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ORGANISATIONAL EMPOWERMENT AND THE INDIVIDUAL: ANALYSIS OF A LOCAL AUTHORITY

A project submitted to Middlesex University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Professional Studies

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a wider audience through the publication of articles in at least one professional and one academic journal by the end of this year.

Dedication

I dedicate this research project report to my dear departed friend,

Barry Lefley,

to whom empowerment was a way of life.

Acknowledgements

The research concept was jointly initiated with my late colleague Barry Lefley. After his untimely death I have attempted to complete it to a standard that I hope he would have been satisfied with.

This research project report is a product of five years of researching into empowerment. During this period I have become indebted to many, and I hope that all will know that I am indeed grateful for their interest and assistance.

A few people deserve a special mention, Derek Stevens for his inspiration, support, patience, encouragement and sticking with me to the very end of the journey; Geoff Bolt for his belief in the research and its potential for local government as a whole and Jane McCullough for bearing the burden of reading my handwriting, without her superb word-processing skills, sheer hard work and warm spirit, the presentation of the report would have been a shadow of its present form.

I am grateful to the many friends, professional and work colleagues for their support, enthusiasm and interest in my desire to use empowerment to make a difference.

I would like to thank my mother and father who throughout my upbringing challenged me to put people before profit, which I hope is well demonstrated within this report.

I am also indebted to my academic consultants Professor Derek Portwood, Professor Ian Cunningham and Dr. Lucy Thorne, who have been unstinging in their criticism of the many inadequate drafts. I have also appreciated their depth of understanding, tactful guidance and support.

Lastly and mostly, I am irredeemably indebted to my wife, Jaswant and my daughters Simran and Serena who tolerated my absence from family life and put up with the many late-night and early-morning sessions. I owe them a lifetime of gratitude.

Abstract

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Introduction

During the past decade local government has witnessed a multitude of change programmes aimed at transforming organisational structures and processes to enhance productivity, effectiveness, and competitiveness. These change efforts have largely fallen short of the mark because most Councils fail to account effectively for human elements in these change projects. Empowerment is a means by which an organisation accounts fully for its individuals since they are seen as the main ingredient. At the same time, it is a concept that can be pursued by individuals within an organisation to a limited extent without formal recognition by the organisation. Empowerment is attractive to organisations and individuals for many reasons. It fits easily into the current values of both managers and workers. Some managers see it as a means of removing bureaucracies, freeing workers from the historic collective union negotiation arrangements, gaining more flexibility and rewarding people for their individual efforts. Many employees are attracted to empowerment for similar reasons.

This is the second of two reports representing 180 credits towards the D.Prof. The first report evaluated literature and proposed the exploration of empowerment from the individual's perspective, to be carried out in the second report. The main purpose of the first report was to overcome the limits and misunderstandings others have imposed on the concept of empowerment and to consider empowerment from an individual's perspective, as this was regarded as an under researched area within the public sector environment. The D.Prof first report therefore outlined the understanding and interpretation of empowerment as a concept, from the analysis of relevant literature; explored the relationship between theory and practice; described and analysed the individual's perspective in relation to empowerment and the issues that impact on an individual in the context of an empowered organisation; in order to gain a better understanding of the relevant issues; outlined the principles of research methodologies and the identification and justification for the most effective methodology; and highlighted the characteristics within an organisation which would need to exist in order that, from an individual's perspective, it would constitute an empowering organisation.

The primary purpose for the second report is to produce a working model ("ideal type") of empowerment for Yardley District Council[1] emphasising the individual's perspective.

The intention of this report is to describe research carried out in a local government organisation with the key objectives being, firstly, to provide, by building upon the first report, a contribution to the development of theories on empowerment and professional undertaking of empowerment through the development of an "ideal type". Secondly, seeking out the practical applicability of the "ideal type" as a working model, within Yardley, with recommendations for development and action in order to contribute to the pragmatic evolution of Yardley.

The specific objectives of this report are therefore:

1.   To analyse the local government environment in general and Yardley District Council specifically, in order to establish the extent of empowerment to date and the conditions and scope for the development of empowerment in the future.

2.   To outline the research approach adopted in investigating and developing empowerment within Yardley District Council.

3.   To test the theoretical conclusions, derived from the first report, in order to establish the relevance of these conclusions to an empowering organisation, from the individual's perspective.

4.   To develop the ideal type as a working model which incorporates both the individual's and the organisation's perspective, setting out the constituents of an empowering organisation and the actions required to work towards this.

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[1] Yardley District Council is not the actual name of the Authority but a fictitious name. However, owing to political sensitivity and in order to anonymise the organisation, this name has been used.

5.   To test the validity and credibility of the ideal type before making recommendations for its acceptance and adoption by the Elected Members of the Council.

6.   To develop a working model that has transferability features in order that it can be shared with professional colleagues, other local authorities, other public sector organisations and to a lesser extent the private sector.

Chapter 1 outlines the general environment within which Yardley District Council operates. Consideration will be given to the extent to which local government has gone through change since 1979, when the Conservative Government came into power with significant manifesto implications for local government, resulting in legislative, funding and control changes. The current issues facing local government including modernisation, Best Value, the changing perception of the public, the emphasis on performance management and inter-local authority comparisons, and the change in local government management. Characteristics, skills, attitudes and perceptions will also be considered. In addition, the chapter will give a flavour of the type of organisation Yardley is, its scale, shape, size, structure, politics and the significant issues it currently faces.

Chapter 2 considers, to a limited extent, the overall research strategy and, in depth, the justification of the instruments to be used as well as issues such as data analysis, validity, reliability and ethics. Consideration will also be given to the way in which data has been collected and analysed along with problems and issues that needed to be resolved during the process.

Chapter 3 outlines the key findings of interviews, questionnaires and the participant observations at Yardley District Council, including the key characteristics that would enable empowerment, as identified by individuals and a comparison of the findings with the conclusions reached in the first report.

Chapter 4 puts forward the ideal type, based on the findings of the first report, conclusions of the research analysis (Chapter 3), as well as personal beliefs and observations, focusing on those aspects that are (a) in the control of the individual and (b) in the control of the organisation.

Through the use of a focus group, Chapter 5 tests the ideal type to establish the extent to which it reflects empowerment, from the perspective of the individuals, which would lead to the achievement of Best Value and continuous improvement within the organisation. Following consideration by the focus group, subsequent changes were made to the ideal type to reflect their views and opinions, leading to a revised ideal type (working model) for Yardley District Council.

Chapter 6 sets out the conclusions and recommendations from the above and sets out the arguments for the adoption of the ideal type and recommends key actions needed to be taken by the Council in order to move toward empowerment.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENT AND YARDLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

1.1   Introduction

The organisation and management of local authorities has to be grounded in an understanding of their distinctive purposes, conditions and basis.

The intention of this chapter is to examine the local government environment within which Yardley District Council operates and to highlight the key issues, themes and pressures faced by local authorities in the recent past, present and those that are likely in the future. In addition this chapter focuses on Yardley District Council and the way in which it operates, as the case study organisation, which will assist in developing a framework for the organisation to enable the effective implementation of empowerment.

1.2   The Local Government Environment

Local government has been a recognised structure for a long time. Greenwood and Stewart (1986) point out that local authorities can usually be defined as having the following characteristics:

i.   A political structure that is dominated by Committees.

ii.   An administrative structure that is dominated by the professional bureaucrat.

They go on to add the further distinctive features of:

i.   Functional expertise.

ii.   Commitment to a service rather than commitment to the local authority.

iii.   Concentration on service provision at the expense of local government.

Even so, it has to be acknowledged, as stated by Greenwood et al (1980) that local authorities organise themselves in various ways to discharge their duties. In Britain, Parliament is sovereign and local government has no specific constitutional status. Its functions are only defined as part of a continuing process of statute, orders, circulars, memoranda, etc. Table 1.1 summarises the principle bodies that operate in the local government environment. Appendix 1 includes the main functions of each type of authority.

	County Councils	District or Borough Councils	Unitary Authorities	Police Authorities
Greater London	-	33	-	2
Metropolitan Areas	-	36	-	6
English Shires	34	239	46	31
Wales	-	-	22	4
Totals	34	308	68	* 43

Table 1.1

* Includes London City Police

1.3 Impact of Change on Local Government Since 1979

A fundamentally important factor for understanding a local council is the effect of the period of hostile relationships between local and central government, beginning in 1979. Irrespective of political developments from the 1990s onwards, local government has been reshaped by the agenda of Conservatism and by an ideological stance unsympathetic to local government culture and values.

According to Hartley et al (1995), the period from 1979 matters for several reasons, including the fact that Parliament passed 143 separate Bills to alter the powers, resources, functions or structures of local authorities, and over 50 of these measures involved fundamental reforms. The metropolitan counties have been abolished, and the two-tier structure of counties and districts (including the parishes) has now been reviewed and reorganisation has been completed. Yardley District Council has subjected an increasing number of services to compulsory competitive tendering, and the consideration of other forms of externalisation,

resulting from the recent adoption of Best Value, may also result in further externalisation.

Long or even medium-term financial planning has been undermined by changes to the rules by which central government funds local government, and by which local councils are allowed to fund themselves. In addition there are the continuing effects of the change from the rating system to the poll tax and then to the Council Tax and now the more recent changes to the Council Tax and benefit systems.

Wilson and Game (1994) point out that local councils have found their duties and powers being transferred to non-elected bodies which are publicly funded, but based on appointees rather than elected representatives. They argue that there has been a shift during the 1980s towards non-elected or indirectly elected bodies at the expense of directly elected councils. Throughout the 1980s, service responsibilities have been removed from local authorities and been given to mainly single purpose government appointed agencies.

Whatever the merits, or otherwise, of these changes, the point is that they have had a major impact on the practical matter of running a local council: resources are not only limited but the basis on which they are allocated is highly uncertain; the requirement for competition continues through Best Value and will be present throughout all layers of council activity; and the existence of the elected local authority itself cannot be taken for granted as new service delivery channels, methods, arrangements and structures are being introduced or being considered for introduction.

For some, perhaps, this high degree of change and uncertainty can be held up as desirable, as somehow approximating to the real-world market of the private sector and thus producing a tough efficient management in local government. Yet this argument rather neglects the fact that the best private sector companies actively seek to replace the kind of uncertain environment so deliberately created for local councils, by creating stable conditions more conducive to service quality, employee care and, indeed, efficiency.

It is quite clear that local government has undergone major cultural change. Whether or not councils stand in opposition to the drift of central government policy, and whatever the local mix of public and private service provision, the culture of local government management has changed. In this process, public sector managers have been required to change their attitudes and to some extent their beliefs.

The exact way in which public sector management has adapted is the subject of debate among both theorists and practitioners. Painter (1993) examined the management of change in local government, pointing to an uncertainty in some councils about the "primary mission" but, equally, a greater emphasis upon strategic planning and management. If this is an accurate depiction of the current direction of local authority management, the problem seems to be that as the need for strategic management grows, so the difficulty of achieving it grows too. The very forces, financial and political, which propel local government toward thinking strategically, prevent it from acting strategically.

Stewart's review (1994) of local government management considers, in addition to some of the issues already raised, the scale of social change, including; the decline of traditional industries; persistent unemployment; growth of the elderly population; growth in numbers of single-parent families; the reality of a multi-ethnic society; environmental concern; social division; and the extra-national nature of problems and solutions. All these aspects of change in society would impact upon local government even in the absence of the financial and political factors already mentioned.

Stewart goes on to make a fundamental point that it is commonplace to state that local government faces a rapidly changing society. It is not the rapidity of change that should be emphasised, but the number of dimensions on which change is taking place.

Stewart (1994) states, that the scale of change has brought with it concrete organisational changes, within which the process of management takes place. These changes include the development of a flatter structure, control by contract in place of control by hierarchy, arm's-length organisation of commercial functions, the client-contractor split, independent inspection, decentralisation, the changing

role of the centre, the decline of traditional service committees and the growth of management boards, new cycles for council activity within the traditional undifferentiated annual cycle, new ways in which the council itself may meet, and corresponding changes to the structure of political leadership on the local level.

In addition to all these external catalysts for change, many local authorities, like Yardley District Council with its recent restructuring, have also been initiating their own internal organisational and cultural changes.

1.4 The Current Factors for Change in Local Government

At present, local government is being influenced by a number of issues, initiatives and themes. In the main, these have been put forward by central government; however, some have been put forward by local authorities themselves. These initiatives are outlined below.

1.4.1 Modernising Local Government and Best Value

The most recent and significant impacts on local government and in particular district councils have been the introduction of Best Value, the preparation towards modernising local government and more recently the introduction of Public Sector Agreements (PSA), which is a recent form of central government funding based on the achievement of specific targets within set timescales.

The government has introduced a series of government papers and legislation, such as the modernising government white paper, the Local Government Act 1999 and the Local Government Act 2000. Modernising local government is at the heart of these legislative changes. The government's intention is for services to focus on the needs of citizens and users and to improve continuously. It wants local democratic government to be renewed and revitalised, with councils being recognised as having the authority, power and influence to be able to lead their communities and work in partnership with other parts of government, its agencies, businesses, not-for-profit organisations, professional bodies, the voluntary sector and local people. This requires councils to:

i.   Gain new democratic legitimacy

ii.   Engage with their communities.

iii.   Be open and accountable.

iv.   Focus on the needs and convenience of the citizen and the user rather than those of the provider.

v.   Have finance systems which match and support their roles and responsibilities.

vi.   Be transparent in their decision-making.

vii.   Be disciplined in achieving Best Value in their services.

Most of these requirements would need organisations that are able to adapt to and manage change effectively. Bureaucratic organisations, due to their nature, could find this difficult.

Tony Blair, in his pamphlet on local government, "Leading the Way" (IPPR, 1998) states:

"Best Value will mean councils being clear about their priorities and objectives, reviewing a proportion of their services each year, examining every single aspect of a service's performance and making year on year improvements."

"Councils also have a duty to be efficient and to make sure that residents receive quality services. The government's Best Value framework will help them deliver this, but it will be demanding."

The government's white paper of July 1998, "Modern Local Government in Touch with the People" proposed three new statutory duties that local authorities owe to local people:

i.   A duty of Best Value.

ii.   A duty to consult.

iii.   A duty to promote the well being of communities.

(i)   Duty of Best Value

The duty of Best Value requires each council to achieve continuous improvements in all of its functions. Continuous improvement is measured broadly in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Measures include national standards, nationally prescribed performance indicators and locally defined performance indicators. Each authority is required to set targets for continuous improvement.

(ii)   Duty to Consult

Consultation by councils, encouraging participation by their communities, is a key feature of producing community plans, developing Best Value performance plans and achieving Best Value. The government expects councils to consult and engage with their communities on virtually every aspect of their business.

(iii)   Duty to Promote the Well Being of Communities

The government has introduced as a duty of councils that they promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas. This formally recognises the role of the council as elected leader of its community and ensure that it considers, at all times, the long term well being of its area.

The modernising of local government white paper and, more specifically, the Local Government Act 2000 have made several proposals that have a significant impact on authorities' democratic processes, including changes to:

i.   Political management structures.

ii.   The executive and representational roles of members.

iii.   Elections and electoral cycles.

iv.   Consultation and other forms of engaging the public.

v.   Ethics and discipline.

(i)   Political Management Structures

The government has a vision of modern local authorities leading their communities. It believes that traditional political management structures are inefficient and opaque and radical changes are needed to enable authorities to become local community leaders. The Local Government Act 2000 proposes three new models (a fourth model is not applicable to Yardley's particular situation) (see Appendix 2) of political management that separate the executive and scrutiny functions of councillors which it believes at present are easily confused within the traditional committee structures. The government believes that the separation of roles that this would bring would mean:

(a)   Greater clarity about responsibility for decisions.

(b)   Clearer accountability for decisions.

(c)   Sharper scrutiny of those decisions.

Councils have a duty to review their political management arrangements and draw up a plan to introduce new arrangements based on one of the broad models. Councils wanting a directly elected mayor will need to hold a referendum to endorse this. Equally, the local electorate can petition for a referendum on having a directly elected mayor and the government will be able to require councils who move too slowly in reviewing their political management structures to hold a referendum on the adoption of one of these models.

(ii)   The Executive and Representational Roles of Members

The executive's role would be to exercise political leadership, to formulate and decide policy and strategy and drive it through. This can be performed most effectively and openly when it is clear who has the power to take decisions.

Members who are not part of the executive would have an enhanced representational role, as separation from the executive gives scope to apply greater scrutiny.   Members would be able to promote and defend the public interest to the council, as advocated by local people. It is also suggested that this role could be extended to cover other bodies operating locally, developing the wider representational role often placed on councils and councillors.

(iii)   Election and Electoral Cycles

For local government, the government believes that more frequent elections will improve accountability.   The white paper proposes that unitary areas will hold elections by thirds in three years out of four, with the fourth year available for other elections such as that of the local mayor. In two tier areas which includes Yardley, councils will hold elections by halves every other year, with counties and districts alternating.

Voter turnout at local elections is clearly of concern and several potential obstacles to higher turnout have been highlighted.   Suggestions for making improvements have included the following:

(a)   Greater local flexibility to set polling hours and use early voting arrangements so that votes could be cast over several days.

(b)   Increase voter convenience by using supermarkets (an initiative first piloted by Yardley District Council), railway stations, workplaces, etc.

(c)   Increase use of postal votes and electronic voting.

(iv)   *Consultation and Other Forms of Engaging the Public*

The government regards openness and responsiveness to local communities as being crucial to the health of local democracy. Effective and appropriate public consultation and participation is strongly encouraged as the way forward for local government. This is reinforced by the duty to consult which does not prescribe consultation methods but focuses on the outcomes achieved.

The white papers put forward several methods of involving the public including referendums; panels, survey panels, focus groups and opinion polling; forums and public scrutiny committees.

(v)   *Ethics and Discipline*

The Nolan Committee (1997) concluded that conduct in local government is generally of a high standard, but identified several weaknesses. These are mainly issues of confusion over standards due to the present framework being the product of extensive ad hoc modifications. The Nolan's Committee's report recommended a new ethical framework. The white paper has embraced this recommendation and proposes new ethical frameworks of standards for members and for officers. The members' framework will require:

i.   Each authority formally to adopt its own code of conduct, based on a national model.

ii.   Each authority to set up its own standards committee to draw up the council's code of conduct and advise on its implementation and operation.

iii.   Rapid, thorough and fair arrangements for investigating all allegations of wrongdoing.

iv.   All serious allegations to be dealt with by a new independent body, the Standards Board.

The officer's framework will require:

i.   Each authority formally to adopt its own code of conduct for its staff, as part of normal conditions of service.

ii.   A protocol regulating relations between members and officers.

iii.   Arrangements for whistle blowing.

The Best Value Process

Central to Best Value are four managerial processes: challenge, consult, compare and compete (4C's). Councils will be expected to demonstrate use of these as part of their Best Value process. The four C's are to:

Challenge the underlying purpose, objectives, formats and costs of services.

Consult with users and potential users to ensure services respond to their needs and concerns, and with providers to encourage and draw out their ideas for increasing service efficiency and quality.

Compare service performance with others, using performance indicators and benchmarking, to seek and explore improvements.

Employ fair **competition** with and between other providers to ensure cost effective services are provided.

The key stages in the cycle of managerial processes that underpin the achievement of Best Value are as follows:

i.   Establish authority-wide objectives and performance measures.

ii.   Agree a programme of fundamental performance reviews in pursuit of the authority-wide objectives and performance measures and set it out in the local performance plan.

iii.   Undertake fundamental performance reviews of selected areas of expenditure.

iv.   Set and publish performance and efficiency targets in the local performance plan.

v.   Subject the process to independent audit, inspection and certification.

vi.   Poorly performing services, requiring intervention, will be referred to the Secretary of State.

The government expects the Best Value review process to identify demanding targets for the improvement of both the cost and quality of services. Year on year improvement of both aspects is an underlying objective of central government for local authorities.

Best Value performance plans (BVPPs) are the means for authorities to report back formally to their communities. BVPPs are published by 31 March each year setting out the following:

i.   The authority's plans and intentions for the coming year. This should draw the authority together as a complete entity, linking its various extant plans for individual services, such as housing, social services, education and libraries or cross service issues such as community safety.

ii.   A report on current performances using comparisons:

         with other local authorities;
         with other providers in the public, the voluntary and the private sectors; and
         with performance in previous year.

iii.   Targets for future years on an annual and longer-term basis.

iv.   Comment on the means to achieve the plans, including capital investments, remedial action required where targets have been missed and procedural and purchasing changes.

In addition to this, authorities are required to give more frequent and detailed feedback and information to their users and the wider public through heightened consultation, dialogue and participation.

Central government seems determined that local government's local democratic legitimacy and accountability to stakeholder is restored and revitalised. As such, judgement of individual authorities' achievement of Best Value is primarily one for local people to make, informed by their own experiences and the BVPPs. External checks of the authority, by the District Auditor and the Audit Commission's Inspectorate is also undertaken to ensure that local authorities are delivering to their objectives and targets and to the expectation of local people.

1.4.2   The Perception of the Public

The increasing emphasis on the public has taken several forms, open to interpretation as either threats or opportunities to those responsible for running local government. The perceived threat of the public is in its challenge to the paternalism of a local state that aimed or claimed to know best. The opportunity is in the strength which local public services (and public service deliverers) may derive from the public, either in genuine defence of local services and how they are delivered or in the form of valuable feedback from constructive consultation. The terms consumer, citizen and community have been seen to imply rather different notions of the public, with different implications for management. This is evident at Yardley District Council, as is likely to be the case in most local authorities.

1.4.3   The European Local Authority

Professional practice in local authorities has increasingly become part of an international framework, in several senses. First, European legislation and

regulations have provided standards which may be viewed as threats or as opportunities for services and for managerial practice. Second, the active role of local authorities in economic development and the reality of a global economy have widened horizons dramatically, driven by the search for resources. Third, industrial societies as a whole face a common agenda of achieving a new balance of taxation, public spending and service provision and can learn positively or negatively from the example of other countries. Additionally, the academic disciplines of public management and administration are undoubtedly less parochial, less ethnocentric, than has traditionally been the case.

1.4.4   Performance Management Systems

The growth of performance measurement has been quite significant, not only from its origin as something imposed by central government upon local authorities, but also as a vehicle by which local government as a whole now examines not only the cost but also the quality and effectiveness of its services. Most authorities now have relatively uniform and coherent indicators for the key areas of council activity. However, a number of problems relating to the quantification of the cost of activities still exist. Problems also exist in linking up performance measurement to performance management, that is, in making an informed use of performance measures as tools of managerial practice rather than as ends in themselves. A key requirement of Best Value is for all local authorities to have effective performance management systems, in order that continuous improvement can be achieved and quantified. Yardley District Council has recently been challenged by its external Auditors for the absence of an effective performance management system.

1.5   Local Government Management: Characteristics, Skills, Attitudes and Perceptions

The consequence of successive changes made to the local government sector via legislation, competition, political pressures and financial uncertainty is that management has become disjointed. There has been a replacement of traditional forms of direct provision by a more complex landscape with various forms of delivering services. Figure 1.2 sums up old and new styles and methods of management (Leach et al, 1993: p.44).

There is also a move away from unified hierarchical management of direct service provision, regarded by many as the most significant feature of change in local government management. The old and new forms of management also have their local political counterparts. Traditional service committees have tended to give way to client-contractor/purchaser-provider forms of organisation, or a cross-service form of committee organisation based around particular user groups.

The new and more diverse pattern of service management requires rather different skills from the ones associated with traditional line-management, such as project management.

Leach et al (1993) carried out research into the characteristics of local government management and discovered that a number of different approaches to management could be identified.

Characteristics of Management

Old Characteristics

Provision of all stages of service direct to user
Hierarchical system of line management
Manager as guardian of professional quality in the area of service delivery
Real budgetary control retained at the centre of the authority
Monopoly
Stability of expectations from staff and public
Public funding and public provision with peripheral charging element

New Characteristics

Provision of some services direct; partial provision of some services via other public and private agencies
Management by contract (i.e. around a present specification for a particular service)
Management by project (i.e. around a particular initiative, development or area of work)
Manager as skilled in "management" per se, transferable to various professional settings
Budgetary devolution
Partial competition
Changing expectations of public services
Public and private funding and provision

Figure 1.2

They stated that emphasis in relation to the new characteristics was being placed on concepts such as empowerment, community leadership, and community governance, which they argued provided an important basis for the motivation of an authority's staff.

It is quite clear, therefore, that there has been a change in the culture of local government. The fragmentation of management reflects and is reflected by this cultural change. It has been a part of central government's agenda since late 1970 to affect a cultural change in the way public services are run and delivered, based around a particular view of how the private sector goes about its work.

Stewart and Walsh (1992), argued that many of the changes sought by the government could be seen as attempts to change the culture of public services, dominated as they have been by the traditions of administration, hierarchy and professionalism.

In most cases the culture has changed along with managerial structures, although not always in the way central government has intended. Some of these changes have been led by performance management. In discovering the "performance culture", local government discovered a powerful weapon in its battle with central government for resources.

Characteristics of Well Managed Authorities

According to Leach et al (1993), a well-managed authority is one in which:

i.   Basic systems are well developed, providing the basis for more innovative approaches.

ii.   There are clear systems for user involvement.

iii.   The development of systems gives priority to those that support core values.

iv.   There is recognition that systems are secondary to other key features such as management philosophy and do not, in themselves, constitute good management.

Young and Mills (1993) looked at the changes that authorities are making to their organisational structures and processes. They examined:

i.   The re-organisation of the overall pattern of departments and directorates - including the extent of restructuring, the pace of change, and the reasons why it was undertaken.

ii.   Changes in the size of corporate Management Teams.

iii.   The new types of relationship between the central and service departments within the local authority.

In the survey they conducted they discovered a general trend towards streamlining the management and decision taking structures, with:

i.   A shift towards consolidation into directorates.

ii.   A reduction in the number of departments.

iii.   A slimming down in the number and frequency of committees and sub-committees.

iv.   A complementary trend towards use of member working parties.

They argued that the pace of this restructuring has been rapid. During the last three years about two thirds of all authorities, and as many as three quarters of the counties, have restructured their administration. Even where the number of departments has remained stable, the allocation of responsibilities has changed.

1.6   Yardley District Council

Yardley District Council came into being in 1974 as a consequence of local government reorganisation, drawing together three constituent authorities into a single Council.

The Council serves a population of approximately 90,000, covering 52,000 hectares. The District has a broad based economy although in recent years it has had problems in attracting new development, which is largely attributed to the poor infrastructure within and around the District. The service sector is particularly strong in Yardley, with market agriculture, leisure and tourism industries as major components. There are over 40,000 domestic properties and 3,200 business properties within the District.

The Council is made up of four main departments; these departments and their key responsibilities are as follows.

(a)   The Chief Executive's Department is responsible for committee management, elections, personnel, land charges, estates management, building maintenance, legal services and economic development.

(b)   The Treasurer's Department is responsible for providing financial advice and support to officers and Members, exchequer services, cashier services, Best Value, billing and collecting Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates, office services, information technology, reprographic services, housing benefit administration and audit services.

(c)   The Planning Department is responsible for planning advertisements, appeals and enforcements, building control, conservation, development control, local and highway planning, listed buildings and tree preservation.

(d)   The Community Services Department's responsibilities include abandoned vehicles, allotments, arts development, beach and seafront, coastal protection, dogs, food hygiene and safety, housing advice, grants and needs licensing, museums service, noise nuisance, parks and recreation

areas, pest and pollution control, recycling, safety at work, sports facilities, street cleansing, tourism and waste collection.

1.6.1   The Development of Yardley District Council

Having had 3 very different Chief Executives over the last 26 years, Yardley has on a number of occasions experimented in terms of service provision, management styles, roles and strategies, resulting in either the increase or decrease of bureaucracy.

Yardley has been particularly proactive and dynamic in its approach to service delivery, working with the private sector wherever possible. The requirements of compulsory competitive tendering made this process easier, with Yardley currently having out sourced to the private sector all of its services that were required to be tested under compulsory competitive tendering, which included a mixture of both blue and white collar services.

1.6.2   Yardley District Council's Values, Mission, Aims and Objectives

Many organisations adopt a set of values or beliefs, sometimes described collectively as "the way we do things around here." Yardley District Council has had such a set of values since 1991 (see Appendix 3). The intention of these values is to help in enhancing the Council's reputation, while clarifying what it is trying to achieve and the way in which it conducts itself. However, through general observations and discussions within the organisation over a period of two years I came across no-one below Divisional Head level who knew even one of the organisation's core values, with few being aware of their existence in the first place. This suggests a lack of communication of the values within the organisation or, to a lesser extent, a lack of understanding of the values by those to whom they are aimed. The values particularly relevant to this research are:

- "Recognising that its most important asset is its staff, who have a key role in promoting pride in our community."

- "Enabling and encouraging involvement in the Council's decision making process."

The values adopted by Yardley District Council are very much in line with those adopted nationally (Leach et al, 1993).

In addition the Council has a number of corporate pledges that are based around the standard and quality of services to be provided (see Appendix 4). Like the core values, the corporate pledges are unlikely to be recited by individuals within the organisation. However, unlike the core values, the corporate pledges seem to be a basic understanding that most individuals within the organisation possess when delivering the Council's services. For example, most people will be courteous and friendly, telephone calls are normally answered very quickly and letters are dealt with promptly: all as a matter of course rather than as adherence to the corporate pledges.

The Government has recently replaced the compulsory competitive tendering legislation with new legislation under the umbrella heading of Best Value. Best Value places a number of requirements on a Council, one of which is to deliver its services in line with its mission, aims and objectives. Prior to the requirement of this legislation Yardley District Council had no mission, aims or objectives that defined its aspirations for the future. In April 1999 following extensive consultation with individuals within the organisation, with Councillors, the public and businesses, the Council developed a mission statement with five key corporate aims, each with a number of objectives. The mission statement for the organisation is:

- "To serve the people and the businesses of Yardley and use our influence and resources to help secure, within the powers available, and in the most efficient and effective way possible, the social, economic and environmental well-being of the District" (Best Value Performance Plan, 2001).

The Council's key corporate aims (Best Value Performance Plan, 2001) are:

- "To lead and engage the community."

- "To provide a safe and healthy District."

- "To provide opportunities to meet the social, leisure and cultural needs of the community."

- "To provide for economic employment."

- "To protect and enhance the built and natural environment."

An outline of the objectives is given in Appendix 5. In relation to the corporate aims and objectives, observation would suggest that most individuals within the organisation are aware of their existence and, in general, have a feeling of being consulted with in their formulation. However, few would seem to know and understand them well enough to embrace them within their day to day working.

1.6.3   The Political Dimension

The Council is made up of five main Committees:

- Strategic Policy & Resources.

- Performance Review & Audit.

- Planning & Land Use.

- Regeneration & Tourism.

- Community & Environment.

The summary budgets and services within these Committees can be seen in Appendix 6. The Council is Conservative controlled; they have twenty-nine seats, Liberal Democrats having eight, Labour having four as do the Independents. The previous administration (prior to May 1999) was one with no overall control. The Council has a strong sense of partnership between Leading Members and Chief

Officers as well as a strong and focused political leadership. There is considerable participation by the Members who are actively involved in seeing through the implementation of their policies.

1.6.4   Strategy

Yardley's current strategy is included within its Best Value Performance Plan, which outlines the approach that it is adopting in order to achieve its aims and objectives and its overall purpose. Yardley based this strategy on its capacity and capability and the required actions needed to deliver the overall strategy, as it recognised that it would be foolish to adopt a strategy which the organisation does not have the capability or capacity to carry out. Yardley's strategy is clearly concerned with responding to external circumstances. It is based around developing strengths and reducing weaknesses in the face of external threats and opportunities and therefore allowing it to respond to a complex and changing external environment, fulfil many potentially conflicting demands, and maintain its internal coherence.

The Council seems to have lacked a clear sense of direction, which would allow it to instil a set of values to support the required internal and external change. Processes of incremental change and development serve to embed value systems firmly in the everyday rules and patterns of behaviour of an organisation. This allows beliefs, attitudes and values to become deeply institutionalised. Without such processes, dynamic change for Yardley is likely to be difficult. Prior to the development of the overall strategy, contained within the Best Value Performance Plan, Yardley was operating without a formal strategy. It did, though, have an informal recognition of what the Authority needed to achieve, and how it would achieve this over a period of time.

1.6.5   Decision Making Process

Policy decisions within the organisation, like any other local authority, are made at Committee and Council levels by politicians. Policy implementation and general organisational day to day decision making is made by the officers within clearly defined reporting lines on a hierarchical basis, with most departments being headed by a Chief Officer. Assistant Chief Officers are the second tier, with the

iii.   The person responsible for maintaining and enhancing the Authority's position in regard to the wider impact on the community within which it operates.

iv.   The person giving the organisation leadership, vision, purpose and direction.

v.   Troubleshooter and arbitrator.

1.6.7   Management Team

Whilst the role of the Chief Executive within Yardley is, by definition, a feature of the organisation's centre, the Management Team is the arena in which the interests of the centre and those of the Service Departments impinge upon one another.   Observations within the organisation show that in the increasingly challenging and turbulent environment within which Yardley operates, the existence of a cohesive Management Team, seems to be a source of mutual support in difficult situations.   It has been observed that officers have different aims and allegiances, and face different political conditions. It is difficult for them to form a united front on issues of administrative responsibility. However it would seem that the current Chief Executive has a strong ability to curtail individualistic aims and promote joint departmental objectives in order to move the organisation forward.

1.6.8   Chief Officers and Service Directors

Recent legislation dealing with compulsory competitive tendering, followed by Best Value and a number of other initiatives including housing, with increased tenant choice, have all had the effect of fragmenting authorities such as Yardley. They have caused many authorities to break down their traditional patterns of hierarchical and relatively autonomous departments into a smaller number of departments. In the case of Yardley District Council, in May 1998 it restructured itself from six departments to four departments, partly because of out sourcing a large proportion of the Housing Department. The consequence of these changes over the years has been a reduction in the number of employees from approximately 600 to 205 in the year 2000. Generally smaller departments have

enabled both quicker communication and easier access from the lower to the higher scales.

1.6.9   Structure and Processes

The structure of an organisation is a pattern of rules, positions, and the roles that give shape and coherence to its strategy and process. In the case of Yardley District Council this is described in organisational charts, job specifications and patterns of authority. The structure of Yardley consists of a set of patterned ways of acting, expressed within its Code of Conduct for its employees. This is seen as an expression of the organisational memory, which enables its employees to behave in the same way when faced with the same or similar circumstances. The organisational structure within Yardley provides the basis of action, and reduces the needs for decisions. It also creates a set of constraints on people's actions and their relationships with one another.

1.6.10   Culture of Yardley District Council

Yardley's culture, that is, its common set of everyday understandings, beliefs and the expectations with which it operates, all of which allow it to persist with a degree of cohesiveness, can be said to be bureaucratic. For its purposes this would seem the most appropriate culture. For public accountability and expectation require that Yardley, like all local authorities, be characterised by a degree of predictability, treating similar cases in a similar way. It is assumed that rules will be followed, and that hierarchy will dominate. People can expect a degree of predictability from a bureaucracy, which they might not expect to find in a more informal organisation. Yardley also has a number of sub cultures within the organisation, expressing the understandings, beliefs and expectations of particular groups and/or departments.

The culture within Yardley works on logic and rationality, which enforces the idea of impersonality of relations with clients and of promotion based on professional/technical qualification. This pattern can be clearly identified within traditional local government. One observes Chief Officers who have risen on professional expertise to be leaders of their own domain, defending their departments' professional interests.   An interesting observation about

bureaucracies is that they function best in stable environments where they are able to handle large uniform, routine and known tasks. This was precisely what was required of local government in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. However, this would not seem to be the situation today. In general, in organisational behavioural terms, this kind of culture encourages organisational members to take a very inward looking perspective. The stable external environment means that organisational members feel secure in their jobs and their roles; certainty and known solutions predominate in the operational environment. For example, when the Treasurer's Department was predicting the basis for the next year's budget, this would be the same as last year's, with an allowance for inflation to which was then added an element of growth.

This bureaucratic type culture is most closely related to Handy's (1993) definition of the role culture where, he argues, the organisational stress is placed upon formal rules and roles and authority is vested in these roles (1993). Role culture is characterised by formal procedures and offers the individual security, stability and predictability; in these ways it is therefore characteristic of a bureaucracy.

Observation of the present Treasurer's Department would suggest that it has a sub culture of its own, which works within the limits imposed by the dominant bureaucratic organisational culture of Yardley. The Treasurer's sub culture would seem to be on the lines of what Handy defines as the task culture. Handy represents this culture by a net where each unit is connected to others while being self-contained at the same time. Although there are power lines at the top there is considerable autonomy within the divisions, which operate on a team culture basis where people strive together to solve problems. The emphasis in the department is on utilising resources to meet the organisation's objectives and it is characterised by the requirement for efficiency. This sub culture within the Treasurer's Department adapts itself to change and is driven by the need to provide quality services for its customers. It is increasingly expected to be output driven and to be seen to achieve clear objectives.

It has been recognised at Yardley that it is much easier to change structures and systems than to alter a culture because culture is built into the organisation's patterns of behaviour in an unconscious and, perhaps, unthought fashion. It is precisely because these have become part of the every day expectations, language

and behaviour that Yardley finds it difficult to change its culture. Although a number of sub cultures exist, a strong Management Team ensures that a common culture for the organisation is maintained because it contributes to the efficiency of the organisation. It enables communication to take place more easily than would otherwise be the case because of common language and common understandings.

1.6.11 Power and Interests

Yardley District Council is an organisation, like any other, within which individuals and groups pursue their interests in competition. The interests at stake are the individual's or the group's position in the distribution of organisational resources, such as finance, status and authority. Any formal organisational introduction in Yardley of empowerment is likely to involve change in the pattern of interests, as organisational advantage and disadvantage change. A key concept for the understanding of interests in Yardley District Council may be that of an individual's career. Advancing one's own interests is usually achieved through career advancement. As one gains knowledge and experience one is able to gain greater influence over one's interests.

