authorising environment' that encourages leadership at all levels; and, 'operating capacity' where resources are available and organised in the way practitioners need them to be, rather than systems and processes driving people (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009). The important feature of public value proposition is that the value base of the public sector is to serve the public - rather than make a profit, so leaders of public services are seen to be authorised and funded through the democratic mandate of the citizens they serve. This notion is complicated by a growing emphasis on performativity, audit and inspection which increasingly characterises shared purpose in the public sector predicated on neo-liberal ideals. Arguably, the current economic, legal, regulatory and policy demands on DCSs creates an authorising environment and operating capacity

that requires them to be more of an executive corporate manager: "*orienting them towards individualism, rather than collectivism, as accountability has been concentrated in the few, rather than many ... [this] drives leadership towards concentration, rather than distribution.*" (Currie & Lockett, 2011, p. 297). When the practice of leadership is intertwined with a child-centred public value base and a commitment to shared ways of working, yet is constantly contending with neo-liberal dynamics and forces, there is likely to be significant unrecognised emotion work being performed, quite different to the 'service with a smile' emotional labour of those in service industry roles (Clarke, Hope-Hailey & Kelliher, 2007; Iszatt-White, 2009).

Frost (2014) and Purcell et al. (2012) highlight similar concerns about the degree to which audit and managerialism dominates children's services - in conflict with Munro's appeal for increased professional autonomy and collaboration. This is likely to foster directive leadership, rather than highly adaptive leaders seeking to enact leadership at multiple levels to effect the positive change and professional learning of self and others that is needed to achieve the best outcomes for children. There are also questions about how realistic it is to hold one senior leader accountable for the actions of so many workers, across organisational and disciplinary boundaries, while simultaneously proposing models of leadership that encourage distributed forms of leadership, courageous innovation and risk-taking when "*the cultural imperative – particularly around child protection is to be risk-averse*" (Purcell et al., 2012, p.97).

Some of these concerns are acknowledged in the most recent review of literature and research into challenges confronting senior public services leaders by Welbourn (2015), who suggests current policies are over-compliant, and performativity and inspection measures need serious attention. This would free up the 'space' needed for the highly adaptive systems leader to emerge as the best response to increasingly complex, chaotic and demanding organisational environments that have become the "new norm". In these contexts, what is seen to be needed is not the traditional command and control approach of public management, nor the transformational hero leader, but leadership that "*engages everyone's intelligence in tackling challenges and crises*" (Wheatley, 2007, p.5). Empirical findings reviewed in the study suggest that DCSs are learning to live with volatility, uncertainly, complexity and ambiguity; accepting that "*part of their view as leaders will always be in the shadows*" (Ghate et al., 2013, p7). While

recognising the many challenges this brings, Welbourn sees the current public sector environment as an opportunity for the ethically-driven, systems leader to excel. He is a key architect of the Virtual Staff College's (VSC) Systems Leadership Model (2013) - which now accompanies the Resourceful Leader Model (2011) and the National Qualities Framework (2011) as the endorsed leadership development approach for all current and aspirant DCSs in England. Welbourn and colleagues emphasise "*necessary dimensions*" of values, behaviours and 'professional style' as integral to effective leadership.

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Systems Leadership for Children's Services: Dimensions

1. Personal core values (ways of feeling)
2. Observations, 'hearing' and perceptions (ways of perceiving)
3. Cognition, analysis, synthesis (ways of thinking)
4. Participatory style (ways of relating)
5. Behaviours and actions (ways of doing)
6. Personal qualities (an overarching way of being that forms the essence of both professional and personal style and approach)

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Figure 2.3 - Systems Leadership: Exceptional Leadership for Exceptional Times, Synthesis Paper. VSC, (p.7, 2013-Current)

Gagnon and Collinson (2014) argue that qualities frameworks and normative leadership models such as those produced by NCSCSL and the Virtual Staff College can be seen as identity-targeting: prescribing not only what a perfectly-constituted, high-performing, effective DCS should look and behave like, but in the Systems Leadership Model (2013), even suggesting there should be 'ways of thinking' and 'ways of feeling'. Keen to encourage congruence with qualities and behaviours deemed necessary for the successful DCS leader:

> Leadership development programmes and discursive practices seek to align participants' identities and behaviours with the construction of a particular ideal leader. (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014, p.646)

Being subject to prevailing institutional and organisational leadership discourse and practices has implications for identity construction (Kenny, Whittle & Wilmott, 2011; Thomas, 2009) as individuals engage in processes to make sense of their professional selves. While it is not in the scope of this thesis to critique leadership models and

concepts, it is thought-provoking to consider the extent to which any other leadership role - in the public or private sector, has its own models and frameworks detailing to quite the same degree desired skills, behaviours, attributes and values.   What this presents to those in the DCS role, or aspiring to it, are some strong messages about how they should act, think and feel (or at least represent themselves as behaving, thinking and feeling) as an ideal DCS. As Ybema et al. (2009) note, in identity construction processes the dialectic between agency and structure in such a context can: "*illustrate how individual agents experience, shape, reconstruct and are subject to the situational and structured 'realities' they inhabit*" (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 300). There appears to be little dispute that DCSs certainly inhabit complex and challenging realities as hybrid professional public managers.

2.8 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter explored and critically analysed relevant literature and research concerned with some of the historical policy developments and more recent government interventions leading to children's services provision in England today. Considerable attention was given to the changing conditions and social forces encountered by those in the statutory Director of Children's Services (DCS) role. The review moved through the 'paternal neo-liberal' (Soss et al., 2011; Wiggan, 2011) new public management practices of New Labour which accompanied the post's inception in 2005, to an examination mid-chapter of how the wrath of the media and the public was turned towards the DCS and social workers involved in the 'Baby P' case in 2007. Seizing on the apparent failings of post-Climbie Every Child Matters policy, the Conservative opposition loudly condemned "deplorable" practitioner and manager failure in that case, and other child deaths from abuse and neglect which followed. Many in the field believe this has fuelled a 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLaughlin, 2012; Parton 2014a), that has come to characterise media and political responses since. Despite such public excoriation, the DCSs role remains for now. Perhaps largely due to the strong representations made by Professor Eileen Munro in her review of child protection (published in 2011) about how important it is to have a senior leader of children's services in every local authority area.

However, with the post-economic crisis funding cuts and significant policy shifts towards localism and radical reform of public services started by a Coalition Government in 2010, and gaining momentum with the recent election of a Conservative Government in May, 2015, the nature of the DCS role is markedly changing. Market forces have become the organising principle, changing the shape of citizen-state relationships (Frost, 2011a) and redefining the public value proposition (Alford & O'Flynn, 209). While still responsible for leading children's services through multi-agency and multi-disciplinary arrangements, these hybrid professional public managers (Noordegraaf, 2007) are legally accountable for children's well-being and safety based on the actions (or inaction) of organisations they increasingly have no direct control over. Is what has been consistently cited as the main reason DCSs are motivated to take on, and remain in the role - the moral imperative and public value of 'making a positive difference to children and families' (Gate et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2013; NCLSCS, 2011) enough to sustain them against a hostile media environment, increasingly blurred professional and organisational boundaries, significantly shifting ideological ground and painful austerity measures?

An examination of DCS leadership development programmes and wider rhetoric about the authentic, high-performing, and highly adaptive leader concluded the chapter. Discussion reflected on the extent to which current provision and normative leadership models prepares and supports them in the current uncertain, fluid environment, or suggests an impossible leader construct that may fuel insecurities and dissonance from "*the sheer impossibility of being as skilful and wise as is required*" (Ford, Harding & Learmouth, 2010, p. s76).

The next chapter concentrates on two broad areas of interconnected substantive literatures which are of particular relevance to this study. The first is concerned with theories of identity and leader-identity construction in the context of contested notions of professions and professionalism. The second involves examining contemporary concepts around emotion work, security and the 'emotional practice' of leadership (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Clarke et al., 2013; Humphrey et al., 2008; Iszatt-White, 2007, 2013) in seeking to further understand how identity as a leader may be experienced, constructed and enacted.

3. REVIEWING THE LITERATURES: IDENTITY THEORIES AND THEORIES OF EMOTION

3.1 Chapter Structure and Rationale

Two broad areas of interconnected substantive literatures are of particular relevance to this study. The first is concerned with theories of identity and leader-identity construction in the context of contested notions of professions and professionalism. The second involves examining contemporary concepts around emotion work, security and the 'emotional practice' of leadership (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Clarke et al., 2013; Humphrey et al., 2008; Iszatt-White, 2013), in seeking to understand how identity as a leader may be experienced, constructed and enacted.

Identity has become an increasingly popular reference point for investigating and theorising a wide range of individual, collective and organisational issues. Agency-structure themes and concerns appropriately contextualise and frame the following brief review - reflecting that questions of identity are central to articulating the relationship between the individual and society. As Ybema et al. (2009) observe: "*Analytically, the notion of 'identity' may be regarded as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society*" (p. 300). It traverses diverse epistemological positions in the fertile arena of identity studies: from essentialist views of identity as centred and robust, enabling a stable point of orientation, to post-modern constructionist interpretations of identity as insecure, precarious and fluid in a 'messy world' (Pettica-Harris & McKenna, 2013). This study works with an understanding that the complexity and uncertainties of modern life make identity a more 'open project' than in the past (Alvesson, 2010; Evans & Lines, 2014; Watson, 2008). Social and organisational contexts have become less stable, more indistinct and often bewildering in a neo-liberal knowledge economy; where public services leaders are increasingly expected to lead others and 'boundary-span' across professional, organisational and sector boundaries (O'Leary & Bingham, 2009; Williams, 2013). In reviewing the literature, being mindful of Layder's Theory of Social Domains (1997; 2006) is helpful for examining the multi-dimensional nature of the social world and the connected dynamics at play in the symbiotic relationship between internal lifeworlds and external social structures and prevailing discourse. Layder's four Social Domains of *Psychobiography* and *situated activity* (largely focusing on agency); *social*

settings and *contextual resources* (largely focusing on structure) take account of power relations and are considered across time and space, recognising that:

> Society, organizations and individuals are constructed in a continuous interplay between externalizations and internalizations … Identity formation involves processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present. (Ybema et al., 2009 p. 303)

In examining some key theoretical themes and analytical debates dominating the literature and emerging through empirical studies, a clear warrant is made for both the lacuna this research seeks to fill, and its location in the field. This two-part chapter begins by critically reviewing pertinent theories and research concerned with identity, leader-identity formation, status and contested notions of what is meant and understood by professional, hybrid-professional and professionalism. The second part considers the role of emotion in seeking to understand how people may construct and enact their leader identity in the context of what Parton (2014) describes as an *'authoritarian neo-liberal state' in the UK*. Such identity work takes place in a climate increasingly driven by intense performativity, severe budget cuts, enhanced inspection regimes, personalised accountability and marketisation of services (Jones, 2014; Knights & Clarke, 2014; Purcell, Christian & Frost, 2012).

Significant changes to public service policy agendas and imperatives since 2010, have arguably confronted leaders of children's services with new emotional dilemmas affecting identity at two levels. First their personal-vocational values, and their 'public values' (Moore, 1995) base, may have been destabilised in the change from leading integrated services to becoming a corporate manager, while still leading multi-disciplinary teams. Here implications for identity construction and ontological security (Archer, 2003) when people operate in unstable, highly pressurised, and intensely scrutinised occupational domains, have been central to a number of important recent studies (Bradford & Cullen, 2014; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Second, and related to this, they are contending with a seemingly contradictory dominant leadership discourse and practice adopted in the UK education and social care sectors, conceptualised as 'Authentic Leadership' (Goffee & Jones, 2006; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Yammarino et al., 2008). This approach compels people to be 'true to

themselves' and others in their leadership, while they simultaneously control and compartmentalise any contradictory feelings through careful emotion management, invoking intense emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Using a dramaturgical perspective, Goffman (1959) described this as an individual's backstage and frontstage performance.

In the face of enacting a leadership role and way of working - which potentially conflicts with some of their own beliefs and values, and is subject to a number of intersecting, often conflicting organisational and wider structural discourses (Clarke, Kelliher, & Schledlitzki, 2013; Gagnon & Collinson, 2014; Humphrey, 2012; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014) there is merit in examining insights from the literature and recent studies into emotion work, and the insecurities and tensions which may be involved in leader-identity construction. This includes examples of resistance and evidence of leaders being able to operate effectively in contradictory domains. Equally important to these considerations is the potential effects of the emotional demands on these leaders exposed to the risks and vulnerabilities carried in a senior public role responsible for leading services for the well-being and protection from harm of children.

Part One: Identity Theories, Professionalism and Hybrid Leader-Identity

3.2 Identity Theories

Notions of identity are fundamental to considering what it means to be human; occupying the minds of philosophers in the fourth and fifth century BC from Socrates to Plato and Aristotle, and reflected in Descartes post-renaissance departure towards a mechanistic framework with his cogito ergo sum musings '*I think, therefore I am*' in the 17th Century. As Gioia (1998) observes:

> What other issue is quite so important as answering the nebulous question, Who am I? What other question so influences understanding and action so heavily? I can think of no other concept that is so central to the human experience than the notion of identity (Gioia, 1998 p.17)

Early Greek philosophers variously dealt with concepts such as the true character-based self, multiple selves and collective identity. Questions of identity were also folded

into larger concerns of later philosophers including Kierkegaard in the 19th Century, and Sartre, Russell and Wittgenstein in the 20th Century. The latter's later work moved him from wanting to perfect philosophy as an investigative means for understanding the objective world, to concluding that the world and what happens in it, is in fact, socially constructed and contextually bound. The work of James (1918), around multiple identities and questions about what constitutes the 'real me' also added to debates from a social-psychology perspective. In seeking approaches to understanding social phenomenon and questions of identity and the self, both Husserl during the first few decades of the 20th Century and later Schultz (1970), extended the view that identity is a constructed phenomenon. Many of the key theorists also writing around this time including Goffman (1959, 1971) and Erickson (1964) contributed to an emerging discourse that identity was formulated and understood though social interaction; that is through personal and social interaction with others where we have different selves, depending on the situation or environment we find, or place, ourselves in. Much of this has been located in two branches of similar ontological concern: identity theory and social identity theory.

Identity theory (IT), keenly rooted in symbolic interactionism (Cooley, 1902; Mead 1934; Blumer, 1969), is predicated on a central tenet that society affects behaviour through its influence on self. The work of Stryker in the late 1960s first established identity theory in the sociological literature and moved the debate towards considering society as differentiated, multi-faceted and often highly organised; arguing this needed to be reflected in how constructs of the self could be viewed. Rather than one self, a number of role identities are performed by individuals and these interact with wider social structures.

Later theorising by Burke (1980) and Thoits (1991) extended notions that role identities are self-definitions people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural roles they have; this also helps locate them in a particular social category. It is through social interaction in roles such as mother, mentor, teacher that they take on meaning. In the role of teacher, an individual can distinguish their occupational role identity by the complementary and symbiotic connection to students. As a micro-sociological construct, identity theory considers the concept of identity salience; where role identities have a hierarchical structure and some roles are more highly-regarded, and engender more

effort and commitment from individuals, than others. The 'self' reflects wider social structures through a collection of identities based on the role positions occupied by an individual.

A sense of identity derived from the social category one may fall into, or wants to belong to, is the distinguishing feature of Social Identity Theory (SIT). Most associated with the early work of Tajfel (1959), with later developments by Tajfel and Turner and JC Turner in the late 1970s - early 1980s, and Hogg and Abrams (1988), the basic premise was that a particular group or affiliation will be seen by its members to require a certain way of thinking, feeling and behaving. It followed that individuals were provided with a self-definition based on how belonging to the particular social category was perceived.

Hogg and Kipling (2001) argue these were often ideological constructs, not always based on reality. What it was seen to produce was stereotypical, normative self-perception and conduct for the 'in-group' which promoted competitiveness and discrimination against 'out-groups'. This helped to protect and maintain the status quo of privileged positioning in the social category. Social identity theory attempted to explain group behaviour in a way that recognised primacy of society and structure over individuals.

Later self-categorisation theories (Haslam, Powell & Turner, 2000; Oakes et al, 1994; Turner et al. 1987) sought to extend understanding of how categorisation processes formed the cognitive basis of group behaviours and notions of 'best fit'; reinforcing perceived positive similarities amongst in-group members and negative characteristics and behaviours in out-group members. The relationship between both groups is seen as particularly important: The salient out-group is central to the dynamic as it becomes the point of difference, and therefore comparison, in the social context where the groups exist. Socio-cognitive processes such as self-enhancement are powerful stimuli in social interactions, but in efforts to get as close to the salient in-groups prototypicality as possible, research by Hogg et al. (2003) suggested that individuals often depersonalise the 'self'. In Bauman's studies of group identities in the 1990s, he also found that in-groups were seen to create a sense of togetherness, with meaning and identity construction partly drawn as a counterforce against out-groups. It was contextually responsive. The stronger that sense of togetherness, the more effort is harnessed

toward prototypical similarities being achieved; described by Tajfel, (1969) as the *accentuation effect.*

While identity theory is generally viewed as a sociological theory and social identity theory more of a psychological perspective, in different ways, both address the structure and function of the socially constructed self and the dynamic interplay between social structure and individual social behaviour. Identity theory offers ideas about role identities and a commitment to these and what they may mean in a social category, while social identity theory suggests self-categorisation and alignment with a particular group will lead to internalisation of group norms and prototype behaviours to evaluate and reflect a view of self.

Scholars including Stets and Burke (2009) and Simon (2004) have sought to integrate these two identity perspectives arguing that to a great extent they are not inherently contradictory conceptualisations. Theorists from both traditions (and it is to be acknowledged these are wide-ranging and multi-faceted in themselves), accept that individuals will view themselves in terms of meanings and constructs that already exist in a structured society: Identity formation is theorised by how a person categorises themselves as a member of a group (social identity theory) or how they enact a role (identity theory). Simon (2004) makes the point that all self-aspects, are both cognitive and social in essence; whether construed in terms of individual, relational or collective identities, and what is largely missing from both identity theory and social identity theory, is consideration of the individual. Rooted in an essentialist perspective, Hitlin (2003) describes person identity as:

> A sense of 'self' built up over a period of time [... it] emphasises a sense of individual autonomy, rather than communal involvement. It is experienced by individuals as *core* or *unique* to themselves, in ways that group or role identities are not. (Hitlin, 2003 p. 118)

Person identity is inwardly constructed, seen by some as an under-analysed level of self in organisational theory, regarded as too idiosyncratic and out of vogue for useful analysis (Hitlin, 2003; Prentice, 2001). Categorisation of the self as a unique individual - differentiated from others by the act of pursuing their own goals and desires, is viewed in social identity terms as the lowest level of self-categorisation. For many social identity

theorists (Brewer & Caporeal, 2006; Hogg et al, 2003; Reicher et al, 2005), the pull of normative fit in social groups is seen to be strong enough to override person identity to prevent subjugation of the needs and desires of a group or category by an individual. Stets and Burke (2009) contend that this is a reductive application, maintaining that person identity should be considered more seriously as it penetrates both role and group identities. They argue for more vigorous and critical integration of person identity theory into dominant theoretical frameworks to challenge embedded concepts such as the process of depersonalisation that many social identity theorists (Eidelman & Silvia *2010*; Haslam et al., 2010; Hogg et al, 2003) advocate is needed for reaching salient in-group prototypicality. Equally, when identity theorists describe a need for self-verification (Swann, 2012; Thoits & Virshup, 1997) - where the self is seen and measured against identity standards for a particular role, then person identity should be valued as 'something in the soul' (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Here person identity is seen to act as an 'anchor' in rough waters (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000) when dominant forces and discourses in society are at work trying to determine what identity in particular domains should 'look like'.

In attempting to establish a general theory of self and identity formation, Stets and Burke (2000, 2009) seek to transcend the different epistemologies and methodological conventions that separate these perspectives. Is the group the basis for my identity? '*Who I am'* or is the basis my role, '*what I do'*? Stets and Burke maintain that these considerations are fundamentally anchored by the idiosyncratic characteristics already extant in our person identity. Here individuals are viewed as separable from social relations and the impact of macro-discourses and institutional forces by dint of their unitary, sovereign selves. There is a pervasive view that the study of identity has begun to move away from such dualistic perspectives (Alvesson 2010; Layder, 2006; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009) towards recognition that identity work is precarious and fluid in contemporary social and organisational life. This does not suggest a choice has to be made between complete rejection of individual constituents and sovereign self at one extreme - or acceptance that people are empty vessels or dupes, completely at the mercy of structural forces at the other, it is simply a reflection that: "*Individual readings of identity, need to be balanced with consideration for the impact of macro-discourses and institutions, on social actors to avoid*

marginalising either self-constructs of identity, or structural contexts" (Ybema et al., 2009, p.302).

Until relatively recently, empirical studies have tended to concentrate on either sociological or psychological based analyses, with relatively few considering a possible nexus between individual, collective and societal levels (Harrington, 2005; Hotho, 2008). The extent to which agency is privileged in identity construction continues to be a central theme in social science. It serves to delineate the continuum of perspectives from humanistic focus on the individual as meaning-maker with a fair amount of agency, to structural and discursive standpoints which tend to position structure and discourse as the dominant forces on identity formation. In advocating a duality which sought to connect elements from interpretivist and structural perspectives, theorists informed by the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) including Bourdieu (1977), Giddens, (1984), Archer (1995) and Layder (1997), began to articulate identity as a reflexive and processual endeavour by individual agents in the context of a reciprocal self-society dialectic; shaped by and through social action, and mediating structural and symbolic forces.

While Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory is utilised in many empirical identity studies (Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2011), both Layder (1997, 2006) and Archer (1995; 2003) while occupying similar intellectual space, believe Giddens tends to over-privilege a generic transformative power in individual agents and enabling structures, leading to potential for diluted analytical synthesis and ontological flatness. Conversely, acute structural perspectives (Hayward, 2000; Townley, 1993; Zembylas, 2005) can decentre individuals' influence on their identity construction to such an extent that they are entirely subordinate to a dominant discourse, determining what and how they should be; disciplining them to reproduce institutional practices from which ideal, scripted selves emerge (Alvesson, 2010).

Layder argues the development of his own Theory of Social Domains (1997) is a response to theories that, in his view, either polarise, or attempt to reductively synthesise, agency-structure concerns. He proposes a multi-dimensional model of four social domains which can account "more fully for the variegated nature of social reality" (Layder, p.273) than some of the more popular theories informing identity studies. In

seeking to examine the agency-structure dialectic, this perspective recognises particular features in each of four domains, but also a symbiotic relatedness across and between them; representing complex inter-dependent relationships between individuals, institutional structures, social and occupational practices and discourse. The domains of *Psychobiography* and *Situated Activity* largely consider subjective and inter-subjective activity, while structural forces can be investigated through the spheres of *Social Settings* and *Contextual Resources.* Importantly, the model does not have closed dimensions; it views the domains as intertwined through social relations of power, stretched over time and space, for "*they do not operate separately or autonomously*" (Layder, 2006, p.282). Within this analysis, Layder argues strongly for the utility of a psychobiographical domain which maps and acknowledges individual experiences, critical events, and trajectories through social and occupational life. In allowing for consideration of different affective impacts - depending on how individuals experience, respond to, and act in social relations, and to institutional practices and forces, there is recognition of emotional uniqueness in the individual's biography. While this may initially appear suggestive of an essentialist, coherent, unitary sense of self extant in person identity theory, Layder in fact makes a case for ontological insecurity. It is precisely because we experience and narrate our existences and social relationships with others differently - with our own configurations and responses forming a dynamic trajectory, that a 'fit' between individual and society is unstable; with threats to security and trust in social and occupational life rendering identity an endlessly unfinished project.

Taking Psychobiography seriously is compatible with the notion of identity as processual and struggle because it offers an analytic device for examining the identity work represented in individuals' narrative as they strive to construct an image of a solid self, independent and distinctive from others. These attempts at securing a centred, robust self, conflict with notions of the decentered self, always alienated from its own history, and never discrete; remaining constituted in, and through others (Lacan, 1966). While accepting that contemporary life is often contradictory, fragmented and unstable, and that affirmation of self - or indeed selves is intimately tied to others, and subject to being undermined by forces acting upon it, narrative around critical life events and career trajectories through Psychobiography can reveal identity construction work taking place where:

[T]he individual, backed up by or being subjected to various 'resources' sometimes can produce and sustain a self-image, neither independent of, nor totally victimized by these forces (Alvesson, p. 201, 2010).

Based on this understanding of an 'in-between' position, alignment – albeit temporal, of a positive self-image with social reality is, as Alvesson observes, in principle possible. Yet, accepting identity as in a continual process of becoming, the social and discursive contexts to which individuals relate themselves, still leaves identity a more open project than in the past: with some of the most concentrated identity work actually taking place in often fragmented and contradictory contexts (Sennett, 2006; Watson, 2008). In Layder's (1997) inclusion of the domain of Psychobiography, which allows for a unique emotional sphere – with individually held fears, anxieties and desires, he argues that an analytic space is created in his multi-dimensional model to take account of a variability in peoples' resources and capacity to create self-narratives in attempts to secure a positive self-image, or images in uncertain and often turbulent worlds.

Psychobiography is not treated as a fixed, static phenomenon. Its in-progress nature means that there is acceptance of ongoing endeavour and struggle, where questions of 'who am I?' and 'How should I be?' (Archer, 2003) involve complex, recursive and reflexive processes (Ybema, et al., 2009, p. 301) where, shaped by particular experiences, social interactions and the individual's responses to, and in them: "*actual as well as possible selves based on one's past history, or images about who one might become, could have been, would like to be, or fears becoming" (*Petriglieri & Stein, 2012 p.1221) can serve as points of orientation for identity work (Ibarra, 1999). In this analysis, fears, desires and anxieties - while emotionally unique in how individuals experience and internalise them, are in movement because they shape, and are shaped by, the effects of social and discursive forces. However, serious account should be taken of active storying of the self (McAdams, 1996) as individuals are not simply at the mercy of external forces:

> The significance of discourse, role and other 'external' forces targetting and moulding the human subject needs to be balanced with the relative inertia following from life history and capacity to reflexively and actively struggle to create a life project out of various sources and influences, including producing and editing integrative narratives over one's self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, p.1168).

In this conceptualisation, identity is understood as struggle, as individuals seek to construct a self-identity which may - at least fleetingly, mobilise a sense of coherence and a lessening of fragmentation and anguish often experienced in contemporary life.

This fragility in contemporary working life, where insecurity is coupled intimately to the concept of identity (Knights & Clarke 2014), dependent on the judgement and affirmation of others, played out under the discursive regimes of new-managerialist controls and disciplinary practices is increasingly becoming a focus for critical theorists (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Clarke, Knights & Jarvis, 2012; Colley & Guery, 2015; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). In the organisational arena: "*identities are multiple, precarious and as dependent on performance as any drama*" (Knights & Clarke, 2014 p. 336), and it is in the inter-subjective dimension of Layder's second domain - Situated Activity, when we are 'physically in one another's response presence' (Goffman, 1959), that these performances and dramas take place.

Goffman's notions of backstage and frontstage performance capture the idea that while an appearance may be being created during the encounter, there is more happening behind the scenes. For symbolic interactionists and phenomenologists, meaning is formed within the situation and between those present - backstage and frontstage, rather than by, or through, structural or social forces. Unlike Person Identity Theory or Social Identity Theory, Identity Theory (IT) draws on an understanding that roles are enacted to enable a mutually constitutive process of identity construction to take place. This involves validation and stabilisation of a socially constructed inter-personal contract (Gabarro, 1990) as individuals make their identity claim, accommodate each other and assess, revise and accept a situated identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Crises phases that challenge identity salience is allowed for as relationships and situations change: Identity is then renegotiated to form a newly accepted construct – an underlying principle is that individuals predominate in identity construction processes. Here Layder (2006) departs from early symbolic interactionists and later theorists (Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007; McCall, 2003; Sosik, Avolio & Jung, 2002) in his articulation of Situated Activity. While he accepts that these encounters produce internally generated shared meaning and behaviour for identity work, he argues it is also a domain infused with influences

from both personal dispositions carried into situations, and external forces, including cumulative cultural contexts and discourse.

The third domain of *Social Settings* provides the environment for *Situated Activity* to take place and is largely a dimension of structure. Organisations form an extremely important site of identity construction forming "local aggregations of reproduced social relations, positions and practices" (Layder, 2006 p. 280).

In seeking social and organisational identification, individuals are looking for 'belonging or oneness' with a larger human entity (Brickson, 2000). In organisational studies, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is most associated with explanations for how individuals may seek to define themselves by aligning with organisational attributes and values (Haslam et al., 2010; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003). They make efforts to embody the in-group prototype in a perceived privileged category. Identity is cognitively understood as being about group membership requiring depersonalisation; creating 'soldier-like' images of individuals in SIT influenced literature (Alvesson, 2010). High levels of compliance and willingness to subjugate personal uniqueness is needed to 'fit in' and to find identity harmony in work settings. The fit is seen to lead to ontological security; work identity has direction and is fairly centred and coherent.

The final domain, referred to as *Contextual Resources* represents the social environment we inhabit. This macro dimension relates to the material resources and exposure to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) we are lucky, or unlucky enough, to be born into. This realm is significant to Layder's (1997; 2006) idea of interconnected layers of social domains, because distribution of material resources and structural privilege are reproduced in particular groupings based on gender, class, ethnicity or status for example. Uneven distribution of material resources is seen in the socio-economic environment of social settings including schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces and are directly experienced and felt in collective and personal lives. So too is the impact of historically amassed cultural resources such as artefacts, language, knowledge and local sub-cultures. These help to establish societal values and how we are seen, and how we may view ourselves. They can continue long after individuals have gone; standing as accumulated social structural and system elements and routinised practice. There are clear influences from Marxist, structuralist and discursivist

perspectives in seeing powers largely created outside of individual meaning making. While we have no agency about what we may be born into, both Layder (1997) and Archer (2003) acknowledge the importance of individual biography while highlighting the mediating influences of situated activity, social settings and contextual resources in enabling and constraining individuals in either reproducing expected trajectories or behaviours, or resisting them. The degree to which constraints such as social and institutional norms, expectations and discourse is seen to act on individuals, is the point of departure for Layder and Archer from Bourdieu (1986) and Giddens (1991).

In terms of identity construction, Layder argues that individuals are not all endowed with equal capacity for transformative action and for negotiating 'successfully' through the terms of how society accepts and measures efforts to achieve improved material resources and extend cultural capital - for example through gaining qualifications and roles with status, so important to Identity Theory, or access into particular social groupings as conceived in Social Identity Theory. In depicting some of the structural forces at work, Layder (1997; 2006) is keen not to underplay the role of these in identity formation in a messy world. However, in seeking epistemological inclusiveness - which avoids compacting or conflating how social reality can be understood, he connects his domains: so elements of agency and system can be seen and examined, yet remain intertwined and deeply relational. The four social domains take account of what Alvesson (2010) has described as 'the in-between position' on identity. This recognises elements of particularly experienced biography and individual agency, and the role and power of structural, discursive and social forces: offering a framework for examining the agency-structure dialectic which informs and mediates identity construction as: "An *ongoing persuasive endeavour that traverses time and space, across macro and micro messages, institutions and actors*" (Ashcraft, 2007 p.15).

Knights and Clarke (2014) observe that organisations are one of the most important sites of identity construction. When individuals are seeking to make sense of their occupational lives, they are often navigating unstable, frequently confusing contexts (Gioia et al., 2000), where possible or actual selves based on: "*Who one might become, could have been, would like to be, or fears becoming … [all] serve as points of orientation for identity work*" (Petriglieri & Stein 2012, p.1220). The openness and precariousness of identity in contemporary society is compounded for many through

contested notions of what may be meant and understood by profession and professionalism.

3.3 Contested Notions of 'Professional' and the Emergence of Professionalism

There are many more occupations defined today as professions than the original 'classical three' of divinity, medicine and law. Derived from the Latin *professio*, the Old French *profiteri* 'to declare publicly an occupation one professes to be skilled in' (Oxford English Dictionary) may offer a literal explanation, but what is actually meant and understood by profession is contested. So too are entwined notions of *professionalism*, described in the OED as the 'competence or skill expected of a professional' and 'the practising of an activity by a professional'.

In the mid to late 20th Century, sociological debates were largely characterised by either trait perspectives which sought to identify professional work as distinctive, with its own knowledge, expertise and attributes, unmediated by the state (Palvalko, 1971; Millerson, 1964; Wilensky, 1964), or neo-Weberian informed theories of social control and social closure, where creation of 'market shelter' was seen to privilege and legitimise particular occupational monopoly to the exclusion of others (Abbott, 1995; McDonald, 1999, 1995; Reed, 1996; Woods, 1989). Writers associated with the Chicago school, particularly Larson (1977) and Friedson (1994) extended concepts of market control by arguing that invested individuals collectively mobilised to create and control their professional project, and protect the jurisdiction of expert skills and knowledge. Illich's (1975) critique of wealth and power in medicine added to ideas of social closure.

Both perspectives were concerned with what may be seen to form the basis for professional privilege. Trait theorists produced typologies of what was considered necessary to define a profession - and therefore define the character of a professional in the first place. This included a person with specialist training and educational qualifications, skill practised within a theoretical-knowledge base, a robust system that tested the competence of members, and organisation and adherence to a professional code of conduct. Later trait definitions were extended to include monopoly powers over the application of a specialist body of knowledge, control over the profession's own

qualifications and entry processes, and an increased emphasis on the value-base of the professional service; promoting the idea of altruistic intent to serve client and community needs, rather than financial gain (Sims et al., 1993).

Writers including Apple (1983), Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Ozga (1998), brought a neo-marxist analysis of professionalism and professional status that was in direct tension with the trait theory approach. Ozga made clear distinctions in his position that far from being free from the state, professionalisation was a form of control, subject to direct and indirect rule. As a central voice of the power-school approach Johnson (1972), had questioned the ideal type of professional and contended that trait theory lacked a substantial or consistent theoretical basis with a tendency towards the descriptive. Prey to: *"accepting the professions own definition of themselves"* (Johnson, 1972, p.25). He was also critical of functionalist-influenced macro perspectives on professions and concepts of professionalism, deeming Parsons (1954) view that professions are a principal cornerstone for the well-being of society as flawed due to its tendency to mask the nature of power differentials between so-called professionals and their client groups. In locating professions and professionalism as concepts that can be constructed and re-constructed, this critique sought to emphasise the social factors relating to power and control amongst professional groups themselves.

Sociologists of the professions had no hope of unravelling the definitional Gordian knot "what is a profession?" before the advent of the power-conflict critique according to Burns (2007), because:

> It seemed virtually impossible to break with the professions are good/beneficial rhetoric which built the normative claim of professions themselves into most core definitions of professions and professionalism. (Burns, 2007, P.94)

Stronach et al. (2002) observe that the literature is still dominated by constructs of 'the professional' as an emblematic figure with: *"An over-investment in expressions of the professional as an agent of good"* (Stronach et al., 2002 p.110). They argue that such perpetuation is paradoxically a reductionist action as it leads to an indefensible unitary construct of a professional that simply does not exist. In searches for identity, this can fuel a constant feeling of anxiety (Baxter, 2011; Kirk & Wall, 2010; Knights & Clarke, 2014) for those trying to measure up to the ideal, or believing that a sense of security

will settle once they have 'found' that core work self. Through empirical investigation, Stronach et al. developed an Uncertain Theory of Contemporary Professionalism. This acknowledges a plurality of roles and uncertain terrain for individuals in contemporary organisational contexts: which can lead to fragmented, conflicted and insecure identity formation, rather than the singular and coherent sense of professional identity often portrayed in more essentialist perspectives (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000; Thomas & Linstead, 2002).

By the time of the study of nurses and teachers by Stronach et al. at the beginning of the 21st Century, a number of influential commentators including Fournier (1999), Evetts (1997) and Schon (1983) had already been theorising the need to understand a less restricted application of the term professional in a growing knowledge-information age and expanding public sector, with neo-liberal organising principles. "*Terminology such as 'true profession' should be viewed as flawed and suspect, because the definition of profession is relative to time and space*" (Kearny & Sinha, 1988 p. 572).

In her sociological analysis of professionalism, Evetts (2003) argues that a shift of focus has happened from a preoccupation with trying to define *profession,* to an emphasis on the appeal of the concept of *professionalism* as a vehicle for trying to understand occupational and organisational change in the modern world. Evetts suggests that the two dominant contrasting sociological interpretations of professionalism as "*normative value system*" and as "*ideology of occupational powers*" of the 1990s, have come to be fused into a new, third interpretation that contains elements of both; with the balance of these played out differently, depending on the occupational groups and their organisational context.

> The discourse of professionalism has entered the managerial literature … Even occupational regulation and control (both internal and external forms) are now explained and justified as means to improve professionalism in work. The concept of professionalism has an appeal to and for practitioners, employees and managers in the development and maintenance of work identities, career decisions and senses of self (Evetts, 2012, p.4).

The context of integrated working in children's services in England is a most profitable arena to analyse Evetts' (2003) notion of the '*appeal of professionalism*' and its increased use in all work contexts. The concept draws on McClelland's (1990) ideas

about 'professionalisation from within' and 'professionalisation from above', with the former embodying the specialist power-knowledge of the occupational group to create and defend occupational control, and the latter referring to influences on the group from external forces, including organisational and institutional ideology. The immediate difference is in the regard given to professionalism as a positive contribution towards a normative social order when seen as being based on an occupational value system. The rather more negative concept of professionalism as ideology is concerned with dominant authority and influence at organisational and institutional levels to control professional workers.

In an organisational context such as children's services comprising what Noordegraaf (2007) rather disparagingly labels 'new professionals' including social workers, teachers, health practitioners and youth workers, and 'para or quasi professionals' such as family support and play workers, he argues a paradox is at work. In attempts by the state and policy makers, and the new professionals/para-professionals themselves to legitimise and protect claims of strong professionalism, they are adopting similar mechanisms and practices - such as member associations, and special training, which long-established, status professions such as law and medicine are simultaneously seeing diminished (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 763).

While contemporary public service is largely predicated on workers drawn in and controlled by an ideological appeal to professionalism (Evetts, 2012; Noordegraaf, 2007) exercised as part of the neo-liberal discourse of choice and agency (Sommerlad, 2012), the growth of knowledge working (Drucker, 1959) has undoubtedly expanded opportunities - and the labour market itself, with potential for multiple career choices and sites for professional identity construction. Within this, individuals and collectives are building communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) and ecologies of practice (Stronach et al., 2002), which open up new understandings of accumulated 'craft knowledge' (Higgs & Titchen, 1995), articulated through distinct professional discourses seen to facilitate belongingness and ontological security. The appeal of professionalism as ideology for practitioners may be in its power for them to feel they 'own' an area of expertise and specialist knowledge which calls on them to use some degree of discretion and judgement in their practice. Yet, as Sennett (2006) argues the flexibility and uncertainty generated by globalisation has resulted in a world of work that for most

people is highly unstable and ambiguous. It is in this context that the precariousness and fragility of professional identity is lived out in modern-day occupational realities (Alvesson, 2010; Knights & Clarke, 2014; Pettica-Harris & McKenna, 2013).

3.4 The Hybrid-Leader

At the intersection of these contemporary organisational domains in the public sector, is the professional public manager - for Noordegraaf (2007), the epitome of a modern-day hybridised professional. Often created through practitioner-manager roles in areas such as nursing, social work, policing, youth work, and teaching, or in growth areas like early years, they may still be involved in occupational practice in their field, as well as managing service teams. Increasingly, leader-manager roles such as Director of Children's Services (DCS) are created to 'control expertise' (Evetts, 2006) with the post-holder having come through a single occupational route and then appointed to manage practitioners from a range of different disciplines they may be unfamiliar with (Booker, 2012).

Such roles demand the hybrid manager - who is already straddling their original occupational profession and that of the leader-manager they have become, to balance this with operating in a hybridised organisational context (Gronn, 2008). Leading the work of others from different occupational traditions and models of practice is further complicated by the fact this may involve responsibilities for practitioners from other agencies in an increasingly indistinct, and gradually more 'boundaryless' public sector domain (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Williams, 2012). As Farell & Morris (2003, p.775) note: "*They have to begin to learn how to behave in neo-bureaucratic settings with hybrid organisational forms*" which accepts uncertainty and contradiction as the new reality.

3.5 Connecting Identity and Emotions

In trying to make sense of "what *it is to become professional in modern times*" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.775) there is a shared acknowledgment that contemporary organisational contexts are not particularly stable, consistent or reassuring environments for identity security (Alvesson, 2010; Collinson, 2003; Evetts, 2012; Sennet, 2006; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). This has an emotional impact on human

beings in their work lives, not least on leaders, who: "*perform unseen yet significant emotion work as part of their role*" (Clarke et al., 2007, p.92). The second part of this chapter briefly examines some key theoretical concepts and research relating to the emotion work of leaders.

Part Two: Emotion Work, Identity and (In)Security

3.6 Identity and the Emotional Practice of Leadership

In what has been described as an "*insatiable quest*" for studying leadership (Jackson & Parry, 2011, p.8), which has produced a very substantial body of research and literature, there is growing interest for considering emotions in leadership (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Ashkanasy & Jordan, 2008; Clarke et al., 2009; Crawford, 2007, Gallos, 2012; Iszatt-White, 2009). However, the study of the role of emotions in leader identity has been rather neglected with only few studies directly considering this (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012; Clarke et al., 2007; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). In research and conceptual studies of children's services leadership, literature touches on emotional demands on senior leaders (Booker, 2012; Daniels & Edwards, 2012; Frost, 2009a, 2014; Purcell et al., 20012; Hulme et al., 2014) but is not specifically focused on the role and place of emotions in leader identity work.

