

# Chapter 1

## AN INTERPRETIVIST VIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Introduction

In Australia, local government is regarded as being ‘closest to its people’ and as a result the impacts of decision making are normally experienced more directly and more immediately by the community (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006a, p. 1). Those entrusted by the people to lead their government at a local level hold the important task of translating the community vision into outcomes that reflect what the community values, needs and expects. Local government is embodied in bureaucratic protocol, process and policy that, in its purest and technical form, seek to deliver predictability, equity and fairness.

Over the years local government has been influenced by the changing face of the Commonwealth and state political landscape as it is often the level of government faced with the challenge of implementing change at a local level. Adding to this, local government is transitioning from a very traditional paradigm of rubbish, roads and rates to a realm where social responsibility and obligations are coming to the forefront of their core business. This shift from a siloed technical approach to an integrated sociopolitical approach brings into focus the importance of values, ethics and emotional competence of the people who lead.

Participation and decision making as part of citizens’ democratic rights is evident at a local level through the election of local members into the role of community leaders. These community leaders, known as councillors, have a key function of representing community views and values. What is less evident is how, after an election, citizens are engaged in a meaningful way in decision

making that is well understood by all. Further to this, how decisions are considered and ultimately made by local government gives an insight into the values and beliefs of those that are entrusted by the community to lead and will form part of the focus of this study.

This chapter starts the journey by exploring the ontological and epistemological assumptions that frame this study and support the interpretivist worldview of the researcher. Furthermore, the interpretivist worldview sets the foundation for the appropriateness of the methodological approach of case study informed by phenomenology that is used throughout this study. From this interpretivist position, the chapter goes on to look at the process of social construction of realities in organisations. How these constructions are influenced by social interactions and by the internalisation processes of managers within a local government context also forms part of the discussion. The discussion continues by looking at local government decision making obligations in relation to citizens' rights. This chapter starts to introduce the context of local government which is the setting for this study. In conclusion, the chapter moves to reveal the research questions and present an overview of the thesis.

## **Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

Each researcher works from a particular way 'of viewing the world' which is often referred to as a paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 160). This paradigm of beliefs guides the interactions that researchers have within their world. In order to detail my potential bias and assumptions as a researcher, it is important that I identify and explore the ontological and epistemological constructions that support my interpretivist worldview.

How people view the nature of the world reflects their ontological position while an epistemological position reflects what can be known about the world and how it can be known.

These two perspectives are referred to as a person's worldview. A person's ontological position affects, but does not necessarily determine, one's epistemological position (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Ontology is the way people theorise about the nature of human existence with the key question being whether there is a 'real' world 'out there' that is independent of our knowledge of it. In order to identify the assumptions the researcher may have regarding the nature of reality, it is important to reflect on questions such as, 'what is there that can be known, and what is the nature of reality?' While ontology is a theory of 'being', epistemology is a theory of 'knowledge', that is how is existence experienced and understood? To identify my assumptions regarding the relationship between the knower and the known, reflective questions are needed such as, 'what does it mean to know and what kind of knowledge is possible?' (Guba, 1990, p. 18).

In daily life, the act of understanding and knowing already exists within us, our friends and our daily practice of life. Truth of the world is constructed and emerges before us, and subject and object are not separate, but belong together in our perception. The philosopher Nietzsche (Clark, 1990) believed that there is no truth without interpretation, suggesting that there is no objective fact or knowledge free from human interpretation. Interpretation calls for human construction of reality and meaning that is inevitably related to one's being. As human beings are active meaning constructors in their lifeworld, it is acknowledged that the researcher is already and always a part of the interpreting process of the researching phenomena.

From an ontological viewpoint, interpretivists look to the belief of multiple realities being socially constructed and recognise that these constructions are one's perceptions of that reality. It is from this position that the researcher believes that there is not a real world waiting to be discovered that

exists independently of the meaning that people attach to their actions. This interpretative ontological position focuses on the meaning of behaviour with the emphasis on understanding. Therefore, it is not possible to establish causal relationships between phenomena that hold across time and space. It is the researcher's belief that the world and social phenomena are understood to be socially or discursively constructed.

From an epistemological perspective, interpretivists acknowledge that a relationship exists between the researcher and the participants and that all knowledge is an interaction between the two. Reflecting on this notion that knowledge is a social and cultural construction, it would appear that researchers must also apply the same principle to themselves and to the research they undertake. It could therefore be understood that researchers co-produce rather than simply uncover the realms of their research. As a result researchers' own assumptions and behaviours must become part of the exploration, within the research process, of the complexities of multiple realities. Of particular importance in this study is that the researcher is also one of the managers working in the local government where the research is situated. The researcher needs to explore and understand how their personal, cultural and social contexts impact on how they interpret the world.

Therefore, there is a need for a variety of personal and interactive inquiry methods of data collection. The construction of social reality is developed through ideas that are created through peoples' imagination. It is through participation and experience that people develop an awareness of the world they live in as well as self-awareness and not through the attainment of knowledge. Human action is intentional and autonomous (Guba, 1990).

Relating to this study the ontology and epistemology refer to beliefs about the nature of reality and the ways in which knowledge is construed; what it means to ‘be in’ the environment of local government and the local community; how does the shape of ‘being’ influence outcomes for managers and the community; and, how do people make meaning of their experience. The interpretivist framework of enquiry provides support for the ontological perspective of this study that looks towards the belief of not one reality but many that are local and specifically constructed and altered by the knower. From an epistemological perspective, the interpretivist framework supports the exploration of human experiences rather than statistical relationships believing that there can never be a uniformed and rigid perspective. Knowledge and understanding about human experience can be lost through research that does not look at the meaning of human existence and phenomenon. At the heart of qualitative research is a set of practices that work to reveal the world, making it visible and transforming it into a series of interpretive, naturalistic representations that researchers work to understand and interpret phenomenon that people unveil. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 196) believe that through an interpretivist framework the investigator and the investigated are interactively linked in the creation of research findings.

Furthermore, qualitative research aims to understand the social realities of individuals, groups and cultures and is concerned with the perspectives, experiences and behaviours of people. Behaviour is determined by the way people interpret their subjective reality. As people live within a context of their accumulated knowledge, life experiences and environment, the data produced is subjective and collected through direct encounters with individuals (Merriam, 2009).

## **The social construction of reality in organisations**

This research is situated within a local government organisation with a focus on managers who have decision-making responsibilities in the council. The researcher is also a manager at the local government organisation in this study. In keeping within the interpretivist worldview, the researcher looks to Gjersvik's (1993) model of social construction of reality to understand how people within organisations continue to function within an environment that is flanked by changes in policy, roles and processes (Figure 1).

Managers within an organisation have their own private realities consisting of their subjective beliefs, views and values, known as their, 'local reality' (Gjersvik, 1993, p. 44). Managers validate these various systems of meaning and this represents their reality. It is these beliefs, views and values about the organisation and the community it serves that will be explored through this study. Managers make their local realities accessible to others through a process of 'externalization' where managers communicate through their actions and act through their communication. The most common way to externalise is through the construction of language, objects, artefacts and institutions (Gjersvik, 1993, p. 47).



Figure 1: Social construction of reality in organisations. Adapted from Gjersvik, 1993, page no.37

The ‘organisational reality’ is inter-subjective and may include elements such as roles, systems processes, policy, language, technology, and history (Gjersvik, 1993, p. 51). It is these organisational elements that work to restrict human variation thereby making actions predictable and governable. The council in this study follows the *Australian Business Excellence Framework* (SAI Global, 2011) that promotes an environment that is process driven and works to reduce variation in systems and processes, and increases predictability and control. If we look to Anderson’s (2012) description of a hierarchy as being of tradition and formality where the focus is on rules, efficient processes and stability, it could be argued that this type of business framework fits well within a hierarchy organisation such as local government.

Organisational reality is interpreted by individual managers and given meaning through constructions in relation to their local reality and this is known as ‘internalization’ (Gjersvik, 1993, p. 54). Externalisation and internalisation of realities occur continuously and simultaneously and are ongoing parts of human activity and of social construction processes. Externalisation can be

seen as the generalities of speaking or communicating, while internalisation perceives, interprets and attributes meaning to externalised constructions dependent on the manager's reality and as a result influences their local reality (Gjersvik, 1993). When applying this thinking to this study, it could be argued that a manager's local reality will then influence how a phenomenon is interpreted, has meaning and makes sense.

Oliver and Roos (2007) wade into the argument by also suggesting that a person's identification with an organisation does not remain constant, rather it is constructed through social interactions and events. Tidwell's (2005) work supports that the organisation's reality is essentially constructed through the internalisation of the organisation's characteristics, behaviour and intentions. It is through this internalisation process that individuals derive meaning and connectedness with the organisation. Mattila and Aaltio (2006) add further to say that the social construction of an organisation's reality occurs through a myriad of strategic processes including the creation of common values and culture. It is through these processes of creation, expression and reinforcement of understandings through social interactions that realities are socially constructed. Particular to this study, Scott and Lane (2000) and Reicher, Haslam and Hopkins (2005) point out the importance of the role of managers in reinforcing an organisation's reality through its vision and directives to other staff and how these images guide and work to construct others' perceptions and understandings of the organisation.

The researcher contends that the organisation's reality is socially constructed and this construction is influenced by social interactions and the internalisations by managers of the organisation's characteristics such as policy, process, hierarchy, and history. In addition, the researcher agrees with Scott and Lane (2000) that managers, in their role as leaders, perform a significant role in

influencing how the organisation's identity is constructed by others. How managers construct their own reality and understand that of the organisation will impact on how they interpret and make meaning of council's social responsibilities to the community.

By taking this thinking forward within the context of this study, what does internalisation feel like for managers and what do they experience? This particularly relates to managers' consideration of community during decision-making and change processes. The managers' construction and interpretation of themselves as leaders and change agents will influence their acceptance and willingness to consult with community without bias and tokenism and influence their decision-making processes.

## **Change and social construction**

Tsoukas and Chia (2002) believe that the process of change is entrenched in the ongoing construction and reconstruction of people's beliefs and understandings, taking on new experiences, as they interact with others. It is through the ability to take on new situated beliefs and understandings and make appropriate adaptations over time, that change takes place. Change centres on the social and cultural norms and practices that constitutes an organisation and adopts the premise that change occurs without being the result of cause and effect. Therefore, from a micro perspective, and supported by the interpretivist framework of this study, an organisation could be seen as comprising of a diversity of thoughts, beliefs and attitudes as a result of the intersecting of multiple realities of people within that environment.

There needs to be an understanding that people have individual responses to change. These responses are influenced by psychological and social systems that exist within organisations and the

community. It is not enough for people to just be part of the process and for leaders to manage the change. The effectiveness of the change process relies on the emotional intelligence and literacy of all stakeholders. Traditional concepts of change assume that change goes through a particular sequence, is initiated by select people under particular conditions and is expected to result in a particular outcome (Goleman, 2006). The researcher proposes that change requires leadership to be an emotional craft with the council committed to nurturing relationships and honouring the feelings and beliefs of those they lead. Furthermore, staff and citizens need to enter into the change process personally and be motivated by hope not fear. This will be relevant for management staff asked to adopt new approaches and for the community to be more active in participating in change processes.

Local government is faced with a myriad of changes in policy, process, roles, planning and development. The focus of this study is on the decisions relating to change that occurs that then conflicts with managers' values and beliefs. It is these same changes in policy, process, roles planning and development that also impact on community through the intended and unintended consequences of such changes.

### **Learning that take place during change**

Cairnes (2006) talks about change not being a curriculum add-on. Rather, it is the basis of essential learning that underpins the entire social system. Cairnes goes on to suggest that leaders everywhere are hanging onto their past learnings, mindsets and behaviours which they reward and teach to the next generation of both leaders and followers. When reflecting on the researcher's experience as a manager, this has been the case in this council where processes for approving developments have

occurred in technocratic silos, resistant to new social directions with the same approaches being adopted by new staff that move into these positions.

While Cairnes (2006) suggests that future success relies on the ability to face the reality of change and embrace the learning that change brings, Goleman (2006) would suggest that there is often learning lost when change occurs. The slowing down of the change process allows the bringing of people into the conversation about their systems, culture and the emotional reality of the organisation. By bringing people into the change process and involving them in respectful dialogue consensus and commitment can be built. Leaders then gain a strong sense of what is needed to support people to flourish and be active participants in change. The ability to build team empowerment, engage people at all levels and understand resistance, takes more than just a set of management skills. It depends on the core values, ethics and emotional competence of the people in charge of the change.

Involving people in decision making relating to issues that affect their lives require a level of leadership that is not only based on sound leadership principles but in social and emotional intelligence. Understanding that change is as much about the process as it is the transition people go through. It helps to reduce the negative impacts of change upon all stakeholders. Traditional leadership has a functional focus without regard for the emotional or personal dimensions. However, sustainable change relies on nurturing relationships and creating human synergies (Goleman, 2006).

Whilst the rhetoric presents a strong case for the role of emotional competencies and values in forwarding the engagement of people during change, a key consideration for this study is whether

or not the people in charge of the change process want to empower and engage with others. The study goes on to explore how managers are included in the change processes and their attitudes and opinions on the effectiveness of the current approach. Further to this the researcher will also explore what influences managers' engagement in the change process and what impact this has on their values, behaviours and belief systems. Zwart, Brackertz and Meredyth (2005) strongly contend that managing change within local communities is also about citizenship that is participatory and based on social systems, values and justice. Local governments need to develop approaches that work to increase the number of opportunities and means in which citizens can actively participate in strategic planning, policies and community issues that impact on their lives. It would be fair to conjecture that this relies however, on those who lead the change to share the same value for citizen engagement.

## **Local government, participation and decision making**

When looking at Nailson, Dalglish, Brownlee and Hatcher's (2004) concept of intelligent leadership through a local government lens, what is seen is the recognition and valuing of the process of participation and reciprocal relationships in the change process for all citizens and not just consultation and a commitment through policy. This is brought about by people who are proficient in managing relationships and in building networks with others.

Local government can assist citizens to connect into the decision-making process by giving them the opportunity to participate and influence outcomes that affect their local neighbourhoods. Understanding that issues such as land use and planning developments have a significant impact on the social development of communities and that these cannot be isolated from the initial planning processes as social impacts exist throughout the whole planning process from conception to

completion. Brydon-Miller (2008) would argue that participatory approaches allow people the opportunity to learn and listen to the views of others. As a result people can learn to separate private interest from issues and concerns that relate to the broader public good. This is particular to the context of local government that aims to be an enabler of participatory democracy at grass root levels.

Part of this council's rhetoric is a strong focus on relationships and consultation as one of its key commitments. However, it is often criticised by some sectors in the community as lacking in participatory process and transparency. Involvement of community at any level is dependent on the organisational culture of not only rhetorical consultative processes but of senior staff who understand and share community values. This is of particular importance for managers who work within a local government environment as one of their key roles is to deliver on the community's vision. When consultation and participation only produce the outcomes of discussions and data on anticipated impacts on communities, the danger is that it fails to genuinely evaluate the actual social or cultural outcomes of development and change on these citizens and to measure the value of the participatory process to citizens.

## **Social and cultural impacts**

In their paper on implementing social assessments, Summerville, Buys, Germann and Cuthill (2006) suggest that when assessing impacts of change processes within a local government environment, consideration must be given to the social construction of each player's identity or reality and the relationship they each play to each other. Greater interdependency results in greater impacts on people's lives, values and beliefs systems and the way in which they view and participate within their local communities. Social impacts are consequences to people of actions

that change the ways in which they normally live and work and function as a member of society. Cultural impacts relate to changes that occur to people's customs, values and beliefs that impact on the perceptions of themselves and the society in which they exist. In all, negative impacts can work to disintegrate the very fabric of people's feelings of belonging and connectedness to their community. Menzies (1993, p. 95) concludes that when social dynamics are eroded people can lose a sense of community pride and a desire to be an active participant. Summerville et al's (2006) suggestion of the consideration during change between the different identities people hold provides the basis for the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of the relationship of identity and change and how people experience the identities they assume during change.

Social change comes about as a result of almost any interference that impacts the lives of communities in any society. Sources of the interference can be varied and wide such as particular developments or non-specific, less noticeable sources, such as increased population diversity, to government policy and technological change. Change that occurs in this manner may have unanticipated consequences or result in negative outcomes for communities, however, social change may also deliver benefits for communities, although these benefits may not always be obvious in the short term (Esteves, Franks & Vanclay, 2012).

There have been documented episodes of planning decisions within this local government body that the local community perceived as having the potential to cause adverse and unexpected social impacts. These impacts were not identified or considered. As a result there were objections, negative publicity and mediation meetings and more critically, these impacted negatively on relationships and trust between citizens and their local government body. An example of this was when a developer submitted amended plans to council to build a set of units on a site previously

set aside for community infrastructure. The affected neighbourhood argued that this change impacted on their access to community services and on their quality of life. The community successfully argued that they had purchased their properties because they were shown plans of the future development of the area which included access to community facilities and the absence of high density housing (Name of council<sup>1</sup> meeting, August 2004).

Vanclay (2005) asserts that assessing the social impacts of change is best undertaken in an environment where the people affected are active participants in determining the effects of change and working towards an approach that may mitigate any negative effects. Decision makers need to be fully cognisant of the people affected and the consequences of the decisions that they make before endorsing the change. The social environment not only reacts to impending change but can adapt to changing circumstances in ways that are reasoned and considered. However, people interpret, experience and react differently to change. It could be argued that it is because of this complexity of human response or as a result of political sensitivities or consequences that the consideration of explicit social consequences of some developments or approaches do not form part of an organisation's decision-making processes. This thinking will be further explored during the study.

## **Technocratic versus participatory paradigms**

Many practitioners agree that the aim of assessing social impacts is to monitor and predict changes in the quality of life, although, it is difficult to make accurate, quantifiable and reliable forecasts of such complex scenarios. Vanclay (2005) concluded that the social, cultural and socioeconomic issues relating to change consist of value judgments and occur within a localised social context. The

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<sup>1</sup> Name has been omitted to protect the anonymity of the organisation

issues identified are socially and culturally constructed and depend on how each person experiences or perceives the impact the change will have on their life. As a result of this social process it would be expected that the experiences in the local government area in this study would be different in another community.

The researcher's ontological and epistemological perspectives are reflected in an interpretivist perspective when exploring the interaction of local government decision makers with different social groups within a community. When people participate in social processes such as interpreting and meaning making, sharing of information and decision making, inequalities such as power and status are not automatically removed. In contrast, Prior (2003) proposes that this type of experience impacts insignificantly on technocratic decisions and therefore the 'worthy political aim of ensuring participation and consultation of the lay public' is erroneous (p. 54). Allmark and Tod (2006) would also argue that knowledge and practice wisdom of the professional is superior in the technocratic realm of decision making. However, others would attest with conviction to the valuable and diverse knowledge held by people that can value add to the decisions by professionals (Nettleton & Burrows, 2003; Martin, 2008a; Whelan, 2007; Ziebland, 2004).

However, effective outcomes are dependent on the approach taken throughout the process and Martin (2009) argues that when looking at ontological and epistemological paradigms there are strong differences between the technocratic and participatory traditions. Participatory traditions are concerned with social enterprise, seeking the inclusion of elements that relate to a sociopolitical context. These participatory traditions look to a socially constructed understanding of reality that is developed by people while in the lived experience. When assessing potential impacts on social

groups there is an absence of measures, frameworks and models, rather representations and understanding of the experience in which the person is engaged.

Clarke, Clarke, Newman, Vidler, Westmarland, Smith and Newman (2007) considers that using a sociopolitical approach has a higher chance of resulting in the examination of development and change at a more intimate and local level. This approach allows for the identifying of impacts on social constructions within a community, power distribution between varying social groups and on impacts that are more individual and indefinable. These intangibles include impacts on social connectedness, social identity and societal attitudes and relationships and enhance the opportunity of active engagement rather than passive opposition.

In summary, technocratic paradigm primarily refers to an approach that is product orientated, viewed through a positivist lens which anticipates that people will all act in a universal way. This is in contrast to the participatory approach being process orientated, generally viewed through an interpretivist lens which anticipates that people will interpret their experiences subjectively. This raises two questions. Firstly, can it be assumed then that the way community experiences participation will depend on the lens by which they view the policy and practice of participation? Secondly, with so many professionals from varying backgrounds and worldviews, how can policy and practice be translated and disseminated throughout an organisation so that there is a shared and understood approach?

## **Technocentric and political approaches to social issues**

A review of conceptual approaches identified some confusion in relation to what conceptual approach is most appropriate when considering the impacts of decision making on social groups

(Windsor, 2005). When looking at the decision making required for a technical decision compared to that for a political decision there are distinctly different processes involved. The distinction is important as information about a society's values and choices, and the need for broad community participation, may be deemed appropriate when making a political decision, whereas there may be a need for greater expertise and adjudication requiring less community participation for a predominately technical decision (Green, 2005).

This council has considered and adopted an integration of both these technocratic and sociopolitical approaches in the development of the integrated planning group. The researcher was in the development and implementation of the group. As a result, it is the belief of the researcher that the intent of the council was to secure the process of integrated approaches in its organisational reality. Greven (2007) adds credence to the adoption of this approach by putting forth the concept that both processes are interwoven. The participatory process often rests on technocratic frameworks as many problems are defined and framed by the professional before being presented up to the community for problem solving. How well this concept of dual dependency is accepted into managers' local reality and applied in projects, policy and practice will rely to some degree on how they interpret the meaningfulness of this approach within the scope of their work and within their local reality. Furthermore, exploring how well this type of approach is accepted and valued by managers and integrated meaningfully into the multiple realities of disciplines and experiences is pivotal to this study.

## **Local government core social responsibilities**

The local government council in this study is situated in a regional area in Australia. The council is headed up by publically elected councillors who represent a population of citizens who reside

within the municipality. In addition, this municipality acts as a service hub for many outlying rural municipalities. It is, therefore, necessary to define the concept of ‘community’ for the intentions of this research. Community in this study refers to all citizens and non-citizens, including children that reside in the geographic municipality.

The council has a number of planning units that are responsible for ensuring development and change processes are effective and efficient for all stakeholders. These planning units include organisational development, environmental sustainability, infrastructure and economic and social planning, all of which form part of an integrated planning committee which meets to discuss development, projects and policy change. In 2004 the council restructured internally forming a community development directorate to place a greater focus on social and community development. As a result, the internal structures of this council are set up to identify and support the social impacts of change and development across a broad number of projects, land use and policy development.

The *Local Government Act of Victoria* (1989, S.3D) identifies core responsibilities of councils in relation to the participation of citizens and the health and wellbeing of their communities. The Act sets out the major role of local governments across Victoria into the areas of advocacy, asset management, strategic planning, and the provision of democratically elected leadership that promotes a vision for all of the community (Victorian Local Governance Association, 2004). Local councils need to encourage and facilitate appropriate development in the municipality that services the best interest of the constituents while efficiently and effectively managing, improving and developing facilities, resources and services.

One of the objectives in the Act (1989) relates to civic engagement in the development and coordination of local government. Council is required to show leadership and responsibility by engaging community members, council staff, and people who use facilities and services during these times of change. Councils clearly have the role of ensuring that there is adequate planning that will meet both current and future needs of its municipality. The *Local Government Act* (1989, S. 3E) sets the framework for assessing the social impact by which appropriate development and change can take place while utilising participatory processes to elicit and assess the effects on stakeholders. The role and function of local government will be further explored in the literature review in Chapter Two.

## Rights issues

Advocacy and fostering for the articulation of rights carry a notion of a wide ranging mix of conceptual thinking and practices. The United Nation Declaration of Rights and Human Rights Framework (Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, 1989) looks to protect the legal, political and civil rights of people. However, this framework could be broadened to promote a multidimensional understanding as to how political and civil rights intersect with social, economic, environmental and knowledge rights (Gaventa, 2004). One of the features in this study is exploring how managers working within a local government context make decisions that ensure a commitment to fairness and equity with respect to these parameters.

Of particular interest is the equal and fair representation and participation of less represented groups. Particular to this study is the representation of children who make up twenty-five percent of the total population in this municipality. The population of adults aged over sixty only equal seventeen percent of the population, with children classed as one of the most dominant groups

within this municipality (id.community, 2012) On a statewide comparison, this municipality's percentage of children is higher than the Victorian average of approximately nineteen percent (ABS, 2012). A key responsibility of councils under the *Local Government Act* (1989, S.3D) relates to the engagement and consideration of community. As children make up a considerable proportion of the population within this municipality, it would be fair to say that children should be a key consideration in planning, policy and practice. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, 1989) provides the framework to guide policy and practice; however, enabling its intent to be carried out is often stymied by the image that communities hold of the child (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). This phenomenon will be further explored through this study.

The opportunity for this local government is to be an advocate for all citizens' rights. This leadership role needs to be reflected not only in 'planning, policy and practice' but secured 'as part of the' organisation's 'culture and mental topography'. This can be achieved through outcomes for citizens that are sustainable and increases the community's capacity 'to mobilise people to create new momentum for change' (Name of Author, 2005, p. 21) The findings of this study aim to influence council's commitment through a review of existing plans, policies and practices that will result in decision makers putting citizen engagement at the forefront of their thinking with a fully informed understanding of citizens' rights and the process of engagement.

## **Situating the researcher**

With this study being located within the political environment of a local government, the researcher can draw on the professional and workplace knowledge and practice of the political planning processes. It is this situating of the researcher that raises questions relating to the

relationship between the researcher and the participants in this study. The researcher looks to Etherington's (2004, p. 21) discussion on reflexivity who contends that to create meaning and an understanding of the subject under research, there needs to be a recognition of the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the participant and between the knower and what is known, and acknowledge what each brings with them into the research process.

The researcher's practical experience within local government planning processes is through the active participation on an integrated planning committee of a local government council, as well as being a local government manager with strategic planning responsibilities in relation to young children and their families. It is through this committee that planning decisions relating to development and change are discussed and debated prior to being presented for consideration at the executive committee and councillor level.

It is the researcher's past experience that many processes for development and change are presented to the committee with a purely technocentric approach and the suggestion of a political approach to issues is often met by local government experts as the 'soft science'. Anecdotally, managers from the social arenas reconcile their internal conflict of the technocentric approach with strategies of persistent emphasis and value on community development and on participatory processes.

Past experiences have confirmed that many projects have not passed through this committee as required, and therefore, are not part of any dialogue that assesses, even if ad hoc, any potential social impacts of proposed developments and change. As a result, some projects have fallen short of expected outcomes and been subject to objections and community dissatisfaction. From the

researcher's experiences, both on this committee as well as working with community groups, there appear to be inconsistencies in not only the practice of managers but also in the understanding of engaging with the community. This research aims to explore the factors that influence managers' engagement in change in this particular local government area.

## **Limitations of the research**

The researcher's current position as an employee of the local government council and as a colleague to fellow managers lends itself to further exploration as to potential limitations in undertaking research that is situated in the workplace of the researcher. The researcher's position of, 'Manager Recreation and Early Years' involves participation in discussions with councillors and the chief executive officer that require confidentiality of process and dialogue. There will also be occasions when original data versus publicly available data will place limitations on the researcher's ability to use this information in the body of the research. The researcher's access to councillors is restricted by the local council's directive that council employees are not to speak directly to councillors, rather, must direct the content of their requests to the chief executive officer. The chief executive officer then assesses the requests and decides the level of contact with the councillors.

The researcher has developed some strong professional relationships and personal friendships with other managers in the planning areas. In addition, some aspects of this study relates to functions and age cohorts under the management of the researcher. These relationships may influence managers to abandon their own beliefs and views in the research process in an effort to project a paradigm and responses that they feel would be aligned to that of the researcher. It is important for

the researcher to recognise that some responses may be influenced by the position of the researcher being the local government's manager of early years.

## **Addressing the limitations**

In an effort to counteract these possible limitations on the research, the researcher met with the chief executive officer to discuss the scope and ethics processes that would frame the research. The local council has strong organisational values of trust, respect, integrity and learning and it was agreed that the research framework and associated processes support behaviours that are aligned with these values. Although there will be information that is confidential, all public documents and transcripts will be available to access.

As a citizen, the researcher would expect to have direct access to the councillors. However, it is agreed that there is conflict here between that of a citizen and that of a council employee and it is therefore acknowledged that this limitation exists and the process for access to the councillors in relation to this research will be through the chief executive officer.

In order to build an environment of trust and openness, work colleagues were provided with information about the scope and aims of the study as well as the reassurance of anonymity and confidentiality. Although it will be recognised by work colleagues of the researcher's employment status within the local council, the researcher presented to the senior staff as a student of the University of New England.

## **The research questions**

Researchers such as Mason (2006) and Creswell (2002) advise that of critical importance to any research are good research questions. Good questions define the parameters of the study while still allowing some flexibility and scope to change and grow over time. In this particular research, the questions are framed within the setting of local government and aim to broadly identify the phenomenon of interest. The parameters of this study are set by the focus on managers and their relationship with both the organisation and the community. In agreeing with Mason (2006) and Creswell (2002) there is an expectation that the research questions may evolve further as the study progresses and the organisation and participants' impact on the two original research questions. When developing research questions consideration should also be given to resource needs such as access to research sites, participants and accessible data. Through an agreement between the researcher and the local government body, assurance was given for access to council staff and key data sources.

The areas of interest for this study aim to seek a more meaningful understanding of the influences of change on the level of engagement of both senior managers and community. The intent of this research is to study what influences the level and depth of engagement of senior staff and community members when change occurs and examine any impact on their relationships, beliefs, views and values.

The research aims to influence local government change management policy and processes, including their participatory approaches. The research will provide an understanding of current practices for staff and community and has important implications for the future use both locally and at a broader governmental and organisational level.

The research questions are:

- How is staff engagement influenced throughout the change process?
- How does council behaviour impact on community engagement?

The research is submerged in the culture of local government as this is the level at which most local proposals are determined. Although the number of large changes within the community is a small proportion, it is often the accumulative effects of smaller decisions that can result in having the greatest impact on communities. Change is constantly being implemented in the local government environment of which many impact directly on community members. Facilitating change that has been carefully considered and rigorously debated forms part of good governance practice. The research aims to identify factors that influence the application of new policy and practice direction and identifies ways to improve managers' involvement in the change process. This research is seen as critical in providing findings that can influence local government in a commitment to change processes that take into account localised issues and form part of a broader policy agenda of social justice and community development.

## **OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter One describes the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the study and particularly looks at the construction of reality for people working within a local government environment. The study is played out within a framework of social considerations, values and beliefs within a local government area while acknowledging the interrelationship and interdependence of organisational and political influences. The chapter goes on to highlight local government core responsibilities to its citizens and how both a technocratic and participatory approach needs to be balanced to ensure that decisions made by local government result in the

best possible outcomes for the community. The chapter concludes with setting the scene for this study and presenting the research questions.

The literature review in Chapter Two commences by investigating the environment of local government focusing on the frameworks of legislation, regulation and policy that influence its governance of community. Emerging from this literature is the key theme of local government as an environment of change and the challenges this presents for leadership and management. The importance of values, relationships and emotional competencies in leadership rejects the notion of a hero like leader, who with a vision and charisma, leads people to a better place. Furthermore, the theme of values, relationships and emotional maturity emerged as not only important within an organisation between leaders and their people but permeated as key principles for community engagement within a participatory framework.

Chapter Three outlines the philosophy, theory and methodology for this study. A case study research approach informed by a phenomenological perspective was used. A range of data collection approaches were applied including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, document review and story writing, which provided the vehicle for managers and community members to share their stories about their lived experiences.

Chapter Four explores the lived experiences of community members and provides the backdrop for this study as it draws out and describes the context in which local government professionals make decisions and effect change. Identities that community members hold impact on beliefs and expectations in their quest to engage meaningfully with local government in a way that enables them to influence outcomes of change.

It is in Chapters Five and Six that managers share their lived experiences, thoughts and beliefs through the stories they tell. The organisation's identity, revealed through its hierarchical structures, expectations, systems and controls, emerges as a strong influence on managers as they deconstruct and reconstruct their realities to align with that of the organisation. This was particularly evident in the stories they told in times where managers' values and beliefs conflicted with those of the organisation. Absent from the managers' stories was any alignment with community values; rather the managers' relationship with the community was expressed as bureaucratic in nature. While Chapter Five reveals this internalisation process for managers, the role of language emerges in Chapter Six as another key influence in managers' quest to make meaning of the context in which change is ever present.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, turns its attention to offering the key findings and recommendations for this study and will present other learning that may contribute to the facilitation of further research, discussion and debate.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This literature review explores the challenges that face local government in managing a changing world of policy, legislation, community responsibility and expectation. For effective governance, local government needs to balance economic, social and environmental responsibilities as well as be responsive to the needs that are perceived and experienced by the local community. This requires a maturity of mind, along with an organisational value base to ensure that change is managed within a framework of trust, relationships, cooperation and socially just principles. This literature review begins by focusing on the myriad of frameworks that local governments across Victoria operate within, ranging from the legislated regulations and policies to the locally developed plans and strategies.

Local governments experience change as a result of elections, new initiatives, community and business expectations and changing policy and legislative direction. However, to accept and manage these changes well, there needs to be a framework of processes and principles that reflects good governance at all levels within local government and into the broader community. Thus, this chapter also reviews literature that explores past and present thinking around local government and the challenges it encounters when trying to manage changes that affect the social realm of its citizens and of the organisation itself.

Organisations and services need effective management throughout the process of change, but most importantly, people need leadership and support. To lead and manage change at whatever level, a sophisticated knowledge of the context and impact of change is needed as well as the personal and interpersonal skills to support and talk with those affected. The concept of change is one most people can embrace as people intuitively understand that improving the way they think and do things is increasingly necessary. It is the tangible change that brings about ambiguity, resistance and fear. When change occurs, it complicates both the human and organisational experience. However, it could be the way in which change is managed and the skills of the people charged with managing the change that causes uncertainty and not the change itself (Cook, 2004).

The concept of change leadership and management and the notion of followership is a strong focus of this literature review. Followership looks to the social relationship between a leader and a follower. Followers are an integral part of an organisation where behaviours and interdependency between the leader and the follower influences social systems and an organisation's effectiveness (Baker, 2008). A key aspect of this study relates to the process of change both within an organisation and the impacts into the wider community. The ideology on how change is best championed is crucial for measuring the effectiveness of any approach that is applied.

The role and responsibilities of local government continue to evolve over time in an effort to respond to changing community needs and government priorities. Local government operates in a complex environment where legal, economic, social, political and historical considerations interrelate and overlap. This literature review also explores how local government meets the challenge to develop communities in which all citizens have access to the support and care that is needed and expected, especially for underrepresented subgroups in the local community. However,

to achieve this outcome, a local and coordinated approach is needed that is led and driven by local councils and recognises the critical importance of each sphere of government in the lives of not only the broader community, but that of our less represented citizens such as children (Zwart, Brackertz, Meredyth & Ralston, 2005).

For local government, from both a legislative and socially responsible perspective, it is critical that those affected by decisions of council are actively invited, in some way, into the planning process. The literature review examines Piotrowski and Van Ryzin's (2007) suggestion that openness and responsiveness is pivotal in promoting citizens' access to participation and engagement with local governments during the change process. They make a further suggestion that values and virtues are also pivotal for local government staff that are often at the coal face of managing the outcomes and impacts of change.

Combining with this approach of openness and inclusiveness is literature that explores participatory frameworks for bringing the input of people who are closest to an issue into the decision-making process contributing valuable insights and perspectives. Councils can influence health and wellbeing outcomes of staff and the community, however it depends on recognising the key stakeholders in any change process and understanding the role that they play in effecting change. All this, however, requires a maturity of both mind and heart (Weisinger, 2006).

In conclusion, this chapter examines the key competencies and understandings that local governments and community leaders require to facilitate change successfully and the importance of recognising and embracing citizens' rights within a participatory framework as a foundation from which sound social planning policy can be built.

## **Local councils - the third tier of government**

The Australian Government (2012, para. 1) maintains that across Australia, local governments are considered to be the third tier of government that are overseen by state or territory governments. Local government in each of the states and territories have equivalent powers and play a similar role, although there can be some differences in the nature of these councils. There are differences in terms of the geographical interpretation of some local government areas, which are referred to as a ‘city’ or a ‘shire’. Some land areas that have extremely low population bases, do not form part of any local government boundary and are either governed directly by the state or by a special purpose body. An example of this would be areas such as the Victorian Alpine resort area.

### **Legislative role in Victoria**

The State Government of Victoria provides a simple definition of local government as being:

A democratically elected body that provides for a specific geographical area within a state. Local councils comprise a third tier of government, in addition to Federal and state governments and are generally regarded as closest to the people. (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006a, p. 1)

However, local government is not formally recognised in the Australian constitution as a formal tier of government with the Federal government generally passing funds through the State government onto local councils. Local government, unlike the State government does not have any sovereign powers to protect.