Organisational change at Yardley will be seen as most threatening by those who stand to lose the most, those who are the most influential and able to achieve most of their interests within the existing system. In the context of Yardley, power may be defined as the ability to make others behave in a way that is in line with one's interests, whether or not that behaviour actually is in line with their interests. Power within Yardley depends upon three factors: resources, organisational processes and skill. Power depends upon resources in the sense that those who are powerful are likely to possess some or all of the base power, such as the largest budgets or responsibility for the greatest number of people. There are also examples where power is contingent on position in the organisational process (an individual may have considerable contact, and therefore influence, with Members). The more important one's activity to the operation of the organisation and the less there are substitutes for what one does, then the more powerful one is likely to be due to those unique skills. However well resourced one may be and however central one's activities may be to the

organisation it is still possible that one exerts relatively little power, in practice, because of lack of skill.

Observations within Yardley show that the exercise of power is a skilled activity. It can be exercised negatively or positively, that is, to create or prevent change. At Yardley, power depends largely upon position within the organisation and is built into the organisational framework, through the establishment of rules and procedures. In all the local authorities the researcher has worked in those with most power are typically those who can establish rule systems that operate to their benefit, without others being conscious that they are being disadvantaged. This is more likely to be the case in Yardley in that the longer the history of the organisation, the more the distribution of power becomes institutionalised. Those whose position is well established in the existing organisation are likely to resist change precisely because it will affect them detrimentally. It is in large part for this reason, particularly in local government, that change is more usually precipitated from outside the organisation.

The control of the pursuit of self-interest in organisations is a crucial part of the overall steering and control process, and can take three major forms:

i.   Punishing those who act against the organisation's interests.

ii.   Rewarding those who act in accordance with the organisation's interests.

iii.   Attempting to align the interests of the individual and the organisation.

Yardley District Council, like most organisations, has used all these approaches to some degree, over its history. These approaches are likely to be used differently depending on the nature of the individual's attachment to the organisation. With staff whose attachment is calculative, as Etzioni (1975) puts it, there is likely to be a greater emphasis upon punishment for action that is against the organisation's interest, on the assumption that it is blameworthy. There is likely to be the development of a low trust syndrome (Fox, 1974) and a punishment centred bureaucracy (Gordon, 1954). This approach is not possible with staff who are more able to pursue their interests outside the organisation. They are

more likely to be dealt with by a mixture of incentives and attempts to enhance organisational commitment.

1.7   Summary and Conclusions

As can be seen from the brief review of public sector and local government literature, there is no "blueprint" for understanding how a public sector organisation can and should behave or the right way in which it should be developed to take the sector forward. The local government sector is a political structure, dominated by Committees or more recently Cabinets, and supported by an administrative structure which, as Greenwood and Stuart (1986) argue, is dominated by professional bureaucracy. Local government has undergone change from the date of its inception. However, it has undergone especially significant change since 1979 with the development of a new era of hostility between local and central government, irrespective of political developments. Local government has been reshaped by the agenda of conservatism and by an ideological stance unsympathetic to local government culture and values, with an increasing level and extent of legislation; introduction of compulsory competitive tendering; gradual reduction in local government powers; and increased financial pressures.

More recently local government has been impacted by the introduction of the Government's Modernisation Agenda, which is aimed at increasing democratic legitimacy, engaging communities, improving accountability, increasing transparency, focusing on the needs of the customer/citizen and ensuring that "Best Value" is achieved in the delivery of all services. To ensure this agenda is delivered, central government has placed a statutory duty on local government to consult, deliver Best Value and promote the well being of communities.

Since its formation, Yardley District Council has had three very different Chief Executives. Each have, in their own way, tried to ensure that the Council is proactive and dynamic in the way in which it delivers it services. Although the Council has been successful in achieving certain things it has lacked a clear strategic direction, one which has the commitment of all employees, Councillors and the community. The Council's corporate values and pledges were first developed and put in place in 1991, however, few people are aware of their existence and little emphasis is placed upon them organisationally.

Councillors make policy decisions within the organisation, with the policy implementation being carried out by officers, who are structured into departments headed by Chief Officers. All Chief Officers meet on a regular basis within a Management Team. Within that Management Team officers have different aims and allegiances, which at times make it difficult for the authority to move forward collectively. The Council's culture is dictated by its bureaucratic nature, characterised by a degree of predictability and an assumption that the rules will be followed and hierarchy will dominate. However, within the bureaucratic culture are a number of sub cultures, those of the departments.

The analysis within this chapter suggests that Yardley District Council does not possess the characteristics and, in particular, the environment to enable it to wholeheartedly embrace the concept of empowerment.

It can be concluded from this chapter that there is a clear need to explore Yardley District Council and its environment further, from an organisational and an individual perspective, to identify how it can develop the characteristics of an empowering organisation. The initial step needs to be the collection of data from within the organisation. The following chapter considers the research strategy which was adopted.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH APPROACH

2.1   Introduction

The aim of this research is to develop an understanding of empowerment within a
local government environment and, more specifically, to put forward a number of
characteristics of an empowering organisation, largely from the perspective of the
individual, and therefore creating an "ideal type".   The existing literature on
empowerment and local government has been reviewed in the first report and
Chapter 1 of this report respectively. Chapter 1 described Yardley District Council
and the environment within which it operates, suggesting that it is unable to
embrace the concept of empowerment, yet recognising that a more detailed
analysis of the organisation is required and therefore further data needs to be
collected. In deciding what data to collect and how, a number of choices had to be
made.   These choices and the reasoning behind them are detailed below.   This
also includes a full description of the data collection methods. These were not
considered in detail in the first report.

2.2   Enquiry Design

This research is based on a single case study encompassing a number of data
collection methods.   Firstly, questionnaires were sent out to all permanent
employees of the Council to assess the extent to which empowerment issues,
tested within the Inland Revenue, were relevant to Yardley District Council.
Secondly, twelve individuals were interviewed in detail on aspects of the
questionnaire, the findings of the first report and their views on the organisation in
the past, the present and future.   Thirdly, a focus group was convened following
the identification of characteristics, from the individual's perspective, which would
be required within Yardley District Council in order for it to constitute an
empowering organisation (ideal type). Following the results of the focus group the
ideal type was redefined and updated to reflect the group's views.   In addition to
these data collection methods, internal and external documents, together with
participant observations over a two-year period were used to support the overall
case study.

2.3   Enquiry Methodology

This case study uses a single case strategy to study empowerment within a local government environment in order to identify from the individual's perspective the constituents of an empowering organisation and, as a result, the development of an "ideal type."

The arguments for and against alternative approaches to this enquiry have been considered in the first report. The intention of this section is to consider specific case study issues.

According to Eisenhardt (1989), case studies are:

"Particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theories seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to the incremental theory building from normal science research. The former is useful in early stages of research on a topic or when a fresh perspective is needed, while the latter is useful in later stages of knowledge" (p.548-9).

According to Yin (1989), when to use which research method depends upon:

i.   The type of research question.

ii.   The control of the researcher over behavioural events.

iii.   The focus on a current, as opposed to historical, phenomenon.

This research is about how and why. According to Ghauri et al (1995) "when research questions concern only "what" - for example "what are the ways in which an effective firm is operating?" - an exploratory study is justified. Here the objective is to develop hypotheses or propositions, which can later be studied. For an exploratory study, any of the main research strategies can be used. If the question relates to "how many?" or "how much?" survey or archival strategies are favoured. But when "how" and "why" questions are asked, a case study method is favoured as a research strategy" (p.88).

Yin (1984) compares the case study method with experiments and suggests three situations where case study is the preferred method:

i.   If we want to follow a theory, which specified a particular set of outcomes in some particular situation and if we find an organisation, which finds itself in that particular situation, we can use the case study method for a critical test of theory and its applicability to the organisation.

ii.   If we want to study some specific characteristics of a rare or extreme situation in which an organisation finds itself, we can use the case study method to compare and contrast.

iii.   If we want to study a situation or an organisation, which has rarely been studied and is unique in its nature, we can use the case study method. In this case, we hope to learn something new and important.

Single case studies have tended to be more popular than multiple case studies. Yin (1989) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) mention multiple case studies but it is Eisenhardt (1989) who has written in detail about their theory building properties. She found that the multiple case study approach encourages the researcher to study the links between cases and theory and to avoid chance associations. Strauss and Corbin (1990) writing about grounded theory procedures and techniques, which are similar to theory building from case studies, assert that the purpose of grounded theory research is to develop theory. In grounded theory, research data is collected to determine how literature and data compare. Constant play between literature and data develops theory. Grounded theory is ideal for studying causality because its questions are based on action and process.

There are two approaches to using the case study method. Yin (1989) uses case studies to test theory while Eisenhardt (1989) uses case studies to develop theory. This study although focused predominately on the latter, places some emphasis on testing currently established theory relating to empowerment, although it is not specific to local government. According to Yin (1989) the first step in the case study approach is to develop theory, the second is case selection. Each case is looked at as a separate entity, enabling unique patterns, which can

be generalised across cases to emerge. Cross case comparison can also be made. These comparisons force researchers to go beyond initial impressions and take a more in-depth, structured approach with the data. When analysing the data, each case is compared to the theory. There is therefore, continuous interaction between the theoretical issues studied and the data collected. The case study data is matched to theory and not analysed to make statistical generalisation. Cross case questions are asked to determine the similarities and differences between cases. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.11) "the discovery and specification of differences among and between categories, as well as similarities, is crucially important and at the heart of grounded theory."

According to Miles and Huberman (1984) a case study is not a survey, where reliability is dependent on the characteristics of the data collection instruments. The case study relies on the trustworthiness of the human instrument (the researcher) rather than on the data collection techniques per se. Hence the characteristics and skills of the investigator are of crucial importance. They argue that you need "some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study; strong conceptual interests; a multi disciplinary approach; good investigative skills including doggedness, the ability to draw people out and the ability to ward off premature closure" (p.46).

It is therefore accepted that the quality of this case study will depend to a great extent on the quality of myself as the investigator. In the process of undertaking it, effective planning abilities, knowledge of research procedures and analytical skills have been developed. However, difficulties have arisen due to the fact that there are no routine procedures or formulas that can be followed in relation to case studies. This has made the study harder, although also more interesting. This case study involves multiple forms of data collection. These include documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, questionnaires and focus groups. These multiple data collection methods have allowed me to conduct a more thorough examination of the research site than could have been possible with a quantitative study. It was also felt that because multiple sources of evidence are used, it can address a broader range of historical, attitudinal and observational issues than would be possible in survey research. Furthermore, Yin (1989) argues that multiple sources help to prevent subjective bias, with findings or conclusions being supported by a range of evidence from different sources, and

are likely to provide more convincing and accurate findings than would be the case with a survey.

By using the case study method new insights were obtained on Yardley District Council that would not have emerged through a large survey. These insights are discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Research Analysis and Findings.

Generalisability in a Case Study

One of the possible outcomes of this research would be for it to lead to benefits for local government in general. Therefore, the issue of generalising from one case is of some relevance.

According to Normann (1970) he views generalisability within case studies as follows:

"If you have a good descriptive or analytical language by means of which you can really grasp the interaction between various parts of the system and the important characteristics of the system, the possibilities to generalise also from very few cases or, even one single case, may be reasonably good. Such a generalisation may be of a particular character; it might be possible to generalise a statement of the type "a system of (a) and a system of (b) together comprise a mechanism which tends to function in a particular way". On the other hand one cannot make any generalisations about how common these types of systems and interaction patterns are. But the possibilities to generalise from one single case are founded on the comprehensiveness of the measurements which makes it possible to reach a fundamental understanding of the structure, processes and driving forces rather than a superficial establishment of correlation or cause-effect relationships" (included in Gummesson, 2000, p.89).

According to Gummesson, generalisation has two dimensions in the above quotation. On the one hand, quantitative studies based on a large number of observations are required to determine questions of how much, how often and how many. The other dimension involves the use of in-depth studies based on exhaustive investigations and analyses to identify certain phenomenon, for

example, the effect of a change in corporate working that lays bare mechanisms that one suspects will also exist in other companies.

Bryman (1998) states "within a case study a wide range of different people and activities are invariably examined so that the contrast with survey samples is not as inadequate as it appears at first glance" (p.90). The single case may, in fact, encompass a number of settings, for example, where it involves a study in a large organisation with sites across the country or even around the world. By comparison, Bryman (1998) points out that many survey samples may be restricted to one particular locality. Nonetheless, a well-completed and rigorous case study is likely to be useful in other context. In relation to theoretical propositions Marshall and Rothman (1989) argue that where one is able to relate one's research project to existing theory, one will be in a position to demonstrate that one's findings have a broader significance than the case or cases which form the basis of the work. They argue that it will be up to the researcher to establish the relationship to existing theory in order to be able to demonstrate the broader significance of the particular case study findings. This relationship will allow a study to test the applicability of existing theory to the settings that are being examined and, where this is found wanting, to suggest why. It will also allow theoretical propositions to be advanced which can then be tested in another context. However, as Bryman (1998) points out, this also has implications for the relationship between theory and research, since the application of theory will be necessary before the researcher embarks on the collection of data.

2.4   The Sample

In relation to the questionnaires, all employees (therefore the entire population) of Yardley District Council were included. In relation to the interviews a sample of twelve individuals within the organisation were selected. An interview sample rather than the entire population was selected due to a number of reasons:

i.   It was impractical for the researcher to interview the entire population and would have been organisationally unacceptable.

ii.   The researcher's time availability outside his normal role within the organisation is limited and therefore prevented him interviewing the entire population.

iii.   It was felt that having gathered substantial data through other forms of data collection, twelve interviews would be sufficient to provide the additional analysis required.

A total of twenty-two individuals volunteered to be interviewed. However, many were senior managers. In order to be representative of the population and the various departments, the selection (based on subjective judgement), had to be restricted to twelve individuals.

2.5   Data Collection - Background Information

Initial background information on the organisation including its origin, history, size, employees, assets, purpose, location, resources, relationships, financial position were all obtained from internal documentation and publications including Committee reports, strategy documents and historical information, much of which was further substantiated and clarified through interviews and participant observations.

Information on management philosophy, company policies, structures, systems, procedures and processes was obtained using both internal documentation and asking direct questions of senior managers. Other additional information, obtained through background documentation and general observations included roles and positions within the organisation, extent of specialisation, communication channels, control systems, co-ordination and span of control, whether the organisation is short or long term orientated, whether creativity is encouraged or curtailed, whether the organisation is risk taking and whether there is a people or a money orientation.

Information on perspectives, attitudes and behavioural aspects was obtained through the use of all of the data collection methods.

Specific details and justification of the various data collection methods used is outlined below.

2.5.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire (see Appendix 7) used for the research was sent out to all two hundred and five of the Council's permanent employees. The original intention of the research was to carry out a comparative organisation study involving the Inland Revenue and Yardley District Council. The questionnaire was designed and developed in 1997 with the main audience being the Inland Revenue and therefore includes terminology and phraseology applicable and relevant to the Inland Revenue. The questionnaire was sent out to approximately one thousand staff members within the Inland Revenue (Wales and Midlands region), followed up by group interviews with two hundred individuals and twenty-five individual interviews extending over a two-year period. The questionnaire was then sent out to the Yardley District Council members of staff in November 1999.[2] To ensure comparability and consistency within the approach the same questionnaire used for staff at the Inland Revenue was circulated at Yardley District Council. A small number of people found the terminology and the wording of the questionnaire somewhat confusing. However, due to the Official Secrets Act and access problems following the death of Mr. Lefley, data from the Inland Revenue has not been used within this research but, pending permission, will be included within an article to be written following the completion of this research.

The choice of the main areas of concentration within the questionnaire was made following the publication of the Inland Revenue's draft Empowerment Strategy. The main areas identified include:

i.   Empowerment levels.

ii.   The role of managers.

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[2] The second collaborative researcher, Barry Lefley, passed away in January 2000. However, as the questionnaires had already been sent out to Yardley members of staff and had been returned, a second Yardley specific questionnaire was decided against due to the workload, objections by the organisation and the likely low response rate due to the fact that a number of other questionnaires were also being circulated around the organisation at the same time.

iii.   The role and thoughts of staff.

iv.   The significance of building relationships.

v.   Organisational structure.

vi.   Team work.

vii.   Participation.

viii.   Clarity of purpose of the organisation.

ix.   Morale and motivation.

x.   Fairness within the organisation.

xi.   Communication.

xii.   The organisational environment.

The questionnaires sent out were self-completed by respondents. The intention of the questionnaires was to gather both descriptive and evaluative research data. The research included obtaining information about the individual's attitudes and opinions on organisational practices and beliefs about empowerment. The distinction, here, is that the attitude variables recorded how respondents felt about something, their evaluation of it from good to bad; these differ from the belief variables which record what respondents think or believe is true or false, the descriptive data.

The intention of the questionnaire was to focus on attitudes and beliefs. A scaling or rating questionnaire is the most appropriate type for the collection of this type of data (Curving, 1992). A rating scale, therefore, was adopted, in which the respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements on a five point scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. A rating scale system of questions had the obvious attraction that it gives a dimensional assessment of attitudes and beliefs, so that

the score obtained gives much firmer ground for subsequent interpretation and analysis. Consideration was given to omitting the middle alternative (neither agree or disagree) as it allows a non-committal response. At the same time, it has the advantage of providing an additional gradation of opinion. According to Robson (1993) approximately 20% of respondents use the middle category. However, he argues that its inclusion or exclusion does not affect the relative proportion of those actually expressing opinions. In relation to the questionnaire at Yardley District Council, a high proportion of respondents used the middle alternative. Therefore, a weighted index system was used to eliminate non-committal responses. This is further described in Chapter 4.

Reasons for Using Questionnaires as a Means of Data Collection

There are a number of reasons for using questionnaires as one of the means of data collection for the study of empowerment at Yardley District Council. These include:

i.   It is accepted that questionnaires are invariable cheaper than a number of other data collection methods, particularly when there are a large number of respondents (Rousseau, 1977). Questionnaires at Yardley were sent out to over two hundred individuals. Approximately one thousand questionnaires were returned by individuals within the Inland Revenue, though those results are outside the remit of this study. The cost of interviewing that number of people would have been extremely expensive and was not viable within the budgets set aside by the organisations.

ii.   The intention was to gain an initial rapid collection of data before conducting interviews. It was decided that questionnaires were best suited to serve this purpose, as they would result in a much quicker response rate.

iii.   It forms a part of the overall triangulation strategy adopted for this report and assists in the reliability, validity and credibility of the overall data collection

Considerable emphasis was placed on securing good response rates. Focus was placed on four key areas.

(a) *Design and Layout*

The design and the general content of the questionnaire distributed at Yardley District Council was the same as that circulated within the Inland Revenue. However, a number of areas were focused on to improve the design and layout without changing the original questions. These include:

- Coloured pages to represent different departments and clarify the structure of the questionnaire overall.

- All questions were clearly numbered and grouped.

- Including a contact point for further explanation.

- Thanking the respondents for their co-operation.

- Inviting those willing to be interviewed to put their names forward.

- Offering to send the abstract of the findings to those who were interested.

(b) *Covering Letter*

The letter was made as clear as possible, stating the aim of the survey, conveying its importance and assuring confidentiality.

The letter clearly stated the parties involved within the research and the intended use of the material.

A pre-survey internal e-mail advising respondents of the forthcoming questionnaire was also sent in order to encourage a greater response rate.

(c)   Follow-Up E-Mail

A follow-up e-mail was sent to all employees requesting any unreturned questionnaires and stressing once more the importance of the study and the value of the respondent's participation.

(d)   Reducing Costs to the Respondent

This was done through trying to make the task appear brief. Eliminating any direct monetary costs through using the internal mail system and gaining permission for the questionnaire to be completed during work time.

2.5.2   Interviews

A total of twelve respondents were interviewed. The interviews were of a structured nature following a written interview guide with a predetermined list of questions (see Appendix 8). The reason for this was to enable me to ensure that all interviews were essentially handled in the same way with each interviewee. The predetermined list of interview questions was developed from the issues, which arose in the first report and from the preliminary questionnaire analysis and findings. The content and the specific interview questions are addressed in detail in Chapter 3. The interview question guide sheet allowed for the recording of answers and responses.

Steering instructions for the preparation of the interviews were prepared in advance and consisted mainly of notes to the researcher. In relation to the answers to the interview questions the researcher responded in one of the following ways:

i.   Recorded responses and proceeded to the next question in sequence, following a response.

ii.   Where the respondent misunderstood the question the researcher attempted to amplify the wording or the meaning of the question and as the researcher progressed through the interviews, realising certain

questions caused some confusion, the researcher amplified those questions as a matter of course.

iii.   On a number of occasions the interview digressed. In order to maintain a flow for the interview the respondents were brought back to the sequence to be followed in the interview. However, in many instances, the digressions provided a valuable insight into the organisation.

In order to enhance reliability the researcher tried to ensure that his use of words and the processes that he followed remained the same with all interviewees. Use of the interview guide assisted in this.

The main benefits of using interviews as a means of data collection were that they gave me the ability to adapt the questions as necessary, clarify them, when necessary, and ensure that I fully understood the interviewee's responses by, where appropriate, repeating or rephrasing the questions. The researcher was also able to pick up non-verbal clues, from the respondents' body language, which might indicate discomfort, stress or problems.

A major drawback in carrying out the interviews at Yardley District Council was the amount of time required for interview preparation, conducting the interview, recording and analysing the widely differing responses. In addition, although assurances were given for anonymity and confidentiality, certain interviewees still felt uncomfortable. It was difficult to obtain co-operation from certain potential interviewees. Originally, twenty-two individuals had identified themselves as willing to be interviewed. However, in the event only twelve of them were selected to be interviewed. Of the others, some were willing but, being senior managers, they would have been over-represented in the group; others were no longer willing to go ahead, though they did not disclose why this was.

The interviews followed a structure but became semi-structured at times. This was to allow the researcher to probe further into themes the interviewees thought especially relevant, or responses that emerged within the interview and warranted exploration.

In addition, it was felt that interviews were the most appropriate method as:

a.   It was necessary to understand the constructs that the interviewee uses as a basis for his or her opinions and beliefs about Yardley, its development, environment and empowerment in general.

b.   It was recognised that one aim of the interview was to develop an understanding of the respondent's world and perspective.

c.   The interviewee may be reluctant to be truthful other than through the confidentiality in a one to one situation.

In certain cases establishing trust took considerable time and effort, especially in a one-off interview where some of the interviewees had not met the researcher before. The researcher's fear was that the absence of trust would result in interviewees simply resorting to telling him what they thought he wanted to know. To develop trust the researcher decided when making initial contact that a telephone call would be better than a letter, and in some cases the researcher made two calls to give sufficient assurances and comfort to the potential interviewee.

In terms of the location of the interview, in all cases the interviewee made the decision. Three of the twelve interviewees preferred the interview to take place in a "neutral area" away from both their and the researcher's own office environment.

Those that were willing to be interviewed were in general motivated and keen to be a part of the research. They saw it as having relevance to them, in that the outcomes of the research, if implemented, might improve the quality of their working life. In addition, it was felt that certain interviewees saw the researcher as a medium through which they could express their thoughts about the organisation, and its direction in relation to empowerment, without being individually identified.

The analysis of interview data was undertaken through the use of PinPoint, a computer package, and the researcher's own manual recording system.

It is recognised, in relation to reliability, that the findings from using interviews as a data collection tool are not necessarily repeatable since they reflect reality at the time they were collected, in a situation which may be subject to change (Marshal and Rossman, 1989). This is because interviews are argued to lack standardisation (Robson, 1993). In relation to these interviews, reliability rest on whether alternative interviewers would reveal similar information (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991). The concern about reliability in these types of interviews is also related to the issue of bias. The areas of bias that the researcher had recognised and had attempted to avoid include:

a.   Interview bias - by ensuring that my comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour did not create bias in the way that the interviewees responded to the questions asked.

b.   Interviewee bias - the interviews were of both a structured and semi-structured nature, where the aim was to explore events and seek explanations. In certain cases, interviewees may, in principle, have been willing to participate but had become sensitive to the in-depth exploration of certain themes causing them to be unwilling to discuss certain aspects and topics. In relation to the generalisation and validity of the findings, Easterby-Smith et al (1991) states that a small qualitative research using semi-structured or in-depth interviews will not be able to be used to make generalisations about the entire population (whatever this may be in the context of the research topic) where this is based on a small unrepresentative number of cases. This will be the situation in a case study approach (Yin, 1994).

2.5.3   Participant Observation

In trying to understand empowerment there is a need to focus on people's behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and actions. Participant observation allows this to happen, as one is able to watch what people do, to record this in some way and then to describe, analyse and interpret the observation.

Reasons for Using Participant Observation as a Means of Data Collection

The main reason for using participant observation in carrying out the research at Yardley District Council is that it is a means of obtaining information without asking people about their views, feelings or attitudes, but involved watching what they did and listening to what they said. Secondly, participant observation directly contrasts with and can often usefully complement information obtained by virtually any other technique. This research also uses interviews and questionnaire responses. However it is accepted that both these means of data collection are notorious for discrepancies between what people say they have done, and will do, and what they actually did or will do (Hansom, 1980). Agenew and Pyke (1982) stated that on a questionnaire "we only have to move the pencil a few inches to shift our scores from being a bigot to being a humanitarian. We do not have to move our heavyweight behaviour at all" (p.129). Thirdly, as Robson (1993) stated, observation seems to be the most appropriate technique for getting at real life in the real world, avoiding the artificiality associated with a number of other techniques. Fourthly, and arguably most importantly, since in this particular case the researcher was working within the organisation it would seem to be the most appropriate technique, as it could be applied on an on-going basis.

However, effort has been made to avoid a number of common drawbacks associated with participant observations by the researcher familiarising himself with these drawbacks and their potential impacts. In particular, the researcher has tried to avoid high levels of role conflict due to being a researcher, professional, colleague, manager and employee.

Researcher as Employee

As mentioned above I am the researcher within Yardley District Council and, at the same time, an employee of Yardley District Council. I therefore work within the organisation, alongside others, to all intents and purposes as one of them. My role as a researcher is not totally explicit as my professional role within the organisation is Divisional Manager of a finance function. This lack of an explicit researcher role allows me the distinct advantage of being able to move around the organisation and gather information and perspectives from other sources without much attention being drawn to it. Such an approach is essential. I feel, as the

researcher, I need to become totally immersed and experience the work and the environment of the organisation, without people behaving or expressing themselves in calculated ways through their knowing that I am a researcher within the organisation. Although my role was not explicit, this is not to say that the research was conducted in a covert way. I had not formally communicated my role as a researcher to the organisation as a whole before officially starting the research. Then, the fact that I was researching was widely communicated. The reason for not adopting any covert role was to ensure that my approach was completely ethical and would engender no resentment within the organisation. As a consequence certain observations will need to remain confidential due to their nature and to my duty to the organisation.

In terms of data recording, diary notes were made of specific situations that were felt to be relevant to the research. These included observing informal banter, hearing conversations, observing decision making and the actions taken by individuals following certain events. However, by and large, the participant observation role within Yardley District Council in trying to study empowerment, has been about understanding the organisation, its politics and how it behaves. Most of this information, although noted, cannot be linked to specific dates or events as it has occurred through the development of the researcher's knowledge over a period of time.

In terms of reliability and validity Gill and Johnson (1991) argue that participant observation is very high on ecological validity because it involves studying social phenomena in their natural contexts. Nonetheless, it is recognised that participant observation is subject to possible weaknesses relating to validity and reliability. The greatest threat to reliability is of researcher bias influencing the research conclusions. As Delbridge and Kilpatrick (1994: p.43) note "because we are part of the social world we are studying we cannot detach ourselves from it, or for that matter avoid relying on our common sense knowledge and life experiences when we try to interpret it." In carrying out the research, the researcher has tried to recognise the possibility of observer bias and, through this recognition, to avoid it.

However, the tendency for our own perceptions to colour our interpretation of what we believe to be true is well known. Therefore to argue that the researcher has avoided observer bias completely would be untrue. Nevertheless, its threat to

reliability was recognised and the researcher has sought to control it. The way in which this has been done is through the process of asking myself questions about any conclusions that have been reached such as "Did s/he really mean that?" "What other interpretations could have been put on this?" Furthermore, where possible, as with all data collection methods, the researcher has used, where possible, respondent/informant verification, where written accounts of situations or interviews were verified for their content by the individuals concerned. The adoption of a triangulation strategy and the use of a number of other data collection methods works towards improving both reliability and validity.

2.5.4   Focus Group

The examination of data collected from questionnaires, documents, interviews and participant observation has led to the development of "an ideal type" for Yardley District Council to constitute it as an empowering organisation. However, in order to increase the credibility and accuracy of the findings, a focus group was conducted. Participants were from among those that had been interviewed and the aim was to test the relevance and applicability of the ideal type, the possibility of its success and its likely difficulties. The results of this focus group enabled the researcher to reformulate the ideal type, taking on board the information obtained from the focus group, in order to make it more relevant to the context of Yardley District Council.

Jankowicz (1995) states that a focus group is a form of group interview in which the data arise from dialogue and general discussion among participants, rather than from a two-person dialogue between researcher and respondent. It is particularly useful for discovering the range of views and attitudes present within an organisation, or part of it. In this case, it offered the researcher the opportunity to observe the processes by which people interact, and to infer something of the culture and climate of the organisation, as well as providing data about the content of people's views on the issues being explored. However, because several people are interacting, it was found that the control over the sequence of questions dealt with was less than in the one to one interviews and the data was therefore generally more difficult to analyse. In terms of designing the process for the focus group at Yardley, the researcher was reliant on previous interviewees volunteering to be included. Therefore, other criteria, such as their compatibility as

a group, could not be used. However, it was assumed, that having addressed empowerment in some depth during the interviews, the interviewees had sufficient knowledge to make relevant and valuable contributions to the debate, particularly as the subject of empowerment can span a number of different aspects within the organisation. In total eight individuals from the original twelve interviewees agreed to be part of a focus group. It lasted approximately one and a half hours. The members of the focus group represented all departments and most hierarchical layers within the organisation.

The researcher's role within the focus group was that of facilitating through leading and moderating the group discussion. This was done through posing a sequence of questions, which stimulated, maintained and directed the flow of discussion and were based around the presentation of the ideal type and the findings of the research to date. The key questions are included in Appendix 9. In terms of his own behaviour the researcher tried to ensure that he:

i.   Ensured that the location and setting for the focus group was in a neutral place where the participants felt relaxed. This place was agreed before the focus group took place.

ii.   Made appropriate comments and probes to maintain discussion on each question.

iii.   Anticipated the flow of discussion and steered it away from areas that were not relevant to the concept of empowerment within the organisation.

iv.   At certain points, prevented some individuals from dominating the discussion at the expense of others.

v.   Ensured that participants understood each other's contributions and at the same time ensured that my own understanding was accurate, through asking participants to clarify the meaning of a particular contribution, and at times through summarising what was said.

It was anticipated that through conducting the focus group the potential wealth of ideas and the flow of information would be so significant that the researcher would find it difficult to both take notes and facilitate the discussion. Therefore an independent third party volunteered to take and write up the notes. She agreed to the confidentiality of the process, its findings and the participants.

One of the main reasons for using the focus group was that, because of the presence of several participants, this type of situation allows for a variety of points of view to emerge and for the group to respond to, and discuss these views. In the case of Yardley, the group was fairly dynamic and generated a number of ideas and issues that helped in explaining and exploring empowerment at Yardley District Council. It is also recognised that a further advantage maybe that the focus group helps to establish the credibility of the research and assists in overcoming any issues of bias that may have arisen through the interview process.

2.6   Data Analysis

The use of a variety of data collection methods including interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and participant observation has resulted in both quantitative and qualitative data. Day (1993) pointed out that due to the significant differences between these data methods, differing and quite distinct data analysis approaches will have to be adopted. He highlighted three differences between quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Based on meanings derived from numbers	Based on meanings expressed through words
Collection results in numerical and standardised data	Collection results in non-standardised data requiring classification into categories
Analysis conducted through the use of diagrams and statistics	Analysis conducted through the use of conceptualisation

While "numbers depend on meaning it is not always the case that meaning is dependent on numbers" (Day, 1993: p.28). He points out that "the more ambiguous and elastic our concepts, the less possible it is to quantify our data in a meaningful way" (p.28). Qualitative data is associated with such concepts and characterised by their richness and fullness, due to our opportunity it gives to explore a subject in as real a manner as is possible (Robson, 1993). A contrast

can thus be drawn between the thin abstraction or description which results from quantitative data collection and the thick or thorough abstraction or description associated with qualitative data (Day, 1993: Robson, 1993). To capture the richness and fullness associated with qualitative data, means that it cannot be collected in a standardised way, like that of qualitative data.

During analysis, however, the non-standardised and complex nature of the data which was collected needed to be classified into categories before it could be meaningfully analysed. In recognising the problematic nature of qualitative analysis, and having been unable to identify a standardised approach to the analysis of such data, it was decided, due to the amount of data collected, to resist categorising or coding the data and to work directly from the original material. This meant thoroughly reading and rereading transcripts or notes that had been taken from interviews and observations. For the researcher's purposes, taking into consideration the size of the study, this approach seemed to be the most appropriate. The interviews allowed the researcher to confirm some of the key themes and patterns which had been drawn from the questionnaire data.

The analysis of the quantitative data resulting from the questionnaires was developed by means of a computer based analytical software package. The software package used in this research is called PinPoint and is similar to a number of other software packages available. The package allowed the examination of relationships and trends and, where relevant, indicated the significance of certain findings.

Following a reminder e-mail, requesting completion of the questionnaires, a cut-off date for their return was set. After the deadline, all returns were compiled and studied. Those where respondents had omitted five or more questions were rejected. Following the input of the results the researcher considered trends, significance, relationships and certain types of relevance. The high number of non-committed answers (neither agree or disagree) caused the researcher to develop a weighted index. This is explained in detail in Chapter 3.

2.7   Validity and Reliability

The issues around validity and reliability were considered in detail in the first report.   In this study, a number of different ways were used to ensure that it was credible, dependable, confirmable, generalisable, rigorous and objective.   This was done in a number of different ways:

i.   Using triangulation to improve the accuracy of judgements and results by collecting data through different methods.   Through conducting interviews, questionnaires, observations and focus groups it was felt that the result would be more complete, and will result in a contextual portrait of the Council.

ii.   Confirming interview and observational recording with the relevant parties.

iii.   Checking and rechecking the data at each level of analysis and maintaining all data for re-analysis if necessary.   Confirming the overall case study with a number of key volunteers within the Council, each of whom have been employed for more than 20 years.

iv.   Carrying out interviews in order to be representative of the whole organisation.

v.   The observational study stretching over a two-year period.

In relation to generalisability it is accepted that on the whole, the findings of this study will not necessarily be applicable in other contexts, situations or times. However, certain findings, due to their local government nature, may be applicable to other local government organisations.   This issue of generalisability from a single case study has been discussed earlier in this chapter.

The conclusions drawn from the findings, and the interpretation of the results of the data analysis, are based on the actual data and, where possible, exclude my own subjective, or emotional values and therefore enhance objectivity.

Rigour is ensured through a good theoretical base and a sound methodology design. This has enabled me to collect the right kinds of information using the appropriate data collection methods, and ensuring a minimum amount of bias, which has resulted in effective analysis of data.

The selection of the data collection methods and the forms of analysis have been justified in relation to the type of research being undertaken and the overall research strategy.

2.8   Ethics

In carrying out the research a number of ethical concerns emerged or were likely to emerge in relation to gaining access to different departments and individuals, as well as in collecting, analysing and reporting the data. It was recognised from the outset that the researcher had a personal obligation to the organisation and the individuals within it, in relation to the appropriateness of his behaviour in carrying out the research and how it would impact on them. The researcher therefore remained sensitive to the impact of his work on those individuals that were approached, to those who provided access and co-operation and to those who were to be affected by the results and findings. From the outset of this research, it has been ensured that the researcher's conduct and behaviour continually gave consideration to the following aspects:

i.   The whole organisation and the individuals within the organisation were informed of the research and for those that were directly involved with the research, additional information was given in relation to aspects of the research and the level of likely intervention. In all cases consent was sought.

ii.   It was pointed out to all relevant individuals that participation was fully voluntary; that they would have an opportunity to review and amend the transcript, and that they could withdraw at any time.

iii.   Every effort was made to ensure that relevant information was not withheld and that participants were not misled.

iv.   The offer of additional information to any participant was given in order that they were comfortable with the completeness of their understanding of the nature of the research and the specific role that they would be playing.[3]

v.   Assurances were given subject to the requirement of legislation, including the Data Protection Act that information obtained about a participant during the research would be confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance.[4]

vi.   The nature of the research ensured that participants were protected and were not exposed to risks greater than or additional to those encountered in their normal working life.

2.9   Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has explored the rationale behind choosing the case study methodology as the basis for researching empowerment within Yardley District Council. It has argued that such a detailed approach is important for the study of a concept, such as empowerment, within an organisation which has rarely been studied and is unique in its nature, in order to enable the learning of something new and important. The chapter has also outlined how the data was collected and the issues that were encountered. Chapter 3 analyses the research findings and responses. Chapter 4 puts forward the "ideal type" resulting from the research. Chapter 5 tests the validity and credibility of the ideal type through the use of a focus group.

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[3] Three of the twelve interviewees requested additional information to enhance their understanding.

[4] Four of the twelve interviewees required complete confidentiality.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1   Introduction

The research strategy for this report has been outlined in the previous chapter. The results of the analysis are based on a questionnaire covering ninety-two points, split into sixteen sections, devised to gauge the level and extent of empowerment within Yardley District Council. Some deliberate overlaps between different sections were included to help check the reliability and validity of responses. In addition, interviews were carried out within the organisation to draw out the key issues raised in the questionnaire, the conclusions reached in the first report and to obtain insight into empowerment and its applicability within the organisation, from the individual's perspective. Participant observations within the organisation have taken place over a two-year period commencing June 1998, along with general observations within the public sector, particularly within the Inland Revenue, extending back to 1990.

The results of the research are largely discussed in this chapter, with some elements being discussed in the next chapter.

3.2   The Respondents

The response rate for the internally mailed survey, with only one follow-up reminder, was fairly high at 47.8% - ninety-eight individuals. This response is much higher than previous surveys carried out within the organisation in the past five years, therefore suggesting a particular interest by individuals in the area of empowerment.