Iszatt-White (2009, 2012) has led the field, alongside the work of Ashkanasy and colleagues (2002, 2008, 2011) in conceptualising new ways of understanding emotional labour in contemporary organisations. This seeks to respond to a more complex, fluid, heterogeneous environment and social conditions to that originally conceived in Hochschild's (1983) seminal work on the emotional labour of service workers. Hochschild's notions of 'surface acting' - where fake emotions are played out in observable (and socially acceptable) bodily displays such as a smile, and 'deep acting', where individuals work to invoke the emotions they need, or want to display, has been augmented by the work of Bolton (2005) who describes a need in the modern organisation for skilled emotion workers. However, she is not in favour of this concept being extended to apply to leaders as emotional labourers; feeling it moves too far away from the spirit of Hochschild's (1983) original theorisation. Iszatt-White (2012) makes the case that leaders do labour emotionally, in fact she argues they are "*required to produce a more complex and varied species of emotional labour*" (Iszatt-White, 2009,

p.448) than that envisaged in traditionally influenced emotional labour perspectives. Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) also take the view that "*leadership is intrinsically an emotional process*" (p. 615), reflecting the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of performing leadership.

Growing conceptualisation of emotional labour in contemporary organisations led to the development of a third form of such labour in action, described by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) as 'spontaneous and genuine' emotional labour. Their view, supported by empirical research and further studies (Diefendorff, Croyle & Gosserand, 2005; Glomb & Tews, 2004; Jordan, Soutar, & Kiffin-Petersen 2008) is that in "*the act of displaying the appropriate emotion*" - the basic definition of emotional labour, individuals may find themselves moving beyond surface and deep acting when they encounter: "*opportunities to express one's fidelity to a valued identity … [enabling] them to have an identity enhancing experience" (*Humphrey et al, 2015, p.753). Witnessed particularly in moments when there was an alignment with how an individual held their self-view, work purpose and values base, and what they were enacting at the time. In these moments there is no need to become 'other', or removed from 'who they really are' in order to display emotions not truly felt.

While other perspectives would not necessarily deny emotionally unique spontaneous and genuine emotional labour taking place, it is important to maintain sight of the wider domains interacting and coalescing to form and reform the environment of working lives. The roles of discourses, cultural and social forces and institutional structures in the workplace, and the socially embedded nature of sensemaking (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014; Weick,1995) by individuals, binds organisational contexts and professional identity construction intimately together. Organisations provide fertile ground for affective events and experiences where Steigenberger (2015) suggests that emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety and hope are an input, as well as an outcome of, sensemaking processes with considerable emotion work taking place by leaders to manage their own well-being and presenting of self to the outer world. This is a different process to emotional labour enacted to satisfy demands on a leader to "*act as the voice and face of the organisation*" (Watson, 2008, p.122). It focuses on felt emotions (Domagalski & Steelman, 2005; Fineman, 2000; Gill, 2015) and managing feelings

awakened in the 'doing' of the job, including emotional responses to organisational events and social interactions

While sensemaking is directed towards DCSs own emotional management in relation to identity work, sensegiving (Steigenberger, 2015, p.435), is seen as part of the leader's outward task; helping others make sense of their experiences and work lives. As Iszatt-White (2012) argues, leadership practice is a relational activity which naturally involves emotions, often playing a critical role in enabling individuals and teams to feel reassured, motivated and valued. It is in this context that she argues for emotional labour and emotional displays to be seen as "*the accomplishment of effective leadership work*" (Iszatt-White, 2009, p.450). The focus here is very much on leaders accomplishing some small, fleeting moments of leader-identity salience, by valuing the practice of those they lead as core to their own practice as leaders. Yet, even leaders positively striving to enact and accomplish valuing practices, have to face being "*toxic emotion handlers",* responsible for creating a holding environment which buffers uncertainty and frustration for others (Gallos, 2012, p.44). Gallos describes how leaders labour to create a 'holding environment' where they act as buffers for others in the organisation; trying to alleviate uncertainty, taking the brunt of frustration and empathising with people's emotional needs and work stresses (p.359). All the while they are often trying to present the face of the 'authentic leader' (Luthans & Avolio, 2003) when paradoxically, they themselves may be struggling to suppress their true feelings in order to be seen as good leaders (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014).

Authenticity with its many subjective interpretations and different cultural meanings remains contested. The question of who defines whether a leader is acting authentically, and against what measures, is problematic (Iszatt-White, 2012; Ladkin & Spiller, 2013 p.2), compounded by a tendency in much of the authentic leader literature to lionise images of a humble, purely-intentioned, always striving to be 'true to self' leader (Wilson, 2013). This is also extant in much of the leadership discourse and normative development programmes discussed in chapter two of this study, where normative professional values also play their part in reinforcing an idealised authentic professional public leader that can keep people "*addicted to the pursuit of a solid sense of self, however illusive …*" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.352).

In a case study of a senior leader-manager's identity work in a multi-national company, Sveningsson & Alvesson, (2003) considered the interactions between organisational discourses, expectations around the role, and the self-authored narrative of self as leader. So, identity is 'struggle' because:

> We will always strive for comfort, meaning and integration and some correspondence between a self-definition and work situation. Discourses, roles and narrative self-identity are all involved – they fuel and constrain identity work. (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1188)

Calling for more studies taking a processual approach to investigating identity and identity construction, they conclude that as self-reflexive beings we are always in a process of 'becoming', rather than ever being fully 'finished'.

3.7   My Position on Identity Theories and Theories of Emotion

In this chapter, I have explored and reviewed some of the established theories on identity, including Social Identity Theory, Identity Theory and Person Identity, along with more current understandings of identity construction, enactment and reconstruction in contemporary working life. Concepts related to emotional experiences and practices in identity work, particularly for leaders, have also formed an important focus in further understanding some key themes and issues evident in, and informing, research and literature on emotion work.   Examining contested notions of what is meant and understood by professional, hybrid-professional and professionalism has helped to illuminate the different ways in which leader-identity constructs may be seen to be shaped and re-shaped. In wanting to do more than just tell the story from my narrative research, I am interested in issues of power and control. For me, the constructed quality of these concepts emphasise social factors relating to power and control amongst professional groups themselves, and also in the wider leadership literature, policy discourse and notions of an appeal to professionalism in contemporary working life (Evetts, 2003). It is apparent that the field of identity studies, including concomitant theories of emotion, is complex, wide-ranging and difficult to categorise in any easy terms.

I have articulated how two related dimensions tend to define differences in epistemological and methodological orientation and perspectives seen in identities literature. First, the extent to which identity is: "*something enduring and central to each of us, or temporary, malleable and context-sensitive*" (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012, P.131). As discussed, differences here are often depicted at the extremes as traditional essentialist views of a robust, anchored self (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000; Sims, 2003), versus post-modern conceptualisations of the self and identity as precarious and in constant flux (Elliott & du Gay, 2009; Gergen, 2000). The second dimension represents one of the prevailing theatres of social theory: the agency-structure question. The extent to which personal agency is privileged in seeking to understand constructs of self and identity, and how we account for influences of structure and social forces on identity formation.

Overall, I work with an understanding that the complexity and uncertainties of modern life make identity a more 'open project' than in the past (Alvesson, 2010; Evans & Lines, 2014; Watson, 2008). Social and organisational contexts have become less stable, more indistinct and often bewildering in a neo-liberal knowledge economy; where public services leaders are faced with constant policy change, and are increasingly expected to lead others and 'boundary-span' across professional and organisational boundaries. Therefore I completely agree that in any consideration of the agency-structure dialectic, it is important to "set *processes of individual identity work firmly in the structural or sociological contexts in which they occur*" (Watson, 2008, p.122). However, while the contexts of contemporary working life are often ambiguous and fragmented, this does not mean acceptance of a completely decentred self - as Alvesson (2010) observes, we do not have to choose between this idea at one extreme, versus a fully sovereign self at the other. Informed by the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) which sought to connect elements from early interpretivist and structural perspectives, Bourdieu (1977), Giddens, (1984) and Layder (1997) amongst others, have articulated identity as a reflexive and processual endeavour by individual agents in the context of a reciprocal self-society dialectic; shaped by and through social action, and mediating structural and symbolic forces. I follow this theoretical stance because it takes seriously the impact of institutional power, social structures, culture and discourse on ongoing identity construction, while also accounting for the efforts and variable capacity of individuals to build coherent identity scripts as part of the conscious struggle to secure some meaning

and ontological security. Such theories inform my philosophy and view of social reality, which is described by Alvesson (2010) as an 'in-between' position.

I do not believe that identity is a monolithic concept which is fixed or static, or becomes 'whole' at any point. Rather it is a dynamic process of 'becoming' where individuals are "*engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence*" (Alvesson, 2010, p.201). While fully accepting that individuals have to be understood in their social and discursive contexts – that they are not autonomous, unitary beings, my approach clearly reflects a philosophical commitment to the 'in-between' position in that I am influenced by Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) appeal to take seriously the value of life history in a fragmented and destabilising world. I am particularly in agreement with their insight that there is variable capacity in how people may engage reflexively and actively in an ongoing struggle to produce and revise integrating narratives over themselves (McAdams, 1996). This leads me to draw on Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains to aid the study's empirical investigation into how senior children's services leaders seek to make sense of their professional identity and how this identity – or indeed identities, sometimes representing contradictory positions (Clarke et al., 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), may be constructed, reconstructed and enacted in the self-society dialectic. He also accounts for ideas of destabilising forces, including discursive influences, while arguing for the equally important place of biography which can illuminate individuals' emotional differences and a variation in capacity to achieve some moments of coherence in pursuit of a sense of identity.

Layder's multi-dimensional model can be harnessed effectively in this study, not as an imposition of theory, but as an analytic device in the way it recognises complex inter-dependent relationships between individuals, institutional structures, social and occupational practices and discourse discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter, and the forthcoming chapter on Methodology. While the domains help to investigate particular agency-structure features and dynamics, they are viewed as intertwined through social relations of power, stretched over time and space, for "*they do not operate separately or autonomously*" (Layder, 2006, p.282). Within this analysis, I agree with Layder's justification for the utility of the psychobiographical domain which maps and acknowledges individual experiences, critical events, and trajectories through social

and occupational life. In allowing for consideration of different affective impacts - depending on how individuals experience, respond to, and act in social relations, and to institutional practices and forces, there is recognition of emotional uniqueness in people's biographies. This changes in their ongoing, dynamic life story, but it is still held and understood in a different emotional way for each individual. Such reflexivity is one of the recurrent central principles of Critical Management Studies (Stokes, 2011).

Taking Psychobiography seriously is compatible with the stance taken throughout my study, influenced by theorists from critical management studies (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992; Essers, 2009; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Stokes; 2011; Svenningson, 2003). Here identity is understood as processual; an ongoing struggle in pursuit of a coherent sense of self, in contexts that are often contradictory and messy, but where a positive self view - even if fleetingly, may be attained through active identity work and sensemaking (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014: Steigenberger, 2015; Weick, 1995). Seen to be mobilised around efforts at alignment or resistance based on an 'authentic sense of self' (acknowledged in Chapter Two as being problematic in itself, but nonetheless a focus for mobilising identity work), I am interested in how participants say they manage feelings awakened in the 'doing' of the job, and like Steigenberger (2015), believe emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety and hope are an input, as well as an outcome of, sensemaking processes.

Of course, this all conflicts with notions of the decentered self, always alienated from its own history, and never discrete; remaining constituted in, and through others (Lacan, 1966). While accepting that affirmation of self - or indeed selves is closely tied to others, and subject to being undermined by forces acting upon it, I believe that empirical narrative around critical life events and career trajectories through utilising the domain of Psychobiography (Layder, 1997) can serve to reveal participants' representation of their leader identity construction work taking place, where they: " …[*S]ometimes can produce and sustain a self-image, neither independent of, nor totally victimized by these forces*" (Alvesson, 2010, p.201). Utilising Layder's theoretical model - starting first with Psychobiography, is intended to lay an important foundation in the study for later interrogation of the empirical data in a way that accounts for the role and place of both discourse and other forces, and of narrative identity and internal sensemaking

processes. The latter, represented in life and career stories of Psychobiographies can offer insights into variable integrative capacities as individuals strive to construct and enact positive identity-identities in the struggle for at least a temporal sense of coherence as leaders in uncertain, difficult and often turbulent worlds.

This section has clearly identified my ontology and how particular theoretical perspectives and frameworks reflect and inform my epistemological position. In turn this has influenced my narrative research approach, with the study designed and conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, but particularly grounded in principles of critical interpretivism. I want to reach beyond telling the story. I want to interrogate insights into leader identity work and struggle and the processual nature of identity construction, reconstruction and enactment in its social and discursive contexts.

3.8 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter was structured in two separate, but interrelated parts. The first, larger section critically reviewed pertinent theories of identity and leader-identity construction in the context of contested notions of professions and professionalism. The second, shorter section involved examining contemporary concepts around emotion work, security and the 'emotional practice' of leadership (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Clarke et al., 2013; Humphrey et al., 2008; Iszatt-White, 2013), in seeking to understand how identity as a leader may be experienced, constructed and enacted. This study is particularly concerned with identity, so a more extensive literature review of identity theories was privileged. However, because emotions are fundamental to our experience of the workplace and professional self (Elfenbein, 2007), it was important to include some context and critique of current scholarship on emotion as it relates to leader-identity work.

The next chapter more fully considers the epistemological philosophy underpinning the study and discusses research questions, methodology, choice of research participants, method and ethical dilemmas, amongst other important research concepts and concerns.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

4.1 Context and Chapter Structure

This chapter is concerned with the *why*, *what* and *how* of the study. It qualifies the purpose and value of conducting the research and reiterates the research questions and aims. The choice of Adaptive Theory (Layder, 1998) as methodology is articulated to show that not only does the study aim to contribute new insights from DCSs' narratives on their identity work and leader-identity constructs and enactment, it also seeks to undertake critical qualitative work by connecting empirical interpretation and analysis to the social and discursive contexts in which these constructs are formed and reformed. This has potential to both reveal and disrupt some of the assumptions and accepted ideology in policy, organisational practices and influences from wider society, following the philosophy of critical management studies (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Knights & Wilmott, 1999; Thomas, 1993) which guide the approach and design of this narrative research study within a paradigm of critical interpretivism.

My research strategy and fieldwork processes are discussed as I justify the choice of extended in-depth interviews as the data gathering method, explain my sample selection and profile, and detail some initial challenges around access. A number of important research concepts and ethical dilemmas germane to my study, including confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, researcher bias, validity and emotions are also shared and examined as I outline the conduct of my research.

I conclude the chapter with my selected framework for data analysis 'Template Analysis' (King, 2004) and qualify the suitability of this analytical approach for the study.

4.2 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how DCSs - as the most senior leaders of children's services in each local authority in England, make sense of, and enact their professional identity in this unique role, with particular consideration of agency-structure dynamics and influences. There is limited research into the experiences and perceptions of those in the role in any context. In a wide-ranging review of the literature

reflected in Chapter Two of this study, much of the empirical research to date has largely focused on trying to understand and define what leadership skills and qualities are needed to operate effectively in the multi-faceted, constantly changing and emotionally demanding environments of children's services (Ghate et al., 2013; National College & Deloitte; Purcell, 2009; Purcell et al., 2012; Welbourn, 2015). Others have concentrated on the difficulties faced by DCSs as a result of the shifting political and economic environment (Booker, 2012; Frost 2014; Hulme et al., 2014). There has also been interest in the causes and effects of a 'politics of outrage' unleashed against DCSs by the media, politicians and public (Frost, 2011c; Frost, 2013; Jones, 2012; Parton, 2014a; Warner, 2015).

All have contributions to make to understanding how DCSs experience, construct, enact and revise their identities at work, but none examine DCS professional identity as a topic in its own right (Knights & Clarke, 2014). This study adds new understandings to the identities work and struggles of DCSs as hybrid professional public leaders (Noordegraaf, 2007) through a small-scale, in-depth, qualitative research investigation.

Two questions underpinned the study:

1. How do Directors of Children's Services seek to make sense of their professional identity in this unique role?

2. How is identity constructed, reconstructed, and enacted as a professional public leader in the context of agency-structure dynamics?

To help order and organise the research process, three aims were established:

I.   Critically analyse relevant literature relating to the creation, evolution and experiences of this high-profile public sector leadership role, and examine broader literature and research concerned with identities work, emotion work and notions of professionalism.

II. Capture the perceptions and interpretations of DCSs [from a government defined regional area of local authorities] in relation to their experiences in the role, and how they construct, reconstruct and enact their identity as a professional public leader.

III. Examine the findings in the context of agency-structure concerns and dynamics to add new critical understandings of leader identity work to the field and to suggest propositions for further investigation.

In choosing an area of interest or importance for investigation we are guided by our ontology, our values, and our epistemological assumptions. These not only influence what we research in the social sciences, but also inform the way in which we set about it, what methods are used and how we handle, use and act as custodians of the data generated. My epistemology – my stance on understanding "*How we know what we know*" (Crotty, 2003, p.3), is an important dimension of the research activity.

4.3 Epistemology – The Starting Point

Defining and exploring the nature of human knowledge and its origins and limitations, stems from philosophical '*wonder and puzzlement*' (Aristotle, 384-322) about the world we live in and how we come to know it. An epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining this, and my ontology – the nature of "*how I understand being"* in the world (Somekh & Lewin, 201, p.2), is integral to how I perceive, and then set out to investigate social reality. This is important because it informs the adoption of research strategies and methods that either takes a positivist path predicated on the objective empiricism of the natural sciences, an interpretivist approach - concerned with understanding the subjective meaning and interpretation of social action and reflexive human beings, or constructionism which accounts for meaning making as socially constructed and in constant flux. There are of course, extremes, middle-positions and blurring at - and across the boundaries of all these positions through research traditions and communities.

As discussed in the Literature Chapter on theories of identity, Alvesson (2010) observes that within studies and the broader theoretical literature, two related dimensions tend to define differences in epistemological and methodological orientation and perspectives. First, the extent to which identity is: "*something enduring and central to each of us, or temporary, malleable and context-sensitive*" (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012, P.131). Differences are often depicted as traditional essentialist views of a robust, anchored self, versus post-modern conceptualisations of self and identity as precarious and in constant flux. The second represents the underlying key dimension of social theory: the agency-structure question. The extent to which personal agency is privileged in seeking to understand constructs of self and identity, compared to how much we account for influences of structure and social forces. These different starting points for articulating

the nature of relationships between the individual and society have implications for how identity is seen to be present, or formed and reformed, in the agency-structure nexus; refracting what can be seen as a 'permanent dialectic' between the self and social structure (Ybema, et al., 2009, p. 300). In rejecting at one extreme, the notion of individuals as fully autonomous, unitary beings - separable from social structures and relations, and able to locate a hermetically-sealed single essential self, and at the other extreme, a much more open, exceedingly precarious understanding of human beings almost entirely at the mercy of external forces, I subscribe to what Alvesson (2010, p.194) describes as the 'in- between view'. My methodological approach is shaped by the belief that human beings carry some emotional uniqueness which affects variability in our integrative capacities and resources in search of a coherent self - even as we are fully embedded in - and not independent from, the social and structural contexts of our lived experiences, and this is well-served by Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains in framing a critical approach and design for my interpretive research.

Layder represents the four 'social domains' of Psychobiography, Situated Activity, Social Settings, and Contextual Resources vertically as 'layers of social reality' and then horizontally to signal awareness that social processes and human activities are not fixed. They are dynamic and flow across time and space dimensions; with the four domains unified and linked through relations of social power. He appears to draw on Laing's (1969) phenomenological studies of mental illness and concepts of ontological security to begin building the first of his social domains, Psychobiography. This domain privileges an interpretation of selfhood: of individuals shaped by their experiences and transformations in identity. Crossing into psychology disciplines, it seeks to map unique experiences from birth and how they may influence individual social interactions. He acknowledges the rich insights offered by the focus on individual experience through phenomenological methodology and its counter-balance to theories which may be overly- deterministic. Yet he believes that such an approach on its own lacks analytical process, at the expense of an awareness of social forces, discourses, institutions and their structures of power.

Social interactions form the space for the second domain, Situated Activity. Influenced by Goffman's (1967; 1983) notion of "*the arrivals and departures of people involved in an encounter*". A time and space when they are 'physically in one another's response

presence'. This domain can represent a fleeting encounter of two people, or a planned interaction of several, but they are always episodic (sometimes repeated over time). From arrival point, time is counting down until the business is complete and those involved move on to something else. The manner in which Layder sees this as an arena for meaning-making is again something akin to phenomenological perspectives. Both *Psychobiography* and *Situated Activity* can be broadly (but by no means exclusively) located as aspects of agency.

Social Settings as the third domain, provides the environment for Situated Activity to take place and is a dimension of structure. Social activities, interactions and routinised practice take place in a whole range of settings, with each having their own organisational form, culture and language(s) built up over time. They embody and reproduce social relations, hierarchies, position-status and ways of doing that influence the socially and organisationally accepted behaviour of individuals in the present. The final domain defined as *Contextual Resources* relates to the material and cultural capital we are lucky, or unlucky enough, to be born into. While we have no agency about that initial encounter with our new world, this structure domain is significant to Layder's (1997) idea of interconnected layers of social domains, because distribution of material resources and structural privilege are reproduced in particular groupings.

Adopting the Theory of Social Domains as an analytic and sensitising device for examining and interpreting the field, and guiding my research strategy and design, offered me a productive theoretical framework to deal critically with questions of identity within the structure-agency nexus. I also share Layder's view – inspired by C. Wright Mills' (1959) extension of Kantian philosophy in 'The Sociological Imagination' - that unless empirical research engages with essential theoretical issues, and a connection made by theory to practical research to enrich ontological understandings, then "*both general social theory and social research are impoverished*" (Layder, 2006, p.292). One should not be privileged higher status than the other, and certainly the tendency to impose general theories on research findings as 'a total system of explanation' needs to be resisted. It is in this context that Layder (1998) outlines his complementary methodology of Adaptive Theory.

4.4 The Value of Adaptive Theory as Methodology

Adaptive Theory fits with my epistemological position, that social research should be concerned with revealing and interrogating existing assumptions and certainties (Knights & Wilmott, 1999) through empirical interpretation, including aspects of social reality produced by the active 'doings' of those involved. This section justifies my application of Adaptive Theory methodology and highlights the relevance of particular elements for my research purpose.

As a research methodology, Adaptive Theory involves investigating agency-structure issues, informed by the theoretical perspective of the Theory of Social Domains. It also seeks to generate theory from the analysis of data; measuring and testing established theoretical assumptions and axioms against empirical evidence to provide new insights, or disrupt the assumptions that underpin how knowledge and organisational practices are understood and discursively reinforced. This process helps to: "*avoid conflating or compacting elements of agency and structure into a one-dimensional view of social reality*" (Layder, 2006, p. 293). The term 'adaptive' is used to imply how theory may adapt to, and be shaped by, empirical evidence if it is considered from a critical perspective, just as the data itself is filtered through relatable existing theories. The place of 'theory' in relation to qualitative enquiry is a thorny one; there are many understandings of what constitutes theory and the plurality of forms it may take, from systems of observable explanations or propositions, background literature, epistemological beliefs, and craft knowledge (Higgs & Titchen, 1995), to abstract reflection and conceptualization (Somekh & Lewin, 2011;Thomas & James, 2006).

While the nature and form of theory remains contested (Abend, 2008; Cicourel, 1979; Eagleton, 2003; Fine, 2001), its relationship with research presents two main points of divergence. These determine whether data is collected to *test*, or to *build* theories. In relation to testing theory, researchers will adopt a *deductive theory* approach; setting out a hypothesis based on what is already known about the domain under investigation. An *inductive theory* approach gathers data as a process of qualitative discovery, to provide a basis for exploration or explanation and then seeks to draw inferences from the findings to generate and build theory. Adaptive Theory (Layder, 1998), falls somewhere between deductive theory-testing and inductive-theory generating

approaches, with similar intentions towards the generation of theory utilising empirical findings as Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Yet, Grounded Theory has limitations in that it prevents ontological pluralism because the approach only focuses on one social domain: situated activity. The other constraint is the insistence of the grounded theory approach that emergent theory must be grounded in the data of ongoing research, rendering critical application to more general theories and theorising invalid.

Layder (1998, 2006) frequently returns to his frustration that too much social research is inward looking, seeking to slot data into preconceived concepts, and not at the frontiers of methodological innovation. A criticism he levels at phenomenology as methodology, is that although rich in sharing the subjective and intersubjective human essence of individual experience, feelings and perceptions of the social world, it largely ignores organisational and institutional structures and power differentials in society. Where agency and structure is actually considered, the tendency to see them as constitutive; 'two sides of the same coin', prevents analysis of the critical dynamics between them. He is particularly scathing of phenomenological writers who assert their position as one that resolves the agency-structure–macro-micro issue or transcend it in a 'happy cloud' of duality. Archer (2003) also takes issue with this loss of distinctiveness, which may be seen as a reluctance, or epistemological stubbornness against theorising about emergent inter-dependent relationships in and across the macro and micro domains.

Having initially thought to adopt phenomenological sociology (Schutz, 1970) as a methodological framework, my review of the literature on agency-structure issues and on social theory, led me to reconsider my approach. I found resonance in Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains, with its clear linkages between the micro and macro domains, and his conceptualisation of Adaptive Theory which allowed methodological flexibility in its deductive theory-testing and inductive-theory generating range. I realised I wanted to do more than simply 'tell the story' - of what I fully expected to be the rich, subjective and intersubjective lived experiences of DCSs identity. I did not want to just leave it 'there' - I was interested in theorising the influences and impact of structural and institutional forces too. As I set about the early stages of research, I began to understand that realistically my ontology and my previous occupational experience in the field of senior children's services management, was influencing expectations about

what I would find and, of course, was shaping my research questions and design. In beginning to define some tentative 'a priori' themes the use of Adaptive Theory methodology acknowledges the theoretical concepts I carried into the research and offered a more open analytic framework for theorising and even suggesting propositions to the field based on the final set of 'a posteriori' themes emerging from the data (King, 2012). As a methodological choice, Adaptive Theory (Layder, 1998), enabled investigation and theorising of, and from, the data guided by - but never imposed on - the Theory of Social Domains and other general theories drawn from both sociology and psychology. In that respect it did feel open to possibilities of understanding the social world as ontologically multi-dimensional (Layder, 2006, p.301) that perhaps retaining a purely phenomenological stance may have denied.

The other attraction of using this approach was its scope for a new contribution in methodological innovation, as it has been little used in sociological enquiry (Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2012). This is surprising given the potential it offers for critically exploring agency-structure concerns that are at the heart of identity scholarship.

The first part of this chapter has examined the *why* and some of the *what* of the research, including research purpose and questions, and the epistemological assumptions and ontology guiding my methodology. This has implications for my chosen research strategy, and the selection of an appropriate sample and methods to investigate the research questions. These are considered in the next part of the chapter, along with an account of the conduct of the study. Important research concepts such as validity, bias, researcher reflexivity, confidentiality and ethical dilemmas were considered throughout the design, implementation and analysis stages of the study. These are also outlined in the following discussion.

4.5 Research Strategy, Sample Choice and Profile

4.5.1 Research Strategy

While the methodological framework adopted would be suitable for quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods of social research enquiry, the nature of the research purpose and questions in my study are in the interpretivist tradition. I sought to capture the experiences, perceptions and feelings of individual DCS participants because I am

interested in how they make sense of their professional identity. This involved capturing detailed and situated empirical interpretation through tracing participants' Psychobiography, while maintaining an analytical lens on the external forces shaping the social reality of leadership in public services today where leaders experience increasingly uncertain, complex and turbulent professional working lives (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010). Following Social Domains Theory, this is not incompatible. In fact, it is exactly the type of social enquiry Layder (1997, 2006) advocates to facilitate a meaningful connection of practical research to theory to enrich ontological understandings of social reality.

In summary, my philosophical and theoretical stance is informed by theories of critical management studies (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992; Essers, 2009; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Skoldberg, 2009; Stokes; 2011; Svenningson, 2003) which views identity as struggle, and therefore in a continual process of 'becoming'. I believe the social and discursive contexts to which individuals relate themselves leaves identity a more open project than in the past: with some of the most concentrated identity work actually taking place in the increasingly fragmented and contradictory contexts my participants inhabit. There is recognition - certainly in the work of Sveningsson, Alvesson and Skoldberg, that individuals may be able to draw on variable integrative capacities and, in exercising these "*with skill and effort, and a little luck*" (Alvesson, 2010, p. 201) they may succeed in constructing a positive identity – albeit offering only a temporal sense of coherence, as they resist or align to their perceived social reality. This understanding has influenced my design and the overall methodology for the study. I have chosen to conduct narrative research (Chamberlayne, Apitzsch & Bornat, 2002) through extended in-depth interviews, and in applying the Theory of Social Domains and its related Adaptive Theory as an analytic device, I have been able to critically interpret and analyse the empirical data in a way that takes seriously both life and career stories, and the social and discursive contexts in which they are embedded.

4.5.2 Sample Choice and Profile

I required participants for my small-scale study who could offer some insights into professional identity perceptions and constructs of those in the role of DCS. I knew it was not feasible - or even necessary, to attempt to interview all 152 DCSs in England to

address the research questions. So, a purposive, non-probability sample was identified using a Government defined administrative region in the North of England to bound my research area. This regional focus gave me access to DCSs managing services in areas with diverse socio-economic conditions and very different communities of children, young people and families living in large cities, former industrially important towns, rural areas and seaside resorts. The region covers over 15,408 square kilometres (ONS, 2014). There are fifteen Directors in the identified region, each situated in a different local authority. One DCS chose not to be involved in the study.

Ten participants are female and four are male, with most in their mid-40s to 50s. As a first, or primary 'occupational-professional' background, six have come from social work, one from youth work, four from teaching or education management, one from youth offending, one from early years and one from librarianship-lifelong learning. Some psychobiographical detail of the participants is contained in chapter six, although care has been taken to obscure as much identifying information as possible, discussed further in 4.7 of this chapter. Selecting as my purposive sample, all DCS's in the regional area was sensitive to ethical issues of peer identification, considered a little later. There is support in the research methods literature for selecting relatively small numbers of participants for an empirical study of this nature. Creswell (2005) recommends that qualitative studies using in-depth interviews, should involve around ten people. While Boyd (2001) argues that there is a saturation point in such interviewing; again indicating this may be around twelve participants.

The range of services DCSs are responsible - and accountable for, generally include: secondary and primary schools, looked after children (including fostering, adoption and legal guardianship), children with additional needs, early years services such as local daycare, childminders and playgroups, children's rights/youth empowerment, family learning, children's centres, children's social care, parenting support, child and adolescent mental health, pupil referral units, advice support and counselling for young people, play and recreation and children's health services. DCSs are responsible for several thousand staff and significant annual budgets of between £40-60 million, not including funding for schools (DfE, 2014). No DCS in the sample (or as far as can be ascertained, in England), is on an annual salary and benefits package less than £115,000. The average outer-London salary range for a DCS is £127,000

(GatenbySanderson, 2014). Each DCS has a statutory duty (under section 18 of the Children Act, 2004) to protect the well-being and safety of all children in their area, even in services they do not have direct management responsibility for. An example would be a children's ward in a hospital, a private sector fostering organisation placing children in homes (including outside the area), a Free School or an Academy.

4.5.3 Gatekeepers and Access

In the organisational hierarchy, DCSs sit just below the Chief Executive of a local authority in England. Most authorities have a similar structure (although the layers of management have been significantly reduced in the last few years due to economic cuts, Hulme et al., 2014). DCSs will normally have at least two Assistant Director's (ADs) and in some authorities four or five, to manage the complex and wide-ranging services and responsibilities. As very senior organisational leaders, each DCS has a Personal Assistant to support them administratively and to organise their very busy work schedules. I faced some challenges in negotiating access to some of the participants and reaching beyond these PA 'gatekeepers' (Neuman, 2000) to secure the first interviews. Two aspects helped me. Firstly, I had some previous professional contact with a few of the DCSs, which lent currency for securing that all important appointment time in their busy diaries. I had sent letters to each of the fifteen DCSs in the region (Appendix 1), explaining the purpose of the research and asking them to be involved. This was followed up in approximately ten days by a telephone call from me. Secondly, I had established a fledging - yet positive working relationship with one of the DCSs in the identified sample. She agreed to take part in an exploratory conversation to explore the most fruitful areas for investigation around my planned focus on how DCSs experienced and made sense of their professional identity in the role, to inform and help me prepare for conducting in-depth narrative interviews (Chamberlayne, Bornat & Wengraf, 2000). The unexpected outcome of this encounter was her enthusiasm for the research study and a commitment to speak with her DCS peers in the region to encourage them to take part. Such personal endorsement is so valuable to the "*lone PhD researcher, often seen as nothing more than an irritant in an already pressurised institutional context*" (Chadderton, 2011, p.57). While I was able to capitalise on this with a number of the DCSs' PAs in my follow up telephone calls to book interview time, others proved a little more tenacious as gatekeepers, but some gentle persistence

(trying hard to not be an irritant) paid off and I secured the commitment of fourteen of the selected purposive sample of fifteen DCSs for my study.

4.6 Method and Implementation: In-depth Interviews, Conduct of the Research and Important Research Concepts

4.6.1 In-depth Interviews as Narrative Research

There are a range of data-gathering methods available to the qualitative researcher. What must remain at the forefront of these considerations, is the need for the tools selected to be the most appropriate method of investigation; enabling the research questions to be answered or explored in the most meaningful way. This study set out to explore how DCSs seek to make sense of their professional identity in a unique professional public leader role, and to examine the extent of influences of structure, and of human agency, on identity construction and enactment. Narrative enquiry allows for individuals to make sense of their stories in the context of the social world and articulate, or consciously represent, their agency in it (Gill & Goodson, 2011). While this study does not claim to be a collection of life histories (as this was not the intention or epistemological inclination behind the research), it did capture important aspects of 'life story' (Miller, 2000) and work history in relation to the specific focus around professional identity, which as method is defined as narrative interviewing (Plummer, 2001). This contributed to building the subjective *Psychobiographies* of participants and captured the inter-subjective dynamics of *Situated Activity* represented in the first two broadly agentic domains of Layder's (1997) Social Domains model.

In-depth interviewing was chosen as the most appropriate method for data-gathering, enabling me to explore the two key research questions in a loosely-structured way by eliciting participants' narrative accounts and interpretations of identity. Focus Groups were also considered but two issues precluded utilising this as an additional method. The first was a very practical one: the DCSs are extremely busy senior leader-managers and securing time for an individual in-depth interview - which I deemed the most important method for generating subjective insights into the lives and perceptions of participants (Schostak, 2011), was challenging enough. I knew I would struggle to also have them participate in focus groups. I did not want to ask more than they could reasonably give. The second reason was that I believed the in-depth interviews would

generate a good deal of rich empirical data in their own right. The particular dynamics created in focus groups can both stimulate discussion into themes which may not emerge in individual interviews, and suppress or distort contributions if dominant voices or unseen (to the researcher) undercurrents within a group known to each other are at work (David & Sutton, 2011). These dynamics would no doubt be insightful in themselves, but I feared would occlude those individual perceptions of interest to this study.

The in-depth interviews gave participants space to talk about critical life incidents and career trajectories (Chamberlayne, Apitzsch & Bornat, 2002), and share experiences in their current role as a DCS. In the process, they articulated and reflected on their interpretations of identity shaping influences and professional identity constructs. The exploratory discussion with one DCS from the sample was followed by a pilot interview with her shortly afterwards. This gave me confidence that there was a rich seam of empirical data to be elicited from the wider sample for investigating the research focus and questions. The pilot process also suggested areas for further theoretical reading related to emotional labour (Hoschchild, 1983), and helped me consider how best to probe and draw focus to the identity themes I was interested in. Burgess (1984, p.102) suggests that interviews are '*a conversation with a purpose*'. Even in the most unstructured interview, there will be an underpinning epistemological focus that will give some clarity of purpose and a degree of structure in terms of themes or broad areas of investigation to the encounter (the few loose questions for initial interviews in this study are included as Appendix 2). Indeed, within and beyond the social interaction of the interview situation itself, there will be also be meaning-making taking place (David &Sutton, 2011; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009) which problematises the interview process; making research "messy" (Schostak & Schostak, 2008) in the way stories of the self may be told (McAdams, 1996). It is also important to be engaged in the research process in a way that prepared narrative can be disrupted by interested questioning. In order to gain insight into participants own interpretations, or representations of how they view social reality, opportunities to challenge organisational and occupational discourse which are based on accepted ideology in policy and organisational practices need to be taken (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

4.6.2 Conduct of the Research

Once access was secured, the participants were hugely generous with their time. A first round of interviews with all fourteen DCSs was conducted over a nine month period. Most interviews took on average ninety minutes, although a few lasted more than two hours (with breaks). The interviews were all conducted at the DCSs' places of work in the meeting rooms of office buildings, or the local Town Hall. One of the challenges was the time it could take to travel to each local authority as some were up to a hundred miles apart. This is partly why the schedule of interviews took some time to work through, but one of the benefits was the richness offered in the very different geographical, socio-economic and demographical environments the DCSs were located in. Each interview was recorded (with consent) and accompanied with short field notes.

Early the following year, I conducted five follow up face-to-face interviews and two telephone interviews with participants from the same sample over a further six month period. These tended to be shorter than the first interviews - mostly around one hour. This second set of interviews took place with DCSs who had expressed an interest in talking further about their experiences and feelings relating to professional identity in the role, or those I felt may have a little more to say once some initial rapport and trust had been built during the first round of interviews. There were also some significant policy and economic changes occurring in children's services during the period of the research, which meant the DCS experience through these turbulent times benefitted from revisiting and had not yet reached saturation point.

The volume of data generated from twenty-one interviews was considerable and in all honesty, I had underestimated the sheer task of transforming recorded words to text. Having transcribed approximately sixty percent of the data (using ExpressScribe software) myself, the remainder was completed through a professional transcription service, with an incorporated confidentiality contract. The data analysis framework is discussed in section 4.8.

4.6.3 Important Research Concepts: Trust, Researcher Bias and Emotions

There are a number of key issues and concepts for the qualitative researcher to consider beyond design and method. In this study, trust and confidentiality were

critically important aspects, not least because, as with many studies of human experiences feelings and perceptions, as researcher I was "*entrusted with information of a sensitive and sometimes quite personal nature*" (Punch, 2014, p.46). Protecting the confidentiality of such information, especially where being careless in published accounts can lead to identification of participants, was uppermost in my mind and is bound into some of the ethical issues discussed in section 4.7. There are issues of power too, although arguably much less so than in research conducted with people or communities already disadvantaged and facing inequalities and social injustices (Bourdieu, 1993). Nonetheless, all research involves issues of power and I tried to be mindful of the fact that I was entering the participants space; involving public and private spheres of what Stake & Jegatheesan (2008, p.8) call the "*shadings and passages*" of someone else's world. While the DCSs might well be actively exploring the boundaries of what they were willing to share in interviews, this takes place in an emergent context, affected by influences of internal and external dynamics. They then trusted me in taking that information out of the situated context, to represent it in a public domain (Barbour & Scostack, 2011, p.62).

One way of viewing participants' 'talk' in interviews is as an inter-subjective performance. Meaning is created within the participant-researcher relationship shaping the way social reality is represented. In fact Holstein and Gubrium (2011) argue from a constructionist standpoint that instead of getting tangled up in the methodological constraints of 'how' interviews should be conducted, researchers "*should embrace the view that the interview is a process of experiential animation* [and] *capitalise on the researchers and respondents constitutive contributions to the production of data*" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p.151). Of course meaning making is a constitutive process and my own experiences – including the fact that I have been a senior manager in children's services, my values and bias have an impact in the research encounters. I am 'always present' as researcher: "*located in space, time, cultural milieu, and like anyone else influenced by the particular understandings about, and interpretations of, the world to which [I] have been exposed*" (Sikes & Goodson, 2003, p.34). The participants too are fully embedded in - and not independent from, the social and structural domains of our lived experiences. This was represented in my analysis and theorising of the data produced. I also acknowledge some tentative a priori themes based on my reading of the literature, previous management experience in children's services, and academic

interest in children's services leadership in my current role as a tutor in a school of education and professional development.

So, in terms of validity and the degree to which I could achieve what I set out to do – to capture experiences and perceptions of the DCSs in relation to identity, and to bring new insights to the field of identity studies, my approach enabled this. Claims are not made for external validity because it is "*impossible to 'freeze' a social setting and the circumstances of the study to make it replicable*" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 33), indeed nor would I want to, as a central strength of the qualitative study is its uniqueness; a portrait in time of social reality. This limits usefulness for generalising to other settings and contexts, but without being drawn into the debates about how much traditional measures from the natural sciences apply to social sciences research (Creswell, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Metcalfe, 2005; Silverman, 2011), I would argue there is potential for others studying similar phenomena - and interested in theory-building, to observe dynamics or insights from similar research which may suggest patterns (Falk & Guenther, 2007) to draw some tentative conclusions.