To understand more fully this role of local government in Victoria it is important to explore both the legislative and social frameworks that bind local government and the community together. A key source of information is found in the relevant Acts, plans, policies and strategic directions

papers of councils across Victoria. Local government has a legislated role in planning that can be found in a number of key state of Victorian legislation documents such as the *Local Government Act* (1989, S.125), *Planning and Environmental Act* (1987) and the *Health Act* (1958). These pieces of legislation sets out local governments' primary objective which is to promote the social, economic and environmental viability and sustainability while fostering quality of life, community connectedness and encouraging active civic participation. This is to be achieved through transparent, accountable and effective governance. It is of interest to note that it was not until 2003 that the *Local Government Act* (1989) denoted a specific role for local governments in Victoria. Previous to this denotation only a purpose and function of local government was described (Office of Local Government, 1994, 1996) not a role.

### ***Leadership, planning and advocacy***

There are many plans and strategies that local governments are required by statute to prepare. These range from annual council plans through to Municipal Strategic Statements. Victorian local governments play a significant role in the key areas of planning and management and in the provision of funding and service delivery within a municipality. In addition, local government works collaboratively with both Commonwealth and state governments in order to influence policy that impacts directly on the local community. Local government also undertakes an advocacy and community capacity building role on behalf of its citizens and is a major provider and investor in human service areas such as the early years and aged care (Municipal Association of Victoria, 2004).

Another core responsibility of councils that is legislated is one of leadership and active participation of stakeholders in the planning and development of both strategies and services. In the *Local Government Act* (1989, S.3D), there is an expectation that local councils will coordinate and

partner with other public bodies to make certain that services and infrastructure are managed appropriately and adequately planned for, now and into the future. As part of meeting community needs and interests, councils need to plan, develop, implement and monitor policies, performance targets, and strategic and council plans and budgets, to ensure strong and secure financial accountability and management.

While legislation and mandated plans exist for all councils that provide a clear framework for legislative responsibility and accountability, the levels at which the advocacy, community capacity building and investment in services exist varies across the state. Council plans are presented by local governments as strategic documents containing strategic objectives and strategies (Exner, 2012). However, a research study undertaken by Kloot and Martin (2007) whereby council plans were examined from across the state, discovered that the areas that were listed in the plans were generally written as action plans that looked at function areas rather than as a strategic document. It was evident that the functions listed in the plans reflected similarities between those denoted by other tiers of government as being the core activities for local government.

An analysis of literature (Pillora & McKinlay, 2011) prepared by local government lead agencies in Victoria indicated that there was agreement on some of the specific roles of local government. These roles included democracy and governance, community development, advocacy, service and infrastructure provision, and planning, indicating a diverse range of responsibilities. In vast contrast, Dale (2008) suggests that the federal and state governments' policy position placed local government's focus on issues of the environment and sustainability providing a narrow and defined set of responsibilities. Taking local governments' description of the role that they play as a reasonable supposition, then it is critical for local governments to have the necessary systems and

processes in place that ensure a good level of governance as well as democratic principles by which to engage the community.

### ***Functions of local government***

The *Victorian Local Government Act* (1989, S.3C) also legislates that local councils have a role to ensure the provision of services and infrastructure that provides equitable access for its citizens. The functions of local government under the Act (1989, 3E) are diverse and wide sweeping. There are enforcement and protection services through to the delivery of a myriad of health and education services. A key role of council relates to the functions of planning and land use and the preservation of order and good governance. While some of these function areas are the responsibility of local government, the extent of delivery of some areas such as community services vary across councils. Other state legislation, such as the *Health Act* (1958), requires local governments to undertake public health functions where the responsibilities are extensive (Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2006). This demonstrates that the functions of local governments in Victoria are far reaching and as Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006, p. 285) state the:

traditional emphasis of ‘roads, rates and rubbish’ that has been the cornerstone of municipal bodies in Australia from their inception has been broadened to encompass new responsibilities, ranging from environmental management to economic and social development.

### **Financial management**

The Municipal Association of Victoria (2004) report that many local governments in Victoria contribute significantly to the effective delivery of Commonwealth and state responsibilities and contribute to health and welfare policy objectives, playing a pivotal role in promoting the health and wellbeing of its citizens. Most councils have developed plans and policies that work to support

citizen's choice to a wide range of public and private services within a municipality. Incorporated is a commitment to universal support systems and core services that are fundamental to achieving quality health and wellbeing outcomes for its citizens. Consistently across the state, councils provide funding for service delivery and to support the building of community capability, particularly citizens from diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds. This summation of local government paints a picture of good governance, sound policy and service planning enveloped with the financial ability to deliver on community needs. The Department of Transport and Regional Services (2005) held a similar view that local government had the ability to service communities by suggesting that councils across Australia were fiscally sound.

There are conflicting views to this position found in the work of Dollery, Wallis and Allan (2006), Dollery, Crase and Byrnes (2006) and Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006) asserting that local government's ability to function independently and with confidence relies on being fiscally sound, and as Self (1997, p. 304) states, 'finance is the Achilles heel of local government'. In addition, the principle causes of local government's financial pressures were other tiers of government cost shifting, asset renewal requirements, higher expectation from community and a restricted capacity to increase income.

Overall, across Australia, local governments' ability to effectively meet community need relies on a combination of internal and external factors. A report on local governments across Australia, commissioned by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration (2003), paints a grim picture of the state of local government and its ability to fulfil its role and responsibilities to both the federal and state governments and indeed its people. This report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and

Public Administration, 2003) points out that across Australia, local government responsibilities had increased dramatically with the burden of widespread cost shifting with some states forcing onto local governments needless revenue limitations. Local governments did not always receive a fair and equitable share of federal or state specific payments nor does local government receive rates from other tiers of government.

In addition, some local governments were targeted as having poor financial management, with poor relationships between governments (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, 2003). The financial position of local governments places it at times in a precarious position whereby it seems difficult to balance the needs and expectations of the community with the fiscal restraints that exist. Community has an expectation of transparency and accountability as part of the democratic process and as a sign of real community leadership by their elected representatives.

### **Democracy and participation**

The development of Australia local government in the nineteenth century was seen as an institutional revolution with the first municipal council elected in 1840 in Adelaide. This election was replicated within two years in Sydney and then Melbourne. While some variations in structure and function existed, by the late nineteen century local governments had spread across the nation. The primary responsibility was for a myriad of functions such as roads, rubbish, public transport, water supply and local public infrastructure. Local government was seen, in the 1890's and still today, as being the legal and administrative responsibility of state governments. As a result, local government was overlooked during discussion relating to the divisions of power at the Constitutional Conventions of the 1890's (Berg & Novak 2013).

Berg and Novak (2013) contend that giving local government formal recognition in the constitution would result in councils having direct access to revenues from taxpayers. This would reduce the effectiveness of the states' rate capping initiatives as federal grants would increase the local government revenue mix. Berg and Novak (2013) go on to suggest that while this is appealing to local government who have long argued about the fiscal constraints set down by the state and federal government, when it comes to political decision making in local issues, the federal is 'prone to significant errors' (p.15) evident by many policy failures.

However, Brown (2008) would argue that to have a more responsive and effective system of governance nationally, there needs to be a coordinated approach to policy making, service delivery and institutional restructuring that involves all three tiers of government. While the suggestion from Brown (2008, p. 23) is that local government is, 'structurally weak', he recognises that local government has increased its credibility and relevance to its local citizens and is growing in strength and significance for both the state and federal government. As the federal and state government contend with the pressures of globalisation, local governments' ability to develop its' capacity to respond and bear a greater burden, is of utmost importance at a national level. This concept of intergovernmental burden sharing brings to the debate the highly contentious issue for local governments of cost shifting.

The federal government's inquiry (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, 2003) formally recognised cost shifting by the federal and state governments onto local government. The inquiry proposed recommendations to address the issue of cost shifting in addition to clarifying the various roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government. This places emphasis on the debate that local government should be receiving a

larger share of public revenue in exchange for its increasing role in policy and services. Brown (2007, p. 242) suggests that rather than acknowledge the issue of cost shifting from state to local government, the state government uses the financial instability of local government to reduce the democratic capacity of councils.

Even if the funding disparities were corrected, local government faces, ‘structural limitations’ (Brown 2007, p. 242) when needing to play a governance role at a regional level. While recognizing the important role of local government and putting the issue of constitution legitimacy aside, Brown (2007) argues that there still exists the constraints of scale, questions around the leadership capacity of locally elected representatives and questions about the level of expertise and policy capacity of councillors.

With the federal and state governments collaborating more on the design and delivery of services and programs at a local level, there needs to be local buy in and engagement relating to how these services will be delivered, monitored and evaluated at the grass roots level. With the absence of this local level collaboration, the scene is set for dissatisfaction by communities with the potential for federal interventions in many local issues (Brown, 2008). This was reflective of the Kennett era of reforms where particular regional and rural community expectations of what would happen in practice were never realized. It was these communities that were the strongest in their opposition to Kennett during his failed bid for re-election.

Pillora and McKinlay (2011) point out the importance of the central features of local government democratic processes as encompassing people’s right to participate democratically through voting, being represented and having access to appropriate information. To ensure local government’s

authenticity in the representation of its community's interests and the sustainability of these rights and obligations, local governments must ensure that democratic processes take place. Councillors who are democratically elected must represent their constituents responsibly and ensure that there is a strong connection with the community.

Interestingly, the Australian constitution (1900) only recognises the federal and state governments and does not mention local government, even though it is often referred to as being a tier of government elected by its community. The Municipal Association of Victoria (2002, p. 5) states:

Lacking in adequate constitutional recognition, local government is placed in a subservient position ... (and) is subject to a range of discretionary controls (and interference) that are exercised by State Government. While its roles and responsibilities are as important as the other two levels of government, local government is not treated as an equal partner in the federal system.

In support, Kiss (2003) suggests that the democratic function of local government is vulnerable to the state government's policy around the purpose of local government. This was aptly illustrated when it was stated by a state politician that only the state government could legitimately reflect the needs and expectations of the Victorian community (Maclellan, 1996, as cited in Dale, 2008, p. 82). The role of legitimate representation is clouded as the definition of community is not clear leaving the claim of representation open to any level of government, further weakening local government's democratic role. Kiss (2003) continues on to argue that the Victorian State Government cannot claim the right to this legitimate representation while its electorate includes voting ratepayers who are not residents. The essential criterion of the democratic right of a citizen to vote carries the condition of locality. This in return allows local government to claim this legitimacy to represent the people who reside within its municipality. However, local governments' bid for recognition in

the Australian constitution as the third tier of government was defeated at a referendum in 1974 and again in 1988 and more recently abandoned in 2013.

Pillora and McKinlay (2011) suggest that local governments can seek to understand its community through good open communication and the active participation of its citizens in transparent processes of decision making. Another key responsibility of elected councillors is to advocate and lobby for community needs and expectations to the other tiers of government, thus demonstrating strong leadership, responsiveness and democratic representation. Transparent decision making and participation underpin the core value of the effective engagement processes that are designed to engage and encourage active citizenship and social cohesion.

If the statement that local government is, ‘the closest to its people’ (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006a, p. 1) has credence, then it would appear that they are best positioned to apply processes that involve open and transparent decision making within a participatory approach. Local government in Victoria is still recovering from the damaging effects of the state government reforms in the mid–1990s on citizenship and on the capacity to be responsive and representative of their communities (Dollery, Crase & O’Keefe, 2009). However, local government is in a prime position to win the battle to drive citizen participation and engagement. Later in this chapter literature is explored that relates to participation and engagement of communities and discusses some of the challenge this presents for local government.

## **Local government reform and the social agenda of communities**

While Jones (2011, p. 1) would suggest that Victoria has gone further than any other state in applying ‘highly prescriptive’ reforms to local government, Connoley (2007) goes further to say

that there is no other public sector in Australia that has been subjected to as much reform as local governments in Victoria. Adding a different perspective to this debate is the assertion of West and Raysmith (2008) who argue that changes that are implemented without the involvement of citizens, including the removal of democratically elected representatives of communities, cannot rightly be called reforms.

## **Reforms or control?**

Victorian local governments have undergone significant change since the Jeff Kennett led state government reforms in early to mid-1990. Kloot and Martin (2007) give a rounded description of the extent of changes by explaining that these were the most dramatic and far reaching reforms ever undertaken by a state government and saw amalgamations forced on councils reducing their number from 201 to just 79. This resulted in the appointment by the State government of commissioners in each council to manage the business of local government. This was oppositional to the former democratically elected structure of councillors. In particular, this move away from communities being able to democratically elect their local representatives to govern their municipality, coupled with a lack of local consultation and participation, was viewed by regional and rural communities as undemocratic and an attack of citizenship.

In addition, councils were required to undertake competitive tendering and operate like a business. Many local government employees were then required to bid for their own work. The state government forced rates to be cut and increases to be restricted and as a result caused many local governments to be put under financial strain. The ability for councils to increase rates in order to meet community need was no longer an option to increase council revenue. The imposed rate cut of 20% by the State government placed pressure on local government to cut costs, cut services to

the community and reduce employee conditions and staffing levels. Driving improved efficiencies through constraining the function of local government was seen as the answer to achieve economic growth across the state. However, the reforms saw the loss of thousands of jobs with devastating effects on local economies (Kloot & Martin 2007).

Impacts on local communities were severe as relationships with democratically elected representatives were lost including the sense of civic engagement, with much of the decision making moving from community level to state level. As a result of this process, many of the community and private sector services saw local government as a competitor and ceased working collaboratively. The ill effects of this process are still being experienced today within some local communities (Kloot & Martin, 2007).

The reforms of the Kennett era resulted in the increase in the importance of the Chief Executive Officer's role within local government. Local government is now focused on operating cost effective services, corporate and operational planning and on achieving sound human and financial resource management and contract management. Delivering on these new management functions required the Chief Executive Officer to have an increased level of authority and power. The business environment in which councils now operate after the reforms is more competitive and measured.

In addition, the management process also elevated manager's role within the local councils to a position of control over the workforce and line management responsibility and accountability. Their control was extended through the management of public budgets, contracts and contractors.

The reforms changed the management hierarchy, which saw councillors operate as a board, where they are responsible for setting the strategic direction and policy (Allam & Pacher, 2000).

In summary, Alam and Pacher (2000) identify the main features of the reform program led by the Kennett government as:

- A comprehensive boundary restructure and the reduction of municipalities from 210 to 78;
- Redefining the role and functions of Councillors to focus more on long-term strategic and policy;
- The introduction of new financial reporting procedures;
- A compulsory reduction of rates by 20% and rate capping for the subsequent three years;
- A requirement to submit corporate plans and annual reports to the Minister for approval;
- The use of government-defined benchmarking and other performance indicators;
- The ability to perform council functions inside and outside the municipal areas; and
- The introduction of compulsory competitive tendering.

Jones (2011) argues that these reforms were in keeping with a global movement at that time to reduce costs and improve efficiencies while making the public sector more responsive to community needs. In opposition to this assumption that there was a dramatic change to the way local governments in Victoria operate, Kloot and Martin (2007) and Dempsey (2006) would assert that despite these reforms, the operations, culture and leadership of local government remain relatively unmoved to this day. Allan (2003, p. 75) wades into the argument to suggest that the economic savings of consolidation of twenty percent failed to materialise with a disappointing 8.5% being realised through tendering of services and not consolidation as suggested by the

government at the time. While there may now be some prudent and systematic reporting undertaken, there was found to be little evidence to support that changes have occurred in management and leadership practices as a result of the reforms.

Framed within an overarching philosophy of liberalism, the reforms were developed to create the opportunity for councils to take the initiative in leading their communities in being responsible for their own quality of life outcomes. These reforms gave local government the opportunity to work together more effectively with the other levels of government to provide better outcomes for communities. Councils were expected to operate like businesses with citizens referred to as customers and for councils to be less accountable for the wellbeing and prosperity of their community (Moon & Sharman, 2003).

## **Liberalism**

The reform agenda was underpinned by the ideology of public choice, as well as concerns relating to the state budget and economic reform. Pollitt (2003) points out that public choice theory makes wide use of the philosophy that believes that individuals, within a framework of decision making, strive to maximise their advantage through behaviour that is rational and self-interested. In addition, it is thought that public choice emphasises that the selfish motivations and bureaucratic powers, in particular in relation to policy implementation, results in oversupply and inefficiencies within the public sector rather than creating an enabling public sector. Some of the major advisors to the Kennett government during these reform times were neo liberal thinkers who supported the general ideology behind public choice.

## **Private versus public good debate**

When looking at these privatistic principles behind liberalism the researcher looks to the works of Richard Rorty, an American philosopher. McCollister (2006) explains that Richard Rorty preoccupied himself with the question of private and public value with his assertion that self-creation is private and unshared while justice is public and shared. When looking at this thinking of liberalism the works of Rorty sits alongside the thinking of John Dewey resulting in two different schools of thought.

Shusterman (1994, p. 397) suggests that Dewey's thinking is embedded in a model of 'active participation in the public sphere and the business of government'. People are always impacted on by their local environment so there needs to be a relationship between how people contribute and participate actively in their community, demonstrating a willingness to work together for the wider public good. Liberalism, according to Dewey, acknowledges that the success and richness of self-actualisation is dependent on others. This thinking points to a harmonisation of liberty and equity with society while Rorty's view is oppositional in that it works towards a disassociation between liberty and equity resulting in a strong division between private and public. Rorty believes that self-actualisation is a private process with the role of a democratic community forming a framework of protection for self-creation; not a central and influential element of self-actualisation.

Dewey's worldview on liberalism looks to the symbiotic relationship between the private and public spheres while Rorty argues determinedly against this thinking. It is Dewey's intent that each individual within a social realm will be fulfilled through their actions contributing to a fund of shared values for the good of the whole. In contrast, Rorty's view of a just and free world is leaving people alone to their privacy, irrationality and creative ways as long as they are not doing harm to

others, to use or neglect their opportunities as they wish. Although differing in their viewpoints on liberalism there is agreement that self-actualisation is distinctly individual and aesthetic (Leib, 2004). Self-actualisation is not about fulfilling a fixed generalisation of a particular social or moral identity, rather a creative projection of individual growth achieved through continual learning, growth and thought modification of behaviour. While Dewey and Rorty encourage the essence of self-actualisation, there is disagreement on how this ideology should be represented. Liberalism espouses democratic processes that are participatory and inclusive and that there exists a divide between the private and public sphere (Shusterman, 1994).

The Kennett led Victorian State Government's neo liberalism ideology was based on the understanding that citizenship was about individual freedom, rather than collective approaches to determining the common good, a concept that is oppositional to building social capital. Public participation in political decision making was discouraged, as it was seen as being oppositional to rational governmental decision making (Wiseman, 2002). This notion of neo liberalism reflects Rorty's thinking (Koopman, 2007) about democracy being born of self-interested individuals in society that took precedence over the concept of a community centred on public good participating in a democratic society. Further to this is the challenge around the question of private and public ethics and whether the two sit alongside each other, strengthening this position of collective good or against each other, as a product of individualism.

Rorty (1989) acknowledges that a capitalist society is unlikely to solve the many problems of the world. However, society is faced with the dilemma of the interdependence and dominance within a global economic system from where wealth is derived, with a vision that is compatible with gross insensitivity to the distresses, inequalities and corrupting influences of that system. Furthermore,

Rorty (1989) makes a point that notions such as private and public are necessary, although separate forms of life. People rely on the construction of a social world of meaning that is dependent on others private and individual integrity.

Keeping with this approach, that government exists to promote and sustain an ethos of social responsibility and regulation, albeit neoliberalism rhetoric suggest otherwise, then the concept of public good could become an indicator of performance for governments as suggested by Flynn (2007). When looking at local government's purpose within a framework of public good it could be argued that a key philosophy is to manage social conditions that enable altruism to flourish and authentic democratic processes to take place. Dewey contended that democracy is not a system of government, rather a way of living together as a community and he:

believes wholeheartedly in the process of experience as end and as means .... Since it is one that can have no end till experience itself comes to an end, the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute.  
(Dewey, 1939, quoted in Morris & Shapiro, 1993, p. 245)

Public ethos is symbolic of social equity and unity. It provides the rationale that it is through the retention of public ownership of fundamental services that people are able to contribute to discussion about the most effective use of services. This in return provides the opportunity for economic effectiveness and a sense of equity and social cohesion. While it could be argued that public politics provides sustenance for the broader growth of self, Rorty contests that it provides bland commonalities, standardised procedures and bureaucratic organisations, which although critical for sound governance, are not the stimulating peculiarities by which a person can flourish, be nurtured and express their individuality. In the case of local government, where managers are responsible for implementing change and influencing decision making, there is merit in exploring

meanings and understandings of the concept of public good and to what extent, if any, their beliefs and values relating to this notion influences outcomes of their decisions.

## **Economic rationalisation**

Debate continues as to the real benefits of these local government reforms and whether the belief of economic rationalists that competition leads to increased efficiencies has merit. Jackson (2001) reviewed more than fifteen studies relating to this issue and found that there is little evidence of increased efficiency or effectiveness to be found in services contracted out or privatised. These reforms required leadership that was focused on the cost driven delivery of services to the community. This in return encouraged the view that local government was incompetent with its elected leaders, parochial, and the public sector staff as selfish and greedy. It could be argued that the real aims of the reforms were to exercise control over local governments rather than a real aim of any improved efficiencies. This argument is strengthened by Jeff Kennett's 'chain of command' leadership style, his courting of conflict and his undertaking that consultation was seen as a weakness of leadership (Strangio, 2012, p.13).

James (2003) brings forth the debate that economic rationalists contest that self-interest and the market economy is the key to all human exchange with the belief that business is rational. Discussions about values are misplaced and not conducive to efficient business practices as values are rational and personal. This raises the question then of the values of competition, self-interest and freedom of choice and whether economic rationalists would argue that these are values that are conducive to efficient business practices. James (2003) argues that these values of economic rationalism do not promote just societies. Ulrich (2007) explores this further to suggest that maybe

the argument lies more with the notion of a citizen with altruistic motives that relate to the common good being understood from within an economic paradigm.

When looking at the role of local government, for public good to reign above self-interest, there must be an environment created that provides the opportunity for altruism to foster and grow. There needs to be a sense of community whereby people identify with each other as a larger group to see that the common good is good both collectively and individually. This thinking is in contrast with neo liberalism that encourages an agenda that works to weaken this identification with the broader collective of the community. Kennett's efforts of reframing local governments' identity into the trademark of business worked to provide a justification for preventing the government from practicing 'public good'. It could be argued that the reforms of the Kennett era forced local government to abandon their role in building community altruism. Bakan (2004) adopts the position that to bring back the balance of altruism in the social realm of communities there needs to be a plan that works towards limiting corporate power and works towards restoring social connections and active civic participation.

## **Public sector identity**

Local governments across Victoria have turned to the use of value statements as a means of promoting their point of difference from the business world and to create a new identity that bears resemblance to the ethos of public good. Dempsey (2006) suggests that it may be as a corrective measure by local government to counteract the previous hard focus of the Kennett era on economic rationalisation. It could be argued that local government needs to ensure that values are embedded only in the notion of good management or it runs the risk of ignoring values for the

public good of fairness, equity, inclusiveness and impartiality. To do otherwise may encourage staff to do work without reflection and agency and to follow without question.

The Milgram (1969, as cited in Dempsey, 2006, p. 244) experiment concluded that when individuals are removed from the people on whom their decisions affect, they become removed from the moral responsibility of their decisions. The relevance to local government can be derived from Dempsey's (2006) suggestion that the very nature of local government hierarchical structure and bureaucratic language can distance individuals from decision-making responsibility and the anxiety of this responsibility. This is pertinent to this study as the researcher seeks to understand what influences local government managers when they are engaging in decision making that impacts on the lives of community members.

The very nature of what has defined public sector values inhibits innovation if it results in not being able to help those who were previously assisted prior to any new changes being implemented. In Dempsey's (2006) study of local government it was revealed that there was the belief that local government did not have the ability to merely withdraw from a service if it was not cost effective. There was a public expectation that services seen as being a core function of local government would continue to be delivered. In addition, community expects that public servants carry certain social values and behave in certain ways that promote the good of the whole. This social construction of the public servant sets up the environment where it is difficult to take risks and innovate and where local government work often puts it in the situation of perceived *loco parentis*. However, this position of *loco parentis* also elicits feelings and attitudes that are often associated with this type of power relationship. Local government works between an environment

of service and regulation and as a result creates a situation where citizens are unsure of the relationship between themselves and staff.

The Kennett government promoted the image that local government public sector staff were greedy, patronising and lazy. This draws attention to the work of Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) that highlights interest of the influencing factors that enable or restrict the construction of identity. Sitting alongside a multitude of forces, the ‘severe pressures associated with cultural templates for who and how we ought to be’, undermines the possibility of being able to deliver on these ideals (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008, p. 8). This attempt to redefine the identity of local government staff moved the rhetoric from questioning what was needed for the good of the collective to thinking about who had more. The study into organisational identity is relatively young with the main conceptual statement made by Albert and Whetten (1985), and empirical investigations taking place by Dutton and Dukerich (1991) and others (Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Pratt, 1998), so there is much more understanding and meaning to uncover.

Albert and Whetten (1985) first argued that organisational identity relates to: what the employee perceives to be the unique organisational attributes that differentiates it from other organisations, and what are the enduring objectives that remain the same over periods of time. This organisational identity then acts to frame decision-making processes. Dutton and Dukerich (1991) supported the supposition that the principles of decision making by employees at an organisational, strategic and operational level are influenced by the identity of the organisation.

This research study provides an opportunity to add to the current thinking around organisational identity seeking an enhanced understanding of human cultural experiences in how people create

and transform meaning. Interpretative approaches that form part of this study aim to work to identify how people develop identities through the social interactions with others and from the varied contextual resources at hand. When looking through an interpretive lens, the concept of identity provides a unique opportunity to gain an insight into the complex relationship that exists between an individual and the organisation.

Further to this and reflecting on Dempsey's (2006) issue of the possible impact of local government hierarchical structure on decision making, brings attention to the thinking of how, through the establishment of an identity of power, relationships can be suppressed and agency constrained. Some scholars (Alvesson & Willmont, 2002; Carroll & Levy, 2007) have approached this issue of identity as a way to seek an understanding of the current thinking relating to the concepts of resistance and control. Interest has revolved regarding organisational externalisations and personal internalisations that are captured within worldviews that serve a subordinate role within managerial systems that encourage business endeavours (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). Local government at the heart of this study is steeped in a hierarchical structure where power relationships exist at many levels throughout the organisation. As outlined in Chapter One, the process of internalisation and externalisation has relevance to this study and will be explored further.

There is a difference in the way that scholars view identity as it applies to organisations such as local governments. While some saw identity comprising fixed characteristics perceived by members (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007), others such as Corley and Gioia (2003), argued that members socially construct and reconstruct the identity of an organisation, individually or collectively through interpretations, meaning making , actions and interactions. The researcher looked further to what

literature said about the distinguishing features of organisation identity. Viewing identity through an interpretivist lens, it appeared that organisational identity was concerned with the reality of what is an organisation? Organisational identity is formed through the type of culture that exists, the corporate behaviours and values displayed. The approach to leadership and management and how the organisation communicates internally and externally, formally and informally also contribute to the formation of organisational identity. History, philosophy, products and services also combine to construct the identity of the organisation (Balmer, 1998). The researcher then looked to social identity theory to gain an understanding of the managers as a group of professionals embedded within the local government context. Social identification originates from group memberships, the uniqueness and prestige of the group and favourable comparisons between other groups. Social identification results in activities that are congruent with the identity and provides support for organisations where the identity is embedded. Furthermore, it promotes individual and collective self-constructions and it reinforces the qualifications and experiences of the specific social identification (Brown, 2000). Ultimately, the philosophical positions discussed are based on the premise of a link between identity and action. The exact make-up of the link, the reasons and methods of exploring it, look quite different dependent on the lens by which it is viewed and will form a consideration in this study.

So far the literature review has focused on the challenges for local government in being the third tier of government that is often impacted on by both Commonwealth and state government. This position of being the third tier of government presents a struggle for legitimacy as well as the need to balance community needs and expectations with a changing and challenging business environment. The exploration of the effects today of the Kennett era of reforms turned the attention to liberalism and the debate around private and public good. Looking at the philosophy

of liberalism, whether it is from the worldview or Rorty or Dewey, brings forward the discussion regarding the contemporary role of the democratic culture of local government and the issue of private and public good ethos for this study. What issues of the public good or individual agency do the people charged with making decisions in a community take into consideration and allow to influence their thinking during change?

## **Change management**

The local government at the centre of this research is responsible for facilitating and implementing many changes brought about by a myriad of influencing factors, broad and diverse in nature. The literature on change management would suggest that how change is managed within the organisation, the community and with other related stakeholders will be critical in assessing the success and validation of any new outcome. Therefore, the literature on change management will be critical in increasing the researcher's knowledge and understanding in order to place context and meaning around behaviours and values that may become evident throughout the research.

In this world of rapid change, organisations including local government are compelled to compete and adapt in a changing market place and work within boundaries of efficiencies and effectiveness, while coping with ever increasing community expectations. As a result, serious change is inevitable if organisations are to continue to stay viable and, in the case of local government, fulfil its legislative, democratic and social obligations to the community.

## **The many faces of change**

As councils continue to monitor and evaluate their economic, environmental and social responsibilities, there is the potential for change to occur in policy, work practices, service

provision and financial commitment or within the organisational structure. Jones (2011, p. 8) presents the notion of conceptualising leadership in local government in three frames of reference, being: the ‘operating edge’, the ‘stakeholder edge’ and the ‘political edge’. When translating these three frames of reference to the sociopolitical context they comprise of managers and staff (operating edge), citizens and community agencies (stakeholder edge) and other levels of government (political edge). When looking at the notion of change within this context it would be reasonable to say that change could be either precipitated through either an internal force or an external force and as a result has the potential to impact in one, some, or all of the three frames. Within this environment of sociopolitical ethos, local government is in a constant state of change. This study will turn its attention to the operating edge (managers and staff) and the stakeholder edge (citizens) in an effort to understand the experiences of the people influenced and impacted on by change. There is an implicit understanding that the political edge is always present in legislation and changing policy direction. Managers are often charged with the responsibility of bringing about action because of change, whereas citizens are often impacted on by these actions resulting, at times, in citizens bringing about tangible pressure on local government. To be sustainable and achieve positive outcomes, change needs to be managed well and not simply reacted to by organisations. Some might suggest that there is too much change in organisations (Christensen, Chenery, Zorn & Ganesh, 2010), while others would acclaim that in this current era a distinguishing and necessary characteristic of a successful organisation is its ability to become competent at managing change (Worley & Lawler, 2006).

## **Frameworks of change management**

Change management frameworks are comprised of processes, tools and methods by which people are managed during organisational change while aiming to achieve effective business outcomes.

Traditionally, change was generally implemented by the leader of an organisation, resulting in the organisation displaying predictable behaviours that were compliant to the new business direction (Reiss, 2012). It would seem that in today's modern world traditional change management models are not regarded as being reflective of the way in which change is implemented in many organisations, including local government. Many traditional models prescribe to change that occurs progressively over time together with a participatory management approach, however many organisations today are subject to change that is rapid where a more direct leadership approach is required (Anderson, 2012). In contrast, local government is an organisation where a traditional hierachal structure exists, however it is influenced by the internal, external and political environments at a rapid pace. When this rapid change occurs within a setting that is highly hierarchical then different tensions may exist.

When Kotter (2007) looked at lessons that could be learnt from successful cases of change, similarities existed. First, there was a demonstrated belief that the change process consists of stages that take a considerable amount of time to navigate and while skipping any of these phases speeds up the change process, it often ends in failure. Secondly, any critical mistake made in any of the phases can have a negative impact, slow down the process and negate any positive gains. Conversely, when you look at the different sources of literature that talks about the management of change (Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter & Cohen, 2002), there are many approaches purported to be the answer to the question of how to best implement organisational change. The review of literature found many testaments advocating the merits of step-based models of organisational level change (Burke, Lake & Paine, 2008; Helms—Mills, Dye & Mills, 2008; Kotter, 2007) and there are formulas, phases, incremental and transformational efforts, and persuasion models, all aimed at effectively managing change.

Further to this, Whelan-Berry, Gordon and Hinings (2003) had examined some of these prescriptive models of change management and found that they also had several commonalities. Firstly, these models work to identify why the change is needed, create an air of urgency, attempt to develop a commitment and readiness, and then create a vision for the future. Whelan-Berry, Gordon and Hinings (2003) found that there were many existing frameworks of change. However, these frameworks continue to be elusive regarding what actually occurs for people during the implementation of the change within organisations. In support of this, Doyle, Claydon, and Buchanan (2000) state that people in leadership positions experience change management models as being overly structured and therefore disregard real inconsistencies, pressures, interactions and relationships of the people in the change process. Although these prescriptive models show how change can take place if all components of the organisation fit well together, they fail to take account of, as Anderson (2012) suggests, that change is a social construction and therefore a continuous process and not a specific project or point in time.

If we accept the thinking that organisational change is unable to authentically occur if particular groups and individuals are not willing to adopt new and different work practices, approaches, frameworks, and, even at times values and beliefs, then understanding the change process for these groups and individuals is crucial. What does analysing the individual response to the change process in local government organisations add to our understanding of the organisational change process?

## **Leadership and culture**

Jones (2011) puts forward that the reforms to local governments in Victoria saw the emergence of sophisticated management models with leadership and direction being sought from highly skilled

chief executive officers who possess strong corporate perspectives and were supported by a broad range of senior staff from different professional backgrounds and qualifications. However, Dempsey (2006) suggests that since the reforms, while there has been a change in the approach to chief executive officer's recruitment, on the whole chief executive officers in local government are still recruited from the public sector. Further to this he suggests that the internal culture and leadership styles in local government have changed very little over time, with Kloot and Martin (2007, p. 495) putting forth the argument that a familiar 'clan based' culture is still dominant in many Victorian local governments.

To understand this notion of clan based culture and how it might apply to local government the researcher looked to the work of Masood, Dani, Burns and Backhouse (2006) who describe a clan based culture as one where the organisation concentrates on looking after the internal operations with some flexibility, shows concern for their staff and thoughtfulness for their customers. The clan culture is considered to be like a family where it is good to work and people care and look after each other. Leaders in the clan are seen as mentors and facilitators and individual development, as well as teamwork and participation, is encouraged. While Kloot and Martin (2007, p. 495) found in their study that local government managers, 'were largely classified as having a clan based culture', they also observed that there appeared to be a 'disconnect between the clan based cultural orientation of local government managers to the environment in which they exist'.

When looking at the context in which local government managers operate across Victoria, it is evident that these organisations are embedded in a traditional framework of hierarchy which looks at odds with Masood et al's (2006) description of clan based culture and more in congruence with Chan's (1997) article on corporate culture. Here Chan (1997) provides an interesting insight into a

different perspective of clan based culture that relates organisations to social enclaves. In addition, Chan's assessment is in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm of this study and therefore adds further depth to the researcher's understandings. Here the discussion concerning clan based culture turns to describing bonds that exist between the organisation and staff that are non-contractual, where there are a set of common sociocultural beliefs and behaviours that act as a cognitive and emotional tether to the traditions, rituals and rites of the organisation that are protected. There are leaders who interpret the rules within the organisation and provide punishment in the form of warnings, suspensions and terminations. This type of culture demands followership and the need for subordination to exist. This ensures that the enclaves' overall goals prevail while the individual goals are seen as expendable. The ethos behind this type of culture is to try to pre-empt what the customer may want in order to exceed their expectations. Additionally, the aim is to continually seek to improve the services and processes provided in order to develop a strong identity with the customer. Customers are active participants in the social enclave and loyalty to the identity of the organisation is of utmost importance.

Taken together, these two descriptions appear to be oppositional although both are considered to be definitions of clan based culture. Anderson (2012) suggests that generally hierarchical organisations are more aligned with systems theory approaches, such as the business excellence framework that is used by the council at the centre of this study. Examining this further, it raises the question of the possibility of a clan based culture, as described by Cameron and Quinn (2006), existing in a hierarchical environment? The researcher aims to understand the environment and culture of the local government body at the centre of this study through the stories told by both managers and the community. For this research there is an assumption that in the context of local government the community is also a customer. Part of this research will also look to gaining a

deeper understanding of what it means to be a customer to local government. What do customers experience and how does this influence their values and beliefs of local government. How do managers view their relationship with their customers and how does this influence the meaning managers attach to customers?