The qualitative comments in relation to the questions within the questionnaires were largely received through interviews and, in three cases, through anonymous notes.

The survey respondents were drawn from across the whole organisation. The percentage of responses from within each department is highlighted in the table below.

Department	Questionnaires Sent	Responses (No.)	Responses (%)
Chief Executive's	36	18	50
Treasurer's	45	32	71
Community Services	82	31	38
Planning	42	17	40
Total	**205**	**98**	

The individual's position within the organisation was requested during the interviews. However, it was felt that such information would not be relevant when analysing the overall perspective of the individual through a questionnaire.

A number of key issues surfaced during the analysis. These issues and the key findings are highlighted below and include a mixture of data from various research instruments, and where relevant to the argument these research instruments will be disclosed.

3.3   Weighted Index

To establish whether responses to a particular issue were moving in a positive or negative direction, it was decided that responses would be given a score. That is, to give negative responses a "negative" score and positive ones a "positive" score and add them up. Thus, in the example below, if 29% of respondents agree or strongly agree that "I am kept informed with what is going on in the Department" and 50% disagree or strongly disagree then on balance there is a 21-point change in the negative direction (50 - 29 = 21).

Example	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am kept informed of what is going on in the department	3%	26%	21%	41%	9%
	positive total 29%		21%	negative total 50%	

This calculation does not make proper allowance for the strength of responses. In this example, while 50% were negative, almost one tenth of the respondents (9%) "strongly disagree." This is a much stronger negative response than if, say, all 50% had merely "disagreed." To take account of this the researcher has also weighted each response. So a Strongly disagree response has been given a "score of -2" and a Disagree response a "score of -1" and, conversely, positive responses have been rated as +1 and +2.

Example	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am kept informed of what is going on in the department	3%	26%	21%	41%	9%
Weighting	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
Weighted scores (% multiplied by weighting)	+6	+26	0	-41	-18
	positive total +32		0	negative total -59	

The weighted overall score for this item would thus be −27 (i.e. +32 -59 = -27). I have termed this score the "Weighted Index" (WI) in this report. Whilst this method is slightly arbitrary (who is to say that a "strongly disagree" response is worth twice a simply "disagree" response) it has the distinct advantage of emphasising the trends in the data and making them much more obvious and easier to understand. It also brings out real differences between a very strong trend and much weaker ones.

The possible range of scores in the WI is from -200 (i.e. 100% of respondents in the "strongly disagree" category) to +200 (i.e. 100% in the "strongly agree" category).

This WI gives us a much clearer view of the relative trends for each item and especially helps us to identify the relationship between different items and broad areas of empowerment within the organisation.

The WI has one major disadvantage and this is where there are strongly polarised views. Thus if 50% of respondents strongly disagreed and 50% strongly agreed with a statement we would get the same WI score (0) as if 100% of respondents were actually neutral on that issue. Where there are obvious polarisations of this

sort, they have been highlighted by showing the full percentage of responses in the body of the report.

Ranking

One of the advantages of calculating the WI is that it allows the individual items to be ranked against one another. In order to get a better idea of the relative responses to different items across the whole area of empowerment, all questions have been ranked from the survey and in certain cases the researcher has redefined the groupings to improve the value of information provided. All ninety-two items were ranked using the WI scores.

These rankings helped to show where individuals' responses to particular items fit into the broader pattern of responses across all ninety-two items.

3.4 Key Findings

3.4.1 Empowerment Leadership and the Role of the Manager

Considerable emphasis was placed on the role of the manager/leader. The questionnaire asked thirteen questions relating to the manager. The weighted scores ranged from -65 to +21 with an average of -20. The specific questions and scores are given in table 1.

	I feel that Managers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Scores
17	Help staff to get the job done	4	50	15	21	8	21
18	Initiate enquiry about common ways of thinking	2	32	31	25	8	-7
19	Challenge assumptions	4	30	42	16	6	-6
20	Encourage risk and experimentation	2	11	31	40	14	-54
21	Delegate authority and experimentation	4	35	21	25	13	-17
22	Inspire a shared vision by stating values, hopes and dreams	2	9	34	29	24	-65
23	Foster a learning environment	2	28	28	29	11	-34
24	Promote shared information/collaborative problem solving	2	24	32	27	13	-8
25	Model behaviour	2	25	38	22	11	10

26	Appreciate diversity of style and behaviour	2	27	26	28	15	-19
27	Focus on developing people	2	20	36	26	14	-28
28	Give positive feedback and help people to learn and develop	4	36	17	31	10	-30
29	Encourage self-expression and open discussion of conflict	0	23	28	36	10	-26

Average: -20.2

Overall Average: -2.4

Table (1)

In terms of a departmental analysis the responses from the Treasurer's Department were the most positive and those from the Chief Executive's Department the most negative. A particularly disturbing aspect of these results is that of the thirteen questions only two of the weighted scores are positive, and those scores are very low. Particularly poor responses were given for the statements "managers encourage risk and experimentation" and "managers inspire a shared vision by stating values, hopes and dreams." There was greater satisfaction with the role of managers in relation to empowerment within the Treasurer's Department, with nine of the thirteen responses having positive weighted scores. However, the most positive response was for the statement "managers help staff to get the job done" with only 29% disagreeing. The respondents expressed a lack of confidence in the ability of managers to focus on the development of individuals. They also suggested a lack of encouragement by managers for self-expression and open discussion of conflict.

The role of managers within Yardley District Council, and their potential role in enabling empowerment, was explored further during the interviews. The interviewees expressed a number of concerns relating to managers. These include:

- Many managers do not tolerate criticism of their leadership style or actions.

- Managers tend to be involved in the detail of all projects and work. As one interviewee expressed:

    "Little freedom is given to the team members to determine the detail of how we go about doing the jobs. I have extensive

experience and knowledge which can be used to add to the efficiency of the operation. However, my manager is unapproachable and this has been difficult, which means that on occasions my comments and suggestions are ignored."

- Encouragement to learn, develop and participate in training is limited, with one observation being:

    "Training is allocated by senior management to managers who tend not to spend training budgets, or due to a lack of communication, are unable to identify the most appropriate training needs for the particular individual."

One interviewee made the following point:

"On making a number of requests to my manager for training I was informed that the training budget was limited, that my request would eliminate in excess of 50% of the section's overall training budget; considering there were another six people in the unit it would be unfair for that level of training budget to be allocated to one individual. However, the surprising thing was that at the end of the year only 30% of the training budget had been spent. Since then I have made no attempts to seek funding for my training needs and neither has my manager made any attempts to identify and assist me in pursuing my training needs. I think it is difficult for my manager, particularly as she needs to be as fair as possible in the distribution of the training budget. In doing so her cautionary approach has led to an unspent budget and no training being provided leading, in my particular case, to some demotivation."

- Managers wanted to be consulted on most decisions team members made in their work. As one individual expressed:

    "My manager tends to do a lot of overseeing and cross checking of my work, which I feel restricts my learning, growth and

development and removed the team emphasis that he argues he is trying to build".

Some interviewees were asked why they felt the questionnaire statements "managers inspire a shared vision, by stating values, hopes and dreams" and "managers encourage risk and experimentation" scored so poorly. In response it was felt that many managers had the ability to do this, but due to a number of reasons did not do it:

"Too much pressure, most managers are unable to achieve their targets and therefore have little time".

"The culture of Yardley is one of directing rather than enabling and one where risk taking is seen as a job threatening strategy".

"Managers are unable to inspire a shared vision as they are unaware of the values, hopes and dreams of the organisation".

"Many actions result in financial resource implications, there is a fear in risking public money".

An observation of the role of the Management Team was given by one interviewee:

"I have little awareness of what Management Team does or discusses when they meet, which to me is a concern in itself." [The interviewee felt that all individuals within the organisation should know what Management Team discusses during its meeting]. "However, I have an idea that they talk about operational issues within each chief officer's department. If this is the case then Management Team need to rethink their role, and focus on strategy areas, thereby leading the organisation forward. Discussing operational issues will not allow this to happen."

In considering what changes needed to take place in moving towards empowerment and in relation to the issues surrounding managers, four interviewees strongly expressed the need to reduce layers of management (but without resulting in job losses), with two interviewees considering this reduction in layers of management should be at the middle manager level. One interviewee expressed this by stating that:

> *"Most team members working under a middle manager knew what their duties, tasks and roles were and felt that the role of the middle manager had solely become one of checking, monitoring, controlling, prioritising and delegating, with the feeling being that all of these duties could be undertaken by the individuals, following some training, and therefore eliminating the need for middle managers."*

In testing this theory with two other interviewees, they expressed concern about taking on these additional, time consuming, roles that managers have been responsible for. The general impression from interviewees was that a manager's role needs to change from one of controller to enabler, and away from directing to facilitating.

When questioning the content of a potential empowerment programme, supervisory and middle management job losses were not considered a viable option. However, a number of interviewees expressed the need for middle managers to undertake additional training in order to enable them to change their approach. In total, eleven of the twelve interviewees felt that within an empowered environment the role of the manager was highly relevant, with one interviewee expressing medium relevance.

In addition, all interviewees felt that strong leadership was either essential or very essential in implementing and developing empowerment within Yardley District Council. The interviewees clearly saw the responsibility of top management as being to make the conditions right to empower staff, and ultimately the organisation:

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"Empowerment may be a good thing for the individuals within the organisation and the organisation as a whole. However, for me a particular benefit is likely to be better communication and a strong connection of the individuals at the bottom of the organisation to those at the top. However, this can only be achieved through initiatives being taken by managers."

The general impression, particularly from the interviews, was that managers were essential within an empowered environment. However, their role and emphasis had to change to allow individuals greater autonomy.

3.4.2   Communication and Information Sharing

In relation to the questionnaire, seven key questions on communication were asked, These, along with their responses are outlined below.

	I feel in relation to Communication that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Scores
54	I know why things are being done	0	29	23	39	7	-24
55	I get "inside" information	0	17	26	45	10	-49
84	I am kept informed about what is going on in the Department	3	25	20	40	9	-28
85	Communication is clear and prompt between groups	2	8	33	46	8	-51
86	I understand why things are asked of me	3	52	25	16	2	38

Average: -22.8

Overall Average: -2.4

Table (2)

In general the results of the questionnaires revealed very poor communication and general information sharing within the organisation. The average weighted score was −22.8. The Treasurer's was the only department to achieve a positive score. A particular criticism in relation to communication was that it was not clear and prompt, particularly between groups. Another was that individual's felt that they were not being kept informed of what was going on within their own departments. In total, eight of the twelve interviewees regarded communication as particularly important in pursuing empowerment.

It is interesting to note that no entries were made by respondents as strongly agreeing with the statements:

"I know why things are being done".

"I get "inside" information".

"People are committed to collaboration".

"People communicate all relevant information."

On the contrary the responses were strongly negative. These negative responses clearly show that individuals within the organisation feel that there is little information sharing, and communication in overall terms is very poor. Some interviewees were asked why they felt the questionnaires showed such poor responses for these questions. The reasons given included:

"Nobody cares what I do, I am just told what to do".

"Actions are agreed by the Council and senior officers are expected to implement these actions. However, rarely do individuals below middle managers know why they are performing certain tasks. I personally would have much greater drive and motivation if someone were to give me an impression of what the bigger picture was. I also feel that I may in some way be able to add to that bigger picture".

"Let alone not being communicated with, lack of information makes me feel unvalued".

"I am convinced that even though my manager knows that I would be able to perform much more effectively if I had all of the information that he possessed in relation to a particular task, he does not pass all this information on to me. Over the last couple of years I have come to the conclusion that this is a way of showing my colleagues and I that he is the boss and we are his

subordinates and that this is clearly the way that he prefers it. His approach of drip feeding additional information as I reach points where I am unable to progress the solution to a problem further is both disappointing for me and financially expensive for the organisation".

In Yardley's case, in communication there seems to be a hierarchy of needs. People want most of all to know what concerns them personally and only after that need is filled do they have energy and interest to listen to things about "us", "our group", and "our achievements." And only when "me" and "us" are taken care of can Yardley expect the attention of the individual to "them" information. One interviewee expressed the concern that:

"At times the stress and anxiety I feel about my job security, particularly under the Best Value regime, causes me to place little attention to my daily job and the responsibilities associated with it. No reassurance is provided by the organisation to me and other people like myself who feel a sense of job insecurity."

A further comment, from another individual was:

"Communication at Yardley is on the lines of I tell you, you tell them, they are informed; with very little consultation or debate in relation to decision making within the organisation, particularly when the decision making affects individuals."

In terms of the importance of communication in relation to the development and implementation of empowerment, all interviewees stated that communication was highly important. Without communication individuals cannot be part of the consultative approach to decision making and will be uncomfortable working to the principles of empowerment within such a climate. It was felt that the degree to which an organisation communicates effectively with and involves its employees, is a key-determining factor of the extent to which it will be able to become a culturally empowering organisation. One individual stated that:

"There is no doubt that we can all improve the impact we make when we communicate and, therefore the effectiveness of our working relationships which should ensure we are able adequately to take on additional responsibility and feel accountable for our decisions, and consequently feel more empowered."

All twelve interviewees regarded communication to be essential in ensuring the effective development and implementation of empowerment from an individual's perspective. In general, Yardley tends to communicate through the use of memoranda and to an increasing extent the use of its internal e-mail system. Its hierarchical systems and clear roles and responsibilities at times prevents the development of networks as one individual commented:

"You would think in a decreasing organisation (in terms of staff) the bold lines separating the management from staff would have been erased. However, I have seen no evidence of this happening although greater reliance by management on staff should ensure that this happens more often in the future."

In general, the research shows that certain individuals feel that they have insufficient information to fulfil the requirements of their jobs let alone exceeding their defined job boundaries. Empowerment requires the need to take risks. Individuals will be unwilling to take such risks without feeling comfortable that they are in possession of all the information and facts needed to make decisions. With regard to managers, there is a clear relationship between access to information and the extent of an individual's power base. Communication and the sharing of information is one of the fundamental requirements for empowerment. In its present state, Yardley District Council does not manage both these aspects adequately enough to enable a positive contribution to be made towards empowerment.

3.4.3   Teamworking within the Organisation

Yardley District Council, although having a strong hierarchical structure, has a number of teams within various divisions in all departments. In overall terms the

analysis of the questionnaires would suggest that the statements relating to teamwork provided the most positive results, with an average weighted score of 30.8. This average is considerably lower than the potential score of 200; however, with the overall average score for all indicators being -2.4 this score is positive.

The table below sets out the key statements and responses. The areas around people helping each other out, people solving difficult problems together and people caring for each other, all score relatively high compared to issues such as whether people have a voice in decisions, problems are shared, or resources are made available to enable the jobs to get done, all of which score negatively. In terms of departmental analysis, the Treasurer's Department had the most positive responses, followed by Planning, Chief Executive's and finally Community Services. The Treasurer's Department had particularly positive responses to statements around people helping each other out and people working together to solve difficult problems.

	I feel in relation to Teamwork that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
51	There is respect for staff as people	2	43	14	31	8	0
52	There is flexibility to meet personal needs	6	52	16	20	4	37
53	There is encouragement of learning, development and new skills	4	30	37	19	8	3
77	People help each other out	8	63	18	7	2	69
78	People work together to solve difficult problems	7	60	19	12	0	63
79	People care for each other	8	45	31	13	0	49
80	People here are out for the group, not for themselves	5	16	48	27	2	-5

Average: 30.8
Overall Average: -2.4

Table (3)

The strong positive results clearly suggest that in relation to teamwork individuals feel that it works for them and they are able to get something out of the set up as it stands at the moment. However, the strongly agree responses are still somewhat low. The results of the questionnaires suggest that teamwork is strong and is welcomed. However, elements within teamwork can be improved.

In total four of the twelve interviewees placed priority on teamwork training as a requirement for moving towards empowerment. One interviewee commented that:

> *"We all work in a team and we support one another. However, we have never had training that would allow us to further develop the relationships and make best use of working within these relationships in order to improve our output."*

In terms of the relevance of teams for enabling and implementing empowerment, seven interviewees believed that teams were highly relevant compared to one who felt their relevance was very low. One interviewee commented:

> *"It is all very well working within a team environment. However, I feel many teams are restricted as they are unable to make the "how to, what to and when to" decisions. In addition many dare not take risks in fear of potential problems and disasters leading to individuals being disciplined."*

The relevance of teams, for the implementation of empowerment, was supported by nine of the twelve interviewees who felt that it was essential or very essential. One interviewee commented:

> *"During my extensive work experience I have worked both on my own and within a team environment and have found that I am far more motivated and target focused when working within a team environment due to the relationships, the reliance of others on me and of me on them and that the joys of achievement are shared by all and during periods of failure people work together to support and move forward positively."*

Another interviewee commented:

> *"Team work is great and in my opinion essential for empowerment. However, with team work there needs to be clear decision making powers and absolute commitment from*

Management Team and Members for the development of team work as a means of pursuing empowerment."

Other comments received in relation to teamwork include:

"It provided me with an opportunity to have my abilities appreciated by others".

"I was able to achieve things that I would normally have been unable to achieve working on my own".

"I have always found team work enjoyable and rewarding. However, the true spirit of working within a team and the support it requires does not seem to exist within Yardley at the present time".

"Within a team I felt I was adding so much more to the organisation and achieving greatly for both myself and the organisation; having the support of the other team members, the guidance of my manager as well as his support in fighting for additional resources along with, most importantly, a clear sense of purpose in terms of what I was achieving and the impact that achievement would have on the organisation as a whole, which was difficult to see when working under direction by myself".

One interviewee raised the issue of teamwork and conflict, commenting:

"I have noticed that in relation to team working, conflict can arise. On a number of occasions, before the team has actually settled into a particular project or period, to the extent that it interferes with performance. The usual outcome is that the manager will get involved and decide the outcome of any conflict and then put forward a number of instructions that she requires us to follow. This resolves the problem to only a limited extent in that it may assist in getting those involved in the conflict to work with each other. However, no attempt is usually made to

address the underlying problems. Furthermore, conflict being resolved by the manager, although accepted by the team members, may not necessarily be agreeable to the team members. It therefore may be a better approach for this Council to push towards conflict within teams to be dealt with through a process of facilitation where all team members are able to express themselves, as conflict needs to be resolved and we need to learn from it to deal with it in the future."

The research clearly shows that there is a strong interest and desire in team working environments. It is also quite clear that a number of teams exist within the organisation where individuals feel that within that team environment they are able to be more productive, motivated and skilled in performing their jobs. The interviews would suggest that self-directing teams, where the group are responsible for a whole operation or a well-defined part of a process, would seem to be their most favoured approach. However, in general, the interviewees argued that in order to move to a complete self directing team environment there was a clear need for the organisation to undertake a number of initiatives to bring that environment about.

3.4.4 Clarity of Purpose

In relation to the clarity of purpose of both the individual and, from the individual's perspective, of the organisation the results, although not strongly positive, were positive with an average weighted score of 27.6 being achieved for the organisation as a whole. Again, the Treasurer's Department achieved a much higher average. The most positive results related to the statements "I know what is expected of me" and "I know what the department stands for." This can largely be explained by the bureaucratic nature of the organisation, having clearly defined job descriptions and job specifications, thereby enabling individuals to work to these well-defined requirements.

	I feel in relation to Clarity of Purpose that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
58	I know where I stand	0	48	18	25	7	9
59	I know what is expected of me	6	64	15	11	2	62

60	Tasks and responsibilities are clearly organised	2	43	16	30	7	3
61	Systems and procedures are adequate	0	33	39	22	4	3
62	I know what the Department stands for	2	69	15	11	1	61

Average: 27.6

Overall Average: -2.4

Table (4)

The statements "systems and procedures are adequate" and "tasks and responsibilities are clearly organised" are less positive. The reason for this may be that individuals are clearly aware of what is required of them and their relevance to that aspect of the organisation but feel that systems, procedures, tasks and responsibilities need to be more well organised and improved.

Comments from interviewees included:

> "I know what I am doing. I think I know what my manager is doing. I am sure my manager knows what he is doing but at times I feel senior managers are not clear in terms of what they are trying to do in relation to the organisation, and therefore creating confusion for people at my level."

> "Chief officers do not seem to understand or be quite clear as to what they are aiming for and the direction that they are taking."

> "Yardley, like most other organisations, is dictated by politics which has resulted in little stability for the organisation as a whole and certainly not beyond five years. Where the same party is re-elected the manifesto changes quite considerably and, therefore, further reducing stability."

In total four of the twelve interviewees knew what the Council's mission, aims and objectives were, with the remaining interviewees being aware of their existence. Only three interviewees placed focus on them in their day-to-day work and only one interviewee believed that the organisation strategically placed emphasis on them. The Council's current mission, aims and objectives were first formulated for the April 2000 Best Value Performance Plan. The first draft

originated from a Management Team brainstorming session and was then referred to the Corporate Best Value Working Group, who consulted with both internal and external stakeholders. Having taken on board the wide and diverse opinions and viewpoints of all stakeholders the mission, aims and objectives were re-defined and formally adopted by the Council. However, certain interviewees commented:

> *"The first time that I was aware of the Council's mission, aims and objectives was when my manager informed me that our service had to be linked in with one or more of the aims and objectives. I cannot remember being consulted."*

> *"I had the opportunity to comment. However, I felt at the time, due to a number of other things going on in the Council, that these aims and objectives were more imposing than being discussed and negotiated."*

> *"The consultation process was very vague."*

> *"No training was given for the background, emphasis and adoption of the eventual aims and objectives."*

> *"I am quite convinced the recent mission, aims and objectives originated as a requirement of Best Value rather than the organisation seeing it as a means of positively moving forward."*

In responding to whether an individual's division or unit was in control of its own future, five interviewees agreed. In these cases, this was largely due to their manager's having sufficient power and authority, as well as internal influence, to shape the division in order to improve service delivery and was, therefore, able to influence the division's destiny. Most interviewees felt that their division had a clear sense of direction, clear goals and strategies to achieve their divisional objectives. In questioning whether the department had a clear sense of direction seven of the twelve employees felt that it had. General comments included:

> *"Employees within Yardley are always willing to change and historically have always done so but a period of stability is rarely*

given between each initiative, resulting in new legislation, policies and procedures being rushed through with little breathing space and at times this leads to some individuals not knowing what they are doing or where their section is going."

"Most sections around the organisation tend to function very well and have a clear direction, a means of achieving that direction and clearly knowing when that direction has been achieved. However, the lack of organisational direction, some of which is down to political pressures, makes it difficult for sections to achieve optimum results as many feel they are working in a restricted environment and are, in general, taking two steps forward and two steps back."

In moving towards empowerment, eight interviewees felt that the clarity of vision for the organisation was paramount. Similar conclusions were reached in relation to the content of an empowerment programme, where issues such as mission, vision, aims, objectives and values were all given high priority. All interviewees identified organisational vision, mission, aims and objective issues as essential or very essential to ensuring the effective development and implementation of empowerment from an individual's perspective.

The issues and findings around the area of motivation within the organisation are to be addressed in the next chapter. However, a surprising finding, relevant to this section, is that individuals within the organisation are especially motivated by issues such as having a sense of achievement. That is, an individual feels that his personal contributions have resulted in identifiable results that have contributed towards his section, department or the organisation becoming more efficient or effective. Some interviewees identified job security, financial reward and job advancement as their primary motivators. However, the majority of the interviewees felt their motivators went beyond the limits of these to:

- Having a sense of achievement

- Respect for employees as people.

- Flexibility to meet personal needs.

- Encouragement of learning, development and new skills.

- Knowing why things are done.

- Getting better information.

- Individuals having control over how they do their work.

- Involvement in decision making that affects them.

The underlying problem in relation to a common purpose for the organisation would seem to be a lack of communication. It may be that the organisation feels that it is communicating effectively and that it receives adequate feedback. However, from the individual's perspective the means of communication are questionable as are the timing, period, and involvement and subject areas. There is a clear need for the Council to develop a mission, vision, aims and objectives that all individuals within the organisation can "live" to. It has, therefore, to be something that individuals on a daily basis can very closely relate to and the principles of which they are able to practice.

3.4.5   Structure

Eight questions were asked about the relevance and impact of the current structure of the organisation and how individuals feel, react and respond. The results of the questions are set out in the table below:

	I feel in relation to Structure that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
43	Rewards are consistent with organisational values	0	10	29	42	17	-68
44	Commonly accepted values are well articulated and widely understood	0	18	39	30	11	-58
45	Individual high performance (physical, emotional and spiritual) is developed and maintained	0	8	28	48	14	-69

46	We provide lateral/vertical expansion of skills and contributions and are committed to mastery of multiple skills	0	14	25	45	13	-50
47	We are committed to high quality and customer service	10	55	15	16	2	56
48	Information about vision, strategy and direction is shared, and staff input is elicited and listened to	0	18	32	36	11	-34
49	People here feel good about working together	5	32	38	20	3	16
50	People are allowed to practise self-care to avoid burn-out and are supported to find resources to develop work	0	19	27	36	16	-41
Average: -31							
Overall Average: -2.4							

Table (5)

The average weighted score was -31 with the highest result being achieved by Planning, (-19.5), and the lowest being achieved by Chief Executive's (-40.9). The questionnaire results were somewhat disturbing in that apart from statement 47 ("we are committed to high quality and customer service") and statement 49 ("people here feel good about working together") all other statements produced largely negative responses, with the Chief Executive's Department having negative scores extending to -89. The most negative responses came to the statements "rewards are consistent with the organisational values" and "individual high performance (physical, emotional and spiritual) is developed and maintained." This may largely be due to the fact that the meaning of "rewards" as outlined by the interviewees is much more than money alone, often being psychological rather than physical. Based on this, an individual may be feeling that the requirements of organisational values are disproportionate to rewards.

In moving towards empowerment, five of the twelve interviewees felt that the organisational structure was an important factor to consider, and six interviewees felt that an adjustment or change in structure was an important factor to be included within the empowerment programme. In considering how essential the organisational structure and its appropriate change was, in ensuring the effective development and implementation of empowerment from an individual's perspective, half the interviewees considered it an essential or very essential characteristic. The results of the interviews can be explained by the operation of formal and informal teams within the organisation. These operate much closer to

the needs of the individual, and therefore reduces the attention put on the organisation as a whole, as is outlined by the first interview comment below:

> "The structure of the organisation and my department are of little importance to me, in that my focus and existence is based around my team. Impact and influence of structures beyond my team are only relevant to me during periods that I am trying to gain co-operation and assistance, which at times is difficult to achieve due, somewhat, to the structure of that particular section or department and their reporting lines."

> "I do not feel that a certain structure needs to exist for empowerment. The structure can be very hierarchical but as long as individuals within that structure have sufficient freedom and scope to make decisions and take actions the structure is not important."

> "If we all had the same type of section based operations around the organisation, with less middle managers, therefore allowing team members to gain access to senior managers, allowing for decisions to be taken more quickly, then the organisation as a whole would be more productive."

Almost all those interviewed felt that some form of structure was essential for empowerment within an organisation to exist, as without structure there would be anarchy. Structure defines tasks and responsibilities and divides them between work roles. This clarifies relationships and provides agreed channels of communication. The structures exist independently of the person doing the work. Such clarity about roles leads to proper accountability and is therefore considered vital to empowerment. However, structures are not an end in themselves; their importance rests on the way in which they enable the organisation to achieve its aims and objectives. The interviewees may also have a strong argument that, in relation to empowerment as a whole, a particular structure is not relevant, which suggests that structures must be flexible so they can evolve to meet new circumstances.

3.4.6 Organisational Environment

This section considers the overall organisational environment, with particular emphasis on morale, motivation, culture, recognition, fairness and the protection of the individual's dignity. Thirteen statements were identified within the questionnaire relating to the first three issues - morale, motivation and culture. These achieved an average weighted score of 7.8 for the organisation as a whole, ranging from 37 for the Treasurer's Department to -24 for the Chief Executive's Department. Both the Treasurer's and Planning Departments achieved the most positive responses for the statements "if I have a problem the office would stand by me while I worked it out" and "I like working here". These statements were still the most positive for the organisation as a whole but were far less positive than if the results were taken from the Planning and Treasurer's Departments alone, being driven down by very poor and negative responses by the Community Services Department.

	I feel in relation to Morale that/ I feel in relation to a Healthy Environment that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
63	People are trusted	1	48	24	21	4	21
64	Policies are flexible enough to consider personal needs	1	30	34	29	3	-3
65	I feel respected as a person	3	49	24	14	7	28
66	Individual differences in lifestyle and values are respected	3	36	35	18	6	13
67	I like working here	14	49	21	11	2	64
68	There is a positive spirit	3	38	30	23	4	18
69	If I had a problem the office would stand by me while I worked it out	16	43	27	6	5	61
87	I am able to manage the pressure of my work	1	31	38	22	5	1
88	I am not expected to do too many things	2	24	28	27	16	-32
89	Change is managed well	3	25	37	25	7	-8
90	Red tape and procedures do not interfere with getting things done	6	16	22	35	18	-44
91	I am able to grow and learn	10	30	30	20	7	17
92	There are opportunities for career development	4	19	27	34	14	-35
Average: 7.8							
Overall Average: -2.4							

Table (6)

In the main the negative responses were largely attributable to issues relating to a healthy environment, as opposed to the motivation and morale aspects. The main criticism expressed by individuals were in relation to the statements "Red tape and procedures do not interfere with getting things done" and "There are opportunities for career development" as well as "I am not expected to do too many things", all of which received very negative responses. This may largely be due to the fact that individuals feel that an insufficient number of staff are deployed to carry out all the tasks required by the organisation, thereby causing an increased level of pressure for current staff. Much of this pressure is amplified by the Council's current Financial Regulations, Standing Orders, rules and procedures which increase the workload. There is also a feeling within the organisation that there are too many supervisor/management posts in proportion to the number of people in the organisation as a whole.

The statement "I feel individual differences in lifestyle and values are respected" received largely positive or neutral responses. However, in relation to the Community Services Department, this statement received largely negative responses, suggesting a fundamental problem that is less relevant to the organisation as a whole but of great significance to the Community Services Department.

Most interviewees felt that the relevance of morale, culture and the overall environment within which they work was important in order for empowerment to be achieved. Eight of the twelve interviewees considered the development of the appropriate culture as essential or very essential to ensuring the effective development and implementation of empowerment.

It was interesting to note that as well as the differences in interpretation and understanding of empowerment from each interviewee's perspective, there was also considerable difference in the interpretation and meaning of culture. However, in all cases an appropriate environment within which empowerment can exist and flourish was regarded to be important. The key interviewee comments on this area are:

> "As a senior manager, I am of the belief that the workforce has a pivotal influence on the health of the organisation and that

creativity and enterprise stem from motivated people with high levels of drive, partly resulting from a healthy environment and a culture within which they feel comfortable."

"To me empowerment is about people and the importance of people. Therefore, as may have been the case historically, in recognising people they cannot be treated as numbers but rather as productive forces in ensuring and enhancing the efficiency of the organisation as a whole."

"I would like to see senior management trust the individuals at the lower levels and to deal with them as equals rather than placing emphasis on rank."

The interviews also revealed that the organisation had a strong blame culture:

"Whenever a mistake is made in my department a culprit is always sought, followed by appropriate discipline and then, finally, after a number of days, or possibly weeks, action taken to resolve the problem or find a solution."

"If empowerment means people take on more and this assists the organisation in being more productive, then the Council need to understand people will get things wrong, which at times may be costly to the Council. A person needs to be happy about this, knowing that they will not be blamed or punished. The current Yardley culture does not allow for this to happen."

A general impression from the interviews and observations is that Yardley has to some extent, become stuck and solidified in outdated values, thinking, practices and behaviour. The type of individual within the organisation has significantly changed in terms of his role, relevance, impact and self perception. These individuals are now requiring the organisation to treat them in a certain way and for the organisation to develop a culture within which they are able to function most effectively. It is therefore essential that the culture, motivation and morale within the organisation allow empowerment to develop and flourish effectively.

Recognition, fairness and the protection of the individual's dignity are issues that are all very important to an individual. Recognition is important in order for an individual to feel that s/he has acted positively and appropriately, and that his actions have been received in this way by the organisation. In order for empowerment to have success throughout the whole organisation, every individual needs to be treated in the same way. Without fairness there will be a breakdown in any empowerment initiative or resulting processes, systems and thinking. It is relatively easy for organisations to undercut the dignity of their employees unintentionally. This could be through demeaning their roles, ignoring their needs or any form of enhancing one's self at the expense of another. Such actions need to be avoided. The statements within this section gauged, to some extent, the existence and relevance of such issues. The summary results are set out below:

	I feel in relation to Fairness that/ I feel in relation to Recognition that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
70	I approve of things that go on here	3	32	26	30	6	-4
71	People are treated fairly	3	46	15	25	8	11
72	I trust what the Department tells me	3	38	28	23	5	11
73	Individual effort is rewarded appropriately	0	10	25	41	21	-75
74	If people do something well it is noticed	2	28	27	26	14	-22
75	The Department looks at what you can do, not who you know	6	38	30	16	8	13
76	The Department expects the best from people	14	68	13	3	0	95
Average: 4.1							
Overall Average: -2.4							

Table (7)

The analysis of the questionnaires showed that these particular statements averaged a weighted score of 4.1, with departmental scores ranging from 42.9 (Treasurer's Department) to -18.9 (Community Services Department). The most positive response was for the statement that "I feel the department expects the best from people", achieving an overall weighted score of 95 and departmental ranges being 107 to 83. However, the concerning factor was that the statement "I feel individual effort is rewarded appropriately" had very negative responses. There were also negative responses for the following statements:

"I approve of things that go on here" (-4).

"If people do something well it is noticed" (-22).

These negative responses would suggest that individuals feel that they are not recognised for their effort and input by the Council as a whole. This is reflected in their feeling inappropriately rewarded (by whatever the means that motivate them) and in feeling their efforts are not being noticed. In exploring these negative responses within interviews, the following comments were made:

> *"We are more likely to get feedback when we do things wrong than right."*

> *"Managers need to understand that words alone are not enough. The way these words are expressed, body language and subsequent actions are the things that count the most."*

> *"The most agitating factor is that a number of Councillors have made negative comments about staff in general. In a period of short staffing and being overworked, such comments only demoralise people more."*

In relation to fairness, the feeling that people were treated fairly and that they trusted what the department told them achieved positive responses for both the Treasurer's and the Planning Departments. However, both Community Services Department and the Chief Executive's Department achieved largely negative responses for these two areas. In the Chief Executive's Department, the main concern was around trusting what the department told individuals, and in relation to the Community Services Department the main concern was about being treated fairly. The feeling of being treated unfairly within the Community Services Department may be attributable, to some extent, to their recent re-organisation and relocation from another town to one central site.

Eight interviewees felt that fairness in all contexts was essential in order for empowerment to be implemented and further developed. However, the remaining interviewees generally felt that fairness was not always possible, and two interviewees commented:

"I believe to be fair in the long term, it may be that one needs to be unfair in the short term to certain individuals."

"Regardless of what is done within an organisation, and regardless of how positive this may be, there will always be some who feel that they have been treated unfairly. The true test of this unfairness is whether that individual understands the whole picture. The only way this can be done is for every feeling of unfairness to be investigated in order to provide comfort for that individual."

In total, nine of the twelve interviewees felt that recognition was highly relevant to empowerment. However, a number of interviewees pointed out that this recognition was not necessarily monetary. In many cases, as mentioned above, words relayed by managers and supervisors were sufficient.

All interviewees felt that, in general, giving fair and equal treatment to all individuals and valuing diversity and differences within the organisation was important. One individual commented:

"Given the pace and level of change having taken place over the last 20 years and currently taking place within local government organisations the achievement of fairness and the protection of individual dignity would at times have been difficult. However, I believe that, overall, local governments' position on this has been a remarkable achievement."

The issue of fairness was also seen in terms of what the Council was currently being expected to do:

"As managers, we are now required to be more entrepreneurial in our approach, which has required many of us to cut corners. Over time, this process of cutting corners has become more acceptable, and more recently has become apart of the norm, especially under the Best Value regime. It will not be long before

*one or more organisations face very serious consequences as a
result of carrying out such action."*

It was interesting to note that recognition was not based primarily around
additional financial rewards. One individual suggested performance related pay.
However, in the main, most of the individuals interviewed were against such a
system:

> *"The performance related pay system is unfair, time consuming
> and inflexible and in my previous organisation it left no room for
> encouragement of good staff."*

In total, nine interviewees felt that protecting the dignity of all individuals was
essential to ensuring the effective development and implementation of
empowerment.

3.4.7 Autonomy and Commitment

Autonomy, in this context, refers to the degree to which individuals have control
over their own work. This relates to the involvement of the individual in the overall
organisational decision making and, in particular, those decisions which affect
them directly. The degree to which people felt autonomous was tested through
the sets of questions which refer to validation and participation. Autonomy makes
an important contribution to the creation of commitment. If individuals are not
involved and do not participate, for example, if they are not asked to contribute, or
if their contributions are ignored, then they are unlikely to have any sense of
commitment. To be committed, individuals need to feel that their views are
valued, and that they themselves can have an affect on the course of events.
Autonomy does not just happen. Management needs to actively create a climate
in which the individual wants to feel involved and wants to take on more.

	I feel Staff/ I feel in relation to Validation that/ I feel in relation to Participation that	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
30	Take responsibility for their actions	0	50	30	17	1	31
31	Speak out about problems and ways to work better	0	51	22	22	3	23

32	Seek to solve problems, not to place blame	0	43	29	17	9	8
33	See networks of "customer" relationships, internal/ external	1	35	47	11	4	18
34	Are willing to engage in enquiry about assumptions	0	36	52	10	0	26
56	Staff have control over how they do their work	1	36	38	20	3	12
57	Staff have involvement in decision making that affects them	1	20	37	32	8	-27
81	People have a voice in decisions	0	20	30	42	5	-33
82	Problems are shared	1	30	43	14	9	0
83	People get the resources they need to do their job	0	15	27	40	15	-57

Average: 0.1

Overall Average: -2.4

Table (8)

Within this section of statements there is a clear separation between those that are very positive and those that are very negative. The responses indicated that individuals felt they took responsibility for their own actions and that they were able to speak out about any problems they were facing. This clearly suggest that although individuals feel they are not recognised for their efforts they are still willing to take action. However, in relation to the statement "I feel staff speak out about problems and ways to work better" the Treasurer's Department achieved more strongly positive responses than other departments, with the Chief Executive's Department receiving comparatively negative responses to this statement. This would suggest that there is the fundamental problem within the Chief Executive's Department about staff having the ability and confidence to communicate their problems to managers and that this problem does not exist within the other departments.