The final theme addressed in this section is emotions that can be invoked in research activity and processes. A common starting point around ethical considerations is the premise of 'doing no harm' to participants involved in research. In the social sciences this is often extended to not leaving people 'any worse off' than if they had not participated, or further still, in emancipative-based research, not conducting research that privileges one group but leaves others behind (David & Sutton, 2011). In raising or being privy to, sensitive and potentially emotive issues in interviews with the DCSs, it was important to consider my responsibilities as researcher. As Ryen (2011, p.432) observes: "*Knowledge production comes with moral responsibility towards participants*". She emphasises the need to be alert to emotional stresses which can unfold in interviews and the significant potential - particularly in life story and narrative enquiry, to intrude, or even be invited in to some of the private "shadings and passages" (Stake & Jegatheesan, 2008, p.8) of people's lives, and then not quite knowing what to do. Such experiences can form part of the emotional demands on the researcher. Anticipating and becoming skilful at dealing with some of the emotional subtleties in research involving people develops from time spent in the field developing reflexivity, and awareness of the:

> Complex and constantly negotiated and interrogated power dynamics in the research field, the researcher and participant both bring [their] subjectivities and emotional lives into the research encounter (Riessman, 2005, p. 476).

Issues of trust, validity, researcher bias and emotions are all bound up in the research endeavour. Effort and attention is needed at each stage - from research design to final publication of the study, in order to maintain the integrity of the data and the trust established with participants. While Hammersley and Traianou, (2012, p.136) are fully committed to these 'intrinsic research virtues', they caution against what can sometimes be seen as "*excessive moralism*" or "*overdoing ethics*" in research.

4.7 It's a Small World: Ethics and Confidentiality

There is a distinction between the rules – or ethics - of how research is conducted and data used, and the actual morals and behaviours emerging within the social research process. Homan (1991) described ethics as "*the science of morality*". There are involved debates (David & Sutton, 2011) about the universality of values and morality and the extent to which a set of ethical codes derived in one context is appropriate for application in another. In the search for justification of research methodologies, methods and analytical approaches, social researchers need to be mindful of the complex, value-laden and particular social and cultural contexts within which they are operating.

Focusing on the relationship between researchers and participants, Bryman (2012) draws on Diener and Crandall's (1978) four main areas of ethical concern, arguing that debates and issues around ethics in research has barely moved on since the 1960s because these remain the enduring ethical concerns for researchers today. Four principles key to ethical research are summarised as: "*do no harm; seek to ensure informed consent; avoid invasions of privacy, and steer clear of deception*" (Bryman, 2012, p.509). There are different stances and practices by researchers which may apply or subvert these principles to varying degrees in defence of the ends of their knowledge production. There is also increasing momentum for recognition that one-sided views of 'participant as done to and powerless' is to ignore participants' personal agency in the relationship. There are interests and motivations for being involved in overt research

studies and in the way stories and lives are represented by those telling them (Bourne-Day & Lee-Treweek, 2008; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012; Ryen, 2011).

The particular ethical concerns for my research largely related to the nature and membership of my purposive sample population. Issues such as informed consent, right to withdraw, assurances about secure storage of personal data and 'checking back' with participants (Bloor, 1997), were relatively straightforward with the group of individuals I was conducting the research with. I was also attentive to the BERA Guidelines for Ethical Research (2011), in self-monitoring that my research activities were 'justifiable and sound' in the spirit of the Association's underpinning aim for ethical research practice. What was challenging was protecting anonymity and confidentiality because of the composition of the sample. With just one Director of Children's Services in each of the 152 local authority areas in England, the entire DCS population is small. Successive Government administrative restructures have established nine local authority regions (LGiU, 2015) and the sample participating in this study is the complete population (apart from one who chose not to be involved) of DCSs in a region of Northern England. This has implications for how I represent my findings and I was acutely sensitive that it may just be possible for research participants to identify some of the comments of their peers or for 'knowledgeable outsiders' such as those working in the sector, to identity participants.

It became apparent at times that this was something the DCSs were aware of too, as on occasion they requested the dictaphone recorder was switched off when they wished to talk about an experience or encounter 'off the record'. This was respectfully accommodated with no details made in field notes either. These incidents of 'off record' accounts were not frequent, but they were helpful reminders of my ethical responsibilities as researcher to treat the interactions with each DCS with complete confidentiality – sometimes a challenge when one participant said something very similar to another and I had to prevent myself from spontaneously proclaiming "how interesting X said that too".

It was not just in the interviews that care had to be taken. Consideration around anonymity has been needed throughout the analysis and presentation of data and I have consistently strived to protect the identity of the individual participants. One benefit

of the sheer volume of data collected - and the nature of the role itself, means that although each of the narrative accounts and perceptions were unique, there were many similar stories and identity struggles shared by participants. I also took particular steps to make identification as opaque as possible, which was sometimes difficult when part of what I was trying to capture was the life history and career trajectories that made up individual Psychobiography (Layder, 1997). An original idea to include short pen pictures, or biographies of individual participants in the final thesis was discarded because I felt it would too easily allow identification, and in any case was not material to the purpose of the study. I used pseudonyms, assigning participants unisex names. However, when I began writing up the analysis Chapters, trying to use these without personal pronouns became incredibly clumsy so I reverted to 'he' and 'she', but deliberately mixed these up. Piper and Simons (2011, p.26) note that the "*research context unless massively disguised often reveals clues to identity, even when names and places are changed*". Bearing in mind Hammersley and Traianou's (2012) appeal to avoid "*excessive moralism*" or "*overdoing ethics*" and to concentrate on "*producing knowledge in ways that answer worthwhile questions*" (p.136), which represent the participants contribution with respect and fairness, I sought to balance ethical principles appropriately in my research, and to produce a study that I hope the participants themselves will value.

The final part of this chapter briefly outlines and qualifies my use of Template Analysis (King, 2004) as a framework for data analysis in the study.

4.8 Framework for Data Analysis

Template Analysis (King, 2004) is open to use as a data analysis process that recognises the researcher is part of the social world they are investigating. Researchers carry perceptions and preconceived ideas within, even when every effort is made to consciously 'bracket' these (Creswell, 2013; Miller & Crabtree, 1992). Both Adaptive Theory and Template Analysis approaches acknowledge that researchers carry their ontological and epistemological influences into the process, along with some expectations around what might be found. What is then encouraged is an opening up to the potential for new phenomena to be uncovered through the research. Template Analysis may be applied from a range of epistemological positions and is "*a technique*

for thematically organising and analysing qualitative data" (Brooks & King, 2012, p.1) which feels eminently suited to this study.

The data analysis Chapters have been structured following themes which emerged from the data - this includes some of the tentative a priori themes which were then emphasised as important in the participants own narrative, represented strongly in the transcribed texts.   Following the conventions of Template Analysis provided a method for producing an initial template (Appendix 3) which captured themes identified as important, both from the data set itself and some *a priori* codes which acknowledges that realistically, some of what I may expect to find, and the nature of the research questions, can provide a few tentative prior themes for the template. However, these can and were adjusted and indeed relegated when the data itself brought in new dimensions or suggested less relevance once coding began. This is different to the Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) approach to analysis which is viewed as a completely 'bottom up' methodology because all the themes are identified in the data set only.

The approach does not involve analysing textual data line-by-line, such as that found in conversational analysis: instead, it enables a more free-flowing process: "*It encourages the analyst to develop themes more extensively where the richest data - in relation to the research questions - are found*". (Brooks & King, 2012, p.4). Also, because this study was not concerned with conducting conversational analysis, examples used from the raw data in the Chapters analysing and discussing findings, have had filler words such as 'umm' and 'aaah' - which have no impact on the content (David & Sutton, 2011, p.335), edited out to assist the flow of reading.   Having first defined some *a priori* themes, I thoroughly read through the transcribed interviews to immerse myself once again in their content and direction. It was then possible to begin the initial coding of data - which used the original research focus and questions of this study as a reference point. Themes from the data were then allocated against *a priori* themes or listed as new ones. This process produced the initial template, illustrating higher order codes (broad themes in the data) and I was able to do this once all the transcripts from the first set of interviews had been reviewed. Once the second data set was produced and read through, the initial template was developed and revised further as each transcript was compared against others, enabling me to continue coding common themes and, most

importantly identify deeper sub-themes, until a 'final template' was arrived at (Appendix 5). As Cassell (2012) observes, Template Analysis offers:

> A structured technique for analysing qualitative data that enables researchers to place some order on their data from the start of the analytic process … and a comparatively structured pathway for critically interpreting and presenting empirical findings (Casell, 2008, p.103).

Although acknowledging some prior themes is a recognised characteristic of Template Analysis, the identification of themes in advance needs to be handled with care. One danger King (2012) cautions against is having an overly defined set of a priori themes on the initial template, as this can restrict and 'blinker' the analysis process. The researcher needs to consciously check against distortion and 'convenient positivistic answers' throughout the iterative routes involved. So, these themes were always viewed as tentative; a helpful way to hasten the first phase of coding. Some further discussion of the data analysis process is outlined in chapter five.

Only a small number of qualitative studies exploring notions of professional identity (Puusa, Kuittinen & Kuusela 2013; Kenny & Briner, 2010; Ross, 2005) have utilised Template Analysis as a flexible approach to data analysis. Yet, Creswell (2005) believes the approach is particularly appropriate for in-depth interviews as it is easy to reconcile to the purpose of particular research compared to more prescriptive analytical approaches. Indeed he is keen to emphasise that traditions of enquiry need not be pure and one might mix procedures from several. This can include an analytical process that moves between theory and data influenced by the research question.

Waring and Wainwright (2008) suggests one criticism of Template Analysis is that it offers little different to what can be generated by analysis software packages such as Nvivo (p.92). However, they take the position – also adopted in this study, that IT applications can act as a barrier to the essential interpretative process that needs to take place; where researchers immerse themselves in the data to identify rich insights about the frequency, nature and relationships of themes, while also contributing new perspectives to inform theory-building. This fits elegantly with the application of the under-used Adaptive Theory methodology (Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2012) in this study, with its emphasis on both theory-testing and theory-constructing.

4.9 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of a methodology chapter in its broadest sense is to explore, examine and explain *"the systems, principles, theories and values that underpin the approach to research"* (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, p. 326) and of course within this, to deal with some of the practical, conceptual and ethical concerns of the research project such as sample, method, research schedule, confidentiality, bias and the data analysis process. In this chapter I have aimed to do that: reiterating my research purpose and aims and the underpinning epistemology which led to the choice of Adaptive Theory (Layder, 1998) as methodology. I discussed the selection of a group of DCSs from a Northern region of England as my sample, and some of the very particular concerns related to anonymity and confidentiality which needed to be considered at each stage of the research process. Some organisational context about the participants' role and operating environment was also provided before I justified my choice of extended in-depth interviews as method to support a narrative research approach. It was important to build a picture, to get a sense of the Psychobiography of my participants as I explored their experiences and identity work - both early career and critical life incidents to help inform how they enact identity in their current role as DCS. Finally, I discussed and qualified my use of Template Analysis (King, 2004) as the most appropriate framework for my data analysis.

The next chapter considers the application of the data analysis framework and an introduction to how the findings are presented and analysed in forthcoming Chapters.

5. INTRODUCING THE FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION CHAPTERS

5.1 Purpose and Context

This short chapter summarises the key themes emerging from the data and explains how the higher order themes are organised and structured to form Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine of this study. The findings presented and discussed in the forthcoming analysis Chapters deepen understanding of, and offer insights into, the complex identity work and struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) of senior leader-managers in children's services today. The nature of the role, the operating environment and many of the peculiar challenges faced by DCSs, was examined in Chapter Two of this study and is briefly recapped here to help reorient the focus back to the organisational context that participants inhabit.

While methodological preferences, epistemology, theoretical conceptualisation, research context and methods of data collection and analysis were articulated in the previous chapter, it is worth emphasising that in adopting the Theory of Social Domains (Layder, 1997) as an analytic and sensitising device for examining and interpreting the data, a productive theoretical framework is being utilised to critically consider questions of identity within the structure-agency nexus. This is intended to contribute to a method of sociological enquiry that enables empirical research to engage with essential theoretical issues, and in making the connection of theory to practical research, it is hoped that ontological understandings can be enriched.

5.2 The DCS as Hybridised Professional Public Manager

As Directors of Children's Services – a role which could be said to epitomise Noordegraaf's (2007) concept of the new *hybridised professional public manager*, the participants offered fascinating narratives describing how they bridge the complex dynamics of agency and structure in seeking ontological security (Laing, 1961; Giddens, 1991; Archer, 2003), and in striving to create a sense of their own professional identity in a world of increasingly blurred boundaries (Colley & Guery, 2015). In most cases, DCSs face the experience of straddling two professional identities - that of their original practitioner background and that of the senior leader-manager they have become. The

majority have been appointed to the role from education management or children's social care backgrounds - although this is slowly changing as a so-called 'new generation' of DCSs emerge from the more generic children's services occupational field (ADCS, 2014).

DCSs "*operate in a particularly challenging organisational climate characterised by high volatility and external pressure*" (NCLSCS, 2011, p.5). Chapter Two examined some of the challenges of leading children's services during radical changes in policy priorities, intense media interest, and the pressures of austerity measures applied by central government to local authority budgets (Booker, 2012; Hulme et al., 2014; Purcell et al., 2012). These DCS leaders "*surf the edge of chaos*" (Pascale et al., 2000) in their daily work lives. There is nothing comparable in senior leadership and management occupations in the UK in terms of their remit. DCSs are held 'professionally responsible' for thousands of multi-disciplinary and cross-agency practitioners delivering services to children, young people and families; ensuring that externally and internally imposed performance standards and measures are being met. They are also 'statutorily accountable' for implementing institutional systems, procedures and practices that prevent and minimise risk of harm or death to children in their government-defined boundary area (S18, Children Act, 2004). Little wonder it has been described as '*the hardest public sector job in Britain*" (Thomas, 2014).

In present-day ambiguous public domains, these 'mixed-up professionals' embody hybridised professional public managers (Noordegraaf, 2007), taking on management of interdisciplinary settings and organisational contexts that cannot be easily contained; fuelling a need to articulate a new type of professional control. This is often manifested in a search for *belonging* and meaning through reframing managerial and occupational identities as appropriate work identities for trying to anchor oneself in the climate of a neo-liberal knowledge society (Alvesson, 2010; Barley & Kunda, 2004; Evetts, 2003). Accepting that notions of identity are 'slippery' (Bauman, 2005), this study works with Ashcraft's (2007) description of professional identity as an: "*ongoing persuasive endeavour that traverses time and space, across macro and micro messages, institutions and actors*" (p.15).

5.3 Framework and Process: Analysing and Presenting the Findings

In this research study, participants' representations of professional identity constructs are analysed in an approach that goes beyond a view of individuals as fully autonomous, unitary beings and recognises the influence of often destabilising and ambiguous structural forces and dimensions which render identity fragile and precarious (Gioia et al., 2000; Knights & Clarke, 2014). The utilisation of Layder's Theory of Social Domains (2007) is a helpful, analytical tool to enable consideration at macro, micro and meso levels. This is drawn on - never imposed - throughout the study as a gentle framing theory, along with his complementary Adaptive Theory Methodology (1998) which simply encourages connection between empirical findings and theory.

Template Analysis (King, 2004) offered a structure and process for analysing the data which started with some *a priori* themes being noted. Once actual themes emerging from the interview data with the fourteen DCSs were identified and coded – using the original research focus and questions of this study as a reference point, these were also added, and an initial template created (Appendix 3). This template illustrated the higher order codes - broad themes in the data, and "*some of the important theoretical concepts and perspectives that have informed the design and aims of the study*" (Brooks & Knight, 2012.p.3). In defining a small number of themes in advance and capturing these on the initial template, it was important to also be open to what the data was emphasising, rather than be constrained by prior expectations. For this reason the a priori themes remained tentative, and as subject to revision or removal from the template as any of the themes if they were "*ineffective in characterising the main thrust of the empirical data*" (King, 2004, p. 267). When the second data set was produced from seven follow-up interviews and thoroughly read through, the initial template was developed and revised as each transcript was considered and compared against others; enabling continued coding of common themes as core areas of interest or concern expressed by participants was uncovered. Following several revisions, deeper sub-themes were identified and a 'final template' arrived at (Appendix 5). It is possible to continue indefinitely with this process, so a decision needs to be taken that the final template settled on is 'good enough' which is generally when the researcher feels that all the important aspects of the research focus and purpose represented in the texts (interview transcripts), have been captured and coded (King 2004, p.263).

5.4 Template Analysis: Higher Order-Lower Order Themes

As a hierarchical coding process, the final template for structuring the findings from this study consisted of four 'higher order' themes, with a number of relevant sub-themes below these (Appendix 5). This enabled the findings to be presented and analysed in four Chapters based on the most important themes, with the sub-themes forming the key elements of empirical data subjected to examination and discussion. The Chapters are:

Chapter Six: On 'becoming' a senior children's services leader: early career pathways and critical life points

Chapter Seven: Identity struggles: idealised self, professional values and harsh realities

Chapter Eight: Making sense of professional selves: searches for identity in ambiguous organisational domains

Chapter Nine: The lonely posting: emotion, resilience & (In)security

5.5 Life Story as Starting Point

At the beginning of the in-depth interviews, participants were invited to begin by talking a little about their biographical life-career experiences with a view to particularly exploring:

> Career processes and key transition points while also eliciting the context to decisions and actions. 'Critical life points' (Chamberlayne et al., 2002) are also explored to understand more about key decisions made by participants influencing where they are today. (Tomlinson, Muzio, Sommerlad, Webley & Duff, 2013 p.252)

The initial data chapter therefore utilises Layder's (1997) first domain of Psychobiography to reveal participants' own representations of their unique life story and career trajectories on the way to *becoming* a DCS. It gives insights into leader

identity construction work taking place and lays the foundations for the critical analysis of themes concerned with identity emerging in the data presented and discussed in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine. This discussion also considers the three remaining domains of situated activity, social settings and contextual resources which constitute social reality for participants in this study.

5.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Although short, this chapter acts as a necessary bridge between the context setting and rationale for the research, research questions and aims, the review of literatures, methodology, and conduct of the research, and the forthcoming chapters, which initially present participants' own telling of their Psychobiographies, followed by more critical analysis and theorising of the findings.

6. ON BECOMING A CHILDREN'S SERVICES SENIOR LEADER: EARLY CAREER PATHWAYS AND CRITICAL LIFE POINTS

6.1 Context and Chapter Structure

This chapter begins the process of introducing the fourteen DCSs involved in the study by focusing on early career pathways and some of the notable points and events in their lives. These were identified by them as having some bearing on their journey towards becoming a senior leader of children's services, and on how they make sense of what is important or instrumental in their lives. While significant life and career experiences are in no way confined to this first findings chapter – in fact this is only fleeting glimpses, there is an attempt to at least give a sense of some of the influences at work in relation to identity construction, reconstruction and enactment through participants' lives revealing a "*parliament of selves that exists in each person*" (Mead, cited in Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). Using a life-career story approach at the beginning of the in-depth interviews offered structure and focus for each participant to find their starting place (Chamberlayne et al., 2002; Wengraf, 2004) and highlighted the unique trajectory of the individual existence of Alex, Morgan, Fran, Chandra, Jesse, Esa, Sam, Charlie, Jude, Nat, Praveen, Jaime, Ali and Billie.

The following accounts offer some insights into their *Psychobiography* "*through time and space in the social world*" (Layder, 2006, p.274) where individual characteristics and inimitable subjective responses to experiences and social relationships establish an ongoing process of individuation that argues against the tendency to conflate the effect of social forces on constructions of the self and perceptions relating to identity. As part of the psychosocially oriented Theory of Social Domains approach, Psychobiography recognises an inner and outer world but posits that "*we are never entirely the creatures of society*" (Layder, 2006, p. 275). We have an emotional uniqueness, as reflected in the individual needs, hopes, fears and aspirations recounted here.

Mapping participants *Psychobiography* offers a context for tracing personal and career experiences and responses of the participants over time, illuminating both the individual uniqueness of participants, and any similarities which may have led them to the role of DCS. It also accounts for the interrelated influences of institutional and structural forces.

Invited to share where they started out on the journey to becoming a DCS, participants naturally chose to begin their story at different life points. This initial question was intended to prompt a gentle opening, establish rapport to ease them into *"a conversation with a purpose*" (Burgess, 1984 p.102), and set some loose structure and direction towards answering the two key research questions underpinning the study. While the focus of this research is on understanding and explaining how DCSs make sense of, construct and enact leader identity in their current role as a professional public leader (Noordegraaf, 2007), this needs to be framed in a 'whole life' context to be of value to the agency-structure structure concerns important to this study. Especially if the notion of identity as a "*fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society … refracting what can be seen as a 'permanent* dialectic' *between the self and social structure*" (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 300) is to be taken seriously.

6.2 Early Career Pathways and Critical Life Points

Several participants began their responses by recounting childhood or young adulthood experiences. Others chose particular events or seminal moments in their career as the starting point. In order to make sense of where they 'were now', a very individual process took place as each participant depicted their personal and career trajectories through life and some of the unique experiences, motivations, influences, social interactions and contexts which they perceived had helped shape this. A few participants identified an interest in wanting to work with children as rooted in their own childhood experiences. Some of these were less than positive; acting as a motivator for wanting to make things better for other children once they were in a position to do so.

> I have this strong desire of wanting to be in a position to look out for the most vulnerable children because that's what I was and no one really spotted it or seemed to care. Except ... except there was this one teacher – I don't know, he just seemed to see potential in me. Things were really tough at home and I struggled to get by each day really. I had an abusive, drunken mother. Well, this teacher he got me involved in a youth club and I just loved it, I found somewhere I felt I belonged. It gave me the confidence to get away from home as soon as I could. (Morgan)

A direct link was made by Morgan on her trajectory from difficult childhood and adolescent experiences, to being in a position where she could influence the environment and encounters other children might face. Here it is possible to see

Morgan's identity image as a Storyteller Alvesson (2010), where her narrative expresses a need to build a strong and robust sense of self and purpose in her professional life, fuelled by early personal experiences and reactions to it. In exploring and giving meaning to identity, the Storyteller builds on their view of the past to explain their present, and to convey how they see a future self (Watson, 2008). Morgan had a very clear sense of direction about her future occupational life, stating simply: "*while this is a precarious role - to say the least … no matter what, I will always stay in a job that is working for children".* Here, being able to construct an adjustable future work identity is suggestive of a reflexivity that can deal with uncertainties through a strong degree of agency (Giddens, 1991) driven by a centred and coherent sense of direction and identity.

Chandra began by sharing her thoughts that it sometimes struck her how far she had come from a "*snotty, deeply unhappy working class kid*" who was bullied at school and largely ignored at home, to head of children's services in a large Local Authority.

> I have these conversations sometimes with my husband who came from a fairly similar background to me. Well, his wasn't quite as bad ... and we wonder how we managed to end up this far. Even looking back at where I started out with my first few jobs … well, back then, I was in nurseries on crap money with pretty poor practices and no real opportunity for progression. I still have imposter moments (Chandra)

In highlighting her insecurities and 'can't quite believe where I am' feelings, Chandra appears to reveal elements of self-doubt, stemming from her earlier life experiences. Where identity is principally seen to be bound to issues of security, any possibility of building a stable sense of identity is constantly disrupted by the demands and fragmentation of social relations and conditions in postmodern society (Collinson 2003; Knights & Willmott 1999). From this perspective, identity construction will often be suffused with anxiety and doubt, which can reinforce insecurity and questions of worth in both personal and organisational contexts. Yet, later in the interview when describing her journey to becoming a 'professional public manager' (Noordegraaf, 2007), Chandra also shares a life-point story which emphasises the dynamic and shifting nature of identity negotiation and understanding.

I was given responsibility for child protection in the day nursery I was working in. It was good to have something I was responsible for … a focus if you like. Anyway, I had to do some training and then ended up doing an in-service social care course which opened up to a broader world really – it was wider than just early years and it ignited an interest in me for learning, that I didn't really have before. I had a bit of a Damascus moment actually. I went on from that to doing the Certificate in Social Services which involved working with children with disabilities and special needs.

The love and passion I felt in particular from working with one little boy with Down's Syndrome has never gone away. I think that passion drove me - not to just want to carry on working with children, but to be the person to make a difference for them. I was really motivated then to do what I needed … to get where I wanted to be. (Chandra)

Here there are clear suggestions of Chandra being quite strategic and focused about what she needed to do; with mobilisation of a professional self around 'making a difference' and becoming part of an occupational field. This is quite far away from representations of a self whose insecurities and anxieties are dominated by external forces and conditions. Chandra began to focus on the need for gaining qualifications and for beginning to plot a particular career pathway that enabled her to mould a work identity seen to advance her ambitions. Alvesson (2010) stresses that this does not necessarily imply an individual is in control – for example career or organisational ideologies may be at play in influencing what an identity can be strategised to 'look like'. Chandra comments about a later point in her career when, as a more experienced family support manager wanting to be considered for a senior role in the organisation, she re-crafted the way she needed to present her 'professional self':

I'd been around long enough to know that … without losing sight of who I am at heart, I needed to show myself as a manager who could take the hard decisions and be really firm with the staff because that was what was needed. That was what they were looking for. (Chandra)

Employing self-presentation strategies where identity self-image synthesises with a professional or organisational 'fit' in the pursuit of personal objectives, requires a stock of resources which, where necessary, can be used in impression management (Goffman, 1971). Here there is an interplay between Layder's (1997, 2006) four social domains of Psychobiography, situated activity, social settings and contextual resources. Experience and skill at mobilising a robust and active professional self, is presented in

social encounters where meaning is created. Layder departs sharply from Goffman's view of an internally contained interactive encounter, by arguing that people carry subjective feelings and attitudes into encounters. These are shaped by 'reproduced cultural meanings' in Layder's view, reflecting human activity as an "*amalgam of subjective, external and situated influences*" (2006, p. 278). While Chandra was strategically constructing a fit to

organisational needs in order to fulfil her own objectives, she had scripts to draw on from an existing socio-cultural repertoire (Tabatabai & Linders, 2011) which leads to Alvesson's (2010) caution about not exaggerating the degree to which individuals can fully control and re-write their own identity constructs. Indeed, while Chandra displays enough agentic intention to *not* be characterised as adopting a docile, conformist identity image, elements of her narrative suggest some surrender to the dominant organisational template in her eagerness to symbolise solidarity with organisational discourse.

Early experiences did not necessarily need to be negative or unhappy to be identified as formative influences on planned choices, or responses to happenstance (Krumboltz, 2009) by participants. Decisions relating to post-compulsory education and career pathways were often connected back to earlier life events. Billie described his experience as one of four children, with a younger brother born with severe disabilities. He was convinced that seeing how well his parents coped and managed to "*make them all feel special and loved*" inspired him to work with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

> I think it built up a resilience in me that meant instead of running a million miles away from wanting to be near people who were ill or struggling in a world not necessarily designed for them by the rest of us, I wanted to be part of making it better. I have always worked with kids who don't fit and one way or another that's led me here. (Billie)

Similar to Morgan, Billie calls upon a defining childhood environment as part of his central story: the explanation he chooses to share as to how and why he has ended up a senior leader in children's services. Acting as a point of reference for building an enduring and coherent identity script, this can be seen to have a stabilising effect for producing ontological security (McAdams, 1996). In Sam's account too, she highlights a

seminal life point from early in her career to explain direction and purpose in her work life, she displays a 'temporally embedded' conceptualisation of agency in how she views her past, how she experiences her present and how she envisages a future (Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014; Watson; 2008).

> I went into management quite quickly in my career, but the defining moment for me ending up a senior manager, specifically in children's services, was the feeling of despair and hopelessness I felt working with young adults in a care home who were really damaged by being so institutionalised. I can still remember thinking 'it's too late for them'.
>
> I just felt a draw to wanting to get in early so they had a chance. Yes, that was probably a big moment for me and the choices I made. It's definitely shaped me and what I do. (Sam)

Sam narrates how she marshalled herself to achieve this personal and career-oriented objective with the intention of finding a 'fit' for her authentic, motivated self in a suitable professional and organisational context. Conceptualising identity building through a strong self-reflexive understanding is redolent of Giddens' (1991) agent with transformative capacity - capable of altering their social circumstances. Developed as part of his Structuration Theory (1984), it was an effort to rebalance agency and structure as a duality, rather than the entrenched dualism and dominant objectivism seen in structural sociology.

Using Layder's Theory of Social Domains (1997, 2006) in considering how identity construction may be understood, reminds us that agency and structure - while inter-related, are different, enabling an analysis that goes beyond Giddens' notion that "*we create meaning and social reality from within social settings and therefore institutions and structures have no existence apart from the activities they embody*" (cited in Layder, 2006 p. 164). Alongside Archer, Layder also takes Giddens and other commentators (Duberley, Mallon & Cohen, 2006; Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001) to task for suppressing the existence of uniquely personal human emotions and passions. He argues that ontological security is not as easily come by as conceptualisations privileging agency can suggest. Domain Theory acknowledges that social forces undoubtedly shape our thoughts and behaviour, but it also gives space in the domain of Psychobiography for personally experienced emotions and thoughts held by individuals.

The balance between individuals and society is always precarious; so the threat to ontological security is never fully allayed or stilled as we go about our personal and professional lives.

Nat illustrates this dynamic well. Starting out in careers guidance which has experienced one of the most shifting policy plains and sites of occupational control in the public sector (Bradford & Cullen 2014; Colley 2012; Evetts, 2013) followed by a short stint in adult education - also a significant field of attention for political 'interference', control and change (Bangs, MacBeath & Galton, 2010), led to feelings of confusion and turmoil about her professional identity at times.

> I started off thinking I was clear about my profession. I went into guidance driven by my passion for working with young people. That hasn't changed, but I found the constantly changing terrain difficult … for me, it is always about keeping it simple. Later, still at quite a young age … [after] I'd gone into strategic educational leadership having to deal with all the vagaries which often seemed like they were for no good reason … sometimes got in the way of feeling in control. There were always plenty of hoops to jump through and barriers in the way, mostly from Government.
>
> What I've learned to do is remind myself we're in the business of children, no matter what the policies are or budget cuts, or whatever – that's what I always come back to and that's how I keep myself balanced (Nat)

Nat was emphatic that in crafting a sense of self in her work environments, she is always fuelled through a personal passion which is: "*profoundly about the children and young people. What I do is important for me, not who I am*" (Nat). Negotiating her way through some of the messy social and structural contexts, discourses and constraints, Nat's description expresses identity as struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and in this processual experience there are elements where she is being quite strategic at work in efforts to mobilise identity in the 'doing' of what is important.

Layder (2006) asserts that while individuals will always have some power - no matter how modest - not everyone is bestowed with the same generic transformative capacity to change or influence their circumstances. Instead, individuals have varying levels of resources and capacity. Some, like Nat can draw on their human capital through personal passions, skills built up over time, experience and position to exert agency in

affecting the environment around them, and in enacting their own sense of coherent identity.

Similar to Nat, having completed teacher training, Jesse started her career in Guidance, working within youth services before becoming manager of a 0-19 team.

> I only spent two years in practice before going into management and then did my DipSW [Diploma in Social Work]. I wasn't long in that job before a restructure took place and I was made more senior. I had a very encouraging manager; he mentored me I guess and when an unexpected opportunity … actually … the Director tragically died, really quite young. It was terrible. After that everyone got shunted up. I was then in a principal officer role. In local authority it's not normally anywhere near that quick. I was asked to act up to the Assistant Director role – I wasn't sure I was ready for it but was encouraged, again by the same person.
> We were both under the impression it would be very short term. In fact, what should have been three months turned into two years. From there I became head of children's services when Children's Trusts came along. Then it seemed natural to go for the DCS post. It was the only job I had actually applied for at that stage and the irony was I didn't get it - it went to an education director. I was devastated. (Jesse)

Jesse explains that she stayed in the organisation and it was during the few years after this event that she realised her motivation was not about wanting the status of a DCS, but:

> The sphere of influence someone in that role has. It was so very difficult to know what needed to be done and not be in the position to make it happen. In that time I began to understand what I was about – my centre is and always has been children and young people, but I need to be directly influencing that. I realised I wanted to be a DCS because I could then make things happen.

Successfully appointed to a DCS role a few years later, Jesse felt she had 'been through the mill' in the intervening years; trying to work out what was important to her and what she wanted 'to be'. Having only been a practitioner for two years, with the rest of her career in generic children's services management, Jesse had learnt how to *be* a new professional public manager. Operating in the local authority, inter-disciplinary setting of children's services, which increasingly exemplifies what Noordegraaf (2007) describes as an environment where: "*neo-liberal and business-like paradigms are at odds with the inferential natur*e of professional case and client treatment" (p.779), Jesse had experienced and sought to reconcile the tensions and impact of different

occupational and social practices to deliver integrated child-centred children's services. She felt like an accomplished children's services manager and the way she expressed her degree of agency in shaping this role was strong. Yet, she also felt that the dominant discourse of the time had prevented her from utilising these skills and experiences in not being appointed to the more senior role of DCS.

> When the new DCS posts were created nationally, the trend at the time was to appoint former Directors of Education. When the directorates of education and children's social services were merged, there was a real fear about schools not accepting leaders who were from social care like me. It left me in a dilemma at the time and, well … it took me a while to accept what happened. Then I sorted my head out and decided I was going to do what I did best - work on relationships… dig deep … bide my time until a new opportunity came up. (Jesse)

At this critical life point, Jesse's 'conscious identity work' can be seen taking place. There was clearly a period where Jesse doubted her self-worth and value to the organisation. There was a processual experience as she worked through the disappointment and de-stabilising impact of external forces on her expected career trajectory. While variable, individuals may be able to draw on integrative capacities and, in exercising these "*with skill and effort, and a little luck*" (Alvesson, 2010, p. 201) they may succeed in constructing a fleeting positive identity – albeit offering only a temporal sense of coherence, as they resist or align to their perceived social reality, often in messy and contradictory organisational contexts. Indeed, as organisational lives become more complex, managers may draw on "*mutually antagonistic discursive resources in authoring conceptions of their selves*" (Clarke et al., 2009, p.324).

In looking back on her first management post, Jaime reflected some of these dynamics during her early career stage:

> I was 24 or maybe 25 and in my second post after Uni when I became team leader and, well, looking back now I think that's a bit scary because we were dealing with such complex child protection cases and I was pretty green. If I'm perfectly honest now, it was pretty scary at the time too. I was anxious and worrying all the time because, well … it's not just about your own caseload, you are responsible for everyone on your team and if they aren't up to the job or mess up you're the one in the firing line. I had real moments when I thought 'is this really what I want to be doing'? but deep down I knew what I wanted to achieve (Jaime)

Praveen too talked about trying to find a sense of coherency working in a first job in education [specific sector not identified to maintain anonymity] "*I felt confused about what I was about. It's important to me to be in control and I was trying to find a sense of belonging and it was hard*" (Praveen).

While the 'mild heroism' inferred by struggler images of identity may irritate some, critical management theorists (Alvesson, 2010; Skoldberg, 2009; Sveningsson, 2003; Thomas & Davies 2005) see the potential it suggests for a world that may offer identity construction opportunities and pathways, as much as it does barriers. Having enjoyed career progression openings from an organisation she had clearly found a 'fit' with, Jesse faced repairing and revising her identity constructs after the experience of finding herself not aligned with a new institutional order. In reorienting herself, she understood she needed to 'dig deep while waiting for a new opportunity' she also appreciated the importance of relationships; she was guided by interests and particular goals which shaped her identity constructs and mobilised her efforts to secure what she wanted to be, a DCS.

In Alex's account of how she took the path to a qualification in social work in order to satisfy her objective of 'being successful' and 'going places', she talked about the nature of her career choice being almost completely influenced by the fact that she didn't want to wait until the age of 21 to start a Youth Work course. Social Work courses at that time were taking people earlier and, as she was really keen to go off to University after finishing A levels and having a year of working in youth clubs and "*faffing about*", she went for that.

> I wasn't even sure what social work was about to be honest. I knew I enjoyed working with teenagers and I could relate to them – well I wasn't far off most of their ages – but I just needed to get on with …. get on with getting my career started. I wanted to be successful. Yes, definitely. I wanted to be going places (Alex)

The importance of building a career deemed to be successful by Alex was represented as a mixture of her own desire to work with young people and a need to be in an occupational role which had what she judged to be societal approval as a 'profession'. This required four years undertaking the course and another few years: "*Slogging it out*

as a social worker before I became a team manager ... which is actually where I wanted to be. I made personal sacrifices along the way but it was worth it" (Alex). Here identity is very much bounded in a work self and Alex's narrative is constructed to suggest she felt the sacrifices she made were necessary to get to where she wanted to be.

Fran was also very clear and matter of fact about her route to the role which started with frontline social work after doing social work training "*when it was considered a prestigious career route compared to now*" and applying for team manager within a couple of years:

> I moved into middle and senior management in the midst of that period when the Community Care Act created adults and children's services within one social services department. There was a lot of upheaval and re-organisations. Actually, it created a good pathway for me … along the way I built a varied portfolio, even getting experience as a senior manager in health. In fact working out in a very different organisation for a few years served me well. I'd worn lots of different hats by the time I became a DCS.

During the early stages of Fran's career authors a story of moving quite freely in a turbulent public sector environment and being quite comfortable with a fluid sense of self. Taking on a number of different management roles and service areas from mental health to disabilities, and commissioning and procurement, Fran articulated how she valued the exposure to different roles and organisations; happy to spend time in diverse, often messy worlds without needing a strong sense of who she was, but rather who she '*needed to be at a given moment*' (Pettica-Harris & McKenna, 2013, p. 825).

Esa too reflects on being comfortable with fluidity in his early career too, but in a rather different way to Fran. He believes the fluid and unplanned nature of his occupational life leading up to becoming a DCS - with some distractions along the way, is rather unusual amongst his senior leadership colleagues.

> I sort of fell into my first job rather than specifically choosing it. In terms of senior management it's been about ten years. Became head of lifelong learning ten years ago, then Assistant Director three years later. None of that was planned, not one little bit of it has been planned… I spent my twenties getting pissed and clubbing. I'm sure I did some other things as well. (Esa)

He then makes an interesting observation about how he encounters and makes sense of what he labels other people's 'professional journey' in an effort to illustrate his different sense of identity, which he clearly feels is not the norm amongst his professional peer group.

> There is something about that professional journey that a lot of senior colleagues talk about…. when you talk with them, they often say things like 'I set out to be a Headteacher by the time I was 40'… Or, social work colleagues who are quite earnest about that's what they wanted to be. I never experienced that. I've dipped into lots of things in children's services, youth and community and family learning, so I feel like I know a little bit about everything in a bizarre way. For me, I'm not sure what's next, but I'm comfortable with that. (Esa)

Reflecting on his career pathway, Esa spoke of being at ease with such openness to his future; happy to move quite freely through a complex and multi-discursive world. While Fran and Esa both portrayed their identity constructs in a very positive light, Handley, Sturdy, Fincham and Clark (2006) query whether people really do have that amount of 'plasticity'. Some of the forthcoming data chapters interrogate this more deeply.

By their mid-twenties, twelve of the fourteen participants were in management roles, a number of these were senior, with responsibility for significant budgets and large staff teams. Jude described the very deliberate career trajectory which had led her to being a DCS: "*I knew exactly what I wanted to do and that's what I did … got my social work qualifications, then I was a service manager by my early 20s and Assistant Director by my early 30s*". (Jude)

Also in a management role within a few years of qualifying as a social worker, Ali described a career trajectory that had been fairly smooth in terms of where he wanted to 'get to'.

> I definitely knew I wanted to manage and quickly went into a team leader role. I then spent some tough years as a senior manager dealing with intensely difficult areas in terms of local need … we had 500 kids in care just in one of our districts and that was way, way above the national norm. Of course I was comfortable with the social care side, but the volume … the scale and size of it was a challenge. It was a difficult pace all of the time.

> So when the chance came along to be AD [Assistant Director] with a social care and housing brief in another area, which was smaller, and without some of the intense challenges, I went for it. (Ali)

While Ali described his years in children's social care as invaluable for developing his professional understanding and skills as a manager, he highlighted something he felt had been very significant in his career.

> I really felt the gap in not knowing much about the education side of things. I had never felt comfortable in that world and there's a pretty powerful force in schools. If you're not part of it …if you're on the outside it's difficult to be accepted. I was so fortunate I had a mentor.

> I was really lucky to be mentored by someone with a strong senior education management background in the area. Let's just say… he facilitated my understanding of the school community and them of me. I needed to know how to present myself to them [headteachers], how to speak their language. (Ali)

Booker, (2012) notes that many people holding senior leadership posts are: "likely to have progressed through a single disciplinary structure, where the opportunities for deep level understanding of other disciplines and their culture has been limited" (Booker, 2012 p.403)**.** Arguably, in seeking to find a 'fit' with part of the services he now had accountability for, Ali had displayed some elements of the Stencil identity image. Efforts to 'present himself' and 'speak their language' are suggestive of an eagerness to replicate a dominant template for 'being' in that particular world in order to be accepted.