If people and relationships were front of mind during change it would be fair to say that in order to facilitate change, an organisation must first look at the people of the organisation and the culture that these people have created. Bolman and Deal (2008) explain culture as a social phenomenon where it is like reality in that it depends on human action and interaction. Culture is developed when individuals hold beliefs, values and traditions in common with others and relates to the degree in which staff identify with the organisation as a whole.

When change occurs it often threatens the organisation's social tapestry, with the risk of unravelling deeply rooted cultural values and ways. As all change involves people doing things differently, managing people well is the most critical principle of change. Overall, the influence of the elements of change frameworks and culture in addition to a hierarchical environment where there are decreasing resources and increasing community expectation and demand, all work to make local government a challenging environment for leaders to implement change.

## **Leadership during change**

The literature on change leadership draws on the core competencies required of leaders to effectively facilitate change. Just as there are innumerable frameworks to manage change, there exists a myriad of notions of leadership with conflicting literature concerning effective change leadership ideologies. One such view is the cause and effect ideology, where the application of an

explicit set of rules by leaders results in people acting in particular ways, similar to looking at leadership through a positivist lens. Giuliani and Kursen (2005) referred to later in the chapter, are clearly leaders who have a strong belief in cause and effect leadership. Other models vary from transformational to transactional leadership, hero like leadership through to leadership styles that are of the heart and mind. Tied closely to the hierarchy structure of local government is the notion of positional leadership (Milner & Joyce, 2005) whereby change is generally executed by the leader of an organisation with culture and belief systems being compliant to the new business direction and where followers are obedient and loyal and carry out the impending change.

Senge (2006) talks about business and management training that promote such images of leaders as being self-reliant, strong and heroic who will save and protect others. This image of leadership relates strongly to the values of self-reliance, individualism, competition and rationality akin to the concept of liberalism. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) challenge the truisms of programs and research around change that advocate for the top down approach, where there is a decisive inspirational leader who knows the answers, has vision and energy, and can build a persuasive picture of the future organisation they want to build. These programs and research stress that change needs to be driven through an organisation by a, 'hero – leader' and must be 'done to' (pp. 10–11) the people within organisations. Senge (2006) offers an alternate concept when he proposes that the challenge is about building the leadership and capacity of organisations to respond to change and to view organisations as living systems with the skills, knowledge and learning coming from many people from within the organisation who can facilitate change in a way that does not leave staff and citizens feeling powerless and frustrated and in a state of constant insecurity. The challenge for local government is to develop the capacity to respond and adjust in

the face of changing circumstances and changing political environments from within a traditional hierarchical bureaucracy.

While there are a myriad of attributes, traits and skills that champion the perfect formula for leadership as well as tips to become more effective in this role (Cohan, 2003; Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Skipper & Bell, 2006), there is little attention paid to the relationship between leaders and those around them. Weisinger (2006) reveals that there are many weaknesses in previous training of people in leadership positions in that a purely academic model of listening, leadership, team building and change management has been adopted. The missing component in this type of training is the critical role of building and maintaining relationships and the development of emotional intelligence. Avolio and Gardner (2005) attest that emotional intelligence is critical for effective leadership as it correlates to the capacity of people to recognise and handle their own emotions and impulses, refine their empathy and social adroitness and the capacity for self-motivation. Emotional competencies are best defined as the practical ability of developing and maintaining relationships with others.

Emotional competencies, as part of leadership, appear to be able to be taught and learnt and can be further developed by some people as they transition through life and learn from their experiences and of those of others. However, Sinclair (2007, p. 171) cautions that many initiatives that have been designed for promoting self-awareness and authenticity in leaders can have a detrimental effect on their development as it may turn the mind to a preoccupation with self and ego rather than a more reflective approach of leadership.

In presenting a different way of looking at leadership, Sinclair (2007, p. 183) challenges readers to question not how to ‘do’ leadership but understand and challenge the myths behind leadership that take over our thinking, values and beliefs. She goes on to urge people to look at how leadership functions as a social idea and how it can be made more meaningful for all involved. This can only come about if there is a willingness to gain a deeper insight and ‘rounded account’ (p. 184) of others’ leadership experiences and to self-reflect (Sinclair, 2007). In this endeavour to understand it may provide powerful descriptions of the barriers to change that exist not only in social structures but in language and conversation and, therefore, has relevance to this study. One of the key aims of this study is to listen to the experiences of managers and communities and use the richness of their accounts to further the understandings relating to the social processes and influences of change.

This focus around leadership in local government brings forth the thinking about the influence of the sociopolitical environment and identity of the organisation on the style of leadership that can be cultivated. Is the desire to lead differently able to survive and thrive in such an environment as local government and what would people experience if leadership looked and felt different? While there are calls for leadership that shows the ability to develop relationships combined with competence and confidence, there needs to be a greater understanding of how this social construction of leadership can develop and flourish within the sociopolitical environment evident in local government. Research that explores the influences of leadership development in varying contexts all work to contribute to this growing body of knowledge.

## **Leadership, relationships and communication**

Giuliani and Kursen (2005), reflect on Giuliani's time as mayor of New York during the September 11 terrorist attack. They assert that good leaders need to be able to not only have a vision and set direction but be able to communicate that direction to others and instil a feeling of trust and security. Expressing a passion and a belief in the vision is one of a leader's most powerful tools and leaders must be able to bring people along on the journey and excite them about the vision and earn their support. Good leaders inspire and encourage others to focus on and share the same goals, so that people are in the driver's seat and not mere passengers. However, Giuliani and Kursen (2005) stress that communicating beliefs and ideas is the symbol of trust and a critical device in disseminating the message to others. To maintain credibility and integrity, people need to be able to rely on the honesty of what the leader is saying and that leader's mean exactly what they say. It is important that leaders strive to include everyone they lead and ensure that the messages presented are understood by all. Giuliani and Kursen (2005) state the need to communicate accurately and clearly with respect and sensitivity. What they fail to acknowledge is that there is limited control over how people hear and make meaning of messages.

Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport (2007) talk about the two major components of change management processes within organisations being the social processes of relationships and communication. Poor communication and interpersonal relationships between team members and management can result in conflict and a lack of trust. Opposition to change may be based on fear and suspicion and it is critical that leaders can facilitate change in a way that balances both organisational and individual needs. Change may challenge deeply imbedded assumptions and people may resist change based on false assumptions, but at times people may resist because they correctly view the change as harmful. Therefore, effective communication or a better approach to

change may be needed. Most change requires a radical change in thinking and behaviours as mental models, assumptions and frameworks enable people to make sense of the world. It is then difficult for people to let go of their mental models when change is eminent.

Senge (2006) contests that change, however, needs to be viewed holistically as it occurs in a system and in the case of local government, in a sociopolitical system that has complex and interrelated subsystems. A change in one subsystem potentially has intended or unintended consequences for other subsystems. Established norms and values may be upset elsewhere in the organisation. Lewis et al. (2007) provides an answer in that effective technical processes rely on social processes and human factors and this requires a balance between the needs of the organisation and that of staff. This coupled with the understanding that there are mutual benefits for both, if working cooperatively together can be achieved. Staff involvement in change is a vital component if organisations are to become proactive and change responsive systems. These social processes, be they communication or relationships, are socially constructed and will therefore be experienced differently throughout the organisation. People will all have differing life experiences and responses in making meaning and sense from the change. When applying to this study the notion of communication as having a key role in change management, then there is an opportunity to explore how managers experience the process of communication during change and how they view the relationship between change and communication. Additionally, there is the opportunity to seek a deeper understanding of the role communication plays during change for both managers and the community.

## ***Can an apple be an orange?***

Interest in the importance of the context in which leaders and followers work has emerged more recently (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Hickman, 2010; Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007) with Avolio and Gardner (2005) highlighting that the environment in which leaders and followers work is social and fluid. Success or failure of leadership relies on recognising and understanding both the dynamics of the internal relationships as well as the external environmental forces and influences at play. If this notion of the importance of context and situation on leadership and followership is accepted (Day, Sin & Chen, 2004; Hickman, 2010), then this challenges the concept of cause and effect and formulaic leadership models because group dynamics and external influences are not considered. The researcher holds an interest in the notion of the relevance of context and internal dynamics on leadership and followership. This study revolves around exploring the influences on managers and the community within an environment that is not only impacted on from external forces but consists of multiple realities and interpretations, therefore rendering it as fluid and dynamic.

The notion that strong leaders can lead anyone at any time through any change disregards the notion that change leadership is as much about people that are led as the leaders themselves. The change process is about relationships and group functioning not just about skill and individual characteristics. It involves taking on the responsibility to champion change through building and maintaining support and commitment from people. When change is viewed as a social phenomenon, change leadership is not fixed; it is characterised by a process of social interactions, mutual congruence in values and a mutual responsibility and trust to seek shared meaning of the change process (Russell, 2012). However, the reality is that there continues to be many people in positions of responsibility who are abrasive, thoughtless and interpersonally inept. Goleman

(2006) attempts to explain this phenomenon using Peter and Hull's (1969) 'Peter Principle' concept, where people are promoted to their levels of incompetence because of technical expertise and then find that at the new level many of the duties relate to managing people. The assumption is that if people have a special expertise then they have the ability to lead.

By simply labelling someone a leader doesn't magically transform them into one; or as Russell (2012, p. 15) so persuasively suggests that, 'Calling an apple an orange doesn't make it one'. Leadership does not just emerge after training or reading a book, rather it is a personal choice, one of the heart and also of the head. Leadership needs both the traditional concepts of skills and knowledge but also inner work such as self-awareness and personal growth. Avolio (2010) adds further to this by suggesting that leadership is a lifelong pursuit as development and growth takes time and commitment and a willingness to lifelong learning; rather than a once only event. Consistent and well intentioned actions and behaviours are what get results, not rank or positional power, as people follow leaders for specific reasons such as clarity, trust, stability, compassion and hope. When practiced authentically these actions create a natural followership where there is trust and positive results and influence on others.

### **Follow the leader: The role of the followers**

When consistent and well intentioned behaviours and relational trust are talked about it raises the question of what does trust and well intentioned behaviours and actions look like and feel like for the follower? How do followers know when leaders do not follow with their hearts and heads and what impact does this have on those charged with the responsibility of implementing change? Local government operates within a hierarchical organisational structure where managers are considered to be the third tier of management. Senior managers in local government are in a

position where they need to manage down towards their staff, up towards the executive, across the organisation towards their colleagues and out into the community and external business environment. Bason (2010) would suggest that it is within this sphere of influence that managers can drive or limit innovation during change and while they may not be the ultimate decision makers they are generally the ones executing the change. Charged with the responsibility of implementing change, the leadership role of senior managers is to create space that allows other people to be empowered, contribute and innovate. By taking this one step further it could be suggested that attention then needs to be paid to understanding what influences managers' ability and willingness to take on this leadership role to be able to empower and be empowered and contribute.

Grint (2011, p. 4) suggests that there is merit in looking back over the history of leadership theory to explore what has worked and what has failed and what lessons can be learnt. Looking back to the 1940s saw the emergence of leadership traits and charismatics where leadership was viewed through a physics lens, in that if all the right elements were put together such as courage, vision, confidence, skills and energy, then the result must be one of good leadership with happy followers. Viewing leadership through a physics lens disregards the followership angle that makes the process chemical and views leadership within an individualist culture. This mutual chemistry works between the followers' needs and the leader's capacity or need to channel them. Emerging in the 1950s and 1960s was Fred Fieldler's (1964, as cited in Grint, 2011, p. 9) contingency theory, which asserts that different people and situations require different tricks from leaders, still it implies that if you know the contingency then you apply the appropriate rule. Glint (2011, p. 13) poses an interesting conclusion in his study of leadership theories when he suggests that how the history of leadership is viewed, and that of followers, depends on the paradigm through which it is viewed. If

through a scientific lens, then patterns of rationality of leadership and followers styles over history may be assumed, whereby an interpretative lens may assume that leadership and followers styles were a consequence of prior cultures, beliefs, interpretations and assumptions.

A contemporary view is that leadership involves human processes between the leader and followers that are mainly emotional. The context of leadership involves the destination towards which the leader points that is usually, but not always, rational. Groves (2006) proposes that one of the reasons that competencies such as managing one's emotions, teamwork, relationships and leadership are more crucial in today's work environment, is because as organisations undergo rapid change and the size of organisations reduce, people who are more accountable are more transparent than ever before.

Leaders who want to lead their followers through organisational change need to assist people to transition from the present to the future. This requires leaders who demonstrate authenticity and responsiveness to those they lead ensuring that people are heard and understood (Groves, 2006). This includes leaders being open to followers having a role in directing and influencing the change. Achieving the outcome without resistance relies on the willingness of the follower to embrace the change as well as the depth and health of the relationship that exists between the leader and the follower. However, Bligh (2011) suggests that caution needs to be taken with approaches to followership as the view can be limited, with Collinson (2006) adding that too often followers are treated as an 'undifferential mass or collective' (p. 179).

According to Kelleman and Webster (2001) leadership is in people's nature. They suggest that people are 'hard wired to, in one or the other role, engage in the leader - follower dynamic' (p.

510). If leadership is viewed as a human process deeply entrenched in our instinctual nature, it would be fair to say that leadership exists whenever the human instinct to follow is triggered regardless of positional power. Riggio, Chaleff and Lipman-Blumen (2008) contend that there are some suggestions that the word ‘followers’ needs to be removed from our dialogue as it is socially unacceptable. They contend that to eradicate ‘follower’ means to eradicate the word ‘leader’ (p. 14) as these words are dialectically linked. They suggest that to change these words mean reframing the conversation about followers and leaders in a way that uses new words as well as a new script. The challenge then is how to choose words and imagery that suggests a more appropriate relationship between followers and leaders that has shared meaning and is culturally and socially meaningful.

While the notion of followership and followers has received more attention in recent times (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera & McGregor, 2010; Chaleff, 2003; Kellerman, 2008), Yukl (2010) emphasises that one of the biggest challenges with followership is that the term is synonymous with perceptions of compliance, dependence and passivity. However, (Carsten et al., 2010; Baker, 2007) suggest that followers themselves construct their identities in different ways with some identities supporting and validating the perceptions of passivity and compliance, while others’ constructs are more proactive. Baker (2007) puts the spotlight on the agency of followers when it is suggested that the success of an organisation can, in part, be contributed to the effectiveness of the follower to follow, and in working with leaders, facilitate organisational results. Reflecting on the literature that talks about the importance of the context and internal dynamics, (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Hickman, 2010; Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007) and overlaying this thinking with the notion of followership, then it gives weight to Allen, Shankman and Miguel’s (2012) suggestion that at the core of emotional intelligence theory is the assumption ‘that leadership is a relationship between the leader, followers and the context’ (p. 187).

## **Understandings around change**

According to Balogun and Hailey (2004) seventy percent of attempts at effective organisational change management results in failure. They contend that change management is often not well considered or thought through and often reactive and suggest that the cause for this could be attributed to an absence of a valid and considered framework on change management. It is argued by Balogun and Hailey (2004) that current theories and approaches of change management are contradictory, unclear and confusing, with many lacking any empirical evidence and proven hypothesis.

Anderson and Anderson (2010) discuss that over the past thirty years debate has raged over leadership and change. The debate has raged over issues such as: personal versus organisational change, people versus structural change, to plan change or to let it progress naturally, to manage change or consciously lead change, to finally, a focus on process versus outcomes. Anderson and Anderson (2010) would argue that the debate still continues today with too much attention focused on solving two problems related to leadership. These two issues revolve around how to plan for better implementation of change and how to prevent resistance to change. They suggest that understanding change is multi-pronged and requires a move away from old mindsets and traditional management approaches. Any new approach requires people to be able to transform their beliefs about people, organisations and change. So with a myriad of ideologies concerning change it is important to keep mindsets open to new understandings and learning about change. It is through the sharing of experiences and stories that a deeper understanding is created as well as the emergence of more questions. This thinking forms part of the rationale for this study that seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how managers experience leadership and how they lead others

during change. The researcher is keen to understand how managers experience their relationship with their leaders and followers and what binds them together.

What appears to have emerged after the functionalist literature of the early to mid-1990s is literature that focuses on the role of leaders and followers throughout change. What is implied in past literature is that the follower's role is a passive one, however, Chaleff (2003, p. 18) talks about how followers have the power to champion the change and model the expected outcome to others. This requires more than just being a part of the process. There needs to be an understanding that when change occurs peoples responses are individual. These responses are influenced by both psychological and social systems that exist within organisations and it is not enough for people to just be part of the process, and for leaders to manage the change. Change requires leadership to be an emotional craft with leaders committed to nurturing relationships and honouring the feelings and beliefs of those they lead. Followers need to enter into the change process personally and contribute to leadership by viewing themselves as 'shapers' of change and not just 'implementers' (Chaleff, 2003, p. 18). The researcher is keen to gain a deeper understanding of how managers view themselves in times of change and what influences this self-construction.

### ***The dynamics between leaders and followers***

Leadership, as a phenomenon, is defined by followership even if there may not be a defensible purpose. Roberts (2010) argues that very few people see Hitler as a great leader because the notion of leadership is generally associated with the pursuit of common good. He uses Adolf Hitler as an example in the way that he understood the black art of combining communication technology and theatre to affect the psychology of the masses. The human processes were managed superbly.

However, the destination was irrational. In this example, the followers, by the very nature of their willingness to discard their values and beliefs and bestow upon Hitler their social approval, became an orderly human phenomenon that severely punished any single voice of rational dissent.

In the past, leadership theory and research have looked at the influence that leader's characteristics and competencies have on the attitudes and actions of followers in contrast to Howell and Shamir's (2005) suggestion that leadership is a social construction that involves the participation of leaders and followers. Brown (2003) proposes that as organisations evolve over time the assumption is that organisational hierarchy will start to dissipate and this will place pressure on leaders who will fail to be the exclusive holder of corporate knowledge and also for the follower who will no longer need to follow without agency. This type of thinking fails to take into account any understanding of contextual variables that may influence or impact on the relationship between the leaders and the followers. If the severity of the Kennett reforms of the 1990s could not dissipate the hierarchical nature and culture of an organisation such as local government then the question to Brown's (2003) assumption would be what would, or is it even necessary? Could a contemporary approach to leadership develop within a hierarchical structure? Dowding (2008a) suggests that literature on leadership misses the important aspect of the contextual nature of leadership characteristics. Individual characteristics and the environment in which they interact are deeply connected and work to transform each other and are not two separate parts of leadership. In addition, there is not any consideration for the level of motivation and performance of the follower. Nor does it take into consideration any influencing factors other than leadership that impacts on the follower's will to take on agency.

## **Heart and head**

Goleman (2006) refers to the ‘great divide’ (p. 23) being the division between the mind, that is competencies that are purely cognitive such as analytic reasoning or technical expertise, and the heart, that is emotional competencies that combine thought and feeling and connect and have the biggest impact on others. When people lack emotional competencies the effect can be widespread throughout an organisation and into the community.

### **The cost of emotional intelligence deficit**

The effect on relationships of leadership devoid of emotional competence and the subsequent actions of followers can result in accounts of poor communication and unrewarding behaviours, such as unfairness and harshness. Goleman (2006) suggests that a deficit in emotional competencies carries a high price for organisations through staff turnover, stress and low job satisfaction. Not all leaders wish to be participative and understanding and involve followers in change processes. The cost associated with staff turnover is not only in direct costs of recruiting and training new staff, but in the hidden costs of customer satisfaction, relations and retention and in lowered efficiency for everyone who works with the new employee. The cost to organisations and leaders themselves of such behaviour is a loss of respect, passivity and opposition, and a weakening of the relationship between the follower and the leader that sometimes results in the departure of the follower from the organisation. In local government, staff turnover comes at a cost to the community through the loss of public money. In addition, relationships and trust that have been developed will need to be rebuilt with each new staff member.

## **Compliance or courage**

Hein (2003) talks about what he calls the ‘dark side’ of emotional intelligence, an area he believes has lacked research and focus, with the concept of emotional intelligence typically being promoted as the ‘good’ side of people. People who display the ‘dark side’ may have well developed emotional intelligence but choose to use their skills in destructive ways. Others develop complicated ways of hiding the realities and still project a transparent approach. Sinclair (2007) however sparks one’s thinking when she looks to the circumstances that exist whereby followers ‘suspend their critical faculties or abdicate responsibility’ and become ‘compliant’ (p. 6). Generally, followers are influenced in some way by the leader and the values of the culture and could therefore be seen as dependent variables subject to the leader’s influences. These behaviours of compliance allow individuals, either consciously or unconsciously, to release themselves of any accountability and of the process of critical decision making within any ethical framework. This thinking is further stressed by Sinclair (2007, pp. 7–8) as she points to Freud’s theorising of group behaviour where he suggests that the idolisation of leaders through conformity or obedience works to abdicate responsibility. When looking for examples that support this thinking there is widely documented evidence of this behaviour which has typically been related to cases linked to ethical and moral failings. More widely known cases have been Enron and Shell in Nigeria where highly regarded and highly educated people abdicated their ethical responsibility (Petrick & Scherer, 2003).

Further to Sinclair’s (2007) thinking, Riggio, Chaleff and Lipman-Bluman (2008) add an interesting suggestion that a crucial attribute of followership is having a, ‘courageous conscience’ (p. 15) whereby followers have the ability to make and promote ethical judgments and stand up against unethical decisions. This attribute of a ‘courageous conscience’ (p. 15) cannot be abdicated by

followers by outsourcing it to the leader. The challenge with this thinking is to determine how followers develop this advanced influential integrity and what environmental and social support needs to exist for the follower to succeed. This area of followership, including the notions of compliance and abdication of responsibility for decision making relate to this study as the researcher searches for meaning on what influences managers' decision making when implementing change. There is relevance in exploring what meaning managers attach to their roles as followers and how this plays out and is experienced in times of change.

Change is forever present in the sphere of local government and therefore in the lives of both managers and the community. Local government is forever trying to balance promoting community empowerment with sound economic policy and approaches. The Kennett reforms of the 1990s have resulted in a move back to try and reinvigorate citizenship and democracy. If democracy is to work well the notion of civic community must be at the forefront of the belief system of local government and be led with leadership that is mature in both head and heart. The challenge in this is gaining a deeper understanding of the contextual influences on leadership and decision making and its subsequent impact on the community for which the organisation is said to exist.

## **Community – a backdrop for common good**

The community provides the backdrop in which this study is etched and therefore is an important focus point as the researcher seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical context in which managers are situated. Local government can lead and advocate on behalf of its people with the ethos of public good reflected in the considerations around planning through policy and in practice. Achieving optimal and just outcomes for all its citizens requires sustainable systems and

increased local capacity that can be made possible by creating opportunities that encourage people to create and drive change. Cuthill and Fien (2005) advocate that through the process of citizen participation, social capital is developed. It is through social capital that a strong local democracy is shaped. Cox (2000, p. 75) adds further to this by suggesting that the development of social capital creates a platform for local action that is collaborative and works for the common good. Adoption of policy and practice frameworks that support social justice, consultation and participation principles, is a step closer to developing a community focused paradigm of common good that looks at all impacts of change on people, the environment and the economic costs and benefits.

## **The legislative context for civic participation**

The operationalisation of citizen participation is founded on the philosophical discourses that inform democratic governance. Here the argument is that civic participation is the basic foundation to a contemporary democratic society. However, citizen participation can be problematic as it revolves around two key issues of power and control, while the process of participation in rhetoric, aims to encourage a cooperative approach between community and their local government that result in outcomes for the common good. However, Mowbray (2005) asserts that levels of government in Australia are becoming increasingly committed to neo liberal principles that are founded on decreasing the dependency on welfare and promoting the concept of economic rationalism and as a result there is a greater urgency that the value of common good is driven by the community. In contrast, Quicke (1999) concerns himself with exploring further Richard Rorty's (1989) position on liberalism and the common good. He considered whether the view of the decentred self and the aestheticised culture could sit comfortably within a 'liberal discourse' accommodating both liberal ideals and democratic values of the common good. Rather than liberal ideals leading to a 'culture of narcissism' (Quicke, 1999, p. 155), it is argued that a commitment to

liberalism requires a degree of moral negotiation and the aestheticised culture accepts and celebrates diversity and opposes fundamentalism. Furthermore, Rorty (1991) does subscribe to the thinking that the development of community can be achieved through the engagement in social practices, however, his escape clause is that if this results in a diminishing of the private identity of people, then the cost is too high. While the debate of individualism versus collectivism continues within the realm of liberalism, the predicament of our time appears to be how we can have agency in the development of self while also restoring an active and participatory public sphere of citizenship.

Haste (2004) would have people first consider how citizenship and democracy is constructed and what effects and influences this social construction. Democracy, like citizenship is not a universal concept as it is transformed and constructed through each society's 'cultural narratives' (p. 414) while beliefs are not necessarily a static and enduring characteristic of the individual. Beliefs provide the narratives that work to make sense of the world, to validate social and political practices and to support a shared identity in a specific social context. Understanding the construction of citizenship relies on attention being paid to the dialogue and sense making that occurs for people as they construct and co-construct their identities whereby the construction of a citizen is a construction of an identity (Fina, 2006).

When reviewing current literature there appears to be a broad range of definitions and understandings of what participation means. However, in the context of this study it is important to grasp an understanding of the legislative requirements of local government to engage with its citizens and what the most common processes are when this engagement takes place. This understanding provides the context by which participatory processes fit into and support the legislative requirements of local government.

The *Local Government Act of Victoria* (1989) is the legislative framework that defines the purpose and function of local governments in Victoria. The Act requires local governments to allow citizens the opportunity to respond to the council plan and annual budget through a formal submission process that includes both written and verbal responses. Further to this, there is reference to consultation and engagement in the *Local Government Act* (1989, S.3D) through councils' consideration of the needs of their local constituents in the decision-making processes and in encouraging civic participation. Council elections are also another way that community members can seek representation and participation in the business of local government.

In Victoria, participatory processes such as consultation along with engagement appear in different pieces of legislation with different obligations and expectations on local government. These vary from the requirement of local government to involve communities in the development of strategic plans to giving citizens the right to participate in particular planning processes and protection where citizens feel they are prevented from being involved (Victorian Local Government Association, 2007). In addition, through the process of Best Value, a legislated process in the *Local Government Act* (1989, S.208B), there is a key principle of obligation for local governments to develop a program that allows the community the opportunity to be consulted on the services council provides. As a result of these legislative requirements it is critical that local government provides opportunities for people to be empowered to have some control over decisions that impact their lives. Literature (Blaxter, Farnell & Watts, 2003; Cuthill & Fien, 2005) suggests that it is the development of participatory policy and practices that will result in positive gains for citizens, communities and local government bodies beyond that of complying with legislative requirements. What has not been said however is that benefits will be contingent on the authenticity and values of not only the process but those that lead.

## **Citizenship and local government**

As the research is located within a local government municipality and focuses on community participation in planning, development and change, reviewing literature about citizenship and change was critical in understanding the thinking on the forms of citizenship that can mobilise and immobilise community engagement. Just as Goleman (2006) talks about the ‘great divide’ of thought and feeling and the importance of not only having technical skills but emotional competencies, Atherton, Hashagen, Chanan, Garratt and West (2002) discuss a sense of community that mixes emotional and rational realms. It feels good to relate to others and have stable relationships, but a well organised locality assists in the many practical problems of daily living. People who have stable relationships have a belief, a sense of purpose and place and work together for mutual gain or simply to just belong.

Managing change within local communities is as much about citizenship that is grounded in trust, and social fairness, as it is about the change process itself. As discussed earlier in this chapter, change needs to be viewed holistically with a transformation in one area often impacting on another as the change works to transform people’s behaviours, thinking and beliefs (Senge, 2006).

## **Citizens’ rights as a catalyst for change**

Nelson, Babon, Berry and Keath (2008) state that internationally the trend has been to try and encourage citizens to increase their participation in local decision making through the increased access to a range and number of participatory initiatives available. Some would suggest that citizens are now actively pursuing opportunities to engage in decision-making processes on issues that may directly impact on them. There could be many reasons for this increase in wanting to participate while it could be said that it is community expectations that are leading change:

Citizens are arguing for a new notion of governance that requires political leadership to engage with citizenry in ways that allow for ongoing input into decision-making and policy formation. (Naidoo, 2003, p. 7)

Acknowledging the rights of all citizens, including the underrepresented, requires leadership that is embedded in the ethos of the heart and head. Ciulla (2004) declares that leadership that is able to develop relationships through compassion, integrity and wisdom, combined with competence and confidence within the socio and political environment, is needed to mobilise the whole community. This type of approach also provides for multiple problems to be addressed and for citizens to equally be able to be involved in decision-making and change processes. Leadership based on ethical and moral values and virtues provides a solid foundation for which organisational policy and programs and their leaders' interactions and characters can be measured (Ciulla, 2004). The challenge for local governments is how to encourage an environment where stakeholders have the opportunity to work together effectively and that participation and contributions are valued resulting in increased accountability. In addition, understanding what people would need to experience for participation to be effective in informing the development of policy and process.

The rhetoric for local government is that it needs to ensure that citizens have equal opportunity and means by which their democratic right to be heard is met. To ensure that this becomes a reality in practice relies on citizens being made visible in decision making and planning on issues of change that may affect their lives, either directly or indirectly. There are individual, social and economic costs of not involving all groups and respecting their rights as citizens. Zwart, Brackertz and Meredyth, (2005) propose that the challenge is to effectively transform the rhetoric of the underrepresented as citizens into visible and general social practice. It is through the presence of

authentic social practice that is inclusive of all citizens that there are gains in supporting the underrepresented.

Atherton et al. (2002) provides some insight into how local government might look to engage with a diverse community by stressing that local government and the community should aim for vertical growth, where there is upwards and downwards mutually beneficial interactions between different levels, and horizontal growth where interactions involve more people, more effectively. The challenge or opportunity for governments is to develop innovative approaches to gain the views of the diverse number of sub groups within the community. There are opportunities in some local governments for change to take place that would increase the likelihood for a broader cross section of the community to be able to play a leadership role.

While rhetoric, frameworks and models all exist, purporting to offer methods to increase the engagement of communities, the results from the departmental report (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2012, p. 19) suggests that community engagement and consultation is a service area consistently underperforming relative to the perceived importance by communities and deem engagement and consultation as areas for ongoing focus. When reviewing literature on this issue that has been published in the last five years the results are consistent with consultation and engagement showing declining satisfaction trends among community members. Zwart, Brackertz and Meredith (2005) support the suggestion that there appears to be a multi-faceted problem of engaging community in ways that are meaningful and mutually understood. To merely use a range of different methods and deem that as participatory democracy ignores the human process at work and the value judgments that are attached to the words engagement and consultation.

## **Participation and the role of leadership**

Earlier in the chapter there was discussion on what leadership in organisations looks like if change was to be managed well. If we look to Goleman (2006) and apply his organisational thinking to communities, then involving people in decision making on issues that impact their lives requires leadership not only rich in leadership academia, but in social and emotional intelligence. Understanding that change is as much about the process as it is the transition people go through, helps to reduce the negative impacts of change upon all stakeholders. Traditional leadership has a functional focus without regard for the emotional or personal dimensions. However, sustainable change relies on nurturing relationships and creating human synergies.

In local government, intelligent leadership is about improving the way that staff and citizens are involved in decisions that affect them and increased opportunities to raise issues and initiate action. Intelligent leadership is about the recognition and valuing of the process of participation and reciprocal relationships in the change process for all citizens and not just about consultation and a commitment through policy. Leadership with community needs to go even deeper than practice. It needs to go right down to the core of the belief and value system of the organisation.

Zwart, Brackertz and Meredyth (2005) reviewed policy and practice for consultation across a group of councils in Victoria and found that there was varying definitions and understanding of consultation between the councils, however, they raised an important issue that these definitions did not always have a shared understanding across the organisation. The varying terms for consultation that were used were dependent on the contexts and sometimes with varying meanings attached. This finding of Zwart, Brackertz and Meredyth (2005) raises questions for this study around what does consultation mean to the people charged with consulting with community and

what do they experience when they consult? What meaning and understanding do they attach to the word community? Dowding (2008a) suggests that more attention is needed to understand the contextual nature of leadership. Applying Dowding's (2008a) suggestion to this study, raises the question of how does the environment influence manager's belief systems on community and participation?

### **Promoting equity through participatory process**

When looking into some of the main drivers for undertaking participatory processes, there is the desirability for corporate citizenship and accountability for economic, social and environmental actions and demands by stakeholders for a greater accountability and transparency in decision making. Drawing on previous discussions on liberalism and public good, Buchan (2003) advocates that participatory processes can also be seen as a mechanism for attempting to smooth inequalities within capitalist markets and give attention to the social determinants of health in inequities and inequalities. Local social capital, buy-in and the facilitation of skills transfer can all be developed through involving communities in a participatory manner. When reflecting on Simpson's (2005) suggestion that change in policy, projects and development generally impacts disproportionately on the disadvantaged or poorly represented groups then this adds weight to Ciulla's (2004) suggestion of the value of ethical and moral measurement of policy and programs.

Impacts that are likely to be differentially distributed by a range of factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, geography, and ethnicity should be identified. By identifying if these impacts are fair and avoidable, options for improving the proposal to address any potential inequities can be developed. Aligned with this approach is the use of participatory methods which fully involve those affected at each stage of the change process. This view supports one of the key principles of change

management discussed earlier, in that it recognises the active role of followers in being able to affect change if included in a participatory process throughout the change process.

However, Buchan (2003) states that the approach to many processes undertaken, suggests that often the community participatory approach tends to be largely designed and managed with information collected and interpreted solely by the professional expert. Community consultations are often undertaken with organised stakeholders, with the non-organised stakeholders affected by the change still not involved in any way. There is support for this view by Atherton et al. (2002) who also stressed the challenges of involving disengaged subgroups of the community. There is an added danger that participation can become merely an opportunity for people to express their opinions, rather than willingness by those in power to involve people in decision making. This is a complex area of understanding and it would be considered appropriate that people responsible for encouraging community participation to not only be competent in building relationships in the sociopolitical environment, but skilled with the knowledge and ethics of social justice and equity principles. This is relevant to this study as it provides the opportunity to seek out what managers' understandings are of the process and value of participation and its connection to social justice and equity.

### **Participation– real or tokenistic**

Herriman (2011) would suggest that the involvement of communities on issues that affect them is essential if local governments are genuine about aligning the rights of citizens with local government planning, policy and practice principles. Participation of all citizens in decision-making processes need to form part of the belief system of an organisation, with a commitment to community participation reflected in their strategic, social and community plans and policies.

To ensure that community participation is not defined and applied in an insular way, processes need to be integrated and considered as business rules for the organisation. Participation by communities, however, needs to be planned for and resourced and the method of involvement needs to be purposeful and not tokenistic. This is more likely to occur if participation is part of the organisational culture. Where there is an argument against involving the community then this could reveal a culture of resistance and an unwillingness to consider different views. In addition, it may reveal an underlying thinking that the community is unlikely to have anything to offer. So by overlaying Ciulla's (2004) ethical and moral measurement with the assumption that the organisational culture is not of the belief that participation is of value, then how is the community's vision and desires delivered by those whose role it is to serve the community?

Whilst participatory approaches can be rewarding and beneficial they also have the potential to be laden with politics, differing agendas and differing visions. After all, these approaches are social processes of interaction and relationships that are framed within a worldview of values and belief systems. With such an array of realities at play the challenge is how to reflect with accuracy the complexities, uniqueness and the depth of community aspirations. Perkins (2010) warns that it must be understood that there are differing agendas and needs of people involved. Facilitation and mediation is often required in an effort to work towards achieving outcomes that results in mutual benefits for those involved in the process.

Participation is more than just giving citizens a say. It involves participating in genuine conversations with people, giving credence to their opinions and suggestions and involving them in any change process. This includes all citizens, even those regarded as bad, poor and poorly articulating. Ideally, citizens need to be able to have the opportunity to identify issues of concern

and be involved in plans to address the issues and also through the change process. Participation is different to consultation, as participation involves professionals giving a degree of power to citizens, so that there can be shared decision making. In contrast, consultation gives citizens less influence, as professionals determine the outcome and lead the process (Hendriks, 2005).

While many frameworks of participation exist for use by local government, when Aulich (2009) examined participatory governance in local governments across Australia, he found very little evidence that citizens were actively engaged. Although changes have occurred and policies developed by councils that make the participation of communities possible (Zwart, Brackertz & Meredyth, 2005), few examples exist where effective engagement has been grounded into the culture of the organisation and been accepted as a citizen's right. It would seem valuable to explore what value managers' place on engaging with the community and what influences these beliefs. In addition, to fully understand this relationship between managers and their community, it would be valuable to understand how communities view their right to participate and what it feels like when they are consulted.