In relation to the statements "I feel staff have control over how they do their work" and "I feel that staff have involvement in decision making that affects them", the score for the latter statement was significantly more negative, with the average weighted index being -27 and the departmental index ranging from -4 to -61. The former statement produced results significantly better than that of the latter statement, with a weighted score of 12, with departmental scores ranging from 28 (Chief Executive's Department) to -6 (Planning Department). In relation to the Chief Executive's Department there is a clear feeling that individual's have

control over how they do their work on a day-to-day basis but have little or no control or involvement in the decision making that affects them.

Strongly negative responses were received for the statements "people have a voice in decisions" and "people get the resources they need to do their jobs". This would suggest that people do not feel that their opinions and viewpoints are seen as relevant by the organisation in making both high and low level decisions. This is further supported by the results of the interviews. Yardley District Council is restricted in terms of its spending by its approved budget. Excessive spending above and beyond that provided by Central Government has to be funded through local taxation. In order to minimise the burden on the local taxpayer, the District Council has maintained inflation limited increases. As such it does not have readily available spare resources that can be utilised within the organisation and contribute towards people doing their jobs more effectively. However, individuals within the organisation generally find it difficult to accept this argument, on the basis that insufficient resource allocation affects overall productivity and the quality of service provided to the local taxpayer.

Eleven of the twelve interviewees stated that, in general, they were able to make decisions that they felt were necessary to do their jobs well. This would suggest that, within the defined job description parameters, individuals had discretion and freedom to carry out their job, although it can be argued that this would have been a prerequisite in any event. In questioning whether interviewees could make changes to improve the way they do their work, ten of the twelve interviewees felt they could, with the remaining two feeling either they were not allowed to, for hierarchical reasons, or that they were not trusted to, for competence reasons. Two interviewees' comments:

> *"In my section there are clear lines of responsibility. I know what my job is. My manager is fully aware of what his job is. My manager believes that any changes to my job are determined by him. Therefore I make no attempts to create improvements. On occasions when I have, my suggestions have been received negatively."*

> *"In order for me to be able to influence and improve the way in which I do my job, I would need to be more confident in my oral and written communication, along with my listening skills. I feel these are key competences for me to be able to perform my job to the highest possible level. However, such training has never been provided to me. I have developed my skills through my own initiative unaware as to whether they are right or wrong in terms of approach."*

More than half of the interviewees stated that they were not encouraged to find better ways of doing things. Most blamed the high level of activity and stress within departments, with some blaming the lack of time to allow creative thinking within the organisation.

> *"I spend most of my time chasing my own tail and fire fighting. I have clearly become a reactive rather than a proactive thinker."*

> *"Finding better ways of doing things would take time, particularly thinking time. Few, if any, within the organisation have this time."*

In terms of being involved in decision making that affected their own work, eight interviewees felt that they largely or to some extent had some involvement. The disturbing factor is that 25% of the interviewees felt that they were not involved in decision-making that affected their work. In any organisation, the individual carrying out the work is the one who is most likely to be aware of the relevant components of that job. This clearly implies that any changes to that job would require, at the minimum, limited involvement of the individual. In questioning whether the interviewees took part in setting their own objectives, 75% replied that they did, either through the recently introduced performance appraisal scheme or other ad hoc means agreed between themselves and their manager.

> *"The performance appraisal scheme has not yet reached my level, however for a number of years my manager and I have agreed monthly targets, which time allowing, are then reviewed on an annual basis."*

Most interviewees (75%) did not worry about the possibility of their jobs changing or disappearing. The extensive and radical changes within local government do not seem to affect, for those within it, the perception of security within the sector, although those most confident of no change to their jobs or their jobs not disappearing were over 40 years of age. It may be that with younger interviewees the results may have been significantly different, particularly with the introduction of Best Value and the application of its "compete aspects."

The interviewees were asked a number of questions relating to control, responsibility and direction of their divisions, departments and the Council as a whole. The questions and the responses are as follows:

Is your division/unit in control of its own future? Seven (58%) interviewees replied "yes".

Does your division have a clear sense of direction, clear goals and strategies to achieve these goals? Eight (61%) interviewees replied "yes".
Does your department have a clear sense of direction? Nine (75%) interviewees replied "yes".

Are the lines of responsibility and authority within your department clear? Twelve interviewees replied "yes".

This would suggest that the closer the situation is to the individual the more vague and unclear are the lines of responsibility and direction but the wider it expands, that is, at departmental level, the clearer it becomes. This may be due to the fact that, to an individual, his direct day-to-day environment is very complex and fast moving. The department as a whole is, to a large extent, outside this environment. Therefore, there is far more clarity to an individual's perceptions of the roles and responsibilities.

> "My department delivers a service directly to the public. It therefore understands what it is delivering and all individuals within it understanding what is being delivered. However, within my section I am doing various duties, some of them being a part of my job, others not necessarily being a part of my job, but they

*are required to be done due to the absence of others or being a
newly introduced job requirement. At times I do get confused as
to what I am supposed to be doing. How much I have done.
What value it is adding to both myself and the Council".*

The research suggests that in order for individuals to be more committed there is a
need for the individuals to feel that the Council is more committed towards them.
Individuals within the organisation are very willing to take on additional duties and
responsibilities in order to move towards autonomous decision-making. However,
they would find this difficult without adequate resources, support, recognition and
being encouraged to participate in organisational decision-making.

3.4.8   Empowerment Levels

The first sixteen statements of the questionnaire attempted to test the extent to
which individuals felt empowered within the organisation. These statements were
then further addressed within the interviews and through observations. Many of
the issues that arise as a result of these statements have been addressed earlier in
this chapter. The average weighted score for the organisation as a whole was 1.9
compared to the overall average of -2.4, with the departmental averages ranging
from 22.6 (Treasurer's Department) to -19.7 (Community Services Department).
In total, seven of the sixteen questions had negative scores, suggesting low levels
of empowerment. The overall results are set out in the table below.

	Empowerment Levels	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
1	I'm not very excited about my work	7	44	33	14	0	-45
2	I feel very negative	8	26	27	35	2	-3
3	I only do what I am supposed to do	7	23	28	35	5	8
4	I don't say what is on my mind	9	24	14	46	5	14
5	I believe that people are suspicious	11	33	41	9	4	-39
6	I believe that people aren't willing to help out	5	12	22	49	9	46
7	I believe that people feel they don't matter	15	34	29	19	1	-44
8	I believe that people feel they should keep their ideas to themselves	7	23	27	40	0	3
9	I believe that people feel they "rent" their job	4	19	45	27	2	3

10	I believe that people feel not much of their skills and energy are needed	7	18	34	38	1	8
11	I believe that people feel they make a difference	1	34	25	28	10	-12
12	I believe that people feel they are responsible for their results	3	53	30	6	6	42
13	I believe that people feel they are part of a team	2	55	29	7	5	42
14	I believe that people feel they can use their full talents and abilities	1	18	34	39	6	-32
15	I believe that people feel they have control over how they do their jobs	3	23	30	33	9	-22
16	People feel they take initiative	1	34	33	25	5	1

Average: -1.9

Overall Average: -2.4

Table (9)

Particularly high scores were achieved for the statements:

"I believe people are willing to help out" (46).

"I believe that people feel they are responsible for their results" (42).

"I believe that people feel they are part of a team" (42).

There would seem to be a sense of feeling that within the organisation individuals support one another through periods of difficulty, particularly within a team environment. The highly positive responses around the existence of a team would suggest that there is some sense of people feeling empowered. Two interviewees commented:

> "My team helps me to overcome the frustrations of having no real influence or authority within the organisation as a whole."

> "I have seen many changes over my period with this Council, some being significant. In all cases I have gone beyond my role and responsibilities to ensure that the implementations of these changes are undertaken as quickly and as effectively as they possible can. However, when the tables are turned and I have

needed some flexibility and support, outside my team, this has been non-existent. "

A clear concern is the fact that although there are a number of positive responses to the above statements, these statements could have been much more positive and therefore should not be considered as a sign of success within the organisation. It is therefore suggested that even though the belief that people are willing to help each other out (46) has the most positive response in terms of the weighted score, in overall terms this is a relatively poor score compared to a maximum 200 mark. Therefore, it would be even more disturbing to see statements scoring negatively. In the Community Services Department only four questions had positive scores compared to the Treasurer's Department, which had only three negative scores.

Particularly poor scores were achieved for questions 1, 5, 7 and question 14. The statement "I am not very excited about my work" scored -45 with departmental scores ranging from -81 (Community Services Department) to -47 (Planning Department). The Council has a large number of long standing employees many of whom have been working within the same area for most of their career with the Council. Decades of doing the same job, even with changes within the job due to legislations or other factors, has instilled in certain people a sense of boredom. In other cases there would seem to be a clear sense of pressure and stress, which is so constant that individuals find it difficult to be excited:

> *"The shortage of people, the workloads and the current demands have created a climate of suffocation where attempts to resolve inefficiencies are addressed at the lower levels as opposed to those at the higher levels. The pruning of middle and upper management never seems to be an option. "*

The statement "I believe that people feel they make a difference" is important in the context of empowerment in that people have the autonomy, power, influence, responsibility and authority to make decisions that they feel have an impact on the organisation as a whole. This statement received largely negative responses, with departmental weighted scores ranging from 18 (Planning Department) to -36 (Community Services Department). A similar statement "I believe that people feel

they have control over how they do their jobs" also received negative responses (-22), with departmental weighted scores ranging from -11 (Treasurer's Department) to -50 (Chief Executive's Department). This is a fundamental statement as it is not implying the ability to work within wider parameters but the much more limited ability to work freely within the closely defined parameters of a particular job. This would suggest that individuals are closely controlled within their current jobs and, therefore, implies some reluctance as to extend their parameters much further.

3.4.9 Results of Key Interview Questions

This section sets out responses to some key interview questions, which have not been fully addressed earlier in this chapter.

The questions "what does empowerment mean to you" and "what characteristics need to exist for you to feel empowered", revealed the use of a number of key words and phrases:

> Communication, freedom, autonomy, recognition, authority, responsibility, self-expression, less rules and procedures, greater emphasis on teams, delegation and responsibility

It was clear from the interviews that not all individuals understood empowerment in its strictest sense. In that it meant different things to different people. Certain individuals felt that empowerment was an extension of delegation; others felt it was a concept bigger and more powerful than delegation. However, all the interviewees believed that empowerment was not the same as delegation although, at times, it could mean the same thing in practice. In asking the interviewees what they felt may be the benefits for them of the Council encouraging empowerment, the answers included the following responses:

> Job satisfaction, improvement in morale, better communication, the ability to do the job more effectively, better decision making, clearer ownership, freedom, motivation, being valued, further general opportunities, wanting to stay at Yardley, improving quality, a recognition

that people are important to the organisation, acceptability of greater expression

When asking what interviewees felt would need to take place in moving towards empowerment the responses included:

Clarification of vision, better communication, reduced layers of management, introduction of more information technology, introduction of self managed teams, fewer middle managers, cut in written policies and procedures

The greatest emphasis was placed on better employee communication and the introduction of self managed teams. The interviewees, in general, felt that being well informed ensured that they had the confidence and knowledge to more effectively deal with situations that may arise and were able to challenge current practices and fundamental assumptions. Teams were felt to create an environment of reliance on one another, along with the ability to share both negative and positive outcomes; thus allowing valuable lessons to be learnt and strengthening both the team as a whole and the individuals within them.

In questioning what an empowerment programme needed to include the interviewee's responses included:

- Clarification of goals.

- Clarification of values.

- Changing structure.

- Communication exercise.

- Employee survey.

- Customer survey.

- Total quality programme.

- Investors in people.

- Training for senior managers.

- Training for middle managers

- Training for first line leaders.

- Training for front line staff.

- Middle manager job losses.

- Supervisory job losses.

- Front line job losses.

- Don't know.

The most popular aspects were the clarification of the mission, vision, aims and objectives and the values for empowerment, changing the structure to allow empowerment to take place, training for all levels and an extensive communication exercise. In further exploring the training issue, interviewees were asked what type of training they felt they would need in order to function within an empowered environment. The responses included:

- Leadership.

- Interpersonal skills.

- Teamwork.

- Finance/budgeting.

- Customer care.

- Negotiation skills.

- Quality.

The most popular responses were training in teamwork, negotiation skills and leadership skills. Most interviewees felt that if an empowerment environment existed they would be involved in situations were they would need to develop the ability to negotiate the best possible outcome for themselves, their team, the organisation as a whole and the individual with whom they are negotiating.

Interviewees were asked about the relevance and importance of the main areas of the questionnaire to the implementation and development of empowerment (see Appendix 7). In general, it was felt that all the key areas addressed within the questionnaire were relevant or highly relevant in relation to implementing empowerment. However, having an appropriate structure for empowerment and high morale were both seen by two interviewees as having limited relevance, as they felt that empowerment can exist within any structure and that morale does not necessarily have to be high in order for empowerment to be developed. Empowerment can, in itself, improve low morale over a period of time.

The main conclusions of the first report were also tested in terms of their relevance in ensuring the effective development and implementation of empowerment. In general it was agreed that all characteristics outlined in the first report were essential or very essential. However, in certain cases, a response of somewhat essential or not essential was received. The characteristics for which this was the case included strong leadership, an appropriate reward system for increased responsibility and accountability, a system of continuous feedback, change in the organisational structure and effective distribution of power. It was quite clear that some questions were, to an extent, repetitive and on a number of occasions interviewees contradicted previous answers. It is difficult to explain the reasoning behind this other than that the interviewees developed a more detailed and clearer understanding of what they felt empowerment meant as they went through the interview and as the interview focused their minds on the concept of empowerment and the issues relating to it.

3.4.10 Other Issues

I feel in relation to Relationships that		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Score
35	People are committed to collaboration	0	24	50	18	5	-4
36	People have mutual trust and respect	0	38	25	30	5	-2
37	Others are engaged in decisions	3	49	35	10	1	43
38	There are shared accountabilities, rewards and penalties	1	31	34	28	4	-3
39	People are helpful towards each other	5	55	28	10	0	56
40	People communicate all relevant information	0	21	28	44	5	-34
41	There is a cross-sectional learning	0	9	59	28	2	-23
42	People focus on process and learning	0	7	56	31	4	-32
Average: 0.1							
Overall Average: -2.4							

Table (10)

While the literature on empowerment claims that it will lead to organisational success, empowerment, itself, is dependant on the presence of the qualities of trust, respect and collaboration. Without these, individuals are unlikely to have the confidence and commitment to want to become empowered. The questionnaire analysis shows a negative weighted score for all these factors. Comments in the interview focused around individuals being unwilling to take risks:

"When things go wrong it's bad enough that those at the top of the organisation are looking for scapegoats but its very upsetting when colleagues working near and around you are, at times, trying to deflect blame and focus away from themselves and towards others".

Negative responses were also received for the communication of relevant information around learning. The organisation does not, at present, have a structured training or career development programme. The main decisions are left to individual departments, who tend to address learning on an ad hoc basis around the requirement of the organisation rather than the requirement of the individual.

3.5   Summary and Conclusions

This chapter analysed the results of data collected throughout the research. The analysis was based on the collection of data from questionnaires, interviews and participant observations. The main findings of the research analysis are set out below.

- The role of the current manager within the organisation, from an empowering perspective, was largely negative. In general, managers tended to be controlling, uninspiring, unable to encourage risk and experimentation, having poor skills in the ability to develop people, give feedback, provide training and shift from a controlling to an enabling role.

- Communication within the organisation is regarded as poor. The major criticism being that communication is slow and unclear. In general, individuals felt that their productivity and efficiency could improve significantly if more information was provided to them rather than information being restricted to managers, who then make the decision on how much information is passed on.   Interviewees felt that communication was essential in order for empowerment to exist. At Yardley, insufficient communication and the poor sharing of information prevent a positive contribution being made towards empowerment.

- A strong sense of teamwork seems to exist within the Council, allowing for the potential of empowerment to be more easily achieved. There seems to be a strong sense of people helping one another out and working together to solve difficult problems in a caring way. However, some concerns were expressed in the areas of people being respected, people being encouraged to learn and the feeling of working in an environment that does not allow groups to take risk.

- The results in terms of clarity of purpose for both individuals and groups were relatively positive. They were less so when it came to clarity of purpose at the divisional, departmental and Council levels. Few people were aware of the Council's mission, aims and objectives even though these were widely communicated, suggesting a fundamental underlying

problem for the organisation in relation to both its direction and communication.

- The current structure of the organisation and its sub-structures are generally regarded as disempowering, with concerns around poor rewards, relevance and acceptance of values, developing and supporting individuals and inappropriate structures to enable empowering to be developed. There is a general feeling from the responses that the ideal structure would be one that is flatter, autonomous and team based.

- In considering the organisational environment and, in particular, issues such as morale, motivation, culture, recognition, fairness and the protection of the individual's dignity, the results were a mixture of both positive and negative. The positive results suggested that there was a strong support mechanism from one's peers the organisation, that the organisation was a nice place to work within, and there is a sense of trust and respect within the organisation. However, in relation to the negative responses, these were largely attributable to issues relating to a healthy environment, as opposed to motivation and morale aspects, with the feeling that people were expected to do too much, a lack of career opportunities, a high level of bureaucracy and inflexible policies and procedures together with a strong blame culture.

- Autonomy and commitment, which are regarded as inter-dependant aspects, are both seen as essential to the achievement of empowerment. The key findings would suggest that individuals feel that they do not have a voice in decisions nor do they have influence over the organisational decision making process particularly within an environment where resources are limited. However, individuals do feel that they take responsibility for their actions, speak out about their problems, understand "customer" relationships and in general tend to have control over how they do their work. It would seem to be clear that in order for individuals to be more committed there is a need for them to feel that the Council is more committed towards them. This is not currently the case.

- From a departmental perspective the Treasurer's Department has significantly more positive responses and the Community Services Department has significantly more negative responses. This may largely be due to differing working practices, management styles and cultures within the separate departments. It is also likely that the Community Services office move is a significant contributing factor to the high level of negative responses.

Overall, there would seem to be a considerable gap between where the Council is currently and where it would be were it an empowering environment. The analysis clearly shows that a number of factors would need to be addressed in order for the Council to move towards empowerment. In addressing these factors, consideration and emphasis would need to be placed primarily on the individual and the individual's perspective. Empowerment cannot be forced into existence, and it may not fit or be suitable for every employee within the organisation. However, for the Council to begin its empowerment journey it requires a toolkit, one which can be taken up by those individuals who have a commitment to becoming empowered.

CHAPTER 4

CONSTITUENTS OF AN EMPOWERING ORGANISATION – THE IDEAL TYPE

4.1   Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous chapters by putting forward an "ideal type" that has been developed on the basis of the research and findings to date. Developing the concept of empowerment within Yardley District Council will require fundamental change in the way that the organisation and its individuals behave and think.   Truly successful empowerment is likely to involve a dual process, which considers empowerment from both the individual's perspective and the organisation's perspective. This chapter is divided into two key parts: the first part sets out the meaning of and case for empowerment within Yardley District Council; the second part considers the ideal type, separated into those conditions for empowerment which focus on the individual and those which focus on the Council.

4.2   The Meaning of Empowerment within Yardley District Council

It is difficult to state exactly what empowerment means to individuals within Yardley District Council. However, having carried out considerable research over the past five years it has become quite clear that empowerment is a word that is emotive and appealing to some people.   There are others who, for a variety of reasons, dislike the word.   Some people at Yardley are attracted to it because it appears to offer something which at present does not exist and yet is capable of transforming their lives. To these people there is a notion of being in control of themselves and their environment, expanding their capabilities and horizons and elevating themselves to greater levels of achievement and satisfaction.

The meaning of empowerment within the organisation seems to be reflected at two levels. Firstly, at an organisation level, where there is always the search for new ideas and concepts to enable the organisation to move forward more effectively.   The word fits easily with the modern concepts that drive organisations such as total quality, continuous improvement, performance management, self directed work teams, internal customers, management

competencies, etc. Analysis of the literature suggests that it is from an organisational perspective at the organisational level that the greatest confusion can arise about what it would mean to apply the concept of empowerment to the people in the organisation. Much of this confusion is due to an inadequate definition of empowerment. The various meanings given to empowerment can range from individuals having a say in the way that their jobs are carried out, right through to worker control of the total organisation. So some confusion on this score is understandable.

My original objective for this research was to develop a universal definition of empowerment. However, I am now of the opinion that each organisation must define its own particular brand of empowerment. However, arriving at this brand or definition it is important to realise that just changing a person's job is unlikely to bring about their empowerment. Many empowerment and disempowerment factors are contained in the values, behaviour, systems, procedures and culture of the organisation. Changes will have to be made at these levels, which are beyond the influence of the individual. They are unlikely to occur without thoughtful planning and greater discretion in decision-making, along with increased autonomy for the individuals within the organisation.

The second level of empowerment is that of the individual. It is at this level where I feel that there is the greatest understanding and popular appeal of the concept, particularly in situations where people who were previously deflated, subservient, compliant and controlled by others suddenly gain authority, skill, status, self belief and image, as they progress to greater things by excelling themselves. Having gained a deep understanding of Yardley, it is recognised that while this may be true for some, the change will be less dramatic for many others. Furthermore, people will not just live empowerment automatically, they will have to go through a lengthy learning process and have help and support for change to occur. It is my belief that when empowerment is effective the results can be quite inspirational. Individuals can transform their lives, achieving goals and reaching targets that they had thought impossible. Empowerment, tackled from the individual's perspective, will ensure that an individual's path of development and growth will benefit himself and his organisation, with that benefit being significantly higher when teams of empowered individuals collectively work together.

4.3   The Case for Empowerment at Yardley District Council

Empowerment is attractive to organisations and individuals for many reasons. It fits easily into the current philosophies of both managers and workers. Managers see it as a means of removing bureaucracy, freeing workers from historic local government collective union negotiating arrangements, gaining more flexibility and rewarding people for their individual efforts. Many at Yardley are attracted to empowerment for similar reasons. Spurred on by the changes in the political context over the past years, leading to greater house and share ownership, people in Britain have become more individualistic, with the desire to look after themselves (Lawson and Rose, 1994). They have a desire to stand or fall by their own efforts, with empowerment giving them the opportunity to do this. A significant advantage for an organisation is that empowerment allows the development and use of latent talent in individuals. Because of the way that jobs at Yardley and many other local authorities have been designed and structured, individuals have been called upon to use only a small portion of their abilities, which, for many, has lead to great frustration and alienation. With empowerment, traditional boundaries can be broken down, demarkation lines scrapped and the constraining job description marginalised. Empowered organisations allow individuals the opportunity to enhance skills, which is important at a time when employment security is increasingly based less on initial qualifications and length of service than on the ability to acquire and market new skills and varied experience needed to function in a constantly changing local authority (Brown, 1994).

Empowerment also offers individuals a greater sense of achievement and, therefore, improved motivation. For an empowered workforce there is enhanced task significance: the sense that the job one does is important, not slight or trivial. Individuals feel that they really can make a difference to important organisational outcomes, that what they do is vital "if only in a small way" to organisational success. Findings from the interviews suggest that such a sense of having real impact can improve morale significantly. It can even help to reduce stress. The interviews suggest that individuals at the lower levels face considerably amounts of stress. A conclusion that can be reached from this is that a manager's stress is less, because s/he can exercise more control over his or her work. Lack of control over how one works is a significant factor in stress: the less control we exercise

the more stressed we are likely to become. Empowerment can increase people's sense of control by enabling them to make their own decisions about what they do and how they do it, to a much greater extent than under traditional management systems (Bowen and Lawler, 1995).

A major potential benefit for the organisation is of increased organisational effectiveness. Empowerment has the possibility of achieving this by removing the blocks on performance, which the tight controls of more traditional approaches to management can produce. In local authorities such as Yardley, the classic problems of bureaucracy, with its overemphasis on regulation and authoritarian command impede this from happening. Yet that management style can be a very efficient way to ensure conformity and consistency, and is an effective choice in stable situations, with a slowly changing and predictable environment. However, it is a much less constructive way to manage people and organisations in a rapidly changing world, where the environment is constantly fluctuating for both external (for example, legislation) and internal reasons.

If organisations are to be able to react quickly and suitably to a fast changing environment, they will need staff who are empowered to respond to circumstances as they find them, without constantly having to seek advice or permission. This requires organisations and managers to place much greater trust in the staff skills and knowledge their and to remove many of the barriers which prevent them from using these.

Underlying the principles of Best Value is a requirement for local authorities to make better decisions more quickly, to be more responsive to customer demands, to be more reactive to the external environment, to be more efficient in the use of resources, to be ready to take advantage of new technology and new methods, to be more effective in delivering services, to maintain high levels of quality in all aspects of the organisation, and to create a culture of continuous development and improvement.

4.3.1   The Changing External Environment

Yardley District Council operates in an environment of uncertainty, complexity and unpredictable change and therefore requires a means of operation which would

ensure that it is able to respond to such pressures effectively. And the main driving forces to change to such a concept or approach include:

i. Constant demand for higher quality and better value. Yardley District Council, particularly under Best Value is required to constantly improve the quality of services that it provides to the public. This means finding out what the public want in the first place and then improving on this. In order for the organisation to improve constantly there is an implication that individuals within the organisation would also need to improve constantly. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is to get individuals to own their jobs. This would require the motivation and drive to come from the individual, rather than as a push from the organisation (Wilson, 1996).

ii. The organisation has a moral duty to develop individuals to their maximum potential. The hours that people spend at work should be as enjoyable as those spent at home. To achieve this aim people would need to be as self-managing as possible, with external management and control at a minimum. They would need to be encouraged to learn new skills, to grow and develop through a constant upward spiral of learning, limited only by their own abilities and aspirations.

iii. The traditional exercise of power and authority and control in the organisation is seen by many as an inappropriate way to run a modern local authority. For many years, organisations have been arranged hierarchically with all the power and authority held by the managers at the top. Below this senior group is a layer of managers. Supervisors and employees each allocated their appropriate share of power and authority. It is a graduated cascade of power and authority, the highest layer having the most and the lowest layer having the least. This differentiation between layers is seen in many ways. The different levels have varying degrees of control over the organisation's resources. A senior manager (director level) at Yardley District Council has the authority to spend in excess of £5,000, a middle manager £1,000 and a clerical assistant £0. The amount of discretionary budget that a person can spend is directly related to their position in the hierarchy and, hence,

the power and authority that they exercise. The control of budgets and discretionary spending is only one factor. Almost everything else follows the same pattern. The outwards symbol of power and authority in a hierarchy are the different levels of salary, holidays and access to information. The hierarchical power and authority-based organisation is appropriate for a slow-moving, stable and ordered operating environment (Mintzberg, 1983). However, it is far too slow and cumbersome and unresponsive in the present conditions within which Yardley operates. Decisions are made at a faster pace, communications are more efficient and the ideas and talents of all the people in the organisation need to be listed and utilised. Furthermore findings from the research suggests that individuals are no longer satisfied with the feeling of being kept in the dark and treated solely as economic units. People expect to participate and share in the running of the Council.

iv. Research findings suggest that people's roles and responsibilities are too narrow and restrictive and hence limit their skills, abilities and creativity. This is particularly so at the lower levels of the organisation where roles are designed on outdated, scientific management principles. These principles are likely to advocate that all strategy and creative thinking should be done by a selected group of senior managers. The rest of the employees would then be given tasks to perform and told how to do them, with limited scope for discretion.

This approach was very effective in stable, unchanging organisations where most things were predictable. However, the operating environment has now changed. Change is rampant, competition and challenge from the external environment is fierce, new ways of providing services are continually being developed and changed and people expect much more from their work. Organisations designed and operating according to scientific management principles are outdated. They are slow to respond, cumbersome, and fail to use the talent of their individuals. Within an empowered environment, individuals would need to be given more tasks to perform and more opportunity to make decisions and take responsibility for their work. At an operating level, this would mean their organising the way the work is done, setting targets and

standards and being responsible for output figures and quality standards. Teams would manage themselves within limits required by the Council. Such teams would take over many of the functions traditionally accomplished by supervisors and managers. There would be a corresponding change in the function of managers. Their role would be to co-ordinate and facilitate the team rather than directly control and manage them. The manager would concentrate on problem solving and the longer-term issues that will affect the team in the future. In order to achieve this, several layers of the organisation's hierarchy would need to be removed, leaving space for other groups to expand their roles and develop more satisfying and fulfilling jobs.

v.   A learning organisation is one which helps individuals develop an appetite for beneficial changes in terms of behaviour and skills. Empowerment, it is argued, is a tool that can bring about a learning organisation, indeed, is a necessary part of a learning organisation (Pearn, 1998). If individuals do not have the freedom to improve the situation in which they find themselves, then it is not possible to create a learning organisation. Empowered individuals often have to take over roles which are traditionally not within their job description, for example, training others, advising Councillors or the general public. The only way they can cope with these added demands is if they work in an organisation that allows them to develop continually and helps them to keep abreast of the needs of their job by giving them access to learning tools. The concept of the learning organisation has much in common with both total quality management and empowerment. All three are based on the idea of continuous improvement; all have a strong emphasis on feedback, creativity, teamwork and problem solving.

vi.   Organisations that intend to respond to the rapidly changing external environment cannot implement the continuous changes required without the goodwill, commitment and understanding of the vast majority of individuals within that organisation. It is possible to convince individuals to accept change when a crisis is big and real enough. But this is usually through fear, which can, at times, lead to deep resignation. To maintain the pace of change it is necessary to move people from acceptance of

givens to the embracing of opportunities. Such a movement, especially when the changes proposed involve a degree of pain, can only come about when people feel they understand what is going on and why; when they feel in at least partial control of what happens to and around them and feel supported by peers and by the organisation itself. One way of describing those feelings is empowerment.

vii. One of the pressures faced by Yardley District Council is the decreasing number of employees, which creates significant problems during periods of absence. At times it can be difficult for managers to gain the flexibility from individuals that they would require. However, in an empowered organisation due to the level of motivation, autonomy and commitment, individuals will do any job that needs to be done, provided she has the necessary skills (Clutterbuck, 1995). The intention would be to avoid statements such as "that's not my job" whenever there is a need for some simple task to be done. As individuals become more involved and are keen to achieve success on the job, they acquire a desire to improve their knowledge and skills. They become more willing to share their skills with one another, to teach others and learn from one another.

viii. Empowering organisations tend to face outwards. The customer is paramount and all processes are directed towards meeting and exceeding customer expectations (Cook and Macaulay, 1996). Adding value is a corporate goal. Empowerment recognises that employees nearest the task are usually in a better position to judge what needs to be done. Members of the public who telephone the Council are usually unimpressed by staff referring decisions to senior managers. No one wants to wait for senior managers to authorise or verify decisions which could and should have been taken on the spot.

ix. At a time of rapid change within local government when services are constantly changing as a consequence of new legislation and changes in customer requirements, the key to ensure quality and productivity within the organisation is to nurture and utilise individuals' skills. If innovation is to be valued and encouraged, an empowered culture is vital so that creativity and initiative can flourish. Nurturing, encouraging and

unleashing talent from all parts of the workforce can have a direct impact on the Council's success. Empowerment inspires individuals to respond in more thoughtful ways, as they are no longer dependant on management approval for every decision. Empowerment allows individuals to question the way things are currently done and therefore allows innovation to flourish. Motivation is particularly central to a "people driven service" like local government where standards are set and maintained by those at the sharp end.

4.4   The Ideal Type

The examination of the organisational research literature on empowerment would suggest that it finds a unique expression in each organisation. As a result, empowerment and the meaning it has to individuals within Yardley District Council will be different to that of any other organisation. However, in order to develop a strategy and a mechanism to enable empowerment to be developed and to flourish within Yardley District Council a process needs to be put into action. This process has been termed "the ideal type" (IDT)[5]. The full potential of empowerment can only be gained when those who work within the organisation understand it as a process for developing both the individuals and the organisation, therefore, as being of benefit to all relevant stakeholders.

Figure 5.1 sets out the IDT for empowerment within Yardley. The IDT leads to an outcome in line with the requirement of Best Value for higher community satisfaction, by displaying a set of steps and processes which inter-act and combine into a number of key actions, policies, procedures, strategies and conditions.

In summary, the IDT suggests that higher community satisfaction is created by the provision of high quality services by the District Council. These services, being largely people orientated, can only be achieved through the deployment of highly satisfied individuals who have a sense of achievement, are motivated and have a high level of self esteem. Individuals reach this state of behaviour, attitude and standing within the organisation through feeling more empowered. This greater

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[5] The Ideal Type has been shortened to IDT to provide an abbreviation that is easy to remember and can become the label for the empowerment initiative within Yardley.

empowerment is achieved through identifying and developing characteristics of empowerment which are either in the control of the individual or in the control of the organisation. In order for this to happen there is a need for a number of conditions that, from the individual's perspective, Yardley District Council would need to possess, and that constitute an empowering organisation (the IDT). In addition to these conditions there is also an emphasis on the individual pursuing certain personal, self-development strategies and actions in order for him to feel more empowered. However, for an individual to pursue their own self-development, the organisation would need to supportive conditions. Therefore, the IDT sets out a number of strategies and key actions to enable this to happen.

The IDT outlined in figure 5.1 also includes a number of other components, which are relevant in order to ensure higher levels of success. These are:

- To establish the case for empowerment.

- To establish a vision for empowerment.

- To ensure there are adequate performance measurement/outcome measures.

In addition, the IDT assumes a loop system so that it cannot be seen as a one-off process or activity but, rather, as a continual and regularly updated process designed to gradually increase the levels of empowerment within the organisation.

The relevance and further details of the components included within the IDT are outlined below.

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The Ideal Type

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│  Higher Community Satisfaction  │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
          ▼           ▲
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│      Better Quality Services    │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
          ▼           ▲
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│      More Highly Satisfied      │
│          Individuals            │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
          ▼           ▲
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│      Increasing Levels of       │
│          Empowerment            │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
          ▼           ▲
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│    What Does Empowerment        │
│    Mean to Yardley DC?          │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ How do we create │   │ Case for   │◄──│ Best Value 4 │
│ the Conditions? │   │ Empowerment │   │ C's   │
└──────────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘

Nodes (Individuals cluster): self perception, parameters, mission statement, personal skills, self learning, motivation, commitment

Nodes (The Council cluster): common purpose, autonomy, structure, teams, leadership, sharing information, culture

Actions to be considered by Yardley DC in moving towards achieving the desired conditions

* More clearly align the corporate mission, aims, objectives and actions to individuals and teams
* Work with individuals to enable them to become self empowered, particularly through learning
* Re-assess the sharing of information and consider the extension of boundaries
* Provide a clear action plan for empowerment, highlighting key tasks, personnel, timescales and targets
* Develop and implement self directing teams
* Develop individual autonomy
* Generate greater organisational and individual commitment
* Pursue the notion of empowering leadership
* Identify and pursue the most appropriate culture for empowerment
* Develop a common purpose
* Re-define the role of the manager/supervisor
* Adjust the Council's structure

┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Measure Performance and Outcomes │
└──────────────────────────────────┘

4.4.1 Uses of the IDT

The ideal type has the following specific uses:

- It provides a graphic overview of the process for conceptualising and planning initiatives to extend and strengthen empowerment.

- It identifies the key steps in the process for extending and strengthening empowerment.

- It helps individuals at all levels particularly the leaders within the Council (senior managers and Councillors) to take a systematic and holistic view of empowerment and to avoid concentrating on single events or actions.

- It conveys the fundamental idea that empowerment is, itself, a process and concept that must be continuously improved.

- It gives individuals within the organisation a common vocabulary for discussing empowerment and taking action that supports empowerment.

- It keeps the Council and its individuals at all levels aware of the skills and knowledge that they require to develop and manage the process of extending and strengthening empowerment within the Council.

- It puts forward an effective mechanism to address the Best Value aspects and challenges the most important element within the organisation, its people.

- It expresses the importance of satisfying the community and the relevance of individuals within the Council in contributing towards this.

- It provides a better understanding for individuals within the organisation of what empowerment means to them, to the organisation and how they can benefit and contribute to the process.

The remainder of this chapter is largely devoted to outlining in detail the meaning of the components contained in the IDT, and the part they play in leading to greater empowerment.

4.5 Empowerment of the Individual from the Individual's Perspective

As mentioned above in the ideal type, empowerment within an organisation is expressed as two parts. The first part being that of the organisation, where the organisation must develop a conducive and supportive climate, adopt all relevant policies, fully understand the concepts of empowerment, particularly in the case of senior management, and be willing to invest in the training and education of all people within the organisation. However, development of empowerment at this level alone will not bring the complete benefits to the organisation or its individuals. It may be possible to introduce the correct climate and give individuals freedom but this is only one half of the formula. The second part of the ideal type is to enable people to develop self-empowerment and to feel energised within their work environment. It is my belief that the extent and impact of empowerment is at is greatest when both these elements are developed. However, the development of one element, particularly that of individual empowerment, can be a significant step towards empowerment.

Different individuals are empowered by different things. What is motivating and rewarding for one person may be uninteresting to another. For example, one individual who is able to think laterally and creatively will flourish if allowed the freedom to exercise his or her talents. The individual may dislike repetitive or structured tasks, preferring a role that involves him in special projects that encourage improvements to the team's operating methods and effectiveness. The reverse of this situation may be true for other individuals, in that they operate at their best within a situation of order, uniformity and predictability. Their ideal role in the team would be to administer systems and control the work and process of the team.

In relation to Yardley District Council, having carried out the research analysis and developed the Ideal Type it is possible to put forward a number of strategies and practices (as set out in the IDT), which would enable the development of self-empowerment within individuals. A number of writers (Brown, 1994; Clutterbuck,

1994; Foy, 1994; Stewart, 1994; Kinlaw, 1995; Wilson, 1996) have made attempts to tackle some of these issues in varying depths. These are[6]:

- Determining self imposed parameters.