This type of interpretation of how identity might be constructed at work is influenced by institutional theory; where a dominant discourse operates on individuals and they surrender part of themselves to the 'expected script' or template. They are a Stencil. The dominance of structural forces operating on an individual denies any real levels of human agency. '*There is no individual before Discourse works upon him or her'* (Alvesson, 2010 p.206). Critics including Giddens (1998), Archer (2003) and Layder (1997, 2006), contest whether discourse can exert such an all-consuming power. They promote instead (to varying degrees) the concept of knowledgeable agents playing their role in influencing the extent to which social and structural reproduction, or reform, takes place. In supporting such analysis, the theory of Analytical Dualism (Archer, 2003; 1996) and in particular Layder's (1997) notion of four Social Domains of

Psychobiography, situated activity, social settings and contextual resources, asserts the inter-related, yet distinct dimensions of agency and structure. In also demonstrating key characteristics of the Strategist image in his clarity about wanting to be a manager and knowing what he needed to do to 'get there', it could be argued that Ali mobilised his agency to present an acceptable 'script' to an institutional force. This was strategically implemented because he needed to gain acceptance from the education sector in his area in order to advance his own professional needs.

Charlie's identity narrative also shows a distinct trajectory from one image to another. Traced from a Strategist identity at the beginning of his career, when he set out knowing 'exactly' what he was going to do and funding himself through an MA while working in youth offending, he became a manager at 22. Having spent some time managing services and juvenile delinquency programmes, he worked as an independent consultant, collaborating nationally with others on systems theory in relation to working "*differently and more effectively*" with children and young people.

After returning to local authority work, a career-defining moment came between his role as Assistant Director, and becoming a DCS:

> I was involved in an inquiry of a child's death and the experience completely changed me. It was so harrowing at times. What it taught me is that being a DCS is utterly and completely about the children and I hold myself to account on this, and I hold others to account on it. In fact what I've learnt is that while structures shape behaviours… well its people who make it work. We need to constantly ask 'so what?' and create conversations which safeguard kids. That's what I'm about. (Charlie)

Charlie articulated a very central dimension to his biographical-career story which points to a more 'integrated and meaningfully created' identity (McAdams, 1996). In his story telling, a level of reflexivity is present which acutely recognises that there are structural and institutional forces at play - not least because of his Inquiry experience, where systems, structures and incompatible occupational practices were shown to have got in the way of chances to save a child's life – but he is resolute about the power of his own agency, and that of others to challenge, rather than reproduce destructive aspects of these forces.

While some would question the possibility of constructing and sustaining a credible long-term self-narrative (Roberts, 2005), and whether it would be strong enough to provide the ontological security implied, this is an interesting example of where the participant has shared an 'enduring, established story' Alvesson (2010). Here, we have a narrative which appears to offer at least a temporally embedded identity construct, giving Charlie purpose in the way he authors the story of his professional self.

6.3 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter offered some insights into influences of early career pathways and important times and events in the lives of the fourteen DCSs involved in the study. These experiences, institutional encounters and social interactions were represented by them as being significant on their journey towards becoming a senior leader of children's services, and on how they make sense of their own trajectory and life story. This illustrates their unique individual character and the distinctiveness of what they bring - ever evolving, shaping and being shaped - to the relationship between them and society (Layder, 2006; Ybema et al., 2009).

What is of interest in the data here concerned with life-career story (Chamberlayne et al., 2002; Wengraf, 2004), is a pattern emerging. There is very little in the empirical data pointing to what Alvesson (2010) has described as the 'stencil' or 'soldier' images of identity, often seen in literature where notions of social dopism are prevalent as an explanation of identity construction. In terms of critical points and early career pathways, most of the interpretations in the narratives shared in this study are suggestive of the individual being quite active in authoring identity conceptions, while also cognisant of some of the social and discursive influences and contexts in which these take place.

In a review of the large body of identity literature, and helpful categorisation into a typology of images, Alvesson (2010) represents a continuum of stances: from extreme essentialist to radical constructionist concepts of identity formation. He is keen to emphasise that the way theorists choose to structure the field, and in the broad acknowledgement by most observers that contemporary social and organisational life is more complex and nuanced than in the past, identity is a more 'open project'. Arguably this is reflected in the movement - and sometimes intersecting and competing

interpretations between different identity images in the narrative accounts of the DCSs involved in this study.

The following Chapter deals more specifically with 'making sense of the professional self' and some of the challenges of a hybrid identity; where participants share their experiences of straddling two professional identities - that of their original practitioner background and that of the senior leader-manager they have become. This presents further, rich opportunities for analysing the extent to which influences of structure, and of human agency are seen to contribute to how identity scripts can be shaped or re-shaped in this unique role.

7. IDENTITY STRUGGLES: IDEALISED SELF, PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND HARSH REALITIES

7.1 Context and Chapter Structure

In attempting to make sense of, and to articulate their current professional identity, most Directors of Children's Services (DCSs) began with the psychobiographical accounts (Layder, 2006) documented and discussed in the previous chapter. These traced some of the ebb and flow of personal and occupational journeys, and critical life points on the way to becoming a DCS. This chapter moves on to first examine a closely related dimension, often rooted in these experiences: the perceived importance and place of personal and professional values in seeking or re-affirming identity salience. In **section 7.2 Values, Images and the Idealised Professional Manager**, DCSs frequently recalled 'moments in time' - particularly related to decision-making, when they became more consciously aware of deeply-held personal values (Barrett, 2014), or commitment to the professional occupational values and principles they had been trained and steeped in (Frost & Parton, 2009). Such experiences tended to be described in emergent terms: A uniquely individual cognitive and emotional process, where values became more fully known to them, or acted as a touchstone and a steadying point of internal reference when faced with some of the challenges in the role.

In their different ways - but through the use of similar language, all fourteen DCSs were keen to emphasise how their work practices and leadership approaches were influenced and guided by child-centred values. In responding to the recursive "who am I?" and "how should I be?" questions (Pettica-Harris & McKenna, 2013, p.824), an interesting discourse is revealed. The potential such a senior role offered to 'make a difference for children' was returned to repeatedly in their narratives; suggestive of positive notions and ideals in identity work and a coherent articulation of how they want to be seen by others.

Section **7.3 Being Superhuman: Self-Identity Narratives,** captures some self-authored identity talk which reveals the majority of participants deem the DCS job as one that can only really be performed well by those in possession of special qualities and skills, including prodigious amounts of tenacity, resilience and child-centred

motivations. DCSs operate in one of the most exposed and demanding senior leadership positions of an increasingly marketised neo-liberal public service in the UK. They are also subject to very distinct, institutionally endorsed leadership models and discourses that emphasise the need for nothing less than a highly-skilled, immensely adaptive and ethically-driven authentic leader (Ghate et al., 2013; Welbourn, 2015). This section examines some of the forces and social dynamics encountered by the DCSs and considers how interactions and expectations (from self and others) may influence leader identity constructs.

In the complex, socially negotiated process of identity construction, the "*internal strivings*" (Ybema et al., 2009, p.301) and images of the professional self, were often found to collide unpleasantly with the external forces of a hostile media, and reactive responses from politicians and the public. The penultimate section of this chapter **7.4 Influences of the Media and Political Rhetoric,** concentrates on DCSs' experiences and concerns with antagonistic media representation - described by some as 'demonisation' of those in the role (Garboden, 2011; Warner, 2014), and with wider society's negative perceptions of senior children's services managers and social workers in the UK. The accounts offer new insights into identity work and identity struggles in action in this unique role. They capture narratives of encounters with these powerful external dynamics: some felt vulnerable and anxious about the personal and professional risks of carrying statutory accountability for children's safekeeping, while others claimed to use it to mobilise a stronger sense of professional self and purpose.

Whatever way DCSs chose to present themselves, it was evident that the judgement of others and the weight of accumulated societal values associated with this area of work had implications for ontological security (Archer, 2003; Layder, 2006). The frequency and diversity of social interactions in the turbulent, complex organisational settings DCSs inhabit, offer abundant encounters for the professional-self to be endorsed or denied by others (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The chapter concludes with an exploration of concern for **Status and Credibility as a DCS, section 7.5,** which appeared as an important focus for meaning-making in situated activity (Layder, 2004, 2006) with many of these 'others,' including frontline staff and senior managers from other organisations.

7.2 "It's All About the Children": Values, Images and the Idealised Professional Manager

In contemporary knowledge societies, people are less likely than in the past to 'put in a day's work' over a set amount of hours, in routinised ways and then switch off into defined periods of rest or recreation. The nature of modern work and fragmented, unstable organisational contexts - especially with advanced information technologies, often leads to a sense of perpetual work in motion, blurring the boundaries between work time, and home or personal time (Sennett, 2006). Most DCSs gave the impression that the role was all-consuming: if they were not physically in the workplace, their minds were:

> You never properly switch off. I tend to be at my desk from about 7.00am. With cabinet meetings and night-time events, I'm often not home until well after dinner. There's stuff on at weekends too with the job being around services for children and youngsters. Your mind keeps ticking. Even in bed at night I'm constantly sifting through things I need to sort out, plates I need to keep spinning … [that] I can't afford to drop (Nat)

Alex makes a similar point about work spilling into other aspects of her life. She reconciles this with her conviction that the impact is worth it because it rests comfortably with the child-centred values that are important to her:

> You do live and breathe this job. I don't say that to be dramatic or 'woe is me' but there aren't many jobs where the action or inaction of other people - who you don't have some form of management control over, can potentially have catastrophic consequences. That doesn't exactly get left behind in the office when you walk out the door of an evening … but I do this because I care about kids and I care about the most vulnerable kids. So the personal cost is worth it. (Alex)

Strong values and guiding principles around wanting to improve the experiences, opportunities and safekeeping of children, were consistently articulated as the key focus and motivation in all the DCSs' work lives; an orienting point of reference in self-authored constructs of their professional selves (Giddens, 1991; Sims, 2003). As Praveen put it: "*If you cut most of us DCSs through we're like a stick of rock, it's: the child, the child, the child*". Others also made fairly simple, unequivocal statements in asserting a strong values-based identity narrative: "*It always comes back to the child for*

me in everything I do" (Jude). "*If we don't focus on the children … on the young people, then for me there's little purpose to this job*" (Morgan). Chandra too was eager to display an 'authentic self-image' (Ybema et al., 2009), aligned with child-centred values and representative of what she stood for:

> I need the kids to know they are valued, they are as important to the community as anyone else. That's what floats my boat, that's what I value most. People know that's what I'm about. (Chandra)

Becoming quite animated as she talked of the potential in the DCS role to "*live out*" her values, Chandra described herself as a "*standard bearer for children's rights to enjoy and achieve, and to be protected in life*". While there was a keenly felt contradictory position (Clarke et al., 2009) here in her anxieties about what that also meant in terms of her statutory responsibility around safeguarding children, it did seem to serve as a stabilising force in her identity narrative. Several other DCSs emphasised the authority and capacity such a senior leadership role could give them to affect change and influence positive outcomes for children.

> My absolute driver is to genuinely make a difference to children and I don't say that in a trite way. In previous jobs where I wasn't as senior it used to frustrate me to death when I could see things could be done in a different way, a better way. When the DCS jobs were first coming out, I thought that is my ideal job because I could change things the way I wanted. The common thread is simple – it's children and making sure they get a better deal (Jesse)

Similarly, Jaime observes:

> The most important thing this role gives me is a chance to make a difference for children, but it needs to be about making the right difference.

That 'right difference' was seen to be guided by what Jaime felt were her personal values – what was important and valuable to her, and the professional teacher training values that had underpinned her career development. These values were portrayed by Jaime as symbiotic and complementary, centred on children being enabled to have better life opportunities especially through "a good education". As part of claims to professionalism and a need to validate - and have validated, a positive self-image, distinctive values-based practices and discourses are generated by professions

themselves (Colley & Guery, 2015; Evetts, 2012). In early interviews it quickly emerged that all but two of the fourteen DCSs continued to understand their professional selves as at least partly embodied in the philosophy and value-base of their original occupational background(s) as Jude's comment illustrates:

> My profession is social work. I operate from a social work perspective, the values of my profession are very important to me and I do draw on that as a DCS. (Jude)

Nat was also keen to emphasise the primacy she gave to her occupational identity, stating: "*I'm an educationalist first and foremost. I know that's what drives my values*". While acknowledging strong identification with original practitioner backgrounds, others also mentioned deepening understanding of diverse professional approaches across the children's workforce, and the imperative of the DCS role to lead multi-agency, multi-disciplinary practice.

> I am aware of a change in me, in terms of understanding about other disciplines – I've been on a particularly steep learning curve around education and the culture there, but I don't think my social care background has been diminished, in fact, if anything the values and principles become stronger.

> As DCS, I have to be the bridge to help people overcome differences. Stay distinctive, but bring those differences together as strengths. (Sam)

Much has been written about the merits of blurring professional roles and forms of practices to operate as 'one team' (Hill et al., 2013; Fitzgerald & Kay, 2008), versus the need to maintain strong professional 'identities' and deliver a complementary, yet multi-disciplinary approach in integrated children's services. (Anning et al., 2010; Davis & Smith, 2012; Lawler & Bilson, 2010). This is an important concern for identity work because as Frost and Parton (2009) observe:

> Social Workers, in common with other professions, have traditionally been trained in a way that developed a strong sense of professional identity, with a commitment to social work as a profession and to its specific values and techniques … [so] it is a paradox then that once they are qualified, much contemporary practice is focused on developing integrated working and a shared sense of identity with other professionals. (2009, p.180)

Like Sam, Frost and Parton (2009) advocate that although it is challenging, it is actually both possible and desirable to retain a strong, distinct sense of professional identity by holding to occupational values and particular models of practice, while acknowledging the diverse contributions brought by other professionals through their occupational training and values. While efforts take place to construct and control occupational identity 'from within', in the UK public sector, the government has an influential role 'from above' (Frost, 2014; McClelland, 1990) shaping and indeed seeking to control the contemporary professional project: partly through directing and colonising some of those values, and in the current neo-liberal knowledge economy, by aligning people's "*efforts, purposes and self-understanding*" (Ball, 2012, p.29) to externalised forms of regulation, accountability and performativity measures.

Documents such as the current UK Teachers' Standards (June, 2013) have accompanied teacher training provision since the James Report of the early 1970s; albeit becoming increasingly prescriptive and more frequently issued by successive Governments. The 2013 Professional Standards set out: 'the values and behaviour that all teachers must demonstrate throughout their careers'. The first standard states: "*teachers must make pupils education their first concern*" (DfE Teachers' Standards, p. 10, 2013).

While the DfE determine the expected values and behaviour of those in education, in social work, it is a professional body - The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) which has established a 'Code of Ethics', laying out the values and ethical principles on which the profession is based. Its first stated value is: "*social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people*" (BASW, 2012, p.8). Alex refers to her social work training acting as a mantra in her day-to-day leadership practice:

> I always remind myself - in this job you should never lose sight of the power you have over other people. Good old social work training gave me that focus on the power dynamic in relationships. All that anti-oppressive practice stuff was a bit over- the-top at times, but that core message, 'don't forget who you are, you're supposed to be here for the kids and families' stays with me. (Alex)

The majority of DCSs involved in this study came from either social work or teaching backgrounds, but there were a few from other professions including youth work, careers guidance and early years. Just like social work and teaching, they are subject to government edicts, yet also have their own established professional codes and values under the stewardship of bodies such as the National Youth Agency (NYA). Morgan started out as a youth worker:

> There isn't a shadow of doubt in my mind that what I do is completely influenced by my youth work training and experiences. I have to say those were some of the happiest days of my career. That whole thing about starting where young people are at, respecting them as individuals it's my values completely. In this sort of position what I [can] do is bring that understanding to the big decisions, to how we might do things better. (Morgan)

In the values-based identity talk of DCSs, there were often echoes of Every Child Matters (2004) policy discourse, which had underpinned the children's services agenda in the final term of the New Labour Government. A policy framework focused on five 'positive outcomes' for children: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being, the ECM Change for Children document accompanied the legislative provision of the Children Act (2004). Both set out a new relationship between the state, and parents and children in the wake of the Climbie Inquiry (2003). Together these led to the largest single reform of children's services in the UK, supporting a significant expansion of multi-agency and integrated working (Anning et al., 2010; Frost, 2011d). The Act established the statutory DCS role in each local authority area in England.

Although swiftly discarded by a newly elected coalition government in 2010, ECM policy principles clearly still held some strong resonance for a number of DCSs who had worked through these new organisational arrangements; in fact, they had often led them. Despite being several years since it had been government policy, some still used positive outcomes language such as 'achieve' and 'keep safe', while others explicitly referred to ECM policy principles as most representative of their professional work selves. Ali and Sam both illustrate this:

> It doesn't matter that ECM isn't current policy – it's still completely relevant to what I do. I mean who is going to disagree with the principle that every child

matters? So, yes it actually still totally reflects the spirit of what I'm about and my constant efforts to work with the child at the centre. (Ali)

Every child matters might be old policy language, but I am very clear the values and principles still remain and that will continue to underpin children's services here while I'm still DCS, and that's really, really important to me. (Sam)

It is of little surprise that the DCSs have at least some residual affection for, and identification with, ECM values. As Ali argues, it would seem counter-intuitive for anyone working with children to disagree with the values and philosophy espoused. It is also important to remember that while the role of DCS was created to be a single line of accountability, those in the post were also responsible for implementing this policy agenda, so became immersed in ECM language and were the most visible ambassador for it. Bradford (2008) has consistently argued, contemporary professional managers are "*central to the project of government*" (p. 22).

The potential implications for identity construction of institutionally imposed values and discourse are explored more deeply in Chapter Eight, with particular emphasis on a shift from what was seen by the majority of DCSs to be a fairly congruent value base to their own in the ECM agenda, to the imposition of current government policy. Marketisation of public services (Hulme et al., 2014) and severe funding cuts are provoking a strong resistance discourse centred on concerns that services for children's well-being, safekeeping and wider child welfare are being undermined. Meanwhile DCSs are still left with all the accountability for child protection across an increasing number of organisations they have no direct control over and, more significantly, these agencies may not have the same child-centred values base as their primary concern (Parton, 2014; Purcell et al., 2012).

Some of the agencies we are now working with in the commissioning process are clearly not coming from the same place in terms of a focus on what's best for children. It does bother me that the values can be so different. The bottom line of profit is the most important thing for some of them. (Nat)

There is continued debate about the degree to which values and ethics are instilled through professional training and the social conditioning of established practices, and how much is vested in at least some emotional uniqueness and private motivations of an individual "*for we are never entirely the creatures of society*" (Layder, 2006 p.275).

At the time of research, almost all the DCSs felt government ideology and targets were in conflict with their own personal and occupational values: the idealised images of 'what' and 'how' a senior children's services leader should be, are being disrupted and disturbed (Baxter, 2011; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Views of the professional self, reified in worthy child-centred values were being unsettled by a political and economic policy agenda: "*A million miles away from the child-centred focus and energy around ECM that made this job so special*" (Morgan). The ideological shift is also in tension with what arguably motivates many public sector practitioners, the 'public value proposition' (Moore, 1995) of delivering the best services for children based on need, rather than cost.

Increasingly exposed to the challenges of leadership in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (Horney et al., 2010), participants revealed considerable identity work taking place as they responded to changes in social conditions and tried to meet the very real demands of deep financial cuts, increased inspections and intense performativity measures. Esa's comment was typical of many observations:

> I didn't come into this job to cut services … to make massive redundancies in services that were already struggling to reach the vulnerable children we need to get to. The government doesn't give a damn about places like this. I don't want to be seen as their hatchet man and actually it makes me want to fight harder to yeah, do things with less money and less people, but we can be creative and I can do that without selling my soul. (Esa)

Praveen also illuminated some of the challenges that changes to the organisational context had brought:

> All the time you have different agendas swirling round in your head. What the government are pushing for, what our councillors want – which here is the total opposite to government, when the next inspection is coming, how many cases of risk are we exposed to at the frontline.
>
> Deep down the job hasn't changed for me but it's challenged me to rewrite the script because there's a corporate agenda out there now. Children stay as my central focus though. (Praveen)

A number of accounts begin with suggestions of Lifton's (1993) notion of the protean self, forming and reforming in an increasingly fluid and precarious modern world. In the

extreme, these constructs are never still or stable enough for claims to identity to be validated by others, or indeed ourselves (Elliott & du Gay, 2009; Gergen, 2000). Yet as Layder (2006) argues, such acute social constructionism obliterates any allowance for even a modicum of agency: an emotional uniqueness that acknowledges individual desires, fears, motivations and contradictions. In this study, DCSs clearly exhibited some agency in seeking security and stability through their narrated self-identity. In fact most of the stories told were more representative of Levi-Strauss' (1966) notion of bricolage, where people creatively utilise what is available and are not completely at the mercy of unbridled social forces. This is not to dismiss the fact that modern working and organisational lives are complex and fragmented with competing, often antagonistic discourse (Clarke et al., 2009, p.325), rather it recognises that agency is exercised in the act of individuals: "*diving into the cultural repertoire of scripts, or the cultural tool-kit, to pull out stories that can account for, and make sense of, their experiences*" (Tabatabai & Linders, 2011). While professional identity as a DCS is constructed, it is partly bounded in the values base claimed as part of the cultural repertoire of a children's services leader, and in identity scripts shaped by occupational learning and experience. DCSs emphasised that although they carried these values and scripts into the role, the demands of leading multi-disciplinary workers in hybrid organisational domains, meant they were exposed to new ways of understanding professional claims to knowledge and different forms of practice.

> I realise everyone's got their own view of right. You can't simply achieve things by being right about them; especially if there are seven kinds of right. I'm so signed up to a shared way of working centred on children's needs first that it completely shapes my leadership approach. What we have to do is get people speaking from the same page, even though we might all have different ways of coming at things (Praveen)

What we see here is indicative of Weick's (1995) idea that sense-making is an act of interpretation, actively employed in identity work to generate a common language. Although as Brown et al. (2015) note that does not imply there are no tensions or differences behind the "same page" that Praveen refers to. As DCSs seek to "*appropriate and enact their realities*" (Brown et al. 2015, p. 265) there are still competing discourses, professional rivalries, emotions, policy instability and issues of status and power at play. The 'fit' between individuals and society remains precarious and anxiety and insecurity can never be fully allayed (Layder 2006, p. 275). Within

these dynamics, there was evidence of changing managerial identity positions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), which appeared to be drawn on to operate effectively in these complex arenas:

> In terms of how I act in different environments you do find yourself playing out in different ways depending on which group of people you're with. I think about what they need to hear, see and feel and that means a different way to present myself depending on whether it's my chief executive, a headteacher or a family with a complaint… [but] I always come back to children at the centre; it's kind of my compass really (Sam)

In their self-constructs, DCSs often reached beyond Weick's (1995) focus on interpreting and generating a discourse of the present, by focusing on a narrative of the future; engaging in 'prospective sense-making' (Brown et al., 2014; Corley & Gioia, 2011), in attempts to find identity salience and to cope with what some saw as the peculiar fragility and risk of the role:

> One of the biggest challenges of this job is the feeling of insecurity. Each day you come in and there is a small part of you highly tuned to the prospect that today could be the day everything slams into your face. But I keep myself focused on what we are trying to do here, the things I want to see us achieve for children. I intend to be around to see that happen (Alex)

> This is the best job in the council. I have the power and influence to make things happen. The potential of what we can achieve for children does help counter the feelings of massive risk we carry (Ali)

Institutional, organisational and professional discourses are multiple, often competing and a source of precariousness for work identities (Clarke et al., 2009; Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). Subjectively authored accounts revealed DCSs pressed into constant identity work in the rapidly changing policy landscape that they inhabit. Several talked about their efforts to translate this into service delivery that still reflected their values.

> Policy is changing around us all the time and the funding cuts are biting deep, but with a clear outcomes focus and professional expertise, you have licence to innovate – you can answer the 'so what?' question. My feeling is: do what the hell you like as long as you are acting along restorative principles and in the interests of children. (Charlie)

Feelings of creativity and boldness even, in what they were doing seemed to be informing a resistance discourse (Watson, 2008), again based on child-centred values:

> I've become bolder about not doing stuff that I think won't make a difference, I say "no" more confidently now. You become more acutely aware of the impact on children and families of your decisions and I go back to that more than ever. Strangely, because we've been so up against it I've also developed better judgement about when to take risks. Losing staff and having to commission even more services means I've definitely become more daring, more creative (Jaime)

While identity remains an 'unfinished project' (Corlett & McInnes, 2012) the DCSs self-narratives suggested that their identity work in such destabilising conditions, was mobilising some degree of security, albeit temporal and often fleeting, as they sought to make sense of their professional-selves (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

> I have a really strong belief system about public service and that is a big challenge at the moment with everything coming at us from the Government. I work on the basis that I can do anything as long as it is informed by my professional knowledge, it is best for children, and is done with integrity. (Jesse)

As part of this sense-making process, the notion of 'wanting to make a difference to children' appeared as such a frequent motif - in both storied selves (McAdams, 1996) and in describing interactions with others, that it was possible to see distinct patterns of languaging, (Clarke et al., 2009; Kornberger & Brown, 2007) emerge in interviews. Even though DCSs were based in local authorities up to a hundred miles from each other, and were the only person in their organisation fulfilling the DCS role, they seemed to draw on this shared value-base and moral code as a "discursive resource" (Kornberger & Brown, 2007, p.2) to help define individual and collective identities. Fran's comment represents some of the typical narrative:

> What's striking about doing this job is that we're all dead passionate about children. You look at the different environments we operate in - from deprived post-manufacturing to really rural … and some of us have both in our patch, the one thing we have in common is the focus on making things better for children in our area. (Fran)

In terms of a shared discourse, Fran spoke of a common mission amongst her DCS peers, directly linking this to how she understood her identity:

> A big source of my professional identity is the culture that has developed around children's services and the sort of collective mission. What the people in this role are about. It sounds trite but it's about championing what is best for children and families and those are our touchstones really. (Fran)

While Fran felt that the National College – a government-funded body organising some of the early leadership development training for aspirant DCSs, "*captured some of the essence and core of the role very well: especially the core values*", Jude felt very strongly that actually the training provider, and indeed civil servants did not have the right, or the informed professional knowledge, to "*dictate the terms of what a perfect DCS should be like, should look like*". She continued:

> What's it all about? 'Ooh I've completed the aspirant DCS programme, I've got the ticket'. Well, I want to be master of my own destiny and I don't see why I have to get someone's tick that says I can go and be a DCS. Why does some stuffed shirt from National College have the right decide if I'm good enough to be a DCS? They don't have the professional understanding. I mean who the hell do you think you are? (Jude)

Jude seemed to be railing against what she felt were state imposed constructs of a 'perfect DCS' and some of the processes and normative mechanisms applied to determine, and indeed establish approval of suitable candidates for senior leaders of children's services. Jude went on to detail her efforts to subvert expectations from the DfE to send her assistant directors on the aspirant DCS development programme. This display of strategic non-compliance (Campbell et al., 2003; Trodd et al., 2011) was justified in Jude's mind because her professional expertise and judgement about the skills and qualities needed to be an effective DCS, were superior to those on 'the outside' seeking to impose ideal types.

Interestingly, other than Billie's view that: "[government] *officials are over-involved in our professional development*" there were no other dissenting voices about leadership development provision and portrayals of what a DCS should 'look like' as represented in dominant models and discourses relating to senior leadership of children's services.

However, what was striking in interviews with all the DCSs was the very frequent use of idioms and metaphors seen in the endorsed models and discourse for current and aspirant DCSs in England. In Chapter Eight, examples in the empirical data of quite particular vernacular around leadership, and enacting leadership identity are examined.

Literature accompanying the Systems Leadership Model (2013), the Resourceful Leader Model (2011) and a National Qualities Framework (2011) which underpins current leadership development provision for DCSs, emphasises the complex, fluid and uniquely challenging environment of children's services. The models specify and set out the special qualities and behaviours needed to "*be a leader and champion for children*" (DfE Statutory Guidance, 2013, p. 4); portraying strong images of a highly-skilled, complex-adaptive, values-driven, authentic leader. While evidence of participants' difficulties and disagreement with current government policy activity and discourse was regularly forthcoming - particularly in relation to a lack of congruence with their (often occupationally rooted) child-centred values-base, it is unsurprising that discourse and models evoking leader identity constructs of exceptional strengths and morally impeccable motives are less likely to be resisted or rejected. Even if, in then trying to enact this ideal, they may struggle with the anxieties and insecurities of never quite living up to idealised images (Knights & Clarke, 2014). A phenomenon acknowledged in some of the narrative in section 7.3.

In summary, deeply-held values and guiding principles of wanting to improve the experiences and safekeeping of children were consistently expressed by participants as central to their sense of identity. Described as "a touchstone", the "common thread", the "spirit of what I do", child-centred values permeated the narrative. Notions of 'who they were' and 'how they should be' (Ibarra, 1999) were largely predicated on a value base that, while in most cases anchored in different original occupational training and professional codes, shared the same focus on achieving the best outcomes for children. In what was often described as a vulnerable, exposed and lonely post by participants, this acted as a discursive resource for DCSs, giving purpose and form to what they were doing in their work lives; especially the recognition that the authority of the role also extended opportunities to effect positive change. Equally, when the principle of 'putting children first' appeared to be under threat from the neo-liberal forces of

marketisation and performativity, this acted as a strong point of mobilisation for identity work (Alvesson, 2010) to take place.

Normative leadership models supported by the professional body of DCSs (ADCS) naturally fete the moral imperative of a child-centred value-base and promote an ideal manifestation of a professional public manager; capable of performing "*exceptionally*" (Ghate et al., 2013) in the volatile, complex and uncertain world of children's services. As DCSs seek identity salience, such idealised images have an integral part to play in meaning-making in their professional identity construction. It is important to avoid reductionist interpretations and to recognise the complex processes and social interactions involved. Attempts to manage leadership practices and target identity (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014; Thomas, 2007) may be at work from institutional forces - aligning DCSs with a particular type of ideal professional public manager (Noordegraaf, 2007), but, reflecting complex agency-structure dynamics, the DCSs have helped to inform and construct these too. Some of the self-identity narratives explored in the next section reveal how images of an ideal identity (Schwartz, 1987), are reinforced by the DCSs, even if in their own view - and the perceived expectations of others (Knights & Clarke, 2014), that demands of them to be 'superhuman'.

7.3 Being Superhuman: Self-Identity Narratives

In seeking to make sense of their professional selves, many of the DCSs were keen to articulate how the role was special and distinctive, requiring particular personal qualities, strengths and skills to fulfil it.

> Not many people can do this job. You have to be very skilful and incredibly tenacious. You have to be at the top of your game in terms of managing the complexity that we deal with every single day and know how to influence at every level, often in other organisations. The pressure can be relentless. I have to be agile, solid and visionary all at the same time (Jaime)

For those either in the role or close to it, there is recognition that it is a particularly demanding leadership position. Thomas (2014) described being a DCS as '*the hardest public sector job in Britain"* and some certainly felt this to be the case:

> It can be an insanely complex, demanding role. My effort is on translating it into simple – not simplistic, you can't ignore the complexity, but I need to enable everyone else to see the picture. What we do and how we do … it can have a really positive or really negative impact on children. That never sits lightly. You have to be strong to carry that. (Charlie)

Lord Laming - the Climbie inquiry lead and original architect of the DCS post, called for recognition that: "balancing the many different demands of the role requires significant levels of determination and leadership skills. The responsibility of the role should not be underestimated" (Laming, 2009). Some DCSs commented that one of their biggest struggles was a misunderstanding of their role by senior colleagues in other organisations working with children, including health services and schools: "They [headteachers] are happy to see DCSs take the responsibility, but quite a few have absolutely no conception of how hard my job is" (Chandra). Gurrey and Brazil (2014) argue that lack of a positive supportive climate, or real understanding of what the role actually involves, from other senior leaders in health, education, youth justice and the police is a significant destabilising force, adding to insecurities around identity. Although for Alex, she found judgement and verification by others a positive experience, strengthening her role identity (Swann et al., 2012).

> I go to meetings with the police and they call me ma'am and I'm like please don't call me that it makes me feel old…. The culture is hugely hierarchical there and it is interesting the way they show deference to me. I think they invest my role with significant authority and that does reflect back to me, and I suppose I quite like that (Alex)

Encouraged to aspire to an ideal identity (Schwartz, 1987) and to act as a particular kind of leader in Children's Services, DCSs are subject to strong messages about the need to embody the 'true to self' authentic leader (Luthans & Avolio 2003), and the highly skilled complex-adaptive leader (Heifetz, 1994; Uhl-bien et al., 2007). Both are manifested in the dominant 'Resourceful Leader' (NCLSCS, 2011) and 'Systems Leader' (Virtual Staff College, 2013) models. Operating in one of the most exposed positions of an increasingly marketised, neo-liberal public service in the UK, these ideals are constantly reinforced by intense performativity demands (Knights & Clarke, 2014) and by the expectation that these leader-managers in charge of hybridised, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary domains are going to preside effectively over it all. When Ofsted recently concluded that, in their view, over three quarters of children's services

are "not good enough", the Government's inspection body felt compelled to prescribe: "*characteristics that are needed in a successful DCS leader*". This includes a *"leadership style driven by a strong moral base*", with the ability to "*do what is right for children [and be] credible and visible, having clear responsibility and accountability*" (Joining the Dots, Ofsted Report, 2015, p.4). The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) quickly disputed the claim that 70% of children's services were not good enough - branding Ofsted's current assessment and inspection framework as 'flawed'. Objection was also raised against attempts to construct a desired leadership identity by a regulatory force: "*By trying to be an improvement agency as well as an inspectorate, Ofsted is marking its own homework*" (Wood & Simmonds, 2015, p.3).

While the ADCS, as the professional body of DCSs, is seen here resisting discourses of control imposed on children's services leaders 'from above' (Evetts, 2003, 2012; McClelland, 1990), much of the rhetoric and leadership development programmes endorsed by the ADCS themselves, suggest occupational control 'from within' is predicated on models strongly promoting particular characteristics and behaviours of a desired type of leader and particular notions of professionalism. A strapline in the documents for an Aspiring DCS development programme states: "*There is no space for anything other than the highest quality of leader*". (ADCS, 2012-14). For some, living up to images and expectations of the role was not particularly reasonable or realistic:

> You are expected to be superhuman in this role. It is a pressure to be honest. You have to be all things to all people and it comes at you from every angle (Chandra)

> Looking at the all the stuff about the amazing behaviour we are supposed to exhibit and the incredible qualities we are meant to have, does ramp it up a bit. I do think people looking at the role as a future step might be intimidated by all that. I am sometimes. (Esa)

Others seemed to be more comfortable - indeed happy, to perpetuate the ideal image of a high-performing, adaptable, indestructible leader:

> I don't think other people even begin to understand the unique leadership challenges of this job. You have to be an incredibly strong leader, being a DCS brings out the best in me. It totally suits me (Alex)

The thing you have to learn to be good at as a DCS is to live with real messiness and contradiction every single day and then look like you're gliding along the water like a swan. You are totally expected to be like this unruffled, completely in control person. Everyone around me expects that and I expect that of myself (Jesse)

Interestingly in Jude's storying of self (McAdams, 1996), she shared the belief that her mental and physical strengths enable her to fulfil the demands of the role:

I've just had a medical and I'm quite fit which is good because you have to be able to take a huge, huge amount of pressure in this job. You need a high degree of resilience and physical and mental strength. In this role, your threshold for work and stress has got to be extremely high and mine is. (Jude)

Jude shared further thoughts about what she saw as resilience issues for some colleagues, she viewed as less able than her to: "*handle the emotional demands*" of the role. These are considered further in Chapter Nine of this study and cast an interesting perspective in relation to the concept of leading as emotional labour, the particular valuing practices of leadership work and the effect on those performing it (Iszatt-White, 2009, 2012).

Resilience was an important feature in Alex's narrative too.

I don't think you can teach the very special inter-personal qualities you need to be a good DCS. Some people stay as practitioners and that's good, we need good social workers and health visitors etc. but this is the difference with management and why some people get to a higher level. I think it often comes down to how tenacious you are, how resilient and thick-skinned you are. You have to be all of that to cut it as a DCS (Alex)

While Chandra felt "*totally committed to what I do*" and able to use positive metaphors about herself in the role "*There are some days when this feels like the best job in the world and I'm just flying in it*", she went on to articulate that in the context of an expanding remit there are times when she felt it was: "*So overwhelming, I just want to run away and quietly stack shelves in M&S*" (Chandra). In an official review of child protection in 2011 for the UK Government, Professor Eileen Munro made specific recommendations that the distinct child focus of the DCS post should be protected, and

not diluted by post-holders being spread too thinly by taking on other service areas. However, reflecting the national picture where up to 80% of DCS are managing other large service areas (Hill, 2015), nine of fourteen DCSs in this study were already overseeing another directorate such as adult services, or housing, and there were expectations that additional management responsibility was imminent for the others.

> I know I'm going to end up with more services. I've had this conversation with my chief exec. I didn't come into this world to be …. in effect a Director of Social Services. I just don't have the interest in adult's mental health and elderly care. There's enough risk here [in children's services] and enough to do to keep me more than busy. It is increasingly expected though; so part of me thinks it's inevitable, but it's not what I'm about (Esa)

Purcell et al. (2012) argue that the reality for most DCSs is that they are more vulnerable and exposed than ever as organisational demands are almost certainly going to exceed the "*reasonable limits of individual performance*" (p.92) in the role. It was clear to see recognition of this in a number of accounts from the DCSs who acknowledged that the changing, and growing remit of the role was contributing to increased feelings of insecurity, particularly where new responsibilities were taking them away from what was seen as their core purpose:

> When the DCS role came, I felt it was 'my time'. It is a special job. You have to be pretty special and pretty focused to do it well. I do feel conflicted sometimes, pulled away too much from what I really care about, but it's about how you respond to that and I cope really well with a massive, chaotic agenda. (Jaime)

It was striking how adept most of the DCSs appeared at reconciling themselves to living with the organisational uncertainties of expanding remits and increased commissioning. At the very least, this suggests evidence of skilled narrative-crafting, perhaps serving as an 'identity stabiliser' (Alvesson, 2010 p. 203) in their scripted stories about the changing organisational context and how they were coping with it. These narratives of the self, presented as 'reflexively understood' by participants (Giddens, 1991, p.53) offered interesting insights into how DCSs were attempting to make sense of their experiences and create meaning in an increasingly messy, complex world. At some stage in the interviews, all participants – even those who at times expressed self-doubt, articulated a self with possession of special leadership qualities and skills, generally

seen to set them apart from others. These senior leader-managers are highly practised at front-stage performance (Goffman, 1959). So, the degree to which interactions and idealised expectations were influencing their narrated leader identity constructs was difficult to tell. However, "*individuals exist both inside and outside society*" (Layder, 2006, p.274) and are subject to the forces and dynamics of contextual resources, reproduced relations and 'ways of doing' in social settings, so self-identity is always revisable. Dominant leadership models and professional and institutional discourses encourage an ideal leader identity construct (Schwartz, 1987). They help 'story' the special leader needed in Children's Services; one who is best placed to achieve positive outcomes for children, and has the qualities, strength and skills to also weather the storm of media, political and public attention and responses encountered in this role.

7.4 Does 'Local Government Officer' Sound Boring Enough? Influences of the Media and Political Rhetoric

The way DCSs perceived themselves was partly filtered through varying degrees of concern about negative media representation and the reaction of politicians and the public towards them. Carrying responsibility for the delivery of effective children's services in increasingly challenging circumstances was seen to be diminished by an imbalanced - and often distorted, focus on child protection failings. When participants talked of making sense of their identity as a DCS, struggles with reconciling real and imagined fears and experiences of a backlash against them by the media, politicians and the public featured strongly.

7.4.1 "So, What Do You Do?"

In responding to the frequently posed social question "So, what do you do?" with its implications for feelings of worth and value rooted in occupational identity in the West (Unruh, 2004), several participants felt that demonisation of the DCS role (Garboden, 2011) both by the media and politicians, sometimes made it difficult to be open and proud about what they did. It was noticeable that many tried to avoid talking about their specific job outside of immediate family and work circles.

> The way my job is represented in the media does colour how people perceive you. That's why I'm careful how much I say about what I do outside my own

world. It really depends on who I'm talking too. If I sense they're a Daily Mail reader, I just say I work for the council (Alex)

I don't tell people what I do. I just say I work for the local authority and if pressed - looking after children's services. People say 'like Sharon Shoesmith?' and the nicer ones say 'that must be difficult'. People just make assumptions about who you are and what you do based on what they read in the papers. I'd rather not get into it (Jesse)

Given that aspects of identity construction work is intertwined with what we do - our role identity (Stets & Burke, 2009), it was interesting to see the effort expended in guarding against giving too much away if there was any sense that a hostile reception may be encountered:

You find yourself censoring what you tell people, anticipating what you think their reaction might be. People make judgements. If that's been fed by what the newspapers say about us and well, about social workers generally … then I just don't have the energy to fight people with closed minds. I tell them I'm a Local Government Officer and hope that sounds so boring that they don't want to hear any more. (Fran)

While both Alex and Fran appeared good-humoured in dealing with the 'what do you do'? question, they became more serious when reflecting on some of the day-to-day realities of carrying statutory responsibility for children's safety and well-being.