While participation and collaboration suggests a practice based on an equal standing between community and local government, in practice achieving this reality is doubtful and as Cuthill and Fien (2005) recommend, could be an opportunity for future research. Governments at all levels in Australia indicate that they are willing to commit to sharing the power of decision making to some degree with citizens. Achieving the reality and not just the rhetoric, is still to be determined.

## Community engagement

The term ‘engagement’ holds many guises and is quite broad in its interpretation and therefore many definitions exist. McCabe, Keast and Brown (2006) suggest that while there appears to be no common or widely agreed definition there is a generally accepted understanding of the term engagement. Engagement is the involvement of the public, either as individuals or as a community, in service and policy decisions that affect them. This involvement can take place in a number of ways with the most common approaches being through activities such as information gathering, consultation and participation. The general concept of engagement implies that through these activities that some form of empowerment is a result.

However, Stott and Keatman (2005) issue a warning that the concept of engagement is value laden and can therefore be interpreted in many different ways by many different audiences, with the word ‘engagement’ potentially disguising deep seated issues of power and control. Stott and Keatman (2005) go on to suggest that whatever definition is being used, it is more important that practitioners identify exactly what they mean by each term in relation to the work being undertaken and are able to articulate this throughout the process of engagement.

In addition, Stott and Keatman (2005) warn that when talking about engagement, practitioners should also expect a diversity of language and understanding to emerge. This appears to be supported in the report *Embedding Community Priorities into Council Planning* (Carins, 2008, p. 28) where it clearly sets out in a diagram (Figure 2) the definition of each process, the level of engagement, the participation goal and what the public can expect as a result of their participation. However, this relies on both the participants and the council staff having a shared meaning and understanding of the engagement process. Furthermore, Aulich’s (2009) findings showed that the

valuing of citizen participation needs to form part of the organisational belief system and custom in order for the process to be authentic.

Brackertz, Zwart, Meredyth and Ralston (2005) clarify the term, 'engagement' as the, 'outcome' (p. 10) realised when citizens feel connected to their community through governance driven by good information flow, consultation and participation. Further to this, Brackertz et al. (2005) suggest that consultation, involvement, informing, collaborating and empowering are all processes offering varying levels of input into decision making from being informed with no input to empowering with final decision making. Successful consultation and participatory approaches are reliant on the transparency of information and decision-making processes resulting in outcomes of citizens feeling engaged.

## **Models of community engagement**

There is a vast array of community engagement approaches to be found in the literature with varying attempts made to conceptualise consultation and participation with an aim to make them more easily applied in practice. There is Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation; Shand and Arnberg's (1996) continuum model; and a model linking participation to policy problems developed by Thomas (1990) and Bishop and Davis (2002). Other approaches (Moffatt, 2005; Heierbacher, 2007) have been translated into principles for effective engagement with one of the best known sets of principles being the International Association of Public Participation Spectrum (International Association for Public Participation, 2007). As well as providing a framework for community engagement practice, the IAP2 spectrum is used as a tool for practitioner training and professional support. Further to this development of the framework, a set of seven core principles advocating for public engagement were developed by the National Coalition for Dialogue and

Deliberation (Heierbacher, 2007). This is the framework that is currently being used by the local government body at the centre of this study.

However, the extent of a having a shared interpretation and meaning of this policy framework and its values throughout the organisation and out into the community remains unknown. There appears to be no indication in the literature relating to the spectrum that encourages any alignment of the framework with either community or organisational values or beliefs. With councils facing negative perceptions and cynicism towards community consultations more work needs to be done in this area to try to understand more deeply what influences people's engagement in these processes.

## The Public Participation Spectrum

Increasing level of public impact



Processes				
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal
Non participation	Passive participation	Nominal participation	Interactive participation	Degrees of citizen power
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulation solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>Measures:</b> participation rates, feeling of engagement				

Increasing feeling of engagement by the community

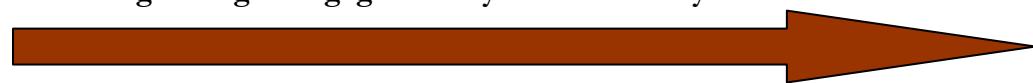


Figure 2: Adapted from International Association of Public Participation 2007, Public Participation Spectrum page no. 27

Most organisations operate in a rapidly changing environment where people's views and expectations change over time. Participation is not a static concept. Community culture changes and innovative ways of involving the community in decision making will emerge. It is critically important that organisations, such as local government, involve the community in dialogue about sharing the experiences and learnings from both success and failures. What is of interest is that a recent study undertaken by Herriman (2011) found that there were a myriad of frameworks and principles being applied in local governments across Australia. One of the key challenges that emerged was one of translating policy into practice with gaps evident in how consultations with community were being integrated into decision making. Processes that are not designed authentically to influence decision making drew criticism from Hartz-Karp (2010) who described them as a 'false model of consultation' (p. 1) that will often result in anger and frustration for the community. This results in a feeling of tokenistic consultation and can eventually impact on the community's interest and willingness to participate in further consultations.

With so many variations and interpretations of the definition of 'community engagement', the Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005) has bought together the most commonly understood meaning as being: a process that is planned and that has a definite purpose for working with particular people to address issues that affect their wellbeing. This concept of community engagement encompasses processes and outcomes and identifies clearly the accountability lines of local government to its citizens as shown in Figure 2. In addition, the Public Participation Spectrum (International Association for Public Participation, 2007) allows the outcome to be measured both quantitatively through participation rates and qualitatively through citizens' feelings of being informed, connected and having a role to play within their community. According to Brackertz et al. (2005) citizens are likely to feel more engaged where a greater opportunity exists for

them to influence decision making. This literature however, has raised questions about how these models are understood by both local government and community. There appears to be differing meanings and understanding on top of multiple models for participatory approaches that as Heriman (2011) contends have failed to translate into community influencing decision making around issues that impact on them. Research needs to continue to understand why these participatory approaches continue to fall short of expected outcomes for communities as reported by the Department of Planning and Community Development (2012, p. 19). What can this study add to the current understanding on consultation policy and practice for local government?

When looking at any community engagement tool and the different ways that local government involves its citizens in processes that affect their lives, there appears to be a strong role for these approaches in supporting local government. This is in meeting its legislative requirements but also in understanding the impacts of council decision making on citizens. Participatory approaches have the potential to assist local government and communities to work together to address issues that impact on their health and wellbeing in the changing environment of community. While communities indicate an overall failing of most models (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2012, p. 19), local government continues with the use of their policies and practices. Exploring why this continues to occur would add further richness to the understanding of this social phenomenon of participation and consultation.

A repeating theme that leads to confusion is the general misunderstanding about what consultation means and what people will experience and expect when participating in the consultation process. By acknowledging that consultation is a social process that is open to varying interpretations it appears important to establish the rules of the conversation at the onset of any form of

consultation. Part of the answer may lie in the need for councils to acknowledge when an issue can't be influenced or when a decision has already been made. The answer may lie, however, in the thinking of an approach beyond the rhetoric of consultation. Maybe the answer lies with those charged with undertaking participatory processes to develop a deeper understanding of the values and visions of those they serve so that participatory exchanges start and end with shared meaning and understanding.

## Synthesis

This chapter explored literature that drew together local government responsibilities to its citizens within a framework of both legislative and socially just principles that identify change as a reality of the local government environment. Given the importance of managing a changing environment of governance, policy, community responsibility and expectation, key principles of change management were explored with a relationship between leadership, core values, people, and processes as influencing factors for the success of any new outcome. This literature drew attention to several schools of thought about leadership and change. There was the thinking that leadership is distinguished by the one who holds positional power with the offering of vision, charisma, skill and ambition. Contrary to this thinking, there was a body of literature that, in varying degrees, talked about leadership as a human process involving a relationship between the heart and minds of people. Understanding the importance of relationships and emotional competencies in leading change was seen as the key driver of successful change management.

In the context of being a manager in local government, literature suggests that while not being the ultimate decision makers, managers are in a unique position of implementing much of the change that occurs. Professionals promoted to leadership roles need technical expertise coupled with the

ability to develop strong networks and mutually beneficial relationships with others, acknowledging the vital role that people play in any change management scenario.

Within the local government context the community is more directly impacted on by change that occurs. The level of participation in the planning, development and implementation of change was the next theme that was explored through the literature. The literature acknowledges the legislated role that community plays in participatory processes relating to change, however, engaging in an authentic process that is not value laden and open to multiple interpretations has been the subject of much debate. Literature supports a commonly understood meaning of engagement and community whilst offering many participatory approaches. Emerging throughout the literature on participatory approaches is the link back to relationships, values and the agency of the people involved.

The review of literature suggests that effecting successful change that results in positive impacts within an organisation and out into the community, requires mature leadership that is situated in a paradigm of shared values and behaviours that encourages greater accountability, responsibility and transparency in decision making. This study looks to explore the experiences of managers and understand how their engagement with the change process is influenced within the context of a local government environment. By focusing on community this study will also explore the experiences of community when engaging with local government. The next chapter addresses the methodologies that have been used in this study to explore and understand the influences on engagement through the change process using a case study approach that has been informed by a phenomenological perspective.

## Chapter 3

### THE METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the methodological approaches that are used in this case study of managers and their community within a local government context. The choice of methodology that guides this research is founded on the assumption that it relates to the underlying ontology and epistemology position as discussed in Chapter One. Ontology and epistemology refer to beliefs about the nature of reality and the ways in which knowledge is construed; what it means to ‘be in’ the environment of local government and the local community; how does the shape of ‘being’ influence outcomes for managers and the community; and, how do people make meaning of their experience.

The researcher looks to the interpretivist framework of enquiry to provide the support for the ontological perspective of this study as it looks towards the belief of not one reality but many that are local and specifically constructed and altered by the knower. From an epistemological perspective, the interpretivist framework and methodology suggested for this study supports the exploration of human experiences rather than statistical relationships. Furthermore, qualitative research aims to understand the social realities of individuals, groups and cultures and is concerned with the perspectives, experiences and behaviours of people relevant to this study (Merriam, 2009).

In addition, the methodology appropriately supported the exploration and search for a deeper understanding of participants' responses to the following research questions:

- How is staff engagement influenced throughout the change process?
- How does council behaviour impact on community engagement?

The literature review identified local government as a unique environment that was highly susceptible to change, at times imposed, from internal and external forces. These forces all work to influence senior managers' engagement in the change process. A case study approach that was informed by phenomenology was used in this study as it provided the framework that gives form and meaning to the lifeworld, being descriptive and focusing on the lived experiences of managers and the community. Phenomenology is about revealing rather than interpreting the nature of a particular lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). This chapter explains how the case study approach provides the scope to invite managers and community members to share their experiences, beliefs and expectations of change to add depth and richness to the understanding of change within a local government environment. This chapter builds on this understanding by drawing it together in defining the conceptual framework of change management that applies to this study.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an explanation for the selection of the methodology, its implications for this study and the key elements of the resultant research process that was used. Further to this, an explanation is provided on how the philosophical understandings of the researcher support the use of this approach.

## **Conceptual framework of change management**

The research takes place in the context of local government. How managers construct their own reality and understand that of others will impact on how they interpret and make meaning of their responsibilities and engagement during change. This will in turn influence their acceptance and willingness to engage with community and influence their decision-making processes. While there are many theories of change management found in literature, this study is flanked in a framework of change that occurs within a sociopolitical environment. While many theories purport academic models of listening, leadership, team building and change management, the framework for this study revolves around the need for technical expertise, process and the development of relationships and emotional competencies that involve the combination of thought and feeling. This perspective is informed by the work of Avolio and Gardner (2005); Gardner (2005); Goleman (2006), and others as identified in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, this approach to change management involves leaders being open to people having a role in directing and leading change and having social adroitness and adeptness in moving people, in a socially just way, from how they presently view themselves to a new secure self. Leaders need to be able to build strong synergies between people and acknowledge the important role each plays in effecting change while understanding that change involves a human process between leaders and people. It is the recognition that leaders of change can come from anywhere from within an organisation and not only confined to those with traditional positional power. However, it is this human process that is a catalyst for varying interpretations and realities that are value-laden and impact on people's engagement during the change process (Nailon, Dalglish, Brownlee & Hatcher, 2004).

People bring their own conclusions to an issue that is drawn on from their own experiences, values and beliefs. In this environment of local government, community and change there will be conflicting frames of reference that need to be brought together to form a single story that might make sense to the people who hold them. The challenge is to allow these differences to exist but ensure that the sense making process provides the opportunity for people to challenge their own assumptions, further explore others meanings and engage fully in the process. This use of collective interpretation has the ability to develop a sense of partnership and deeper understanding of the change, rather than one of mistrust and disengagement (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Often it is managers who engage with the community around change and who are also charged with the responsibility of implementing change. Their understanding of the value of these opportunities to engage in sense making processes impacts on the outcome for community members.

Senior leaders are in an ideal position to work with others to drive adaptive change, develop collective capacities to innovate, build resilience and instil intensive and relentless debriefing of results, values and behaviours throughout organisations. Organisations are the product of the way that people in them think, feel and interact with others. By simply applying a theory of change that involves training, and command and control management approaches does not alter people's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions or level of commitment. There is a particular risk in an environment such as local government that it is flanked by traditional hierarchical organisational structures and bureaucratic protocols and practices. The risk is that managers become compliant rather than create new energies, innovations and new ways of working to meet community needs. This results in a self-filling prophecy of the need for more control and systems as new crises of change emerge (Senge, 2006).

Sinclair (2007) draws cautious attention to management practices that divert individual ambition towards serving the purpose of the organisation through which performance management systems work to place value on rewarding the most compliant of individuals with formal leadership positions. These processes, systems and tools produce leaders that have been assessed and evaluated against set criteria of leadership and it is through these approaches that compliance is achieved by the organisation. Sinclair (2007) points to Nikolas Rose's (1999) argument that there needs to be more scrutiny of systematic forces and power relations by which desired qualities are defined and reproduced.

So if change is to be effected well, people need to take part in the change process, in both heart and head, being given opportunities to innovate, challenge, develop and commit to the change. It is this combination of thought and feeling that needs to be embedded into the belief system for change for the organisation. The absence of trust and essential social and emotional competencies of people charged with the responsibility of change, impact on mutual gains that result in positive influences within an organisation and out into the community and, therefore, forms a crucial part of this research.

It is this framework of heart and mind that talks to the interpretivist worldview of the researcher and guides the methodology that will investigate this phenomenon of change within a sociopolitical context. Van Manen's (2007, p. 12) phenomenological theory also informs the researcher and provides the opportunity for the researcher of seeing 'meaning' and seeing into 'the hearts of things' by gazing towards where meaning originates. This study explores the participant's stories to reveal the social and cultural influences on past experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values within this framework of sociopolitical change. Furthermore, it looks to the context of senior managers within

local government and their experiences, values and beliefs and expectations of change management within policy and practice. These expectations and experiences are constructed by the managers themselves, by others and by the reality of their roles within the organisation. By the very nature of local government's core function, the impact of the beliefs, values and understanding of managers towards effecting change, moves far out from the walls of any council offices and into the lives of the people it serves.

## **Appropriateness of qualitative research in management studies**

For this study, the researcher sought a methodology that provided the most effective way to share the experiences of managers and community members around a complex area of change management and social policy which is very context specific. The researcher seeks to gain rich descriptions of the experiences, perspectives and behaviour of staff and community members to gain an understanding of what it means to be a manager and community member within this specific context of local government.

While management research generally covers areas such as general management, leadership, marketing, organisation and corporate strategy, Sekaran (2003) suggests the inclusion of studies into employee attitudes and experiences, and various types of management practices. For a number of decades, quantitative research had been strongly advocated for in areas such as management and organisational research with qualitative research methodologies being marginalised in many disciplines (Gummesson, 2000; Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

The traditional view of management dictates that there are set activities that managers are expected to perform which sees them leading, planning, organising, and as a result exerting a degree of

control over their work environments (Mukhi, Hampton & Barnwell, 1988). However, research over the past forty years suggests that management is much more complex and, similar to leadership, also relies on interpersonal skills and experience. In adopting this concept of management being a sociocultural phenomenon then a qualitative study is an appropriate approach to explore this social experience. Van der Mescht (2004) provokes thinking when he suggests that the outcomes of exploring particular social experiences that fall outside of the boundaries of established theories can uncover surprisingly new ‘insights’ into the ‘uniquely’ complicated practice of ‘managing and leading’ (p. 1).

The aim of using reflective methods in research, is about creating foundational relations between acting and being, ‘who we are and how we act’ and ‘between thoughtfulness and tact’ (Van Manen, 2007, p. 12). The aim is not to confirm or deny an assumption. Rather develop an understanding of what being a manager is like in a changing environment of local government and understand how the influencing factors of this environment impacts on the engagement of managers and the community. Case study research informed by phenomenological thought is an appropriate method to explore the application of language, feeling and thoughtfulness to a phenomenon as it is described by the participants.

## **Case study methodology**

Methodologically, the main aim of using an interpretivist perspective is to enable the researcher to attend fully, through a process of interaction with the participants, to the interpretability, the dialogical and the conservational nature of the participants’ experiences (Smith, 1991). It is through this process of interaction and discovery that the knowledge and understanding of people’s lived experiences will evolve.

By adopting an interpretative approach, the researcher is allowing for broad research application and a delineated boundary for the research. In addition, case study methodology provides structural processes whereby many methods can be used that are appropriate for investigating diverse research areas (Luck, Jackson & Usher, 2006). Langford (2001) and Yin (2003) contest that in a research study, the use of case studies can serve multiple purposes such as describing phenomenon, building theory, exploring, or explaining the case of interest in the aim of developing a more profound understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied. George and Bennett (2005) add that case study research is consistent with an interpretivist approach as there is a deliberate attempt by the researcher to search for a profound understanding of the human experience that is situated in a complex social and physical world. Methodological rigor can be determined in a case study approach by using the measures normally associated with the particular methods used. A strength of using a case study approach appears to be in its methodological flexibility and practical application.

Yin (2003) suggests that there are certain conditions that need to exist to determine if case study is the best methodology to use. If the focus is on 'how' and 'why' questions (p. 7), then participants in the study cannot have their behaviours manipulated. If the context in the study is important to the phenomenon being studied and the peripheries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, then a case study is the most appropriate approach. That is, in this study the 'case' is local government and it cannot be considered without understanding the sociopolitical context in which it exists and the social and political interactions involved. With respect to the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher, Langford (2001) and Yin's (2003) supposition presents the descriptive case study as being an appropriate methodological approach that supports an

interpretivist research process as it provides the scope to use and integrate a range of research strategies that moves the researcher between description and understanding.

Case study is considered particularly useful where understanding of the context is important and where there is little understanding of how and why phenomenon occurs or where the experiences of individuals and the context of actions are critical. How managers' engagement is influenced during change is critical in gaining an understanding of the experiences within the sociopolitical context where decisions that impact on community take place. A research approach that also supports this interpretivist worldview is the qualitative research approach of phenomenology. Phenomenology aims to change the lived experience into description that reflects the appropriation of meaning. As a result, phenomenology was used to inform the case study research undertaken for this study.

## **Philosophy of Phenomenology**

Phenomenology originated from the underpinnings of social philosophy and psychology and is most commonly associated with Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher and mathematician who lived in the mid–1850s to 1938. Phenomenology is referred to as a philosophy and as a qualitative research method often thought of as being fundamental to the interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Koch, 1995). Over time, phenomenology has provided the opportunity to explore and gain an understanding of phenomena of human experience that has previously been ignored and has broken through many scholarship fields (Tymieniecka, 2003). Its principal position is to investigate phenomenon and to study the human experience as it is lived and from the perspective of the individual with the person being central to the environment (Draucker, 1999; Moran, 2000; Swanson & Wojar, 2004). While there have been many important contributions made to the debate

of phenomenology over the years by important philosophers, the researcher turns to the work of Van Manen (1990) to help explore the key understandings of phenomenology that will inform this case study.

### ***The application of phenomenological theory***

Van Manen (1990), a well-known contemporary phenomenologist, asserts that the intention of phenomenological research is to build a descriptively grounded understanding of the nature of a particular lived experience. Van Manen (1990) takes into account that a person comes complete to any situation with a diverse range of lived experiences, beliefs and values. In order to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon, and to appropriate and interpret a meaning implicit to the lived experience, it is necessary to bring to light the various moral and sociocultural influences encountered in the lived world. In opposition to Husserl's position of bracketing, Van Manen poses the notion that: 'if we simply try to forget or ignore what we already know, we might find that the presupposition persistently creep back into our reflections' (Van Manen, 1990, p. 47).

Van Manen (2007) purports that phenomenology opens up possibilities for the researcher as it allows the creation of formative relations between being and acting, self and others, and who we are and how we act. Phenomenology provides the opportunity for the researcher to return to the stories of the lived experiences as described by each participant, revealing and interpreting the phenomenon. Phenomenology provides researchers with a lens by which they can see the unique and individual meaning that participants ascribe to lived experiences and how as a result, realities are created.

As Munhall (2007) attests, Van Manen's approach to phenomenology is emerging as an approach being used successfully by nurse researchers to clarify thoughts, connect concepts in new and innovative ways and to discover experiences that add to new knowledge in this field. Enns and Gregory (2007) used Van Manen's approach of phenomenology when studying the caring experiences of surgical nurses. It was through this study that Enns and Gregory (2007) revealed the major theme of sorrow and loss for these surgical nurses. In the same year Lauterbach (2007) answered Van Manen's call for qualitative researchers to remember that literature, music and other art forms provided a wealth of experimental information that worked to increase insights into the interpretation and meaning of the experience being studied. With this thinking in mind Lauterbach (2007) investigated the experience of mothers in the death of their infant through the use of poetry and literature. These studies demonstrate to the researcher the richness and unique understandings that can be discovered through the use of an approach that searches deep into the lives of people in ways that draw out new insights and interpretations in meaningful and diverse ways. These diverse approaches reaffirms for the researcher that a phenomenological approach is most appropriate when seeking to understand the human processes at play in the sociopolitical world of managers, community and local government.

This study was also informed by a phenomenological approach as described by Munhall (2007), Van Manen (2007), Enns and Gregory (2007) and Lauterbach (2007) as it provided the framework that gives form and meaning to the lifeworld and focuses on the lived experiences of the people at the centre of the study. When addressing significant questions in the human realm, there is increasing acknowledgment of the limits of empirical methods and traditional forms of logic and authority. This study attempts to unfold meaning as it is lived in everyday experiences by senior managers and the community within a sociopolitical environment flanked by change and multiple

interpretations and identities. Thus, the researcher aims to understand senior managers' and communities' experiences and expectations of change management within policy and practice. These expectations and experiences are constructed by people themselves, and by the reality of roles within the organisation and the community. Understanding what managers and community experience, perceive, and believe assists in framing new ways of thinking about policy and practice that is led by managers and that interfaces and impacts the community.

The outcomes of research studies have the potential to contribute, influence and strengthen current research in a particular field. Seeking to understand others' experiences and meanings requires the development of a research design and processes that support an interpretivist approach.

## **Research design**

The following section on research design supports the qualitative approach used in this study and starts the discussion on the rationale for the data gathering procedures that will be used throughout the research process. Furthermore, this section will define the perimeters for the study using a case study approach.

The design of the qualitative study is dependent on how to best understand the social setting, the rationale for the inquiry and the research questions. The type of technique used will influence the practical aspects of the technique and management of the process. How the researcher views the world, in this case through an interpretivist lens, shapes the data generated and ultimately the findings of the study. A case study facilitates a phenomenon being explored within its context through the use of diverse and varied data sources that assist in revealing multiple facets of the phenomenon to develop understanding and meaning. Case study research can be used within an

interpretivist approach as it aims to develop an insight into the understanding of the nature of the phenomenon while attempting to draw out meaning from behaviours and experiences. This methodology explores predefined phenomenon but does not try to manipulate behaviours or experiences as the focus is on the understanding of the phenomenon and its context.

A combination of methods to collect data such as interviews, surveys or questionnaires, document and text analysis, and observation are generally used in this type of methodology with an aim to provide descriptions of phenomenon and explore areas where existing knowledge is limited (Yin, 2003). Further to this, Yin (2003) argues that case studies are widely considered to be either qualitative, quantitative or both and as a result there is no agreed set of techniques to be used, rather it depends on the research question and aims of the study. As a result, interviewing, questionnaires, document review and story writing were considered to be the best techniques that provided the best synergy between the social setting, the purpose and the research questions.

### **Defining the ‘case’**

Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2008) propose that in order to delineate the case study the researcher needs to define the parameters of the study. Through case study multiple methods are used that reveal phenomena of interest and understandings of the complexity of human experiences, and interpretations are progressed. With this thinking in mind, this research is defined as being based on a single case study of a local government organisation using a selection of data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and extensive access to secondary data from the organisation. These multiple data collection methods were used throughout this study to explore and attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the organisation, enabling a rounded and detailed description of the managers’ and community’s experiences and thoughts during change. The units of analysis for this study have been defined as being the senior managers from the

organisation and community members, both adult and children, who reside within the municipality (Figure 3).

The research design for this study has looked at connecting the interpretivist paradigms first to the qualitative framework of enquiry and secondly to the data collection methods. The design of the research study places the researcher at the centre of the empirical world. It is from here that connections are made to particular sites, people, groups and organisations where the relevant information needs to be collected, analysed and used to inform change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

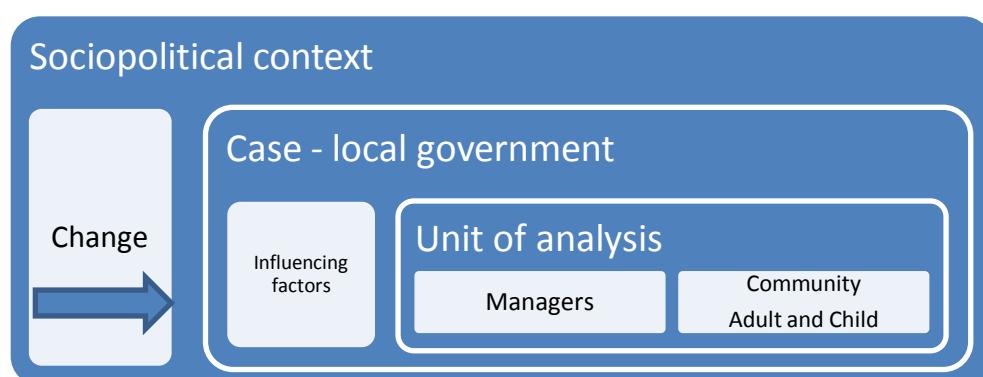


Figure 3: Conceptual framework for the case study for this research

## Selecting the site

The site selection, or ‘case’ for this study was a regional local government. This was due to its accessibility by the researcher, the diversity of staff’s professional backgrounds and its susceptibility to change from within the organisation or from external forces such as the Australian or state governments. Local governments’ requirement to be responsive to the community through a legislative and civic responsibility makes local government a unique environment for this study. The researcher was also a senior manager within this local government and was also a member of the integrated planning committee.

## **The participants**

According to Kemper, Stringfield and Teddlie (2003) complex research questions often require the use of more than just one sampling method. A combination of both purposive and convenience sampling was used throughout the study of the three cohorts of participants. The rationale for the use of each of the sampling methods is explained as it relates to each specific cohort of participants.

## **Managers**

The aim of the study was to select participants who had lived the experience of being a manager in local government and who were willing to engage in conversations about that experience and who were distinctive enough from each other to enhance the possibility of profound and unique stories. For senior managers, purposive sampling was selected over randomised sampling as the researcher aimed to focus on the shared experiences of a small group of senior managers, of which belonging to both the managers and the council's integrated planning group was integral. Participants were identified based on their position in the organisation requiring them to be senior staff with the ability to influence change. There needed to be participants from varying disciplines with a technical or social background to offer a diversity of perspectives to elicit a more balanced view of the 'reality' of the managers and the organisation. Senior staff were selected as a specific target group as how they construct their own realities and understand the organisation impacted on how they interpreted and made meaning of change process and its implementation or facilitation. The managers' construction and interpretation of the decisions made had the greatest influence on their acceptance and willingness to accept the change without bias and tokenism.

Therefore, the understanding of how managers interpreted their reality, and that of the organisation, and what they felt needed to be present to support change, identified them as the critical group for this study. The council has fourteen senior staff in total excluding the researcher. The identified senior staff for this study consisted of eleven managers who came from varying professional backgrounds. From these eleven eligible managers, ten agreed to participate. All have a planning role and all are members of the integrated planning group for this council. It is through this group that recommendations for projects, developments, policy and strategies are driven up to the executive and councillor level having an influential impact on final decision making (Table 1).

**Table 1: Selection criteria for manager participants in the study**

Selection criteria for senior managers to participate				
Managers	Integrated planning	Planning role	Policy influence	Agreed to participate in study
1.	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.	✓	✓	✓	✓
7.	✓	✓	✓	✓
8.	✓	✓	✓	✓
9.	✓	✓	✓	✓
10.	✓	✓	✓	✓
11.	✓	✓	✓	X
12.	X	X	X	Did not meet criteria
13.	X	X	X	Did not meet criteria
14.	X	X	X	Did not meet criteria

## Adult community participants

The community members consisted of two key cohorts: adults and children. Community members in this study refer to all citizens, including children, who reside in the municipality.

Adult community members were chosen by using a convenience sample of people who were agreeable to participating in the study and accessed through a diverse range of existing programs,

organisations and locations across the city that community members frequented. This approach of convenience was seen to be most appropriate due to the difficulty in accessing a diverse range of community members coupled with the possible impact of the relationship of the researcher being a council employee and the willingness of community members to speak freely to the researcher. Participants chose to participate through surveys that were accessible from a broad range of facilities and services. It was anticipated that the best way to reach adult community members was through networks and places that they would normally frequent such as the library, toy library, community centres, hotels, childcare centres, senior citizens clubs and sporting clubs. By distributing surveys throughout a diverse range of venues, it was anticipated that participants would have varying backgrounds and experiences. In total there were one hundred and fifty surveys sent out with eighty-eight being returned. Heeding Czaja's (2005) advice on survey design, the researcher determined that the collection of demographic data would add unnecessary length to the questionnaire, could be interpreted as being intrusive by participants by asking for sensitive information, and as a result, impact on response rates. In addition, the researcher deemed the demographic data as not being relevant to the purpose of the study therefore chose not to include this requirement in the survey.

## **Child participants**

Purposive sampling was used for the community members who were children. The child participants were selected through a local primary school and were aged between eleven and thirteen. This particular group of twenty-seven children from this school was selected as they had previously been engaged by council for input into a recently designed nearby playground and could therefore call on their previous experience through a change process. In addition, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2007)

framework applied to this particular age cohort of participants. One of the key learning domains of the VELS is civics and citizenship with two relevant learning areas of civic knowledge and community engagement. As part of the research methodology involved story writing, the researcher was also reliant on children being complex thinkers able to combine both the relevant learning content of the VELS with their own experiences and thoughts to be able to express their views and beliefs on the research questions. The techniques used to collect the data from each participant group are outlined below.

## **The data collection methods and process**

Data collection and analysis processes need to support the researcher's quest to transform personal experiences and meanings into disciplinary understandings. Any methodological approach that is used needs to ensure that the data collection and analysis is robust and works to endorse the merits of the study in attempting to create new learning of the chosen phenomenon. The following section outlines the steps taken by the researcher to achieve this outcome.

### **Interviewing as a technique**

Literature (Merriam, 2009; Minichiello, Madison, Hays & Parmenter, 2004; Patton, 2005; Silverman, 2013) supports the view that interviews are a suitable technique for data collection within a qualitative research framework. From a philosophical and epistemological perspective, interviewing is an appropriate technique for the researcher who seeks to access participants' understanding of the world and their experience. It is through this technique of interviews that the researcher provides the participants with a vehicle by which they can describe their experiences in detail and give their own perspectives and interpretations of these experiences. The fundamental value of interviews is that the meaning of questions and answers can be explored and probed

deeply, capturing the participants' thoughts, feelings and perceptions. As a result, misunderstandings can be minimised and the data collected can be rich, meaningful and individual. This supports Minichiello et al's (2004) suggestion that due to this ability to explore meaning, interviewing is a methodological approach unlike the perspective requirements of quantitative methodologies. According to King and Horrocks (2010), the interview is a good methodology to access people's perceptions, meanings, and understandings of situations and lived experiences.

Therefore, interviewing can take on many different forms and purposes giving greater flexibility and scope to meet researcher needs in trying to understand other people. An interview can be one-on-one or in a group and can be used as a measurement device or to gain individual or group perspectives, and can be structured, semi-structured or structure free (Fontana & Frey, 2005). While interviews were undertaken on an individual basis with managers, some children chose to participate in small groups while others were willing to participate on an individual basis. This was more about children's confidence levels to speak with an unknown adult and in the presence of an audio recorder. The researcher, however, needed to be aware of the need to ensure each child in the group had the opportunity to participate at whatever level they felt comfortable.

There are a wide variety of interviewing methods with Patton (2005) identifying three main types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Regardless of the typology used, the commonality in these different classifications is the degree of structure, the depth of interview and the degree by which the interview is standardised across the participants and the situations. Although Mason (2006) suggests that there is no research interview that can be totally absent of some degree of structure, this may be in the form of the use of an open ended question that is used to encourage thinking and dialogue.

The interview method that is chosen needs to be able to support the aims of the research questions. The research questions in this study aim to elicit rich and meaningful data that is context specific. The interview method needs to provide the researcher the scope to probe for an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of managers and the community. Each interview needs to be unique to allow the participants to describe in their own words their understanding of experiences, beliefs and values. Participants need the opportunity to construct and deconstruct their daily lives and experiences through their purposeful descriptions and conversation with the researcher who aims to capture that uniqueness and subjective account. To achieve this outcome, the interview process and order of questions needs to be flexible and adaptable so the flow and sharing of views are more natural and the respondent has a degree of control over what they want to talk about, to what degree and the descriptors they use to tell their story. The respondent needs the opportunity to influence the topic so a myriad of issues may emerge. Therefore, semi-structured interviews that provide flexibility and scope are best suited for this study as the data collection tool.

### ***Semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool***

Qualitative research methods are effective in studying social processes, behaviours and attitudes allowing for deep understanding of the phenomena being studied. However, this view needs to be balanced with an awareness of the potential problems that exist with qualitative methods with mitigation strategies developed (Babbie, 2013).

For this study, the objective was to seek a deeper understanding of managers' and the community's lived experiences with change rather than making generalisations about their beliefs, experiences and expectations. Therefore, a technique that allows the participants the opportunity to talk in-

depth about this particular subject is needed (Babbie, 2013). Heeding Babbie's (2013) warning, it was important that sufficient time was allocated to allow the stories to be told and heard and as a result the researcher booked extra time for the interviews than may be normally required.

There was a need for the researcher to explain to the participants their rights to withdraw even at the late stage of an interview and to reassure anonymity. There did not appear to be any hesitation from any managers, rather an eagerness to tell their story. This could be attributed to the familiarity between the researcher and the participant in that there was a sense of trust and camaraderie. It was this relationship between researcher and participant that needed careful management to stay within the role of researcher and not peer. The researcher needed to be disciplined in the execution of the semi-structured interviews to ensure not only objectivity and integrity of the process but to maximise the opportunity of eliciting rich data from each of the participants. In addition, it was important to create a relaxed and secure environment in which these interviews could take place.

### ***Interviewing skills***

Semi-structured interviewing is an effective and practical method for collecting data for things that are not easy to observe or measure. However, the result depends on the interviewer having the skills to be able to build rapport, not provide cues that guide respondents' answers and extend questions and the self-expression of the respondent. The skill of the interviewer is a powerful influence on the responses of the respondents and data may be corrupted through inappropriate questions, inadequate listening or the absence of appropriate interpersonal skills (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008). Familiarity and staying with the role of a researcher was also a particular risk for the researcher being a peer of the manager participants.

A mitigation strategy, to avoid pre-conceived ideas contaminating the data, is the training of the researcher in interview techniques so that questions were delivered with clarity and confidence. The researcher has had previous experience participating in research projects where interviewing was the primary source of data collection. The researcher also has access to mentors with experience in varying interview methods of data collection.

By considering all aspects of the semi-structured interview as a qualitative data collection method, it is seen by the researcher as an effective method of understanding managers' and community's experiences, expectations and roles in the change process and the tensions that may exist when these identities and expectations conflict. The use of semi-structured interviews provides a way that ensures participants voices are heard and clearly articulates the context of the methodological framework and remains true to the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspective. Therefore, they were used in this study and conducted with the senior managers of the local government in this study on ten occasions and with child community members.