- Self image.

- An individual's personal mission statement.

- Developing key personal skills for empowerment

- Developing self learning

- Motivation

4.5.1 Determining Self Imposed Parameters

The research showed that some people felt innumerable restrictions were placed around their sphere of action. Ambitious and competent individuals, in particular, tend to sigh about these restrictions and express resistance to constraints they feel hamper their freedom to act as they would wish, in pursuit of the organisational goals. The initial tendency is to assume that one lacks power and scope without ever really trying to find out just what the boundaries are. Yardley like most organisations has many people who have less freedom to exercise initiative and discretion at work than they would like to. The question that I would raise at this stage is "are the individuals simply accepting that restrictions exist, without actually checking that this is so?" In other words, are individuals fully aware of the boundaries of their own sphere of responsibility. As Stewart (1973) argues, if an individual does not know clearly what his or her boundaries of discretion are it is likely that the individual will place tighter than necessary restrictions on his or her sphere of action. This can unduly restrict an individual's capacity to work autonomously.

It is important for individuals to know how much freedom they have in relation to their work. However, freedom is not enough. At Yardley some individuals have

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[6] This forms the first part of the Ideal Type (the individual's perspective)

stated that they have extensive freedom to do as they please. However, this is only as long as they get things right and do not make mistakes. It's only when problems occur or mistakes are made that boundaries are sharply drawn, and usually rather more narrowly than before. This is, of course, a demoralising state of affairs and one which ultimately tends to deter all but the bravest from exercising initiative. At Yardley a number of cases were cited where people stated that they had stopped taking risks when they felt they were more likely to be reprimanded for getting it wrong than to be praised for getting it right. It was felt that Yardley was, to some extent, acting with hostility to some initiatives, and had a punitive reaction to mistakes. This resulted in many individuals restricting their actions and activities within what they define to be "the safe zone." They chose to limit both their thought and action to a small percentage of what they might be. From my own experience, the greatest benefits that I have been able to provide for my employer have usually resulted from a certain amount of sensible risk taking.

It is unlikely at Yardley, due to the organisation's systems, processes and regulations, that any single individual could make a sufficiently large error to cause the organisation to completely fail in the provision of its duties and services. However, what is all too likely, is that an organisation which punishes risk taking will find it difficult to succeed within a constantly changing and highly pressurised environment similar to that which Yardley operates within.

It is, therefore, important for individuals to empower themselves so that they no longer feel restricted, or nervous of stepping outside their present boundaries. The self-imposed barriers which individuals place around their work tasks and responsibilities are frequently drawn much tighter, often by a wide margin, than those set by the organisation or the individual's manager or supervisor. Individuals often have much more freedom to exercise discretion and act on initiative than they realise and, as is the case within Yardley, discretion can extend much further down the formal hierarchy of the organisation than one might think. It is, therefore, essential that each individual sets goals and makes plans for their self-empowerment in relation to the context within which they work (Wilson, 1996).

In working to extend boundaries, a possible approach may be for individuals to list:

i.   The boundaries that they feel exist around what they are able to do.

ii.   The action that individual would like to be able to take but feels unable to?

iii.   The changes that individual would like to make but feels that s/he cannot.

iv.   The boundaries in terms of organisational and operational restrictions, such as lack of proper budget of his own, or no access to necessary information.

v.   The actions necessary to resolve areas of boundary limitations and restrictions.

This can be regarded as the first step towards self-empowerment; identify the boundaries and develop an action plan to tackle them. It is essential for individuals wishing to become more empowered to establish their current and desired parameters.

4.5.2 Self Image

The research findings in general, the interviews in particular and arguments set out by Clutterbuck (1994), emphasise a strong self belief, image and perception that individuals are capable of a lot more than they are currently required to do. It was observed that every individual had a view of him or herself, although at times this view may be difficult to describe. Nonetheless, the analysis and understanding of one's self is important particularly as it influences the way one behaves and acts. This understanding can be developed to enable individuals to be more proactive and positive in their general approach, which can significantly enhance their motivation. Wilson (1996) argues that to be empowered it is important to develop a positive self-image which gives the individual the confidence to reach out and try new things. If one has a positive self-image it is likely that s/he will see opportunities rather than problems and take progressive actions that seek to improve the general circumstances that s/he is involved in.

An individual needs to feel competent, challenged and liked by others. A person who lacks self-confidence is likely to feel inferior to other colleagues and therefore will be unwilling to excel and take on new challenges. The research showed a number of individuals had fears about extending their autonomy or using their initiative at work beyond a certain limit due to being aware of the potential pitfalls that could arise. It is important for individuals to maintain a positive attitude by focusing on the potential benefits of situations.

4.5.3 An Individual's Personal Mission Statement

In order for individuals to become more empowered and at the same time to understand empowerment, along with its potential, each individual within the Council should have a personal mission statement. The Council has a Mission Statement for the organisation as a whole. Therefore, there is some basis to argue for the development of Mission Statements for each and every individual within the organisation, as a means of putting into context what an individual does. For example, if Environmental Health Officers who inspected commercial premises were asked what they did, one may answer, "we are inspecting premises to ensure some level of cleanliness and hygiene within the commercial sector." A second Environmental Services Officer may answer, "we are contributing towards the provision of a safe and healthy district." The first answer described the activities of the Environmental Services Officers; the second answer described a mission.

Missions are very important because they set a direction to be followed, provide motivation and give meaning to an individual's work, job and activities. A mission is not an objective or plan but it does provide an understanding of them. If you have a strong mission then finding a direction and planning your actions will be much easier than if you have no mission. The mission adds logical force and support to your actions. It is my belief that an empowerment mission, if implemented successfully, is capable of radically changing how an individual thinks and acts both in personal and working life.

An empowerment mission statement would involve an individual's description of empowerment and would be based on how that particular individual describes empowerment. How he sees empowerment in relation to his job and how

empowerment is seen within the organisation as a whole. Once an individual has a description of empowerment then there is a need for that individual to describe what empowerment could do for him. This description should then be taken forward to describe that individual's purpose is by using a phrase or sentence. For example, an individual's mission statement could be "understanding, developing and using all my latent potential" or "I am the ship that never reaches the horizon."

The research has shown that the Council's mission, as with many mission statements, is written with good intentions but has little impact on the organisation or its people. It is important that a mission is lived day by day and that individuals as well as the organisation behave and act according to it. The most effective means of doing this is to identify key actions that ensure the mission is being applied. Therefore each individual who has an empowerment mission statement should endeavour to list a number of actions which she will be taking to ensure that her empowerment continues and grows. Some of these actions will be short term others will take several years.

4.5.4 Developing Key Personal Skills for Empowerment

Empowerment can enrich an individual's working life by making his job more satisfying. This is achieved by broadening his job activities, giving him more involvement in decision making and allowing him greater responsibility for success or failure. This process is as applicable to a typist as it is to a senior manager. Extending the boundaries of a job may give greater empowerment but some people will also have to develop other skills. For example, people who are making decisions must be able to deal with the consequences and the associated stress if decisions are wrong. There is greater uncertainty where there are long timescales from initiation to fruition. The control of budgets and resources may be another potential source of anxiety. I remember some years ago when I asked a junior accountant to communicate directly with external auditors, the accountant was very uncomfortable and was concerned about the consequences of giving wrong information or sounding incompetent. He, therefore, thought dealing with external auditors should be a management responsibility. The empowerment of a person does not occur automatically. People slowly build up their strength and courage to meet the demands of their greater role. In this research, the literature review and,

in particular, the research analysis, I have identified a number of factors which are involved in doing this. These are:

a.   The requirement for an individual to be relaxed with the greater demands that his extended role brings. It is a natural human reaction to be worried or uncertain when taking on new responsibilities. An individual will wonder if she will be able to do the job and not let others down. It is, therefore, essential that such fears and concerns be discussed with colleagues who may be in a position to provide support and assistance. Some fears will be irrational, and they will disappear when an individual becomes used to the new responsibilities (Stewart, 1994).

b.   As an individual starts to become empowered he will require a great deal of enthusiasm to ensure that he is successful in what he is doing. Enthusiasm will derive from the new responsibilities and challenges that empowerment brings. As an individual succeeds his competence will grow and he will have an enhanced self-image and greater enthusiasm (Smith, 1996).

c.   An individual's added responsibilities will involve more thorough planning and decision-making. Empowered people are likely to take over tasks that have previously been done by their managers. These additional tasks must be planned and executed with a systematic approach; empowered people must learn managerial skills and disciplines such as writing memoranda, running meetings and data gathering techniques, which are used in everyday work. It is likely that each person's empowered job will change with the development of new techniques and methods that they must learn. A gradual build up of skills will add to an individual's strength, courage and flexibility and help her to cope with the demands that are part of empowerment (Clutterbuck, 1994).

d.   In an unempowered situation, initiative is a function of management. People are paid to do a job which consists of a set of pre-determined tasks. The individual is not encouraged or taught to question if these are the correct tasks or whether they could be done differently and better. Specialists and more senior people do the thinking about quality and

efficiency. They then initiate changes, which are followed by unempowered people. The process is "top down", with workers doing the work and the managers doing the thinking and managing. Empowerment should mainly be a "bottom up" process. The people who are doing the job have the knowledge and experience to suggest improvements and initiate change in methods and procedures. This would give them more control over their jobs, greater interest in their work and higher personal self esteem. All these factors contribute to an individual's strength, courage and flexibility in handling the extra responsibilities that are part of empowerment (Scott and Jaffe, 1991).

e.   Learning is perhaps the most important factor in the growth of an individual's strength, courage and flexibility. It takes time to become empowered. An individual will develop wider perspectives, absorb greater knowledge and learn additional skills. For an individual, some skills will gradually develop as she takes on a wider role, while others will require formal training. It is, therefore, essential that an individual analyses her requirements and considers if learning is necessary to perform effectively. The learning process can take a long time and, therefore, an individual should develop a training plan and ensure that she systematically follows it (Smith, 1996).

f.   In order for an individual to develop through empowerment he will need more information, for example, on the performance of the Council so that he can see how his efforts and those of his colleagues are affecting the business. People with the responsibility for quality need the statistics and information that allow direct feedback on quality standards. Yardley District Council publishes performance indicators as a measure of service standards. Every empowered job within the Council must be supported by the necessary information. It would give an individual a greater understanding of the Council's business and more commitment to his work (Johnson and Redmond, 1998).

g.   As an individual makes the transition from his existing role to his empowered role she may experience increased pressures and stress. She will, therefore, have to unlearn the behaviour of her old job and take on

empowered behaviour. An individual's empowered job will be large and carry more responsibility than her old job and until she learns to delegate some of her tasks to others she will probably be overwhelmed. Therefore, greater levels of energy will be required.

h.   As an individual becomes empowered he will develop more contacts and communication networks. There are several reasons for this. Empowerment will give an individual a desire to explore and search for new ideas. An individual in an empowered environment is likely to be more inquisitive and questioning and, therefore, will need to talk to a wide range of people, thus requiring the development of networks. There are clearly a number of networks currently in place at Yardley and these operate both on a formal and informal basis. Networks are an important part of the development of an empowered culture. However, it will take time to build up further effective networks (Bishop, 1997).

i.   An individual will have to retain a high level of confidence as she becomes more empowered. Personal confidence is important in providing the faith to follow an empowerment strategy and, also, so that an individual can cope with the increased demands that will be placed upon her. A high level of confidence will sustain an individual's energy and add to her courage, strength and flexibility. It will be particularly important to retain high levels of confidence when there are problems or distress due to mistakes being made.

j.   The final factor is developing strength, courage and flexibility is the control of an individual's emotions. Changing roles can be a stressful and worrying time, with many worries being based on imagined fears or events that are unlikely to occur (Wilson, 1996). The uncertainty of the change brings fears of failure or of not being able to cope with the greater demands of increased responsibilities of the job. If the fears and stress are too great then an individual's performance will deteriorate and he could develop a negative attitude towards empowerment. To prevent this happening, an individual must be encouraged to learn to recognise the changes that will take place in his feelings and emotions so that he will be in a better position to cope with them.

In addition to the issues raised above, and having carried out the analysis within the Council and an extensive review of the literature, presented in the first report, it is possible to put forward a set of characteristics of an empowered person. They are:

- Well trained.

- Confident.

- Enthusiastic, motivated and committed.

- Able to use their natural creativity.

- Able to take responsibility.

- Able to communicate needs, successes, problems and ideas.

- Able to work on their own or in a team.

- Flexible, both in what they do and how they tackle new situations.

- Able to make decisions when needed but know when to involve others.

- Proud of their work.

- Proud of their team and their organisation.

- Trusting of and trusted by colleagues.

- Comfortable about questioning the status quo.

- Able to understand the context and consequences of their work.

- Able to set their own priorities and manage themselves, therefore having a sense of self-determination.

- Able to make process improvements on their own initiative.

- Knowledgeable about how well they are performing.

- Clear about who their customers (both internal and external) are, and what they require of them.

- Empowered outside the work place as well.

- Still learning and developing.

- A high level of competence, which extends to confidence about their ability to do their work well.

- Having a sense of impact; that is, that people believe they can influence their work unit and that other people will listen to their ideas.

- Having a sense of meaning; that is, empowered people feel that their work is important to them and they care about what they are doing.

The research analysis suggests that within a local government environment, such as that of Yardley's, in order for an individual to become empowered she would need to:

- Develop the skills needed to take responsibility.

- Take responsibility.

- Share responsibility.

- Develop effective networking of information and influence.

- Help others in their team to acquire the personal skills they need to be effective.

- Enhance personal and team creativity.

- Find ways to make a difference.

- Be prepared to challenge accepted wisdom.

- Maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.

- Do a job she enjoys.

- Keep learning.

Responsibility

Those interviewed closely associated responsibility to empowerment, with a strong correlation of increasing responsibility leading to increased empowerment. An individual can take responsibility at several levels:

- For tasks directly related to him alone.

- For tasks allocated to a group of people in general. For example, whenever a query is put to a group, whoever attends to it is the person responsibility for answering it and for ensuring that the query is dealt with properly.

- For tasks that are not allocated to anyone, but which clearly need attending to.

- For tasks that have not yet been conceived, such as developing and piloting a new and better system, or improving a service.

A fully empowered person is likely to take responsibly at all these levels.

In developing skills necessary to take responsibility there is a requirement for the individual to:

- Develop trust in his colleagues and help them develop trust in the individual.

- Understand his strengths, weaknesses and limits.

- Try to see the job in the context of the organisation and not just the individual's part of it.

- Develop the confidence and self-image that allows taking that responsibility.

4.5.5   Developing Self-Learning

It would be both ineffective and unfair of any organisation to expect for an individual to become empowered, adopt the appropriate attitudes and increase productivity, without the creation of an environment of learning both formally, through the organisation, and informally, self-learning by the individual.   An empowered person will keep learning, formally and informally, at work and in their personal activities, throughout their life. Argyris (1991) stated that the success of a business in the modern environment increasingly depends on learning, yet he argues most people do not know how to learn, and those members of the organisation that may be assumed to be best at learning are, in fact, not very good at all. He argues that the most successful people often have the most difficulty learning because they have rarely experienced failure, and have thus never learnt how to learn from failure. He states that whenever these people's learning strategies go wrong, they become defensive, screen out criticism and put the blame on anyone and everyone but themselves. In short, their ability to learn shuts down precisely at the moment they need it most. Another problem with learning outlined by Argyris is that most people define learning too narrowly as mere problem solving, so they focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment. Problem solving is important, but if learning is to persist, managers and employees must also look inwards. They need to reflect critically on their own behaviour; identifying the ways they inadvertently contribute to the organisation's problem, and then change how they act. In particular, they need to learn how the very way they go about defining and solving problems can be a source of problems in its own right.

In order to move towards Argyris's learning environment there is a need, initially, to understand formal learning. This is likely to require the introduction of personal

development plans. These would include a combination of the working environment, career, family, leisure and self-fulfilment (the need to achieve outside the work and career environment). A significant part of the groundwork of any self-development plan is to understand and manage these conflicting demands. At the same time, it is essential to recognise why it is necessary to set goals and work towards them.

A possible approach to setting a personal development plan may include the following key steps:

a. To set challenging but realistic goals. The key is to balance enthusiasm and vision with wisdom and experience and, therefore, an individual will need to be able to:

    •   Assess where he is now.

    •   Identify, understand and accept the reality of personal strengths and weaknesses.

    •   Identify development options.

    •   Prioritise development options within a framework of clear personal objectives.

b. With a relatively small amount of assistance an individual is able to draw development routes via promoting or training by which he can achieve his objectives. These routes should not be rigid. They should begin with the priority goals and work backwards to practical actions.

c. It is likely that most people will find it difficult to stick to a personal development or improvement plan on their own. The organisation, therefore, should assist by using a variety of methods of motivation and encouragement. The Council's current appraisal process is clearly important in trying to do this, as are peer group pressures and the provision of appropriate mentoring or counselling services.

Individuals within the organisation can be trained to assist in the production of personal development plans or, alternatively, external expertise can be sought during the initial stages. The plan would enable the individual to assess where she has been, where she is now, where she wants to get to, how she intends to get there and how she will know when she has arrived.

4.5.6   Motivation

The research has clearly shown that individuals at work want to make a difference and, in almost all cases, when conducting the interviews the respondents stated that they wanted more satisfaction from their work. This is in contradiction to some theories on work motivation, which assume the opposite: that people basically do not care, and that they need to be watched carefully to make sure they work. In terms of empowerment, an individual is motivated through self-awareness, a sense of being fully involved and commitment to the tasks and the Council as a whole, having a natural desire to be helpful and to make a difference to the organisation.

Empowerment questions the view that the organisation and the individual are in conflict. Empowerment suggests that the organisation can satisfy the individual and also get what it needs, therefore being in a win, win, mutually beneficial relationship.

The key to both the organisation and the individual is to identify the motivating factor or factors. According to the main motivational theorists (including Maslow, 1943; Hertzberg, 1966; Mayo, 1971; McGregor, 1960) they are likely to be one or more of the following:

- Money.

- Job security.

- Promotion.

- Personal development.

- Working conditions.

- Interesting work.

- Loyalty from the organisation.

- Appreciation/recognition.

- Flexibility about personal needs.

However, it is recognised that the above motivators are traditional and would involve scarce resources for Yardley District Council. They would be difficult to provide under the current financial and operational climate within which Yardley District Council operates. Following the analysis of the questionnaires, general observations and interviews, the conclusion can be drawn that within the Council the key motivators are different to those listed above. The primary motivators for individuals, although including relatively high up issues such as job security, financial reward, and job advancement included a number of others, notably:

- Having a sense of achievement.

- Respect for employees as people.

- Encouragement of learning, development and new skills.

- Knowing why things are being done.

- Getting better information.

- Individuals having control over how they do their work.

- Involvement in decisions that affect them.

The key observation is that the motivators emerging from the research would require only limited scarce resources within the organisation. In fact, most of these

motivating factors can be achieved through freely available resources, in that every manager can provide respect, information and participation in the workplace.

As outlined in the first report, the key to creating an empowered workplace is to tap into the new motivators, to create a workplace where people want to work. This means realising that individuals will be more likely to help to get the job done if they feel they are being treated with respect and dignity, and are given the authority that they feel they deserve (Clutterbuck, 1995).

A number of interviewees commented on the fact that empowerment is not something that management does to employees, but rather a mind set that employees have about their role in the organisation. Whilst management can create a context that is more empowering, employees must chose to be empowered. They must see themselves as having freedom and discretion, they must feel personally connected to the organisation, confident about their abilities, and capable of having an impact on the system in which they are embedded.

4.6 Yardley District Council's Role in Creating the Conditions for Empowerment

This part of the chapter gives consideration to the major policies, strategies and procedures that must be pursued by the Council in order to move towards empowerment. It will include other characteristics, initiatives and conditions that the organisation can create or contribute towards in order to enable individuals to become empowered. These characteristics, initiatives and conditions form the second major part of the ideal type, some of which have been identified within the first report, and include:

- Developing a common purpose

- Autonomy, planning and decision making

- Organisational structure

- The use of teams for empowerment

- Establishing empowering leadership

- Culture and organisational climate

- Sharing information and communicating effectively

- Developing commitment

4.6.1 Developing a Common Purpose

Recently, a move towards the involvement of all staff in the formation of one purpose has to some extent taken place at Yardley. However, this is largely within the Best Value Performance Plan, which to a great extent was dictated by external requirements and by the Councillors of the Council. Empowerment would require the involvement of every individual within the organisation in the formation of organisational strategies and plans. This does not mean that everyone gets a veto. However, it does mean that everyone will have the chance to contribute their perspective on where the organisation should be going and what they can do to take it there. All elements of the organisation must continually create and recreate together the plans and culture. These become the reference points that empowered staff use in making the decisions that have devolved to them.

From an organisational perspective, a major purpose of an empowering organisation is to satisfy customer requirements. This external focus is of paramount importance to the Council, in particular, as a consequence of the requirements placed upon them by Best Value. The Council, regardless of the fact that it is a public sector organisation, exists only because it has customers and, therefore, it is essential that its organisational objectives are aligned with the requirements of the customer. The common purpose needs to result in a number of practical strategies and approaches. Some of these are already in place within the Council. It requires:

- Developing and sticking to agreed targets and decisions.

- Agreeing on cultural values.

- Maintaining the common purpose, which demands a constant review and evaluation of success.

The Organisational Vision, Mission, Objectives, Goals and Job Descriptions

The research showed that individuals had differing motivators. However, there seemed to be a significant number of individuals who were motivated by "having a sense of achievement." This implies that individuals within the Council, in common with many human beings, are wanting to accomplish something. A key advantage of the organisation having clear job descriptions, as an interim measure, is that these put into focus the arena within which an individual can accomplish something or, in Hertzberg's (1966) framework, have a sense of achievement. It is a part of empowerment because it relates to a primary source of human motivation. It was argued in the first report that a highly motivated individual would probably perform better than one with a low level of motivation. Yardley District Council, therefore, has an interest in ensuring that people are motivated and morale is good throughout the organisation.

However, if, as identified within the research, a key motivating factor is a sense of achievement, then it is essential that the organisation as a whole has a clear direction and vision to which individuals can relate and to which they can aspire. If the Council hopes to be effective in the long run it must develop and adhere to a core ideology that explicitly spells out a set of core values and a purpose. The process through which this is developed must be one which ensures the adherence of everyone in the organisation. That core ideology then becomes what guides people's plans and actions. Within an overall bottom-up, value-driven process, the Council's Members and Management Team must take the initial step in clarifying the legal and legislative limits within which the Council, as an empowered organisation, can operate. At the same time, people throughout the organisation should be asked to create their own vision for the Council. These visions should be brought into a process designed to create alignment amongst the individual visions, and between individual and organisational visions. Once the vision of the future is clear, it must be viewed in relation to where the organisation is now. In terms of empowerment, the current reality is a hierarchical culture. Strategies must be developed to build a bridge across which the organisation and its people can pass from the current reality to the future.

Within the overall strategy, it may be appropriate for the Council to establish performance goals for each individual. These goals should be set through a collaborative process involving dialogue between team members and leaders. For such goals to be useful, meaningful, and motivating, each should answer five key questions that make goals "SMART":

S = specific: "What am I going to do?"

M = motivation: "What's in it for me?"

A = attainable: "Can I reasonably expect to achieve it?"

R = relevant: "Why am I doing this?"

T = trackable: "How will I assess ongoing progress?"

4.6.2   Autonomy, Planning and Decision Making

Planning is critical to empowerment because it is the process by which targets and goals are established. It is vital that everyone is involved. If people do not contribute when the plan is being put together, gaining their voluntary agreement to its targets at a later stage is infinitely more difficult. All plans should contain (Smith, 1994):

- An acknowledgement of the strategic goals of the organisation and ways in which the specific objectives will help to deliver these aims.

- Some targets by which success can be measured, with an estimate of any resources.

- An analysis of the key threats and opportunities that the Council (or the division or unit, if that is where the plan is focused) faces and how to handle any contingencies which might arise.

- A clear definition of where the responsibility and accountability for decisions rests.

In relation to the specifics of the Council, there are three vital aspects to this view of planning:

i.   Every part of the Council should have a service (unit or division) plan with everyone having been involved in its formulation and able to understand not just what the targets are, but also why the group has set them. This is particularly important as individuals will not be able to make suggestions for improvements unless they understand the full picture.

ii.   The plans cannot be set in isolation. There must be a process of both horizontal and vertical dialogue to ensure the co-ordination of all relevant activities. For example, the strategy cannot be divorced from the realities of operations, nor can operational goals be agreed without an understanding of the strategies demanded by the future. A process of negotiation between the two is needed. It is a bottom-up, top-down and side-to-side process.

iii.   The process must be real. In effect the plans become a form of quasi contract between the corporate aspect of the organisation (possibly Management Team) and all its sub-units (divisions, units and teams). Once a plan has been agreed the only measure of success is whether its targets are achieved. In my own experience I have been guilty of pursuing such a process in an entirely symbolic manner; once the paper exercise was over, getting back to "the real business". However, I am now fully aware that such disregard is fundamentally undermining to empowerment.

The extent of their contribution to planning and decision-making demonstrates the extent of an individual's autonomy.

Autonomous Decision Making

Managers at Yardley District Council spend a great deal of time trying to make high quality decisions and generate commitment in their team members to carry them through. However, the research would suggest that only a limited number of managers make these decisions through a consensus process. Neither are they

allowing extensive autonomy to individuals at lower levels to extend their boundaries beyond traditional parameters.

At Yardley, the degree to which individuals and teams are able to take responsibility depends on several factors.

i.   The scope of an individual's knowledge and skill base - If an individual does not think she has the skills to do a job, she will normally be hesitant to take it on. It is, therefore, essential that the skill base of individuals is expanded and their ability to access and absorb additional knowledge is also enabled.

ii.   The scope of discretion an individual has over what tasks are done - Individuals within Yardley abide by clear policies, procedures, standing orders and financial regulations and as a consequence many feel that discretion is extremely limited. As pointed out in the first report (drawing on Clutterbuck, 1995), the key to empowerment is to allow the widest possible level of discretion without causing risk to the individual or the organisation. Therefore, a review of the boundaries within which individuals work will need to be carried out and the extent of discretion clarified.

iii.   The scope of discretion an individual has over when tasks are done - This element has significant potential for individual discretion. With clear, relatively simple processes and a precise definition of when the customer needs a particular output, individual's at all levels, particularly at the lower levels, are the most well placed and well-suited to prioritise work in order to deliver the highest quality of service to the right customer at the right time.

The parameters for discretion can be fairly wide in that, at one extreme, the actions and tasks of an individual are clearly defined, in terms of order, standards, quality and finance. In such cases those individuals who break the set procedures are likely to be reprimanded. At the other extreme is a situation which is likely to be based around work teams, which define both what they do and how they do it, within their own frames of reference. In such cases a team would have a very

broad brief, for example, to deliver a cashiers service for the general public. Such individuals or teams are likely to have substantial freedom, as they would be working within clear boundaries and defined levels of autonomy.

The degree to which individuals at, particularly, the lower levels are able to influence the Council's strategy will largely be determined by its corporate policy. However, Yardley would need to give some consideration to the following questions in order to ensure all those affected have had the ability to influence the policy (Harley, 1995):

i.   Where is the impact of the policy felt most strongly?

ii.   Who takes responsibility for the policy?

iii.   Who needs to be consulted if the policy is to work?

iv.   What is the lowest level to which policy making on this issue could be delegated without causing serious problems?

v.   Is the policy aimed at constraining action or stimulating it?

In a situation where the policies are to be defined at Management Team level the ability to influence these can be extended to all levels of the organisation through:

i.   Participation in cross-functional, cross level panels, which discuss and review policy.

ii.   Opinion surveys.

iii.   Open discussion of policy issues in a Council newsletter.

According to Harley (1995) the crucial factor in relation to the concepts of consensus decision-making, power sharing, discretion is that without clear boundaries from the outset one of two responses usually occurs. One, is the fear of senior management that chaos will breaks out when people are exercising the freedom they perceive comes with empowerment. In the face of any failure,

senior management tends to revert to a "we will sort the problem out" mode. This perpetuates a hierarchical culture of leaving things as they are, prompting the conclusion that empowerment is a flawed concept. The second response, which is more typical, is that sceptical team members do nothing different. They assume that empowerment is just the next fad, and will soon pass. Managers see this lack of action and conclude that empowerment is just another flawed concept.

It is important to distinguish between boundaries of empowerment and boundaries of hierarchy. Boundaries that exist within a hierarchy, and with which most people are familiar, tell people what they cannot do. In other words, these boundaries constrain behaviour. The boundaries of empowerment clarify for people the range of actions and decisions that they are able to make. In other words, the latter boundaries guide actions and encourage people to take responsibility.

It is important to clarify for individuals that they will not be making all the decisions for the Council, especially at first. Team members and supervisory leaders may think that empowerment means they get to make or be involved in all of the Council's decisions. Conversely, senior managers may worry about losing control if people get to make or, be involved in, all decisions. Essentially there are two categories of decisions in relation to the Council that focus can be placed upon, these are strategic decisions and operational decisions. It needs to be made clear that strategic decisions will continue to be made by Management Team. Management Team will decide in overall terms how to implement the policy of the Council as a whole, resulting from the political manifestos. What team members will decide are operational matters, focusing initially on less complex and involved decisions but gradually moving towards more complex and involved decisions. In dealing with operational decision making individuals throughout the Council are likely to focus on how to improve operations in ways that cut costs, reduce errors, enhance quality, increase productivity and so on. There will be a need to explain that improving such operational matters is a clear expectation of everyone, not just something to focus on if an individual has spare time.

The Relevance of Power to Enabling Autonomy

Mintzberg (1983) argues that it is likely that managers will resist change attempts in order to "protect" their power and avoid devolving it to their team members. At Yardley there is a deeply held belief that being given more power and authority marks advancement. The outward manifestations of power and advancement are large budgets, and a big staff. They are aggregated bit by bit in steady steps up as one goes up the hierarchy. The product is rigidity and a culture in which everyone knows their place and acts accordingly.

Empowerment does not mean the end of power. Any organisation would continue to have decision making structures and rules and would continue to enforce obedience to them. What does change is that members of the organisations themselves develop structures and systems supporting collective purpose, rather than their being imposed by senior managers. The idea is that members of an empowered organisation give willing agreement to the organisational forces that bind them to a common purpose. Within Yardley District Council, a bureaucratic organisation by definition and, as such, structured in a hierarchical form, there is a notion that conflict can only occur between two individuals who possess more or less equal power and who disagree. In an unequal situation, the exercise of power is trivially easy and cannot give rise to argument. By definition, in a hierarchy such circumstances are minimised and on the rare occasion when disagreement between colleagues of a similar position does occur within Yardley a senior manager will resolve the situation.

Research from the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, has shown that the more people believe that they can influence and control their work and the organisation, the greater will be organisational effectiveness and satisfaction and that shared power results in higher job satisfaction and performance throughout the organisation. The increasing use of teamwork in organisations with its development of power-sharing seems to lead to more effective organisations. Parker (1990) states that companies using teams experienced greater productivity, more effective use of resources and better problem solving success.

Kouzes and Posner (1996) state that the amount of power that individuals or business units have is derived from:

i.   The ability to perform important tasks.

ii.   The degree of discretion and visibility associated with the job.

A leader or team's ability to meet the first point depends on three factors:

- Access to appropriate resources.

- Information, sufficient to identify alternatives and make decisions.

- Support from team members, colleagues, managers and suppliers.

Having more discretion and visibility further enhances power for one's role or team. Discretion is the ability to take non-routinised actions and exercise one's own judgement without reference upwards (Hennessy, 1994). It is therefore important, within the Council, that the Management Team ensures that it:

- Gives people important work to do on critical issues.

- Gives people discretion and autonomy over their tasks and resources.

- Gives visibility to others and provides recognition for their efforts.

If the Council is able to create an environment where individuals are aligned with its direction and understand their performance boundaries it enables them to take responsibility and ownership for: seeking improvements, identifying the best course of action, and initiating the necessary steps to satisfy customer requirements. This highlights the need to connect individual and team goals to the Council's goals. Then the output of teams with contribute to the successful achievement of the Council's goals.

A broader appreciation of the big picture, coupled with an understanding of Council values, enables people to use their discretion. Without this link to broader organisational goals, discretion can be used in dysfunctional ways, however well intentioned.

Power is not a simple concept. However, its effective distribution is critical to the success of autonomy within an organisation, and to the organisation's own eventual success under empowerment.

4.6.3 Organisational Structure

Since its establishment in 1974, Yardley District Council has maintained a bureaucratic structure, which is characterised by slow decision making, with central control exerted through the hierarchical system. Yardley is a pyramidal organisation with highly specialised functions, clear boundaries, imprecise job descriptions and tight control by supervisors to make sure work gets done consistently and quickly. As such, being a control-focussed organisation, the people at the very top plan and think whilst the lower levels do the work. Empowerment within hierarchical structures is possible but only in a limited way. This is largely due to the fact that structures must follow strategy. If an organisation adopts a strategy of empowering its people then it must develop the structure that will best deliver this. Attempting to empower within the limits imposed by an existing or slightly altered structure will allow an organisation to achieve, at best, a part measure of empowerment.

To make the change process of empowerment completely successful would require transforming every aspect of the organisation simultaneously. This means the concept of the job, the working environment, the structure, hierarchy and communications all being dealt with at the same time. Ideally, an empowerment initiative would involve dismantling and rebuilding the structure from scratch. It is highly unlikely that Yardley can change to this extent, but a positive and committed move towards such a goal would be a significant step towards achieving empowerment. The key requirement would be to move away from the pyramid structure to one that would best facilitate empowerment for Yardley District Council within its unique environment.

However, hierarchy is not completely incompatible with empowerment, as the best shape for empowerment is whatever allows and encourages people to become empowered (Kinlaw, 1995). Generally though, the empowering organisation is thought of as being flat, broken into small, semi-independent units tied to the centre by a small number of control and support systems. Communication

systems are horizontal rather than vertical and command paths run so that empowered teams are answerable to their internal customers rather than to their boss. The right shape for empowerment depends on the purpose of the organisation. The critical factor to take into account is what exactly the organisation is trying to accomplish at the individual, team and organisational level. How do these purposes fit together and interact? What can individuals do to improve their own position, the team's position and the organisation's position? In bureaucratic organisations such as Yardley, there is frequently clarity of role, but little sense of team or organisational purpose. In an empowered organisation people can readily assume someone else's role (some roles tend to be less distinct) and be guided in doing so by their understanding of the larger picture.

The review of the literature in the first report (drawing from Lorenz, 1993) suggests that Yardley's vision of an empowered structure may include:

- Instead of a series of levels, which command and control the one immediately beneath, power and information on many issues must be delegated, decentralised and more defuse.

- Trust must be established between managers, peers and subordinates.

- Cross-functional teams must replace individual effort.

- Instead of information being withheld at each successive level in the hierarchy it must become shared or, at least, accessible through networking.

- The new structure invariably means fewer managers, each with wider responsibilities. There is a need to move away from the old principle that a span of control of between five and fifteen people is the most anyone can manage effectively. Instead, span of control can, according to writers such as Drucker and Lorenzo extend to beyond twenty as the manager's role shifts from controller to coach, or mentor.

The right shape for empowerment must take account of the needs of the customers. Yardley District Council has, over the years, increased its emphasis on

the customer and has slowly tried to move away from the form of relationships where managers of the Council are at the top and customers are at the bottom. Consideration may need to be given to a customer-responsive structure, where the needs of the customer inform the structure that is created. This may be as simple as turning the relationship on its head, putting customers at the top of the structure, customer-facing staff beneath them and those further from the customers, such as senior and divisional managers, towards the bottom.

Structures exist solely for the purpose of enabling the organisation to achieve its goal. That goal should be to satisfy its customers. Structures, therefore, must be flexible and evolve to meet new circumstances. Empowerment cannot offer a blueprint for the structure of an organisation. By definition, each one will be different from every other. Nonetheless, there are a number of guiding principles, which will hold true for an empowered structure. These are (Brown, 1994):

a.   To organise around purpose and output and not functions. In arriving at a definition of structures designed around purpose and outputs, Yardley District Council needs to ask and answer two vital questions. Firstly, what do we exist for and, secondly, what key activities do we need to do outstandingly well. Once those questions are answered, the answers can be used to design structures which fit the particular situation. This may cause the Council to reconsider how its support services are allocated. Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed on supporting departments which provide direct services to the public, rather than the departments representing professional disciplines. The ideal situation would be to abolish the traditional functions of support services such as finance, legal and personnel in order to create multi-disciplinary teams focused on service planning (uniting service priorities with the budget process) and the review of service performance (combining the analysis of both service and financial management and obtaining customer feedback). However, due to the size of the District Council such an option would be unfeasible and is likely to create additional costs for the authority.

b.   Devolve management decision-making. The frontline, where the Council's services are delivered, must be given as much freedom and responsibility as possible. The creation of autonomous and self-directed work teams,

which are discussed later in this chapter, would seem to be the most effective means of achieving this and would further enhance the Council's services through enhancing quality and flexibility.

c.   Clarify roles. Success in any structure requires detailed clarification of roles in order that there can be effective integration of decision-making. These would not be traditional job descriptions focusing on the process of how a job is to be performed. Instead, they would concentrate on the results or effects of each particular post. Once roles are clarified, the ground work for allocating accountability and responsibility has been done. Accountability is a fundamental building block of any process of empowerment. It requires each individual, each work team, and each department to be absolutely clear about what is expected of them. It also means providing adequate resources, in terms of people, money, materials, time and, most critically, the necessary authority. This can therefore be represented in the equation:

$$\text{Responsibility} = \text{Accountability} + \text{Authority}$$

If managers and work teams are to be held responsible, they need the authority to make operational and staffing decisions, and to allocate and reward work. Authority without accountability causes equally difficult problems. A common problem within the District Council is that decisions are made or actions taken without reference to what resources are available. Access to the resources is then rationed through the use of waiting lists. Such a system places no responsibility on the professional to exercise sound judgement in getting the best value for public money. Often, rather than being responsible for awkward decisions, which challenge the status quo, people leave it to vocal customer dissatisfaction to bring about change.