I have literally been driving around with an alternative mobile phone and an overnight bag because I might have to go into hiding if a story breaks in a particularly vicious way. In these periods it's not easy to carry on with ordinary life (Fran)

The existential insecurity this was seen to bring for some of the DCSs, including Fran, is examined more deeply in Chapter Nine. However, in relation to locating a professional self - or potential selves (Ibarra, 1999), many of the experiences recounted spoke of a fragmented, sometimes fragile existence in relation to this dimension of their work lives; continuing to make identity uncertain, tenuous and precarious (Alvesson, 2010; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Although politically elected Lead Members for Children's Services (LMCSs) are named alongside Children's Services Directors as responsible for: "*providing a clear and unambiguous line of local accountability*" (DfE Statutory Guidance, 2013, p. 4) in each local authority, it is noticeable that of the two, DCSs –

along with social workers, are most often in the line of sight when a tragedy occurs, or cases of systemic abuse uncovered (Frost, 2013; Gurrey & Brazil, 2014; Hudson, 2012).

7.4.2 Subjects of Outrage: The 'Incompetent' Professional Public Manager

DCSs balance persistently on the edge of encountering two powerful external forces: angry reactions from an influential media attacking their professional and personal competence and integrity (Jones, 2012), and the attendant 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLaughlin 2012; Parton, 2014) unleashed from government ministers and the general public. A number of studies and reviews (Aronson, 2011; Baxter, 2011; Gleeson & Knights, 2006; Leece & Leece, 2011; Leigh, 2013) have found that adverse, or positive public attitude and reactions to particular public sector occupational roles or groups such as social work, teaching, nursing and management has considerable impact on professional identity constructs.

> I definitely feel that the public in general have been influenced by the constant drip-drip of terrible failed children stories. I've actually had some really scary nightmares where it's me all over the papers. I've woken up in a cold sweat. Of course it plays on your mind. I don't believe anyone who says it doesn't, even sub-consciously. (Jaime)

Alex shared an example of her experience of media treatment and how it has shaped her approach since:

> I only ever do live media interviews. Learnt my lesson on that some time ago after leaving myself open to the imagination of editors when I had done some pre-recorded stuff and they portrayed me as personally responsible for running a Taliban recruiting cell in two residential children's homes . The way you can get edited is truly scary. It's better telly if you can be cast as the devil isn't it? (Alex)

Alex's use of the expression devil is interesting. As identifiable 'folk devils' (Cohen 1972; Garland, 2008; Jones, 2014), DCSs are perfectly positioned for attack by politicians and the media to help sate a stirred up public appetite for someone to pay for the moral breakdown in society. In an analysis of politicians 'moral talk' in this area over the last five years, Warner (2013) argues that politicians from all sides - both with and through the press, have mobilised public anger against social workers and children's services managers so successfully, that there is deep distrust of their 'professional

competencies' and a normative acceptance that children's services are failing institutions with weak, inept leadership.

The 'Baby P' case which Parton (2014) observed *"quickly came to represent all that was wrong with contemporary managerial and professional decision making"* (p.87) as far as the media, politicians and the general public were concerned, was referred to on a number of occasions in interviews for this study. Media and public reaction following Peter Connelly's death - and a number of tragic child deaths since, has been accompanied by rhetoric of 'deplorable' practitioner and manager failure, and 'outrage at a lack of professional responsibility in broken Britain' (Parton, 2014). Such powerful discourse consistently reinforced, is shaping societal values and the cultural context of the social settings DCSs are operating in (Layder, 2006).

> The way newspapers report child deaths and serious case reviews is not only sensationalist and often inaccurately - or at least very selectively told, but irresponsible. You really would think the DCS and the social workers had killed the child themselves. Of course we get things wrong and of course we have to learn from past mistakes, but the attacks are so deeply personal it does kind of haunt you and make you feel vulnerable. (Morgan)

This echoes what Shoesmith herself had said following her summary dismissal as DCS for Haringey Council in December 2008, about the media and political witch-hunt (Jones, 2014) which followed Peter Conelly's death: *"Being a Director of Children's Services is like no other senior public sector role. It's personal. When a child dies in 'your area' it is almost as if you are tainted as the murderer"*. (Shoesmith, 2013). While not to the same level, several DCSs in this study had encountered hostile media attention. In considering identity formation as a dynamic process and an ongoing struggle; often filled with insecurity and anxieties about who we are and who we could be (Collinson, 2003; Knights & Clarke, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009), the potential effects on security and stability in DCSs professional, and indeed personal, lives is far-reaching. Morgan recounts her experience and how fragile it left her feeling:

> When a particularly difficult case broke the first thing the press did was demand my sacking and all of us [DCSs] know that is going to happen because it's been so normalised. The baying starts and they want your head to roll. I can't really explain how bad that feels…it's a constant shadow hanging over you. It affected every part of my life (Morgan)

A 2008 headline by The Sun newspaper 'Blood on their hands' referred to the practitioners and managers involved in Peter Connelly's case, not the adults who had actually abused and killed him (Warner, 2013). Such distorted perceptions shift the weight of responsibility for these tragic deaths and serious injuries: actually increasing workloads as child protection referrals rise (Parton, 2014) and misrepresenting the leverage and resources available to tackle issues, and deliver both prevention and crisis intervention services effectively in a climate of severe funding cuts.

> You say you manage children's services, then they will often say 'Oh like that Sharon Shoesmith, the one with poor Baby P?' There seems to be an impression that there was Sharon and a little team of social workers with a few families to look after and she was just useless and incompetent. (Praveen)

A number of experts and researchers interested in children's services and child protection in the UK (Frost, 2014; Gurrey & Brazil 2014; Munro, 2011b; Parton 2014; Sikes & Piper, 2010) condemn the unrealistic expectations negative media coverage and political discourse brings: It gives the impression that operating children's services is straightforward and fuels a belief that child protection is not complex, or full of uncertainty. Although Ali agreed that the judgement of others and media coverage in particular helped create an unfavourable external environment for DCSs, he felt some of the behaviour of the dismissed former DCS for Haringey did not necessarily help:

> The mood out there is highly critical but I try to defuse people who get angry about Sharon and start directing that at me as a fellow DCS by saying: look the way she handled it was really wrong. You should never go to a place of being defensive or celebrative about anything concerning the death of a child and some of her behaviour, especially after getting the payout helped fuel things. But I say to people dismissing her was right, the way it was done wasn't. People have certain employment rights. (Ali)

Ali stood out as unusual in his perspective on the Shoesmith case. With the exception of Billie and Jude, the other DCSs generally supported the view that an ethos of blame and defensiveness is fuelled by negative and imbalanced media and political representation of children's services managers and social workers (Green, 2012; Rawlings et al., 2014). This was seen to have contributed to a lack of understanding about the complexities of the job and adversely affected public perceptions around the professional status of this leader-manager role. As Nat comments:

There is no appreciation of the fact that we manage significant service areas with many staff from different disciplines, millions in budgets and, actually, child protection can be really very complicated. The media have made things more difficult, it's not helpful. Expectations of my role and of children's workers generally are so unrealistic and you're not exactly made to feel proud about what you do. It can make you defensive. People don't value what we do and the professional skills involved (Nat)

Esa too makes the observation that hostile media and political discourse only adds to the difficulties faced by social workers and directors of children's services to anticipate and respond to need.

Perversely the treatment of professionals trying to do their jobs increases risk for children because people are so worried about making a mistake they stop being critically curious with families. They can become very process driven in what they do. People are worried about being judged all the time. (Esa)

Interestingly, this reflects Munro's (2011) concerns that hostile and critical reactions from the media and public to child protection issues push governments into enforcing ever more prescribed systems. Yet this drives practitioners away from the very professional values, expertise and judgement needed.

7.4.3 Identities in the Balance

Encounters in social contexts and the judgement and affirmation – or denial, of our identity by others, contributes to conscious identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The reaction and responses of others are often not predictable and are certainly not controllable; especially in relation to our work selves: "*Identities are always in the balance, as a person's social significance* [can] *easily be disturbed, disrupted and reshaped by changes in social relations*" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 338). The DCSs in this study face levels of uncertainty and precariousness which are arguably beyond the realms and daily realities of most work roles. Constantly being at: "*the frontline of risk personally and professionally because you are only your own individual [child protection] tragedy away from losing your job*" (Dunkley, 2011) carried an emotional dimension that weighed heavily on many DCSs minds. This is explored in greater depth in Chapter Nine, but it became evident that carrying statutory accountability for children's well-being and safety, added a particular feature to how the DCSs made sense of their identity. It shaped, and was shaped by relationships, work practices and

discourses that had come to be quite distinct amongst this group of senior public leaders as they managed staff and resources across disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

Social interactions and practices, affected by structural forces, build up their own organisational form, culture and language over time reproducing position status, ways of doing and organisationally acceptable behaviour in the present (Layder, 2006). For Chandra, this manifested itself in a very obvious tension:

> When I went for the job, I had two thoughts in mind. In fact I had a real personal dilemma. In one sense part of me thought they have created my dream job. On the other hand it was very clear that the DCS role was created so there was somebody to blame if something went wrong. I actually remember conversations in the early days and saying "Who in their right mind would ever want that job?" When the Shoesmith case happened, it was very, very public. It's all around us (Chandra).

Chandra had the phrase 'A risk to a child is a risk to the organisation' in very large letters across the top of her office whiteboard. The board faced a sizeable meeting table where the local authority children's services senior management team met on a weekly basis. Probing what this meant to her and why she had written this, Chandra explained that although what drove her was her passion for children, she needed to remind herself and the team that it was their priority to focus on closing down risk as much as possible. They needed to have that at the forefront of their minds. The fallout for the organisation of a serious incident or child death and the political and media attention it could attract would be "*catastrophic*" for the council.

> To be honest I can't think of the enormity of what I am responsible for every day of my working life in this role, I just wouldn't survive. So I compartmentalise it. What I focus on is: what does the organisation need me to do, to say, to prevent happening? I have to make sure we don't fuck up and be spread all over the Sun or the Express. (Chandra)

In an attempt to stabilise her anxieties and fear of the external forces embodied in a powerful media and an intolerant government, Chandra appears to have strong identification with what she perceives to be the organisation's needs . Politicians and large sections of the UK press have shown what they are capable of when someone in such an exposed senior position is deemed to have 'failed a child' or children. It is not

an exaggeration to claim that no other executive leadership post in the UK public sector has encountered such a spotlight of scrutiny, 'trial by media' and politically accountable attention. From the ill-famed Shoesmith case in Haringey in 2008 to the dismissals and abrupt departures of: Baker in Salford 2009; Tucker in Birmingham 2010; Vahey in Derby 2011; Donaldson in Calderdale 2011; Pyper in Slough 2012; Christensen in Norfolk, and Green in Coventry 2013; Lewis in Somerset 2014; Thacker in Rotherham 2014, and McHale in Leicester 2015, the security of the DCS position has been compared to that of a UK Premier League football manager (Gallagher, 2013). In the period 2013-14, one in three Directors' of Children's Services left the role either voluntarily or through dismissal (Wiggins, 2014).

These dynamics are only reinforced in a culture of performativity and neo-liberal practices which sees local authorities increasingly acting as commissioners of services through a complex network of stakeholders, rather than direct providers of integrated services. As Hulme et al (2014) argue, in this ambiguous organisational context DCSs are facing increasing limits on their autonomy and disparagement of their professional leadership wisdom and expertise in an arena that needs to retain an understanding of the complexity and uncertainty of working with children. Fears such as Chandra's are illustrative of a colder, more technical approach permeating the daily working lives of many in the role. They grapple with their authentically felt child-centred values, while being caught *"in an iron cage of performance management"* (Wastell et al., 2010 p. 311) which is primarily focused on evaluating and managing risk. In identity terms Alvesson (2010) would describe Chandra's experiences and struggle as oscillating between identity constructs where discursive and structural forces are imposing identity, and the more agentic strategic image, representative of her efforts to reconcile the contradictions and messiness between self-view and organisational and external demands in identity struggles. Such processes are illuminative of agency-structure debates concerned with: "*Identity construction, and identity constructed … How much is the individual doing identity and* [how much] *are they having identity done to them*" (Peticca-Harris & McKenna, 2013, p. 829)

7.4.4 Mobilising the Resilient Children's Services Leader

While the majority of DCSs expressed feelings of anxiety and vulnerability in relation to the external forces they were exposed to in the role, many also talked of drawing on their own agency to counterbalance what could be destabilising dynamics. Sam was passionate about the need to push against what she saw as the imposition of others in 'her' area. In striving to articulate what she stands for and what children's services in the area need, a strong sense of self, and a particular leader-manager identity position (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) emerged:

> We are not going to be done unto here. We're not going to be picked off or told by the Secretary of State what's going to happen here. It's our area and we know what is best – what works for families, what doesn't. It makes for an interesting debate… takes a lot of energy and it's time consuming, but we are not just going to roll over. It's my responsibility to lead us through - to be firm and clear. I really am focused on what I need to do and how I need to be and I think that acts as a bulwark against storms from the outside (Sam)

As a contrast to Chandra and Morgan's accounts in particular, both Billie and Jude also conveyed a more agentic position suggesting that further individual autonomy and transformative capacity could be harnessed (Giddens, 1991) by DCSs to resist negative external forces and discourse. While Billie acknowledged, like others, he might at times avoid becoming engaged in explaining or defending his job: *"Sometimes I say I work for local government because I really can't be arsed with the response you get when you say you manage children's services",* he recognised that people in the job were "*very afraid because if they make one mistake, or something goes wrong, they can lose everything*", but he felt that a number of his DCS colleagues were:

> … a little full of their own self-importance about the role. If you take this job on then you've got to be prepared for what it involves and be realistic about the way you can get hung out to dry. Being a DCS can be incredibly difficult, but it can also be very enjoyable and I focus on that instead of 'Oh dear me how difficult it all is, no one understands' and perhaps that's my different perspective. (Billie)

Jude also felt that those in a DCS role should accept that carrying the weight of statutory responsibility for children "*comes with the territory*". She commented:

> [T]he risk is that politicians - both local and national, and the media may well shred you to pieces if something goes wrong …. I don't feel victimised or

vulnerable, there's no need for constant shroud waving. In fact when I've felt things have gone too far with budget cut proposals I have made it extremely plain it could be harmful to the delivery of children. Believe me our local politicians understand what that means. I'm too long in the tooth to worry about what that might do to my reputation. I know how to use my position and power if I need to (Jude)

In the conscious process of identity construction, Jude exhibits a stance suggestive of an instrumental and strategic process at work (Morgan-Roberts, 2005) in explaining how she navigates organisational and role expectations, and deals with a turbulent and uncertain environment by mobilising a formidable leader-manager identity script where she is very much the one in control. Similarly, Billie felt that he had been more successful than some of his colleagues in marshalling a proactive, functional identity: "*suggestive of a subject guided by interests and an ability to shape identity in accordance with a particular objective*" (Alvesson, 2010, p. 204). In Billie's case he talked of not succumbing to feeling intimidated by others and being bullish in promoting how well the children's services he was leading were doing. He concluded that the energy of DCSs who were "*distracted by anxiety*" over potential negative or hostile publicity, might be better spent nurturing relationships with the media to shine a spotlight on what was being done well and some of the successes of partnership working with other organisations. Lombard, (2009), Maier, (2009) and Munro (2011) support this notion, arguing that while a lack of engagement with the media by children's services managers and social workers, was understandable, it does little to help develop a deeper appreciation of the work undertaken and the complexities of that work. Jones (2014, p.84) is also an enthusiastic advocate of more 'doing', rather than being 'done to' in relation to the media: feeling too many good news stories from social work and children's services are being left untold.

Participants accounts of dealing with media influence and feelings about wider society's negative perceptions of social work and management of children's services, offer new insights into identity work and identity struggles in action in this unique role. Subject to - or always at risk of the 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLauglin, 2012; Parton, 2014) being directed towards them, adds a peculiar fragility to their work lives - and indeed personal lives, rendering identity precarious and in the balance (Knights & Clarke, 2014) in ways not necessarily seen in other leadership posts. In amongst these structural and discursive forces, there was evidence of some agency being mobilised against the

imposition of negative constructs as participants returned to the child-centred values deemed important to them.

While status and credibility is influenced by media and public perceptions, encounters with others such as staff at the frontline, director level peers and children themselves, also offer opportunities for the professional-self to be endorsed or denied (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The final section of this chapter explores some of the DCSs perceptions about their status and credibility in the eyes of others.

7.5 'You Either Have it, or You Don't': Status and Credibility as a DCS

Credibility as the most senior children's services manager in the local authority area was frequently mentioned during interviews. Billie was very clear in his view that "*You either have it, or you don't*", while others felt it was more of a changing and fragile dynamic; dependent on those involved, organisational challenges and the external environment. Most DCSs cited the relationships and reputation they felt they had with front-line staff, such as social workers and teachers, as one of their key measures of professional credibility. Headteachers also featured as important 'others' (Ybema, 2009) in identity work – often in a rather negative light; with social interactions in this area of their work appearing to take considerable effort and impression management (Goffman, 1959). Concern with status and credibility was further reflected in accounts of relationships with the chief executive as their immediate boss, and the elected councillor designated as Lead Member for Children's Services. One striking, and quite moving aspect, was the number of DCSs who also gauged their credibility in relation to children.

7.5.1 At the Frontline

Without exception, each DCS emphasised the importance to them of having credibility with their frontline staff. These are the early years workers, social workers, family support officers, teachers, adolescent mental health practitioners, play workers and others, who directly deliver services to children and families.

> It's with the frontline that you really know whether you have credibility as the DCS (Nat).

This was a focus for meaningful validation of the professional self, perhaps illuminative of the identity work taking place where status and value is partly drawn from claims to expertise and standing amongst different occupational groups. DCSs are responsible for the delivery of children's services through multi-agency and multi-disciplinary teams. In most cases, coming from a single professional background, they talked of straddling the practice base, values and identity of their original training and experiences which may have been in youth work, teaching, social work, or other professions, while striving to secure credibility in their current role as a senior leader of large numbers of practitioners, often from disciplines different to their own. There was a strong understanding that some judgement was inevitably being made by these practitioners of 'where they had come from'.

> One of the biggest fears I had when I first acted up as DCS was a massive anxiety about schools and my credibility there. Teachers seem to have a very strong sense of themselves and I felt they would judge me because I wasn't one of them (Chandra)

The DCSs articulated how they have to both facilitate effective cross-disciplinary working in a complex organisational environment, and gain credibility in their own leadership position.

> It is challenging. I feel really solid about my education background and feel comfortable around education people, but frontline staff take you more seriously if they believe you know what you're talking about and I wonder how much the social workers do rate me. In my head though, I just come back to the fact I've got a job to do, my job is to lead the services and I don't need to know about every nook and cranny to do that well (Praveen)

Purcell et al. (2012) make the observation that issues around different professional values, ethics and practices in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working is one of the biggest challenges for leaders of children's services. Literature reflects a continuum of views from those who believe loss and blurring of distinct professional identity is inevitable and a common identity is beneficial for integrated working (Fitzgerald & Kay; 2008; Hill et al., 2013) to others who argue it is neither desirable, or necessary, to 'give up identities'. Indeed, creating spaces to work within such difference is actually better and more empowering for children and families (Davis & Smith, 2012; Lawler & Bilson, 2010). Certainly the Systems Leadership approach currently endorsed by the ADCS

promotes the latter perspective: that the job of the DCS is to enable the valuing of different practices and expertise and create the space where this is focused on achieving the best outcomes for children. Frost (2011, p.3) argues that this requires acceptance that "*we cannot all be experts in all aspects of our work*" and the most effective leaders are those who can boundary- span. Recognition of this was evident in many of the accounts of the day-to-day work of the DCSs.

> One thing I try to do is say: "Okay, I haven't come from social work, but I do know about how to make things work best for children". We can only do that with all the skills and professional knowledge carried in our frontline teams. I think they respect me for being clear that's what I value. (Morgan)

Esa felt his credibility was based on not being tied to a particular occupational identity. It freed him up to be seen as a professional public manager:

> I've come into something where I don't have a status from an historical social work or teaching background. In a sense I think that actually helps because I'm sure that's how some tensions arise between a DCS and their frontline staff. Practitioners can feel threatened if they think you have excessive insight into what they should be doing in their jobs. My staff see me as the DCS (Esa)

While for Alex, the importance placed on the judgement of others from the same professional background as her own, meant she went out of her way to show she had insight into their working lives:

> I believe in spending as much time as I possibly can out with people delivering frontline services. So whether that's getting around schools, visiting our children's centres or being with the social workers for a day... Well, I like people to know I care about what you do. I wouldn't like them to think I'm a bureaucrat chasing targets and goals. I do understand what it's like to come out after a home visit and want to scrub every bit of yourself clean. I need them to know that. (Alex)

In shaping their leader identities, it is the frontline - the place where they are most exposed to risk (in their statutory accountability for safeguarding children), which serves as the site of concentrated identity work. Some DCSs looked to their original professional background for credibility and status with their frontline staff; others sought identity salience in the professional standing of the leadership role itself and its focus on enabling multi-disciplinary teams. Responding to the identity question "who am I", it was recognised that some mutual definition and validation - or denial, was taking place

as practitioners from different professional backgrounds interacted in the complex organisational context of children's services. DCSs revealed how being engaged in: *forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness*" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165) meant their identity work was both complicated, and enriched by these dynamics.

7.5.2 Headteachers and Other Senior Leaders

Senior leaders from partner organisations, particularly headteachers also emerged as significant 'others' in DCS identity work. Here status and credibility was often seen as hard won or never fully achievable by participants who had not come from a teaching background. Nat acknowledged that schools can be "*intimidating fortresses if you are on the outside*". Many headteachers have been subject to leadership development and discourse which encourages charismatic, high-powered school leaders, used to being in control and operating in a culture of performativity (Bush & Glover, 2003).

> I've come from an education leadership background. Schools can be immensely powerful places. It can be frightening if you are going in and trying to influence that, trying to work with headteachers who think "'who the hell are you to come in and think you know what's best". (Nat)

Alex commented, "*Not long into the job, I bravely threw myself into a room full of headteachers with a sense of terror*". While told with humour, this perhaps gives some indication of feelings of uncertainty and lack of confidence stepping into an arena where, at the very least, a DCS needs to feel like an equal because ultimately they are accountable (rather than the headteacher) for the well-being and safety of children in all schools in the local authority area.

> As far as they're concerned, if you haven't been a teacher … actually if you haven't been a headteacher, then you have little credibility with them. I've appointed a former head in my senior team to strengthen relationships. Some of them think he's gone over to the dark side (Alex)

Rivalries around professional standing, cultural conflict and encountering different institutional and occupational practices all have implications for identity. Accounts from participants revealed the relational nature of identity work where: "*Identities emerge*

though the articulation of similarities and differences. Enactment involves the discursive separation of 'self' from the 'other' (Ybema et al., p.306). This was evident in participants identity talk where there was a tendency to first position themselves in their original practitioner background, before then seeking to evaluate their identity standing now as a senior public manager in a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary domain.

> I get kudos from the social care team managers because of my social work background but headteachers and some of the senior health managers don't always acknowledge my senior leadership status. I definitely find myself acting in a more authoritative, assured way when I'm with them. I need them to take me seriously (Sam)

DCSs operate across a wide range of social settings, where situated activity is a critical domain for meaning-making (Layder, 2006). Some conscious agentic control was being exercised in these social encounters; with DCSs acknowledging their efforts at impression management (Goffman, 1961). Scripted performances were sometimes displayed when participants wanted other senior leaders to 'see' them in a particular way in the hope that their leader identity is confirmed and validated.

> You have to work in a way that people recognise as strong leadership. When I am in meetings with the police for example I regularly remind them of my legal responsibilities for child protection. I am looking for status around that table and I know I behave and even speak in a certain way in those situations (Esa)

Considering the interconnectedness of Layder's (2006) four social domains (Psychobiography, Situated Activity, Social Settings and Contextual Resources) in these encounters, Ali illustrates how identity is also intimately tied to Psychobiography in his recognition that childhood influences permeate how he feels in professional interactions, even now as an adult, and a senior leader:

> I was lucky. I had the benefit of being mentored by someone who had been a Director of Education. He got me some credibility with headteachers - so it felt a little easier when I got the DCS post. I do still feel a bit intimidated by heads though. I was brought up where teachers were put on such a pedestal (Ali)

Interactions in contemporary public services point towards the processual nature of identity construction, where identity remains an relatively 'open project' and DCSs "*create several, often changing, managerial identities (identity positions) rather than one*

stable, continuous and secure, manager identity" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). This was illustrated in stories about encounters with other senior leaders in partner organisations. It was also evident in relationships with their direct line manager, the council chief executive, and the elected Lead Member for Children's Services who is, at least in statute, part of the single line of accountability for children's well-being and safekeeping alongside the DCS.

7.5.3 Chief Executive and Lead Member for Children's Services

The majority of DCSs felt that their chief executive was expecting them to become 'more corporate' and 'business-like' in their management of children's services. Increasing moves towards taking on additional directorates in the council such as housing or adult services (so called twin or triple-hatters) was also seen to be changing the nature and expectations of the role.

> You cannot afford to bury your head if you want to survive. You need to play the game and be seen to be willing to absorb more, to take up some of the other areas because ultimately there are cuts to our senior team. Be tactically astute, especially with your chief exec but don't fall into the trap of being cynical. That's hard to live with; it starts churning you up inside (Nat)

All participants felt there had been a seismic shift both in the ideological drive behind how services should be delivered, and in the way they were expected to operate in an increasingly ambiguous organisational domain (Noordegraaf, 2007).

> I still say this job is mostly about the skill of influencing people, but I do have to spend a lot of time with commissioning processes now. The whole emphasis has changed. Budgets for my non-statutory services have been annihilated which hurts because we all know early intervention is actually more cost effective and protects more children in the end. (Esa)

While most participants seemed comfortable describing both their original occupational background *and* their current DCS role as representative of a composite professional identity, Jude challenged the notion that being a DCS could be considered a profession. She appeared to find strong identity salience in the description of herself as a 'corporate leader' which, in her view, did not need children's services in the role title:

> I'm a corporate leader in the senior management team. I don't need to be tagged with the children label as a senior manager. Being a DCS isn't a profession is it? I mean what's the definition of a profession anyway? My chief executive needs to see me as a leader in the corporate team. (Jude)

It could be conceived that Jude is applying a role identity to herself as a response to structural circumstances (Burke, 1980; Thoits, 1991). In assertions about her corporate leader role, salience appears to be aligned with what she does, rather than 'who' she is. However, comments Jude had made in an earlier interview that "*my profession is social work*" draws attention back to the need to avoid dualistic perspectives (Alvesson, 2010; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Layder, 2006) and to consider that while macro and institutional forces have an impact on identity construction, so too do unique individual readings of identity (Ybema et al., 2009). In Jude's case she perceived her professional identity as a social worker, and her role identity as a corporate manager.

In addition to many feeling that they had become more of a corporate manager (rather than an integrated children's services manager) in recent years, there was recognition that political and media attention when 'something goes wrong in children's services', and increased inspection and public shaming of staff and councils, had affected their visibility and status in the role.

> Our chief executive is very, very anxious. He interferes in my job on a day-to-day basis and I have to tell myself it's because he is frightened. It does colour my relationships in the senior team because my post is the one with all the risk. I get a disproportionate … and unwelcome level of attention (Chandra)

Alex reflected awareness of the situation Chandra and other DCSs in the region found themselves in: "*Some of my DCSs colleagues are dragged into weekly meetings with their chief exec to reassure them*". She was conscious that the situation could be similar for her if she moved to another council or there was a change in circumstance, or relationships: "*I do have strong trust and respect here with the politicians and my manager, but it could be very different in another local authority, and I know my standing here is always reliant on how I'm viewed*" (Alex). In such accounts, it is possible to see how identities are always in the balance, with DCSs vulnerable to their "*social significance*" in the organisation being rather easily shaken or changed (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.338). Billie suggests he strategically seeks collective identification in

crafting a sense of self (Alvesson, 2010) to mobilise and maintain his standing with powerful others such as the chief executive.

> For me credibility comes from being an organisation person. I don't marginalise myself in the council in the way that I think some of my colleagues do by saying "There'll be dead children if you don't give us [children's services] money". You can be quite effective in the short term ploughing your own furrow, but in the long-term you are setting up trouble for yourself because you won't have the alliances you need. I won't get any respect by pissing people off. (Billie)

All DCSs have to work closely with their council's elected Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) who holds political accountability under the Children Act 2004 (S19) for services provided. A number of views concerned with status and credibility, revealed interesting perspectives on how some DCSs saw themselves, and indeed their colleagues, operating in this domain.

> In the political arena you can sell your soul to the devil. That's how some DCSs think they get their status and position. I would walk away before selling my soul. For some colleagues, being DCS defines them and it's how they look to get their power and kudos. (Jesse)

There were a number of accounts that suggested relationships with the Lead Member could be fraught with difficulty and plagued by uncertainty, with all the attendant implications for anxiety and self-doubt that affects identity constructs (Sennett, 2006). It was recognised that a fall from grace could be swift and brutal.

> The political stuff can be very hard. You have to walk on a knife-edge. If you fall out with them in an irrecoverable way, they will hang you out to dry if something goes wrong. I work hard to get them to back me, to keep my credibility and some currency with them, especially my lead member (Jaime)

> You quickly realise there is a whole set of different skills needed for influencing and having any status with local politicians. I have an excellent lead member and that makes a phenomenal difference to your position in the council, but that can change in an instant with a new administration. Some DCSs find their lives have been made hell by the politicians. (Praveen)

Having moved from being a DCS in one council to an equivalent role in another (quite some distance away), Esa describes an incident which happened shortly after starting in post as an example of an encounter intimately linked to the institutional features of

social systems (Giddens, 1991; Layder, 2006). He had been walking down a public corridor in the Town Hall with other members of the all-female corporate team. They were on their way to a cabinet meeting:

> The leader of the council came past us, swung around and said … well, he shouted right down the corridor actually: "Hey, here come the spice girls with the new spice boy". I mean that just wouldn't have happened in my last authority. It's outrageous that someone in his position can think that is acceptable. My colleagues were like 'Oh fuck off'. It's weird the political culture here. It could knock your self-esteem but I've learned to stand up to it. (Esa)

Other participants recounted significantly more positive affirmations of their status and regard, including times where they felt their Lead Member (LM) had respected them because of their expert knowledge. Morgan offered an example at the other end of the spectrum to Esa's experience:

> My LM was incredible. He could see I was getting lined up to take the fall, to stop the spotlight falling on some of them [councillors] for historic issues I had inherited, but he nearly had a nervous breakdown over it. He was a wonderful man. At a personal cost to himself he helped me keep my job. Really it was my reputation too. No-one will touch you for a new DCS role if you've been sacked; it's a very small world. (Morgan)

Despite some very different relationships and experiences with chief executives and Lead Members, the DCSs were unanimous in the view that they had to make every effort to be transparent with them about what was happening in their children's services; especially in relation to any safeguarding related concerns about to break in the media, or issues likely to be uncovered in an inspection: "*What you absolutely cannot have are any nasty surprises. That's their biggest fear"* (Charlie)

Energy is clearly invested in seeking to establish and maintain status and credibility with those considered critical to the ongoing endeavours of DCSs. Negotiating the fragile nature of these social interactions reveals some of the struggles involved in this important site of identity work. What could be easy to lose sight of in the high-pressured, volatile and uncertain environment of children's services, is a focus on children. However, there was a very strong representation from participants that their purpose and motivation - indeed their most important measure of credibility, lay with children as their key stakeholders.

7.5.4 Children as Key Stakeholders

The notion of children as stakeholders is embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) with a commitment not only to the safety, well-being and access to opportunities for all children, but also meaningful involvement in all aspects of decision-making that may affect their lives. While the extent of their social capital and the real value given to children's voices all over the world, including the UK is contested (Hinton, 2008), the participants child-centred value base - referred to frequently in interviews, sees children as stakeholders in this context.

> Look, in the end the whole purpose of us being here, of doing this job is they [children] are the stakeholders who matter. It should feel like building a legacy with them, and I use "with them" very deliberately. My whole sense of what I'm about is vested in children. They won't know who I am. My status means jack to them - I'm another children's worker out there and that's fine by me. (Billie)

Writing about stakeholders in education, Gross and Godwin, (2005), define them as *"individuals or entities who stand to gain or lose from the success or failure of a system or an organization"* (p. 4). Applying this more widely, and recognising the dual character of society which connects the influences on, and of, people in systems and structures (Giddens,1991; Archer, 1995; Layder, 1997), Morgan's observation offers an insight into how reminding herself children are the key stakeholders, brings her back to purpose.

> Sometimes you lose a sense of what it's all about, but being with children – spending a little time with them, well it grounds me. It also helps me be more creative in my work … makes me think 'how can we do things differently?' I am in a position to make things happen, even in this climate. That refocusing definitely stops me losing sight of what actually makes me feel anchored. The whole point of this is to improve things for kids. (Morgan)

Identity construction remains precarious and uncertain in the messy, uncertain world DCSs inhabit. In dealing with competing demands and conditions, it was possible to see participants attempt to 'anchor' themselves by drawing on their agency as the most senior leader of children's services, with access to organisational resources and some influence over systems. Meaning and direction, and efforts to allay insecurity (Alvesson, 2010), are seen to come full circle, realised in "*the values and principles by which decisions and actions as a professional are taken"* (Trodd, 2011, p.48).

> We worked with a little boy with special needs who went from being a baby who only ate yoghurt and literally screamed all day to being able to go to mainstream school at five - with support and still with lots of issues, but he got there. I have a poem his mum wrote about what that meant to them as a family. I keep it in my office because it reminds me that my job is about children and sometimes that can be quite difficult to remember as a DCS. That's where my sense of credibility really lies. (Chandra)

> Our priorities for outcomes we need to achieve are predicated on 'what's it like being a child or young person growing up in this city?' What part the kids play in terms of voice and influence in negotiating those priorities is very important to me. (Charlie)

Many accounts of the social interactions with frontline staff, other senior leaders, chief executives and Lead Members evoke the dramaturgical notions of Goffman's (1959) frontstage and backstage performance being enacted, as situated activity takes place in a range of social settings. When DCSs spoke about their interactions with children there was no sense of them feeling they have to 'perform', to 'be another' to secure status and credibility. Perhaps because as Ali wryly observes:

> At the end of the day, children can see right through you better than anyone else (Ali)

This final section explored participants' accounts of some key social interactions in the complex, often turbulent political and organisational contexts of children's services; particularly focused on perceptions of their status and credibility with others. This offered insights into the DCSs domains of contextual resources (Layder, 2006) where cultural and material features have built historical 'ways of doing', value-bases and discursive practices which influence, and are influenced by, those encountering and drawing on these largely structural forces in situated activity. As DCSs attempt to make sense of their professional selves, they remain vulnerable to the affirmation or condemnation of powerful 'others' such as their chief executive and Lead Member for children's services, and the unique challenge of establishing credibility with their own multi-disciplinary teams, and other professionals outside their management.

7.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed some of the empirical findings documenting identity struggles encountered by DCSs in the context of their own internal readings of

identity (Ybema et al., 2009), and some of the institutional and organisational forces and social dynamics they are both part of, and exposed to.

Strong images of children's services leaders driven by shared personal and occupational child-centred values emerged, seen to create a discursive resource which gave purpose and form to their work lives. Protestations against what was largely viewed as government ideology and policy agendas incongruent with their own, revealed a discourse of resistance which found strength in reaffirmation of guiding principles and values to help mobilise some identity salience. It is interesting to consider the extent to which the DCSs in this study may have been displaying a socially accepted (and expected?) 'face' in exalting virtuous child-centred values in the storying of themselves (McAdams et al., 2006). Yet, time and again, in interviews at different points, the same claim to child-centred values was made; the same passion and conviction was expressed in the commitment to these values on a personal and professional level. Critically, participants suggested that there was still enough influence and potential in the role to 'make a difference to children's lives'. This sense of agency enabled them to reconcile some of the vulnerability and risk they carried as a DCS.

It is no surprise given the occupational backgrounds of my participants, that their language is steeped in discourse around 'making a difference for children' and placing value on the importance of child-centred practice. In their professional training and in the social and discursive contexts that they operate in, this narrative runs deeply through their occupational and organisational ideology. Critical perspectives help to reveal and disrupt this, and what becomes clear is that participants draw on this dominant narrative to both align themselves with a view of social reality if it 'fits' with their self-view as a values-based leader, or to resist it if it is seen to be in conflict, and this forms an integral part of their identity struggle and work.

In articulating a particular leader image capable of bearing this risk and the weight of statutory responsibility for safeguarding - while effectively leading children's services delivery through complex multi-agency and multi-disciplinary arrangements, the DCSs were keen to emphasise how the role was special and distinctive, requiring particular personal qualities, strengths, skills and leadership approaches. Similar character and behaviour-based images and messages are also evident in dominant leadership

models, institutional discourses and collective professional DCS discourse. Together these encourage an ideal leader identity construct (Schwartz, 1987) which in reality, some found hard to live up to. Even for those who actively promote these images in self-identity narratives, in the final analysis, it subjects all DCSs to idealised expectations and "close and constant scrutiny" of their leadership behaviours and performance (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 338).

An interesting perspective on leading hybrid organisations is that the realities of practice and social encounters do not measure up to ideals about unbounded human capacity and scope for professional autonomy (Frost, 2011; Trodd, 2011). So, rather than creating what could be perceived as a superhuman construct with very prescribed skills, qualities and behaviours, determining 'who' and 'what' a DCS is, a more productive approach is to accept identity as always unfinished (Corlett & McInnes, 2012): in constant 'dialogical relationships' with others (Rinaldi, 2005). Viewing identity in this more open way - which sees uncertainty as a quality rather than a limitation, has implications for ontological security (Archer, 2003; Giddens 1991) but given the vulnerability of identity in contemporary organisations, this could bring new insights and resources to identity work. Indeed, it may better equip these senior professional public leaders to deal with the harsh realities of a hostile and critical media and damning political rhetoric. In the accounts shared, this dimension of their professional lives clearly causes significant anxiety and feelings of insecurity for most participants. Naturally, much work is needed to influence and change the perceptions and reactions of these powerful external forces to engender a better understanding of the complexities of the role and the fact that risk cannot simply be managed away (Blyth, 2014).

The chapter ended with a critical exploration of the DCSs perceptions of their status and credibility with others - including practitioners on the frontline of their service area, who may share the same occupational training and background as them, or come from a different discipline. This offered some insights into the hybrid nature of DCS identity as participants found themselves quite comfortably straddling both identities, or feeling inadequate and lacking in credibility in situated activity with other professionals. Encounters with senior leaders from other organisations suggested similar dilemmas. Negotiating the fragile nature of these social interactions reveals some of the struggles involved in identity work, none more so than the energy invested in trying to maintain

positive relationships, status and credibility with chief executives and elected Lead Members for Children's Services who had the organisational power to significantly affect a participant's standing in the organisation, including the 'ultimate horror' of standing back and allowing or facilitiatng a DCSs' public shaming and dismissal as the sacrificial lamb for the council if a serious incident, or death involving a child in their area reached the media. The potential for ontological insecurity and feelings of vulnerability in this context are substantial, but there is little doubt that esteeming children as their key stakeholders, and returning to their child-centred value base - and the potential to effect positive change for children in the role, demonstrated some salient identity positions and stability, even if these remain fleeting and temporal (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

The next chapter more deeply considers how DCSs are seeking to make sense of their identity as hybrid professional public managers (Noordegraaf, 2007) in the ambiguous organisational domain of children's services. The extent to which influences of structure, and of human agency, are contributing to leader identity-identities constructs and how these are enacted in the context of individual understanding, and institutional and discursive forces is examined. Claims to professionalism from DCSs themselves as a form of occupational control, and the experiences and impact of external attempts at control, regulation and discipline (Evetts, 2003) form a key part of the chapter.

8. MAKING SENSE OF PROFESSIONAL SELVES: SEARCHES FOR IDENTITY IN AMBIGUOUS ORGANISATIONAL DOMAINS

8.1 Context and Chapter Structure

This chapter more deeply considers how DCSs – often described as hybrid professional public managers (Noordegraaf, 2007), are seeking to make sense of their identity in the ambiguous organisational domain of children's services in England. The extent to which influences of structure, and of human agency, are contributing to leader identity/identities constructs and how these are enacted in the context of individual understanding, and institutional and discursive forces is examined.

Each DCS involved in the study came to the role through various public sector practitioner backgrounds, with most rooted in education or children's social care. Their own emphasis on, and exploration of these career trajectories was germane to the perception and location of their current professional selves because occupational values, training, work cultures, practices, experiences and various discourses, shaped and informed how they articulated their sense of identity now as a professional public manager. In different ways, the participants reveal how they are engaged in a constant endeavour to construct their professional identity; shaped both by previous history and by ongoing encounters with discursive forces in a turbulent political and economic landscape.

Claims to professionalism from DCSs themselves are embodied in some of the discourses and activities of the professional body the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). These are also explored along with an analysis of the degree to which dominant leadership and policy discourses may have "*permeated their professional identities*" (Baxter, 2011, p.66), or a more agentive involvement, even resistance has been mobilised against aspects that conflict with personally and professionally-held values (Baldwin, 2008).

The chapter first explores participants' expressions of **hybrid professional identity and notions of professionalism in 8.2**, which links quite naturally to the second theme of **professional and organisational discourses in 8.3**. This latter part of the chapter

focuses on influences of organisational or institutional discourses of control, and on occupational discourse created and sustained by the DCSs themselves. Both are instrumental in how they construct, revise and enact their leader identity.