### ***The interview process with managers***

The semi-structured interviews with the senior managers were set up in the meeting rooms of council, as this was seen by the participants as convenient for them to return to work after the interview, minimising time demands and acknowledged as a private setting by staff. Glass meeting rooms were avoided so that privacy could be assured. The times of the interviews were set with senior staff at a time most convenient to them to fit with their competing demands. The participants were sent electronic invitations to their diaries with automatic reminders set prior to the interviews. The researcher ensured that there were refreshments available for the participants making the setting more comfortable.

Prior to the researcher gaining access to potential participants, it was essential that approval was gained from the chief executive officer (CEO) of the organisation to undertake research in the workplace and for willing staff to be free to participate within work time hours. Approval and support was given for the interviews to occur within work hours by the CEO.

Managers were first informed of the study at a monthly managers' meeting. The intent of the study and criteria for selection was outlined along with consent procedures and anonymity explained. Managers were informed that they would be contacted via email to seek their potential willingness to participate.

Of the eleven invitations sent out, all but one manager responded that they would like to meet to discuss their potential participation. The one who declined met with the researcher to say that participation in the study, regardless of anonymity promised, would expose the manager's identity through the language and thoughts that were expressed. This particular manager felt that this could then result in punitive action. The researcher met with the other ten managers and spoke in more detail about the research, the relevance of the criteria by which they were chosen and data collection methods. The information letter (see Appendix 1) was discussed and consent forms (see Appendix 2) were signed with a follow-up invitation setting the dates for the semi-structured interviews to take place.

Follow-up discussions were held so that managers could read over the transcripts to confirm that the words actually matched their intent. All but one manager, who had left the employment of council, participated in the follow-up discussions. Throughout the data analysis process the

researcher also checked with participants to verify the understandings that were emerging during the interviews. This was achieved through both face-to-face and email interactions.

## **The qualitative surveys**

Surveys are generally referred to as being a systematic method for collecting information from groups or individuals with the aim of developing quantitative indicators aimed at describing numerical distributions of variables (Groves, 2004). However, for this study, framed in an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher sought to use a survey for the purposes of social enquiry that was aimed at determining the attitudes, meaning and experiences of the local population and conceptualising the common essence of these experiences.

According to Babbie (2013) and Groves (2004), surveys can be used in social science research for descriptive, exploratory and explanatory purposes. The researcher aimed to elicit community members' personal accounts and evaluations of their interactions with the local government body. As a result, the research questions were transformed into a standardised questionnaire to gain knowledge of the chosen area of interest as expressed in the community's own words. Further to Babbie's (2013) explanation, the researcher makes the distinction between surveying as a methodology and the questionnaire as a data collection tool for this study.

Due to the researcher being a local government employee, it was acknowledged that some community members may not have wished to participate because of concerns that there may be repercussions should they say anything negative against council. Older people in particular, are often scared of losing services if they complain (Department of Human Services, 2002) and as a result it was decided that sending out questionnaires to services and programs would allow a degree

of anonymity. Additionally, the information letter indicated that a return of the questionnaire indicated consent to participate rather than requiring people to give formal consent and provide their names. By the researcher explaining the research aims to the staff at the participating locations it was hoped that participants could be reassured by these staff if there was any concern.

The questionnaires were designed to allow for community members to write a personal account relating to the particular question topic, however the questionnaire did not ask for any demographic information in an attempt to further reassure participants of anonymity. The questionnaire was seen by the researcher as an effective data collection tool to reach a diverse section of the community that would be too large to observe directly.

### ***The process of disseminating the questionnaire***

Community members were invited to participate in the study through an information letter and questionnaire that was sent to a number of services and locations from across the city (see Appendices 3 and 4). Approval was sought from the CEO of the council for the questionnaires to be placed at council services such as community centres, the library, the childcare centre and aged care facility, while the researcher approached the local publican, toy library committee members, the senior citizens club and the local sports club (see Table 2). There were options for people to either place the completed questionnaires in the provided box or post the questionnaire to the researcher (envelopes provided). The questions were designed to elicit information that could then be analysed using a qualitative framework. This required questions to be open ended and provide space to write in their answer or their account of the experience. It was also important not to ask questions that were too long and complicated that may in turn be misinterpreted.

The researcher first made contact with the relevant people who were responsible for the facilities or agencies where potentially the questionnaires could have been distributed. The research aims were described and the process for distribution and collection of the questionnaires were discussed. It was important to inform the responsible people that the survey had received ethics approval. When approval was given, the researcher arranged for the surveys, along with information letters, return boxes and envelopes to be delivered to the various distribution points. Regular contact was made with key personnel to arrange convenient times for regular collections of completed forms by the researcher with a total of eighty-eight of the one hundred and fifty surveys being returned from across eight locations, registering a response rate of 61.25%.

### **Story writing and interviews as data collection tools with children**

Previous research with children has seen the use of a wide range of different methods (Clark, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2005c; Flewitt, 2005; Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007) to invite children into the participation process of research. It was important to choose methodological approaches that reflect the development and abilities of children while achieving the research questions intent. Both approaches of semi-structured interviews and story writing are based on a right's based, participatory methodology. It assumes that children have the right to be consulted and are afforded the opportunity to contribute to the research through the generation and selection of data to the researcher. If children's rights are to be recognised and taken seriously in communities, then good research, improved knowledge and understanding needs to be at the forefront of our thinking when working with children (Mason & Hood, 2011).

Story writing was selected as a data collection tool to assist children to reflect on their experiences, express their ideas and project these into the future. This was considered a useful tool as it allowed

for the participation of children who did not feel comfortable talking to adults. It allowed children to be involved in contributing their ideas and understandings through a less direct means. The focus was on the meaning and messages in the stories and not on its presentation.

### ***The process of undertaking interviews and storytelling with children***

The interviews and storytelling with the school children were undertaken at a local primary school. Permission to use the school in the research was approved by the principal once the researcher provided evidence of university ethical clearance. The researcher first emailed the principal to set a time to meet to discuss the research process and then, once approval was gained, the teacher in charge of this age group was the researcher's primary contact. Discussions took place with the teacher and she became the conduit by which information letters and consent forms were given to parents (see Appendices 5 and 6) and information letters and assent forms given out to children (see Appendices 7 and 8). On the day of the interviews the children, who had both parental consent and had themselves signed an assent form, were grouped in the classroom so that the researcher could discuss the aims of the research along with the process for the interviews. The teacher was present at all times. As children were story writing, others were being interviewed. Some were interviewed in pairs or small groups while others were confident to be interviewed individually, however at all times children were within sight of the teacher in charge. From thirty eligible children, twenty-seven aged between eleven and thirteen years of age participated in the research (see Table 2). The children were able to freely choose which activities they wanted to undertake. Fifteen children chose to be interviewed while twelve children participated in the story writing. While the interviews were all audio taped and then transcribed verbatim, the researcher

was unable to undertake a member's check with the children due to the children going on school holidays and many moving into different secondary schools the following year.

## Data collection timetable

The initial data for this study was collected over a period of nine months commencing with the semi-structured interviews and story writing with the children. This process was followed shortly after by the semi-structured interviews with managers. This process was undertaken over a period of nine months due to the availability of managers and the researcher at a mutually suitable time. This time also allowed for transcription to occur while new interviews were undertaken. Member checking was carried out within two months of the interview taking place.

*Table 2: Data collection timetable*

Manager respondents	Method Semi-structured interviews	Follow-up to verify transcript content	Emails – personal correspondence
Respondent 1	15/12/09	1/1/10	Unavailable as left employment
Respondent 2	29/7/10	13/9/10	15/1/11
Respondent 3	24/3/10	4/5/10	7/1/11
Respondent 4	15/1/10	23/2/10	7/1/11
Respondent 5	23/3/10	4/5/10	7/1/11
Respondent 6	26/7/10	13/9/10	7/1/11
Respondent 7	29/7/10	13/9/10	7/1/11
Respondent 8	28/7/10	13/9/10	7/1/11
Respondent 9	5/4/10	10/5/10	7/1/11
Respondent 10	26/3/10	4/5/10	7/1/11

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Population</b>
Children (15)	Semi-structured interviews	7/12/09	Children aged 11–13 years
Children (12)	Story writing	7/12/09	Children aged 11–13 years
<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Population</b>
150 surveys sent out with 88 returned	Qualitative survey - questionnaires	Sent 05/04/10	Adult community members
<b>Venues</b>			
Local library, two community centres, childcare centre, toy library, local hotel, senior citizen club, local sporting club			

## Review of documents

The researcher chose to increase the comprehensiveness and the credibility of the study by supplementing interviews and questionnaires with a process of reviewing organisational documents (see Table 3). Like interviews and questionnaires, this data collection tool needs to link to the research question and conceptual framework of this study. Documents are never fixed and static as they need to be read. Reading suggests that the contents will be descriptive and therefore be situated and interpreted by the reader, which is the task of the qualitative researcher and therefore fits within the philosophical framework of this study (Bowen, 2009). The aim of analysing relevant documents was to identify any common themes, patterns and categories that connect and capture the phenomenon of change as described by the participants in this study.

Bryman (2012) suggests that the analysis of documents as part of a data collection process is an unobtrusive method, which can portray values and beliefs of participants within a setting, while Atkinson and Coffey (2004, pp. 85–86) adds that such documents are essentially culturally standard

discourses associated within value systems an organisation wants to promote. The history, context and systems of social meaning and practice of a particular setting can be elicited in part by reviewing organisational documents. Generally available documents are those that are strategic and well executed, and deliberately produced for wide circulation by an organisation. The council plan, customer satisfaction results and council minutes of public meetings are examples of these widely and publically accessible documents (see Table 3). Internal documents such as staff opinion results and staff employee handbooks that describe organisational values, culture and social meaning are less available (see Table 3). The researcher sought permission from the chief executive officer of the organisation to review these documents.

*Table 3: Other documents analysed*

Data form	Method	Date	Source
Council employee opinion survey report June 2010	Review result of employee opinions relating to attitude, perception and relationships	27/07/2011	Internal document. Approval to access for research given
Employee handbook and position description	Document review of contents	3/08/2011	Internal document. Approval to access for research given
Community satisfaction survey results	Review relevant content relating to advocacy and community engagement	3/08/2011	Council website
Council minutes for ordinary meeting	Document review of contents	13/08/2011	Council website
Council plan	Document review of content	3/08/2011	Council website
Victorian Essential Learning Framework	Review document content	5/07/2009 13/08/2011	Victorian education website

## **Data analysis**

When viewed through interpretivist eyes, qualitative data is full of rich descriptions and accounts set in a localised context. The role of the data analysis phase of the study allows the researcher to capture the essence of personal accounts that works towards the development of a real world understanding of both meanings and actions (Babbie, 2013).

The methodological approach of this study, where local government, community and managers are explored, is based on the tenets of social phenomenon. It is important that the analytical process used not only supports the research questions but allows the ideology of social phenomenon to be central to the analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). As the study is encased in an interpretive paradigm, the raw data was obtained from qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires and children's story writing. In order to search for important descriptors of the phenomenon, a qualitative method of thematic analysis was used with data from the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and story writing tools. This case study seeks to understand the phenomenon of the lived experience of managers and community members. There is an assumption that the researcher can enter the lifeworld of the individual and through looking for underlying themes be able to interpret the meaning of shared experiences (Van Manen, 2007).

According to Lacey and Luff (2007) when looking at qualitative data analysis, there are some common processes that are needed to be carried out regardless of what theoretical approach the researcher may take. For this study, the researcher approached the analysis of the data in a methodical manner that involved different stages that allowed for a thematic approach to be the basis of the analysis. To enable the drawing together of the many threads of data collection and analysis in a way that facilitated the many stages of analysis to occur simultaneously, an organised

and systematic approach was necessary. The first step the researcher followed was the transcribing and familiarisation of the data.

The researcher is morally and ethically obligated to ensure that the participant's stories are given a voice to facilitate an understanding of the experiences of managers and the community. To facilitate this obligation, all data collected through semi-structured interviews was audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then subjected to a process of revisiting and rereading, in addition to listening to the audio tapes to immerse oneself in not only the stories, but to hear how the stories were being told and what emphasis was being placed on what words or sentences. The familiarisation process was so intense that the researcher became intimately involved in the process as suggested by Pope and Mays (2006), that each participant could be identified by the idiosyncrasies of their particular style of language and phrases.

The process of a data driven inductive approach involves identifying themes and categories by continually revisiting the data by reading and rereading the transcript and making notes and summations in the margin as themes began to emerge, grounded in the participants' descriptions of their experiences. Keeping the conceptual framework in mind, the researcher attempts to formulate a theme or a phrase which represents inherent meaning; the selective approach isolates phrases or statements from the descriptions which stand out as being particularly revealing of the phenomenon; and the detailed approach examines every sentence for what can be revealed (Van Manen, 2007).

This familiarisation is an essential stage before the formal analysis commences. The emerging data then serves to begin the process of categorising and analysis. The researcher kept descriptions in

their context initially to avoid focusing on themes in the early stages and then used a coding process to group and categorise like descriptions. The categories allow data to be seen as ‘same type’ and be grouped under the one heading or theme. To enhance the depth of analysis, the data that has been interpreted as belonging to a particular category can be looked at together and compared with other data in other categories. The development of categories develops through interpretations of the data, capturing the qualitative richness of the phenomenon being studied and assisting in drawing conclusions about the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process used enabled progress towards the identification of predominant themes that depicted the phenomenon that was described by the participants.

Minichello et al. (2008) recommend that prior to commencing the process of data collection, a systematic method for managing the data be developed to ensure a quality outcome. With this in mind and with the aim to protect the integrity of the data, the researcher used a systematic and organised approach towards the generation, use and analysis of the data. Data management strategies including both technological and manual processes were used to assemble the data into a manner that used the analysis of transcripts, filing systems, category files, memos, annotations and matrix representation.

The researcher codified each manager respondent with a pseudonym and then used the first initial of that name along with the date the story was told and the number of the page that the selected excerpt appeared in the transcript (e.g. E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5). For further email correspondence with managers, the researcher coded it as the pseudonym and then the words, ‘personal communication’ and then the date on which the communication occurred, (e.g. D. personal communication, 23 January, 2011). A similar approach was taken with each child who participated; however, to not confuse the children’s identity with manager’s identity the researcher used the

code of 'C' to indicate a child respondent and a number to represent the number of the child participant, in this case child number four (e.g.: C4, 7 December, 2009, p. 3). For the adult community members, the letters 'ID' were used along with the month and year that the surveys were undertaken and the page of the survey that the selected excerpt was taken (e.g. ID 13 April. 2011, p. 1).

The analysis of the data was undertaken in a cyclic and fluid process of data collection, data reduction and display making analytical choices of sorting, focusing and discarding, edging meaningfully towards interpretation and conclusion writing. This was assisted by the use of the computer program NVivo used for analysing the transcripts of the managers and children. The program supported the enquiry and discovery of themes or 'nodes' with deeper investigation uncovering common themes that emerged from the spoken words.

Themes emerged by bringing together components of ideas, experiences, words, feelings and sayings that viewed in isolation would appear meaningless. The stories were pieced together to form a collective picture of the participants shared experiences that brought forth meaning and understanding of what it was like to be a manager in local government and what it was like being a community member.

As the analysis process unfolded and themes and patterns emerged the researcher also analysed a range of documents to identify if there were other data that existed that supported the emerging themes in the stories that had been told. Two key documents that were critically examined were the employee opinion survey (Insync Surveys, 2010) and the community satisfaction survey (Wallis, 2011). Both surveys provided qualitative data in the form of written comments. These comments were analysed according to key words, phrases and salient features to identify themes and patterns

that emerged through collection methods used throughout the study. Similarly, on reviewing community satisfaction survey documents with the results from this study, the data comparisons identified similar thematic statements that were echoed throughout all data sets.

Debriefing with the researcher's supervisors also helped explore relationships between categories as well as the refinement of themes and categories. It was the opportunity for the researcher to test emerging perspectives to see if they seemed plausible and for the supervisors to probe the researcher to challenge and uncover perspectives and assumptions. While Dahlberg and Drew (1997, p. 315) would contest that 'pure description and knowledge' that is free from the researcher's own perspectives and worldview is impossible, Starks and Trinidad (2007) draw on Van Manen's (1990) suggestion that researchers should begin with a focus and interest on the phenomenon and acknowledge any pre-existing knowledge. Giorgi (2008), like Van Manen (1990), offers similar advice and suggests investigating the descriptions as experienced and spoken by the participant, not as may be conceptualised by the researcher.

As the analytical phase continued with data collection, interpretation, analysis and writing, the researcher started to share the conclusions with peers, colleagues and other professionals, all the time testing the findings, increasing the credibility and self-reflecting to understand her own transformation throughout the study. This process of sharing reflections and thinking was carefully executed to ensure that ethical standards and processes were followed. Throughout the analytical process, the researcher was drawn carefully and attentively towards regularities, patterns and explanations as propositions and conclusions started to form, embryonic and vague at first, but then becoming explicit and grounded.

## **Ethical considerations**

Due to the sharing notion of the research process, ethical considerations exist in all aspects of research. Qualitative researchers intrude to some extent into people's lives and take on an active membership within the community that they are studying; in this case the researcher is an active member of a local government senior management group. Denzin delicately suggests that:

our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us. (Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

The researcher was given ethics clearance through the University of New England Research Ethics committee by meeting the guidelines in the National Ethics application form (NEAF). This process provided the avenue to reflect on the ethical considerations needed when undertaking research involving human subjects. According to Punch (2005) all research involving human subjects requires that the subjects be informed fully of the nature and consequences of the research in which they are involved and then they must voluntarily consent to participate without coercion. As the participants are all top line managers, there are no dependent or power relationships between the researcher and the respondents. This absence of any dependency minimises, but does not eliminate, the risk that the respondents believe that they are not free to refuse participation.

## **Reflexivity and ethical research**

Linsted (1994, p. 1325) would contend that it can be argued as to whether reflexivity can result in self-knowledge that dispels the biases and assumptions of researchers totally from their research to a point where they can start to fully understand their assumptions. However, reflecting on the role of 'self 'embedded in the research process and critically exploring assumption, biases and the

power and political relations are critical not only at the design stage of the research study but throughout the whole of the research process.

Being a manager within the local government at the centre of this study raised an important concern relating to the issue of researching, ‘with’ rather than researching, ‘about’ managers in local government. The distinction was an important one to define and was reliant on ethical research that generated practices of reflexivity that looked at issues of positionality, assumptions and power relationships. Kobayashi(2003), suggests that it is important for the researcher to reflect on how they are positioned within the framework of power relations in order to fully understand how that influences methods, interpretations and knowledge creation. Reflexivity can assist to open up the research to a deeper understanding of the issues where the boundaries between process and content can become unclear.

The starting point for considering reflexivity was from the understanding that a researcher is not an objective observer, rather, is an integral part of the study being undertaken. With this in mind the researcher heeded Ramanathan’s (2005) advice that it is important for researchers to be open about the assumptions and biases from which they are starting, and to openly explore and grapple with ways in which these assumptions and biases impact on the story that will unfold. As the researcher was interviewing managers of varying backgrounds and experience, it was important to reflect on differences between the researcher and the managers who worked together in the local government at the centre of this study. The researcher needed to challenge biases and assumptions that emerged from differences in management styles, experiences, values and beliefs around community development and the divide between the profession of social science, of which the researcher was educated, and the technical science; often seen as an opposite paradigm by the

researcher in her role as manager. A process of inner monologue and exploration coupled with dialogue with the researcher's supervisors provided the avenue to tease out and reveal any assumptions and biases and then to form strategies to address these conflicts.

During the design stage of the research process it was critical to reflect on the questions to ensure that these were not tailored to the researcher's biases or assumptions, particularly relating to the socio political paradigm of the researcher. Analysing the questions and the design process with the university supervisors provided the researcher with the necessary rigorous reflections.

It was important to recognize that although the researcher was presenting as a student researcher, the relationship that existed for the managers was one where the researcher was a peer and an experienced manager who had many years in local government. This familiarity, lead to the managers using language during the interview that demonstrated intimacy and camaraderie. In an attempt not to take advantage of the relationship or elicit information that managers did not want to devolve, the researcher needed to pay close attention to staying in the role of student researcher and not falling into the familiarity the working relationship afforded.

There is always the risk that the information gained by the researcher as a result of the study could be used against the participants in an effort to disadvantage or discredit them. Edwards and Chalmers (2002) warn that in such situations the researcher assumes double agency where they are executing two roles at the same time relative to the same individuals, in this case the role of peer and researcher. This can cause conflicting loyalties as a peer and as a researcher. Miller and Boulton (1998, as cited in Ferguson, Young & Myrick, 2004, p. 4) suggest that researchers in this position need to 'be guided by a conscientious moral framework to ensure professional integrity' of the

process. The researcher was diligent in presenting as a student researcher and ensuring that approval was gained through the appropriate channels for access to information, dissemination of information and undertaking research in the workplace. The researcher presented through all written and verbal correspondence as a student researcher and not as a manager or council. The aim was to immerse both the researcher and the participants in the framework of the research and to reinforce role and responsibilities in relation to the study.

### **Ethical considerations for managers**

The qualitative research may raise sensitive issues as senior managers will be interpreting their experiences, opinions and beliefs relating to change management processes of the organisation. It is imperative that they feel that what they say is in confidence and that their anonymity will be assured. Confidentiality and privacy is seen as being one of the most important safeguards against harm to individuals represented in studies. One of the managers who declined to participate in the study spoke of a fear of punitive action. Although this was not viewed by others in the study as a concern, it is especially important to address in the context of local government that operates within a hierarchical management system. Respondents were reassured that the raw data would not be made available or distributed in any form to the executive or the CEO nor would the thesis be shared until the examination process was complete.

Qualitative researchers often illustrate developing themes by way of direct quotes gained from the data which can expose participants' identities, particularly in a small organisation where people are often very familiar with each other's verbal expressions. Ensuring that direct quotes that could put at risk the anonymity of the participants are presented in a way that the identity of the participant is indiscernible maintains the participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were also

informed that the data collected would be represented in the study in a de-identified form protecting their names, gender, roles and identities. As a further protection against identification, although gender based names are used in this study, it may or may not be reflective of the participants' actual gender. In addition, the researcher has not named the organisation or location and has not used information or direct quotes that may reveal the participant's role or responsibilities resulting in their anonymity being compromised.

Ethical issues may arise from the design decisions; therefore, the design was used to manage some of the ethical issues concerning confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews, face-to-face and emails were used to ensure that anonymity was not lost to others by alternate data collection methods such as focus groups. Interviews took place in private meetings rooms to provide further assurance of anonymity. Due to the time that has lapsed from the when the research was undertaken and the time of the dissemination of the outcomes from this study, the executive and CEO have changed and some of the managers interviewed have now left the council employment or changed positions within council further assisting with protecting their anonymity.

### **Ethical considerations for adult community members**

As the researcher is employed by local government that delivers services to the community, community members may feel that their refusal to participate may impact on the services available to them. To preserve their rights, surveys were used with a return of the survey indicating a willingness to participate. Disseminating surveys through a range of services and organisations and not through the researcher, attempted to minimise any feeling of pressure to participate. In addition, the information letter reassured potential participants of anonymity and that refusal to

participate would not impact on services available to them from the organisation. Only information identified as essential for the study was asked in the questionnaires.

### **Ethical considerations for child participants**

One of the aims of this research is to ask children about their experiences in the city as children are often underrepresented. As the age group indicates the participants are minors, parental consent to participate was required. In addition, in line with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), children had a right to consent or refuse to participate in the study. The researcher was known as a local government manager responsible for the delivery of services to children across the city. As a result the researcher was diligent in ensuring that the consent forms and information letters were all distributed by the school through the children's teacher. This was in an effort to balance any unequal relationship forming between the researcher and the children or their parents. The teacher explained that parents were free to indicate that they did not want their children to participate and as a result, not all children participated on the day. Three parents choose for their children to not participate in the study.

It was important that the researcher explained the research aims and the tools being used for data collection to the children on the day. The researcher reaffirmed to the children prior to audio taping conversations that they were free not to participate, could participate as individuals or in groups and that they could withdraw from the audio taping at any time through the recording. This was aimed to ensure children understood the research process and that they felt empowered to make choices regarding their involvement in the research.

The teacher was present at all times throughout the data collection period however the researcher ensured that the appropriate state government police checks were undertaken and current before undertaking the research with children. Having the teacher present at all times, with intimate knowledge of the children, also served the purpose of the teacher being able to identify any subtle signs of discomfort in the children so a reminder could be given that children could withdraw at any time. Children were reminded that to withdraw they just needed to excuse themselves and then move to the room where activities were set up for the children either not participating or who had finished participating. The researcher was diligent in asking children if they were right to continue at various points throughout the interviews and story writing. Throughout the data collection all children chose to continue and not withdraw.

### **Ensuring rigor in qualitative data collection and analysis**

Rigor is the way in which researchers make evident integrity and competence, reinforcing the authenticity of the processes used throughout the research study. Qualitative researchers frame rigor within the epistemology of their study to demonstrate its relevance to the aims of the research being undertaken (Tobin & Begley, 2004). To ensure the credibility of the outcomes of this case study enquiry, the researcher placed importance on undertaking a process of rigorous data collection and analysis. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the correct processes were employed to be satisfied that the findings have been appropriately and ethically achieved in the conducting of this research.

Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007) and Meyrick (2006) offer a pathway for determining rigor in research that involves human experience. The pathway (see Table 4) consists of four criteria of critical evaluation of the trustworthiness of the data and outcomes of the research through

questions as to the truth value, the applicability of the findings and the consistency or stability of the findings.

*Table 4: Criteria to establish trustworthiness of research. Adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1989)*

Criterion	Qualitative approach	Strategies
Truth value	Credibility	Triangulation Member checking Peer debriefing Supervisor debrief
Applicability	Transferability	Rich description on background of participant's, research context and setting Member checking
Consistency	Dependability	Rich description of research method Triangulation Peer check Memo
Neutrality	Confirmability	Triangulation Documented and trackable research process

### ***Truth value, establishing credibility***

Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007) propose that to establish truth value, credibility must be established to the point where the researcher represents the phenomenon so truthfully that others who have experienced the phenomenon would immediately recognise it. The aim of truth value is to look at the strength of the findings relative to the design and context of the study and the participants. In qualitative studies, truth value is generally achieved through the bringing to light human experience as lived and perceived by the participant.

Adding further to this, Smythe and Holian (2008) suggest that to achieve credibility, the researcher needs to identify their involvement in the study, check for representativeness of data across the transcripts and use multiple data sources. To apply this thinking to the study, the researcher engaged in debriefing sessions with the university supervisors and an external peer to discuss the researcher's involvement, the data from the transcripts, alternate approaches and to challenge and

recognise biases, addressing transferability of the findings of the research. Heeding Smythe and Holian's (2008) advice that increased credibility is achieved through multiple data sources the researcher used triangulation as a key strategy throughout the study to address this issue.

### ***Triangulation***

Throughout the study, the researcher employed a number of strategies for enhancing the robustness of the data collected and its analysis in an effort to increase the credibility of the study. Babbie (2013) emphasises strongly that a research study should draw on more than one research method to reduce the likelihood of the research findings reflecting the one particular method of enquiry. The researcher heeds Babbie's (2013) advice and uses methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of the qualitative analysis.

To establish credibility in the findings, the researcher chose the methodology of a case study using a range of data collection techniques of semi-structured interviews combined with document reviews, story writing and surveys as its approach to triangulation. The researcher was able to elicit data from these multiple data sources to assist in the credibility of the findings.

The convergence of data from more than one data collection source while studying the same phenomenon, known as triangulation, is a useful strategy in enhancing the credibility of qualitative analyses. Ambiguity in the interpretation of data is greatly reduced when there are two or more independent measurements used. When social research is founded on just one data collection method, then it may be impacted on by the limitations and specific application associated with that method (Yin, 2009).

The purpose of triangulation within qualitative research is not to confirm if the respondents' perceptions are accurate or a true reflection of a situation. Instead, its purpose is twofold; firstly to ensure that the findings accurately reflect people's perceptions and realities, and secondly to increase the probability that the research findings will be seen as credible by others (Patton, 2005).

Embodied in this research study are the sociopolitical and technocratic paradigms that converge in the socially situated context of local government. Burdge (2002) concluded that the social, cultural and socioeconomic issues that relate to development and change comprise of value judgments and occur within a localised social context. Keeping this in mind, the use of methodological triangulation provides the opportunity for different aspects of the phenomenon to be given attention providing multi-perspective discoveries.

### ***Applicability – the transferability of case study findings***

The researcher looked to Koch (2006) who proposes that transferability or 'fittingness' (p. 92), where the findings can fit into a context outside of the setting of a study, is a more appropriate measure to determine applicability of research findings than the traditional criteria of generalisability. Influencing the extent of transferability is the quality of the descriptive data. The evaluation of the consistency of the research data and findings is done by the criterion of dependability whereby the process used is logical, traceable and clearly documented. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) put forth the thinking that transferability is achieved if the original researcher offers enough descriptive data that enables comparisons to be made by others who may then wish to apply the findings to another circumstance.

According to case study critics, the examination of a number of cases provides little justification for proving transferability of findings. Whereas others claim that the findings are biased due to the intensity of the exposure of the case, others reject case study methods as being useful only as an exploratory means in research. However, case studies continue to be used successfully by researchers when studying real life situations and exploring problems and issues. Using a case study approach within the strategic management field is purported to be most appropriate and have provided ground breaking insights in this field. This is seen as being a sound approach particularly in contemporary management theories, as key phenomenon emerge and their associations are explored (Gibbert, Ruigrok & Wicki, 2008). Further to this, it is common practice for case studies to be carried out in collaboration with professionals as they manage real life situations in the workplace, providing a methodology that is appropriate for the creation of knowledge relevant to the strategic management field (Amabile et al., 2001). In caution however, Scanura and Williams (2000) heed a warning that if applicability is to be claimed in management research, then rigor must be present in the process.

### ***Consistency defined in terms of dependability***

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that consistency in qualitative research is best described as dependability, implying variability that is trackable and able to be attributed to identifiable data sources. The researcher ensured that all data was kept in an organised way with the use of memos and notes that recorded emerging themes and values throughout the process of data analysis and documentation. Additionally, the process of participant checking of adult interviews was undertaken through face-to-face conversations, emails to the participants and participants reviewing their transcripts to check the accuracy of facts and observations (see Table 2). Although Waldram (2007), Angen (2000), and Cho and Trent (2007) offer a comprehensive

critique of the process of the negative aspects of member checking, such as: the participants changing their minds or being confused, wanting to agree with the researcher to be seen as cooperative, or may want to deny their story and have it removed; the researcher takes a cautious yet positive approach in line with this technique for establishing credibility.

### ***Neutrality defined as confirmability***

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) propose that confirmability is the measure by which neutrality is assessed. Neutrality is realised only when truth value and applicability can be established. Neutrality relates to the extent to which the research process and findings are as of a result of the participants and the research conditions are not influenced by other preconceptions, motives or viewpoints. The researcher used a research design process that followed a logical decision making trail including: raw data, notes, thematic categories, interpretations, process notes, schedules, and forms. These were all discussed with the researcher's supervisors in supervision visits or debriefing sessions.

### **Shaping the new way forward for change**

The concept of immediacy requires the researcher to become immersed in the study through being present and engaged with the participant in order to establish a degree of trust and intimacy, while maintaining an appropriate distance that allows for self-awareness and the facilitation of process and purpose (Seymour, 2001). It is through this level of trust and intimacy that self-disclosure by the participants occurred and contributed to the deeper and more concrete understanding and meaning of the phenomenon. This study allowed the researcher to capture the essential themes and look more broadly at the understandings, meaning and relationships that were laid bare by the participants in this study. The discovery of these themes holds implications for further study and

also points the way forward for policy and practice reforms for managerial practitioners and for local government.

Whilst Bolman and Deal (2008, p. 29) point out that many management texts may depict organisations as a ‘rose garden’ whereas in reality they may be a ‘snake pit’, the truth is probably somewhere in between, where managers need to recognise the opportunities that exist as well as the ‘traps for the unwary’. The data analysis moves us forward to addressing the question of how managers make sense of what is going on in an environment that can at times be complex, changing and ambiguous.

The research raised issues of the value of systems and processes that provide support and training to managerial practitioners within a value based and ethical framework. The establishment of frameworks that support system reform and people development could be used to deepen the understanding of the holistic nature of relationships that occur not only on an organisational basis but at a community level.

## Synthesis

This chapter describes the nature of qualitative enquiry, the ethical considerations and the role of the researcher in qualitative research. The chapter strives to outline the overall research methodology, design, and process while attempting to address the concerns of credibility and trustworthiness in interpretivist research. Qualitative research seeks to find meaning for the participants within the changing context of local government and seeks out multiple realities that are reconciled by the researcher. The researcher was in a unique position of having established trust and intimacy with some participants; however, this needed to be balanced with careful

attention and considerations to ensure the integrity of both purpose and process of the study for all.

The chosen methodology of a case study informed by phenomenological theory proved to be a meaningful way to elicit deep and rich data that informed the data analysis process. This approach provided a methodology that worked to develop an understanding of the lived experience, its essence, ‘openness, encounter, immediacy, uniqueness and meaning’ would remain elusive and undiscovered (Dahlberg & Drew, 1997, p. 305). The case study also proved to be an effective methodology to advance the understanding of human experience in relationships with organisations where issues are often complex and meaning paramount. This study raised questions about the complexities and nature of living and practising in local communities bringing into play the internalisation processes that influence managers’ decision making and challenges the development of sound policy and practice

The following chapter starts the journey of telling the stories of the experiences of community participants as the symbiotic relationship with the ever changing world of local government unfolds. As councils are experiencing a transformation from a traditional role of roads, rates and rubbish to take on a more social and advocacy role, communities are also developing different relationships with their local government with shifting expectations and choices to engage differently. The importance of Chapter Four is that it starts to set out the community ecosystem in which managers are embedded and who they need to understand and respond to in an ever changing landscape.

## Chapter 4

### **COMMUNITY – WITHIN A POLITICAL TOPOGRAPHY**

#### **Introduction**

In Victoria, local government is legislated to encourage its community to actively participate in civic life, and for local government to take into consideration the diverse needs of its communities. The *Victorian Local Government Act* (1989, S.3D) also provides the framework that encourages consultation and engagement in decision making by community. As set out in Chapter Two, there is a myriad of legislation and policy frameworks that set out local government purpose and function in relationship to its community, providing many opportunities for citizens to engage in participatory decision-making processes.

In order to build a foundation for strengthening communities and democracy, there needs to be a platform that enables citizens to engage in participatory decision making. This platform involves a process of conversing with elected representatives and local government professionals in a manner that builds relationships, connectedness and trust but, more importantly, results in decisions and directions that reflect community needs, expectations and values.

This chapter works to dig deeper into the rhetoric of policy and legislation and to listen to the stories of the lived experiences of community members, including children. It is from this platform of experience and beliefs that the analysis of the data painted a complex social picture of people's identity and their relationship with local government. The data told a story of the role of language

in influencing interpretations and reinforcing not only social group identity but perceptions and expectations of community members and local government.

Chapter Four explores the narratives of adults and children through an analytical lens that captures a snapshot of the sociocultural identities that exist within the political topography of local government. What emerged from the data were conflicting identities of adults and children. Some adult and child community members recognised their democratic rights to be involved in decisions that affected them and, as a result, had formed strong civic identities when dealing with local government. Other adults related more to a consumer identity when dealing with local government expecting value for money. It was this difference in identities that saw the emergence of the citizens who wanted to influence change through their personal contributions as opposed to consumers who expected to influence change because they had paid for it with their rates. Of further interest, the data revealed that it was adult beliefs about children's rights and children's beliefs about their own rights that saw major conflicts arise in the identities of children in this local government area.

It is through the exploration of the two main aspects that emanated strongly—the impact of social identity on the engagement of community and the impact of children's social identity on their rights to participate—that began to draw out the symbiotic relationship between local government and its community of adults and children. In exposing this relationship, Chapter Four starts to provide a backdrop for the study that permeates from grass roots community through to the managerial level in local government, which is the subject of Chapters Five and Six.

Furthermore, this chapter explores the notion that if one of local government's key functions is to serve its people then there needs to be an understanding and shared meaning of the values, beliefs and expectations of the local community. This needs to be balanced with the true extent at which local government can influence and manage change that at times is beyond its control.

## **Identity through a community lens**

The literature review in Chapter Two explored various types of methodologies that enable community participation in decision making. The Public Participation Spectrum (International Association of Public Participation, 2007) currently used by this local government sets out a sequence of processes that, if followed, starts the process of basic engagement through to a point where citizens should ultimately experience an increased feeling of community engagement. However, the literature (Arnstein, 1969; Cook, 2004; Shand & Arnberg, 1996) would suggest that there are a myriad of models that can be used to theorise the connection between community and participation. These range from a continuum model, a matrix, the ladder metaphor and a descriptive approach. Brackertz et al. (2005) propose that local governments should choose the techniques and processes most appropriate for the context and that best support the objectives for the engagement of community.