4.6.4   The Use of Teams for Empowerment

At Yardley District Council, due to its hierarchical structure, managers make most decisions, with varying input from their subordinates. In order to move towards an empowering structure, a possible replacement is self directed teams. The current environment within which Yardley District Council operates is complex and

calls for it to take complex decisions. The most effective way to make such a decision would seem to be to invite input from a number of people. Implementation of decisions requires team effort if they are to have the desired results so it seems only appropriate to have team input into the decision-making process. It is my belief that teams are more effective than individuals, particularly in complex situations. In some parts of Yardley, a team with its synergy of effort, offers greater knowledge and a strong support mechanism for people who are trying to act in an empowered fashion. Self directed teams, within an empowered environment, should not be seen as the same as participative teams, quality circles or semi autonomous teams as they make and implement decisions and are held accountable for results, unlike other types of team where only recommendations are made. The development of self directed teams would take considerable time and effort on the part of the Council.

Teams provide high productivity for a number of reasons (Pearn, 1998):

i.   Empowerment can increase within teams, partly because of the synergy that is a recognised characteristic of successful teamwork.

ii.   Team members are closest to the work they perform and know best how to improve their jobs.

iii.   Most employees become more involved in their work when they feel "ownership" of their jobs and know that they, and their contributions, are of value to the organisation.

Self directed teams offer the organisation the advantage of flexibility, multi skilling and self-disciplining. Self directed teams are usually permanent groups working together on a daily basis, responsible for a whole operation or a well defined part of the process. The team is likely to (Wheatley and Parker, 1995):

i.   Plan and control their own work processes.

ii.   Set goals and monitor performance.

iii.   Take on responsibility for the quality of their work.

iv.   Manage their budget and deal with various stakeholders.

v.   Manage their own training needs, recruitment and discipline.

Most of these factors go beyond traditional employee involvement, and ask of individuals a willingness to take full responsibility for their work.

In essence, individuals will need to, over time, acquire commitment to teamwork and acquire the skills to make it work. It is, therefore, essential that the Council provide adequate training to develop team members. Firstly, it is crucial to let people know that the issue in team training and practise is not whether they possess the technical skills to do the job (it is recognised everyone needs to continually learn new technical skills, and Yardley District Council tries hard to provide opportunities for people to learn those skills). The issue that needs to be addressed is of teaching people "how to manage themselves."

Secondly, essential to the effectiveness of self directed, empowered teams is learning how to make consensus decisions as a team. It has been observed through the research that many managers and individuals do not really understand what consensus decisions are. Team training has to help people understand that consensus decision making means people might, even after extensive discussion, still have different opinions about the best solution to a problem (such that a vote on the options would not be unanimous). In spite of those differences, everyone is willing to get behind one option, and to do everything he can to make it work. Paramount in this communication phase is that team leaders create a safe environment where people can say whatever it is they need to say, with no fear of reprisal. It is important for team leaders to learn the difference between a team member expressing a feeling or opinion that is divergent from that expressed by others and a team member expressing a refusal to support the team's decision.

Thirdly, for team processes to be effective, people must develop good communication skills within the team setting. This can have quite different requirements from one to one communication. In a team context, the skill of listening to multiple ideas and assimilating those ideas into a whole is complex, especially where people have different ways of presenting their ideas. The issues relating to communication are addressed later in this chapter.

Fourthly, all team members must be taught the skill of planning and conducting an effective team meeting. It is not enough for the team leader alone to know these skills. When everyone knows the skills of preparing an agenda, running a meeting by the agenda, and providing follow up to the meeting then everyone can take responsibility for ensuring that the team meetings are effective. Everyone can share the three key tasks of agenda preparation, meeting conduct and follow up.

Fifthly, the Council would need to help individuals appreciate the benefits of working in teams. Both team members and leaders need to understand and believe that teams can fill many of the voids left when leaders are stretched due to excessive work loads or other organisational pressures. Teams can help in providing the direction and support that was once provided by a hierarchical structure, and in a more timely and efficient manner. A team should be able to share ownership, responsibly, authority, power, rewards and energy.

In order to move towards a team environment the Council will be required to create a number of conditions and undertake a number of initiatives. These include:

- An environment in which mistakes and failures are viewed as learning experiences, not occasions for blame. Plunkett and Fournier (1991) emphasise that improvements in performance and quality do not mean that errors can be, or even should be, eradicated. It is not the absence of mistakes but the way in which they are managed which characterises an empowering workplace. Ideally, the climate should encourage initiative and innovation without fear of failure.

- Clear and constant communication about the organisation, covering, for example, its activities, performance, needs, external pressures and departmental initiatives, is a common requirement to enable self directed work teams to work and to integrate their work with overall business objectives.

- Team members will need training for any management functions they may take on; training to enable them to do each other's jobs; and training to monitor performance. Teamwork requires particularly well-developed

interpersonal skills, for which training will almost certainly be needed. Training in negotiation, meeting facilitation and other areas may also be required, as the team progresses (Pearn, 1998).

- Frequent meetings are necessary for the team to engage, for example, in co-ordinating activities, monitoring processes and developing ideas. In many team-based organisations, teams meet for five to fifteen minutes on a daily basis, with longer meetings on at least a weekly and usually an "as necessary" basis.

- The self-directed work team needs well-defined goals, and visible monitoring of progress and performance (Wheatley and Parker, 1995). Charts, figures, graphs and other visual means can be used to show objectives and progress towards them. The ability of support functions (particularly within the Chief Executive's and Treasurer's Departments) to provide the necessary information is essential.

- Both the self-directed work team as a whole and individual team members require information about the progress they are making. Feedback on performance, both in group meetings and in one to one sessions, should be given constructively, with emphasis on the positive and discussion of possible ways of dealing with any negative aspects (Kinlaw, 1995).

- Rewards are an obvious area in which managers can create an empowering context. The research analysis shows that non-financial rewards, which recognise performance, are extremely important, while actual remuneration might be linked to performance through implementing bonus schemes, group incentives or similar schemes.

For individuals, self-directed work teams are likely to offer what some interviewees have regarded as benefits, namely:

- To participate in work management.

- To learn different job skills.

- To feel a valued part of the organisation.

4.6.5   Establishing Empowering Leadership

Johnson and Redmond (1998) argue that within an empowering organisation the principle is that people take control of their own destiny and participate in the workplace to their full potential and, therefore, an empowering leadership style is vital for this process to work.   An empowering leadership style encourages organisational members to become committed to a common purpose in which they jointly believe and which, at the same time, will lead to the success of the Council. In the process, they both help one another and become self directed. All empowered individuals provide leadership when required and teams need leadership to ensure they work co-operatively.   The current style of management within the Council has been observed to be one where management:

- Plan for the future and set the overall objectives for the organisation.

- Set goals and targets for every activity in the organisation.

- Set out how each task must be done, in detail.

- Provide all the resources necessary for the operation (supplies, services, equipment, information), monitor it and ensure that these are available at all times, as and when required by the workforce.

- Ensure that every individual is properly trained to carry out any tasks to be assigned; the individual must be able to complete the task in the proper manner and without risk to health or safety.

- Monitor the attendance of every employee.

- Continuously monitor what each individual is actually doing.

- Monitor the results of the activity continuously.

- Attempt to improve the operation.

- Allocate tasks to individuals at the beginning of each period and reallocate people as demand changes.

- Step in whenever there is a deviation from the prescribed activity or results and decide what action to take.

- Initiate discipline at the first signs of any problem, and deal with any grievances at source.

- Co-ordinate the activity of the various sections of the operation.

In an empowered organisation, many of these tasks are likely to be delegated to the workforce, which releases the managers to deal with the longer-term issues. It is therefore suggested, in order for Yardley District Council to move forward as an empowered organisation, that the Management Team devote more time to strategic planning. They have the final responsibility to secure the long-term future of the Council. This means that, however the strategic plan is developed, they will need to sign it off, and stand behind it. Strategic planning involves scanning the environment, identifying community needs and planning to meet those needs. It involves taking stock of the environment, and of the threats and opportunities that the organisation is likely to face. From these considerations, the overall objectives of the Council can be determined. For a "command and control culture" similar to the one currently in place this may be enough but in an empowered culture more is required. To gain the commitment of the workforce, so vital to its success, people need to be part of creating a vision of the organisation, what kind of organisation it should be and how to make it so.

An empowered local authority will not just achieve results, it becomes a recognisable entity. People need to know what that entity is. It is characterised not just by what it achieves, but by how this is done, what values are implicit in the way it does business, the way it deals with customers and treats people, the way it views its employees, the community and the environment. The role of the Management Team is to provide leadership in creating, disseminating and discussing this vision with the workforce and, perhaps, projecting it beyond its locality.

Below the Management Team, the leader of a team has a significant role to play. The leader of the team is not the person who gives the orders to march. The leader is the person who is in charge of the personal development of team members, the person who creates the environment for performance, learning and development. This new role for the Yardley manager or supervisor would be more along the lines of being a facilitator. For a facilitative leader, developing a climate for team performance is an essential skill of empowerment. Many local authorities are responding to new pressures and initiatives by moving towards the flattening of the organisation, with a move away from a pyramid structure to one of a circle-based structure with the customer (or the community) in the centre. As a consequence middle managers have been required to reassess their roles within the organisation. In order for Yardley to go forward as an empowered organisation, middle managers must do more than oversee, they must help people to learn, grow and develop. They need to help the team to work together, not just check up on the work of the group or individuals. Middle managers within an empowered environment can easily be seen as an endangered species unless they are able to adapt to the new workplace, following the principles of empowerment. As such, the manager's role is one of being a teacher, an encourager and a coach. The manager is also a communication link, connecting the team to other groups and integrating their efforts with those of others.

The research analysis and a review of literature suggest that an empowered leader would need to have a number of key qualities. These qualities would include:

- Leads with vision, not tradition. The vision is generated by everyone and is inspiring and meaningful. The leader aligns people with a vision of what they want to become.

- Learner not teacher. She knows what she does not know and is willing to learn. She is not committed to the old ways as the only means of finding solutions.

- Focus on process, not content. He seeks to get the process going instead of trying to determine the detail of how the team works.

- Enabler not controller. She does not try to keep control. She delegates and gives people freedom to perform; she shares responsibility and the authority to act.

- Coach not expert. He helps people to learn and develop skills.

- Emotional literacy not technical skill. She understands that change is difficult and that people have differing feelings. She is sensitive to the needs of the individuals within her team, finding ways to create originality. She encourages those team members who are resistant to change, to develop. Such a leader will be an optimist, seeking excellence in every aspect of her work. She will be eager to see all her people develop their knowledge and skills to the full. She will be concerned to move ever forward, striving for excellent results, for both a continuous improving return on investment and for service to the community.

The Role of the Manager

For empowerment to take root within the Council there must be a thorough understanding of the concept and a commitment by managers to invest in the policies that will bring it about. Haynes (1980) points out that local authorities, being bureaucratic in nature, have tended to structure themselves on a hierarchical basis with many layers, particularly in the middle. The more management layers an organisation has created in its middle, the less the layers at the top receive direct information from the bottom. It is noticeable in the local government environment currently that a number of authorities are creating the post of communication manager. This can be interpreted as absolving all others from having to bother about communication.

Empowerment brings about a fundamental change in the way that managers think about their jobs and the relationship with their people and is a move away from the traditional management thinking of "I am the manager and these people work for me." There a pyramid structure exists, with team members reporting to the manager and the manager being in a position of psychological advantage over those that are below him.

At Yardley, team members tend to comply with the manager's directives and the amount of freedom or discretion they have to organise and run their own jobs is limited. The manager tends to do much of the thinking and planning for the team members and they are dependant on the manager. In such a situation they are not asked to think any broader than their everyday jobs. Research suggests that in some cases they have become inward looking, doing just enough to satisfy the demands of their manager and little more. However, another paradigm is the reverse of dependency, where the triangle is turned upside down with the team members being at the top and the manager being at the bottom and can be summarised by the phrase "I am the manager and I work for these people". The assumptions underlying this approach are that the team and its members are competent and perfectly capable of organising themselves. The manager's role is now elevated to resource provider, visionary, coach, mentor and facilitator. The manager works within the boundaries of the team, ensuring they adhere to the standards and expectations of the organisation. The manager also guides the team in its development by ensuring that its role fits the longer-term organisation objectives. The move from the dependency paradigm to the empowerment paradigm is not easy. It requires a change in the management ethos and in the perception and skills of every manager and is likely to involve extensive training and re-education. The change in focus that is required involves moving away from close supervision, and acceptance of full responsibility for all of the work unit's outputs. Instead, management control is maintained through, firstly, the drawing of boundaries within which people can more freely manage their own work; and secondly, the setting and monitoring of the goals that people work towards. The skills required by the manager in this context resembles those associated with leadership rather than supervisory control. These include setting goals, facilitating the Council's business processes, monitoring progress, maintaining self esteem, providing information, facilitating communication, coaching, counselling and providing resources.

By these standards, management responsibility centres not on a push to obtain results, but on developing and maintaining conditions that will, firstly, encourage others to care about obtaining results; and, secondly, allow others to share the responsibility for obtaining these results.

Foy (1994) argues that genuine change in complex organisations often comes from the middle. That is, the professionals near enough to the "coalface" to know what is possible, what is going on, where the levers of change are and near enough to the top of the hierarchy to manage local initiatives and protect them until they have taken root.

4.6.6   Sharing Information and Communicating Effectively

The research analysis has shown that certain individuals feel that they have insufficient information to fulfil the requirements of their jobs, let alone exceeding their defined job boundaries. If the Council wishes individuals, particularly those on the front line, to be responsible for making good business decisions that would benefit the community, there is a need for these people to have the same information that senior and middle managers have. People without information cannot make good business decisions. Nor are they motivated to risk making decisions in such a void. On the other hand, people with information are very much more motivated to take the risk of making business decisions to the best of their abilities.

The key factor is that if the Council wants people to take the risk of making important decisions, they must feel that they can trust management and the organisational systems. In a hierarchical organisation such as Yardley, although it has become less the case in recent times, compliance is often rewarded more than is good judgement. Unless this changes, empowerment would be difficult to achieve. Individuals will be wondering, "What will happen if I make a bad decision but make it with good faith and with my best effort?" If people fear the consequences (that is, if they do not trust the leadership), then they will not be willing to take the risk. It would be safer not to act and just let someone else make the decision. Hence no empowerment occurs. It is my opinion that one of the most effective means of building trust within a team environment and, therefore, in all likelihood, within an organisation, is through the sharing of information. As a manager, if I am willing to share the power that information represents, then I feel those who report to me hear through that action, more clearly than any words could express, that this manager is reducing the barriers and including people in the circle of influence and involvement. I feel this is especially true if it is sensitive information that is shared.

Another important factor in sharing information is the need for people to have direction, both individually and within a team. It is quite clear from the research that individuals within Yardley have had very limited experience with empowerment. Many of those interviewed about the prospects of making higher level organisational decisions, giving them greater autonomy, expressed excitement and a sense of motivation. But in most cases, they lacked knowledge, experience or the necessary information to be able to do this at the present time. Initially, therefore, individuals will need strong leadership. But in order to develop them towards autonomy, gradual and continuously increasing levels of information must be provided. Particularly, information that they are normally not privy to.

In terms of the sort of information that individuals are likely to require, most individuals will need to understand the real objectives and the detailed workings of the Council. They need to be told how the Council generates its funding, what its expenses are and the extent of its reserves, along with its long term forecasts. They need to be aware of the financial situation in their particular service area. This information needs to be meaningful to everyone. It will, probably, need some explanation, especially during the early stages of changing to empowerment. Individuals will also need information about corporate aims and objectives and the particular targets that they can contribute towards within their service area. This information needs to include a regular monitoring report, which would enable a team to understand the extent and level of their achievement.

One of the key reasons for not sharing information at Yardley usually tends to be its sensitivity. However, in order to move towards empowerment the Council would need to teach individuals about sensitive information and the way in which to use it, if it is to develop trust in the Council and an interest in its future. By sharing accurate information, (both good and bad) people will begin to set challenging goals based on this information. Gradually, as they believe in the information's accuracy, they will want to use their considerable knowledge and experience to improve the picture shown by the numbers. To give an example, I have come across a number of managers who have felt that the information they have is either too sensitive or too complex for many of those that report to them. However, in most cases, this was a value judgement they were making about adults with similar levels of intelligence, but in a lower hierarchical position. The question then arises how these managers would feel if someone else was to make

the same statement about them. It is likely that most people who are directly or indirectly receiving such statements would feel those with the information either believe they cannot be trusted with it or are incapable of understanding it. Either assumption undermines the ability to develop empowerment.

It is, therefore, important for the Council to undertake an exercise to compile a list of types of information individuals within the various groups have at present and to compare that list to the types of information that their managers have at various levels within the Council. The question would then need to be asked, what information are these individuals lacking that would be necessary for them to make responsible organisational decisions. Such information is likely to include income and expenditure figures, quality measures, quantity information, performance indicators, customer satisfaction and complaints, etc. The Council needs to consider effective mechanisms that can be used for sharing information. Using new technology, these are quite extensive, for example, internal e-mails.

What the Council needs to achieve is a feeling among staff that they are accountable for results that positively impact the Council's performance. In other words, the Council should want them to feel the same sense of responsibility that managers typically feel. In order to do this, individuals need the same information that managers use to make important organisational decisions. When such information is shared with individuals there is an enhanced level of knowledge, which will significantly impact the feeling of responsibility of the individual. However, in order to achieve this impact on responsibility, it is critical for the Council to teach people how to interpret the information they receive.

The initial questions that need to be asked of individuals include:

- What do you think you would do better if you had more information?

- Is there additional information that would be useful for you to have?

- If so, what is it?

- What information do you have that would assist others, including managers, in working more effectively?

- How can we begin to share the information in a meaningful and timely manner?

This exercise alone should provide significant information for senior managers and the organisation as a whole to use in order to develop an information sharing system.

The Relevance of Information Technology

It is possible to argue that within any organisation such as Yardley, the flow of information is a mirror of the flow of power. The individual, or team, which is getting top quality information, will be in a superior position, whatever the formal structure dictates. Information technology is fundamental to empowerment. Modern information technology has the technical capability to distribute information, knowledge and decision-making tools to all staff without a massive rise in costs. It is this that raises the potential for real empowerment and genuinely opens up the possibilities for large-scale participation in decision-making.

Information technology, whether it automates a process or enables open communication to flourish, is a neutral tool. New technology does not inevitably produce empowerment as an automatic by-product: it can equally well support hierarchical control. The working assumptions of the people who design and commission an information system determine its use, as in any other aspect of management. It is not a "value free" technical issue to which there is only one right answer.

Feedback

Some aspects of the research also suggested that people did not feel they were valued and this was largely due to the fact that they were unaware of their performance and the perception their managers had of them. In moving towards an empowered environment, the opinions of every individual within the organisation matter, as every individual has a contribution to make to the success of the Council as a whole. It is, therefore, essential that managers are fully willing to hear the views of the individual. Also to be prepared to provide some level of feedback in order to allow the individual to gauge their contribution, and inform

them of the implication of their actions and attitudes for other people, for the team, the department, or the organisation as a whole.

According to Smith (1996), feedback is a specific and effective tool, which empowers individuals in a number of important ways:

- It allows them to understand where their strengths are and the areas they may have to change.

- It lets them know about the progress they are making with regard to their personal goals and targets.

- It tells them that their manager is taking an interest in what they are doing.

- It underlines the importance of their work in the context of the wider organisation.

- It helps them to take a new perspective on their problems and concerns.

Feedback is empowering because it contributes to an individual's self-awareness. If it is competently given, it should also leave recipients with a choice; they do not have to act on the feedback unless they wish to do so. The feedback must occur in a climate which allows the individual to feel safe, to feel that management is supporting his or her efforts and to feel co-workers want the individual to succeed. This is necessary because, when a human being resolves to try to change, she risks embarrassment and failure in front of her colleagues. Even in a highly nurturing environment, some individuals and managers will still be extremely fearful of losing face, and will be so well defended in their present practices, that they will be unwilling to accept or heed the feedback (Harley, 1995). However, it is my belief that most individuals will thrive and grow in this climate and will be the best identifiers of the type of feedback they need in order to improve. Unfortunately, at present Yardley District Council provides an insufficient amount and an inadequate quality of feedback. The reason for this is, in my opinion, that the nature of the feedback that individuals have been getting has been determined for them. The failure in not involving the individual in the identification of the

necessary feedback has deprived individuals of what they need or want. The fear of doing this is that in some cases it may be that the Council inadvertently is sending out a message that it does not acknowledge the worth of its employees and does not consider them to be equal partners in the improvement process. It also identifies the improvement climate as one in which the individual is not adequately safe nor sufficiently supported for him to take the personal risks inherent in making change.

4.6.7   Developing Commitment

The issue of commitment concerns both individuals, in terms of their commitment to the Council and what it is about, and management, in terms of its commitment to the process of empowerment. The phrase "giving all of yourself while at work" encapsulates what is generally meant by the word "commitment" (Lowe, 1994). According to Martain and Nicholls (1987) it entails such things as:

- Using all of one's time constructively.

- Not neglecting details.

- Making that extra effort.

- Getting it right first time.

- Accepting change.

- Willingness to try something new.

- Making suggestions.

- Co-operating with others.

- Developing one's talents/abilities.

- Not abusing trust.

- Being proud of one's abilities.

- Seeking constant improvement.

- Enjoying one's job.

- Giving loyal support where needed.

This is a broad list, but one that is readily comprehensible. In terms of empowerment, a committed workforce is likely to be one that is pulling together, with everyone doing their best, and getting satisfaction from the common effort to do as well as possible. People feel they belong, are excited by their jobs and have confidence in the organisation, themselves and management.

Argyris (1998) makes a distinction between internal and external commitment. In his terms, the Council should make an effort to pursue internal commitment. With internal commitment, individuals define their tasks; individuals define the behaviour required to perform these tasks; management and individuals jointly define performance goals that are challenging for the individual; individuals define the importance of their goals. The research confirmed some of the findings made by Argyris in that incentive programmes, such as better career paths, recognition rewards, and higher salaries are not necessarily the key motivators to ensure commitment. On the contrary, as Argyris suggested, such incentives create dependency rather than empowerment. Inevitably, the power of such methods wear off with use, for all that is being created is more external commitment.

In relation to management commitment, it is not enough for top management to be committed to empowerment and its values. Ways and means must be found to involve the next layer of management. A typical way of doing this would be to hold workshops with, first, the Management Team alone and, secondly, having the Management Team working with the next layer of management. The aim of the workshops is to gain the commitment of managers to the process of change, to give them an understanding of what is likely to be involved and to give them an opportunity to shape the specific objectives of the exercise. Even at this stage, it is unwise to get too close to operational solutions.

It has been observed that most individuals within the Council have some level of commitment but at times tend to lack a sense of belonging, a sense of excitement and pride in their jobs and in the Council. This may be overcome by:

a.   Informing people by, for example, team briefings, open disclosures and using simple language.

b.   Involving people by, for example, consultation and creating greater equality through single status conditions.

c.   Giving responsibility for quality, direct identification of output, comparison with competitors.

d.   Creating better conditions for a trusting environment by, for example, peer group control.

e.   Creating accountability for results by, for example, pushing decision making down the line.

4.6.8   Culture and the Organisational Climate

To many, the word "culture" is associated with the traditions and ways of behaving that one finds in different countries. It's not just the language, it is people's gestures, the way they eat, the way they behave and the way they relate to each other. In recent years, people have begun to realise that organisations, too, have their own cultures. Businesses have their own different ways of doing things. Different types of personalities will tend to do well, and different kinds of relationships will be encouraged in different organisations. Organisational cultures are shaped by the type of work people do, what has happened in the past and by the kinds of people that work there. Divisions, sections or teams also tend to have their own unique cultural pattern. This is the case at Yardley. These cultures both influence and are influenced by the culture of the larger organisation.

Culture is important to the empowerment of individuals since the process of empowerment often demands a break from tradition and a change in culture. While an organisation's culture gives people stability, predictability and familiarity,

which can be beneficial, culture, because it is based on the past, can act as a brake on new thinking and ideas. It is not only working practices that can inhibit empowerment but also people's thinking, their feelings and their attitudes. As many of these are invisible there needs to be a process to bring them to the surface before they can be tackled. Within Yardley District Council, job titles often carry a heavy weight of assumptions as to what that group of people can do. For example, accountants are number crunchers, so one wouldn't expect any creativity from them. There are many rather limiting job titles which fail to convey the breadth of a person's activity. For example, those involved in front line delivery of the Council's services are also the organisation's ambassadors.

Observations of Yardley would also suggest that to some extent the organisation has become stuck in outdated values, thinking, practices, and behaviour. Over the years, the circumstances, environment, and conditions within which the Council began have, to a large extent, changed. Unfortunately, Yardley has been unable to adapt to the new set of conditions and circumstances as effectively as it may have wished. This may, largely, have been due to the regular changes in political control or the extent of legislation passed by central government. The consequence has been that Yardley has fallen behind in its culture.

In order to move towards empowerment, the Council needs to create a climate for empowerment. The term climate refers to what it feels like to work in a particular organisation, department or team. According to Stewart (1994) climates are typically described in words such as "warm" or "cold" as well as phrases such as "feeling hostile, confusing, supportive and passionate". The research within Yardley would suggest that senior managers are much more likely to describe the organisation as supportive, enabling, facilitative, people centred and flexible. However, in a few cases, middle managers experienced the organisation as hostile, repressive, petty in the application of rules, rigid and punitive. It is therefore very important to try to find out how the organisation, department or team actually feels, from the perspective of all individuals. The research clearly shows that individuals at the lower levels have significantly different feelings about the organisation than those at higher levels. A starting point, in order to assess the climate of the organisation, would be to use an anonymous questionnaire, or focus groups. This would allow the organisation to get some

sense of how individuals experience, even if this is very different from how it seems to senior managers.

In developing a climate that allows empowerment to flourish, there is a need to continually focus on two factors: trust and openness. Trust between individuals and their manager is a pre-requisite of successful empowerment, particularly as empowerment requires the capacity of the manager to tolerate errors. A manager must be able to accept that errors will occur from time to time, even without empowerment, and he must be able to tolerate well-intended errors made in the pursuits of appropriate goals. This requires a manager to trust the individuals within his team to use their initiative and make their own judgements, even if these judgements are not always identical to those that the manager would have made in the same circumstances. It is essential for individuals to feel that they are trusted to take sensible risks, if necessary, in pursuit of clear and agreed goals, and that those above them will be able to tolerate the occasional errors that may be made. Individuals need to feel that they can be open with other individuals and managers if openness is to flourish throughout the organisation as a whole. Openness within the Council should allow for the expression of doubts and even criticism, and should work towards eliminating cynicism, unnecessary criticism and inequality. However, it is also essential that those at supervisory and management levels are open to those below them and that the individuals below them feel the managers keep them fully informed, not just about what is happening but about their thoughts on future plans.

Allied to openness and trust is the need for the Council to eliminate the existence of any type of blame culture. Where this remains, individuals are unlikely to take risks, out of fear of making errors.

4.7   Measuring Performance/Outcomes

One of the key goals of empowerment for Yardley should be the continuous improvement of the Council through the development of those who work within it. Evaluating how well this is being achieved is a means of assessing the success of empowerment. The key test for empowerment, as with any other organisational change, is whether it has produced improvement and will continue to produce improvement both for individuals and for the Council. It is beyond the scope of

this report to discuss performance and improvement measures in detail, although it would be useful to identify the general areas where measurement can be made and how performance measurement can be linked to the overall progression of empowerment particularly as this is an under-researched area. From the Council's perspective, the key areas of focus would need to be the following:

- Customers/community.

- Outputs.

- Processes.

- Inputs.

- Suppliers.

- Work environment.

Each of these elements represent a set of variables that can be measured and tracked to improve performance. Empowerment should be related to the improvement of performance along all of these variables:

- Customers/Community - in the widest sense, the Council's customers are its residents and visitors. However, services within the Council have specific customers. For example, for the Revenues and Benefits Division the customers are likely to be those paying Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates and those in receipt of Council Tax Benefit, as well as the internal customers that this particular section provides services to. The key performance measure in relation to customers is likely to be satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is, first, made up of what customers "see" in a service. It depends on such factors as their perception of quality, convenience and on their perception of the timeliness and completeness of the service. Customer satisfaction also depends on the expectations they have that are over and above the service received. The Council will satisfy the perceptions of its customers when its services meet the required performance standards. This can be tested through

assessment against performance indicators, and by comparison with other local authorities and other suppliers. In its necessary pursuit of customer satisfaction, the Council will be faced with changing its practices. For example, there are those processes which will need to be fully automated to meet requirements for efficiency; communication processes will need to be clearer, to remove the burden on customers' of deciphering the Council's public communication.

- Outputs - for the Council outputs are of two kinds: services and, to a lesser extent, products. These outputs can be tracked by many different measures, for example, productivity, speed, costs, goal achievement, errors, etc.

- Processes - a process is any sequence of events which begins with an input and delivers an output. Any process can be improved by reducing the various steps involved, reducing time or by reducing errors. The challenge is to reduce the number of operations, reduce delays and reduce the need for frequent inspection. An unnecessary operation reduces the value that the process can add. An example, at Yardley, would be that financial information is still being delivered through the internal mailing system. Two measures that can help to improve a process are measures of stability and measures of capability. Measures of stability address whether the process actually achieves what it is supposed to do. Measures of capability assess whether the process has the potential and flexibility to respond to emerging needs.

- Suppliers and Inputs - the same variables for measuring customer satisfaction are applicable to measuring satisfaction with suppliers and their input.

- Work Environment - work environment influences performance. Appropriate variables that can be used to measure the work environment include measures of health, safety and the perceptions and expectations of people. One set of perceptions and expectations that we all want to track is how organisational members expect empowerment to work and how well they see it working.

In addition, individuals will need to test on a regular basis their feeling of empowerment and whether it is in a condition of gradual improvement, and whether they are achieving some of the empowerment targets they had set for themselves. Though the potential list is huge, a limited selection of factors to include when assessing one's sense of empowerment are:

- I express enthusiasm.

- I want to learn new things.

- I am open-minded.

- I am willing to make suggestions and put forward new concepts.

- I have the ability and agreement to undertake a degree of risk.

- I can identify myself and my job with the Council's overall aims and objectives.

- I have the confidence to make suggestions and recommendations for improvement, which are, in general, accepted positively even when not implemented.

- I am far more co-operative with other individuals and I feel the same sense of co-operation from those individuals themselves.

- I feel far more independent and confident in my general day-to-day working.

- I feel I have far more control, authority and influence over my area, in particular, but the organisation and its direction, to a lesser extent.

In progressing towards empowerment and having put in place all the required elements, the Council and those who work within it will want to ensure that all their efforts are producing results, and that these results are worth the effort. Possible factors, which indicate the success of empowerment, may include:

- Staff seem happier (once initial teething problems are over).

- Performance standards have at least been maintained and preferably improved.

- Errors and complaints have fallen

- Staff absences are reduced.

- Staff turnover is lower.

- Staff are increasingly able and willing to offer constructive criticism of management.

- Mangers are increasingly able and willing to accept constructive criticism from staff.

- Staff/management relationships are warmer and more open.

- Customers/clients are expressing greater satisfaction.

- Managers are spending less time on fire fighting and more on strategic planning.

- Communication from the lowest grade to the highest grade is efficient and far more rapid compared to previous practices. Everyone in the organisation is valued and encouraged to make a personal contribution. Individuals are continually aware not only of what they are seeking to achieve, but also why they are seeking to achieve it and how it fits with the wider organisational aims and objectives.

- Culture is co-operative and purposeful, rather than blame orientated.

- Individuals have a real willingness to take personal responsibility for the success, the success of themselves, the team in which they work and the

organisation as a whole. Furthermore, the organisation should ensure it has:

- An empowerment policy.
- Identified champions of empowerment.
- Strategies and plans for the development of the empowerment culture.
- Finance and resources available for the introduction and development of empowerment.
- Management structures and processes for managing the introduction and development of empowerment.
- A strategy for communicating and publicising, internally and externally, the successes of the empowerment initiative.
- Organisational and wider community successes which are directly attributable to empowerment.
- High morale and satisfaction within the organisation.

In relation to the measurement and assessment of teams within the Council, in the shape of divisions or sections, there is a need for:

- An understanding of empowerment by managers and their team members.

- Resources being allocated to developing the empowerment culture.

- Morale and satisfaction indices.

- Considerable employee flexibility.

- Lessening the extent of resistance to change.

- The growth of employees' skills and abilities.

- Increasing levels of trust.

- Increasing number of suggestions or improvement ideas.

■   Improvements in the atmosphere amongst the staff.

A list of the transformation signs, elements and factors has been developed over the period of the research.   These outline the traditional state and the required empowerment state in terms of a set of indices in relation to attitude and organisational action. These are set out in Appendix 10.

4.8   Summary and Conclusions

The approach to empowerment can be developed from either the individual or the organisational perspective and in many cases from both perspectives are used. In relation to the individual it may be a focus around the job(s) she performs and a possible change may be to expand the role of the individual giving greater responsibility and scope for decision-making, which leads to a broadening of skills and the development and utilisation of latent potential. Through this process the individual develops a greater sense of personal esteem and may, as a result, become more closely integrated into the organisation. From the organisational perspective, the organisation may decide to restructure itself or to pursue a change in its culture. The implication for the organisation of each of these perspectives is clearly very different, both in terms of impact and the timescale of the change. The ideal type argues that in order to pursue empowerment it is generally best to develop both the individuals and the organisation as a whole at the same time.

It is recognised that empowerment is a word that is both emotive and appealing to many people. However, its meaning is at times difficult to establish. Of the two levels at which empowerment can be considered, the organisation level and the individual level, it is in relation to the latter that I feel the concept is best understood and has the greater popular appeal. It is important, in this light, to recognise that tackling empowerment at the level of the individual's path of development and growth will benefit not only the individual but also the organisation.

This chapter has set out numerous advantages to Yardley District Council pursuing empowerment from both perspectives. The most obvious is the potential for increased organisational effectiveness. This, in turn, through better quality

services, will ensure a higher level of community satisfaction, an objective that would seem to be paramount to both the organisation and the individuals within it. The ideal type sets out the process through which this can be achieved.

The ideal type is separated into two components: the perspective of the individual and the perspective of the Council. Nonetheless, its main focus is the individual. From the perspective of the individual it has been argued that a number of conditions or components are essential in order to move towards ensuring successful development and implementation of empowerment. These include individuals determining their own self-imposed parameters, further developing their individual perceptions of themselves, the development of a personal mission statement to set a direction and aspirations for the individual, assisting the individual in developing key personal skills for empowerment in order to ensure that she has all the characteristics of an empowered person, the development of an individual's self learning, both formal learning through the organisation and informal, requiring personal development plans and, finally, improving self motivation, particularly through self awareness and through being fully involved and committed to the tasks of both his department and the Council as a whole and having a natural desire to be helpful in making a difference to the organisation.

In considering the major policies, strategies and procedures that must be pursued by the Council in order to move towards empowerment it has been argued within the chapter that those relevant to the individual's perspective include: the development of a common purpose in order that the individuals know why they are doing what they are doing, and can do it together; awareness of the vision, mission, objectives, and aims of the organisation, as a basis for decisions on how these are to be achieved; knowledge of the extent and level of decision making, together with wide parameters for discretion, in order to enhance individual's freedom, influence and authority; moving away from a hierarchical bureaucratic organisational structure to one that is customer focused, organised around purpose and output, rather than functions, with devolved management decision making and clear roles; and moving to a team based approach to improve overall effectiveness and motivation particularly in complex situations where a team is likely to offer greater knowledge and support than individuals working alone. In particular the development of self directed teams with their high level of autonomy and responsibility are suggested as a way forward. An essential organisational factor is

the establishment of an empowering leadership, where those at the higher levels understand and are motivated towards empowerment. This extends to the change in the role of a manager from that of the traditional controller, teacher and checker to one of coach, enabler and learner; to ensure that individuals have sufficient information to fulfil the requirements of their jobs and to contribute positively to the Council as a whole. This requires moving away from the traditional understanding that a manager passes on information in a limiting form and only when necessary, to one where as much information as possible is provided to all individuals at all levels in order that they gain a better understanding of the Council and how it works. It is therefore essential that the Council develop a communication strategy that has organisational wide ownership. This can develop commitment within the organisation, so that the whole work force is pulling together, with everyone doing their best, and getting satisfaction from the common effort to do as well as possible. In such an environment people will feel they belong, they are excited by their jobs and have confidence in the organisation, themselves and management. To develop such a culture and climate within the organisation, one that allows empowerment to flourish, would require greater trust, openness and for the Council to become more supportive, enabling, facilitative, people centred and flexible, at the same time, working towards eliminating cynicism, unnecessary criticism and its current blame culture.

The ideal type is an evolving process focusing on continuous improvement through the development of its individuals. In order to ensure that it is achieving these aims there is a need to evaluate its progress and success. For this purpose, a system for measuring the performance and outcomes of empowerment, under the guidance of the ideal type, are put forward which focus on customers, the community, outputs, processes, suppliers, inputs and the work environment.

This chapter has put forward an ideal type for Yardley District Council which would constitute it as an empowering organisation from the perspective of the individual. This ideal type has been developed through a combination of organisational research, personal beliefs and previous academic research.

CHAPTER 5

TESTING THE IDEAL TYPE

5.1   Introduction

The ideal type's validity and creditability is dependant to some extent on acceptance by those individuals who have been instrumental in contributing towards its development, these being the interviewees. In order to gain this additional credibility a focus group was conducted, its participants being volunteers from the original interviews, in order to lead to the revision or restatement of the ideal type to more closely reflect the requirements and perspectives of empowerment as interpreted by these individuals.

5.2   The Focus Group

The original interviewees totalled twelve. However, of these only seven were able to attend the focus group. Of the original twelve interviewees, two individuals had been assured confidentiality throughout the whole process and were unable, for that reason, to attend the focus group; the remaining three were unable to make the meeting due to other commitments.