8.2 Hybrid Professional Identities

In seeking to make sense of professional identity, most participants described it as rooted in their original practitioner background. Their 'identity talk' (Ybema et al., 2009) often moved across a continuum between early career occupational learning, training and values-base, and their current identity constructs as a senior public services leader. Noordegraaf, (2007) sees the hybridised professional as representative of 'mixed up' professionalism in contemporary organisational domains where what it means to 'be professional' is being redefined by new ways of working. This draws on developing cross-disciplinary knowledge and understanding and the skills to interact with practitioners and contexts from a broad spectrum. In a process of continuous interpretation and meaning making in the organisational setting, the hybrid professional utilises their own craft knowledge (such as youth work practices, assumptions, values) in situated activity with other practitioners, leading to what Schon describes as "*a new epistemology of practice*" (1983, p.49). Distinct boundaries of professional expertise and occupational closure (Abbot, 1988; Freidson, 2001) are much less defined than in the past as knowledge workers bring more accommodating perspectives. For the professional public manager like a DCS, this involves:

> Knowing how to operate in organised, interdisciplinary settings that cannot be organised easily … this is no longer a mere matter of occupational control or of organisational control, it is about controlling the control of expertise (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.775).

In sharing self-perceptions about their current role, there were differences in the extent to which some DCSs described themselves as being a leader-manager of children's services, while others identified more as a corporate leader within the local authority executive leadership team. This is interesting from the perspective of the perceived 'span of control' (Urwick, 1956) - the reach of how far DCSs felt they controlled expertise in the organisation. The male DCSs tended to speak of themselves more in terms of a 'corporate leader' than the women leaders, perhaps reflecting the gendered nature of leadership discourse and the way leader identity is constructed within and by

discursive forces (Ford, 2006). While particular discussion here risks leading to identification of male participants, this could certainly be of interest for further study.

In Chapter Seven, a number of participants' shared their views and feelings about how they understood their professional selves as at least partly embodied in the philosophy and value-base of their original occupational background. While Sam had spoken of how important her social work values and background is, she also perceives herself as a professional public leader (Noordegraaf, 2007).

> I see my identity as a leader in children's services. My identity comfort blanket is to associate my work with being the head of all things children. I do have a wider corporate role, but my sense of who I am is strongest in the children's side and also when I'm with other DCSs, not with my peers here in the council executive. (Sam)

Further along in the interview, Sam explained how she had felt driven by a need to find 'a fit' for herself in her work life, recounting how she had made some very deliberate career choices in order to secure a leadership position that reflected her desire to work in children's services, and importantly, find a role in the sector which had influence. While she felt her social work background informed her identity now in a positive way as a DCS, the opportunities in the role to gain a deeper understanding of other occupational practices and values, was something she enjoyed. In fact a number of the DCSs made a point of emphasising how comfortable they felt with a hybrid identity: seeing their occupational training and experiences as incredibly important foundations for their sense of professional identity and shaping how they acted and perceived themselves as a leader.

In relation to social work – but just as applicable to any of the occupational backgrounds that DCSs first trained and practised in such as youth work or teaching - Frost and Parton (2009) argue it is possible in dynamic integrated settings such as children's services, to hold on to a 'core' social work identity with its own techniques and value-base while being: "*involved in a complex and continuous process of negotiating both identity and forms of practice*" (p.180). Indeed, similar to Sam, Fran commented that her social work-informed philosophy of drawing on the skills and knowledge of those from different professional disciplines is complementary to her leadership role, as the end

intention is to place the child at the centre of service delivery and decision making. This is not to suggest Fran does not experience conflict, insecurity or tensions in her identity work as she bridges her original occupational background with her expressed identity now as a senior children's services leader. As Frost and Parton note, it is a complex and continuous process of negotiation. Fran found some of her responsibilities for controlling expertise to deliver services easier than others and she reserved the right to intervene:

> Sometimes there are approaches or ways of doing things [from practitioners] I don't agree with, but part of my role is to facilitate people to have creative solutions. There is a line though and I will step in if I think the best outcome for the child or family is being compromised. That's my prerogative as DCS (Fran).

There is some insight in this account of the relational nature of the hybrid professional public leader role which is largely concerned with facilitating and enabling others' expertise. Integral to these subjective and inter-subjective relationships is an inferential dimension particularly relevant in an organisational domain such as children's services, where decision-making about cases and situations involving children and families, is a daily reality. This draws attention back to "controlling the control of expertise" (Noordegraaf, 2007) in that DCSs are defining, discovering and learning how to behave and organise inter-disciplinary practices in ambiguous, unstable settings with hybrid organisational forms (Farrell & Morris, 2003).

Charlie described how he understood this when explaining his approach to enabling frontline practitioners (including those from other organisations), such as teachers, social workers, special needs practitioners, child health specialists, to practise and operate in ways that best safeguarded children.

> In any leadership role, you want to make sure you are surrounded by strength. I bring what I have in terms of my professional knowledge, but I see it also as the other bits you have to do through influencing and shaping behaviours of a whole raft of people you don't manage. I can go in with a big stick with the whole safeguarding thing, or I can try to create conditions where people's behaviour comes together and they work it out for themselves. That's what I prefer to do. (Charlie)

In these domains it is possible to see meaning-making taking place which shapes organisational contexts and those in it; creating new understandings of professionalism attuned to the unstable, insecure, and complex worlds that now constitute most modern day organisations (Alvesson, 2010; Barley & Kunda, 2004; Trodd, 2011). The inferential nature of the work undertaken in children's services, "*emphasises professional behaviour as judgemental and therefore sense-making, or meaning-making behaviour*" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.774). This has implications for identity work as DCSs navigate their sense of professional self. As Sveningsson and Alvesson argue, in such contexts, leader-managers do not have one, unitary work self, they:

> Create several more or less contradictory and often changing managerial identities (identity positions) rather than one stable, continuous and secure manager identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165)

This is evident in Praveen's interpretation of her leader-identity in the current organisational context which is being greatly affected by the external forces of a neo-liberal state (Parton, 2014; Soss et al., 2011; Wiggan, 2011).

> I see myself as an executive director. I'm part of the corporate organisation. The pull from the Chief Exec and politicians is towards the corporate need, rather than specific children or family service areas and I do have to remind myself, Praveen, you're director of children's services and that's what I'm committed to, but I think we have to see the script differently now. That involves seeing beyond my service area and sometimes accepting you will be pulled this way and that and there is tension sometimes in the different ways I have to be. You have to be really adaptable. (Praveen)

Praveen's use of the term script a number of times during both interviews was an interesting feature in relation to her identity work. She expressed reflexivity and some agentic control being exercised in drawing on particular 'scripts' in different situations as a manager, enabling her to: "*author a conception of [managerial] selves from mutually antagonistic discursive resources*" (Clarke et al. 2009, p.324). Accepting identity work and struggle as a process of 'becoming' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), rather than ever being fully 'finished' and always situated and embedded in the wider social world, reflects the utility of Layder's (1997) theory of social domains for helping to frame agency-structure concerns. Any developed understanding of identity construction needs to acknowledge discursive and structural influences, while also accepting that at

least some uniquely agentic self-identity narrative (McAdams et al. 2006; Sims, 2003; Giddens, 1991) is at work in the process.

While Morgan, like most of the participants continued to hold her original occupational training, values and experiences in esteem, forming a very definite constituent of how she viewed her professional self, she had also worked hard to articulate a DCS leader-identity as a construct used to describe herself:

> I feel secure now in saying I am a DCS. I have got an identity as that, as a senior leader of children's services. I didn't always feel like that though. The first year was really tough as I didn't sit in the social work camp - I didn't sit in the education camp in terms of background. I didn't feel I had the strength of identity and affinity the other DCSs' had, or that they accepted me as an equal. (Morgan)

Morgan's need to have a sense of belonging and purpose in her professional self is strong, with affirmation of others in her professional group important to this construct. In her storytelling (Alvesson, 2010), Morgan refers to her past to explain how she drew on agency to establish a strong identity position now as a DCS, and how she envisages her future self (Watson, 2009).

> I think because of what I went through as a kid, I've got a lot of resilience. I just decided I deserve to be here. I'm as bloody good a DCS as anyone else doing the job and I'm going to make a difference because there's a lot of power being a DCS. I just didn't realise it at first and that's what I've harnessed going forward. Once I'd accepted that I just felt more secure. (Morgan)

Conversely, Esa spoke of feeling fairly secure in his leader-identity from the beginning - even though his occupational training route was not in social work or teaching either. Esa believed his previous local authority management roles had taught him what it was like to be peripheral to an organisation's core agenda. While not wielding some of the influence associated with senior managers of services dominated by child protection concerns or heavily monitored educational performance, Esa felt the concomitant lack of risk in his previous management roles, allowed him some space to develop enhanced influencing skills and creative approaches to integrated children's service delivery: "*When you're on no-one's agenda, you make it your business to become part of everyone's agenda*" (Esa). Ultimately, he felt this left him unfettered by a particular

occupational background and able to fairly easily align his current professional identity with being a professional public manager:

> I didn't come into this job with any distinct professional discipline. Post Baby P I think that became less common and for a while people panicked and went back to only appointing social work qualified managers as DCSs. They took a punt with me because I am a very experienced senior manager and know how to operate across the wider agendas. Yes, I am a DCS but the way I see my professional identity is as a corporate director, I'm a director for the city and it's my job to help everyone in this organisation deliver for the city and people in it. (Esa)

Esa's interpretation of his leader-self could be seen to represent the way notions of professionalism are manifested in ambiguous organisational domains, where the focus is on organising multi-disciplinary, complex service provision that can attempt to bridge the tension between enabling expertise and judgement to be used to meet the needs of children and families, while constrained by performance and cost demands of a neo-liberal state. Noordegraaf argues it is not the role of the professional public manager to prescribe how the inevitable trade-offs this involves must be made, but to "*provide direction for making them [and…] it is in this search for professional control that new searches for managerial identity are fuelled*" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.779).

8.3 Professional and Organisational Discourse of Control

A good deal of organisational theory refers to discourse and discursive resources with assumptions made that there is a clear definition, or common understanding of these concepts by the reader. Mangen and Brivot (2015) make the observation that there is no single agreed understanding of discourse and suggest working with the definition that it: "*pertains to a means of communication that revolves around language*" (p.664). While Watson (1994), describes discourse as: "*a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking and writing about a particular issue*" (p.113). While these are useful basic starting points, even a brief reading of the literature reveals a complexity and tension in how discourse is understood, often centred on how, and in what forms, meaning making is activated and controlled to create social realities. Layder (2006) contests that "*language is never innocent – discourses reflect the practices and positions that are tied to them*" (p.119). For Layder there is an "essential connection" between discourses, power and control.

What is important for the purposes of analysis here is that DCSs are subject to, and part of, the discursive forces which influence and shape how they construct, revise and enact their professional identities (Clarke et al. 2009; Kornberger & Brown, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009) in ambiguous organisational domains.

8.3.1 Institutional-Organisational

In common with leader-managers operating across the public sector in the UK, DCSs are subject to a significant amount of policy and institutional discourses. They also have their own occupational discourse acting on identity construction and reconstruction. Evetts (2012) sees attempts to justify both institutional-organisational control, and occupational control and regulation, bound into a new discourse of professionalism:

> The discourse of professionalism has entered the managerial literature. The concept of professionalism has an appeal to and for practitioners, employees and managers in the development and maintenance of work identities, career decisions and senses of self. (Evetts, 2012, p.4)

DCSs spoke often of professionalism 'from above' and professionalism 'from within' (McClelland, 1990), in their narrative accounts of day-to-day life being a DCS. Concentrating first on institutional-organisational control, it was interesting to hear about how they viewed and reacted to the considerable amount of policy discourse that permeates the work of children's services.

> It is a constant merry-go-round with new policy directives. Coming from the world of education management, I am well-versed in dealing with new imperatives and with the completely frustrating experience of just getting something consolidated when, 'oops here we go, off again in a different direction'. What's challenging as a DCS is the sheer scale and diversity of policy I have to keep on top of – it's across disciplines and agencies. I have to make sure we are all making sense of it in the best way we can. (Jaime)

One aspect of this sensegiving (Steigenberger, 2015) role is that in a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary environment like children's services, there may be contradictory directives from policy makers:

> It does feel sometimes that the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing – we get one command come down from Whitehall, which might have us

responsible for measuring school improvement and at the same time the duty on schools to co-operate with us has been removed. (Jesse)

Also, because policy is value-laden (Baxter, 2011), the principles and practice behind policy may sit well with one professional group, but clash with the practice models and ethical guidelines of another (Anning et al.2010; Baldwin, 2008; Frost, 2014; Søreide, 2007).

> There is a difficulty sometimes between health professionals and social workers who definitely have different understandings and ways of doing things. Which can be good of course, but around confidentiality issues it can cause real frictions. It depends how flexible they are. Do they stick rigidly to guidance from their own professional or regulatory bodies, or do they follow the spirit of it, which should lead to the best decision or outcome for the child. That of course is often the crux because it's a matter of professional judgement. When it's different - does one trump the other? (Billie)

This example of situated activity is a good illustration of the role DCSs are called on to take responsibility for "*controlling the control of expertise*" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.775) and in giving some direction for the trade-offs which need to take place in negotiating how professionalism is enacted. In amongst policy directives and statutory requirements, there is also the imposition of what Søreide (2007), describes as a 'narrative of control' where the discursive power of the policy narrative, acts as a form of identity control, shaping and configuring what a social worker, a teacher, an early years worker, a DCS should 'look like' and 'act like' (Pettica-Harris & McKenna, 2013). The shape and imperative of policy discourse is partly informed by public narratives about how these public servants should be; drawing together influences from politicians, the media, think tanks and influential bodies, and the users of the organisation themselves (Baxter, 2011). As the highest-ranking, highest-paid 'public protectors of children', this puts DCSs in a particularly visible line of fire when something goes tragically wrong and a child is seriously harmed, or killed. Some of the fragility and anxiety experienced around the role in regard to carrying statutory accountability for safeguarding children was discussed in Chapter Seven and is expanded on in Chapter Nine. Alex emphasises just how powerful this public narrative can be:

> It's hard for anyone outside of this to understand what this job is about and I do understand that. The problem is in my head, I'm a champion for children. I work day and night for that to be more than an empty saying. So, it completely rocks

you when there is a backlash against DCSs and you see headlines in the paper calling you scum and saying there is blood on our hands when a child dies. Not one DCS or social worker or health visitor wants a child to be hurt, or to die, so how can that define how you are seen by some people? (Alex)

Baxter (2011) argues – like many others *(Frost, 2014; Gurrey & Brazil 2014; Munro, 2011b; Parton 2014; Sikes & Piper, 2010)* that a dominant and negative public narrative seen in cases such as Peter Connelly's in Haringey (2007), can perversely put children more at risk by diverting attention away from those who have perpetrated the abuse, making practitioners more procedure driven, increasing applications for children to be taken into care and lead to a recruitment crisis in social work. It also permeates self-views, so important to identity construction (Alvesson, 2010; Ashcraft, 2007; Giddens, 1991) and is a reminder that identity is: "*always precarious and uncertain … dependent on others' judgements, evaluations and validations of the self and these can never be fully anticipated, let alone controlled*" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.336).

One unfortunate outcome in identity terms, is that the 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011; Parton, 2014a) seen in public narratives such as these, often leads to a reaction where policy that arises due to perceived failure, or to sate public appetite for 'something to be done', often "*Instantiate[s] elliptical discourses that appear rooted in neither professional values, nor current practices within the public sectors*" (Baxter, 2011, p.64). Yet, it is these that are pushed forward to become embedded as new language, new ways of determining professionalism. However, it is important to highlight that in the DCSs narrative accounts, there was evidence of resistance discourses at work against efforts 'from above' to regulate and control identity formation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2004; Thomas & Davies, 2005; Watson, 2008) and DCSs were certainly not "*"cultural dupes, or automatons*" (Giddens, 1991, p. 56), passively being inculcated and shaped by policy and other institutional discourse and forces.

The thing is this is a powerful position and I do have quite a lot of influence about how we take things forward. While I take a corporate approach generally, everything I do is focused on the best services for children. So, if something comes in and that really pushes against it, I find ways - I find means - to translate it so we are still striving to get the absolute best for children. We have massive cuts yes, we have a policy agenda that doesn't sit comfortably with my values but it's interesting to see what you can do when you're up against it. (Jude)

Jude was by no means alone with examples of not just resisting discourse, but creating alternative narratives that felt more aligned to her values, her perceived responsibilities in the role as a DCS, and her self-view (Baldwin, 2008; Brown et al., 2014; Ybema, et al. 2009). Individuals and professional collectives can resist and manipulate policy discourse as well as being coloured by it (Baxter, 2011). In the turbulent, unstable organisational context where the "*changed conditions and a programme of cuts to public services* have, *altered the modus operandi of directors*" (Hulme et al., 2014, p.78), the efforts from the DCSs themselves to exercise some occupational control was evident in their narrative.

8.3.2 Professional Discourses of Control

As hybrid professional public managers, DCSs are continuously negotiating their identity in complex, ambiguous organisational domains. As leaders, they balance their own identity work and struggle, with concern and responsibility for others who are trying to establish how to operate in a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary context. While there are different forms of practice and accumulated professional resources across these areas and workers, one of the more stable features in children's services is that there is at least a broadly shared child-centred values base acting as a common point of reference. The importance of personal and professional values was discussed in Chapter Seven in relation to DCSs' notions of identity expression and their stabilising influence; often seen to act as a 'touchstone' when faced with challenges and uncertainty.

In Chapters Two and Seven discussion focused on how leadership discourses, qualities frameworks and normative leadership models for DCSs - such as those produced by NCSCSL and the Virtual Staff College, can be seen as identity-targeting (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014), prescribing not only what a perfectly-constituted, high-performing, effective DCS should look and behave like, but in the Systems Leadership Model (2013), even suggesting there should be 'ways of thinking' and 'ways of feeling'. Gagnon and Collinson argue that in the desire to encourage congruence with qualities and behaviours deemed necessary for the successful leader:

> Leadership development programmes and discursive practices seek to align participants' identities and behaviours with the construction of a particular ideal leader. (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014, p.646)

Being subject to prevailing institutional and organisational leadership discourses and practices has implications for identity construction (Kenny et al., 2011; Thomas, 2009) as individuals engage in processes to make sense of their professional selves. What is interesting about some of the prevailing discourse and dominant models – as is the case according to Noordegraaf (2007, p.777) for many "rushing to professionalise themselves" – is that DCSs themselves are involved in creating, substantiating and embodying significant elements of these discursive tools. The Virtual Staff College is the 'training arm' of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and is the main provider of leadership development, also acting as a professional resource and commissioner for research and a virtual site for professional knowledge accumulation and transfer. Sam describes the early establishment of the Association:

> There were all sorts of tensions about which model to go for with the formation of the ADCS. In the end, although the old association of education directors and association of social services directors were merged, the ethos and philosophy of working has been more along social services and of course that influences the professional ideology. (Sam)

The idea of the ADCS was to create a professional membership body, focused on support for those in the DCS role and others in senior leadership roles in children's services. Part of that support involved leadership development, but there was also an effort to set up regional support structures which mirrored the administrative regional organisation created by Government structures. It is the regional networks which most participants spoke of as a site of meaning-making in relation to their social identity (Hogg and Kipling, 2001) as a DCS. Chapter Nine explores this in more detail, as participants described either finding salience in the group, or the opposite - and actually feeling alienated and "not belonging". This is important for identity work and struggle because self-definition in a social group context is based on how belonging to a particular social category is perceived. Chandra in particular struggled to find a 'fit' in the regional meetings:

> It becomes more isolating the more senior you become, and being a DCS - the only one in that position in the whole authority - can leave you feeling vulnerable.

> You look to your leadership network for support. I really don't feel like I fit in. (Chandra)

Sam acknowledged that there were particular dynamics at work in the group:

> As a regional group of DCS, we've talked about the really different cultures our professional backgrounds bring. Some people seem more secure than others in their identity, their levels of confidence. With any professional grouping, you get that support, that strength and peer. There is a bit of a hierarchy in the wider regional group. You have to find your place, and that takes time. (Sam)

While most participants appeared fairly secure in their role identity as a DCS (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Thoits, 1991), expressing complementary and symbiotic connection to their work in children's services, and often emphasising salience in the level of commitment they felt for the enactment of this professional self, collective efforts to organise a fluid discourse of occupational control felt more difficult to capture in identity narrative. Although Nat offered an example of how DCSs were mobilising themselves in the turbulent political and economic environment they are operating in.

> In the group, our common thread is we are focused on children – on getting the best possible services in each of our areas. What we tend to do when we all meet up is place children at the centre of business 'talk', and as key stakeholders: I really think this reminds us all that we're in the business of children. (Nat)

Nat's observation was particularly insightful because DCSs frequently used this phrase 'in the business of children' during the narrative interviews. This could be explained as 'languaging', a way of colonising discourse by the professional social group of DCSs, which can offer salience and identity affirmation. Brown et al. describe this process as "*seeking to appropriate and enact realities*" (2015, p.265); part of sense-making acts of interpretation and actively employed in identity work to generate a common language.

It will be interesting to see how much may change in the professional group as some of the members move on (or are moved on as the case is all too often for DCSs - with one in three DCSs leaving the role either voluntarily or through dismissal, Wiggins, 2014). The first generation of DCSs were often former Directors of Education according to Alex, as they were quite powerfully positioned in local authority management hierarchies, so often stepped into the role as it was created from 2005 onwards, but

quite quickly more and more former Social Care Directors were appointed as there was a significant gap in knowledge to deal with the statutory requirement for safeguarding children. This may explain why, according to Sam, the national membership body ADCS, was formed more "*along social services professional ideology*". Alex believes that the balance is changing again:

> I think the balance is shifting as a new breed of DCSs has emerged. There has been a softening, a coming together. New DCSs coming through have spent time in integrated children's services and often grown up as an Assistant Director [of those services]. They have that different understanding. They have a language that cuts across because they are not steeped in just education, or just children's social work. (Alex)

For now, the current DCSs are individually and in most cases, collectively, interpreting and generating a professional discourse for themselves for the present, and this is partly achieved by focusing on a positive narrative of the future where they articulate an intention to make a difference to children in the DCS role. In engaging in 'prospective sense-making' (Brown et al., 2014; Corley & Gioia, 2011), attempts are continually made to find identity salience and to cope with what most saw as the peculiar challenges, fragility, risk and joys of the role.

8.4 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter explored participants' expressions of hybrid professional identity and notions of professionalism (section 8.2), reflecting on how participants often moved quite comfortably across a continuum between early career occupational learning, training and values-base, and their current identity constructs as a senior public services leader. As hybrid public leaders what it means to 'be professional' was seen to be defined and revised in new ways of working; especially in relation to learning how to control expertise in the ambiguous, multi-faceted organisational domain of children's services. The second theme in part two of this chapter (section 8.3) examined influences of organisational or institutional discourses of control, and occupational discourse created and sustained by the DCSs themselves. Both were illuminative in offering new insights into how DCSs construct, revise and enact their leader identity.

The next chapter examines some of the important emotional dimensions of what has been described as 'the lonely posting' of a DCS leader. Strong themes emerged from the data concerning the emotion work and emotional labour enacted in the role. These are organised around three central themes: Emotion, Resilience and (In)Security.

9. THE LONELY POSTING: EMOTION, RESILIENCE AND (IN)SECURITY

9.1 Context and Chapter Structure

The emotional dimensions of being and *becoming* (Alvesson et al., 2008) a DCS are considerable. They emerged so strongly in the data, and have such important implications for identity construction and enactment that they warrant detailed exploration and analysis. As participants seek to articulate and make sense of their professional identity as hybrid public leaders, they reveal new insights which enhance understandings of the role emotion plays in identity work – a theme that remains underexplored in empirical studies and theoretical perspectives on identity (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012; Croft et al., 2015).

Following Iszatt-White's (2009) conceptualisation that emotional labour in contemporary organisations is more complex and heterogeneous than originally conceived in Hochschild's (1983) seminal work on the emotional labour of service workers, the first section of this chapter **9.2 The emotion work of leading children's services,** considers the management of emotions by DCS. This captures a different process from the emotional labour enacted to satisfy demands on a leader to "*act as the voice and face of the organisation*" (Watson, 2008, p.122). It focuses on felt emotions (Domagalski & Steelman, 2005; Fineman, 2000; Gill, 2015) and managing feelings awakened in the 'doing' of the job, including emotional responses to organisational events and social interactions. Participants share some of their conscious identity work in accounts of their efforts to reconcile emotional experiences and feelings (both the strains and joys of the job) by recourse to their values and the moral purpose of their work; consistent factors cited as central to helping them orientate meaningful attempts at identity construction and searches for salience.

In identity studies, theorists often flatten the ontological terrain (Alvesson, 2010; Collinson, 2003) by either concentrating on individuals as autonomous, unitary beings - separable from social structures and relations, and able to locate an essential self, or by a much more open, extremely precarious understanding of human beings almost entirely at the mercy of external forces. In loosely adopting Layder's theory of Social

Domains (1997) as a sensitising device for examining and interpreting data, this study views social reality through the distinct, yet interrelated domains of Psychobiography, situated activity, social settings and contextual resources to reach beyond dualism and the conceptualisation of agency-structure connections as singular processes or phenomenon.

Evidence that the self is both psychological and social - *"for the self can only exist within a social context"* (Layder, 2004, p.7), can be seen in section **9.3 Bruising encounters, resilience and (in)security.** Here participants highlight examples of situated activity in the social settings they occupy as DCSs, and articulate some strong beliefs that such encounters both demand of them, and build in them, a special type of personal resilience. The 'lonely posting' phrase included in the chapter title, reflects a comment made by one of the DCSs (Chandra) when she spoke of how isolating and lonely the role can be: especially the emotional challenges and feelings of vulnerability she believed were peculiar to the lived experience of being a DCS. This observation was by no means unusual, with many participants sharing similar reflections in their stories of sensemaking and constructions of the professional self. Included are examples of where, even fleetingly, they felt some salience and security in their identity positions based on positive encounters and internally realised satisfaction in what they were achieving on behalf of children.

While sensemaking is directed towards DCSs own emotional management in relation to identity work, sensegiving (Steigenberger, 2015, p.435), is seen as part of the leader's outward task; helping others make sense of their experiences and work lives. As Iszatt-White (2012) argues, leadership practice is a relational activity which naturally involves emotions, often playing a critical role in enabling individuals and teams to feel reassured, motivated and valued. It is in this context that the notion of emotional labour and emotional displays enacted in "*the accomplishment of effective leadership work*" (Iszatt-White, 2009, p.450) is investigated in section **9.4 Leading as emotional labour.** Here narrative accounts illuminate how DCSs see themselves as "*toxic emotion handlers"* responsible for creating a holding environment which buffers uncertainty and frustration for others (Gallos, 2012, p.44). However, a significant number also saw themselves as standard bearers for keeping everyone focused on child-centred work, and this was very much linked to positive emotional experiences. At these times, the

labouring did not feel 'surface', or 'deep' - which in Hochschild's (1983) original theory risks alienation and emotional dissonance as individuals may become 'other', or removed from 'who they really are' in order to display emotions they may not be truly feeling. Rather it was described more in terms of 'spontaneous and genuinely felt' emotion (Glomb & Tews, 2004; Humphrey et al., 2015) which offered: "*opportunities to express one's fidelity to a valued identity … [to have] an identity enhancing experience* " (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p.99). For participants in the present study, their valued identity - or identity positions in this context, was as an ethically-driven, values-based leader of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary children's services teams. One aspect that stood out when DCSs talked of enacting their leader identity was repeated reference to humility as an essential quality. Almost all participants claimed this needed to be exhibited in genuine emotional displays to practitioners and staff teams in order for them to be taken seriously as a values-based, authentic leader, regardless of which occupational background they had emerged from.

The final theme addressed in this chapter - section **9.5 'It takes one to know one',** is concerned with the expressed emotional affinity participants felt (or did not feel) with other DCSs, in a role that only has around 150 incumbents across England. Sharing unique insights amongst themselves of the significant vulnerabilities and risk involved in both doing the job, and managing to hold on to it, drew most participants into a shared discourse around a particular DCS leader identity construct, the 'valued identity'. This promotes 'professionalism from within' (Evetts, 2003; McClelland, 1990) reaffirming the 'special' skills and qualities all the DCSs at some point in interviews had articulated was needed to do the job well; reified in leadership development models and programmes endorsed by the DCS professional body and Government agencies. As part of their identity work, some participants seemed keen to favourably or negatively compare, or align themselves with other DCSs. Others talked of feeling they did not belong. While aspects of perceptions and actions in a collective context (Hogg, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) were considered in chapter eight of this study, it is the emotional dimension and implications for identity that is of interest here. This final data section analyses and discusses some important contributions to the limited literature (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012) on the role of emotions in sensemaking within and between a distinct group of leaders as they construct and enact hybrid public leader identities.

In summary, this chapter first explores the emotion work involved in leading children's services in section 9.2 - with particular focus on how DCSs manage and reconcile their own emotions. Some of the bruising encounters experienced by DCSs are then documented in section 9.3 to further examine the social and institutional dynamics encountered; seen to both demand and build resilience as an extremely important constituent of the DCS leader construct. Themes concerned with vulnerability and insecurity/security and implications for identity struggle as part of sensemaking processes are also investigated. Notions of sensegiving, and leading as emotional labour are explored through some illuminating narrative in section 9.4. Finally, participants' emotional connections to each other and views of their professional selves - influenced and shaped through interactions in the DCS social group, forms section 9.5.

9.2 The Emotion Work of Leading Children's Services

In research studies concerned with the leadership development needs of DCS (Ghate et al., 2013; Purcell, 2009; NCLSCS & Deloitte, 2011) acknowledgement is made of the unique emotional and cognitive demands on those in the role. This is also the case in the small amount of literature exploring the challenges of being the most senior leader of multi-agency, multi-disciplinary children's services in a constantly changing, complex environment (Booker, 2012; Daniels & Edwards, 2012; Frost, 2009a, 2014; Purcell et al., 20012; Hulme et al., 2014). It is surprising then that the role and place of emotions in DCS identity work remains largely unexplored in empirical and conceptual studies. A rich vein of personal accounts illuminates the sensemaking processes experienced and enacted by DCSs as they attempt to recognise and manage their own emotions and nurture well-being. Praveen gave an example of when she knows the pressures and emotional demands of the job are having a particular effect on her:

> I have to leave very early in the mornings but around once a month I just can't get out of bed. I lie there and think I can't, my legs won't move – I'm paralysed. You think, you're not paralysed you just don't want to get up. I make myself move, I drag myself out of bed and drive to work. Don't misunderstand me I absolutely love my job, but I think the emotional energy it takes just wipes me out now and again. (Praveen)

In articulating it is the emotional energy sometimes demanded in the role that leaves her feeling this way, Praveen draws on the cognitive process of interpretation involved in sensemaking (Weick,1995), taking her subjectively felt experiences to build and

construct an internal understanding (reality) of her work self. This fits with Brown, Colville and Pye's (2014) definition of sensemaking as:

> People not merely engaged in interpretation and meaning production, but the active authoring of the situations in which reflexive actors are embedded and are attempting to comprehend … [in order to] construct 'realities' in a continuing dialogue of discovery and invention. (p.3)

In the workplace, the inter-subjective and socially embedded nature of sensemaking by individuals is intimately tied to organisational contexts and to professional identity construction; reflecting the interrelated domains of Psychobiography, situated activity, social settings and contextual resources (Layder, 1997). Fran gives an indication of this when describing a particularly difficult emotional experience:

> You feel this job very personally - there is something quite intense about it. I had to sign legal documents to switch off a child's life support machine – he'd been in a road traffic accident. He was in our care so we had corporate parent responsibility. I never met him but you can't forget things like that. It stays with you, colours the job. [It] reminds you what you can carry being a DCS because that is the stuff that's very real (Fran)

A number of DCSs shared similar feelings when relating difficult and emotionally upsetting situations that had ultimately fallen on their shoulders as the senior leader in children's services with statutory accountability for the protection of children.

> So, I'm there alone on a Friday evening trying to make a decision about a young person being put into secure accommodation. With a court judgement still pending, the police wanted urgent action before the weekend. It weighed really heavily on me because until she got to court for the hearing scheduled in the middle of the following week, she didn't have a voice. I signed it off. I had to keep other young people safe. She'd come into care very damaged and attacked another girl in her foster home. What I've realised is there's never really a right answer, there's only the best answer at that time, but you still feel anxious and question yourself after the event. (Chandra)

While Chandra and Fran - amongst others, recounted specific episodes, it was interesting to note how participants also spoke of dealing with the impact of day-to-day uncertainties in *expectation* of facing difficult emotional experiences.

The pressure always sits there – you are just one case away. That could come in tomorrow. You are always on edge, never complacent but it's about how you deal with that, how you respond to that feeling. (Jesse)

In endeavouring to obtain some stability for their identity it becomes apparent that "*the vulnerable self is both a condition and consequence of insecurity … closely intertwined with our sense of who we are*". (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.337). This corresponds well with Steigenberger's (2015) notion that emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety and hope are an input, as well as an outcome of, sensemaking processes. Organisations provide fertile ground for affective events and experiences. The following extended example relays an encounter Morgan had with a powerful agency in her local area. It illustrates some of the emotion work invested in making sense of the experience; discovering more about herself and what was important to her. This was represented as a seminal moment which strengthened her sense of identity in the DCS role. Having recently started in post as a DCS for a Local Authority she was unfamiliar with, Morgan was invited out to lunch by the director of a major children's project, funded through the children's services budgets she now had responsibility for:

I thought 'how nice'. So I met him for lunch in my bestest suit it was all very civilised through the first course and then waiting for the main, he just said "Let's get something straight here, you just give me the money and I'll get on with it, just don't interfere we know what we're doing. I said sorry that's not how it works. We will agree what you will be delivering and then we have mechanisms in place to monitor that is happening. "No", he said "let me make it clearer, that's not how it happens here". I stood up and said "well I think lunch is over, don't you?" I walked out and was so, so scared. I mean for him to be overt in that way. I thought what the hell have I got into here? My principles got me through that and I knew I had to stand strong.

We pulled the contract, faced a legal challenge but I had to put down a marker to him and well, to everyone in the area. It was scary. I hadn't had time to mentally prepare for it – had no idea that was going to come at me, but I learned such a lot about myself. It really made me think afterwards about what my values are and basically I found the courage to stand up to him because I thought 'no way this money is for kids who need it, not for some mafiaesque outfit'. (Morgan)

In the processes of interpretation, meaning making and active authoring of her experience (Brown et al. 2014), Morgan's sensemaking helped her discover her 'red line' – what she would not cross and could not compromise on. Ingram (2012, p.149) describes this as application of a 'values hierarchy' as individuals internally navigate

what they are prepared to do to enact the requirements of the job, and where they draw the line because the values compromised are too important to their 'authentic self' to surrender. The concept of authenticity with its many subjective interpretations and different cultural meanings remains contested. The question of who defines whether a leader is acting authentically, and against what measures, is problematic (Iszatt-White, 2012; Ladkin & Spiller, 2013 p.2), compounded by a tendency in much of the authentic leader literature to lionise images of a humble, purely-intentioned, always striving to be 'true to self' leader (Wilson, 2013). This is also extant in much of the leadership discourse and normative development programmes discussed in chapter two of the present study, which Morgan and her DCS peers are both subject to, and part of promulgating. In any case, as Zander (2012, p.280) wryly observes, it may not be helpful to be true to self "*if your authentic self is a jerk.*"

What is interesting about Morgan's experience is that in recounting the event, she was aware of the sensemaking processes. Morgan recognised the initial visceral emotional reaction she had; reflecting the way in which human emotions such as fear are 'hardwired to the brain', producing a sub-conscious quick trigger effect (Izard, 2010; Phelps, 2006), followed by a related more thoughtful, conscious processing of the situation. Together these guide decision-making and actions (Steigenberger, 2015, p.436) which are not enacted in a hermetically-sealed vacuum, but in the social and structural context within which she exists. For Morgan, part of this process involved affirmation of her values, appearing to give at least a temporary sense of security about 'who she is' and 'how she should be' (Ibarra, 1999).

There is openness in this study to the interrelated, yet distinct agentic and structural dimensions of identity work emerging from the data, predicated on the belief that the self – or rather selves, are not a unitary construct, but also not completely fragmented and fluid (Alvesson, 2010; Archer, 2003; Clarke et al., 2009; Layder, 1997, 2006). The DCSs identity narratives often drew a connection between deeply held values around child-centred practice and the construct and enactment of themselves as an authentic leader.

> You anchor yourself in your values the job is too scary without something very firm to tie yourself to and doing that helps me stay true to myself (Jesse)

While images of the idealised ethically-driven, seemingly superhuman DCS leader, and the place of personal and professional values in mobilising identity work were both discussed at some length in previous Chapters, what is of interest here is the emotion work employed in efforts to make sense of their own professional reality.

> You have to accept that at director level there's something quite isolating about the role. You do have to keep a lot of the emotional stuff in your own head and deal with it. I've learned to process things, find ways to let out the pressure. You have to, or you could get mentally quite unwell. I make a point of grounding myself back into why I do this job, the values around making things better for our children and young people. We all have to go out there and perform at different times … [in] different ways, but the stuff about the children is completely authentic. I can't fake that (Sam)

> You need to find a place where you are comfortable with yourself. People look to you to lead them, to feel comfortable in what you are doing, and you do that by being clear about the values we work to, and by being an authentic leader (Nat)

It would be easy to slip into an essentialist interpretation of the self, where fully autonomous, self-reliant DCSs are choosing to act authentically in their leadership, unencumbered by the dynamics of social relationships and organisational and institutional forces. As Ladkin & Spiller (2013), observe: "*from this perspective, being authentic involves the relatively straightforward task of acting in a way which is congruent with that unified sense of 'self'*" (p.2). Undoubtedly, the importance of child-centred values and their perceived stabilising properties in the fragmented, turbulent environment DCS leaders operate in, was strongly and consistently emphasised by participants throughout this study. There is clear evidence in the data of the influence of individual Psychobiography on identity constructs, and of the emotionally unique nature of the DCSs; each with their own private desires, fears and motivations (Layder, 2006). There is also a high level of awareness that sometimes this means the 'fit' between themselves and the ambiguous context within which they have to enact their leadership role is imprecise and a site of tension for identity struggle and work. Billie gives an indication that rather than discovering a unified sense of self, what is experienced in the coming together of individual, social and institutional dynamics is "*a conception of the self reflexively and discursively understood*" (Kuhn, 2006, p. 1340), but also one not completely at the mercy of social forces. Individual emotional uniqueness has an important role to play in identity work.

We move about in a very complicated world. You have to be all things to all people – like a Swiss army knife. I have to be able to come at things from different angles and have different tools and responses for different people and situations. You are juggling Government policy changes, funding cuts, media interest, internal politics, managing staff with their different professional perspectives, opening a new building and all the while you are expected to be this almost haloed leader. Well, I can do all of that if it's going to make a difference to children. I can switch and swap, but I think that's because I keep a little bit of the private me locked away. (Billie)

Billie's perspective – similar to all the participants narrative in this respect, suggested that their child-centred values base held firm, but around this, identities were continuously in a process of 'becoming' in their particular social and discursive contexts. The DCSs scripted stories evoked "*several more or less contradictory and often changing managerial identities rather than one stable, secure managerial identity*" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). Yet, this did not mean they were being (or feeling) inauthentic about their commitment to leading children's services to achieve the best outcomes possible. Sometimes that actually demands what Clarke et al. (2013, p.84) describe as "labouring under false pretences" and concealing their 'true self' or true feelings, because the situation, and practitioners may need this from them at that point in time. It also moves away from prevailing assumptions and unhelpful, essentialist conceptualisations in organisational discourse and the literature, of a truly authentic leader - always acting from their 'one true self'.

Secretly I'm agreeing with my team, that what we're asked to do to prove we are competent - and the time wasted doing that is ridiculous, but we have to play the game. Inspectors in particular make us jump through a lot of useless hoops, but to carry on doing what we're doing well, it's my job to show we are playing by the bureaucratic rules. That can be a strain, but it's part of what I need to do. (Jesse)

The emotional stresses on DCSs are significant and while there does appear to be fairly strong influences from externally imposed normative leadership models and discourse (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014) and their own discursive reinforcement of a 'truly authentic' leader with special and distinctive skills, there is general acknowledgement by the DCSs that their leadership is best enacted by enabling it to be distributed. This of course challenges much of the rhetoric, and the wider authentic leader literature which still largely invests 'true authentic' leadership as realised in the single, unitary bounds of the heroic leader rather than continually evolving; affected by, and affecting social and

structural domains (Collinson, 2011; Jones & Grint, 2013; Ladkin & Spiller, 2013). Ali spoke of his recognition that leadership is relational, explaining how he works to facilitate a more shared leadership approach:

> If you are omnipotent or fantastically charismatically wonderful, then people won't find space to contribute to excellent, creative services for our children and young people. You have to be able to accept that you can't control everything, you can't fix everything. The best chance we have is to let people have the confidence, the structures and relationships to use their expertise and professional judgement (Ali)

As previously discussed in Chapters seven and eight of this study, there are challenges for ontological security as the very nature and environment DCS operate in is antithetical to supporting distributed leadership (Frost, 2014; Purcell et al., 2012). Yet, there was evidence that participants were able to cope with this tension, and indeed for some, hold contrasting, even antagonistic positions (Clarke et al., 2009, p.324) as part of their leader self-narratives.