Whilst the Public Participation Spectrum provides a process driven framework for participation of community, Cavaye (2004) takes the thinking back a step before engagement occurs to ask: 'What is community?' He expresses doubt in the ability to have a common and generalised definition of the term 'community'. Cavaye's (2004) argument rests on his belief that the definition of community is socially constructed, and therein lies the variability in definition. He believes that communities are diverse in makeup consisting of a range of stakeholders operating in complex

networks with differing perceptions, interests and interactions with each other and local government (Cavaye, 2004). In order to move the argument forward, Cavaye (2004) does however, concede that if there was common agreement then community could be referred to as a group of people who have something in common. Pratchett's (1999) thinking however, moves the argument away from the definition of community and onto the process by focusing on local government providing a democratic process whereby political equity and a level of representativeness is, 'met in relation to geographic, demographic and political' (p. 630) dimensions of a community. This concept of representativeness urges the process to be accessible to all areas of a community defined by demographics, that no socioeconomic groups are disadvantaged by the process and all political views are given opportunity to be expressed.

Making the process more representative is challenging in that it involves not just inviting identified groups into the process but ensuring that they have the opportunity to be involved, despite the fact that they may be difficult to engage. In response, Wilson (2003) would assert that one method of consultation is not able to satisfactorily represent all groups within the community and a pluralistic approach should be sought. Drawing on Stott and Keatman's (2005) assertions that community and engagement are both open to interpretation and value driven, the use of any methodology needs to consider these aspects and move beyond what is conventional engagement with community.

This study found that language and shared meaning played an influencing part in how communities saw their roles playing out during the consultation process and, as a result, mirrors some of Stott and Keatman's (2005) warnings relating to the importance of a shared meaning. However, a more prominent and complex picture emerged of the influence of social identity on community

members and its impact on the manner and level at which they engaged and how they viewed their own rights and the rights of others to be involved.

In this study the community felt that the local government was good at leadership and advocated well to other levels of government for their local community. However, the majority of community members surveyed felt that the council was not good at consulting with the community. When reviewing the independent community satisfaction survey results undertaken at a state level for this particular local government area, the researcher found evidence of positive results for advocacy and negative results for consultation, supporting the research findings in this study (Wallis, 2011).

Community members overwhelmingly connected consultation with their democratic rights and with their identity as citizens. However, alternatively, some saw themselves as ratepayers or consumers and therefore provided the source of income for the operations of the council. Keeping within this consumer identity, some community members saw council staff as servants to the community as a result of this income stream. It was through these identities as citizens and ratepayers that they perceived the level of their participation in decision making to be high and, as a result, contextualised the meaning of the word consultation with their relevant identities. These changes in expectations either from a civic or a consumer viewpoint place pressure on local government to respond in a different way as social changes continue to place pressures on the relationship between community and government.

### **Identity: citizens and consumers**

The prevalent perception of the community was that the council was a democratic institution that was there to serve the community: *it's part of being a democracy* (ID 33, April 2010, p. 1) and, *council*

*serves the community, therefore it needs to work in conjunction with the community* (ID 78, April 2010, p. 1).

The role of voting to elect community representatives and the understanding that council was a tier of government strongly affirmed their role as citizens with a right to influence decision making of the organisation: *these decisions are being made for citizens by elected members as it is a level of government, it involves ratepayer money so the community as a whole should have a right to influence the decision-making process* (ID 57, April 2010, p. 1). It also affected their perceptions that organisational staff were: *servants* (ID 73, April 2010, p. 3) and as a one resident commented that as council staff were paid by the community through rates therefore community had a right to be involved in decision making. Adult community members went on to give descriptions of the bureaucratic nature of local government when describing what makes change difficult for them. Their experiences were of a bureaucratic nature with lengthy, political processes that reinforced the organisation's identity to community members. Descriptions such as: legal and governance considerations, lengthy decision-making and approval processes, opposing views needing to be taken into consideration, budgets and resources were commonly used. When asked what within council made change difficult, one community member explained: *long decision-making processes when some things are very simple. Council members that delay change for a minority point of view* (ID 5, April 2010, p. 3).

Although there was a strong connection to citizenship by the majority of community members, a connection to consumerism emerged with statements such as one resident claiming that as council was paid by the community then the community in fact became the client and they had certain expectations on what they expect in return for their money: *the community is council. The community pays for the council. The community is the client so, what should a client expect for their money?* (ID 13, April 2010, p. 1). Another talked about the relationship between the community and council as one of a user pays

relationship: *I am in a user pays situation and whilst I can't always have what I want I should get some things* (ID 12, April 2010, p. 1).

During this study, it became evident that two very distinct sociopolitical adult identities existed within this community. One was of a citizen and the other was a consumer. The conceptualisation of citizens being referred to as consumers emerged with the economic rationalist approaches to public services in Victoria during the Kennett era of the 1990s (Hess & Adams, 2003). Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005) argue that if citizens are considered to be consumers of council services, then they should have negligible participation into decisions about services, not increased influence. Consumers could, however, contribute their feedback through the normal process of satisfaction surveys and complaints procedure or exercise their right to decide which service to use, however, this identity only enables them to have a minimal influence over service delivery. The researcher would argue that consumer input provide many benefits that can lead to enhanced brand and reputation, increased sales and customer loyalty and increased quality of services and products. While it could be viewed that local government is not a marketplace and that citizens do not have a choice as to their municipal area, unless they choose to move, they do have a choice in services and products they can purchase from council.

Notwithstanding that, regardless of what identity community members assumed, whether as citizens or consumers, there was the expectation that consulting with the community was a right that would result in an outcome that reflected community input into the decisions that were made. Community members wanted to see that they had influence over outcomes that affected themselves and their communities.

The local government area in this study used the Public Participation Spectrum at a policy level as a suitable framework to guide engagement at a practitioner level. In addition, adult community expectations on their level of influence were clear and contextualised. This study was interested in exploring the lived experience of participation when both of these points intersected.

## **The lived experience of consultation by adult community members**

When asked about their experiences of consultation, community members used emotive words such as disappointment, confused, mistrust and anger. Their experiences were disproportionate to their understanding and belief of what it would be like to be involved in a consultation process. Adult community members conveyed disappointment that they were asked for their opinions and the council took none of it on board. Comments of: *why do they ask if they are not going to use our information* (ID 95, April 2010, p. 3); *I don't know why my input was not effective?* (ID 13, April 2010, p. 3); and *they have already made up their minds* (ID 66, April 2010, p. 3) were expressed as a result of their previous experiences with the consultation process. However, according to council's own communication and engagement strategy, based on the International Association of Public Participation (2007) Public Participation Spectrum, the definition of the process of consultation is to seek community feedback on options and decisions. Consultation is considered to be passive participation whereas the community is expecting an interactive participation or some degree of citizen power as reiterated by one of the managers: *I think there is a lot of confusion. I think a lot of the public could get the perception of, well, I gave them this feedback and this is what the change is that I'm expecting so I think they do feel empowered* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 13).

This was supported by responses by community members to the question about what good consultation would feel like. They put forth ideas such as *empowerment* (ID 23, April 2010, p. 2) and *a sense of contributing to the community* (ID 54, April 2010, p. 2), *ideas taken on board* (ID 71, April 2010, p. 2), *see where we have made a difference* (ID 47, April 2010, p. 2), *decisions that are based on the communities input, involvement in the decision-making process and on committees* (ID 6, April 2010, p. 2). The community described processes whereby participants would be experiencing a high level of engagement where council would be taking direct advice and innovation by the community into consideration in the formulation of solutions (International Association of Public Participation, 2007).

A recent public council consultation process further highlighted the confusion over the word consultation for members of the community. A local playground was being reviewed and local residents were asked for their comments on its usage and importance to them. Residents could phone, email or write to the council with their views. As a follow-up to this process, a public meeting was held to discuss issues and viewpoints with residents. Residents who attended were sent minutes of the meeting and asked for further feedback. Following this, another public meeting was held to ensure all issues and viewpoints were collected. The attendees were informed that there would be a period of twenty-eight days after a report went to council to submit any more information they would like council to consider. At the end of this meeting, residents then asked when council was going to start to consult with the community over this issue. When informed that this was what council had been doing and asked what they thought had happened, they replied that they thought it was just information collecting by council. When asked what they meant by consultation, they replied that it was a formal process of asking the whole community about the playground not just the affected neighbourhoods and that if lots of people wanted the playground to stay as it is then this is what would happen. As a result of this understanding, the residents had

started to collect signatures on a petition. It was never council's intention to ask the broader community (P, personal communication, 17 June, 2010).

This situation demonstrated a critical gap in the relationship between the social constructions of the word consultation for the community not only found within the organisation's own policy document but that of the professional practice of managers. Local government managers and the community were never going to intersect at a point of shared understanding when there was such a disparity in the interpretation of words and meaning. This gap not only impacted on the relationship between council and its adult community but as this study found, held further ramifications for young children. It was also this social construction of the word consultation, and its perceived relationship to empowerment and decision making by adults, that impacted on children's image as competent, capable citizens who had a right to be engaged in decisions that impacted on them.

### **Identity and rights: children's worldview**

Children expressed a strong connection to their social identity as children and it was in this role that they vehemently argued their rights to be heard. They felt that they needed to be asked about changes that impacted on them because no one else could experience what it was like to be a child other than children themselves. They felt that by asking adults what children wanted, needed or expected, what would be produced would be adult focused and not child focused. As a result the outcome would not reflect their lived experiences as children as described by Matilda: *cause they would just do what they reckon kids would like and what they used to do when they were little. Things are different now* (C3, 7 December, 2009, p. 2). The children interviewed, aged between eleven and thirteen years, drew an analogy to a recent playground that was constructed with input from children. Most

of the children interviewed commented that it had been built with ideas from children and this made it challenging and fun and child focused, whereas Joseph pointed out that if adults had been asked then it would have been: *safe and small and we'd want something safe but kinda big and fun* (C7, 7 December, 2009, p. 2) and Jai comments: *the playground as an example, if all the adults say what they want it may not be what kids want and they won't like it* (C5, 7 December, 2009, p. 1).

Although children saw themselves as part of their local community: *we're part of the community too. We might just be kids but we deserve the right* (C9, 7 December, 2009, p. 3), there was a sense of the need for equity or fairness by children in comparison to the perceived rights of adults. Children felt that if adults were asked what they thought, then why not ask children what they wanted? Being asked for their opinion reinforced children's sense of belonging and connectedness as Jordan explains: *well it makes me feel part of the community not just the one that just walks around, you're actually part of things* (C9, 7 December, 2009, p. 3). George agreed when asked how it made him feel when council involved children: *you're part of the community and all that and they're listening to you* (C3, 7 December, 2009, p. 2). Children showed an awareness of the challenges that belonging to their social group brought in relation to how they were viewed by adults. Nevertheless, they held a strong desire and perceived it as a right that the benefits that the group could bring to their local community were recognised. Sammy summarised his feelings: *it makes me feel good that I had a say in it and it's for us by us and not for us by parents or by littler kids. It feels good to know that you are the one that actually helped make something fun and exciting* (C7, 7 December, 2009, p. 3).

Being involved in consultations previously had intensified children's sense of belonging and connectedness to their community: *You know the new playground that was designed by children here at the school well they probably feel ecstatic that their imagination has come off and it's really fun for other kids and it*

*probably puts a big smile on their face* (C10, 7 December, 2009, p. 2). Being connected to community is a local phenomenon as it is socially constructed, in place, by individuals and is subject to ebbs and flows as the social world changes: *Children would be so happy that they have contributed to their community.*

Children presented sound rationales as to why they had the right to be heard: *we are part of the community as well and not just older people, we should have a say because we are people too* (C18, 7 December, 2009, p. 1); and: *because they (adults) don't really know what we want unless they ask us and we should know about what things we want to do* (C8, 7 December, 2009, p. 1). Children showed an acute self-awareness of their perceived and desired position within the adult community: *well some people think that it's not really important what the kids think because the adults are what are, like, who are, older and more responsible but yeah they think they control things* (C9, 7 December, 2009, p. 3); and: *children would be so happy that they have contributed to their community* (C22, 7 December, 2009, p. 1).

In addition to children demonstrating a strong sense of identity, they also demonstrated a sound awareness of the role of local government and raised questions about future possibilities: *well some children would like to know about lessons that go on in art space and like with the new pool some of the kids might like to know what council's gonna put in there and yeah have a say with certain ideas and things* (C9, 7 December, 2009, p. 1); and: *council should update kids on the things that are getting built in the town like the pool and the cinema* (C20, 7 December, 2009, p. 1).

## **Identity: children and local government**

The children were able to articulate how they perceived the relationship between children and local government could be strengthened so that children could be seen as active participants in changes that occurred in their local community. Not unlike adults, some of these children aged between eleven and thirteen, showed an awareness of the council being a political organisation with

comments such as: *the political people should let us have a say* (C10, 7 December, 2009, p. 1). There were references to voting when talking about council suggesting that the voting age for children in their local community be dropped to sixteen: *well we live in this community and they're people who run this community so we should have a say. Well people at sixteen know what they want too. It's not really what age just how mature you are* (C10, 7 December, 2009, p. 1). There was also discussion from children about the decision-making powers of council by expressing their desire to pass comment to council about issues that impacted on them: *they should either come to the school or send a survey or something. You can see what ideas they (children) have and you can put down your own ideas to it. And so they can see like what kids want and not want parents want* (C11, 7 December, 2009, p. 3).

These children believed strongly that they were part of the community and had rights in relation to the organisation: *umm, we're part of the community. We might just be kids but we deserve the right* (C9, 7 December, 2009, p. 3); and *it's our right too because we may be kids but adults think they're more powerful than us but they're really not, so yeah* (C7, 7 December, 2009, p. 4); and: *we're important too and we should get a right in everything as well as we are just as much of the community as anybody else, older people, little people or much older people* (C7, 7 December, 2009, p. 4).

Emerging from the children's story writing was, similar to the adult community members, a touch of consumerism and a connection between the role of money and the perceived power with decision making. One child wrote in her story: *we should have a say because we are people too. Sure we don't get money from work but we will one day* (C18, 7 December, 2009, p. 1). Another expressed a connection between money and decision making when he wrote: *we should have a say on what the government money goes to. They should ask our opinion and acknowledge it* (C22, 7 December, 2009, p. 1).

A close association can be formed between narratives of adults with those of the children in this study. Both adult and children community members described a relationship with the organisation that was of a political and bureaucratic nature. The construction of this identity was influenced by their membership with a social group; be it as citizens, consumers or as children. It was their membership to these social groups that impacted on their perceptions, expectations and experiences with the organisation and in the case of children, with the broader community.

## **Conflicting identities of children**

Children clearly related to themselves as being a member of the social group of children. However, when discussing their rights to have input into the changes in their local community, there was a strong desire to also be identified as being part of the social group of community. Data from the surveys revealed that the majority of members of the community felt that children were seen as being part of their local community. However, what varied was the extent that children should be involved in decision making. Whilst children expressed their rights and desires to be consulted on change that impacted on them, this was not shared by the community who felt that children did not have this right as they had: *no understanding of the impacts of their decisions* (ID 2, April 2010, p. 1), and that: *children do not have the knowledge or background. Parents would have a better understanding* (ID 7, April 2010, p. 1).

In contrast, there were community members who agreed that children should have a say as they were part of the community. This was often qualified with an additional statement reflecting the thinking of children being young and not able to make sound decisions: *but being young it would be too difficult for them to know what they wanted* (ID 103, April 2010, p. 1). However, what emerged through the comments on the surveys were words such as: asking, talking with children and holding

conversations. Community members expressed that it was okay to hold conversations with children about their community and to ask children what they thought. This was, however, mixed with other comments that disregarded the value of children's contributions, with one community member thinking it might be: *fun to ask them* (ID 13, April 2010, p. 1). The community conveyed that children's rights to participate in decision making was conditional on it being seen as an informal process of conversation rather than anything formal whereby children had any real influence over the decisions being made. This was oppositional to how children viewed their desired level of involvement.

When looking at the qualitative comments made by community members relating to their understanding of consultation, these ranged considerably depending on their experience with the process. However, their views all involved some level of participation, informing, giving opinions that influence processes and outcomes, showing plans, participating in a formal process, acknowledging mistakes and an expectation of feedback from council to the community. There was an expectation that if the community participated in consultation then there would be a level of influence over the decision-making process. By taking this concept further and considering it in relation to the community's image of the child as not having the level of maturity required to make important decisions: *they are too immature to have a say* (ID 5, April 2010), it helps understand what conversation and consultation means to the community of adults.

### **Identity: managers' worldview of children**

How does this image of the child translate to the cultural setting of local government and to the professionals charged with decision making and ensuring civic participation of all of community? The thinking by adult community members was in vast contrast to managers' beliefs on consulting

with children. When managers were asked if children had a right to be consulted, all managers agreed. It is important to note that these responses may have been influenced by the position of the researcher being the local government's manager of early years although the analysis of the data drew out sound reasons why each manager thought it was a good practice to engage with children.

Eleanor described her thinking based on a recent experience she had: *well, I probably hadn't thought too much about it before you went out and did all your consultation around the playgrounds and then I realised that that was just a really obvious thing to do. I think it's really important because, well, they're members of our community for one thing and they get overlooked a great deal. Just as a sheer practical issue, what children want and like and don't want and don't like influences a lot of what their parents do and don't do. If you get it wrong for the children, you get it wrong for the community* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 16).

Terri's interpretation of engaging with children related to the value of differing perspectives: *I think that's an area we really need to think about because I do believe that the point of view we get from children and young people is often quite different to what we get from adults but is very valid and often can give us a whole new insight which is really important* (T, 5.4.10, p. 14). Sally saw children as future residents and recognised the need for varying perspectives during consultations when asked about children's roles during consultations: *really important. Some of the things you guys have done in early years I think have been really innovative and I think young people, they're the people of tomorrow, they're going to be the residents here. They have a whole different viewpoint that should be brought to consultation* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 9).

There was also the thinking that if council can engage children in the process of consultation then children may grow up to be more involved and connected to their local communities. This was an approach that Tom believed in: *if you can engage these kids at a really early age, it only means you're going to*

*engage more when they're adults and able to make, not better decisions because they can make good decisions as kids too. They talk about it in just about anything, breed them young, just get them in that mindset from an early age that hey, you can have a big influence in your community. The more you're out there and speaking to them the more likely as they grow older they'll continue to have an involvement in the community* (T, 26.7.10, p. 11).

Managers appeared to agree with the concept of children being active participants in council's consultation processes. However, they raised the issue of language and process needing to be adjusted so that the appropriate models of consultation could be undertaken that would allow children to understand and make meaning of the process. When asked if they had undertaken any child consultations, all commented that this was not something that they had entered into as they felt ill equipped to consult with children.

So while managers agreed that children had a right to be consulted, it was not undertaken as part of their professional practice. Whereas adult community members were averse to consulting with children yet agreeable to conversations with children, it could be argued that managers were agreeable to consult as they held a different interpretation to the meaning of consultation than adult community members. This highlights the possibility of the assumption a gap exists in the relationship between the social construction of the word consultation for the community and for managers has merit.

What has emerged from the discussions with adult and child community members are the strong connections they have with the identities they assume. It is through these identities that shared understandings and meaning are developed. In the case of children the absence of a shared

meaning of consultation between adults and children becomes apparent and influenced the relationships between each other and the levels of engagement in decision making.

If the legislated and democratic role of local government is to engage community in civic participation and decision making to affect change, a sustainable practice needs to be developed that results in a change of practice and encapsulates the assumptions, values and principles that the community embraces. This would result in a shift from the traditional, universal engagement model to one where relationships with community would be valued and true partnerships developed through conversations rather than consultations (Cavaye, 2004). Further to the valuing and investing in relationships, this chapter highlights the need for a shared cultural meaning for not only the processes we lead but for the language we use with community. Hierarchies, systems and processes created by an entity of local government develop a bureaucratic approach to community and, as a result, limit the legitimacy and responsibility of engagement outcomes. The challenge is to listen to the voices of the people and together create a new paradigm for not only hearing the many interpretations, including those of children, but engaging for the betterment of the community.

## Synthesis

This chapter started the journey of describing the community context in which local government professionals play out their roles of leaders, decision makers and enablers of community engagement. The identities adult and children community members take on are highly influenced by the relationship each member has with its local government authority and to each other. The history of the organisation is derived from a democratic and governance basis with adults and child

community members developing a relationship with the organisation according to their assumed identities.

Adult community members described a relationship of disillusionment and disempowerment with local government where community agency to make positive change was futile. Even when community members took on the identity of consumers with perceived capitalist power, the bureaucratic nature of local government remained unmoved and unresponsive. There was a great divide between that which was rhetoric and policy regarding consultation and the lived experience of, in particular adult community members.

Uncovered in this chapter was the fragile nature of expectations and meaning when not shared and understood by social groups and identities, including local government. The rationales behind consultation were not clearly understood, with terms and meanings being interchangeable and holding multiple meanings for both community members and council staff. A critical gap was revealed between the social construction of the meaning of consultation for community and that found in both policy and practice of council. This discovery also extended to the conflicting nature of children's identity in the adult world and the perceived rights that accompany this identity. Children viewed themselves as holding dual identities; as contributing community members and as children in their own right. In contrast, adult community members, while acknowledging children as being part of the community, only saw children as immature and vulnerable and as a result placed limitations on children's rights to be heard and participate within their community. While local government managers articulated conflicting views to adult community members on children's rights, this was rhetorical and was not professional practice for these managers.

The community, including children, held definite views of the identity of the organisation that were constructed and supported by formal processes, systems and the organisation's historical relationship to democracy and governance. Community members viewed local government through either a political or economic lens. However, there was a strong sense of entitlement to influence decision making regarding change, whether it is as a citizen or consumer. Although different identities were assumed by community members, expectations on the level of active participation were high. The lived experiences, beliefs, expectations and understandings of the community are all important and set the backdrop for understanding the social contexts in which managers in local government undertake the political process of decision making and facilitation of change.

The next chapter looks at the influence identity has on managers' engagement during the facilitation of change and on their process of decision making. The organisational entity of local government holds a strong focus on structure, systems and processes as these elements reduce variability and strengthen control. Senior management develop strong loyalties with organisations and this can throw up struggles for senior managers when values and beliefs conflict. Delving deep into the hearts and heads of managers exposed the thinking and feelings that confront them while fulfilling their practitioner roles within local government and forms part of the stories in Chapter Five.

## **IDENTITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHANGE**

### **Introduction**

The analysis of data in this research study involved three main cohorts of participants. These cohorts of managers, adult community members and child community members each told a different story about their relationship with the organisation of local government. Stories were impacted on by the experiences and identities of the storytellers and as the identity of each social group unfolded, it was the relationship between the organisation and managers during times of value based conflict that emerged as the most significant influence on their thinking, attitude and behaviour and as a result was one of the most critical loci of interest for the researcher.

The previous chapter described the community's experiences, expectations and their relationship with the local government at the centre of this study. Furthermore, the chapter set out the context in which senior managers undertake decision making to affect and facilitate change. In this chapter, the researcher seeks to gain an understanding of how managers make sense of change that challenges their values and belief systems and why this is critical to their professional and personal identity.

This chapter starts with an analysis of the data relating to the construction of organisational identity by managers and then goes on to explore the influence this identity has on how managers engage during times of change. Managers, like the community, held definite views of the organisation's identity and this in return influenced their attitudes, behaviours and expectations according to their

association with their social group. Furthermore, managers had a strong sense of what they thought was the role of the organisation and the key characteristics that defined and differentiated it from another.

Whilst community members held definite views of the organisation based on their roles as citizens or consumers, managers had a more intimate relationship with the organisation and, as a result their professional identities were cemented firmly in the context of local government. Regardless of the length of time that managers had worked within this local government context, a strong attachment was developed between the organisational identity and that of the managers. The organisation's relationship with the community was seen and experienced as being bureaucratic in nature while managers believed their relationship with the organisation was value based and more intimate.

The extent of the influence of the organisation's identity on managers emerged when it came to change processes that challenged their own values and beliefs. A process of deconstructing and reconstructing realities became evident as managers told their stories about their struggles when unable to align their values and beliefs with those of the organisation during change. This weighed heavily on managers' minds as their attempts to remain authentic were at odds with the change that was to be implemented. Managers expressed their belief that in order to coexist in harmony with the organisation, the value systems of themselves and the organisation must be aligned. Failure of this alignment would result in tension causing stress, burnout and a desire to leave the organisation.

However, when asked about implementing change that went against their value systems, all managers agreed that they would implement the change as instructed. When asked would it affect

how they implemented the change, all agreed that they would implement it as instructed by the organisation.

This chapter concludes with the exploration of the impact of the value based conflict on managers. In an attempt to remain authentic to their perceived shared values and beliefs, managers each underwent processes of reframing the perceived change. Reframing situations in an effort to remain authentic was a key phenomenon strongly aligned with their identities as managers. As a result of its significance, it is given due diligence in this chapter. Following on from this, in Chapter Six, the researcher continues to explore another critical point of interest that emerged through the data analysis of the role that language plays in the critical transmission of meaning within the organisation and out to the broader community.

## **Identity through managers' lenses**

For managers, the role of identity emerged as one of the most influential factors in determining how they faced the challenges presented during the change process. Social identity theory provides a starting point to create an understanding of how identity influences managers' interaction with change within a local government context. Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer (2007) suggest that individuals organise themselves into social groups and tend to associate more closely with groups where there is some emotional and value significance and as a result share the successes and failures of the group. Whilst it was evident in this study that individuals organised themselves into social groups, it was the impact that this close association had on participants' values, beliefs and experiences during change that is explored in this chapter.

Whilst managers described the organisation as a tier of government with bureaucratic systems and processes similar to the community experiences, they interpreted their relationship in vastly different terms to that of the community. As David explained: *there are some differences and those differences are there as relationships to manage in an organisation; out there (in the community), there is a process to manage and there is an outcome to achieve* (D, 24 March, 2010, p. 3). Managers talked about a strong alliance with the organisation and having shared values and beliefs on the role and key characteristics of the organisation. They expressed that the hierarchy of the organisation was necessary for the successful operation of a local government. The organisation was steeped in history and protocols that helped to facilitate democratic processes.

In managers' position descriptions it states that a key leadership role is to, 'motivate and lead staff through the process of organisational, operational and environmental changes' (Schedule 1, position description, August 2011, p. 3). Eleanor believed this to be true: *for certain sorts of things I think that in their leadership role, it's really important for them to be talking about it and showing that they are supportive and embrace it, those sorts of things. So they have a huge capacity to influence how a change is perceived by people. But I think there is a leadership role and it's about setting direction and it's about feeling of alignment and people needing a level of confidence that those at the helm of the ship actually know what they're doing and that there's a plan* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 9).

Some managers felt that the hierarchy enabled the organisation to function in its role as a local government entity and it provided a sense of leadership and control: *I think the structure is fine. What I observe is that there is a lot of power in the CEO, it's a pretty tough gig and a lot of responsibility and leadership in that position and I've seen a few now and that's certainly because of the legislation that recognises the CEO. The structure of local government is that the community funnels through the councillors, the councillors funnel through the*

*CEO and the CEO out to the rest of the organisation* (R, 15 December, 2009, p. 10). Ewan's words added to this thinking by saying that: *the leaders at the top have an obligation to push the council party line. They have a stronger obligation than I have. They are really at the highest level and then it dilutes on the way down. The CEO has got to be pushing and driving the hardest. The organisational structure makes it a walk in the park. So you've got three directors, it's pretty straight forward, the message is clear, I don't have to tell four people only three and they only have to tell three or four* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 11).

To these managers the hierarchy of the organisation represented the rules by which people in leadership positions played and offered stability, and efficiencies throughout the organisation. Furthermore, Anderson (2012) suggests that hierarchical organisations are more likely to be drawn to systems approaches in the business environment as this offers the belief that systems are commonly alike, are predictable and therefore can be controlled.

## **The workplace environment**

The very environment of structures, systems and strict protocols reinforced the bureaucratic nature of the organisation for managers. Part of the reinforcement of this organisational identity was the processes and language that were unique to the context of local government. Processes that were encased in protocol were very much a part of this organisation's operations. Processes such as decision making needed to move through a hierarchy of control points prior to a decision being ratified. Managers were aware of these processes and the relationship of these to the governance of the organisation as these processes were very much a part of their immediate context and professional practice. Deloras explained how systems, processes and protocols informed her about her role as a manager: *becoming familiar with all aspects, understanding procedure, processes, protocols, service agreements as they presented and undertaking system views were important to gain an understanding of my role*

*within council* (D, personal communication, 23 January, 2011). These processes were known, formalised and consistently followed closely by staff with actions and outcomes clearly documented as Ewan described: *the org structure, CEO, directors, processes, makes it clear, definitive, non-confused, very direct. The more bureaucratic structure rather than a flatter structure. I think the more bureaucratic style, unless someone stuffs the whole sentence incorrectly, it should be coming down pretty straightforward* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 13).

## The use of language

The use of specific authoritative and uniformed language was strongly connected with the organisation's identity as a local government and appeared to be understood in practice by managers. Words such as resolution, ratified, strategic, systems views, operational, fiscal, representatives and ratepayers all appeared to have the same language meaning to managers as it closely mirrored their lived working experiences. This language was all shared by managers in everyday conversations and in the narratives they gave during the interviews, and through this social sharing appeared to contribute to managers' construction of their professional identity. This would suggest that the meaning of this organisational language was strongly situational or held in place by the very context of local government. This aspect is further developed in Chapter Six.

## Decision making

Many of the managers talked about the organisation needing to make decisions for the good of the whole community or organisation and that, due to the hierarchy that existed, not all the information relating to decision making was available to managers or the community. There were also comments relating to the organisation setting the strategic direction for the community and that there needed to be systems and processes to ensure decisions made were consistent with this

direction. Managers talked about: *pushing the party line* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5) and looking through an organisational lens not a personal one: *so you're responsible for making sure that your department's views are put forward but also that you see as a wider organisation what's happening. It may be detrimental to your department but good for the wider organisation. You need to be able to think from the organisation's point of view. What's best for the organisation* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 4). Ryan used stronger language when describing how managers needed to put their faith in the organisation by referring to this process as: *submitting to the organisation* (R, 15 December, 2009, p. 5).

Managers' beliefs about how they perceived the organisation was evident in their narrative descriptions. As an institution of democracy, managers related positively to the organisation's traits and were willing to put a lot of trust in the organisation. What became more obvious as experiences and thoughts transpired throughout the conversations was the extent that the organisational identity influenced the development of managers' own professional identities.

## **Identity: the influence on manager development**

This ever changing workplace of local government has a significant number of people who identify as being part of specific professional groups such as councillors, executive, managers, team leaders and down to individual team members. The contextual environment of local government and the hierarchy reinforced managers' status. The protocols that existed within the organisation such as managers' meetings, delegated powers, their relationship with executive and councillors and their perceived influence over decision making within the organisation all worked to confirm their roles as managers. Further reinforcing their apparent status, the employee handbook defines managers' roles in decision making as having corporate significance as opposed to team leaders who communicate on matters affecting the operations of the organisation. Managers took seriously

their roles and responsibilities and understood and supported protocols within the organisation.

They knew where they fitted into the system and they trusted the system.

Pratt, Rockman and Kaufman (2006) describe professional identity as the active construction of managers' identity in the workplace context where models and stories of managers are defined and redefined as they transition over time and new managers emerge. This description is reflective of managers in this study as affirmed by Ewan's belief that his role as a manager continued to evolve over time in response to the ever changing environment of local government: *the constant in there is knowing that change is ever present, so it is there. Knowing if you want to stay—I don't even want to use the word up to date—but knowing that you've stayed marketable, viable, then you have to keep up to date with that change* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 10). The organisational structure provided managers with an opportunity to be part of a management team. This provided a sense of authenticity and confirmed their role as managers as well as a sense of camaraderie with others. Managers were diverse in their backgrounds, experience and time in local government, some from technical and some from social backgrounds. However, their membership to this group allowed them: *to be supportive of each other, willing to share and not be as competitive* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 27). Serena strongly believed that her membership in this group influenced her development as a manager as she: *watched other managers, particularly those who I think are good operators and asking them lots of questions about what they would do in a particular situation, observing them at work* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 14).

The managers in this study felt a connection with the organisational identity and believed they shared similar values and beliefs which influenced their self-conceptions and behaviours. When discussing her values in relation to the organisation, Andrea recounted that: *all the values are consistent with mine* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 15). She went on to say: *the organisation has very clear, strong and effective*

*values and these are being reflected in my behaviour. Makes me think about things in ways that I haven't thought about them before* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 15).

Although managers expressed a connection to the organisation, they felt the organisational identity was stronger at influencing their behaviours during change due to the expectations by the organisation on the role of managers in affecting change. Position descriptions stated motivating and leading and assisting staff through change, being flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, having a demonstrated ability to manage effectively with a high degree of flexibility within a changing environment, and being able to gain cooperation, persuade, convince and negotiate. However, what emerged throughout the managers' stories were descriptions that were socially constructed by managers relating to: 'trying to please' and 'priding yourself', 'working to a professional standard' and then 'fear of losing your job' and 'disciplinary repercussions'. All managers expressed a strong affiliation with their professional identities as managers or as leaders and had a shared understanding of the role of managers during the change process.

## **Change**

The literature review discusses a leader's role as being able to apply his/her beliefs and philosophy to real life situations and being able to back strong beliefs with plans of actions. As a result, beliefs and values are demonstrated and strengthened by actions and behaviours being congruent to each other, demonstrating authenticity (Vannini & Williams, 2009). As the stories unfolded, it became apparent that managers were most challenged when faced with the situation of demonstrating actions and behaviours that were in conflict with their values and beliefs.

## **Identity and change**

Managers strongly believed that their role was to champion change, understand the impacts and then motivate staff to believe in it. Even when managers disagreed with the change, there was consensus that they must present a united front to staff as Deloras described: *there can't be seen from a leadership point of view a potential for someone to put a wedge in between the decision makers and then make the wedge wider because what that will do is impact on the higher level leaders and their relationships* (D, 15 January, 2010, p. 7).

Managers believed they had a serious role in leading change and in ensuring that they supported and led the change for the organisation as Eleanor believed: *my role as a manager in the organisation is to be positive about change and to support the organisation through change* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 4). Managers also felt that they had the responsibility to: *have the debate* (D, 15 January, 2010, p. 7) and to get all the information from executive so that they could try and understand all the potential impacts of the change on staff and the community.

There was a belief that staff were influenced by managers in their thinking and attitudes and that managers' roles were to lead, monitor and get the job done regardless of whether they agreed with the change or not. Eleanor believed that managers' behaviours and attitudes impacted on the morale of others in the organisation: *as one of the management team, I think how we behave, what we say, what we don't say, really has a very powerful impact through the rest of the organisation. So I think it's my responsibility to act and speak well to the extent that that's possible at all times. Because I think you can drag people down* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 6). She felt that managers had so much more contact with staff than others in the organisation and that people: *are very influenced by them* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 7). This

important role of managers was echoed amongst other managers interviewed who believed that they were the conduit from which information flowed between the decision makers and the staff.

### **Contradictory tension of change**

The contradictory tension that emerged from the data was that managers strived to demonstrate to staff their authenticity and commitment to change. Managers thought that staff were influenced by their behaviours and thinking. At the same time, managers were internally fighting to reconcile the changes with their value systems in order to emerge authentically and provide leadership for staff.

The managers held strong beliefs about what their relationships with staff should entail. They spoke about having more intimate relationships with them, being prepared to advocate staff's views to executive and councillors to ensure that staff were well represented. They spoke about their challenges with trying to support staff through some decisions that they felt would impact on them, to become less transparent and honest than they would like to be: *I'm a fairly compliant person in that my expectation is that here is my job and I don't always like it. But sometimes have to do it. But I'm also an honest person and so if rolling out that change people were coming to me with issues and concerns, it would be really difficult for me to keep pushing the party line or not engage with that person's concerns and take them seriously. So I guess to some extent I would end up in the position of trying to sort of negotiate to a win-win* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5).

However, managers thought that they were being authentic in the way they perceived their role in supporting staff through change. In a way, their authenticity was constituted by their relationship and interaction with their staff. They wanted to be leaders and: *you've got to be an example. I think your actions speak louder than words* (D, 24 March, 2010, p. 8), encourage innovation and reflect behaviours

that were congruent with their values and those of the organisation. Kasey reflected on this point to say: *if I'm not championing it and motivating the staff, the risk of that change not being implemented to its ability, you'll then create negativity within the team and they might reject the change. So I think it's very important that I motivate, I clearly understand the change so I can pass that on through down to the team* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 6).