Although the primary aim of the focus group was to test the ideal type through the collection of additional data a number of further benefits were derived from the process:

- The focus group acted as a learning environment where the individuals were able to tackle a number of issues within the organisation which although not, in their direct sense, issues of empowerment were closely related to the success of empowerment.

- The focus group allowed for further promotion of empowerment within the organisation and allowed individuals to become more aware of the issues surrounding the concept.

- The focus group also permitted individuals to express their feelings and opinions in depth and at length, particularly around the area of how they visualised empowerment within the organisation.

- The focus group brought people from different departments and environments together for a common activity (discussing empowerment) and by the end of the meeting there was a strong feeling of cohesion. There was team working, in terms of brainstorming, and, most importantly, a sense of common purpose in wanting to make the ideal type work within the organisation.

- The focus group environment also allowed individuals to inter-act with others and share experiences both totally and partly relevant to empowerment.

- Although it was not an organisational exercise, individuals seemed to feel a sense of involvement and participation at finding themselves in a context where their opinions and thoughts were valued and were acted upon.

- From a personal perspective, I found the focus group one of the richest experiences that I have ever had. I received significant and appreciative recognition of all the work and effort that had been put into the research process. At the same time, and most importantly, I was seeing, at first hand, the reality of the potential impact that the ideal type could have within the organisation, if adopted.

The focus group commenced at 9.30 am on Friday, 6 October 2000, finishing at 1.30 pm. The overall structure of the focus group was:

- Introducing myself as the moderator and the Office Services Manager as the scribe.

- Thanking all participants for attending and for their contributions.

- Outlining how the participants came to be there, that the process was voluntary and the reasons for other interviewees not attending.

- Giving a background to the research, its purpose and key findings to date.

- Giving further assurances of the confidentiality and anonymity of anything that came out of the meeting.

- Participant introductions and key information including name, department, etc.

- Answering any questions or issues that I had not covered to that stage.

I made use of this introductory session to set the overall tone for the discussion, emphasising what I regarded as the key principles of the focus group:

- That this was a discussion group with a research purpose.

- That there were no right or wrong answers.

- That we will all have different and varying viewpoints and participants should make every effort to respect one another's views whether they agree or disagree with them.

- That my role was to steer people through the discussion, not to directly contribute my own opinions, although where appropriate I would provide additional information and clarification and, where essential, ensure accuracy.

It was also agreed during the focus group that all participants would be given some form of feedback within two months or at the completion of the research (whichever was sooner). Assurances were given that the feedback would be provided on a personal basis, not through an inappropriate channel such as a general memorandum. Feedback was provided for a number of reasons, including the request of participants, common courtesy, to ensure continued interest by the participants in the concept of empowerment, and to demonstrate that the

participants' opinions had been taken seriously, thus increasing involvement and ownership in the concept of empowerment.

Discussion also took place on how the findings would be used within the organisation and to whom the various results (questionnaires, interviews, observations, focus group) would be targeted. It was agreed that outside the research itself the findings of the focus group and the key discussion areas would be summarised and presented to Management Team as a number of issues which, although relevant to empowerment, were significant in their own right, in particular, communication within the organisation.

One of the participants was also a senior union representative and was able to make contributions both from the perspective of the union's stance and from his own perspective as an employee carrying out specific duties within the organisation. In general, his feedback would suggest that the research into empowerment was much appreciated by individuals within the organisation and that there was some hope that use of the research would be made by the Management Team.

5.3   Key Discussion Points

5.3.1   Organisational Aims and Objectives

A discussion took place on why only four of the twelve interviewees knew what the aims and objectives of the organisation were and the reasons for this. The comments around this area were:

> "Individuals are unable to know or have ownership of the aims and objectives when there have been no real changes in working practices."

> "The fundamental problem is one of communication and following on from that the resources needed to communicate with individuals within the organisation."

"At the moment the aims and objectives are words not action. There is a time delay before we can start to see the benefits of the aims and objectives. It would appear that there is no demonstration from Members and senior managers that actions are currently taking place and making individuals aware of what they are. However, this will happen in time. It is quite clear we do not have the resources to be proactive in this way."

"The Council's aims and objectives have to be lived. It will take time to get to know them and making them all job related. Only once they are job related can individuals start to live the organisational aims and objectives because it is only at this stage that they will truly understand the impact from their own personal perspective."

"The real challenge is to cascade down the aims and objectives. However, the attitudes of Councillors and chief officers will need to change in order for this to happen."

5.3.2   Communication

"The results of the research seem to show that communication is a big issue."

"The concern around communication was first identified two years ago as a big issue, when separate research was being carried out."

"From my experience and understanding, communication between teams on a day to day basis is good but between departments it is poor, with no formal or informal mechanism in place. There is no socialising between departments particularly when departments are in different buildings."

The group went on to discuss ways in which the organisation could possibly improve communication.

"In my previous organisation, the departments were all situated in different parts of the town, a new building was built and all the employees of the Council moved into that one building. Communication within the organisation as a consequence improved significantly, further enhanced with notice boards, a canteen and a staff room where people could meet."

"The internal e-mail system is a fantastic means of communicating but we, within the organisation, do not make good use of it."

"Consideration needs to be given to inter-departmental working groups, brainstorming groups or task group type of relationships."

"Is this not already happening through Best Value groups? Is there not a danger of us as an organisation having too many groups?"

"I think a bulletin board would be the most effective initial step to take."

5.3.3   Best Value

A discussion took place about the relevance and significance of Best Value and the impact it has had on the organisation as a whole, particularly focusing on the Council's aims and objectives.

"Have the aims and objectives come about as a requirement of Best Value or are we as an organisation passionate and want them to exist?"

A general discussion followed within the group and it was agreed that the aims and objectives had originally resulted as a consequence of Best Value. However, their relevance now was much greater and it was hoped by the organisation that the aims and objectives could reach a much wider audience.

"The problem with Best Value and, in particular, the Best Value reviews is that unless you are involved in them you don't feel a part of the review or the Best Value process. The aims and objectives only mean something to those involved in the Best Value process."

"It's in its early days with Best Value and the adoption of the aims and objectives. We have to realise that we are not yet a year through them. We can only gain experience after the first year, once results have been collated. It is then that we will see some outcome and relevance to the aims and objectives and the Best Value process."

"The problem with Best Value, and as a consequence the aims and objectives, is one of presentation. That is, it is not embraced with enthusiasm and not led from the top."

"This is an important point, Management Team need to be dragged kicking and screaming. There is no process of leading by example."

"Yes, I agree, although I won't agree with the kicking and screaming. Management Team went through the aims and objectives, target by target. Staff are likely to be told that during the first six months, 75% of targets within the Performance Plan have been achieved."

"Yes, but there is still a communication problem. Many people do not yet fully understand Best Value, let alone the aims and objectives. Therefore, it is essential that some training is undertaken."

"The best form of training is not through manuals and documents but, perhaps, through a formal face to face process, where personal mission statements, as outlined in the ideal type need to be adopted, reviewed and constantly be evolving."

"Staff appraisal is being used as a tool to link Best Value to individuals. However, at present, the process is yet to reach the lower levels within the organisation."

"Staff appraisals and the Best Value Performance Plans can only benefit staff if they are able to understand their impact and, therefore, Best Value training is essential, with a particular onus on the aims and objectives and how they impact on the individual - perhaps we need a workshop approach."

The focus group moderator then asked the group to specifically concentrate on the ideal type (which had been sent out to all participants one week earlier with some summary information describing its components). The key issues raised by the participants are outlined below. This part of the session commenced at the participant's request with an initial discussion about general issues that were relevant to them concerning discussions to date and the model in overall terms.

5.4   The Ideal Type

In discussing the specifics of the ideal type one participant initially focussed on the issue of training and learning.

"This model cannot be achieved without significant training being provided by the Council."
"In relation to the conditions and control of the Council, no reference seems to be made to training, development and learning."

The discussion then focussed on the role of the individual and the resources available within the organisation for the provision of training.

"The employee has a part to play in it. If there is no commitment from the employee to be trained and to further develop, both personally and professionally, then the value of training overall is undermined."

"This is true. However, personal commitment can only start to develop once organisational commitment is in place, and it is, therefore, essential that within the model a circle to represent training and learning is included."

"At Yardley we have insufficient training budgets and resources. Within large organisations these resources are made available as a matter of course."

"Yes, but individuals can define their own destiny and become more in control of themselves if they are able to define their self learning and take full advantage of training opportunities."

"People-related initiatives such as empowerment have never before been tackled by the organisation at such a scale. Therefore, many people have never undertaken any training or structured learning. I would guess if the organisation in its wider context was able to understand the discussions of this focus group and the overall findings of the research they would be very keen on self development and learning."

"This is a good point. Most people feel they are small cogs in a large wheel, leading to a lot of unrest within the organisation."

It was agreed that the ideal type would incorporate training and learning from the Council's perspective.

5.4.1 Individual's not wanting to be Empowered

A participant raised the question:

"How does the ideal type recognise that some people don't want to be empowered?"

"Empowerment cannot be forced. It must be a voluntary initiative and, therefore, this model needs to recognise how such

individuals would be handled, and at the same time ensuring that their rights are respected."

"Empowerment is not for everyone. Some people may not have the personalities, attitudes, attributes, skills or the motivation to become empowered."

It was agreed that consideration would be given to incorporating within the model respect for those individuals who do not wish to be empowered. However, it was recognised that there were degrees to empowerment and in the long term these should be investigated further in analysing why individuals did not want to be empowered.

5.4.2 Barriers to Empowerment

A participant raised the question:

"Are barriers to empowerment and a means to overcoming those barriers fully recognised within the model?"

The moderator responded that barriers in general had been considered within the research but recognised that, due to their nature, they had to be formally considered within the ideal type.

"There are numerous barriers, some which may not be recognised as barriers. For example, the definitions you have used within the ideal type, for example, autonomy to me may mean something different than it does to you."

"Picking up on that point, is empowerment not delegation?"

"Surely it can't be, delegation is harmful."

"Delegation means giving power and setting parameters within which an individual would work. Is it not more an approach where you go away and do a specific task?"

The focus group had a lengthy discussion on various terms used within the ideal type, with widely contrasting views and opinions. However, the debate ended with the following comment made by one participant:

> "As a group, it would be wrong for us to start focusing on specific labels used to describe certain initiatives. This would not be constructive. I think, in essence, we all know generally what the terms are leading towards and no two people will describe one specific activity or condition in exactly the same way. Therefore, we should respect the definitions and terms used and try to provide constructive feedback in overall terms."

It was agreed by the moderator that the incorporation of barriers to empowerment would be considered within the ideal type.

5.4.3   Customer Focus

In general, all participants of the focus group made positive comments in relation to the model's overall objective for the Council, that of higher community satisfaction.   It was generally felt that all individuals within the Council were aiming towards achieving this objective. As one participant noted:

> "This is the first time that I have ever seen a clear link being made to better services leading to higher community satisfaction."

A second participant noted:

> "The links, flows and processes as stated within the ideal type seem logical, realistic and achievable and at the same time simple to understand and relate to from a personal job viewpoint."

Concerns were expressed by the group that the community is largely made up of customers for the services the Council provides and, therefore, it was essential that the model recognised customer service and focus.

"The relevance and relationship of the customer and empowerment needs to be stated within the model."

"The Council does not have a customer service ethos in broad terms. It would, therefore, be desirable to clarify the role of the customer and whether the customer fits in anywhere else within the model other than higher community satisfaction."

"We must all remember it is because of the customer that we are here to day."

It was agreed that incorporate of customer focus/service would be considered for the ideal type.

Structure of the Organisation

The focus group placed considerable emphasis on discussing the current structure and generally agreed that creating the right structure for empowerment was essential.

"We are a bureaucratic organisation. How do we reduce our level of bureaucracy in order that we can move towards a culture that will allow us to become empowered more quickly and with less pain?"

"There do seem to be too many managers and supervisors, with few people at the lower grades."

"Yes, and with the hierarchical nature of the Council those on the lower grades are at times made to feel inferior."

It was agreed that the moderator would consider the extent to which bureaucracy had been tackled in the research and, if required, would include a brief exploration of means by which the organisation can move away from its bureaucratic nature and consider whether those aspects should be included within the ideal type.

Further relevant comments made by members of the focus group included:

> *"A key requirement must be to train and re-educate senior managers and Councillors in order for them to think, act and behave in a manner that is conducive to empowerment."*

> *"This will be difficult because we are very entrenched in local authority thinking, where individuals believe that Elected Members and senior managers are clearly in charge and it is to their direction that many of us carry out our duties without any thought on challenging assumptions and current thinking. In addition, the passing of time has also allowed Councillors and senior officers to share in this belief."*

5.4.4   Other Issues

Other general issues were raised for which no defined action was identified. Usually these were areas that had been covered within the research, but were not, necessarily, clearly displayed within the ideal type:

- A quality of treatment/protection of individual's dignity.

- Trust.

- Developing the right climate.

- What an empowered individual looks like.

- Distributing power.

- Eliminating the blame culture.

- Developing the ability to take on responsibility.

- Dealing with pressure and stress.

Some participants also pointed out that although all actions were relevant for the ideal type to be achieved, some actions needed to be clearer and more understandable to all individuals within the organisation, regardless of their grade. In particular, the action "more clearly align the corporate mission, aims, objectives and actions to individuals and teams." In addition, actions needed to extend to include the proposed revisions to the ideal type and, in particular, the development of a communication strategy and a summary report outlining the key findings and proposals of the research to the Management Team.

5.4.5 Closing Comments

At the close of the focus group session each individual was asked for his or her overall opinion on the research, the findings, the actions, empowerment in general and how they now felt having participated in the research and, in particular, in the focus group. The key comments are outlined below:

FG Member 1 *"Try not to get too hung up on the words. It has been an interesting morning and it has been a good exercise in getting people together as a discussion group to voice their opinions and reactions."*

FG Member 2 *"It has been very interesting. Would like to feel it has been beneficial if we could move on what has been discussed. Good to integrate individuals to make them feel as one Council to provide one vision but I don't think it would work given the structure we have. How much influence do we have on senior managers?"*

FG Member 3 *"Communication is the key issue. Management Team have the opportunity to take up the challenge and take it forward."*

FG Member 4 *"It has been shown that there is room for improvement at Council level. This is always dependant on resources - how far can you actually take it? Consultation takes into account the Council's aims and objectives. Trust - there has to be trust.*

This is a good model, it's motivating just to listen to <u>you</u> speak about it."

FG Member 5   "An interesting morning. As said before, communication is a key issue. Culture is something which counts against individual's empowerment. Certain structures benefit staff. Yardley has a hierarchical culture working that would need to change. For the lowest staff, training and communication is essential. It is management's responsibility to ensure that this happens. Management being Management Team and Councillors."

FG Member 6   "I would like to express my thanks for the research carried out today. You seem to have considerable passion and belief in empowerment and the value of this ideal type; I think you are right to do so, it has great potential. I will want copies of the results to enable me to take them away with me into my new job. As a manager, if I am not involved in making an individual feel empowered I feel I am not needed (in my role as manager)."

"In relation to the question "do you feel you can influence decision-making" the answer would have to be "not always" because some people will always shout me down. I believe it is the manager's role to provide support, to give them the opportunity to voice concerns. It is not only the individual but the environment which has to be taken into account."

"Communication comes in different forms which have not, as yet, been recognised by this Authority. Pieces of paper don't get very far. We need to get people to interact. Managers should get braver regarding conflict. Maybe on some occasions we need to get people into a room and face conflict."

FG Member 7   "Does empowerment lead to anarchy?"

"As a Chief Officer and part of Management Team I have the ability to make change but also have the ability to understand

why changes can't be made.   There are many pressures which staff are totally unaware of which dictate why things aren't done.   Resources are a problem - when do we get a chance to do our own job - staff take time to make time.   Individual staff moan at first but then latch on to the challenge."

"I also believe that it is vital that something happens to this document.   I believe it is incumbent to progress this with Management Team."

Researcher   *"This is a powerful group which has strengthened considerably my research findings and should perhaps continue as a focus group with other issues that the Council may need to address, and if empowerment is adopted, perhaps this group can play a role."*

FG Member 5   *"From my own point of view I would be willing to give up a lunch hour to meet."*

FG Member 7   *"This is a good model involving different tiers of staff."*

FG Member 1   *"It's a good example of small cogs being giving a chance to speak.   This ideal type has great potential for the worker within the Council and may, after some modification, be relevant to other organisations."*

FG Member 7   *"It has been a stimulating three hours.   As an officer it has been a tremendous experience.   Thank you."*

5.5   Addressing and Clarifying the Key Outcomes of the Focus Group

This section further explores and outlines the issues which need to be considered in order to move towards empowerment.

5.5.1 Training and Learning

Encompassing and developing empowerment is not a skill or a competence that an individual can learn. It is a strategy for the organisation, and a personal conviction for each individual within the organisation. The strategy needs to be spelt out so clearly that all individuals within the organisation are, at least, aware of what is expected of them, in particular, middle managers. It would be safe to assume that few middle managers will feel naturally committed to empowerment. The starting point would have to be to outline and sell the benefits of empowerment from the individual's perspective throughout the whole organisation.

It is unlikely that all individuals already possess the full range of skills, attitudes and knowledge that they will need if they are to get full benefit from, and make a full contribution to, the process of empowerment. Individuals will probably need to develop new skills in such areas as planning, problem identification and solving, teamwork and organising. Although it is easy to make such general predictions, more detailed identification of specific needs is essential if individuals are to be fully equipped for empowerment within the Council. Therefore, the Council will need to undertake a proper training needs analysis. Such an analysis may include some of the following factors:

- To identify performance shortfall. That is, to establish the gap between current performance and desired or potential performance.

- To identify ways in which training might rectify or close this gap.

- To implement appropriate training.

- To evaluate the results, following training.

- To continuously repeat the process.

In relation to identifying performance shortfall, it would be pointless to train individuals to acquire skills or knowledge which they already have, or which they don't actually need. For an organisation such as Yardley, with limited financial resources, this could be further damaging and potentially demoralising. It is,

therefore, essential that an appropriate exercise be undertaken to identify such required and desired training with a comparison to the training currently provided.

Any training needs analysis exercise would require direct and full involvement of all individuals within the organisation particularly in assessing their needs. Interactive methods such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and appraisals can be used to identify such training needs.

It is essential that all training needs analysis be tightly tied to the organisational mission, aims and objectives. Yardley would need to continue to recognise that training is a substantial organisational investment, and needs to be planned and monitored, as carefully as any other investment would be. Furthermore, like any other investment, it needs to be closely linked to organisational objectives. In analysing training needs, it is, also, essential that the organisation has identified the appropriate funding mechanisms, as without a budget the exercise would be pointless.

From an individual perspective, in order to be empowered it is essential that individual have control over the use of their time. This time should extend to identifying training needs and allowing individuals to decide and determine when and how these training needs can be met.

Given the financial constraints under which the Council has to operate, it may wish to consider other training, learning and development approaches, ones which do not, necessarily, involve external financial expense. These include coaching, counselling, mentoring and appraisals. Coaching is concerned with helping another person to acquire a skill, or knowledge and understanding, that the coach already possesses. The term is commonly used in sport, where a coach helps an athlete or player to improve. In an organisational environment, the word is more commonly used to describe the process of helping someone to do better in their job by observing the person in action and offering them learning advice and guidance. The help may take the form of a boss setting his subordinate more demanding tasks and providing support as she tackles them. It may take the form of a manager asking questions of the learner that are aimed at helping the individual to think things through more carefully, consider more options, or explore possible outcomes of decisions. In each case, we assume that the coach has

knowledge, skill or experience to pass on to the trainee. Within an organisation such as Yardley, with strong differences in understanding and approach between the different parts of the organisation, it is likely that individuals will not work well together if they do not understand the basic needs and concerns of their colleagues. It is, therefore, essential that individuals spend time together and learn from each other.

Counselling involves helping someone to make a decision about the way they would behave in future or how they will cope with a problem. Counselling usually takes place when the person, and they alone, can decide what to do, we cannot decide for them. Counsellors within organisations provide a context to listen, clarify and provide assistance in exploring options for an individual, without telling the individual what to do.

Mentoring is a term used to describe a process whereby one person helps another in his personal, usually career, development. A mentor may be a senior person within an organisation, who is asked to maintain contact with an individual over a certain period of time. There may be no reporting relationship involved. The mentor sees the individual from time to time, seeking information on how he is developing and what challenges he has encountered. The mentor will endeavour to ensure that the individual learns from these events. If the mentor considers that the individual needs to be exposed to new experiences, he may approach the appropriate authorities and support the individual by facilitating a transfer or secondment to a new situation or area. The mentor will help the individual to plan his personal development and provide advice and guidance based on his own knowledge and experience. The role of the mentor has elements of counselling and coaching.

Yardley District Council has recently introduced an appraisal system. However, this appraisal system has yet to reach those below senior management grades. The Council needs to ensure that the process does not become mechanical, forced and patchy in its effectiveness, as may be the case with the growing cynicism, due to its slow progress through the organisation. Traditionally, an appraisal is an assessment carried out by a manager on one of her subordinates. It is usually followed by an appraisal interview. In this interview the manager informs the interviewee of her opinion of the individual's performance over the past period (in

Yardley's case, one year) and they discuss this together. The discussion then moves on to the future and the manager seeks to gain the interviewee's agreement on how performance is to improve in the future. Typically, interviews offer a formal opportunity to consider matters that ought to have been discussed from time to time during the year, perhaps on an informal basis. In addition, it offers, to the interviewee, a formal occasion to obtain feedback on past performance. To assure a level playing field, the manager's boss is required to sign off the form. The assessment is made against a set of behavioural categories and performance is measured alongside a set of objectives from earlier in the year or a previous appraisal.

The development aspects of the appraisal process focus on the future, on the way the organisation and the operation will develop over the coming months. Both the manager and the interviewee have an interest in improving the unit's performance and in working together to achieve this. In an empowered organisation, they can openly discuss what has happened, not seeking to find fault or to ascribe blame, but seeking to learn from these experiences. They may both have something to learn and can discuss this and how the learning may be achieved. Consideration can be given to widening the scope of the appraisal, by involving more of the people who relate to the interviewee in the work context. There may be people other than the manager who have a role to play in the assessment. Consideration may need to be given to the person's environment, which involves asking for appraisals from all the people who deal with the individual. Such a system or process would be difficult to envisage without a high degree of trust between all those involved.

5.5.2 Customer Care and the Benefits to the Customer from Empowerment

The benefit to the customer in dealing with an empowered organisation is that those they deal with recognise the important part they play in delivering service to the customer, and they have the authority and flexibility to ensure it is delivered to a high standard. An empowered organisation, therefore, is easy for the customer to do business with: its entire manner of doing business is geared towards the needs of the customer.

In an empowered District Council, people would share responsibility for problems and be proactive in their response to the customer. The customer, whether a resident, business or any other form of stakeholder, will recognise empowerment through the way he is treated in the course of doing business or having dealings with the Council. Individual employee's attitudes towards the customer would be positive and proactive. The customer will see this through:

- The ability of employees to provide information and make decisions.

- The speed of problem resolution.

- Increases in creative new ideas and improvements.

- Standards being set and maintained by self-discipline, not centralised enforcement.

- Being dealt with by staff who listen actively and show willingness to understand the customer's point of view.

- Being greeted with enthusiasm and a positive attitude by members of staff.

- Seeing evidence of teamwork and the willingness of staff members to support each other in order to serve the customer.

Empowerment, therefore, will be visible to the customer through people's behaviours, which are the expression of their underlying attitudes and values. In the empowered organisation it is not internal policies or rules which are important, it is customer satisfaction.

Yardley District Council is made up of a mix of people some of whom work there because they have an allegiance to the ideals of local government and some of whom work for the Council without any such allegiance. On asking a few members of the focus group what characteristics an undertaking would need to have for them to pursue it for extremely long hours for little or no pay, the responses were "It would have to be something where we thought we were

making a difference for others; we would have to feel we were making the world a better place; we would have to feel we were serving others in a meaningful way." Local government is all about serving others, to make the local area a better place and to ensure a high level of social and economic well being. One of the Council's primary responsibilities is to create a work environment where this natural human tendency to be of service to others is developed. In order to work towards achieving this the Council would need to carry out certain actions. Firstly, since all the Council's employees are service (as opposed to manufacturing) orientated, it is essential that the Council assist each individual to redefine what it is they do in terms of deliverables (particularly in relation to the corporate aims and objectives). When the Council has assisted each individual in the organisation to become clear about what deliverables (service contribution) she personally creates, the individual knows how they are going to serve others. Secondly, once everyone is clear about what service contribution they personally make through their work, then the Council can assist all individuals to identify the end-user customers for their service contribution. These end-user customers, as distinct from intermediary influencers of the service, may be inside and/or outside the Council. They are the individuals or groups for whom the services are intended, and who will try to achieve some kind of desired outcome using the services. Once all employees (including managers) are agreed about whom the end-users are, for the service contributions they personally create, all individuals know whom it is they are going to serve.

5.5.3 The Recognition that Empowerment may not be for everyone

When first starting the research, my co-researcher and I assumed that everyone wants to be empowered and be given the opportunity to extend his or her skills and take on more responsibility. This assumption was based on the belief that human beings naturally want to learn, develop their potential and be more in control of their working environments. We further assumed that people, particularly in the public sector, are unable to achieve these aims because of repressive hierarchical structures and the control exerted by the organisation and its managers. Most people, we felt, would grow and benefit from the release of controls and the resulting greater freedom.

However, we discovered that some people have no real desire to become empowered. They require stability and order, and find it painful and distressing to be in a position of uncertainty and to have to make decisions. They are unwilling to extend themselves and want others to take the responsibility for decision-making. We came to accept that these people are not odd or unusual; they are merely a reflection of the society in which they live. There are other people in organisations who are not impressed with the empowerment arrangement. They see that they will have to work harder and think harder, for no extra remuneration, which, to them, adds up to a poor deal. They may prefer to put their intellectual energies into activities outside work. Middle managers and supervisors may also be resistant to empowerment for different reasons. The extension of other people's jobs is often achieved at the expense of their own. Why should they co-operate in initiatives designed to take away their livelihood? In practice, the opposite might occur and they might be more fulfilled, but it is their perception that is important.

Empowerment needs to be approached carefully, and individuals need to be supported in coping with the stress of such new ways of working and thinking. However, it should also be clear that if implemented properly empowerment has something to offer to everyone, and to every organisation.

At the core of empowerment is the principle that each person is considered in terms of his or her own unique capabilities and circumstances. Thus empowerment cannot be a set of monolithic principles applied regardless of the situation. It must be tailored to the needs and abilities of each individual. To push someone beyond his or her wishes or capabilities is probably the most disempowering and undermining experience that can be inflicted. Furthermore, although I believe that every Council can benefit from empowerment, it would be unwise to pretend that the process does not mean considerable investment of time, energy, emotion and money. Therefore, the imperative for change is stronger where the organisation has a much stronger desire and need to want to achieve the potential benefits of empowerment.

The revised ideal type allows individuals without a desire for empowerment to have the freedom to function within an empowered environment without a commitment to being empowered or wishing to pursue empowerment. However,

most organisations are likely to hope that these individuals may have a change of mind once they are able to witness the real benefits. The revised ideal type is set out below in figure 6.1.

The Revised Ideal Type
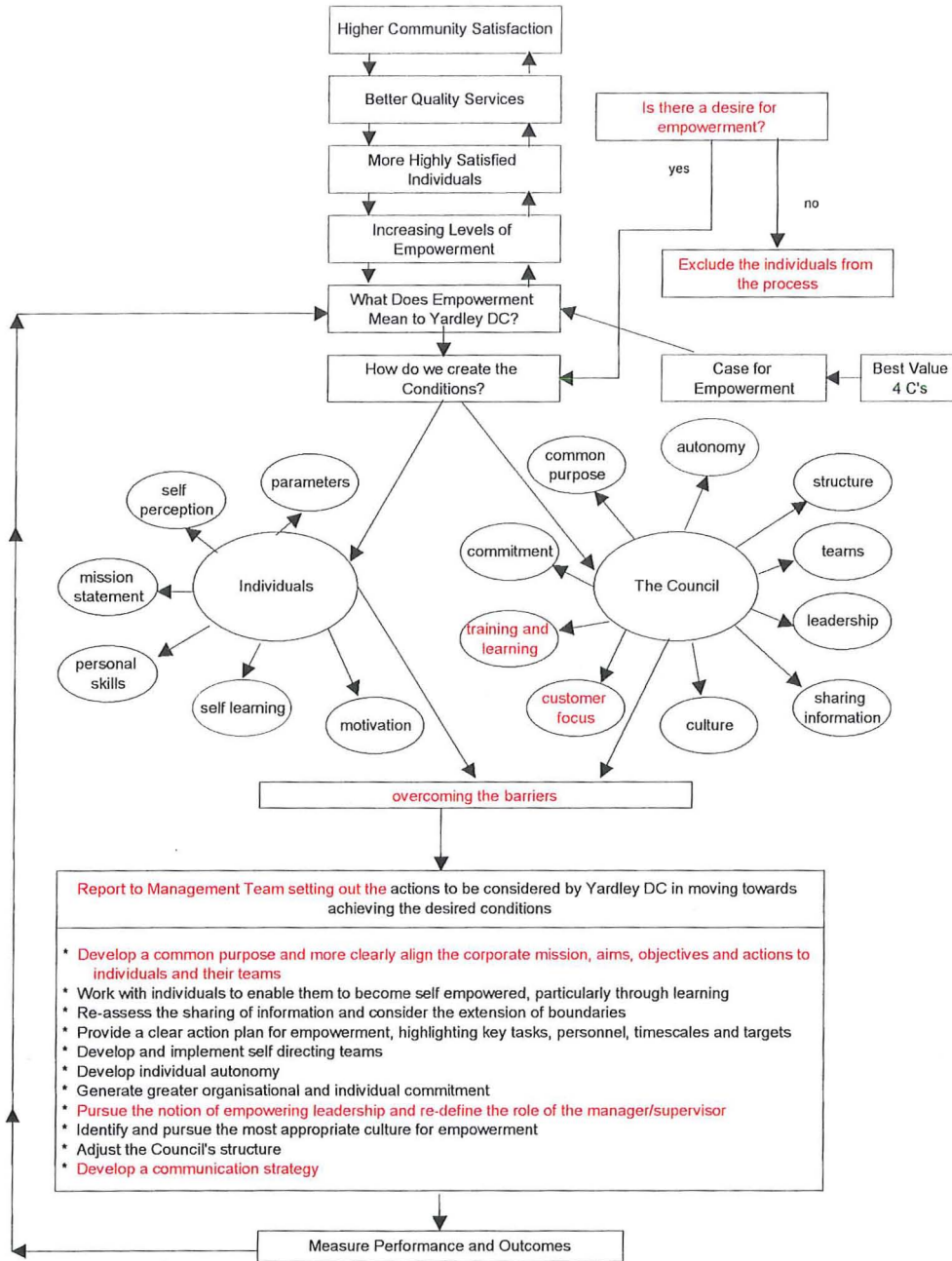
* Revisions to the previous ideal type are set out in red.

5.5.4 Overcoming Barriers to the Implementation of Empowerment

There is a reasonable possibility that, like any change programme, there may be some individuals who will be very sceptical of the whole idea of empowerment when it is first presented to them, and may become resistant in the face of its implementation. This resistance might arise for a number of different reasons. It may simply be a result of misunderstanding and, possibly, poor communication of the concept. For others, it may be a fear of loss of power; particularly, for those individuals with junior managerial or supervisory functions who may fear that they will lose control as part of the empowerment process. For some, the fear may be of the loss of status, in the belief that with the loss of status will go loss of opportunity for promotion or career advancement. In such cases, there is a need for the organisation to help them to understand that empowerment does not lead to fewer managers but to less management. That is to say, that managers remain as important as ever, but their role and function change, from being, predominately, leadership and control, to facilitation and support.

Other staff, without supervisory or management roles may also fear the loss of power. Within Yardley District Council there are a number of long serving and senior staff who wield a substantial amount of informal power. They, too, may fear its loss, and the informal status that goes with it. Such staff are often important opinion-formers within the organisation or the department and may be able to exert substantial negative influence. Opinion-formers may not be only individuals, but influential and powerful groups, often with a power base in some specific activity or skill. It is essential, therefore, that such individuals and groups are identified are early as possible and efforts are made to win their support.

There is a further resistance, that of a simple fear of responsibility. In Yardley District Council there are some staff that are reluctant to accept any more responsibility than they feel they absolutely must, and who avoid it whenever they can. However, participant observation has shown, on a number of occasions, that when staff are persuaded to accept more responsibility they almost always rise to the challenge, and seem to enjoy it. The issue may not necessarily be about responsibility but about risk. When an individual looks at the possibility of taking on more responsibility, she may also calculate what the consequences of taking that responsibility might be. What she sees is that risk is an unavoidable result of

any responsibility. Therefore, it may be that when people reject the opportunity to take on more responsibility, what they are actually turning down is not responsibility but risk. The biggest of these risks is likely to be the risk of failure. If an individual never accepts responsibility, they may believe that they can never be blamed if anything goes wrong. It is not responsibility itself that people are reluctant to accept, but responsibility for failure. It is, therefore, essential that a culture be developed within the Council that tolerates well-intentioned errors.

An individual's attitude can also be a significant barrier to empowerment. In most change programmes, individuals tend to take a personal viewpoint and question "what's in it for me?" and, in the main, the answer is often "nothing." As a result it is unlikely that individuals would in such cases want to give the idea their full support. If the probable outcome is to be neutral personally, then it is likely that the individual will respond neutrally to the idea. If, however, an individual foresees only negative outcomes then his or her response is likely to be negative. Only if an individual can see the possibilities of real and substantial personal benefits is she likely to greet the idea of change warmly and enthusiastically. It is therefore of paramount importance that individuals are assisted in identifying personal benefits which empowerment might offer them. This requires an analysis of motivational needs.

A further barrier is the need to change beliefs. Many individuals will have deeply engrained beliefs about the nature of the organisation and management. Such beliefs are likely to include the idea that it is management's job to manage, and their's to do as they are told. The notion that staff and managers might actually share responsibility for the success of the Council, as equal partners, may seem very odd to the individual. However, unless individuals within the organisation are able to accept this idea, empowerment will be difficult to achieve.

5.5.5   Reducing/Eliminating Bureaucracy

Following further consultation with members of the focus group by telephone it was agreed that this issue would not need to be further incorporated into the new ideal type. The feeling was that the issues around bureaucracy had been adequately covered in the research to date and were sufficiently emphasised.

5.6 Summary and Conclusions

The main aim of this chapter has been to test the validity and credibility of the ideal type through the use of a focus group. However, the gathering of the group led to a number of other general organisational issues being discussed, all of which the focus group regarded as being relevant to empowerment and are therefore, included within this chapter. Prior to addressing the specifics of the ideal type, the focus group had a discussion on three key areas. Firstly, the organisational aims and objectives, with the main comments being that there was a lack of ownership of the aims and objectives, they were poorly communicated, unrealistic, poorly lived and not action orientated. Secondly, communication, where all members of the focus group recognised that good communication within the organisation was important and, if empowerment is to be pursued, would be fundamental. Finally, there was the area of Best Value. Here the focus group felt that insufficient emphasis and attention, training, and communication had gone into Best Value, the Best Value Performance Plan and the aims and objectives within the Performance Plan.

In relation to the ideal type the focus group were positive and welcomed the ideal type as set out in the previous chapter. However, the focus group felt that a number of further issues needed to be addressed in order to ensure that the ideal type was robust. These included:

- Addressing circumstances where individuals did not want to be empowered.

- Training and development for empowerment, from the Council's perspective.

- The barriers to empowerment, and the need to give greater emphasis to customer focus and customer care.

- The need to move away from a bureaucratic organisational structure.

In relation to all of these points, it was agreed that I would undertake to incorporate these points within a "revised ideal type".

These issues were all addressed, and the draft inclusions within this chapter were sent to all attendees on the focus group. Paragraph 5.5 is the draft, following some minor amendments, as agreed by the attendees of the focus group.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   Conclusions

The primary purpose of this report has been to produce a working model of empowerment, for Yardley District Council, from an individual's perspective. This working model has now been developed and would seem to meet with the satisfaction of all relevant stakeholders including members of the Council's Management Team (though it has not yet been formally presented to the Management Team).

The level and extent of change within local government, largely resulting from legislation and central government initiatives, has been significant and far-reaching. Recently, local government has been faced with issues such as Best Value, the Modernisation Agenda, Promoting the Well Being of Communities, ensuring consultation with all stakeholders and dealing with reducing central government funding, which over the recent years has caused considerable pressure and strain on most local authorities.

Yardley District Council is an authority that has tried to ensure it is constantly working towards meeting the needs of the community, and in doing so has been relatively successful. However, Yardley seems to have lacked clear direction, placing little emphasis on its corporate values, mission, aims and objectives. During the research it was discovered that only a few senior managers were aware of the existence of core values and corporate pledges. The Council's current corporate strategy was implemented in April 1999 and has, for the first time, given the Council a clear direction. However, the implementation of this strategy was a requirement by central government, rather than an aspiration by the Council. In general, individuals within the organisation have as a consequence of this lack of direction, been limited in their ability to add extra value, above and beyond their normal job remits. This is due to their not having had the information to enable them to understand what the organisation is about and where it is trying to get to. This makes potential empowerment initiatives difficult to develop and implement.

The research enquiry methodology was implemented through a case study supported by a number of data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews, participant observations and a focus group. This research strategy ensured that the study was credible, dependable, confirmable, generalisable, rigorous, ethical and objective.

It is recognised that gender issues are important in the consideration of empowerment. However, due to the nature of this research it was decided that gender issues are outside the remit of this research report.