> I say to staff this is a business, I run it as a business we're in the business of caring but the question I pose to them is: is it a caring business or are we in the business of caring? Depending on where you are in the organisation, you answer that question differently. I answer you can be both. This is a multi-million pound business, so there has to be a business ethic. (Jude)

Building and constructing ongoing narratives of their professional selves in a volatile, uncertain and ambiguous world: "*people are engaged constantly in identity work as they deal with moral challenges and the existential worries that accompany them*" (Clarke et al., 2009, p.346). Arguably for DCSs the moral challenges and existential worries of their job are greater than most people experience in organisational leadership roles, requiring substantial engagement in sensemaking and emotion work.

This chapter began considering interpretations, meaning making and active authoring of experiences (Brown et al. 2014) as part of emotion work by DCSs in their particular social and structural contexts. The data pointed to a child-centred values base acting as a consistent feature in searches for identity salience, and at least a temporary source of stability in identity work by participants. It was also evident that – partly as a consequence of this more stable aspect, DCSs can operate from several different

managerial identities as self-reflexive beings in a process of 'becoming' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), rather than ever being fully 'finished'.

The next section examines some further bruising encounters, in day-to-day situated activity with others and the existential worries entailed in carrying statutory responsibility for children's safety and well-being, along with the constant threat of being exposed to trial by media and the 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLauglin, 2012; Parton, 2014). Particular attention is paid to an aspect that was strikingly present in the DCSs self-narrative - their focus on personal resilience as at least a partial defence to the anxieties and insecurities they face.

9.3 Bruising Encounters, Resilience and (In)Security

The precariousness of a secure fit between society and the individual is borne out in the reflections of DCSs when they talk of the existential anxieties they experience in the role. Often brought into sharp relief by what one of the DCSs, Jaime describes as "*bruising encounters*", these indicate that society is "*not the well-oiled machine it is frequently portrayed as in the social sciences … [with] smooth social routines, rituals and encounters automatically producing ontological security*" (Layder, 2006, p. 275). When full account is taken of the discursive and structural forces we are always already situated in, and the socio-cultural context in which we find ourselves (Archer, 2003; Layder, 1997; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014), there are questions about the real extent of generic transformative capacity exercised through individual agency in the way Giddens (1991) envisages. Nonetheless, it is certainly accepted that *"social actors are not cultural dupes, or automatons"* (Giddens, 1991, p. 56), and while embedded in these contexts, individuals bring emotional uniqueness and an in-progress Psychobiography that enables them to respond to threats and uncertainties with varying degrees of 'success'. What can be seen in the data are stories of personal accomplishments which secure some stability - albeit often fleeting, that repeatedly emphasises personal resilience as a defining quality in DCS leader identity constructs.

> Bruising encounters are our bread and butter we have them every day. I often say to myself 'out of the most difficult, hard situations, out of the turbulence, comes the greatest good'. So when it gets really hard, I dig deep. I get more resilient every time and I really can take a lot of shit. (Jaime)

Charlie had talked about how his years of experience in managing children's social care and dealing with serious case reviews (which take place in cases of serious harm or death of children where abuse and/or neglect is suspected) had helped him to strengthen his capacity to deal with the uncertainties and threats to security that come with the DCS role. In fact he advocated the need to understand that risk cannot be controlled and resilience is built through accepting that:

> Resilience is the number one quality you need as a DCS. The pressure is relentless. The workload is relentless. The tragedy of some of the families we work with is relentless. You have to learn to embrace the risk and the risk of failure – it's not something you can control. Resilience is in reconciling yourself to that (Charlie)

This perspective is supported in Professor Munro's (2011a) review of child protection in the UK, where she argues for a systems approach that conceptualises child protection as a complex-adaptive system. Here practitioners are supported to step away from fear of the blame culture and talk about their experiences 'good and bad'. To be open to the risks carried; so that opportunities for learning can happen and adjustment (adaption) made in response to that. Rather than what tends to happen - which is the system turns in on itself; paradoxically creating a more controlled and procedure-driven workforce that limits opportunities for learning and change and potentially increases risks for children. Charlie shared his analysis of how resilience plays a critical role for him, other DCSs and practitioners working at the frontline:

> The Government response to the Victoria Climbie Inquiry [in 2003] was too focused on structures. What the Inquiry was asking was 'what led a young, good, enthusiastic social worker like Lisa Arthurworrey [Principal Social Worker in Victoria Climbie's case] accepting such low professional standards?' That had something to do with the culture she was dropped into. She'd been in post just 18 months. It was not that she was a bad person trying to do a bad job. The structural stuff bringing in our DCS role was needed, but it's the responsibility in that role to give clarity of purpose and make sure the right conversations are happening with the right people. We have to build our resilience as leaders and the resilience of the frontline because that's what safeguards kids at the end of the day. (Charlie)

Other participants also highlighted the importance they placed on resilience, but spoke more specifically about the emotional strains and existential anxiety of particular encounters and episodes experienced in the role.

We've just had a safeguarding inspection – it's a really, really hideous, and intensely stressful process. We did fine and I'm very proud of everyone, but as the person where the buck stops you feel completely vulnerable until they announce their judgement on you. It's weird, in one way you never feel as alert, as focused as you do going through that. You also never feel as exhausted and battered. It's mostly mental, emotional stress which takes a lot of resilience. (Esa)

This is a finely-grained example of the fragility and precariousness of the self in social and organisational life, where everyone is subject to the unpredictable and uncontrollable evaluation and judgement of others, leaving:

Identities always in the balance, as a person's social significance could easily be disturbed, disrupted and reshaped by changes in social relations, particularly in that most important site of identity construction – the workplace. (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.338).

In the case of safeguarding inspections, that balance hangs in the hands of Government inspectors as 'powerful 'others,' (Best & Kellner, 1991; Weber & Glynn, 2006), with the potential outcomes ranging from a possible career-ending rating of 'Inadequate' children's services, to the superlative (and now rarely awarded) 'Outstanding'. To his relief, Esa's services were rated positively in the most recent inspection. The Framework for Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services is part of statutory provision (Education and Inspections Act, 2006) which measures the 'effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children', including a focus on looked after children, and the 'effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people and the quality of professional practice locally.' (Ofsted, 2015) There are four possible ratings: Outstanding; Good; Requires Improvement (previously adequate rating); Inadequate.

Chandra explained the impact for her of being rated inadequate:

I had an independent diagnostic of children's services commissioned as I was coming into post as DCS. I was only a few months into the job - just about to go on holiday for Christmas. The consultants came back and said "your children's social care is unsafe", and, … [this is] absolutely true, on the same day I got an email from Ofsted that they were going to do an inspection in the first week of January. Despite working relentlessly, the inspectors found what I knew they would find and put us in intervention. You live on a knife edge once you've been pulled over that particular cliff. (Chandra)

Once in 'intervention' what is encountered is very close and continued scrutiny from Government officials and regular, detailed reporting of actions being taken to improve – with the possibility of commissioners being 'sent in' to take over the operation of your children's services, if a further inspection determines little, or no progress has been made.

> The pressure is incessant. I had the Chief Exec on my back every day. The politicians jumping around like scalded cats and the staff terrified about doing the wrong thing. The local media are not kind. I felt permanently nauseous to be honest. (Chandra).

The implications for professional identity in this situation are profound as a form of "*social policing of action*" (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1641) takes place through institutional controls and power relations. In the agency-structure dialectic, it is important to "set *processes of individual identity work firmly in the structural or sociological contexts in which they occur*" (Watson, 2008, p.122). This need to be done in a way that does not privilege structure over individual agency but takes seriously the impact of institutional power, social structures, culture and discourse on ongoing identity construction. Enduring the prolonged and heightened emotional and psychological pressures that Chandra describes reveals the peculiar fragilities and insecurities inherent in this particular leadership role. However, while clearly dealing with high levels of anxiety and being plagued by self-doubt at times, chapter six of this study captures Chandra simultaneously scripting a strong representation of her leader-self; one that strategically draws on individual agency (Alvesson, 2010) to mobilise a potent image of a professional self who can "*make a difference for children".* This supports findings in other empirical studies of leader-manager identities, that not only do individuals hold multiple identities at the same time - these can incorporate contrasting, even antagonistic positions (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012; Clarke et al., 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

A central feature of participants' sensemaking around professional identity and the ongoing maintenance and recrafting efforts this involves, is the work taking place at an emotional and cognitive level. This seeks congruence between self-perceptions of themselves as leaders - explored through internal conversations asking 'who am I?' and 'how should I be?' (Archer, 2003; Ibarra, 1999), and external representations which

encourage an ideal leader identity image (Schwartz, 1987). Images often generated and reinforced through identity-targeting normative leadership models and development programmes, and institutional and professional discourses (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014; Kenny et al, 2011). Together these form a "*valued identity*" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p.99) needing validation in the social world. There is a *positioning* then, an expectation of what embodies a leader identity - not just by the self, but also by others who may hold a particular view of what a senior children's services leader should be. A role as publicly exposed and visible as that of a DCS is subject to a particularly high level of attention and scrutiny. Perhaps this is because they embody society's expectation of them as noble public protectors of children.

> The more visible and demanding the leadership role, the more pressure there will be from the self, followers, and the public for the person holding the role to embody views of what [that] leader should be like. (Petriglieri & Stein, p.1220)

DCSs are always "*just one case away*" (Jesse) from the media and public spotlight falling on them if they are seen to have failed in their role as protectors of children. Fran was one of a number of participants to share a particular experience to help illuminate the impact of trying to reconcile the uncertainties and the emotional challenges of the role which continue to render identity fragile and precarious (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.336). Fran described carrying an overnight bag and alternative mobile telephone in her car, in the event of having to suddenly go into hiding amidst concerns that a child neglect and abuse case was going to turn particularly unpleasant in the media. She observed that in those periods "*it was not easy to carry on with ordinary life*". What she found most difficult to cope with was the lack of control, when in most of her work encounters and situations she felt she could be very rational; able to compartmentalise and manage her worries.

> My usual take is you cannot be driven by events, if you let that happen you are just running around reacting all day, every day in this job. I am confident about my leadership approach and my decision-making. I have processes and the experience for dealing with the most critical of incidents which means mostly I don't get angsty and worried (Fran)

Fran explained why potential media attention and the possibility of a hostile spotlight being put on her was the most difficult issue for her to deal with on an emotional level as a DCS:

> The problem with the media is the unknown. Within a day you can be massacred by them, by politicians, by the public – pretty much painted as a child killer. That is hard to live with when your whole motivation and values is about protecting children. Even if you are pretty resilient which I am, it does mess with your emotions. (Fran)

In sharing her Psychobiography in an earlier interview, documented in chapter six of this study, Fran had articulated how she valued the exposure to different roles and organisations in her career before becoming a DCS; happy to spend time in diverse, often messy worlds without needing a strong sense of who she was, but rather who she '*needed to be at a given moment*' (Pettica-Harris & McKenna, 2013, p. 825). This was reinforced in further narrative accounts about her feelings now as a DCS, relatively comfortable with the many challenges and uncertainties such a role appears to bring. So, it is perhaps some indication of the depth of her dread and fear of powerful external forces of the media and risk of the 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLauglin, 2012; Parton, 2014) being directed at her, that this was the one area singled out as a particular potent threat to her ontological security.

Participants spoke of their emotion work - almost always unseen, unsupported and unacknowledged (Clarke et al., 2007), as being performed on a daily basis; demanding and building resilience in often distressing contexts: "This job is all about resilience. You have to come into it with tons of it and you will not survive some of the horrors we deal with, without building tons more" (Alex). A high tolerance to such emotional pressure was consistently represented as an extremely important constituent of the DCS leader construct.

> Around Christmas time a few years ago we had three child deaths in a row. One was a boyfriend, a hideous case of abuse involving a step-child. Another was found to be a cot death. The third was a sixteen-month old who died while lying on the sofa with his mother, he was smothered. You're working with the police and the other agencies. Is it neglect? Is it a tragic accident? That's the sort of thing that leaves you feeling raw, but that's what we face in this job and you know that coming into it. You have to be exceptionally resilient to deal with this stuff (Billie)

As part of his Psychobiography, Billie had also spoken of the influences of critical life events and career pathways; making the assertion that his strong personal resilience stemmed from a childhood growing up with a younger brother with severe disabilities. In his storytelling (Alvesson, 2010) depicted in chapter six, Billie chose to share this as the motivation for working with "*kids who didn't fit*", leading to the career trajectory culminating in his current role as a DCS. Efforts to build a coherent identity script are part of the conscious struggle to secure some meaning and ontological security, helping to cope with the uncertainty and challenges DCSs face in their turbulent, complex worlds. Viewed through the theory of Social Domains (Layder, 1997, 2006), anxiety and insecurity can never be fully assuaged or overcome, but some may be able to deal with intense emotional stresses and manage their emotional needs more effectively than others, simply because "*real individuals possess uniquely variable powers*" (Layder, 2006, p. 276) - influenced by circumstances and experiences in the social world, rather than the generic transformative capacity Giddens (1991) tends to assign.

In Jude's storying of self (McAdams, 1996), she shared the belief that her mental and physical strengths enable her to fulfil the demands of the role. In fact, Jude felt she was better able to deal with these because she was more resilient than some of her DCS colleagues.

> You need a high degree of resilience and physical and mental strength. In this role, your threshold for work and stress has got to be extremely high and mine is. I think I've always had high tolerance and it's interesting because I equate it to high pain thresholds. I have a high pain threshold and I watch other colleagues who have difficulties with certain illnesses and they've got resilience issues too and I believe they are linked. (Jude)

Jude shared further thoughts that some of her colleagues struggled to "*handle the emotional demands*" of the role. In her sensemaking, Jude engages in social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Suls & Wheeler, 2000) as she appraises and defines herself and her character against others; in this case it is those in her own social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Perceptions of the self, realised in social and organisational contexts are important processes of professional identity work. Jude constructs a particular self-view that she has a high degree of resilience because she has a strong pain threshold and does not suffer from illnesses in the same way her colleagues might. While Jude's interpretation could be seen as an unusually strong expression of

superiority bias in her social comparison with colleagues (Hoorens, 1993), self-enhancement in the authoring of identity scripts was by no means isolated to her narrative. Billie too had made the observation that he felt "*more emotionally equipped*" than many of his peers to cope with the pressures of the role. Jaime spoke of her belief that she is a "*much better public speaker*" than most of her DCS colleagues, viewed in her mind with "*a bit of envy by them*". Praveen articulated that her level of knowledge about the education sector set her apart from most of the other DCSs, whom she felt had less understanding and poorer relationships with senior leaders in education than she did. Examples in the data were many. The point is that day-to-day life resonates with "*multiple insecurities – existential, social, economic and psychologica*l" (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009, p. 37) and human beings will utilise social comparisons and favourable self-views in efforts to mitigate at least some of those insecurities.

While many of the encounters described by participants were emotionally demanding and often connected to distressing situations, there were also accounts reaffirming the consistent finding in this study, which is that a child-centred values base continues to act as 'a touchstone', a point of orientation or reorientation for identity through the joys, as well as the anxieties of the role.

> I like to go and be with the children to ground me, remind me what it's all about. What I'm about deep down. The best way I can guarantee that happens is making a promise to children because I know pretty much unless the sky was falling in, I won't let them down. So, I do reading time at a school down the road with three children struggling a bit– a weekly session, just an hour each child. It's such a privilege to be an important part of their lives. Some of the dreadful things we have to deal with. I think if I can help three children deal with life a bit better, to understand they are special little people and they can do anything, then I can feel more worthwhile. (Morgan)

Morgan spoke of having to defend this three hours out of her working week to the chief executive who had told her "*that sort of work is beneath your level*" and felt, as a director, she needed to concentrate only on strategic concerns and ensuring all the operational services were functioning.

> He doesn't get it. That is exactly my level. When I am fighting against millions in cuts, when I'm making a final call with our safeguarding manager on whether to remove four children from their home, it's what keeps me connected. Stops it

becoming coldly rational, a bit removed from reality which it all could at this level (Morgan)

Time and again participants shared similar stories to Morgan of how they fought hard to carve out some space in their intensely busy work schedules to spend a little time with children.

I love being with the kids, even though it can feel like the easy thing to ditch when you are so pushed for time. Making the time to visit a school or a children's centre - even for a short while, reminds me, actually this is the most important thing. It really helps me put things back in perspective (Ali)

Emotions such as joy and fear shape sensemaking, as well as being an outcome of the process (Steigenberger, 2015, p.432). The pleasure found in simply 'being with children' was identified by most participants as a particularly important feature of their emotion work. This appeared to help them manage and frame some of the more difficult emotional demands and impact of the role; offering moments of salience and security with their 'valued identity'. An identity strongly rooted in a child-centred values base, evoking a "*natural and spontaneous type of emotion work*" (Glumb & Tews, 2004; Humphrey et al., 2015, p.753) as DCSs connect to genuinely felt emotions when reminded of 'what is important' to them.

This part of the chapter has explored DCSs' efforts to make sense of, and enact their own reality in the context of bruising encounters, existential worries and threats to security - along with the moments of small personal accomplishments that constitute their day-to-day experiences and situated activity. An interesting mix of fragility and resolve was unveiled, as participants authored a central place in their identity narrative for possession of extremely strong personal resilience. This was generally seen to be the most important quality of the DCS leader construct; enabling some counterforce against the emotional demands of the role. In fact some felt that anyone coming to the role without a high level of resilience, or capacity to build it quickly, would struggle to survive long, or become quite unwell. While meaning-making is "*never free of self-interested behaviour*" (Vlaar, Van den Bosch & Volberda, 2006, p. 1629), in that self-enhancement - and its counterpart self-doubt, is never far away in identity work, what emerges from the data is a claim by the majority of participants to have an exceptionally high tolerance in managing and dealing with intense levels of uncertainty and threats to

security. While anxiety and insecurity can never be fully assuaged (Layder, 1997, 2006) - not least because of the impact of uncontrollable, often unpredictable social, institutional and structural forces, the DCSs capacity to refract the emotional and psychological pressures they face through the positive light of an enduring commitment to child-centred values is palpable. It is clear that finding some space to be with children helped them re-orientate, to focus again on 'who am I?' and 'what do I stand for?' (Archer, 2003; Ibarra, 1993).

Sensemaking is an integral feature of identity struggle and work, so too are the experiences and processes of sensegiving. The penultimate part of this chapter focuses on the leader's outward-facing task of helping others to make sense of their experiences and work lives. The more aware and skilled leader-managers are in processes of sensemaking, the more likely they will be to engage in effective sensegiving (Steigenberger, 2015, p.439). DCSs are managing large multi-agency, multi-disciplinary teams. Practitioners who constitute those teams are likely to have a much more nuanced and sustained relationship with the children, families and communities they work with, than if they were employees in profit-making enterprises; often operating to the 'service with a smile' one-off encounters examined in many conventional studies of emotional labour. The emotional labour involved in the "*practice of leadership*" (Iszatt-White, 2009, p.448) in such domains - where the values base and moral imperative is quite different to that of the commercial sector, brings another dimension to inter-personal relationships, and to the identity work of those involved. DCSs also need to influence those practitioners and managers outside their organisation through emotional appeal, rather than positional authority.

9.4 Leading as Emotional Labour

The importance DCSs placed on their responsibility to build and sustain positive relationships with colleagues and staff teams in order to lead people towards a shared outcome of 'making a difference' for children in their area, emerged frequently in interviews. It is not necessary to rehearse the differences in the field of emotion studies about 'who' can perform emotional labour - defined as "*the act of displaying the appropriate emotion*", (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), other than to acknowledge that the analysis here moves beyond Hochschild's (1983) original conception of emotional

labour over thirty years ago - largely focused on service industry workers such as airline staff, towards a more contemporary understanding of working lives. Advocates of an unsullied interpretation of the original concept, including Bolton (2005), have added some valuable new dimensions to reflect changes in organisational life, including the idea that individuals can be 'skilled emotion managers' (Bolton & Boyd, 2003), but remain critical of those theorising the emotional labour of leaders. In feeling people are "*jumping on the emotional labour bandwagon*" (2005, p.54), Bolton contests that the construct was not designed for the professions, and certainly not for those in leadership roles. A relatively small, but growing body of influential research and theories specifically concerned with leadership and emotional labour (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Clarke et al., 2007; Iszatt-White, 2009, 2012; Samra-Fredericks, 2004), suggests otherwise. Exploring leadership experiences, practices and enactment through the lens of emotional labour, adds empirical insights from the present study which indicate leaders invest considerable emotional labour in their roles as 'sensegivers' (Steigenberger, 2015).

> My job is to join up the world for other people, help them make sense of what can be very messy and complex – get them to connect to 'if we do this, this is what it means for children and young people in this city'. (Esa)

Broadening out from Hochschild's (1983) notions of 'surface acting' where fake emotions are played out in observable (and socially acceptable) bodily displays such as a smile, and 'deep acting', where individuals work to invoke the emotions they need, or want to display, a third form 'spontaneous and genuine' emotional labour has been added by Ashforth & Humphrey, (1993). This is particularly useful for examining DCSs emotional practices as leaders, where the moral imperative for making a difference for children and the values base of those they lead, is expected to be broadly similar. Ostensibly, this should make emotional labour - as "*a recognised tool of leadership*" (Iszatt-White, 2012, p.230) a more fluent prospect.

> As DCS you feel like the embodiment of a wider mission we all share. Generally people working in children's services are here because they want to make sure children are safe, that they're enjoying just being a child - having fun. Getting love, food and shelter, going to school, learning about how to cope with life. We might come at that from different angles, but as I said before, my job is helping people see that from the same page. (Praveen)

Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) argue that "*leadership is intrinsically an emotional process, where leaders display emotion, and attempt to evoke emotion in their members*" (p. 615) to achieve the aims of the organisation. With a shared child-centred values-base, albeit with different professional perspectives and practice models, it should follow that the way DCSs assemble and display their emotions can connect quite naturally with the motivations and emotions of their practitioners and teams. The emotional labour employed as they navigate staff through operational realities, establish discourses of control, and the control of expertise (Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2007) to "*get the work done*" (Samra-Fredericks, 2004, p.1104), could therefore be seen as relatively light; congruent with their authentic leader selves. This of course is problematic in that the construct of the authentic leader-identity that DCSs are encouraged to emulate - reinforced by largely essentialist, 'superhuman' leader discourse and leadership models, is not reflective of the complex, fragile social and structural arenas they operate in, or the relational nature of leadership (Clarke et al., 2013; Iszatt-White, 2012). Neither does it allow for the paradox of sometimes acting to suppress their true feelings in order to be seen as good leaders (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014).

> I find it hard to go out there and push my managers to spend hours on procurement and commissioning bloody contracts in this brave new world of selling off to the lowest bidder – and let's be honest what often comes with that is the lowest quality - when what they are brilliant at is actually running these services themselves. I can't let them see it upsets me though because I have to make it feel as positive as I can for them (Jaime)

Jaime talked of feeling *"internally conflicted at times"* when presenting a front to staff that did not align with what she believed in. These acts were clearly understood as a frontstage performance (Goffman, 1959), drawing on surface and deep acting for appropriate emotion displays. However, there appeared to be an understanding by most of the DCSs, including Jaime, that sometimes "*labouring under false pretences*" *(*Clarke et al., 2013, p.75) was exactly what was needed from the skilful leader: who knows what and when to share with staff, and can operate from several managerial identities, or positions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) to be effective in their role. This does not make their commitment to child-centred values inauthentic, but recognises that a coherent storying of self brings together multiple, fragmented and complex elements and contexts, rather than being bound up in an elevated authentic leader construct.

Both Alex and Charlie give some insight into how they enact their leadership in the task of sensegiving:

> To learn to be a good leader in children's services, you need to think 'what does it feel like to stand in someone else's shoes here? What do people need to hear me say as their leader?' What they don't need to hear me say is "Yeah, things are pretty crap at the moment". The quality of my relationships and how I communicate with my staff is a critical skill, it takes a lot of investment, a lot of energy but I go in and do what I need to do. (Alex)

> As a DCS you should be asking not just 'what's it like being a child growing up here?', but 'what's it like being a youth worker, a social worker, an early year's practitioner here?' Then make sense of it with them in a way that relates to their world. (Charlie)

Similar to findings in a number of other recent studies (Ashkanasy et al., 2011; Clarke et al., 2007; Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012; Iszatt-White, 2012), it was evident from the emerging data that a high level of emotional labour is demanded from DCS leaders, not least because the ideological and policy imperatives of the current UK Government were seen to conflict with their deeply held personal and professional child-centred values. Spontaneous and genuine emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Glomb & Tews, 2004) - where there is congruence between genuinely felt emotions and leader 'display rules' needed by followers or the organisation, appeared to come fairly easily. However, the strains of surface acting and deep acting, which required them to pretend to feel differently, or try to become 'other' (Hochschilld, 1983) were often not recognised or supported in the organisation, or through leadership development provision.

> To operate in this territory people need to see a sense of coherency from you - you have to bring that for them. It is completely part of my job to do that. It would be lovely though if someone was doing that for us. Or if we just got a bit more recognition of how we carry a lot of people's hopes and fears and shield them as best we can. (Nat)

The idea of leaders as 'toxic emotion handlers' (Frost & Robinson, 1999) is explored with some insightful analysis in Gallos' (2008) reflections on the emotional labour of university leaders which bears considerable relevance to the professional lives and emotional experiences of DCSs. Gallos describes how leaders labour to create a 'holding environment' where they act as buffers for others in the organisation; trying to

alleviate uncertainty, taking the brunt of frustration and empathising with people's emotional needs and work stresses (p.359).

> When I came here, people were desperate for good leadership. I don't mean that arrogantly. There was just a need for them to see someone very visible, calm, able to fight the battles for them, able to be a bit of a shock absorber really, so all the nonsense that is coming at the minute - especially through the cuts, is cushioned a bit. (Esa)

There were many observations similar to Esa's during the interviews, with DCSs often expressing the view that a key task of their day-to-day leadership role in the complex, ever-changing and turbulent environment of children's services, was to act as a bulwark against difficult organisational and external conditions. In chapter seven of this study, Sam had described how being focused on what was needed for children and families in her area, helped her deal with emotional strains and mobilise herself. She also recognised this was a technique she used with practitioners and teams.

> I try to galvanise everybody, keep spirits up and keep us all focused on what's really important, which is our services for children. Most of my contact is with the team managers and my ADs [Assistant Directors] but it's like a layered sponge – they soak up everyone's anxieties and fear from the frontline, and then I try to soak up theirs. An optimistic approach and calmness goes a long way. (Sam)

Being 'toxic emotion handlers' reflects the relational and very human side of leadership. The effects of which Gallos (2008) warns can grow out of reasonable proportion, particularly when individuals are trying to live up to constructs of the 'hero leader' and 'truly authentic' leader selves:

> They are placed recklessly in the line of affective fire … [compounded by] commonly accepted myths of the solitary superhero whose brilliance and strength saves the day - perpetuating stoic acceptance of added pressures and responsibilities. (Gallos, 2008, p. 360).

All the DCSs at some stage of the research process had spoken of the pressures in the role to support emotional needs of practitioners and teams. This is especially acute in the organisational context of children's services because of the levels of risk around safeguarding, and responsibility for other provision which may not be in their management control.

> You have to spread optimism across the organisation and beyond even when it's grim. The minute you stop it completely impacts. We're supporting everyone internally and at the same time you're working all the relationships with schools and other partners like health. People are relying on us. You can go home and cry about it in private later. (Jesse)

The emotional labour demanded of leaders carrying the 'emotional garbage' (Cohen & March, 1974) of others, and putting energy into dramaturgical performances (Goffman, 1959) at the frontstage to lead people through difficult times, is seen to have both psychological and physiological health costs (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004; Restak, 2003; Stansfeld & Candy, 2006). While the scope of the present study precludes further analysis of this dimension, there is certainly merit in future research exploring the impact on DCS leaders' health and well-being, and how much that may perversely damage their capacity to lead and support others well. Jude had certainly expressed the belief that some of her DCS colleagues were less well equipped to cope with the emotional and physical demands of the role, leaving them susceptible to stress and illness. While a review of recent research into leader work stress (Sherman et al., 2012) found that senior leaders in organisations tended to experience lower stress levels than those more junior in the hierarchy, their stress was accelerated by lack of control and emotional pressures from many quarters at once - because this demands the most intense emotional labour. Both features are increasingly seen in the DCS leader's domain:

> You get a tiny bit of stability in one thing, look away to deal with something else but it's like frogs boiling under the water you've gone and taken your eye off the ball. So you have to go back keep it tight everywhere all the time. We are in constant flux, constant change. (Jude)

The DCSs have largely emerged from a single-occupational background to lead substantially sized multi-disciplinary teams in these turbulent, hybrid organisational domains. This brings quite different challenges to those faced by leaders in single profession domains (Frost, 2011), not least because credibility and 'leadership standing' with practitioners is partly based on their evaluation of how much they believe the leader really understands 'their world'. In narrative accounts, the DCSs consistently emphasised what they saw as a rewarding dimension to emotional labour – resonating with Humphrey et al.'s (2015) notion that emotional labour has a 'bright side' found in spontaneous and genuine acts, and even in some deep acting. DCSs described finding

congruence in acts of valuing the practice of others and having the "*humility to recognise the incredible talents and experience we have in children's services*" (Nat). Achieving emotional 'connection', or what Charlie described as "*a common glue*" with practitioners from many different disciplines, coalesced around working towards the shared professional and organisational purpose of making lives better for children. When Iszatt-White speaks of the 'effortful accomplishment of valuing practices' (2009, 2012) she is trying to capture the 'missing what' of leadership (Button, 1993); quite simply, the day-to-day doing of leadership work, which sees valuing the practices of others as central to an effective leader's emotional labour. While forming part of the sensegiving task of leading, such acts can also be identity-affirming.

> You have to have sense of humility – we are going to have people in our services with much more experience and knowledge in some areas. You would be an idiot to pretend you know everything, and won't get respect for it actually. It's better to let people know you value what they have, what they do out there. I'm more confident as a DCS with that approach than pretending I know everything. I can focus on being a strategic leader, which is after all what I am here to do. (Fran)

Through the small accomplishments of valuing other people's different expertise and contributions, some salience with valued leader-identity was seen to be achieved. It turns 'deep acting' on its head (Iszatt-White, 2009, p. 462). Instead of the DCS labouring to summon up and act out emotions they may not necessarily feel (Hochschild, 1983), it is the commitment to valuing practices - bolstered in their case by a largely shared child-centred value base with practitioners - which prompts natural and spontaneous emotional labour. This often helped DCSs to mitigate against some of the toxic handling pressures in the role, and the emotional energy expended on the frontstage performances (Goffman, 1959) they still have to enact in order to 'get the work done' (Samra-Fredericks, 2004) across organisational boundaries. The ability to focus on a 'narrative of the future' engaging in prospective sensemaking and sensegiving (Brown et al., 2014; Corley & Gioia, 2011), also revealed efforts to secure at least some stabilising interpretations and discursive resources (Clarke et al. 2009; Kornberger & Brown, 2007) in their identity struggle and work.

This section considered the emotional labour involved in the practice of leadership and some of the implications for identity work. There was strong representation in the data that in the sensegiving (Steigenberger, 2015) processes with practitioners and staff

teams, DCSs were creating a strong organisational discourse around the shared child-centred values base to help mobilise everyone, including themselves. Findings from the present study are seen to concur with other recent empirical research that public sector leadership roles demand a high and sustained level of emotional labour. For DCSs this involves a considerable amount of 'surface acting' and 'deep acting' (Hochschild, 1983) activity, especially as they often felt conflicted by ideological and policy shifts affecting services they were then having to require others to deliver. Although there were also plentiful moments of spontaneous and genuine emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Glomb & Tews, 2004) in the narrative accounts.

The exploration of participants as 'toxic emotion handlers' (Cohen & March, 1974; Gallos, 2008) saw DCSs acting as buffers to try alleviate uncertainty and frustration for their staff. This reflects the relational and very human side of leadership, with concerns from some participants about the often unacknowledged emotional demands of the role. One place DCSs might be expected to find affinity and succour with someone who *really understands* the peculiar emotional demands of their professional role is amongst other DCSs. For some, that was certainly true and this also provided a source of support, while others were more circumspect or even felt alienated in the regional DCS group. This chapter concludes with a brief, but important exploration of the emotional dimensions and potential implications for identity work of relationships and dynamics between DCSs as a social group.

9.5 'It Takes One to Know One'

There are approximately 150 DCSs across England, generally one in each local authority area - with a few exceptions where councils have merged children's services and appointed an overarching DCS. Sharing unique insights amongst themselves of the significant vulnerabilities and risk involved in both doing the job, and managing to hold on to it, drew most participants into a shared discourse around a particular 'valued identity' (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). This generally portrayed a child-centred, ethically driven DCS leader identity construct, with special skills and qualities. While reference to a valued identity may help with efforts at salience as individuals negotiate their professional worlds, collective aspects of this construction work tends to reinforce normative images and promote the 'professionalism from within' (Evetts, 2003;

McClelland, 1990) discussed in chapter eight. Of particular interest here are some insights into the role of emotions in sensemaking and sensegiving within and between a distinct group of leaders as they "*go about shaping, managing and working at their concept of professional se*lf" (Watson, 2008 p. 122). Contributions towards understanding emotional processes involved in identity construction and enactment in this context remains a rather limited focus in the identity literature (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012, p.131).

Identification and affinity with each other was expressed frequently by most DCSs; especially during reflections on what was viewed as the uniquely demanding challenges and encounters experienced in the role. In fact Jaime claimed that she only had to see another DCS to recognise them as such, even if she had never met them before.

> I can go to a national conference of council directors from all different services, or be in a room of senior managers from different councils somewhere well away from our region and I can spot a DCS. Don't ask me how, it's so weird but I guess it's that thing 'it takes one to know one', you can just sense it (Jaime)

Focusing closer to home, participants often emphasised how valuable the Regional DCS Network - which meets around every six to eight weeks, was to them for sharing experiences and for emotional support.

> There is something about getting together with the other DCSs. It's easy to talk in ways you know they will understand and others can't possibly really. (Ali)

> I've personally found it very supportive. There are difficulties for many of us in the region at the moment with notices to improve and interventions. The thing you get is a level of understanding of what is involved in the role… [it's] different for all of us, but the unique element we share – carrying this responsibility day-to-day, well you feel the other DCSs 'get it'. It's not possible to get that from someone not in this job. (Esa)

The sense of belongingness and identification with others who have an understanding of 'what it is to be a DCS', attaches a particular emotional and value significance to membership of their social group (Hogg, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This can be an important site for meaning making as DCSs interpret and enact their realities. Although cognitive and emotional processes are both at work in the dynamics of social identities, in particular social settings emotions can be a more powerful constituent than cognition

(Jaros, 2009) for identity construction, maintenance and revision (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

> I get real strength from peer support with other DCSs in the region. We're all arrogant enough to think 'oh nobody understands what we have to deal with except each other'. It's the only safe space where I can say "does your chief exec make you do this stupid stuff". For me, the emotional support is really important, it gives me some security. (Sam)

Issues around trust and self-esteem are critical to identity because while anxiety and insecurity can never be fully allayed, participants like Jesse, Ali, Sam and the other DCSs who spoke of the importance of peer support to their emotional well-being and sense of self, find those 'safe spaces' to build some in-group solidarity, shared understanding and 'resistance talk'. As a small personal accomplishment in a sea of ambiguity, existential threats, and intense pressure to perform, this can help cushion the impact of uncertainties and threats to security, at least temporarily (Layder, 2006). However, reflecting the complex dynamics of individual Psychobiography and relationships in the social world, not everyone reported such warm, identity-affirming opportunities. Chandra shared her feelings and experience of the DCS Regional Network:

> I feel I don't fit in our regional group. There are rather cliquey relationships. They try hard in fairness, but I'm not one of them and I'll never feel I'll fit. Every time I go I think this doesn't feel comfortable, I'm not going again - but I always find myself going to the next gathering. If feels like a bit of an emotional dilemma every time and I can't quite explain it. (Chandra)

Chandra expanded on her observation by suggesting part of the reason for her discomfort and feelings of 'not fitting' may be rooted in her perception that the other DCSs did not value or "*give much credence to*" her occupational background in early years - a profession traditionally viewed as having less status (Leeson, 2010) than the other DCSs backgrounds, largely in teaching and social work. It is interesting to note Chandra's comment that she comes away from the group meetings with the decision she will not go again, but inexplicably finds herself drawn back. In adding to understandings of the agency-structure dialectic, we are reminded that although we are emotionally unique individuals, the social nature of human beings takes us into encounters where "*we seek recognition, acceptance, inclusion and approval from others*

in an effort to affirm and reaffirm self-esteem and security so important to identity"
(Layder, 2006, p. 279). As meaning is brought to, and emerges from, situated activities
- with their social routines, rituals and cultural contexts, disillusion and rejection may be
experienced just as much as esteem-building and trust.

> When we went into intervention [close Government scrutiny of performance] I
> really was Billy no mates with the other DCSs. People don't want to know you in
> intervention. It's almost like they feel they'll get tarnished - it's contagious and
> might rub off on them. I felt very isolated, very unsupported. (Morgan)

Praveen and Chandra also reported similar feelings of being marginalised while their
children's services were in intervention. While feelings of 'not fitting' or being
marginalised were not widely expressed, there was ambivalence about the degree of
emotional openness the group afforded members. Jesse was effusive about how
important the DCS regional network was to her for support, but conceded:

> What you absolutely wouldn't get with DCSs is them baring their souls to each
> other. Yes, we share things and talk generally about how hard the job is on us,
> on our families, but most DCSs wouldn't truly admit that they were vulnerable
> ever. (Jesse)

While the situated activity of the network group offered positive, identity affirming
encounters for some - a space to share experiences and emotional strains with similar
others who '*get it*' (Esa), not everyone found the social acceptance and approval they
desired. Even some who did were aware of "*power and control strategies being
engaged in*" as encounters unfolded (Layder, 2006, p.279). There were clearly rules to
the 'social game'.

> There is a way of doing things and as long as you know how to behave –
> because there is a behaviour code – you can't just come in all fancy pants. So
> you come in, you listen, you earn your stripes. (Jude)

Insights such as these reveal once again the complex dynamics of subjective and inter-
subjective social relationships in the context of the social systems and structures in
which they are embedded.

This final part of the chapter has briefly considered how DCSs navigate their sense of professional self in interactions with other DCSs. Subjectively felt experiences and emotions were brought into these encounters, and emotions also played an important role in creating meaning in the situated activity itself; contributing to identity construction and enactment as a DCS. There was evidence that a shared affinity was felt by many participants, with identity work at collective level helping to build and galvanise a shared discursive resource around a valued leader-identity construct. In sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995), there was 'active authoring of the situation' in which they found themselves embedded as reflexive individuals (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014, p.3). Some DCSs found this a positive arena for their ongoing identity struggle and work, while others experienced a quite powerful (and perhaps unexpected) threat to their security, self-esteem and identity from those in their own professional group. Capturing some of these insights has enabled consideration of the role of emotion in social identity dynamics. It has also drawn attention to the evaluative nature of this important dimension of identity construction, which renders identity "*always precarious and uncertain … dependent on others' judgements, evaluations and validations of the self and these can never be fully anticipated, let alone controlled*" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.336).

9.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In summary, this chapter examined some of the important emotional dimensions of what has been described as 'the lonely posting' of a DCS leader. Strong themes emerged from the data concerning the emotion work and emotional labour enacted in the role - with participants illuminating the strain of these demands, and the fragility and insecurity they often feel. However, they also authored a central place in their identity narrative for the significance of their child-centred values base in acting as 'a touchstone', a point of orientation or reorientation for identity through the joys, as well as the anxieties of the role.

The emotion work involved in leading children's services - explored in 9.2, gave some insight into the sensemaking processes (Brown et al., 2014; Steigenberger, 2015; Weick, 1995) DCSs engaged in to interpret and enact their realities. This was concerned with the inward-facing management of felt emotions (Domagalski &

Steelman, 2005; Fineman, 2000; Gill, 2015) and emotional responses awakened in the social interactions and contact with organisational and institutional forces in the 'doing' of the job. In this internal process of making sense of their professional selves, it was evident the DCSs are not unitary beings - separable from social structures and relations, but they are not at the unbridled mercy of internal forces either. Mediating processes are being put to work in the agency-structure dialectic (Ybema et al., 2009) as participants strive to secure at least some fleeting stability in their internal readings of a valued leader identity. These dynamics were explored more deeply in section 9.3, where some bruising encounters experienced by DCSs in the social settings they operate in cast them into some intense and emotionally demanding identity work. In these reflections, participants repeatedly emphasised how this situated activity both demanded from them, and built in them, a special kind of resilience; as a personal quality, this construct was stitched tightly into their DCS leader identity scripts. In amongst the bruising encounters, participants recognised some resilience-building and positive sense of self, was linked to internal affirmation of their values. Many sought out particular social interactions - such as time with children or visiting services as a means of 'grounding themselves' in efforts to achieve some security and answer the recurring identity questions 'who am I?' and 'how should I be?' (Archer, 2003; Ibarra, 1999).