This behaviour of managers to motivate and act in authentic ways with staff mirrors closely Vannini and Williams' (2009) reflection on authenticity in that it was 'found in volitional acts unfolding in problematic situations and more precisely in those acts which index the self's motivation to feel and act in congruence with personal values' (p. 4). They go on to say that authenticity is 'central to self-functioning, to meaning formation, and to individual and collective motivation' (p. 4). Whilst managers aligned themselves strongly to the identity of the organisation and to their professional group, the extent of this loyalty was tested when it came to value based considerations relating to change. The next section explores the ethical considerations and implication of this alignment when managers were asked about the implementation of change that ethically challenged them.

## **Attitudes to change**

Overall, change was seen as an integral part of the context in which local government operated, with Andrea commenting that change was needed in local government if it was to be responsive to the changing political landscape and changing community needs: *it's very much a part of local government. That comes from different policies being pushed down onto local government from state government. There's always different funding programs; there's different pressures from community about expectations on what council does* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 13). Kasey held strong beliefs that change was necessary in ensuring

viability and in the development of sound work practices: *we have to be open to change, we have to be creative and innovative with our programming. So therefore, if we weren't we're going to be left behind. If you're not in touch with say correct planning principles you could not only put at risk your community but commercial operators as well* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 5).

Ewan felt that the motivator for change varied from person to person whereas it might be job satisfaction, job security or remaining marketable and relevant to the organisation: *so to that guy it isn't money, job satisfaction might get him over the line. It's picking those right levers, I suppose, that will help people say, yeah that's the motivator and that drives the change mentally and knowing that you've stayed marketable, viable, then you have to keep up with change* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 3). He went on to say that: *I'm believing that innovation is good, change is generally good* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 10). Each manager agreed that in local government change was inevitable with Ewan summing up that in local government: *the only one constant in local government is change* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 1).

However, what emerged from the conversations with managers was the conflict and tension that arose for them personally and from within the organisation when change was not affected well and when change occurred that challenged managers' value and belief systems. When talking to the managers about organisational decisions that challenge their belief systems, it emerged that managers undertook a process of cognitively reframing situations in order to align their values with that of the organisation's as well as preserve a sense of authenticity.

## **Identity: surrendering to the organisation**

When faced with the dilemma of change that challenged their belief systems, managers undertook a series of deconstructing and reconstructing their realities in an attempt to try and make meaning

of the new practice being implemented and to understand the implications of the change on their roles as managers. All of the managers interviewed agreed that if asked to implement change that was strongly against their value system and beliefs, they would implement the change. All commented that they would first attempt to advocate for their point of view to be considered. However, if a decision was made that was oppositional to their values, they would still do as directed and implement the change. When asked how they then were able to reconcile their behaviour with their values, what became evident through the stories they told was that they entered into a process that worked to reconcile internally the disconnect between the organisation's values and their own. There were three themes that emerged relating to these processes that allowed managers to reframe a situation that was causing an ethical dilemma. By changing the meaning, function and context of the change, managers were able to reshape the complicated task of value alignment to a point where this could be achieved and there could be acceptance of the change.

## **Changed meaning**

Managers each had varying levels of experience with change within the local government sector. However, all had experienced situations where their values and belief systems were challenged by decisions that involved changing a known element. Their role as managers within the local government context meant that they were often active participants in change processes rather than passive recipients or observers of change. During these times, their role as managers was often compounded by the influence of the organisation's identity on their behaviours and thinking. Intricate networks within the managers' social group tightly connected managers together where a narrow and predictable range of behaviours was expected by the organisation and of each other.

Managers referred to these shared behaviours and thinking as the groups ‘trademarks’ where team rules were expected to be followed and individualisation was discouraged.

Managers strived to make meaning of these challenges as they constructed and reconstructed them mentally and emotionally. The organisational ‘realities’ of the change were interpreted individually by managers and then negotiated through a number of either social and/or cognitive interactions including any similar experiences they may have had previously. Eleanor’s story was one at times of struggle as she worked to embrace a sense of authenticity emphasising that: *it’s the stuff that keeps me awake at night if it happens, because the value stuff is really important* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 4).

Some managers went through a process of trying to convince themselves that their values were much closer to those of the organisation by attempting to reduce the perceived discrepancies that faced them. Eleanor asserted that she strived in: *getting to a level of comfort about it* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 4) by talking to the executive or the director about the change to try and somehow ‘frame’ it so there was a degree of comfort about supporting the change. She attempted: *talking about it to gain a sense of comfort and meaning and try to elicit a win-win situation* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5). There was a need to negotiate this win-win situation in order to: *keep pushing the party line* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5). In expressing the dilemma, she would experience she went on to say: *that would be the most comfortable I could probably get with that kind of dilemma and I’ve done that before because I think once your personal values don’t align with the organisational values you just have ongoing conflict* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5). There was a strong need for Eleanor to bring together the contrasting values between herself and the organisation in order to strengthen her belief in the organisation’s decision-making process and bring about a sense of inner peace.

When Ewan answered that he would implement a change that was against his value system, his struggles with authenticity were evident and immediate when he followed on from his admission asking himself: *so how could I fix that up in my mind? How do I get over my beliefs and values then? With some circumspection and determine what are the issues that I can't negotiate. You have to revisit some of the things about where your values are etc. You have to do that. Maybe you could come to some different view in your mind. Because you may have your views determined by factors that you haven't really thought well enough and it could well be the sort of there's another half a dozen things you don't know about, and you don't know what you don't know. That may well get you over the line* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 5). Ewan also interpreted change as a fluid construction whereby he said that: *in local government the only one constant is change* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 1) and went on to talk about the need to reinvent yourself and keep yourself marketable, and a viable option as change occurred within local government if you saw local government as a long term employment option. He talked about being adaptable to change and having to re-examine and realign your values to that of the organisation as it evolved over time.

### ***Missing pieces of information***

Ryan really appeared to struggle with a recent decision that resulted in significant change within the organisation. His attempts to make sense of the change occurred on a number of levels as the conversation unfolded: *clearly if there is difference in a belief system, umm, I don't always think that it is the responsibility of the organisation to umm deal with it. Such as it would be more a question for the individual and if umm, if I had a problem with the values espoused within the organisation, umm, I mean I choose to work here therefore I choose to submit to the system the way things happen here and as long as I allow myself to make those choices and submit to that choice then things are fine* (R, 15 December, 2009, p. 5). In saying that, he continued on trying to reconstruct a new meaning of the situation and argued that: *the way I've come to deal with it is to recognise that I don't see the full picture; I only see what I see and it isn't necessarily the full*

*picture, umm it isn't, so therefore if I knew the whole picture I would agree with it* (R, 15 December, 2009, p. 7).

He talked about this thinking somehow changing his viewpoint and bringing him to understand the reasoning behind the implementation of this significant change. This was a change that he knew would have consequences on him personally. However, he proceeded to say he: *thought that the decision was a wrong decision but I can now understand how it might be a good decision. Really gotta respect the decision that has been made and do the best you can to implement it* (R, 15 December, 2009, p. 7).

Ryan was not alone with this thinking as many other managers also felt that if they had all the information about why the change was occurring then this would change the storyline and align better with the organisational values and actions. The absence of information or purpose of the change gave managers the opportunity to modify the meaning of the change to fit the storyline they were most comfortable with: one that did not conflict with their own beliefs and values. Another suggested that: *there must be information I am not privy to that makes the decision right* (D, 24 March, 2010, p. 5). There was a sense of trusting the executive team and the chief executive officer and that they wouldn't make decisions that were not aligned to the organisation's values and therefore not against managers' values: *you need to be open and say, well there's got to be a reason. If these guys are hell bent on doing something, they are not stupid people, presumably, so there's got to be a logic to it* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 6). When asked why he thought this, he replied that it was because he felt that his value base matched that of the organisations and: *my view would be there's got to be a rationale* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 6). There was a strong desire for managers to believe that the organisation's value system and their own were aligned.

### ***For the good of the whole***

The restructuring of managers' thinking processes took on a different guise with one manager in particular. Kasey thought through the change that challenged her values and downplayed the impact on her personal values and accentuated the perceived impact on others. She felt that just because the change impacted on her value system, this may not be true for the majority of others involved and therefore it may be for the good of the whole or good for the organisation. She spoke about the need to keep an open mind to others as she talked about being aware of potential repercussions for a lot of other people outside her individual value system if she failed to implement change as instructed: *I think you need to be open minded and go, well what is actually the greater impact going to be; whether it's on the community, whether it's on another internal unit and you've got to consider that* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 4).

However, there was also a strong link to her professional identify as a manager that would also influence her thinking and behaviours to engage in practices that were typically expected of managers: *certainly you often pride yourself on what you do and what you deliver to a professional standard so if you're not delivering something to the standard of management, I think that would come into play that you would fear how it would be seen. You are always trying to please and do the best you can but if you didn't implement it to the way management wanted also you risk the project potentially falling over and there could be repercussions for a lot of other people outside of my individual values and views* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 4).

### ***Renegotiation of values***

The struggles continued with one manager believing that it was her values that needed renegotiation and she needed to keep an open mind to the needs of others. Terri said that she

would examine her values to see: *is it a negotiable thing or not, can I line my value system up with that of the organisation in a way that does not counteract each other* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 5).

The process of being an active participant in a change process that conflicted with personal values and beliefs led Teri into an internal process of negotiation with her recounting a recent experience: *this has happened so I can think through this. For me personally it would be going back to well what is it that's rubbing against my values and is that a negotiable thing or not. If it's not, at what point can I personally live with that tension* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 5). This attempt to reconcile perceived opposing values appeared to trigger an awareness of self as she attempted to evaluate her values against the organisations'. She demonstrated a struggle to remain authentic to her values while also trying to reconcile these with those of the organisation.

While managers struggled to make sense of the tension they were presented with by the change, for some, added tensions emerged. Three managers spoke about the fear of losing their jobs or disciplinary repercussions if they did not implement the change and that this compounded the dilemma for them and influenced their willingness to implement the change. So not only was there an internal struggle with authenticity but a multiplying effect of fear that heightened managers' awareness of the situation. All managers spoke about the tensions that existed when instructed on the implementation of a change with which they were not in agreement. For them, some sort of reconciliation was necessary to enable them to stay committed to the organisation.

The analysis of these stories would suggest that managers went through a number of processes until the situation could be internally reframed, deconstructed and reconstructed until the meaning or purpose of the change altered to a point where acceptance and alignment of values could be

achieved. However, this posed problems for managers if this process failed. Situated very soundly within their identities as managers, was an expectation that they would implement change as directed once a decision was made. In order to facilitate these actions with a degree of authenticity, managers again altered the change from a social function involving ethics and people to a purely task function.

### **From consciousness to function**

Changing the landscape of the change from a social function to a task appeared to be the fall back plan for managers if they failed to mutually shape their own values with that of the organisations'. When the researcher asked what if they couldn't reconcile values systems, there was widespread justification of implementing the change due to it being their job. In order to manage the tension that exists when implementing change that managers felt did not align with their value base, the justification for their behaviour was related to their identities as managers or leaders.

These identities held a certain expectation of the behaviours that would be displayed when summoned by the executive to implement change. That was their role and this changed the meaning of what was being asked to a function that needed to be performed and not a value that needed to be consciously challenged to remain true to oneself. Andrea has resigned herself to the fact that sometimes you just had to implement the change because: *that's the decision that's made and you work for an organisation. If everybody said their personal opinion about things that were going on I don't think we'd get very far at all. So I think sometimes you just have to suck it up and get on with what's—if it's what the majority of people have determined is best for the organisation then you need to do that* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 6).

While Deloras argued that she would seek further clarification in an attempt to change minds, she would however implement the change as directed citing that she held no agency over the decision because: *at the end of the day it is our job to umm to carry out the organisation's wishes. But if I didn't feel comfortable doing that initially I would have to voice my reasons why and then they might take on board some of those reasonings and make some changes but they may not and at the end of the day if I am directed to do something I've got to do it* (D, 15 January, 2010, p. 5-6).

This thinking was common amongst managers as supported by Serena when asked if she would implement the change as directed and she explained: *yes, yes I would. If I—I wouldn't do it without arguing my point though, it's not in my nature to just accept that that's just the best thing for us. I would sort of say well what about this or try and come up with alternatives. But I wouldn't go kicking and screaming either. I mean there comes a point where you have to accept change and even though you may not get your own way, you have to implement it because that's your role unfortunately at times* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 3). Although there appeared self-awareness with many managers using phrases such as: not normally compliant, it's not in my nature and I'm an honest person; there also appeared awareness that these characteristics were not always enough to influence change at this level once a decision was made.

This shift in the meaning of function, allowed managers to move the change from a value based phenomenon to something wholly inconsequential. Their management response was one of denial that kept intact their reputation as a good manager and displayed their loyalty to the organisation. By not challenging the culture in which the managers were embedded allowed them to reconstruct an ethically challenging change into a functional task and as a result ward off any responsibility for the outcome. This enables managers to remove the social or people element and give a greater

scope for managers to remain authentic and true to their stated beliefs but inadvertently succumb to the organisation's identity.

### ***The use of language***

Language used by managers changed from a social construction whereby they recalled experiences and talked about how they felt, their values, and beliefs in more formalised language that described their function and expectations as managers as explained by Eleanor: *I'm a fairly compliant person in that my expectation is that here is my job and I don't always like it. But I have to do it* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 5). When recalling a recent experience, Ewan added to this thinking that decision makers are paid to do a job: *there's a boss and you need a chief and you need Indians, so you need some decision making stuff. I'm not the strongest supporter for the group think. There's no doubt that group consultations have some merit. But you pay people to be managers, leaders, etc., so, nah, so they say, we're going back to three managers and that's it* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 4).

Andrea said that she would implement the change; however, the non-alignment of values would impact on how she implemented it. She felt that her communication of the change to other staff would clearly be affected and therefore staff would feel her lack of commitment to the change. She felt that this would affect their commitment to the change and how authentically it was implemented: *you wouldn't be passionate about it. If you believed in something you'd be really passionate. You'd be able to sell it to people. To have someone putting a change onto you that you can see doesn't believe in it makes you not believe in it as a staff member. So as a manager I would find it difficult to do because I would worry that I wasn't coming across that I supported it. Therefore the staff wouldn't support it* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 5). So although she would follow instruction, her ability to lead the change would be impaired.

However, in order to reconcile this action with her values, she also underwent a reframing process as she went on to explain how she then adapts her thinking and reasoning to achieve a sense of authenticity and alignment to the organisation: *being a leader's not always about doing what you believe in. I think if you've had opportunity to have input into it, you've been able to maybe change a few things or you've had your opinion heard and that's still the decision that's made. Well that's the decision that's made and you work for an organisation* (A, 29 July, 2010, pp. 6–7). Andrea referred to the context as being a political environment and decisions needed to be made for the good of the whole. Andrea put forth a rationale that managers needed to try and look through an organisational lens whereby it may be detrimental to your department but better for the organisation as a whole.

What was common with managers was the awareness that change was often brought about by forces outside the immediate context of local government. While these types of changes may have challenged managers' values, there was a general belief that these types of changes occurred outside their circle of influence and was less of a challenge to their sense of authenticity.

## **Contextual change**

As indicated previously, managers related strongly to the organisational identity and saw it as a complex entity of governance, hierarchy, protocols and relationships with citizens. Although only intermittently, it emerged in the discussions that the political environment in which local government operates often resulted in change. This was due to the political sensitivity of an issue or of a Commonwealth or state legislative or policy change. Managers felt that they had very little influence or opportunity for engagement over this type of change. These types of changes left managers feeling less conflict between their own values and that of the organisations' as they were less able to influence these types of legislative and government policy changes.

It was in this realm that managers talked about decisions that were made for the good of the whole or the best for the organisation, therefore, in the best interests of the community. As a result, by reframing the issue to a political paradigm or context they were better able to make sense of the change and feel a sense of authenticity. Again managers changed the decision making landscape from a social environment to a political one. Through this change managers could assume the role of a passive observer of change rather than a driver.

This passage of conversations with managers highlighted the absence of any prior alignment of values between managers and the community. If managers were there to serve the community, then it would be reasonable to assert that understanding what the community wanted, valued and understood would be a fundamental first step in developing a meaningful relationship with their constituents. It would also be fair to say that managers should share an understanding of who makes up the community they serve; what does each neighbourhood look like, what does it feel like to live there, what are the challenges, what are the opportunities, what is important and what are their stories?

However, it would appear that managers are compliant to the organisation's identity in that they do not seek to question whether the organisation's values are aligned with that of the community. Although extensive community consultations are undertaken as part of the council plan process and the plan itself outlines the vision and values of the community, there appears an absence of robust discussion or reflection on whether actions and behaviours are authentically aligned with these values. The political landscape further removed managers from hearing the stories of their community of interest.

When looking closely at the cognitive processes that were transpiring during the process of change, the managers were able to transform their own identity equipped with values and beliefs to align with the organisation's belief system through a process of transformation that involved meaning change, political contextual change and functionality change resulting in an outcome of deconstruction and reconstruction of their reality. It was through this process of reframing that tensions were managed and identity alignment was further reinforced by the organisation. It was at this point that when reflecting back to David's assumption that: *there are some differences and those differences there are relationships to manage in an organisation; out there (in the community), there is a process to manage and there is an outcome to achieve* (D, 24 March, 2010, p. 3), it became clear that community existed in the minds of managers as a system that needed to be managed rather than a relationship that needed to be invested in and valued.

## Synthesis

This chapter explored the role that identity plays in influencing the engagement of managers during the change process. Emerging strongly from the data was the significant influence the organisational identity had on managers. Managers had developed a unified professional identity that was socially constructed by their continued interactions with the hierarchy, systems and processes that existed within the organisation. It was this relationship with the organisation that gave status, surety and provided membership to a professional group. It also posed the biggest challenge for managers when conflict emerged between their values and beliefs and those of the organisation. Managers struggled with their desire to remain loyal to the organisation but at the same time not compromise their own sense of authenticity. These findings indicate that managers went through a process of cognitive restructuring or reframing of situations in a struggle to remain authentic in their own right yet faithful to the organisation.

There was common consensus with managers that change was an inevitable part of the local government environment, and to be responsive to both governmental and social change, managers needed to be open to change. Managers saw their role as being a champion of change and to lead by example in an effort to move change forward and deliver on the outcomes for the organisation while simultaneously struggling to make meaning of conflicting situations. Of interest was the absence of managers questioning if the organisation's values reflected those of the community considering it is the community that managers have a responsibility to support and engage. Further to this, the reframing process made way for a more systematic approach to dealing with value based conflict and further removed the community to the outer periphery of managers' thinking.

The development of identities and the relationship to change provides a platform from which to build the next chapter. During this study, the role of language converged with the role of identity in a permanent and consequential influence on engagement of managers during change. It is through social interchange in each of these relationships with local government that gives language its capacity to mean. Therefore, it must also be seen as the critical point at which meaning can be lost and, as a result, forms the focus of Chapter Six.

## Chapter 6

### **IDENTITY: TRANSLATIONS AND LANGUAGE MEANING**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter explored the relationship between identities and the influence that this membership had on roles, expectations and belief systems during change. This chapter reveals that as language meaning emerged as another significant influence on the engagement of managers during change, the concept of identity still held a strong presence.

While this local government's 'Communication and Engagement' policy (Name of council<sup>2</sup>, 2009) in rhetoric sets the path for a clear and shared understanding of the engagement processes during change, that data from this study revealed that the lived experiences unmasked the synchronous weakness of such policy. This specific policy sets out a range of narrow and predictable behaviours with a dependency on the knowable and is not flexible in its approach to the unknown or unknowable. What appears absent from both policy and practice is not only a shared understanding of the key processes but a shared meaning of the language that is associated with these processes that translate into lived experiences by the participants.

Throughout this study the role that language plays in the facilitation of change within a local government context permeated as one of the indicators of success or failure and as a result is the focus of this chapter. With all three participant cohorts, adult and child community members, and

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<sup>2</sup>Name has been omitted to protect the anonymity of the organisation

managers, language played a critical role in determining the extent of involvement people believed would occur during the change process. It was clear from the responses of all three cohorts that the role language played was anchored strongly in an interpretative paradigm.

From here there emerged conflicting interpretations of language that were informed by the subjective nature of the varying interpreters. The interpretation of language used was strongly connected to the social reality of the people undergoing change. As a result people had socially constructed their own meaning of specific dialogical processes and terms, either collectively as a social group or as individuals.

## **Identity and the right to participate**

There are many forms of literature that cite the rights of citizens to be engaged in decisions that impact on their lives such as the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, 1989) and the *Local Government Act of Victoria* (1989). Employee rights to be consulted are generally covered within internal documents such as the council's 'Communication and Engagement' policy (Name of council<sup>3</sup>, 2009) or under an enterprise bargaining agreement with specific clauses relating to employee consultation during change.

In all three cohorts, there was a belief by each one that they had a right to be involved in change processes that impacted on them and the perceived level of this involvement was connected to the identity group that each participant cohort belonged. For the community, the authenticity of this engagement, however, varies widely and is dependent on social justice and collective methods of

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<sup>3</sup> Name has been omitted to protect the anonymity of the organisation

engaging citizens in processes where mutual trust and social cohesion are pivotal to achieving just outcomes (Williamson, 2002).

While managers' rights to be consulted were officially aligned to the internal documents or policies, the reality was that they were often the conduit by which change that was decided at a higher level was translated and driven down into the coalface of council staff and community. Identified in the previous chapter, managers' rights to be consulted are also defined by the willingness of managers to exercise their rights and authentically engage with the process, take risks and challenge the ideologies of others. This chapter looks closely at how managers interpret the rights of those they lead in the change process and the impact on relationships when a gap exists between these interpretations, values and policy.

## **Policy rhetoric versus practical interpretations**

This particular local government had developed a communication and engagement strategy that set out the importance of key processes and definitions of communication and engagement for use with the community. However, when speaking to the managers about their understanding and experience of engagement, consultation and related key processes, this differed widely across the organisation. There were differing interpretations of engagement and consultation and as a result differing views of what people should or shouldn't experience. It was felt that there was an overuse of the word 'consultation' both internally within the organisation and out into the broader community, as Andrea states: *people get over consulted with things* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 8). There was confusion with what 'consultation' meant and what it looked like when implemented. Managers felt that consultations meant something different to not only staff but the community as Tom

recounts: *so there is a real difference between what they think that they're getting and what we think we're giving* (T, 26 July, 2010, p. 12).

Managers all displayed varying interpretations of words associated with the consultation process as David described his understanding as: *where you tell somebody you are looking for input* (T, 26 July, 2010, p. 7), however, reinforcing the confusion relating to the meaning of these words he went on to say that: *we should go out with an engagement strategy not a consultation strategy I think at the start, and then once the decision is made then you consult and tell them. When you consult there is some scope to move I think, but not a lot. When you engage it's an open book, you just tell us what you want and we'll take it from there* (T, 26 July, 2010, p. 10). Ewan's interpretation of consultation was slightly similar in that: *consultation is basically giving them the information and I don't know how many times you can bounce it around. I don't know the answer to that* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 7). David shared his interpretations as he spoke about his experiences in the past he suggests that: *consultation is more than just here we're going to tell you what the decision is. To me it's we haven't made a decision, here's the outcome we want to achieve, help us achieve that particular outcome. So to me consultation is taking people on a journey. Information is telling people what you've decided and I think the terms are often confused* (D, 24 March, 2010, p. 2).

The variations in the understanding of council's own engagement processes continued when the researcher asked Teri's thoughts on whether her staff were clear on the differences between consulting, informing, engaging, empowering and involving. She proceeded to point out: *I think my team kind of represents the rest of the organisation. It's very patchy. Although we all give lip service to it, in practicality there are different levels of understanding of how that actually should work, or could work. If I say we'll consult with the community, to me that means if I go to consult with the community about what colour a swing should*

*be, I'd go out and ask them what colour would you like, some of my team would go out and say would you like red or blue* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 12).

Although the policy document was written generically, its application was to a multiple and diverse audience. It was through these multiple realities that varying interpretations were applied and what resulted was a myriad of different meanings and understandings of the processes of change. Managers felt that the meaning of consultation needed to be co-constructed in a way with both community members and staff in order to build a shared language repertoire within the context of local government and its community.

## **Lost in translation**

Whilst the community expressed uncertainty on what their role was during the process of consultation and had experienced differing levels of participation, managers were much more critical of the consultation processes held internally and externally. There were widespread variances in the meaning of the word consultation. Some managers agreed that the process of consultation was the same if it was an internal or external process. Some argued that it was a different process internally as the relationship was different between the council and their staff in comparison to the council and the community. The relationship was more intimate with staff and the effect of change more immediate. It was felt that there were too many histories and different realities within the community and the message could be received in too many different ways due to the size and diversity of the community, while it was felt that council staff shared an organisational reality and: *externally it's quite difficult because there isn't that pre-knowledge but there's usually a lot of pre-judgment. People come from all over the place; again there are different histories and different realities. Here we can give a message and it's going to be fairly consistently received. We go out to the community and we give a*

*consistent message but it's received in ten or fifteen, a million different ways so that's quite difficult* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 13).

While council managers all agreed that the community, including children had a right to be consulted, their understanding of what this looked and felt like in practice, varied from just being informed and having conversations through to implementing some of the community's ideas. Managers expressed that they were unclear of the process of consultation and felt that the community was just as confused as they were. They felt that when council says that it will consult with the community there is not a shared understanding of what that meant. Although there was a strategy that guided staff on how to consult, local government staff had attached their own meaning to the language that was used throughout the strategy document.

### **Impact on community relationships**

For managers, the impact of differing understandings of consultation, seen as a key process of change, was wide reaching and affected the relationship that council had with its community. The meaning of consultation for some managers was constructed from experiences that they had previously with community members. Many had experienced consultations that went badly with the community and felt that they have each entered into the forum with different expectations, interpretations and views of how the consultation was to be played out in practice.

Managers felt that these types of experiences built mistrust and animosity between the community and council staff with one manager conveying that if one department had a bad experience with a community member then often the future relationship between that community member and council, regardless of the department, was strained: *I think it probably brings about a lack of trust. I think*

*if the community's expecting some sort of change and then it's different they don't trust what council's done. Even though there might be a process behind it. Community expectations can be completely different to what we think they're going to be. Yeah, I think trust would be the main impact and that spreads to other departments. If it's one department that they worked with and that spreads within each one. That they've had one bad experience with one department and they view it as all of council* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 9).

Managers commented that the language council managers used was often confusing for the community with Andrea stressing that: *they just want to know how it's going to affect them in their language. I think we talk about too many technical decisions and terms. People get confused so then they don't understand what their involvement might be in something. Then they find out later that whatever they said wouldn't have mattered anyway or that they didn't understand exactly what they were being asked* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 8). It was this absence of a shared meaning that not only impacted on its authentic implementation in practice but caused tension between managers and the community.

These negative experiences combined to create an environment where some managers were apprehensive or didn't see the value in consulting with community, with Eleanor sharing concerns she had heard throughout the organisation that: *there's a concern with some staff about we're going to go out and ask the community about everything. So there's some attitudes—well, there's some practical things to be addressed—but there's some attitudinal stuff in there that says, oh for God's sake, because it's going to be really hard why would we bother* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 22).

Individual managers were each challenged by the process of consultations with three managers suggesting that consultation was best left to the social directorate of council as the technical directorate staff were not equipped with the skills to consult with the community so: *we leave the*

*engagement to the community development wing. We don't have the skills to do that. We're technically skilled* (T, 26 July, 2010, p. 7).

It was interesting to note that the community did not differentiate between community development and technical staff in their experiences with council. All staff were seen as being 'council' with an expectation of interfacing with the community. The will, commitment and trust of all staff to work with their community in return impacts on the community's willingness to work with local government (Cavaye, 2004). These attitudes, beliefs and practices whether real or perceived by managers all work to expose the gap that exists between community and local government contextual realities.

This myriad of different meanings was not confined to external consultations with the community. As the interviews continued with managers they drew into their conversations their reflections and experiences with internal consultations. On a deeper and more personal note, managers kept the most criticism for the way internal consultations were undertaken. It was through these reflections that the impact of a lack of a shared meaning of language was most evident.

### **Managers' beliefs regarding others right to be consulted**

All managers demonstrated an awareness of the realities of the hierarchical decision making of this local government environment when talking about change processes and the uncertainty this created for staff involvement during change. Managers expressed the desire that all staff had the right to be consulted if there was a change to be implemented that impacted on staff. However, many expressed that the reality was that this just was not possible all of the time as Eleanor explained: *My first response is that in theory they have rights to be informed, involved to varying degrees about*

*everything that affects them. However, I would have to say that in practice that's probably—it's just not feasible* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 2). Eleanor also pointed out some unplanned consequences as she relayed a recent experience: *in a pure sense the greater the impact on them the greater the level their input should be. One of the dilemmas though and we've seen this in recent times with the changes happening here is even when you think you've identified who's going to be impacted, there'll be people who feel impacted or perceive that they have a stake in it in some way that you would never have thought of. So inevitably you always get it wrong by somebody* (E, 26 March, 2010, p. 2).

Terri felt that although the staff may not have a choice over what change occurs, they may be able to influence how the change is implemented: *I think perhaps staff don't have a lot of choice in what change has to happen but I think they have the right to be involved in how change happens and I think they have—my belief is that it's important that staff be involved in participating in how the change be rolled out so they have some ownership of it* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 3).

Again the role that identities played during the change processes permeated throughout the discussions with managers. Kasey related her rights to be consulted closely to her position as a manager: *I think if you've been employed in a position to do your job and you are, like I said before the professional, then I think you have a right to be consulted. You know your business; you know your products and services. I think it's very important to be involved from the very beginning in following that through. So I think you have a right, if that's what you've been employed to do, you have every right to be included* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 2).

When the researcher asked her how much influence staff should have over change processes Kasey believed that the right to have influence over decisions of change was linked to the hierarchy that existed within the organisation, with the higher positions yielding the most influence: *I think—and it's hard depending on the structure of the organisation and your line managers and where you sit within the*

*company to be able to influence. So, for example you would think that managers at senior level should be engaged and be able to influence and team leaders might be consulted but they may not be—have that level of authority in being heard. But I think it's very nice to give them the option to give input into the situation or the new process or whatever it may be* (K, 28 July, 2010, p. 2).

Managers beliefs varied marginally in relation to staff's rights to be consulted about change that impacted on them. While managers believed staff had a right to be consulted there was an understanding that change that occurred within the context of local government was often surrounded by complexities with decisions impacting on multiple levels. As a result there was a resignation that the needs of the organisation would generally be seen favourably over staff's needs or expectations.

As a manager, Serena felt that her staff had very little influence over the change process and that the organisation's needs would always come first. The example she provided was one of a pending restructure: *I don't think they can really influence it to a large degree, I think we can communicate with them. I think we can talk about why it might have happened but at the end of the day sometimes these things come down to what works best, what's the best for the community, what's the best for us and it also comes down to the financial resources that we might have available. But it's like all the community engagement if you can take them along for the ride and if they don't like the final outcome, at least they understand or they feel like they were at least notified about it* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 3).

Ewan's views were similar to Serena's taking in the whole of organisation approach: *I think you should say, that's it, that's what we're doing, if you want to have the right of comment, that's fine. But then there should be at the end of the day, there should be that response, we've investigated, considered, your thoughts, your views*

*etc. Whilst they're all good arguments from your perspective, at the end of the day, you have tunnel vision and you only see that bit of the pie, the job, and when we weigh it over the whole organisation, we realise there were factors, A, B and C, well outweigh, X, Y Z, or whatever the case may be. I like the system, you put it out, which allows a whole lot of whinging and moaning, but at the end of the day someone's got to call the shots* (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 5).

Although managers acknowledged the realities and attitudes about consulting with staff, there was a willingness to engage in some way. Ewan's description of, '*putting it out there*' (E, 23 March, 2010, p. 5), led the researcher to explore what this might look and feel like and what opportunities this process gave managers to lead change and for staff to be active participants in the change process.

## **The impact of language during internal dialogue**

In a recent survey undertaken by the council (Insync Surveys, 2010), the top three gaps in performance were with staff feeling valued, feeling engaged and in the level of trust within the organisation. These results were echoed in the stories that managers told about the impact of poor communication processes during change. Nine of the ten managers all commented that the success of internal consultation relating to change rated poorly across the organisation.

Although not having personally been impacted by a restructure or significant change, the one remaining manager experienced the negativity from her staff of the most recent restructure and office change. There were many stories of being 'consulted' with and of being asked for opinions of how work units may work better. Staff were being encouraged to come up with new structures, ideas and suggestions with a perception through the word 'consultation' that this information would inform decision making and staff would see changes that they had suggested become a reality.

## **Disengagement and disillusionment**

When this did not occur staff felt undervalued, let down, angry and confused as experienced by one of the managers. She emphasised that: *because they feel like they've been consulted with but nothing's happened from it and they haven't been taken seriously. It's worse than not doing anything in the first place and they get really disillusioned with the process* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 4). The more times this occurred the more disengaged staff became, with Andrea commenting that staff have conveyed to her: *well I'm not doing the staff survey again. Because they feel that they've been consulted with but none of the feedback they've provided has been taken on board* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 3).

When asked what she felt had contributed to these feelings of disillusionment and disengagement several themes emerged. One was the use of language and the construction of the meaning of language by staff and the other was the understanding of the purpose of consultation as Andrea explains: *it's the language that they use. A lot of staff are happy not to be consulted if there's decisions to be made. They trust that their manager or director is going to put forward the Department's views within that process because it is often exec or managers making those decisions. To feel like they're supposed to be involved and then they're actually not, is where the problem is* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 4).

Andrea recalled a recent experience where there appeared to be two issues that intersected at a point of frustration for staff and this was the misfit between staff's interpretation of what was happening and the congruency between what staff were told and then what actually happened: *I think they were expecting communication about what the process would be. Also consistency between what they were told compared to what actually happened. Each person relayed this different to me; but they seemed to say that there was decisions made and they didn't know what they were* (A, 29 July, 2010, p. 2).

Another manager, Serena, expressed that from her experience, communication and how communication is disseminated affect staff engagement with change. She talked about: *poison pockets of negativity* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 1), and: *water cooler talks* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 2) across the organisation that could dramatically change the intent of the communication or message from management. She stated that this could come from people affected by change or mere observers who interpret the change element through their own eyes, some based on their previous experience with change. Serena uses the comment: *they don't really know what's going on so they just make it up* (S, 29 July, 2010, p. 2).

However, rather than view this as an attempt by staff for mischief or malice, it could suggest that the language used influences the social construction of change based on previous experience or one's own interpretation in an attempt to seek a shared meaning of the change. As conversations unfolded, the gap between language used during change and having a shared meaning widened and impacted further on staff's willingness to engage.

### **Disconnect between language used and meaning**

What emerged throughout the interviews was this disconnect between what management thought they were doing and what staff thought was being asked. It could be argued that the language used had no common meaning or common understanding between executive and managers. Communication processes were not explained so, therefore, left open to interpretation and this depended on staff's previous experience and what they perceived was asked of them. The types of language used often set up expectations and did not set boundaries or set out what would happen with the information and how it might or might not inform decision making: *I was asked to provide a submission but they'd already made their mind up; so I was informed, not consulted* (D, 24 March, 2010, p. 11).

Further to this, once a decision was made there was often no explanation as to the process taken to reach that decision or the influencing factors. Many managers commented that there was no rationale or purpose as to why one decision won over another. This left managers and their staff feeling confused and less willing to participate in future discussions or consultations.

Many managers felt that the word ‘consultation’ was misleading as to what was really being asked and that there needed to be a common definition of these types of words with an explanation as to what this actually meant, what was expected of staff, and how would the information be used and then how would staff be informed of the outcome. Managers felt that not everything had to be consulted on and that if it was a decision that staff had no impact on then use different words to express this.

When asked why the word consultation concerned managers, it emerged that it was more than just the need for a shared understanding or definition, rather a shared meaning of what the word translated into in tangible terms. What would staff and the community experience and expect if they were being consulted? What role would each person take on and play out and how would these roles assist in the overall making or development of the outcome or decision?

Teri’s thinking took her to consider ways staff in the organisation could best work towards some kind of consistent approach to change, even if the language used didn’t have shared meaning: *I think we need to do some professional development. We’ve got quite a bit to do. We need to do some consistent stuff throughout the organisation because there is never going to be one consistent understanding of what it means because it is a vague term but at least if we can get some consistency and some professional development around some tools and*

*some processes to follow at least we'll start to get some consistency in the way we deliver it. If it's not perfect at least it's consistent* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 12).