The main research findings were that:

i.   The overall level of empowerment within the organisation was low, with widely differing levels and extent of empowerment within different departments and sections.

ii.   The current role of the manager within the organisation was regarded as disempowering due to his/her focus being on controlling rather than coaching.

iii. Communication within the organisation is slow and unclear, which affects an individual's productivity and efficiency, with many individuals feeling that both limited communication and sharing of information is a significant obstacle in moving towards empowerment.

iv.   Team work was seen as essential for empowerment and, in general, the Council has a strong teamwork environment, although in the main this has been due to the teams themselves rather than through any corporate action that the Council has taken.

v.   In general, individuals felt distant from the Council's mission, aims and objectives, largely due to the fact that they were confused about the Council's common purpose, and stated poor communication as a contributing factor.

vi.   The Council's current hierarchical structure was regarded as disempowering, bureaucratic and, due to the nature of organisational reporting, restricted the ability of many individuals. The main preference was a flatter structure based around autonomy and self-directing teams.

vii.   In relation to the organisation's morale, motivation, culture, recognition, fairness and the protection of the individual's dignity, it was felt that individuals gained strength from their peers but that organisational commitment was lacking to ensure a healthy working environment developed from one which was regarded as bureaucratic, inflexible and blame orientated.

viii.   Individuals within the organisation lack autonomy and feel a lack of commitment by the organisation towards them. It was felt that autonomy and commitment were both interdependent and both essential to the achievement of empowerment. Individuals need to feel that they have influence over the organisation's decision making process particularly within an environment that is resource limited.

Both the examination of the literature on organisational research and empowerment suggest that empowerment has a unique flavour in each organisation. As a result, empowerment and its meaning to individuals within Yardley District Council will be somewhat different to that in any other organisation. It has, therefore, been argued that in order to develop a strategy and a mechanism that enables empowerment to be developed and to flourish within Yardley District Council a process or working model needs to be developed for this specific Council. This model has been termed "the ideal type" and provides a working model for Yardley District Council.

The ideal type gives consideration to both the individual's perspective and the Council's perspective. It proposes a number of processes, at both the individual and the Council level of analysis, which have the aim of developing the empowerment of individuals within an empowering Council. The ideal type results, through the interaction and combination of a set of steps and processes, in a number of key actions, policies, procedures, strategies and conditions. The claim

is that, were the ideal type put into operation by the Council, it would result in higher community satisfaction.

The ideal type suggests that higher community satisfaction is to be created by the provision of higher quality services by the District Council. Since these services are largely people orientated, this is achieved through the deployment of highly satisfied individuals who have a sense of achievement, are motivated and have a high level of self esteem. Individuals reach this state of behaviour, attitude and standing within the organisation through feeling more empowered. This greater empowerment is achieved through identifying and developing characteristics of empowerment, which are either in the control of the individual or in the control of the organisation. In order for this to happen, it has been argued that there is a need for the creation of a number of conditions within Yardley District Council that would make it an empowering organisation. These are included within the ideal type. However, further to these conditions, there is also a requirement for the individual to pursue certain personal, self-development strategies and actions in order to feel more empowered. Therefore the ideal type puts forward characteristics in the control of:

a.   The individual, which include:

- For individuals to identify the parameters within which they have extensive autonomy.

- For individuals to further develop a strong self-image and self-confidence, which makes it more likely that they will behave and react positively.

- For individuals to develop personal mission statements in order to set a direction and aspirations to aim for, and against which they are able to assess their performance.

- For individuals to develop a number of key personal skills required for empowerment, in order to ensure that they have all the characteristics of an empowered person.

- For individuals to seek further self-learning in order to adopt the appropriate attitudes and characteristics to become more empowered.

- For individuals to improve and develop self-motivation by identifying their key motivators and the way in which these motivators can be adopted.

b.   Characteristics in the control of the organisation (from the individual's perspective) include:

- The development of a common purpose, in order that the Council and those within it are fully aware of its vision, mission, aims and objectives and know how these are to be achieved, the relevance each and every individual has to the achievements of these aims and objectives and the roles they are to play in this.

- The extension of autonomy, discretion and influence over section, departmental and organisational decision making, leading to consensus decision making and power sharing.

- The move away from a hierarchical bureaucratic organisational structure to one that is customer focused, organised around purpose and output (and not functions), with devolved management decision-making and clear roles.

- The development of self directed teams in order to improve organisational flexibility, multi-skilling, motivation and quality. Developing and implementing empowering leadership within the organisation as a whole, which will allow individuals to help each other to become committed to a common purpose in which they jointly believe, and, in turn, will enable them to become self directed, as they voluntarily work for the success of the Council. However, in order for this to happen, there will be a need for a management style and leadership focused on developing teams,

devolving responsibility, authority and power, moving from a controlling to a coaching and facilitating approach.

- Sharing information and more effective communication. Individuals need sufficient information to fulfil the requirements of their jobs and to contribute positively to the Council as a whole. This requires moving away from the traditional understanding that a manager restricts the passing on of information, based on his discretion, to a situation where as much information as may be useful to individuals is shared widely throughout the whole organisation. It is, therefore, essential that the Council develop a communication strategy that has organisational wide ownership.

- The need to develop commitment by individuals and particularly by the Council to the process of empowerment, in order that a strong sense of belonging to the organisation can be developed.

- The creation of a culture and climate within the organisation that allows empowerment to flourish, and which would require greater trust, openness and for the Council to become more supportive, enabling, facilitative, people centred, flexible and committed to working towards the elimination of cynicisms, unnecessary criticism and the current blame culture.

The achievement of these characteristics has, to an extent, been addressed within this report. However, each characteristic requires considerable emphasis and attention in its own right and would, therefore, need to be considered in more detail, prior to implementation.

The ideal type proposes an evolving process focusing on continuous improvement through the development of its individuals. In order to ensure that this ideal type is achieving what it was designed to achieve, a performance measurement system has been incorporated which enables the testing of empowerment from the perspective of numerous stakeholders, including customers, the community,

suppliers, employees, Councillors, as well as testing outputs, processes, inputs and the work environment.

Following the testing of the ideal type's validity and credibility through the use of a focus group, the ideal type was further enhanced to incorporate a number of additional aspects including:

- Addressing circumstances where individuals did not want to be empowered.

- Training and development for empowerment from the Council's perspective.

- Recognising the barriers to empowerment.

- The need to give greater emphasis to customer focus and customer care.

- The need to move away from a bureaucratic organisational structure.

A key advantage to the ideal type is that it does not consider the individual or the Council without considering the other, therefore allowing both human and organisational issues to be considered jointly, which should ensure that improvements would tend to be unified, innovative, continuous and permanent.

This research has enabled the production of a working model of empowerment for Yardley District Council in the form of the ideal type. Furthermore, by building and testing the conclusions of the first report, and through the development of a case study, this report has contributed to the development of theories on empowerment from both the individual's and the organisation's perspective.

The ideal type as a working model is seen as a practical means of contributing to the evolution of Yardley District Council.

Furthermore, the working model, due largely to its generic characteristics has transferability features that allows for it to be shared with professional colleagues in other local authorities and, to a lesser extent, with the private sector.

This report, therefore, is contributing to theoretical understanding as well as working practice.

The outcomes of this research enable it to make a number of contributions at three key levels; the organisational contribution to Yardley District Council; the professional contribution to local government; and the contribution made by adding to current theoretical knowledge and research practice. In relation to Yardley District Council, this report represents the first formal consideration of empowerment as a corporate issue. The ideal type clearly has the potential to increase organisational effectiveness by removing blocks to performance, which the tight controls have produced to date. It allows the organisation to understand and establish the relevance of empowerment from its own perspective. It provides a model, in the ideal type, which sets out the relevant factors that it needs to consider in pursuing empowerment and the benefits that it is likely to achieve. The ideal type helps individuals at all levels, particularly senior managers and Councillors, to take a systematic and holistic view of empowerment and to avoid concentrating on single events or actions which may contradict one another. Furthermore, it proposes a clear strategic direction for the Council: the overarching need to satisfy the community. There is considerable value in the research, without reference to the ideal type, in that a wealth of information and analysis from interviews, questionnaires, participant observations and a focus group has been undertaken, and which, if nothing else, helps the organisation to understand itself better. In addition, the introduction of empowerment within Yardley District Council, through the use of the ideal type, is likely to lead to a number of tangible benefits:

- More responsive to customer demand.

- More responsive to the legislative environment.

- More efficient in the use of resources.

- More able to take advantage of new technology and new methods.

- More effective in delivering services.

- More able to maintain high levels of quality in all aspects of service delivery.

- More able to create a culture of continuous development and improvement.

The most significant contribution of this research to Yardley District Council is that empowerment will allow the development and use of latent talent in individuals. This research has clearly shown that because of the way that many jobs have been designed and structured, individuals have been called upon to use only a small proportion of their abilities which, for many, has led to great frustration and alienation. With empowerment, traditional boundaries can be broken down, demarkation lines can be scrapped and the constraining job description modified to reflect empowerment. However, Yardley District Council is a complex organisation with many pockets of power and influence, and with differing levels of motivation and willingness on the part of individuals to become empowered. It is, therefore, recognised that several complex issues and questions are likely to arise during the period of planning and implementation.

In relation to its professional contribution to the local government context, this research provides better understanding of empowerment, its applicability to local government and, most importantly, a working model which has been developed with the professional manager in mind. In addition, it provides managers with an effective means of understanding and proactively dealing with the increasing pace of change, the turbulence of the local government environment, the speed of service delivery and the acceleration of customer and community demands. The research clearly suggests a new approach to management which would be a significant move away from the old command and control systems. Professional managers will also see this research and, in particular, the use of the ideal type as a means of removing bureaucracies, gaining flexibility and dealing with people who in general seem to be more motivated. From an individualistic perspective, there is an attraction to empowerment because the overwhelming focus of empowerment is on the individual. In general terms, changes in the political context over the last 20 years leading to greater house and share ownership, has led people in Britain to become more individualistic, with the desire to look after and take care of themselves. They have a desire to stand or fall by their own efforts, and

empowerment gives them the opportunity to do this. This has clearly been highlighted within the research findings.

Together with the first report, this research has contributed significantly to the current theoretical understanding of empowerment, particularly within the context of local government organisations. This research has added to current theory in a number of ways including:

- It provides a working model in the form of the ideal type relevant to the environment of a local authority.

- It considers holistically the concept of empowerment concentrating both on the inputs to the process (the need for empowerment) and the outputs (proposed action plan) in working towards achieving the desired conditions.

- It places considerable emphasis on the individual's perspective yet also considers the Council's role in ensuring both the individual's perspective and the Council's own perspective are given attention. It places emphasis on the need to measure performance and the outcome of empowerment, thereby allowing individuals and the Council to gauge the level of success.

- It questions whether a standard definition for empowerment is acceptable. It provides a practical means by which theoretical aspects of empowerment can be applied to an organisation.

This report has set out the attractions of empowerment to the Council and those who work within it. However, it cannot be assumed that the benefits of empowerment are so obvious that individuals will immediately become dedicated to all empowerment initiatives. Individuals are likely to be weary of change and may have reasons to be sceptical of empowerment, even to the extent that they will resist its introduction. The release of power by managers to people below them is central to empowerment. It is likely that some managers will be incapable or unwilling to give up their power to others. This is particularly so in those cases where their psychological drives require them continually to seek power and

influence, through gaining larger budgets, greater resources and more people to control. The revised ideal type requires the consideration and resolution of barriers to empowerment, both within and outside the organisation.

6.2   Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that, in the first instance, a brief report, outlining the findings of the research and the relevance of the ideal type, be presented to the Management Team for their consideration. This report will clearly set out the benefits to both the Council and those who work within it. However, in addition, emphasis will be placed on the considerable practical problems and resistance that may arise.

Following approval by Management Team it is recommended that the Council consider a number of actions in order to move towards an empowering organisation. These actions would require further development in terms of their organisational applicability, relevance and implementation. In a number of areas set out below the Council needs to develop its own terminology and definitions in order that these recommendations can be further specified and quantified. These actions include:

- Improving the current corporate values, mission, aims and objectives in order that they are more understandable and relevant to individuals within the Council.

- The development of a communication strategy.

- Working with individuals to enable them to become self-empowered, particularly through learning.

- The development of a more empowering structure. In doing this, the Council needs to determine the best structure that allows and encourages people to become empowered. Hierarchy is not completely incompatible with empowerment. However, a flat structure with a small number of control and support systems would seem to be the most appropriate.

- The development and implementation of self-directing teams.

- Pursue the notion of empowering leadership and, thereby, redefine the role of the manager/supervisor - away from command and control to enabler, coach, visionary, learner and counsellor.

- The reassessment of sharing of information and consideration of the extension of boundaries, in recognising that people without information cannot make good business decisions. In doing this, mistakes need to be accepted as a means of personal development, risk taking needs to be extended and trust needs to be developed.

- The development of individual autonomy.

- The research, identification, development and pursuit of the most appropriate culture for empowerment within Yardley District Council.

- The generation of greater organisational and individual commitment.

- The development of a clear action plan for empowerment, highlighting key tasks, personnel, timescales and targets.

Furthermore the Council should ensure it has:

- An empowerment policy.

- Identified champions of empowerment.

- Strategies and plans for the development of an empowerment culture.

- Finance and resources available for the introduction and implementation of empowerment.

- Management structures and processes for managing the introduction and development of empowerment.

- The publicity and communication for empowerment initiatives and successes.

- Organisational and wider community successes directly attributable to empowerment.

- High morale and satisfaction in the organisation.

In the process of implementing empowerment initiatives there would be the opportunity to identify, investigate and analyse the reasons why some individuals may not want to be empowered. This analysis should be incorporated within the Council's empowerment policy in order to overcome non-participation. It is also intended that the findings of the research, including the theoretical aspects, the principles and implications of the ideal type, will be shared with a wider audience through the publication of articles in, at least, one professional and one academic journal by the end of this year.

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APPENDICES

List of Appendices

MAIN FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

Services	Met Councils	Unitary Councils	County Councils	District Councils	Police Authority
Abandoned Vehicles	✓	✓		✓	
Advertisement Control	✓	✓		✓	
Allotments	✓	✓		✓	
Animal Welfare	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Arts Development	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Beach Cleaning & Beach Huts	✓	✓		✓	
Building Control & Conservation	✓	✓		✓	
Bus Passes & Countycard	✓	✓		✓	
Bus Shelters	✓	✓		✓	
Car Parking, Orange Badges	✓	✓	✓		
Car Parks	✓	✓		✓	
Cemeteries	✓	✓		✓	
Children, Youth & Family Services	✓	✓	✓		
Coast Protection	✓	✓		✓	
Community Care	✓	✓	✓		
Consumer Advice	✓	✓	✓		
Council Tax & Business Rates	✓	✓		✓	
Dangerous Animals, Dogs & Pest Control	✓	✓		✓	
Drainage Enquiries & Flooding	✓	✓		✓	
Ecology & Countryside Management	✓	✓	✓		
Economic Development	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Education	✓	✓	✓		
Elections & Voting	✓	✓		✓	
Emergency Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Services	Met Councils	Unitary Councils	County Councils	District Councils	Police Authority
Energy Conservation	✓	✓		✓	
Environmental Health & Food Hygiene	✓	✓		✓	
Fire Brigade & Fire Safety	✓	✓	✓		
Grants	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grass Cutting : Roads & Verges	✓	✓	✓		
Grass Cutting : Parks & Amenities	✓	✓		✓	
Gritting	✓	✓	✓		
Hazardous Waste	✓	✓	✓		
Health & Safety	✓	✓		✓	
HIV/Aids	✓	✓	✓		
Home Adaptations	✓	✓		✓	
Homelessness	✓	✓		✓	
Household Waste Sites	✓	✓	✓		
Housing & Housing Benefits	✓	✓		✓	
Land, Property & Land Searches	✓	✓		✓	
Libraries & Archives	✓	✓	✓		
Licensing	✓	✓		✓	
Local Agenda 21	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Museums Development	✓	✓		✓	
Occupation Therapy	✓	✓	✓		
Planning & Development Control	✓	✓		✓	
Police					✓
Pollution Control	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Population Information	✓	✓		✓	
Private Finance Initiative	✓	✓	✓		
Public Conveniences	✓	✓		✓	
Public Transport Information	✓	✓	✓		

Services	Met Councils	Unitary Councils	County Councils	District Councils	Police Authority
Refuse, Litter, Recycling & Waste Management	✓	✓		✓	
Registration of Births, Deaths & Marriages	✓	✓	✓		
Safety at Sports Grounds	✓	✓	✓		
Sports, Leisure, Parks & Playgrounds	✓	✓		✓	
Street Lighting	✓	✓	✓		
Street Name Plates	✓	✓		✓	
Tourism Development & Information	✓	✓		✓	
Trading Standards	✓	✓	✓		
Traffic Calming, Signals, Highways, Pavements & Footpaths	✓	✓	✓		
Tree Preservation	✓	✓		✓	

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

OPTION 1 : A MAYOR, ELECTED BY LOCAL PEOPLE, WHO WOULD THEN APPOINT A COUNCIL MANAGER

Directly Elected Mayor
- Provides political leadership
- Proposes policy framework
- Proposes budget
- Takes executive decisions within
policy framework

Council
- Decides new constitution
- Agrees policy framework
- Agrees budget
- Appoints Chief Executive and
  Chief Officers

Cabinet
- Appointed by the Mayor from the
  Council
- Implements policies under the
  political guidance of the Mayor
- Takes delegated executive
  decisions as group or individuals

Councillors outside the Executive
- Propose amendments to
budget to Mayor and Cabinet
- Propose new or changed
policies to Mayor and Cabinet
- Represent electorate
- Scrutinise executive

Chief Executive and Chief Officers
- Executive and full Council to concur on appointment
- Provide required support including dedicated staff to councillors
  outside the executive, Mayor and Cabinet
- Implement policy and secure service for executive
- Account for executive actions to councillors outside the executive

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

OPTION 2 : A MAYOR, WITH EXECUTIVE POWERS, ELECTED BY LOCAL PEOPLE, WHO WOULD THEN APPOINT A CABINET FROM AMONG THE COUNCILLORS

Directly Elected Mayor
- Provides political leadership
- Proposes policy framework
- Proposes budget
- Takes executive decisions within policy framework

Council
- Decides new constitution
- Agrees policy framework
- Agrees budget
- Appoints Chief Executive and Chief Officers

Cabinet
- Appointed by the Mayor from the Council
- Implements policies under the political guidance of the Mayor
- Takes delegated executive decisions as group or individuals

Councillors outside the Executive
- Propose amendments to budget to
   Mayor and Cabinet
- Propose new or changed policies to
   Mayor and Cabine
- Represent electorate
- Scrutinise executive

Chief Executive and Chief Officers
- Executive and full Council to concur on appointment
- Provide required support inducing dedicated staff to councillors outside the executive, Mayor and Cabinet
- Implement policy and secure service for executive
- Account for executive actions to councillors outside the executive

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

OPTION 3 : A LEADER, ELECTED BY THE COUNCIL, WITH A CABINET, THAT IS EITHER APPOINTED BY THE LEADER OR ELECTED BY THE COUNCIL

Council
- Decides new constitution
- Decides policy framework
- Decides budget
- Appoints Council Manager and possibly Chief Officers

Directly Elected Mayor
- Provides political leadership
- Proposes broad policy framework

Councillors outside the Executive
- Propose amendments to budget
- Propose changes to Council policies
- Represent electorate
- Scrutinise executive

Council Manager (Chief Executive)
- Appointed by full Council
- Possibly appoints Chief Officers
- Under political guidance of Mayor
- Develops and proposes budget
- Develops and proposes details of policy framework
- Implements policy and secures service delivery

Chief Officers
- Appointed by full Council or appointed by Council manager
- Provide required support including dedicated staff to Councillors outside the executive, Mayor and Council Manager
- Implement policy and secure service delivery for executive
- Account for executive actions to Councillors outside the executive

THE COUNCIL'S CORE VALUES

- Working in partnership with people who live or work in the District

- Enabling and encouraging involvement in the Council's decision-making process

- Making services open and accessible so that everyone can approach the Council with confidence, be listened to and treated with respect

- Providing high quality, cost effective services which meet community needs in a changing environment

- Promoting equality where everyone is treated fairly but taking account of the special needs of people who lack resources or face disadvantage

- Investing wisely for the future, protecting and developing resources to ensure that decisions of "no-regret" are made

- Recognising that its most important asset is its staff, who have a key role in promoting pride in our community

- Acting on behalf of the community by lobbying for and advocating residents' rights and duties

CORPORATE PLEDGES

Whichever of the Council's services you use, we want you to feel satisfied with the treatment you receive from our staff.

Our aim is to provide the highest possible standard of customer care and give value for money at all times.

To do this we pledge to .....

- Be courteous and friendly at all times

- Answer your telephone calls promptly, normally within 20 seconds, and connect you with the right person to help you

- Reply to your letters promptly and within 10 working days (with the exception of comments on planning applications)

- Welcome your views and take them into account in the way services are planned and provided

- Put things right quickly if we make mistakes

- Deal with complaints sympathetically and fairly in line with complaints procedure

- Give all our customers and taxpayers fair and equal treatment

MISSION STATEMENT

"To serve the people and businesses of Yardley and use our influence
and resources to help secure, within the powers available,
and in the most efficient and effective way possible,
the social, economic and environmental well-being of the District."

CORPORATE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim 1 : To Lead And Engage The Community

Objectives:

a)   To provide high quality, cost effective services which are accessible to our customers and responsive to their needs.

b)   To provide an effective organisation, investing wisely for the future and making decisions in the general community interest.

c)   To conduct our business in an open manner so that all decisions are made in public whenever appropriate.

d)   To consult with the community and our partners to enable and encourage participation in the work of the Council and ensure accountability through the democratic process.

e)   To act on behalf of the community by lobbying for the interests of our residents.

f)   To promote understanding of the Council and its work.

Aim 2 : To Provide A Safe And Healthy District

Objectives:

a)   To participate in reducing crime and disorder.

b)   To help maintain and enhance standards of public health and safety.

c)   To seek improvements in the personal health of the local community.

Aim 3 : To Provide Opportunities To Meet The Social, Leisure And Cultural Needs Of The Community

Objectives:

a)   To maintain and improve our parks, open spaces, woodland and beaches.

b)   To maintain and improve amenity areas and leisure facilities.

c)   To provide access to a wide range of cultural, sporting and leisure activities by working in partnership with others.

d)   To identify the District's housing needs and seek to meet them in partnership with others.

e)   To reduce social exclusion in the community by providing, enabling and supporting, in partnership with others, services which pro-actively address the issues involved.

Aim 4 : To Provide For Economic Growth And Employment

Objectives:

a)   To provide and encourage better employment opportunities, wage and skills levels in the District, for example school leavers, returners to work and redundant persons and to recognise the value of its own staff and promote their development for the benefit of the Authority and the individual.

b)   To seek significant improvements to the road, rail and public transport infrastructure in partnership with other relevant agencies and organisations.

c)   To promote the development of employment sites, with special emphasis on brown field sites, throughout the District and especially in the main town, whilst being mindful of the impact upon the environment.

Aim 5 : To Protect And Enhance The Built And Natural Environment

Objectives:

a)   To use our powers and influence to achieve a more environmentally sustainable future.

b)   To protect and enhance the character of the wider environment including air and water quality and the reduction of pollution.

c)   To protect the countryside and enhance particularly sensitive areas of high landscape, wildlife and agricultural value.

THE COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET

	2001/02 Gross Expenditure £	2001/02 Gross Income £	2001/02 Net Expenditure £
Committee Approved Revenue Budgets			
Strategic Policy & Resources (service expenditure only)	7,149,250	4,603,700	2,545,550
Performance Review & Audit	413,560	254,670	158,890
Planning & Land Use	1,822,490	583,570	1,238,920
Regeneration & Tourism	2,877,890	1,228,760	1,649,130
Community & Environment	25,906,960	15,711,100	10,195,860
Total Service Spending & Income	38,170,150	22,381,800	15,788,350
Strategic Policy & Resources (financing items)			
Asset Management Revenue Account	893,560	1,476,880	(583,320)
Interest & Investment income	0	2,411,460	(2,411,460)
Appropriations from Reserves	489,540	3,271,950	(2,782,410)
Total Budgets Approved by Committees	39,553,250	29,542,090	10,011,160
Add: Parish Council Precepts	537,569	-	537,569
Total Council Revenue Budget Requirement 2001/02	40,090,819	29,542,090	10,548,729

Amounts to be taken into account under Local Government Act 1988 Section 97(4)

Less: Council Tax adjustments	(93,055)
Less: Revenue Support Grant	(2,925,892)
Less: Redistributed Non Domestic Rates	(3,440,053)

Council Tax Requirement 2001/02 (Yardley & Parishes) £4,089,729

QUESTIONNAIRE

	Strongly Agree Circle 1	Agree Circle 2	Neither Agree or Disagree Circle 3	Disagree Circle 4	Strongly Disagree Circle 5

Empowerment Levels

1.	I'm not very excited about my work	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I feel very negative	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I only do what I am supposed to do	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I don't say what is on my mind	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I believe that people are suspicious	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I believe that people aren't willing to help out	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I believe that people feel they don't matter	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I believe that people feel they should keep their ideas to themselves	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I believe that people feel they "rent" their job	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I believe that people feel not much of their skills and energy are needed	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I believe that people feel they make a difference	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I believe that people feel they are responsible for their results	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I believe that people feel they are part of a team	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I believe that people feel they can use their full talents and abilities	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I believe that people feel they have control over how they do their jobs	1	2	3	4	5
16.	People feel they take initiative	1	2	3	4	5

I feel that Managers

17.	Help staff to get the job done	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Initiate enquiry about common ways of thinking	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Challenge assumptions	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Encourage risk and experimentation	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Delegate authority and experimentation	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Inspire a shared vision by stating values, hopes and dreams	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Foster a learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Promote shared information/collaborative problem solving	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Model behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Appreciate diversity of style and behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Focus on developing people	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Give positive feedback and help people to learn and develop	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Encourage self-expression and open discussion of conflict	1	2	3	4	5

I feel Staff

30.	Take responsibility for their actions	1	2	3	4	5
31.	Speak out about problems and ways to work better	1	2	3	4	5
32.	Seek to solve problems, not to place blame	1	2	3	4	5
33.	See networks of "customer" relationships, internal/external	1	2	3	4	5
34.	Are willing to engage in enquiry about assumptions	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Relationships that

35.	People are committed to collaboration	1	2	3	4	5
36.	People have mutual trust and respect	1	2	3	4	5
37.	Others are engaged in decisions	1	2	3	4	5
38.	There are shared accountabilities, rewards and penalties	1	2	3	4	5
39.	People are helpful towards each other	1	2	3	4	5
40.	People communicate all relevant information	1	2	3	4	5
41.	There is a cross-sectional learning	1	2	3	4	5
42.	People focus on process and learning	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Structure that

43.	Rewards are consistent with organisational values	1	2	3	4	5
44.	Commonly accepted values are well articulated and widely understood	1	2	3	4	5
45.	Individual high performance (physical, emotional and spiritual) is developed and maintained	1	2	3	4	5
46.	We provide lateral/vertical expansion of skills and contributions and are committed to mastery of multiple skills	1	2	3	4	5
47.	We are committed to high quality and customer service	1	2	3	4	5
48.	Information about vision, strategy and direction is shared, and staff input is elicited and listened to	1	2	3	4	5
49.	People here feel good about working together	1	2	3	4	5
50.	People are allowed to practise self-care to avoid burn-out and are supported to find resources to develop work	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Validation that

51.	There is respect for staff as people	1	2	3	4	5
52.	There is flexibility to meet personal needs	1	2	3	4	5
53.	There is encouragement of learning, development and new skills	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Information that

54.	I know why things are being done	1	2	3	4	5
55.	I get "inside" information	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Participation that

56.	Staff have control over how they do their work	1	2	3	4	5
57.	Staff have involvement in decisions that affect them	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Clarity of Purpose that

58.	I know where I stand	1	2	3	4	5
59.	I know what is expected of me	1	2	3	4	5
60.	Tasks and responsibilities are clearly organised	1	2	3	4	5
61.	Systems and procedures are adequate	1	2	3	4	5
62.	I know what the Department stands for	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Morale that

63.	People are trusted	1	2	3	4	5
64.	Policies are flexible enough to consider personal needs	1	2	3	4	5
65.	I feel respected as a person	1	2	3	4	5
66.	Individual differences in lifestyle and values are respected	1	2	3	4	5
67.	I like working here	1	2	3	4	5
68.	There is a positive spirit	1	2	3	4	5
69.	If I had a problem the office would stand by me while I worked it out	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Fairness that

70.	I approve of things that go on here	1	2	3	4	5
71.	People are treated fairly	1	2	3	4	5
72.	I trust what the Department tells me	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Recognition that

73.	Individual effort is rewarded appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
74.	If people do something well it is noticed	1	2	3	4	5
75.	The Department looks at what you can do, not who you know	1	2	3	4	5
76.	The Department expects the best from people	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Teamwork that

77.	People help each other out	1	2	3	4	5
78.	People work together to solve difficult problems	1	2	3	4	5
79.	People care for each other	1	2	3	4	5
80.	People here are out for the group, not for themselves	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Participation that

81.	People have a voice in decisions	1	2	3	4	5
82.	Problems are shared	1	2	3	4	5
83.	People get the resources they need to do their jobs	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to Communication that

84.	I am kept informed about what is going on in the Department	1	2	3	4	5
85.	Communication is clear and prompt between groups	1	2	3	4	5
86.	I understand why things are asked of me	1	2	3	4	5

I feel in relation to a Healthy Environment that

87.	I am able to manage the pressure of my work	1	2	3	4	5
88.	I am not expected to do too many things	1	2	3	4	5
89.	Change is managed well	1	2	3	4	5
90.	Red tape and procedures do not interfere with getting things done	1	2	3	4	5
91.	I am able to grow and learn	1	2	3	4	5
92.	There are opportunities for career development	1	2	3	4	5

Please telephone extension 7711, e-mail or write if you are willing to be interviewed.

Thank you for your co-operation.

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can your name be used in the research?

    What department do you work in?

    What is your age (range)?

2. How long have you worked in Local Government?

    How long have you been with the Council?

3. What is the level of your post?

4. What changes within the organisation have you seen during your time with the Council and what impact has this had on you?

    What do you think lies ahead?

5. Do you know what the Council's mission, aims and objectives are?

    Do you place focus on them?

    Explain.

    Do you feel the organisation places focus on them?

    Explain.

6. What does empowerment mean to you and what characteristics need to exist for you to feel empowered?

7. Are you able to make decisions that you feel are necessary to do your job well?

8. Can you make changes to improve the way you do your work?

9. Are you encouraged to find better ways of doing things?

10. Are you involved in decision making that affects your work?

11. Do you take part in setting your performance objectives?

12. Do you worry about the possibility of your job changing or disappearing?

13. Is your division/unit in control of its own future?

14. Does your division/unit have a clear sense of direction, clear goals and strategies to achieve these goals?

15. Does your department have a clear sense of direction?

16. Are the lines of responsibility and authority in your department clear?

17. What do you feel may be the benefits for the organisation in encouraging empowerment? How does YDC do these things now?

   What do you feel may be the benefits for you in the organisation encouraging empowerment?

18. What changes do you feel would need to take place in moving towards empowerment? To what extend has YDC done this?

19. What would an empowerment programme need to include?

20. In order to function within an empowered environment what type of training do you feel you would need? Why?

21. In terms of empowerment what is the relevance and importance of the following and why? To what extent does these exist in YDC? (relevance: H,M,L)

a.	role of the manager	relevance:	
		because:	
b.	your relationship with others	relevance:	
		because:	
c.	structure of the organisation, department, division	relevance:	
		because:	
d.	information sharing	relevance:	
		because:	
e.	participation	relevance:	
		because:	
f.	clarity of purpose	relevance:	
		because:	

g.	morale	relevance:	
		because:	
h.	fairness	relevance:	
		because:	
i.	recognition	relevance:	
		because:	

j.	team work	relevance:	
		because:	
k.	communication	relevance:	
		because:	
l.	the overall culture/environment of the organisation	relevance:	
		because:	

22. How essential are the following characteristics in ensuring the effective development and implementation of empowerment from the individual's perspective? State any other characteristics.

		very essential	essential	don't know	some-what essential	not essential
i	communication					
ii	sharing information					
iii	a clear organisational vision, mission, aims and objectives					
iv	development of teams					
v	strong leadership					
vi	provision of relevant knowledge and training					
vii	an appropriate reward system for increased responsibility and accountability					
viii	a set of well defined parameters (including discipline, control, line of authority and task responsibility)					
ix	to allow effective autonomy					
x	an environment of support and a sense of security					
xi	the dignity of all individuals to be protected					
xii	clear organisational values					
xiii	a system of continuous feedback					
xiv	the development of internal commitment					
xv	changing the organisational structure to enable empowerment					

xvi	ensuring high motivation and morale					
xvii	effective distribution of power					
xvii	the development of a culture that allows empowerment to exist					

23.   What is it that Yardley District Council, as an employer, and organisation is not doing well to allow/encourage empowerment? What should it be doing?

24.   Do you have any comments you would like to make on the subject?

EMPOWERMENT FOCUS GROUP AT 9.30 AM ON FRIDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2000

1.   Introductions

2.   Confidentiality assurances

3.   An outline of the research to date

4.   Empowerment and its potential

    ●   The ideal type and its detailed workings

5.   Key issues:

    (a)   A discussion of the issues relevant to individuals attending the focus group

    (b)   Points attendees wished to make regarding the interview process which they were willing to share with the other attendees

    (c)   Their views on the questionnaire and research findings from the questionnaire

    (d)   Views on the ideal type, its relevance and usefulness in the real world

    (e)   Suggested improvements, changes or modifications to the ideal type

    (f)   Individual summaries

6.   Closing and expression of thanks

DEVELOPMENT OF EMPOWERMENT THINKING COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL THINKING

Traditional Organisation	Empowered Organisation
Role of Supervisor	
Get results primarily by directing people and getting their co-operation	Involve people and help them invest their personal commitment
Build good followers	Build good initiators
Get people to understand good ideas	Get people to generate good ideas
Manage people one on one	Build collaborative, interdependent and supportive teams
Develop strength within your own unit	Develop strength between your unit, other units and your peers
Implement directions from above	Initiative new ideas and directions yourself and at your own level
Help people change when directed and help them make the best of it	Generate positive innovations with your people without those changes being imposed from above
Communicate well	Be masterful at interpersonal communication
Culture of the Organisation	
Theory X	Theory Y
Low quality concern	High quality concern
Closed and secretive	Open and trusting
Conservative and risk averse	Entrepreneurial
Low team spirit	High team spirit
Task orientation	Results orientation
Organisational focus	Guest focus
Status oriented	Meritocracy

Structure of the Organisation	
Top-down	Bottom-up
High role definition	Loose role definition
Static	Constantly changing
Serves employees	Serves guest
Line	Cluster
Formalised reporting procedures	Autonomous work groups
Competitive	Collaborative
People within the Organisation	
Unskilled	Skilled
Limited potential	Vast potential
Low commitment	High commitment
Reactive	Pro-active
Low organisational commitment	High organisational commitment
Antagonistic	Co-operative
Oppose change	Like change
Organisation's Systems	
Organisation-led	Business-led
Rigid	Flexible
Inorganic	Organic
Hindrance	Supportive

Changing Management Beliefs and Attitudes	
Steady state structures	Dynamic and adaptive organisations
Emphasis on control/reporting	Focus on gaol/achievement, devolved authority
Hierarchy and authority	Managers as "integrators"
Closed/top-down communication	Open 360° communication
Role focus	Goal/strategy focus
Procedures and systems	Process effectiveness/management
Conformity	Individuality
Reward for length of service	Reward for results
Individual responsibility/accountability	Team/inter-team working
Risk/change-averse	Continuous challenge and adaptation
Internal focus	Market focus
Top plans/middle co-ordinates/rest deliver	Consensus on strategic direction and plans

Behaviour Descriptions	
She made the mistake, she can clear it up	She made the mistake, we will help her clear it up
To try and fail is punished	To try and fail is applauded
Some people are dumb and will never do anything	Every person has latent talents that can be developed
If you are not in the club you will never succeed in this organisation	The criteria for success and promotion in this organisation are talent and job performance
The only innovators and creative people are in the marketing and research departments	There are motivated and creative people at all levels in the organisation
You work from 9.00 to 5.00 and then you escape	Work is as enjoyable and exhilarating as the rest of my day
You keep your head down and your nose clean	Enterprise, initiative and the challenge of trying new things are the norm
We have seen it all before	We thrive on new ideas
You have to be cynical in this organisation	Most people try to be open and genuine
Never volunteer for anything	Volunteering for special assignments is the pathway to growth
What we produce is no better or worse than anyone else's	The products and services we give to our customers are world class
No one takes an interest - you just swim around in your own cul-de-sac	There is a genuine concern for all individuals' welfare and development
Tasks are defined by others	Individuals define tasks
The behaviour required to perform tasks is defined by others	Individuals define the behaviour required to perform tasks
Performance goals are defined by management	Management and individuals jointly define performance for the individual
The importance of the goal is defined by others	Individuals define the importance of the goal

Attitudes	
Powerless	Empowered
Waiting for orders	Taking action
Doing things right	Doing the right thing
Reactive	Creative and proactive
Content	Process and content
Quantity	Quality and quantity
Boss responsible	All responsible
Blame placing	Problem solving

States of Empowerment and Disempowerment

Avoiding taking responsibility	Accepting of responsibility
Being passive	Being active
Timidity	Boldness
Conventional	Creative
Lethargic	Energetic
Gets little joy out of life	Enjoys life
Depressed and miserable	Happy
Many health problems	Healthy
Dull and unimaginative	Imaginative
Dependent	Independent
Conforming	Individualist
Sticks to routines	Innovative
Dull and boring	Interesting
Unmotivated	Motivated
Reluctant to take risks	Prepared to take risks
Unobservant	Observant
Frustrated in job	Satisfied with job
Not sensitive to subtleties	Sensitive to subtleties
Uses only a fraction of potential	Uses full potential as a human being
Does not use intelligence to the full	Uses intelligence to the full

Communication and Other Systems	
You alone are responsible	Shared responsibility
High-intensity persuasion	Low key encouragement
Prescribes what to do	Facilitates group discovery
You assume you know the way	You ask others to help
Minimal feedback	Communication and controversy
Mid-course correction is difficult	Flexible, easy to shift direction
Used when there is little prior commitment	Used when everyone shares the goal
No time for pilot tests or questions	Makes use of pilot projects and continual evaluation of results
Top-down communication	Two-way communication