While leaders need rational skills, emotion skills are integral to leadership practice (Dasborough & Ashkanasy 2002; Iszatt-White, 2009). Sensemaking by the DCSs revealed some of the important processes of emotion work and identity struggle taking place. The penultimate part of this chapter, 9.4 leading as emotional labour, focused on the leader's outward-facing task of helping others to make sense of their experiences and work lives through sensegiving (Steigenberger, 2015). Narrative accounts revealed how seriously DCSs take their responsibility to build and sustain positive relationships with colleagues and staff teams in order to lead people towards a shared outcome of 'making a difference' for children in their area. The findings strongly indicated that DCSs invest considerable emotional labour in their roles as 'sensegivers' through frequent 'surface acting' and 'deep acting' (Hochschild, 1983), especially as they often felt conflicted by ideological and policy shifts affecting services they were then having to require others to deliver. This saw them demonstrating the capacity to operate from several different, and sometimes contradictory managerial identities at once (Clarke et al., 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), while also experiencing some of the strains

of being 'toxic emotion handlers' (Cohen & March, 1974; Gallos, 2008). Although there were also plentiful moments of spontaneous and genuine emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Glomb & Tews, 2004) in the narrative accounts.

The final theme considered in this chapter was a brief, but important exploration of the emotional dimensions and potential implications for identity work of relationships and dynamics between DCSs as a social group in section 9.5. Emotions were seen to play an important role in creating meaning in the situated activity DCSs engaged in with each other; contributing to identity construction and enactment. Feelings of affinity and opportunities to appropriate and enact a DCS identity, was described by most participants as an important product of collective level identity work. Although as some of the accounts testify, this was not the case for all.

In talking about their emotional selves at individual, group and organisational level (Watson, 2008), participants revealed sensitive, challenging and often highly-pressured situated activity taking place in the complex social structures and settings they inhabit. Following Social Domains Theory (Layder, 1996, 2006), this involves more than meaning being created in the interactive situation in which it occurs, account needs to be taken too of personal, subjective understandings and feelings being brought to the encounters by those involved, and influences of structural and stored cultural phenomenon (Popper, 1972) at work. This study has revealed unique insights into the role emotion plays in the identity work of leaders which contributes a new understanding of a 'refracted professional leader'. One who can refract the positive light of their genuinely held values base, to enact and reshape their identities in the practice and accomplishment of effective leadership.

The final chapter of this study concludes with a synopsis of key themes and issues emerging in the research about how DCSs seek to make sense of their professional selves in the agency-structure nexus, and implications of these findings for policy and practice. Plans for dissemination are shared and potentially fruitful areas for further research studies are identified.

10. CONCLUSION: THE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

10.1 Context and Chapter Structure

This chapter offers a synopsis of the key themes and issues emerging in the data. It also reviews conclusions drawn from critical discussion of the findings in understanding how DCSs seek to make sense of their professional selves in the agency-structure nexus: highlighting new insights and the contribution to knowledge this study makes. In considering the significance and implications of the study's findings, messages for policy development and the contribution this research could offer to inform the future direction and shape of the DCS role, and leadership development provision are articulated. I highlight the methodological advancement of utilising the Theory of Social Domains as a sensitising device throughout the work and there is a brief reflection on scholarly writing as identity. Limitations of the research and potential for it to be extended - and also used to inform future studies to investigate germane themes of interest identified, but lacking in space to explore, are considered. Finally, my plans for dissemination are shared.

The research set out to investigate the professional identity constructs of some of the most senior children's services leaders in England today. Two questions were at the heart of the study:

1. How do Directors of Children's Services seek to make sense of their professional identity in this unique role?

2. How is identity constructed, reconstructed, and enacted as a professional public leader in the context of agency-structure dynamics?

In seeking to answer these questions, the research has brought new insights into what it means *to be*, and to be in the process of *becoming* a DCS (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Based on narrative accounts of their professional lives and the processual experiences of identity construction, revision and enactment of leader-identity in the context of agency-structure concerns and issues, this is an area that does not appear to have been researched in any previous studies in the UK. DCSs spend their professional lives "*surfing the edge of chaos*" (Pascale et al., 2000, p.6) as leaders of complex, often

fragmented, ambiguous organisational domains, and through it all they carry the risk and responsibility of statutory accountability for children's well-being and safety.

Layder's (1997, 2006) Theory of Social Domains was utilised as a sensitising device to investigate agency-structure concerns and themes in relation to identity work and struggles, and to help interrogate the findings; enabling empirical research to engage with essential theoretical issues in the spirit of Adaptive Theory methodology, (Layder, 1998). The study is informed by my epistemology and understanding of social reality, which is summarised well by Ybema et al. (2009):

> Society, organizations and individuals are constructed in a continuous interplay between externalizations and internalizations … Identity formation involves processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present. (Ybema et al., 2009 p. 303)

The key findings have already been presented and critically discussed in detail in the data chapters and are summarised here in Section 10.2. The contribution to new understandings and knowledge from this research is emphasised in Section 10.3. I intend these to offer enriching and stimulating insights to the field, and to act as the basis for further opportunities to research the identity work of senior leaders in the public sector, but in particular the under-explored and under-theorised area of emotion work of leaders in identities studies (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012). Above all, it is the conceptualisation articulated in Chapter Nine of a '*refracted professional leader*' - one who can refract the positive light of their **expressed** genuinely held values base, to enact and reshape their identities in the practice and accomplishment of effective leadership, that stands as my main contribution in this thesis.

10.2 Synopsis of Main Findings

The following offers a brief summary of key findings from the research. The aims of this study were to:

I.   Critically analyse relevant literature relating to the creation, evolution and experiences of this high-profile public sector leadership role, and examine broader literature and research concerned with identities work, emotion work and notions of professionalism.

II. Capture the perceptions and interpretations of DCSs [from a government defined regional area of local authorities] in relation to their experiences in the role, and how they construct, reconstruct and enact their identity as a professional public leader.

iii. Examine the findings in the context of agency-structure concerns and dynamics to add new critical understandings of leader identity work to the field and to suggest propositions for further investigation.

10.2.1 Meeting Aim One

An extensive and critical review of the literatures concerning the creation, evolution and experiences of the high-profile DCS leadership role was conducted and presented as Chapter Two of this study. Considerable attention was given to the changing conditions and social forces encountered by DCSs. The review moved through the 'paternal neo-liberal' (Soss et al., 2011; Wiggan, 2011) new public management practices of New Labour which accompanied the post's inception in 2005, to an examination mid-chapter of how the wrath of the media and the public was turned towards the DCS and social workers involved in the 'Baby P' case in 2007, impelling a 'politics of outrage' (Greer & McLaughlin, 2012; Parton, 2014a) against public service workers to levels not seen in the UK before. The penultimate section of this chapter considered how market forces have become the organising principle, changing the shape of citizen-state relationships (Frost, 2011a) and the operating environment of DCSs, children's practitioners, and for partner agencies. The chapter concluded with a critical analysis of prevailing institutional and organisational leadership discourses, practices and qualities models, with their implications for identity work (Kenny, Whittle & Wilmott, 2011; Thomas, 2009) in the agency-structure nexus.

A further review of literature and research concerned with identity theories and notions of professionalism formed Chapter Three, offering an insight into the changing nature of the field which has moved from examining discourse as occupational or institutional control, to a new conceptualisation of the 'appeal to professionalism' for knowledge workers in neo-liberal organisational contexts (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Evetts, 2003, 2012). The notion of the hybrid professional public leader (Noordegraaf, 2007) in this context was also examined. The chapter then considered some contemporary theories and concepts concerned with emotion work, security and the 'emotional practice' of

leadership to offer a foundation for analysing emotional dimensions emerging from the data.

10.2.2 Meeting Aim Two

A qualitative study was conducted involving fourteen DCSs as a purposive, non-probability sample, identified using a Government defined administrative region in the North of England. The purpose of this study was to investigate how DCSs - as the most senior leaders of children's services in each of the 152 local authorities in England, were making sense of, and enacting their professional identity in this unique role, with particular consideration of agency-structure dynamics and influences. A significant and rich body of empirical data drawn out through narrative research (Creswell, 2013) was captured to enable analysis of the two research questions framing this study.

10.2.3 Meeting Aim Three

In seeking to add new understandings of professional public leader identity work and construction to the field, the key findings from the study are summarised in the short bullet points below and then expanded on in Section 10.3. A fuller examination of their significance and possible implications for policy development and practice are considered in Sections 10.4 and 10.5.

- DCSs retain strong affiliation to their original practitioner background, but also appear to comfortably identify themselves as a professional public leader in their current leader-manager role.

- Particular life events and occupational experiences which formed their emotionally unique Psychobiography, saw most participants identify with an actively agentic trajectory leading them to the DCS role.

- A child-centred values base and commitment to improving the lives of children and families, formed the dominant narrative for participants' storying of themselves in the role. Seen to act as an enduring and strong 'touchstone' for their identity orientation, particularly during the most turbulent and challenging

times. This was drawn on in examples of resistance as well as in stories of perceived alignment with their social reality.

- Idealised images of an almost 'superhuman' DCS are imposed in prevailing discourses and qualities focused leadership models, but also promoted and reinforced within their own professional discourse.

- Status and credibility with other senior leaders, local politicians, DCS peers and their chief executives is important. However, the most meaningful stakeholders were identified by the participants as frontline staff and children.

- Different leader selves (identity positions) were skilfully drawn on as DCSs learn to operate in increasingly complex and ambiguous organisational domains.

- A special type of personal resilience is seen to be both demanded of them, and built in them, through the 'bruising encounters' of social interactions, and the existential anxiety of carrying statutory responsibility for children's well-being and safekeeping.

- A pervasive shadow from potential exposure to negative and vitriolic political and public reactions (seen to be fuelled by an 'outraged' media) if a child, or children, are killed or seriously harmed/put at risk in 'their area', was emphasised by almost all participants as the single largest source of insecurity for DCSs.

- Emotion work - both sensemaking and sensegiving, is a significant part of their daily leadership enactment and practice.

- All participants expressed strong feelings that it is a privilege to be in such a senior position that they can have some influence in improving children's lives, despite the current harsh realities of the ideological and socio-economic environment in which they feel they operate.

The rich empirical data gathered through this study, offers previously unknown insights and understandings into how DCSs experience the role, and how they construct, reconstruct and enact their identity as a hybrid professional public leader.

10.3 New Insights and Contribution to Knowledge

The ability to refract, to bend to angles that adopt different leader-manager identity positions, often in sites of competing, even antagonistic discursive forces (Clarke et al., 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) while retaining a sense of professional belonging ascribed to their child-centred values base, was seen to emerge consistently through the narrative accounts. 'Making a difference' and being motivated by child-centred practice is a dominant motif in the narrative, which is of little surprise given the occupational backgrounds of the DCSs and the social and discursive contexts in which they operate. The storying of self through this narrative (McAdams, 1996) is drawn on to produce and revise integrating narratives over themselves. This analysis is not to suggest an essentialist perspective on identity. That would rather contradict my 'in-between' stance (Alvesson, 2010) on how I understand social reality. There has always been an openness in this study to the interrelated, yet different agentic and structural dimensions of identity work emerging from the data. This has been predicated on the belief that the self – or rather selves, are not a unitary construct, but also not completely fragmented and fluid at the unbridled mercy of external forces (Alvesson, 2010; Archer, 2003; Clarke et al., 2009; Layder, 1997, 2006).

Explanations have also been suggested about the extent to which influences of agency, and of structure, contribute to these complex, multi-faceted processes and dynamics. Alvesson (2010, p. 212) makes the observation that "*identity is a difficult theme to study and it can easily involve everything and nothing [...so] calls for sensitive interpretations*" (Alvesson, 2010, p.212). It is sensitive, critically informed interpretations that I have set out to achieve in these new insights into DCS identity struggle and work, and in my conceptualisation of a Refracted Professional Leader suggested to the field.

10.4 Messages for Policy Development

The policy landscape for children's services in England has been particularly fast-moving for the last decade or so, with considerable political, socio-cultural, economic and legislative developments very distinctly shaping and shifting the operating environment and institutional structures over this period. The joined-up, multi-agency approach to children's services delivery, embodied in the Every Child Matters (2004) policy agenda funded and heavily championed by a New Labour Government, has given way to an imperative for localism and commissioned individual service providers (Frost, 2014; Hulme et al., 2014; Parton, 2014a) first under a Conservative led coalition with Liberal Democrats, and most recently through an increasingly radical reform programme of marketisation and performativity reflecting the neo-liberal ideology towards public service provision of a Conservative Government elected in May 2015. Ongoing austerity budget cuts of up to 40% since 2010 have been a constant feature for local authority leaders, especially in the poorest areas of the Midlands, London, and the North of England (Ramesh, 2012; Ward, 2013) where this research was conducted.

The almost immediate renaming of the Department for Children, Schools and Families to Department for Education under the Coalition Government in 2010, signalled a clear intention about how children's services was to be treated under decision-making and policy direction; subsumed under the amorphous umbrella of 'education', removing the deliberate emphasis on children and a child-centred focus that the previous administration had established in its policy activity and discourse. In less than a year in office, Prime Minister David Cameron had spoken in a newspaper article of his desire to: "*abolish the state monopoly on public services by releasing the grip of state control of public services*". He added that *"competition should be opened up to a range of providers competing to offer a better service"* (The Telegraph, February 2011). This was cemented as a political commitment in the Open Public Services White Paper, published in July 2011. While it was indeed the previous New Labour Government which had opened the door to neo-liberal policies such as Private Finance Initiatives in the health sector and to fund Building Schools for the Future - along with arrangements for some level of procurement and commissioning in children's service provision, as Parton (2014a, p.59) argues, this was as nothing compared to "*the wide-ranging, rapid, sweeping and coercive nature of policy imperative and cuts"* being seen under the Conservative-led coalition.

This short précis of some of the discussion in Chapter Two of the study is important to considerations for policy development in areas that involve and impact on DCSs currently. In contending with neo-liberal reforms in education, social care and health, including the expanding Academies Programme, and Clinical Commissioning Groups' (CCG) decision-making powers over children's health and well-being services, there is a risk of marginalising broader agendas around children and young people's welfare and development (Hulme et al., 2014; Parton, 2014a; Purcell et al., 2012). Meanwhile DCSs are still left with all the accountability for child protection across an increasing number of institutions and organisations they have no direct control over, and an ever-diminishing influence. The effects of this were represented as being keenly felt in the identity work and struggle of the DCSs involved in this research; especially in relation to political and media responses to cases of child deaths, or serious harm. I agree with Jones' (2014) assertion that a more active policy of working with the press and other media on 'good news' stories needs to be pursued because there is evidence that coverage can be influenced to explain some of the realities and complexities of social work practice and management of children's services. Otherwise, in a climate where market forces are increasingly becoming the organising principle for all social, economic and political relations, the narrative that failing children's services can only benefit from being opened up to these markets, remains fairly easy to peddle (Hulme et al., 2014; Jones, 2014b; Parton, 2014a).

The intense performativity and audit culture highlighted by a number of the DCSs in this study as a strong contributor to uncertainty and insecurity in their organisational context - and seen by many commentators (Ball, 2012; Floyd & Morrison, 2013; Gurrey & Brazil, 2014; Wastell et al., 2010) as a blunt and sometimes brutal instrument of Government control and censure, largely exercised through its inspection body Ofsted, needs to be challenged. There may be some hope in respect to the inspection regime itself at least, as the professional member body for DCSs, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, is involved in the recently announced Ofsted reforms agenda (September, 2015). DCSs have articulated that they want to inform more realistic ways of measuring effectiveness and impact of service delivery for children and families, and encourage the integration of peer support and challenge as an integral aspect of developing and sustaining the highly adaptive systems leadership called for by Professor Munro in her Review of Child Protection, (2011). This is an interesting juncture in policy development

in an area of significant concern for local authorities and senior children's services leaders who challenge the credibility of the current system for evaluating effective leadership and service delivery. In a statement released after publication of Ofsted's 2013-14 Report into Children's Services in England claimed three quarters of them were failing (March, 2015), the outgoing President of ADCS, Alan Wood argued that "*the way Ofsted evaluates children's services does not get to the heart of how services are working*" (CYPN, 2015).

Interestingly, in the Department for Education's 'Five Policy Tests' published in 2013 to "*Help ensure policies are deliverable and ultimately lead to improved outcomes*" (cited in Barcoe & White, 2013 p.15), there is no mention of citizens, including children as key stakeholders, and no call for the inclusion of senior public sector leaders from education or children's services in policy making processes, implementation or evaluation. The language is very much oriented towards 'What does the Government want to achieve and see?' in policy development and implementation. A simple, yet significantly important practice which in my view, can and should enable policy making to be not too distant from those directly affected by it, is to meaningfully engage with those closest to it. If this was done, then perhaps concerns for example about what may happen if children's social care is largely sold off to competing providers (Jones, 2014a) will be better understood. It is difficult to qualify why the Government is willing to take risks by putting this vital function of children's services out to the highest bidder when, despite appearances, the UK currently has one of the safest child protection systems in the developed world (Jones, 2014b; Laming, 2009; Parton, 2014a; Wood, 2015).

Policy development needs to move away from the persistent hollowing out of a public value based approach (Moore, 1995) predicated on serving the public - rather than making a profit - as it is *this* public value proposition that DCSs say they are committed to. When the practice of leadership is seen as intertwined with a child-centred public value base and a commitment to shared ways of working, yet is constantly contending with neo-liberal dynamics and forces, there is likely to be significant unrecognised emotion work being performed, quite different to the 'service with a smile' emotional labour of those in service industry roles (Clarke, Hope-Hailey & Kelliher, 2007; Iszatt-White, 2009). In identity terms this is important because in the self-authored narrative accounts of DCSs' identity construction, enactment and reconstruction in this study,

there is representation of a dominant child-centred values-based self-narrative acting as a touchstone in searches for a coherent sense of self which perhaps obfuscates the antagonistic nature and emotional 'cost' of the contradictory social and discursive contexts they operate in. Such experiences shape their identity work as ongoing struggle. This is not necessarily pejorative; indeed one of the central findings in this study is that DCSs are capable of creating, and operating from, different and changing leader identity positions rather than a single, stable identity which concurs with findings in other identity studies (Clarke et al., 2009; Ibarra, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, everyone could benefit if there was a more balanced public and political narrative about the positive aspects of such a dedicated senior leadership role and the work of children's services in general.

Some may argue that the shape and operation of children's services is already hostage to fortune in that as more of the service provision is contracted out, DCSs simply become corporate commissars without any need for a professional background, knowledge or understanding of children's services work. In this scenario, contracts with other organisations could be set up and managed by contract managers in a corporate centre whose experience may be in commissioning for road repairs, grass cutting and rubbish collecting (Hulme et al., 2014; Jones, 2014). It is in this context that DCSs are articulating a defence for the ongoing need of their role. Now, more than ever, this resistance to a contradictory political and ideological discourse forms an integral process of their identity work and struggle.

10.5 Challenges and Implications for Practice: DCS as Professional Public Leader. What of the Future?

In many respects, it is surprising that the DCS role remains, given the significant changes in political direction and the operating environment. Even the local authorities Chief Executives' group Solace, has called for the post to be abolished. In a 'more austere and more localist climate', they want local authorities to be allowed flexibility to put in place what they believe is: "*Locally, the most effective leadership of children and families issues*" (Solace, May 2014, p.15). Given the rapid expansion of the remit for many DCSs to now include other services directorates, the majority of local authorities

are already applying their own flexibilities for senior management around current statutory arrangements.

However, the Munro Review of Child Protection in England (Final Report, 2011a) strongly recommended to Government that in light of their public service reform plans, there was a need for:

> Protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of a Director of Children's Services … [to] allow sufficient focus and attention to be paid to the nation's most vulnerable children, before allocating any additional functions to individuals occupying such roles (Munro, 2011a)

Yet, the clear evidence is that in the last few years local authorities are increasingly requiring those in a DCS role to also take on executive management of additional directorates - especially adult services, but also areas as diverse as highways and environmental services. "*More than half of DCSs are now twin, or triple-hatters*" (CYPN, 2015). Others put it at closer to 80% (Hill, 2015). Operating across different remits and becoming more of a corporate manager - rather than a distinctly defined senior leader of children's services, has implications for professional identity construction and enactment. There were differences seen in the way DCSs in this study sought to make sense of their professional identity depending on whether they still had a discrete role, or if their responsibilities had already been expanded.

As the neo-liberal marketisation of children's services continues apace, Hulme et al. (2014) have argued that in this context DCSs are facing increasing limits on their autonomy and disparagement of their professional leadership wisdom and expertise. A move towards disbanding the role and replacing DCSs with senior level contracting managers could seem inevitable. So, what is preventing the Government, at least at the present time, from taking such a step? A cynical answer might be that with the sad fact children will tragically still die, be seriously harmed and be at risk from perpetrators of abuse, neglect, child sexual exploitation, trafficking and so forth, there is a need for a single line of accountability to remain for the simple reason it is expedient to have a ready scapegoat. When the role was first conceived I heard some practitioners working in children's services saying with great pessimism that DCS stood for 'Dead Child Scapegoat'. Indeed, this early perception from some in the workforce is part of what

interested me in investigating how those in the role might make sense of their professional identity.

However, while there is no denying that the risks around safeguarding and potential fallout of something going wrong for their personal and professional lives adds to uncertainty and insecurity in the role, rendering identities precarious (Knights & Clarke, 2014), there was also a strong narrative in the empirical data about the importance of the role. Despite the impact of austerity cuts and increased marketisation, participants believed the DCS role still retained enough oversight, understanding and influence in children's issues to feel they could 'make a difference'. This was an enduring and dominant motif in their discourse. It is also echoed in the professional discourse of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) in their assertions that while safeguarding is one of the important pillars of the DCS role, it is part of a wider responsibility and influence in children's development opportunities and welfare. In her presidential address to the ADCS conference in 2015, Alison O'Sullivan stated unequivocally: "*it is crucial that the role remains to give a single point of accountability for all children in a local area …* [and] *it is our belief that the systems leader is critical to this going forward*" (O'Sullivan, 2015).

Purcell et al. argued in 2012 that there are questions about how realistic it is for one person to be accountable for the actions of everyone in the workforce, especially given the increasing span of practitioners involved in service provision from other organisations (p.97). At the time of this study, three years later, there has been significant further fragmentation of services and continued reduction in local authorities' direct management of parts of the children's workforce - particularly the erosion of their involvement in education.

In the messy and often contradictory organisational contexts that DCSs now operate in, the role is likely to continue to change quite considerably from that originally conceived by Lord Laming in 2003 as part of an integrated local authority-led children's services. Questions about a single DCS remaining accountable for what happens for all children in an area also become more pressing as services are increasingly contracted out and fragmented. However, for the foreseeable future, I believe that the DCS role will endure for a number of reasons, including some already discussed. At present Recommendation 7 of the Munro Review (2011a) - that the discrete role and

responsibilities of a DCS should be protected stands as 'accepted in principle' – although it is recognised that Munro's plea for DCSs to only take on additional functions in exceptional circumstances has been almost entirely ignored. It could be argued that agency has been strategically employed in turning this to an advantage by the DCSs themselves in the nature of leadership development provision they have commissioned and delivered through their training arm, the Virtual Staff College. Within the current complex and turbulent environment, there have been observations that practice is ahead of policy (Blyth, 2014) and in respect to children's services leadership development there has been an agility and arguably a positioning of leaders and potential leaders who, through learning how to take a highly adaptive systems leadership approach (Welbourn, 2013), are poised to be professional public managers in different areas of local service delivery, as well as services for children, young people and families.

The DCSs involved in this research expressed a view that they can comfortably straddle two professional identities - their original practitioner identity, and as hybrid professional public leader. In reflections on their daily leadership practice and enactment, the outward task of sensegiving, seen to be so important to leader identity work (Steigenberger, 2015), which involves helping others to make sense of often contradictory directives from policy makers in order to deliver services at the frontline, is cited as a core component of the systems leadership approach. Whilst this current model utilised in DCS and aspirant DCS development is very tightly bound to a child-centred values base, the specific dimensions it identifies as being integral to effective leadership (Fig. 2.3) appear generic and broadly transferable to any organisational context or sector. What is important here though is that in stories of sensemaking, the DCSs in this study authored a central place in their identity narrative for the significance of a child-centred values base acting as 'a touchstone' - a point of alignment, or at times, resistance in identity work and struggle in searches for a coherent sense of self. It is being able to refract their leadership practices and enactment through the construct of a touchstone that enables them to angle and bend, operating from several leader-identity positions at once. This may serve them well in coping with the inevitably expanding management remits over additional service directorates, and in adapting to the changing nature of the children's services provision.

While the statutory post of DCS may not always be with us, children will still need services, they will still need safeguarding. This may take a different form especially as the citizen-state relationship continues to be radically renegotiated, but even though structures may change, there will still be a need for leaders with the skills, qualities and capacity to do this well in increasingly complex and ambiguous organisational domains. New insights from this research about how DCSs may construct, enact and reconstruct identity as a professional public leader, reveals the reflexive and and processual nature of identity work and struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in the often volatile and contradictory social and discursive contexts in which they operate. These understandings can be harnessed to inform how leadership development, succession planning and wider workforce development in the sector is perceptively designed and delivered; providing those currently in the role - or aspiring to the most senior levels of children's services leadership, the space for critical reflection and challenge, and for them to be most effectively supported and enabled.

10.6 Methodological Contribution

The application of Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains and Adaptive Theory methodology as a sensitising theoretical framework throughout the study, adds to, and advances, current understandings in identity studies because it is a valuable, yet under-utilised approach which seeks to connect empirical interpretation and analysis to the social and discursive contexts in which identity may be constructed, enacted and reconstructed. It "sets *processes of individual identity work firmly in the structural or sociological contexts in which they occur*" (Watson, 2008, p.122) and in so doing, it also gives important space and consideration to life history and ways in which individuals may engage reflexively and actively in an ongoing struggle to produce and revise integrating narratives over themselves (McAdams, 1996) in searches for a coherent sense of self. Many empirical studies interested in professional identity, utilise Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory (Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2011). The appeal in using Layder's theories instead for this study is its application of a multi-dimensional model to understand social reality; four domains are considered through which to interrogate the agency-structure nexus. These recognise both the different features of agency-structure dimensions, and their dynamic inter-connectedness. In an interpretivist study, consideration of participants Psychobiographical Domain is particularly important because in Layder's approach, rather than assuming potential for a generic

transformative facility in people, account is taken of differences and variability in individual capacity, and the way life story and the affective impact of experiences - and our responses to them, can be drawn on in identity work and struggle.

A significant number of identity studies especially in the fields of education, health, and social care, also tend to adopt a phenomenological methodology. Although rich in sharing the subjective and intersubjective human essence of individual experience, feelings and perceptions of the social world, these studies largely ignore organisational and institutional structures and power differentials in society by simply telling the stories and leaving it there (Alston & Bowles, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013; Lopez & Willis, 2004). This flattens the ontological terrain. In taking a critical stance, interested in interrogating the empirical narrative presented in this study, storying of the self is represented, but this is balanced with understanding the context of external and institutional forces, and a critical interpretation seeks to reveal, connect and disrupt assumptions and ideologies in prevailing ideologies, discourse and practice. In this process, it is evident that 'identity' may indeed be "*regarded as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society … refract[ing] what can be seen as a 'permanent dialectic' between the self and social structure*" (Ybema et al., 2009, p.300). Developing critical and useful understandings of this dialectic requires empirical research to engage with essential theoretical issues, and for a connection to be made by theory to practical research to enrich ontological understandings.

10.7 Writing as Identity Work: My Researcher Self

As this study is all about identities, it seemed important to just say a little about my own growing identity as an early career researcher. Entering what can feel like the hallowed domain of academic scholarship and research is a challenging, sometimes enervating and intimidating, but ultimately rewarding experience. Not least in those joyous (but not frequent enough!) moments when some seemingly dense theory or complex concept suddenly and finally makes sense, or when presenting a small part of my early findings at a research conference to those already confirmed and esteemed members of the academy, and I feel, one day, possibly, I could 'hold my own' here?

Kamler and Thomson (2014) describe the notion of textwork/identitywork where the doctoral researcher "*feels themselves becoming different*" (p.15). This is in two respects: the first as an articulated process on the way to acquiring new identities as post-doctoral researcher and as member of an established Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The second which involves textwork, is less palpable, at least to others and quite possibly - as in my case, considerably advanced in the thesis writing process before it was recognised by me. I saw the slow progress of the material act of writing, but in the struggle, and attempts at writing, in the doubt and the questions about whether anyone would be interested in what I had to say, it is clear that 'me' as the writer at the end, is different to the 'me' as writer at the beginning (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p.16). In keeping with my ontological and epistemological stances, I believe that, of course, it does not begin and end with 'me' and my identity work and concerns. As Somekh and Lewin (2011) observe, academic writing is a discursive social practice and in drawing on Fairclough's (1992) three-layer model of discourse, it is possible to see the complexity of spoken and written language as social action; shaped and reshaped not just in the immediate environment of writing, but by the social, cultural and political climate in which it is produced. Then it is mediated by the disciplinary field, conventions, institutional 'ways of doing' (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Kamler & Thomson, 2014) and this renders identities - including scholarly ones as: "always *in the balance, as a person's social significance could easily be disturbed, disrupted and reshaped*" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p.338) even after acceptance into the academic community.

10.8 Limitations of Research

The main limitation of the research concerned some of the ethical considerations and dilemmas discussed in the methodology chapter. Some of the richest data had to be left out of the study because it would be too easy for other participants, or those with some knowledge of the sector and the region, to identity who the DCSs are from specific examples or comments made in interviews. The research represented here is still full of rich, illuminating accounts, but some difficult decisions had to be taken, and careful judgement applied over which data examples to include in the final study, and what should be left out.

The study is also small-scale and it is recognised that this can limit some of the utility of the findings - although I would maintain that valuable learning and understanding can be drawn from the shared experiences captured in the narrative and in some of the critical analysis of key themes. The new insights contributed through the research add to understandings about how public sector senior leaders construct, enact and reconstruct their professional identity. This would be very interesting to explore further in a larger-scale study, along with a deeper analysis of some obvious themes of interest to identity theorists such as masculine discourse (Ford, 2006) which had limited investigation due to the scope of this study. Data is always situated (Iszatt-White, 2009 p.462) and it is important to acknowledge that there is a need to be cautious about claims made from the research produced.

While every effort was made to produce a study of quality and rigour, there will always be limitations in social research and I recognise that in utilising a relatively under-used approach and pushing for methodological innovation in my research, I am inevitably going to discover limitations in its application. Avoiding the Theory of Social Domains (Layder, 1997) becoming a 'total perspective' was one of the challenges I faced, despite Layder's claims that avoidance of a totalising effect is one of its distinctive features.

10.9 Dissemination and Potential for Further Research

10.9.1 Dissemination of Findings

There are a several avenues where dissemination of the findings in this study may prove fruitful. It will be important to sensitively share the key findings with the Regional Network where this research took place. Other DCS regional groups in England, and indeed other areas, may also be interested in hearing about the study. One of the most significant points of dissemination will be to the National Board of Directors of the ADCS (Association of Directors of Children's Services). As the professional membership body for DCSs and their senior management teams, they oversee committees related to the primary work of children's services and seek to influence and shape policy agendas. The Workforce Development Committee, and the Standards, Performance and Inspection Policy Committee may have particular interest in my research findings to help inform policy discussion and development. The Workforce Development

Committee has responsibility for training and qualifications frameworks, and for succession planning; so particular findings and analysis in my research around leadership development approaches and support to current and aspirant DCSs could be drawn upon. The Virtual Staff College is currently entering the final phase of providing the 'Future Directors Programme'. This is due to end in early Summer 2016, with proposals for more joint leadership development programmes for Directors of Children's and Adult's Services being offered, along with more integrated leadership provision for those in senior positions in health, social care and the primary and secondary education sectors. Again, given some of the findings in the empirical narrative and the discussion about Systems Leadership as the preferred model and dominant discourse in DCS leadership development, there may be some useful insights for those involved in designing, delivering and evaluating these programmes.

The ADCS Research Group is a Sub-Committee of the Standards, Performance and Inspection Committee, established to advise the Association on research issues, priorities and studies of interest to the sector. It is also responsible for approving any new research conducted within local authority children's services – although this particular study pre-dates that requirement. Members are tasked with trying to ensure that research informs service development and delivery, including professional learning and development, and that practice and research help to inform each other. Sharing my findings within this forum can contribute to this aim. There may also be an opportunity to make parts of the study available through the research platform maintained by the Committee.

 The ADCS works directly with Government ministers, senior civil servants and Ofsted. It also liaises closely with the Local Government Association, and Solace (the Professional Association of Local Authorities' Chief Executives), along with other large public sector organisations such as the NHS and the Police. Certainly, some of the findings in my research have something to say about the relationships and dynamics between DCSs and these key organisational stakeholders, so it may well be of interest in this respect too.

One other area where my research could add value is in informing some of the discussion and approaches aimed at challenging the narrative of negative stories and

perceptions in the press about the work of children's services and DCSs in particular. There are efforts to address what can be misleading, and at times, vitriolic discourse about social work and senior managers of children's services, which was shown to have a palpably destabilising impact on participants in the study. However, as Jones (2014b) notes, there are opportunities to try to influence more good news stories and to convey the complexities and realities of the both social work and children's services management.

Finally, the findings will be internationally available to policy-makers and researchers through the University research repository, and through potential future publications. Academics active and interested in research on children's services leadership will also be able to access relevant research forums and groups, including the British Educational Research Association's Special Interest Group (SIG) on Children and Childhoods, and the Huddersfield Centre for Research in Education and Society (HUDCRES) Research Groups on Policy, and on Professional Identities, where I intend to further disseminate the work.

10.9.2 Further Research Opportunities

There feels to be a considerable vein of untold stories about senior leader-identity work and struggle in children's services still to be tapped. Even in a study of this size, there was a lack of space to examine and drill deeper into some interesting and important themes including aspects of control, power and self-aggrandisement seen in some masculine practices and discourse emerging through the narrative. While notions of an idealised construct of a leader-self (or selves), were critically discussed, there are further opportunities to interrogate the rich data, and to conduct further studies involving a larger number of participants currently in the DCS role. Some of the leader-identity positioning revealed in narrative accounts of their own feelings and behaviours - particularly in practices where self-love and positive self-affirmation appeared to be directed at themselves at the expense of other DCSs, there are strong suggestions of narcissistic forms of leadership at work (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). The contempt some (and it was a very small number - so needs to be kept in perspective) participants showed for the perceived weaknesses and lack of resilience in their peers, and the feelings of isolation and abandonment felt by other participants who had been placed in

'Special Measures' by Government, spoke of individualising, masculine practices which could be seen to run contrary to the organisational culture and collegial management practices one may expect from services predicated on the caring values of 'making a difference to children' and acting in the 'best interests of children'.

Idealised identity constructs of the superhuman leader in both occupational and institutional discourse was critically examined in this study. There are further opportunities to investigate how this also runs contrary to the dominant narrative of child-centred practice which, drawing from the values base of participants original practitioner backgrounds in education, youth work and social care, promotes a shared and supportive approach to practice learning and professional ethics of care that appears to be denied in some accounts, even towards themselves. It would be interesting to examine identity work and struggle more extensively in relation to the interface between individual DCSs and organisational identity in their constructs of the self (Watson, 2008) because the DCSs identifying as a 'corporate leader' rather than a 'children's services leader' in this study, tended to be the most critical of their peers' perceived weaknesses. However, in the interests of balance, there was also clear evidence in a number of narrative accounts of a real level of empathy and shared understanding and support for each other; especially recognising that the demands and experiences encountered in a DCS role are difficult to appreciate or understand without stepping into 'their shoes'.

Other profitable areas which could benefit from further research and investigation include themes around the insecurity and fears arising from the existential - but sometimes brutally real, media reaction and stigmatisation that DCSs are exposed to, and although this work has contributed to understandings of emotion work of leaders in identity construction, enactment and reconstruction, it remains an under-explored and under-theorised area in identities studies (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012), leaving plenty of further scope.

Finally, the application of Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains as a sensitising theoretical framework throughout the thesis, may act as encouragement to others seeking methodological innovation in identity studies. I believe it is really important that

empirical research engages with essential theoretical issues, and a connection is made by theory to practical research to enrich our understandings.

> *"Let your mind become a moving prism - catching light from as many different angles as possible"* (C. Wright Mills, 1959, p. 236)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:   Participant Invite Letter

Appendix 2:   Interviews - Possible Questions/Prompts

Appendix 3:   Summary of Initial Template

Appendix 4:   Summary of Final Template

Appendix 1:   Participant Invite Letter

Dear

I am currently undertaking some research as part of a PhD into personal experiences around professional identity and leadership amongst senior leaders of children's services in the North of England.

This is a small-scale study in terms of numbers, as I intend to work in-depth with a handful of people to gain a meaningful understanding of how individuals shape their sense of professional identity and the leadership approaches they may adopt.

I know that this is an extremely challenging and difficult time for senior leaders in local authorities and don't wish to add to your current pressures. I would hope in fact, that if you were willing to participate in this research, it would provide you with some confidential space and opportunity to capture your experiences and helpfully reflect on some of these in discussion with me.

The research will be carried out in full accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) Guidelines for Ethical Research. This promotes an ethic of respect which begins with seeking voluntary informed consent to participate. My intention is to use unstructured interviews to explore your feelings and perceptions around how you lead, and how you construct a sense of professional identity in your role. It is likely that I will want to carry out an initial interview and then follow this up with one or two further meetings over the course of the next 6-9 months.

The experiences you share will be completely anonymised in my study; I will focus on the *essence* of your experiences and how you are interpreting and making sense of these, rather than specific examples. If you agree to participate you do of course have the right to withdraw at any time and I will commit to an open, transparent research process with you. Once the study is complete, my intention is to utilise the findings to help inform the focus and nature of leadership development and support for people in your type of role.

I would be really delighted if you would be willing to participate in this study and will be in touch over the next couple of weeks to discuss further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 2:   Interviews - Possible Questions/Prompts

In-depth Interviews (1): Professional Identity Research

- Thank you for time & give brief outline of theme interested in for research
- Explain what will happen with findings (+purpose for PhD. But also share broad findings with ADCS to help inform DCS support mechanism/leadership development)
- Protect confidentiality & secure storage
- Okay to tape record?

Broad Open Questions/Prompts for DCS Interviews

- ➢ I'm interested in how, as a senior leader in a complex role like yours, you make sense of your professional identity. Can we start by you telling me a little about your background?

- ➢ Early career, training and experiences. How you came into the role, anything significant on the way that stands out for you?

- ➢ How would you describe your sense of professional identity? Where does that come from?

- ➢ What are the most important aspects of your work as a DCS? What means most to you? What do you find most difficult?

- ➢ What do you feel are the most significant influences on your professional identity? (+ barriers/challenges?)

- ➢ How would you describe your leadership approach – what do you think influences that?

- ➢ How do you think others perceive a DCS?

Appendix 3: Summary of Initial Template

(EMERGENT DATA & A PRIORI THEMES)

High Order Themes	Deep/Sub-Themes
Becoming a DCS	Early management pathways to role. Individual explanations and definitions Prototype DCS Leader? Uniqueness of role Cultural differences – influences from education and from social care backgrounds etc. Importance of life story & choices/happenstance/circumstances Influence of previous career on identity perceptions Building child-centred values base Motivation and Purpose
Experience and Influences: Being a DCS	Values/purpose in role Original occupational background - influences Expressions of 'what it means' to be a DCS Images & expectations Leadership qualities – esp. resilience Status & credibility with front-line staff relationship chief exec. & LMCS, status with other senior leaders. Children as stakeholders Media hostility, vulnerability & carrying risk
Hybrid Leader: Complexity of leading multi-disciplinary provision. Ideological changes and policy shifts	Hybrid sense of professional identity Constructing/enacting leader identity Challenges in current organisational & policy context (incl. funding cuts & commissioning) Performativity Shared DCS discourse Status and gravitas Dislocated identity Institutional and structural issues DCS regional network: Professionalism from within/professionalism from above
Emotional Influences on Identity (Vulnerability/Security)	Feelings of vulnerability & risk in role Importance of values Emotion work needed for own well-being strain of statutory responsibility for children Emotional labour for staff/organisational demands Bruising encounters – resilience Other DCSs support? Mutual support and understanding Audit & inspection Measuring up Emotional demands (incl. media & others)

Appendix 4:   Summary of Final Template

High Order Themes	Deep/Sub-Themes
Early career pathways critical life points	Importance of life story & choices/happenstance/circumstances Influence of previous career on identity perceptions Building child-centred values base
Identity struggles: idealised self, Professional values. Realities in role	Values/purpose in role Original occupational background - influences Images & expectations Leadership qualities – esp. resilience Status & credibility with front-line staff, relationship chief exec. & LMCS, status with other senior leaders. Children as stakeholders Media hostility, vulnerability & carrying risk
Making sense? Professional selves: identity in ambiguous organisational domains	Hybrid identity Constructing/enacting leader identity Challenges in current organisational & policy context (incl. funding cuts) Performativity Shared DCS discourse Professionalism
Emotion, vulnerability and resilience	Feelings of vulnerability & risk in role Emotion work needed for own well-being Emotional labour for staff/organisational demands Bruising encounters – resilience Other DCSs support & understanding (?)

C. Daniels