This raises questions on the interpretation of the key processes of the engagement spectrum that forms part of the engagement and communication strategy for council. This study would suggest that similar to Stott and Keatman's (2005) assertion that community and engagement is open to interpretation, that the word consultation is also value laden and open to interpretation and as a result impacts significantly on the ability of the organisational policy to deliver a sense of engagement and value during change.

## **Use of common language to convey meaning**

The language that was used with the children in their interviews was of a simpler structure with terminology such as 'listened to', 'ask children what they think'; and 'if council has asked you what you think about something, then how do you know if you've been listened to,' and 'how do you feel when asked about something in the city?' Children felt that they were listened to if adults took the time to ask them about changes that impacted on them as Sydney pointed out: *I know I am being listened to because I am asked questions and paid attention to what I want to say and council seems interested* (C12, 7 December, 2009, p. 4), and: *council takes the time to ask children* (C7, 7 December, 2009, p. 3). With Taylor summing up: *Well say for instance it was about the playground, there was a fun day where children were asked lots of questions but we could send our comments on email or the website* (C15, 7 December, 2009, p. 3). If this conversation resulted in council taking on board the suggestions then that made them feel good that they have helped something happen: *Umm you can see changes happening and know that you've been a part of that and you feel great cause you suggested stuff like that* (C11, 7 December, 2009, p. 2). There was not an expectation that council would do anything with the information only that they asked

for it and showed an interest in what the children were saying. The children felt the process was important to them as it made them feel part of the community and it gave them the opportunity to put forth children's ideas about the impact of change. There was a strong sense that adults did not know what children wanted unless they asked them and that childhood now was vastly different to their parents' childhood: *Yeah they were young once but they've grown up and forgotten what it's like to be little and they want different things but there's been new things invented, cooler things* (C12, 7 December, 2009, p. 2). Pat added: *Only kids know what they want and if adults try and explain it then it doesn't seem to be what the kid actually wants and the kid can explain it properly* (C2, 7 December, 2009, p. 1).

When children were asked how they wanted to be consulted into the future they made comments such as: *what you are doing right now* (C12, 7 December, 2009, p. 3), and: *through newsletters* (C5, 7 December, 2009, p. 3), or: *on the web* (C10, 7 December, 2009, p. 3), and: *send a survey* (C11, 7 December, 2009, p. 3). Children felt that they were being listened to because someone from council had come to the school and asked the children what they thought.

When reviewing the local government's communication and engagement strategy (2009), there is a chapter written exclusively relating to the process for consulting with children. In this chapter there is reference to the use of appropriate and relevant language when consulting with children so that the opportunity for participation and understanding is optimised. Further to this, in a research project by Charles Sturt University in NSW (2009, para. 5) involving this particular local government consulting with children and young people, one of the key outcomes was that children now had an expectation that they would be consulted into the future about issues in their community. Children and young people enjoyed their participation in the project and reported the view that their opinions mattered and that they could have an impact on their local community.

The gap between the child and adult experiences when consulted, whether it is community members or council staff, appears to be significant. This study suggests that the words used impact on people's interpretations on what they will experience and expect from this exchange.

### **Shared meaning: Conversation versus consultation**

The word 'conversation' emerged throughout the interviews with some managers as being a more universally understood means of communication and a good starting point with staff, children and the community when first raising issues of change. It was perceived that most people understood their role in a conversation as it had cultural meaning and understanding within the social realm. Conversations didn't set up any expectations other than an understanding that there would be an exchange of information whereby people would listen to what others were saying and in some small way get to know something about each other. Paul Born (2008, p. 20) summarised that:

conversation is not just what is said; it is also what happens between people. Conversation is not always about an event or time; it is part of a much larger process of change. It leads to more conversation and is a part of a journey to understand. Community conversations are a deliberate form of listening to the people of a community in an effort to learn to agree, to become committed and engaged...

In Chapter Four the process of conversation was initially raised by adult community members as a local socially acceptable way for adults to seek feedback from children about certain issues. The process of conversation for this community of adults did not hold any formal status of empowerment or active decision making and was therefore not seen to be giving children any real influence over decision making in their community. Conversations in this context did not look to being part of a journey towards a deeper understanding, rather a mechanism to be heard but not heeded. Drawing upon the conclusions of Chapter Four, the art of conversation in this context cannot be supported by Born's (2008) definition of the enabling process of conversations.

Definition is impacted on by social identity and the social hierarchy that exists differently in communities and cultures. It would appear that any definition is value laden and needs to be a culturally shared interpretation. Only then will the gap between rhetoric and practice be lessened.

## Synthesis

The role that language played during the change process further compounded the tensions that emerged for managers, in particular, as they strived to lead and implement change. For the community, adults and children alike, the rights to engage in dialogue concerning change was strongly aligned to their social identities. Where adult community members held differing interpretations of consultation, children conveyed having a positive experience and the process was not complicated by different meanings of the word consultation. The researcher would extend this further to say that the process of using simple structured sentences with children that easily conveyed what was being asked assisted in having shared language meaning and reduced the likelihood for variations in interpretations of the language used.

Although adults held differing views on the meaning of the word consultation the intent of the word in providing perceived active participation in decision making was well understood by the community. However, this definition was not shared by council staff in policy or practice. It was this lack of a shared meaning that was the source of confusion and frustration that worked to place pressure on relationships between council staff and the community. This pressure on relationships was not confined to the community with language used during internal consultations proving to be a point of frustration and concern for staff.

Emerging in Chapter Five was that managers demonstrated a clear understanding of the governance and hierarchy of local government and had a shared meaning of the associated systems and processes. Contrary to this was their lack of a shared meaning of this key policy document with one manager describing the understanding of this process to be: *very patchy* (T, 5 April, 2010, p. 12). The researcher would suggest that the policy failed to establish a common understanding and shared meaning of the key processes of this document.

According to the council's policy, the more intensive the participation then the greater level of engagement will be experienced. This is also the outcome reflected in the Public Participation Spectrum (International Association of Public Participation, 2007). However, this study would propose that this outcome can only be achieved if there is a shared meaning of each process that takes into consideration the identity of each player and the relationship that each one has not only within the process but with the leading organisation.

## **LEADERSHIP EMBEDDED IN A SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

### **Introduction**

This final chapter starts by describing the research journey undertaken in this study and then moves onto offering its key findings and recommendations for the field. During the research period the researcher was a managerial practitioner situated within the local government body that was the subject of this study. This position gave the researcher the unique opportunity to gain a deep and rich understanding of the influences of change while seeking to contribute new learnings to the field of leadership.

Local government is the level of government deemed as being ‘closest to its people’ with decisions made often affecting citizens directly and more intimately than other forms of government (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006a, p. 1). The researcher was aware of the local government environment that is governed by strict protocols, policy and processes and its strong history and connection to democracy and governance. Feedback from the community was often negative, conveying a lack of transparency and consultative practices when decisions were made that resulted in change for the community.

Through working within the local government sector that is subject to a myriad of changes by both internal and external forces, the researcher held an interest in how local government managers and the community engage in the change process. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influences on engagement through a case study approach that was informed

by phenomenological theory. The aim was to seek out stories of people's experiences, values and beliefs and bring about suggestions for a way forward towards improved outcomes of change.

This chapter is concerned with presenting the implications and recommendations for managerial practitioners' development, organisational, community and policy development, and, in addition, the study raises new questions and implications for further research.

## Reflections of the research journey

Being both a spectator of and a participant in change processes, the researcher experienced how different people responded to change and their varying level of engagement in the process. This thinking pointed the researcher towards literature that offered many explanations of the process of change. Bridges and Mitchell (2000) talked about the transition people go through during change and that they need leadership, time, communication, understanding and agency to contribute to and influence change. Chawla and Kelloway (2004) furthered the argument by suggesting that job security was also an influencing factor on openness and commitment to change. Similar factors were echoed through much of the literature that was explored. While not disputed by the researcher that these elements assist some people through change, there was an absence of discussion concerning the influence of the type of setting or the identity of the environment in which the change takes place. Dowding (2008a) concedes that much of the literature on leadership misses this important aspect of the connectedness and transformative relationship of leaders' characteristics and the environment in which they lead.

Working in local government, the researcher was keen to gain an understanding of how leaders were influenced throughout the change process. This motivated the researcher to think more

deeply about what influenced people's thinking and decision making during change. As a leader in local government the researcher understood that implementing change was a key role of managerial positions and was keen to explore what influenced managers' willingness or reluctance to lead the change.

The literature review continued the researcher on a journey exploring the theories of leadership. There were varying conceptions on leadership from pure academic models of leadership, outcome focused leadership, to cause and effect leadership whereby leaders supplied a vision, some purpose and charisma and people would follow (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Gibson & Pason, 2003; O'Connor, 2007). Goleman (2005) however, combined both leadership competencies with emotional and social intelligence to draw up a model of leadership that relates to both hearts and minds with a focus on the importance of sustaining and nurturing relationships. This literature also highlighted the dark side of leadership where leaders may have emotional intelligence but choose to use their skills in destructive ways while others develop complicated ways at hiding the realities.

Sinclair (2007, p. 77) raises the issue of leaders who suspend their critical faculties or abdicate their responsibilities and this is often at times when facing ethical dilemmas. She goes on to talk about powerless passivity and ethical failures that see people fail to lead differently, which led the researcher to ask what is happening to make managers compliant. How do leaders do this and why, what do they experience, what are their beliefs and internal processes that they go through to get to this point and what can we learn by gaining an understanding of their experiences, feelings and thoughts?

The researcher has worked in local government for fifteen years and is very cognisant of the bureaucratic nature of its governance. With cries of democratic rights to be involved in decision making by citizens and the requirement by local government to engage with its community, the researcher was interested in this symbiotic relationship and why the perception from both sides was that it was a failed partnership when it came to participatory processes. By combining the researcher's professional knowledge of local government legislation and operations with literature on local government's social role and responsibilities, this gave the researcher a solid foundation from which the notion of community engagement could be explored further through supporting literature. Furthermore, this enabled the researcher to critique the current policy and practice of the local government against literature and the community's experiences and beliefs and as such forms a secondary focus for this study.

A critical aspect of this study was addressing the reflexivity associated with the paradigm adopted for this study and with the researcher's position as a manager within local government. The researcher looked to Humphreys (2005, p.852) who advises that researchers need to look inwards and study themselves to create reflexive dialogue, whereas Cunliffe (2003, p. 985) suggests to make truth claims more transparent, researchers need to question how they themselves construct meaning. In keeping with the interpretivist paradigm the researcher attempted to write in a way that moved away from creating answers, rather asked many questions in an effort to provoke thinking and generate possibilities and seek openness of one self. The researcher's dual role was presented early in the writing up of the research and discussed when addressing the limitations of the study. Throughout the analysis of the data it was important for the researcher to set objectivity aside in the interim in order to critically analyse the plurality of participants' stories against her own. It was necessary for the researcher to acknowledge subjectivity and this was done throughout the

study by reflective note taking and through phone conversations, emails and visits with the university's supervisors. The researcher was embedded in the sociopolitical context of local government and had assumptions on how realities and knowledge was created in this environment. Therefore the researcher needed to challenge these assumed categories and histories. It was through this exchange of dialogue that the researcher not only sought to reveal her biases and assumptions but to have those challenges by others.

In addition, the researcher needed to be aware of her position within real and perceived power relationships. As discussed in earlier chapters, the researcher was challenged by the familiar way in which the participants referred to the researcher in the interviews. To enhance objectivity, the researcher needed to present, talk and behave as a student, to reinforce the roles between peer and student.

The community played a critical role in providing the socio-political context for exploring not only the strength of the relationship between community and local government but assisted in validating managers' experiences and beliefs in relation to consultative processes and professional practice. The stories managers told about their struggles, compliance and understanding of council consultative practices, when analysed against the community's experiences, provided a sense of authenticity to the data as well as highlighting the gap between the managers' understandings of consultation and that of the community's.

Within this study, managers were conceptualised as leaders working within a sociopolitical organisation, who were charged with delegated responsibility in decision making that has corporate significance and therefore community significance. The conceptual framework for this study is one

where there is a combination of both thought and feeling that forms part of the belief system for change for the organisation. This is based on the premise that trust and essential social and emotional competencies of people charged with the responsibility of change, impact on mutual gains that result in positive influences within an organisation and out into the community and therefore forms a crucial part of this research. The impact of how well leaders perform their roles is felt at the grass root levels of community where there should exist a sound and trusting relationship that espouses democratic values and systems wrapped tightly in sound governance. The researcher has a passion for the ethos of local government and is strongly committed to supporting managers to perform their roles within a context that is fully understood, meaningful and authentic. Whilst the organisational identity is strong and influential, it should not compete against managers' values and beliefs systems, rather encourage and nurture the development of leaders who are competent, coherent and authentic who work together to serve their community.

As a result of this desire of the researcher to understand and support managers throughout the change process and to realise improved outcomes for community within the context of local government, the following research questions were developed:

- How is staff engagement influenced throughout the change process?
- How do council behaviours impact on community engagement?

Keeping within an interpretivist paradigm the researcher chose a case study methodology that was informed by phenomenological theory. A range of data collection strategies and an interpretative approach to the data analysis was used for this study. This approach was chosen to seek a deeper understanding of the symbiotic relationship that exists between local government and the

community, and to explore how managers were influenced, particularly at the times when their values and beliefs are challenged.

Eighty-eight community members returned surveys about their relationship and engagement levels with local government. The survey provided space for qualitative narratives to be included. Surveys were chosen to assist in the management of reaching a large number of community members as well as the researcher being aware of the perceived power imbalance that may exist due to the researcher being a senior employee of local government. As a result of surveys being chosen there was limited richness in the qualitative data that was collected as community members restrained the length of their narratives. However, in addition, a number of documents, such as customer satisfaction survey results and council minutes were reviewed to compare and strengthen the credibility of the data analysis and findings and starts to inform the researcher about the community's perceptions and experiences.

A combination of interviews and story writing was chosen for the children who participated. As the number of children participating was small it was desirable to hear first-hand of their experiences with local government during change. The data collected provided an understanding of the relationship between local government and its younger citizens and also identified some common influencing factors between managers and the community.

Ten senior managers described their lived experiences and perceptions of the influences on engagement during change from their own perspectives. The researcher used triangulation within the research with its purpose being twofold; firstly to ensure that the findings reflected managers' perceptions and realities as expressed by them and secondly to increase the probability that the

research findings will be seen as credible and trustworthy by others. As a result a combination of face-to-face professional conversations, member checking, semi-structured interviews and emails were the chosen methods of data collection. In keeping within an interpretative approach all data collected was analysed using a thematic approach.

The researcher identified that being a peer of the managers would be a limitation to the study, perceiving that the managers may withhold information or slant their explanations towards what they thought would align with the researcher's thinking, values and beliefs. In contradiction to this thinking, managers were very open and forthcoming with sharing their experiences, beliefs and views. The basis for this trust and openness appeared to be borne from the relationship between the researcher and the managers and on further reflection the perceived sharing of the professional identity of being a manager and their belief that as managers we shared a reality.

## **Research findings**

As this study unfolded it began to reveal the strength of the notion of 'identity' as a significant influencing factor with not only the ten senior managers who shared their most detailed and personal stories but with members of the community. While 'identity' gave an insight into how community viewed their role and rights in the relationship with local government, it was the impact of identity on managers that was the significant contributor to the phenomenon of deconstructing and reconstructing managers' reality. These significant themes, along with the sub theme of 'language meaning', permeated consistently throughout the study as each participant drew on their experiences, beliefs and values to give their personal account of the impact and influence of these factors.

While appearing a separate point of interest throughout the study, the focus on community was important as they are directly impacted on by decisions made by local government. Regardless of the impact being significant or minor, community often feel powerless to influence decision making relating to change. Analysis of customer satisfaction survey narratives undertaken in 2011 (Wallis, 2011) supports the findings in this study of a fractured and disenfranchised relationship between local government and the community. The focus on community is important as while a divergence in understanding and shared values exists between the community and managers, decisions made will be shaped by the organisation's identity. Yet the impact will permeate out to the broader community. The challenge that has risen from this research is to how best support senior managers to make decisions and be actively engaged in change based on a shared understanding, meaning and value base. A further opportunity lays in Sinclair (2007) notion of, 'courageous conscience' (p. 15) where managers develop an advanced influential integrity, demonstrating ethical judgment and standing up against unethical decisions.

## **Identity**

The researcher was experienced with the influence that the bureaucratic nature of local government has on the way managers work and behave and as a consequence expected that this influence stopped at a superficial level of work systems and access to information. When theorising bureaucratic identities the researcher acknowledges that processes, protocols and policy restrict variations in approaches and as a result should in rhetoric result in consistency, predictability and fairness. However, the collection and analysis of the data revealed that the identity of the organisation penetrated deeper into the value systems of managers raising ethical dilemmas and as a result controlling much more than just systems and information.

Literature on organisational identity (Corley & Gioia, 2003; Hatch & Schutz, 2004) revolves around core issues of social construction by individuals or collectives and elements that distinguish the organisation from other organisations, or alternatively, similarities that connect it to other like organisations. This premise of an organisation's identity being socially constructed is supported by this study. What differentiates this study, however, is the revelation of the deconstruction and reconstruction of managers' realities in order to align with that of the organisation. In this study the organisation's identity serves as a framework for managers for decision making and practices. Decisions are made and changes implemented by managers from a position of compliance and obedience to the organisation rather than from a position of serving the community within a framework of sound and ethical governance.

While the researcher, herself a manager, belonged to the manager's group, the study exposed a stronger underlying dependence and value on this membership by managers than was expected. Through assuming this group identity responses and responsibilities for decisions considered and made were heightened for managers and strongly embedded within the decision-making framework of the organisational identity.

The study revealed minimal processes or systems that brought the managers together as a collective to formalise membership as well as an absence of a shared approach, vision, values or collective action, yet managers perceived the membership to be real and this reinforced their professional identities. When faced with dilemmas the managers did not seek each other out to discuss, debate, challenge or seek advice. Although they saw themselves as a collective, they behaved and thought as individuals. This could be in part due to an issue of trust or competitiveness between each other.

It could be conceptualised that the absence of any complex, dynamic and reciprocal alliances between managers worked to heighten the dependence on the organisational identity.

### **Deconstructing and reconstructing realities - reframing**

This study suggests when a manager is faced with a situation where their value systems are challenged while they are operating within the organisation's reality; they go through a process of deconstructing and reconstructing their realities or reframing. This process of deconstruction and reconstruction manifested itself in different guises dependent on the ability of the manager to alter their understanding of the change to a point where they were no longer in conflict with the organisation.

A key finding that emerged from this study was the absence of dialogue about community values and expectations when managers were entering into the process of decision making that challenged their values and beliefs. Managers never questioned if the organisational value system with which they strived to align themselves was a reflection of the community's values. A pertinent question considering the most essential and democratic role of local government is to serve its community. The stories managers told gave the researcher an insight into managers' thinking that helps to conceptualise the differentiation in the relationship between managers, the community and the organisation. The relationship between managers and the organisation cannot be seen in isolation to the power relations that influence the construction of the organisational identity by managers. The relationship needs to be conceptualised within the social system of the organisational identity with its embedded organisational membership and meaning. In contrast, managers' concepts of having a relationship did not extend to the community. Managers saw interactions with the community as an operative function of managing processes and systems.

As managers' stories unfolded there emerged a common thread of internalising and reconstructing aspects of the decision-making process that clashed with their values and beliefs. The construction of the organisational identity by managers was dependent on managers incorporating their values and beliefs into that of the organisation making both personal and organisational values compatible. All managers were seeking a way that would bring about a sense of compatibility with the organisation. Managers' conflict was further exasperated by the positional power they held through their roles of being a leader with the expectation that they would openly accept and implement organisational change. This process of reframing a dilemma appeared to be a simplified answer to the complex organisational process at play; however, it led managers into a complex minefield of deconstructing and reconstructing their realities.

Reframing took on different guises from reconstructing their realities through to changing the meaning of the issue (Figure 4). To facilitate this they believed there was more information that they didn't know or that the change was good for the whole or for the organisation. Failure of this reconstruction process saw managers then contextualise the issue differently. They tried renegotiating their values and ignoring social impacts through to functionalising the task and then finally conceding it was just part of being a player in a political environment. Managers changed the words they used from intimate and value based to language that was more formalised and task orientated. The process of deconstructing and reconstructing of managers' realities that was revealed through this study was strongly connected to managers' relationships with the organisation's identity and with their own professional identity. The process was internal to the organisation therefore making it easier to justify the process of deconstructing when faced with a dilemma. This discovery points towards an absence of any nexus between the organisational culture, identity, purpose and collective effectiveness.

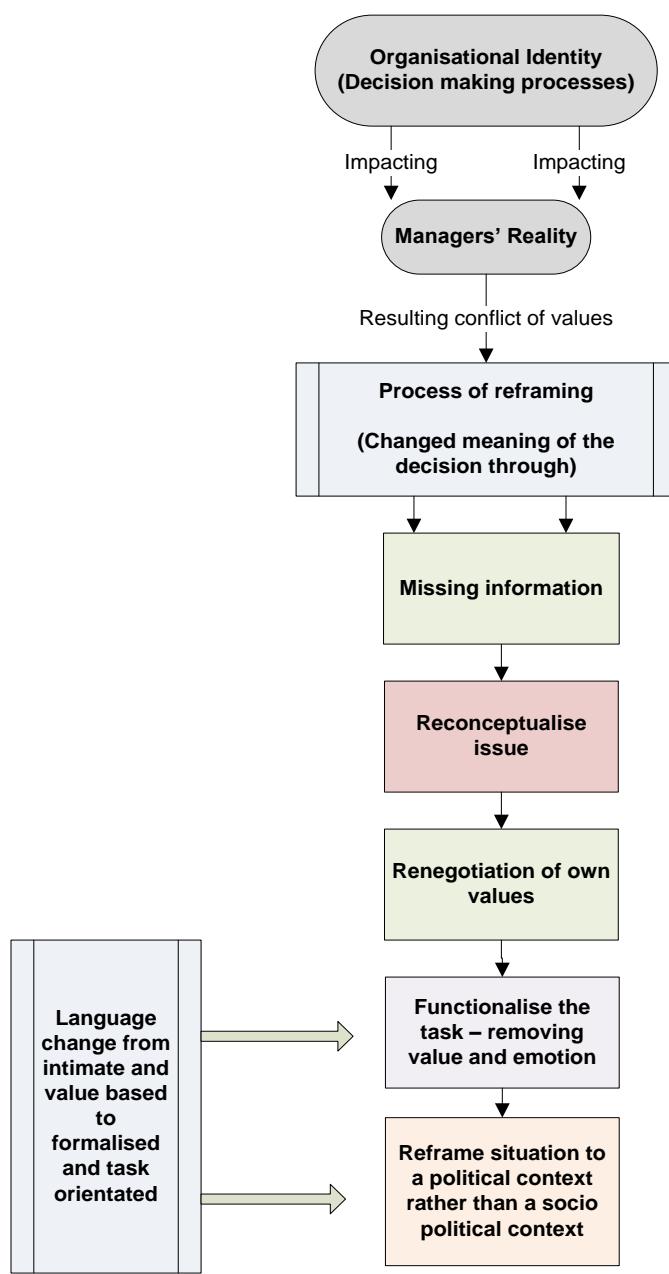


Figure 4: Flowchart depicting reframing process of managers

Managers undertake emotional and cognitive struggles as they work their way through the myriad of reframing tasks. At no stage during the study was there mention of any collective action between managers on the challenges presented to them. Formal avenues to come together were

limited as documents would suggest, yet managers failed to see the enabling opportunities provided by collectively discussing their struggles, if only on an informal basis. This may point to managers operating independently and not as an integrated management team in its true essence. This would suggest that managers need support in defining a set of shared values, purpose and assumptions that would guide their interpretations and actions and decision making. Managers may need opportunities to engage in dialogue regarding barriers that may exist in their understanding of the value of learning through experiences with others and a value system that encourages considered risk-taking and innovation and that questions assumptions. As the influencing factor of language started to become more prominent during the process of reframing it again emerged in the study as a commonality between managers and the community in influencing their engagement with change.

## **Language meaning**

At the start of this study the researcher had a general understanding that people interpreted the meaning of language in many different ways. However, the impact of these interpretations on how people were engaged in the change process, how they perceived change, and the impact on relationships was far greater than anticipated. While the right to engage in dialogue concerning change was strongly connected to people's varying social identities, it was a lack of culturally shared meaning around words that caused confusion and frustration for the community and managers.

Not having a shared meaning of words and processes through policy or practice worked to polarise managers from their own staff and the community. Managers spoke about bad experiences with the community and also when engaged in internal consultations. Managers talked about feeling disillusioned and disengaged during consultations when their suggestions for change were not

considered. Community conveyed a similar message about the failure of council to listen and be effective in implementing the community's wishes. Policy relating to communication and engagement added to this confusion as it failed to enable processes promoting dialogue that was mutually understood. What the study discovered was that the policy document was written generically, its application was to a multiple and diverse audience and its aims and objectives not understood. Without any agreed understandings the policy took on multiple interpretations by both community and managers.

What failed to be recognised was that dialogue and language meaning is value laden and needs to be enabled from a point of shared interpretation and meaning. So while the organisation endeavoured to have a process by which change could be communicated and people engaged, without this shared interpretation and meaning, disengagement and frustration with the change process would always be the result and policy would fail to impact positively.

To reduce the number of failures and negative interactions with the community and internally with staff, managers needed to be fully cognisant of the policy aims and processes and of its application across multiple audiences. Having a common meaning and being able to translate words and processes into tangible terms would give greater clarity and congruency with actions. This could assist and empower managers to engage more actively and confidently in the change process. By experiencing success when engaging with others during change this would work towards restoring managers and the community with a sense of empowerment and value to their respective roles.

The study also uncovered a connection between language meaning and the impact of this meaning on the rights of children to be engaged in decision making relating to change. While adult

community members hold the interpretation of ‘consultation’ as a form of empowerment, and the image of the child is conceptualised as being vulnerable and unable to make decisions, children will be denied a right to be heard. Although this community felt that children could be asked for opinions, this had cultural meaning relating to passive participation. Children were not confused about their role in decision making and understood what was being asked of them. Managers expressed that children should be engaged in a participatory way with local government but lacked the skills to undertake consultations with children. To ensure that this willingness to engage with young children is not lost, policy documents that relate to participatory approaches should include processes relevant to young children, reinforced through training for all managers.

Bringing about a sense of control and meaning to the roles of managers relies on supportive and robust value based organisational systems. These systems will provide managers with not only the necessary skills and knowledge required to engage in change in a manner that results in good, sound decision making but the skills to align value systems in a more authentic way.

## **Implications of the study**

Drawing out the implications of this study for local government starts with the question of what influences engagement during change and how does this occur. As change evolves to be an everyday part of the life of many, it will continue to demand the attention of not only the enablers of change but the recipients of change. Although the researcher had many years’ experience working in local government as a manager, the richness of the study provided for findings that gave a unique insight into new ways of understanding and supporting managers during times of change. Systematic public policy development, manager professional development, organisational development, community development and future research all contribute to an increased

understanding of ways to support managers in ways that are meaningful and authentic in the change process (Figure 5).



Figure 5: *Model for facilitating positive change outcomes for community and managers*

This framework of new understandings of the influences of change is embedded in the rich and open stories told of the lived experiences of managers and the community. It is through these stories of managers' leadership experiences that powerful explanations of the obstacles to change emerge. The challenge of working within an organisation that holds a strong identity, constructed by social and system frameworks, was also revealed. Managers are best placed to engage authentically with change when systems and policies are in place that supports their development as leaders. Being more competent and collaborative encourages accountability, fairness, integrity and compassion in leaders and challenges thinking about one's own ethics framework in relation to other relationships, or as Sinclair (2007) describes a 'courageous conscience' (p. 15). The implications of this study point towards the development of strong leaders who have the capacity

to engage with change fully and consciously without the need to have their identities or values surrendered to the organisation. It is these implications that form the basis of the next section.

### **Increased level of engagement with change**

Throughout this study views have been presented that support the notion that increasing levels of engagement with change can result in positive outcomes for community and the organisation. In the environment of local government there are many benefits and beneficiaries to consider during change. The outcome of a higher quality policy decision on change is improved where participants are engaged and informed on technical and social understandings. However, participatory processes alone do not act as a transformative tool for positive social change. This requires the development of an integrated and multi-tiered approach that speaks to the heart and heads of decision makers at an organisational level and that of managers and community.

### **Implications for managers' professional development**

The model points to the importance of managers' professional development as a key influence in increasing the level of engagement with change for both community and themselves. Managers were in the unique position of being leaders within the organisation to staff while being followers to both the executive and councillors. By playing the part of followers managers were blinded to their reciprocal part in the leadership relationship with executive and councillors. Managers failed to recognise their own agency to challenge decisions and saw themselves as being subject to the organisation's influence (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). Taking on the principle that managers should act with agency, then it is the managers' values that should guide their decision making and not that of the organisation. However, as also supported by Dowding (2008a), managers and the organisation are intricately linked and work to transform each other as they

construct and reconstruct their identities over time. By recognising this contextual influence and being able to work with agency within it will encourage managers to engage more influentially with change and impact positively on the level of internal conflict.

While theorising concerning organisational identity continues the accepted concept by the researcher is that it answers the question of, ‘who are we’ and ‘why do we exist?’ (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Organisations such as local government that have a long history with governance have strong identities forged out of tradition, protocols, compliance, bureaucratic policy and process. Local government in its simplest form is known to exist to ‘serve the people’. Decisions made in local government impact directly on the lives of citizens and as a result careful thought and consideration within a value based framework needs to be given to ensure fairness and equity. Unearthed through managers’ stories were times when they were faced with dilemmas between personal and organisational values and principles. Whilst acknowledging that these tensions exist in many organisations from time to time, a key principle for the protection of leaders is to invest in the development of the necessary skills and knowledge that will work to develop a personal framework for ethical decision making. These skills and knowledge will assist leaders in resolving dilemmas and in building their individual capacity for ethical decision making.

Whilst it is acknowledged by the researcher that managers may not consider that they do not make ethical decisions, this principle is not about apportioning blame or highlighting limitations of managers. Rather, the development of managers as leaders opens up an avenue to recognise different ethical perspectives among peers, to participate in informed reflection and openly discuss and challenge particular pressures on good decision making faced by managers. While participation in more open and direct discussion and debate about these issues and ideas helps foster greater

awareness of moral responsibility there is merit in a more formal approach of ethics training provided by a quality provider and a prerequisite of effective management. Lowe et al. (2007) cautions, however, that although training can result in increased knowledge and confidence it does not necessarily influence people attitudes, beliefs and emotional responses. As the model indicates, to effect lasting change and to embed training principles in the approaches used by managers and within the organisation's culture, a multidimensional approach is needed. This may include managers networking with other organisations, from both the private and public sector, and the participation in coaching or mentoring with an experienced and well regarded person.

The research raised the issue of managers struggling alone with decisions that challenged their values and beliefs. Although the study highlighted that managers held a strong association to their identities as managers there was almost an absence of systematic structures that supported the development of managers individually or as a team. This leaves managers feeling vulnerable and alone in their quest for the organisation's values to be aligned with their own. Reframing revealed that managers were left open and vulnerable on the premise that the organisation was performing to an expected value base, even though the managers had no control or perceived influence over the organisation. As managers spoke, they told stories of their perceptions of authentically trying to deal with the considerations of good decision making, all the while handing over power to the organisation through their process of reframing. This process of deconstructing and reconstructing their realities also resulted in a passivity, compliance and obedience to the organisation. The issue of alignment with the organisational values by managers was a key driver for reframing and a source of anxiety and stress with managers.

In order for this discovery of managers' reframing to add value to current leadership understandings, the researcher turns to the model to emphasise that there is no one answer to how this can be addressed. Rather, the answer lies in multiple experiences through varying approaches that seek to increase managers' understandings and alter their world view on the role they play and the agency they have in relation to their level of engagement during change. It is through increased knowledge and skills, self-confidence, accountability, humility and authenticity played out in a supporting and participatory environment, that managers will be provided with the opportunity to influence the organisation's identity and that of their own. The commitment for good leaders to listen to people's experiences, to go beyond conformity, to question assumptions and take on new ideas, takes humility and courage.

### **Implications for community development training**

The study revealed a relationship between managers and community that was driven by process, policy and function. Managers spoke of their frustration and confusion with the organisation's consultation processes. While the processes gave community members the opportunity to influence policy and decision making it was the elected council and council officers who made the final decisions and could dismiss community input. Managers did not appear to hold a strong understanding of the community to which they served. There was an absence of any relationship to the community's vision, values, hopes and expectations. Managers' alignment was with the organisation not with the community; yet local government exists to serve its community by way of providing quality of life opportunities within a sound participatory governance framework. In addition, some managers believed that it was the role of those staff from a social science background to understand and consult with community. In contrast to this view held by some

managers, community did not differentiate between disciplines in their interactions with council, rather it was the quality of the experience that had most impact.

Quality professional development relating to the principles of community development for all managers may aid in the creation of a better understanding of community and how it functions. Further to the discussion regarding a multi-dimensional approach to managers' development, this professional training could be further enhanced by the involvement of all managers at a practical level within the community. A process whereby managers engage with their local community at neighbourhood levels, developing a repertoire of knowledge and understanding at grass root level, may work to engender a growing sense of community in all managers that develops the desire to influence and advocate at times of decision making and change. For increasing levels of engagement to be achieved, as set out in the model, this experience for managers needs to be more than just gaining an understanding and knowledge of the demographic makeup of the neighbourhoods.

There is value in managers engaging in a program of purposeful interactions and dialogue with community members out in neighbourhoods to see, feel, hear and experience the community's lifeworld. Furthermore, the literature review in Chapter Two supported the view that increased participation and engagement can help transcend barriers to effective policy development and help bring about an improved understanding of community issues. A policy that is grounded in a shared understanding and meaning might be implemented in a more effective manner with improved outcomes. This is in vast contrast to the issues raised during this study of policy development that was confusing and failed to impact positively on staff and the community. Public policy development forms part of the next tier of the model for increasing engagement with change.

## **Implications for public policy development**

The research reveals many of the challenges of engaging with change in an environment seeped in many strong protocols and processes. Change often comes to play in numerous guises, bought about from varying influences but having direct impact at the grass roots levels of the community. While managers have an intimate understanding of the internal workings of the political environment of local government they struggle to implement change when supporting structures are not in place to facilitate successful encounters with the various elements of the change process.

The findings resonated strongly the role that language meaning played in securing shared understanding of policy and process for local government staff, but more importantly for the community. The experiences of the community engaging with local government places the community in a unique position to inform government and others of the negative influences of incoherent policy that fails to communicate in a language that has cultural and local meaning.

There was a lack of congruency between the meaning of consultation for the community and that outlined in the council adopted communication and engagement policy. It would be fair to argue that the community's understanding of consultation also varied significantly from that outlined in the widely accepted Public Participation Spectrum. As a result this profoundly changes the way the community experiences engagement in change processes. This policy is only useful in its approach if there is a shared understanding and meaning of the language used and an intimate understanding of the social processes at play in each aspect of the Public Participation Spectrum.

Managers clearly articulated that they were as confused as the community and many gave varying interpretations of the processes contained in the policy. The policy was developed and

implemented without attention to how it would be used in practice or understood. Managers spoke about similar experiences with internal communications as was experienced by community members. Through the drawing together of the messages from these experiences, this study recommendation can add further learning about what is needed for more effective outcomes. While it is acknowledged that writing a good policy document for a broad and far reaching audience presents challenges, it is the contention of the researcher that the meaning and interpretation of the policy is what transforms it from rhetoric into reality and therefore this needs due consideration in the planning of the policy.

When disseminating information about a new policy to the community the organisation cannot control the multiple interpretations that will come into play. Looking at this from an interpretative worldview, the researcher believes that social reality is constructed and people have their own values, belief and views based on their lived experiences and will therefore place their own interpretations on what is presented resulting in multiple realities across the community. However, by providing support to managers who are charged with the task of engaging directly with the community, combined with managers developing an increased understanding of the community they serve, key aspects of policy change can be communicated with more consistency and effectiveness.

This approach can be mirrored in its implementation with internal communication policy by ensuring that policy is rolled out along with dialogue and an agreed shared meaning rather than adopted with the assumptions that everyone shares the same understanding. Local governments need to determine the nature of citizen involvement in the change processes they wish to promote and then provide clear approaches that avoid value judgments to be made which is generally

implicit in continuum models of participation. This research would suggest that participatory approaches need to be able to serve different purposes depending on the context, the audience and the presenting issue. The study would suggest that the council needs a suite of approaches for both internal and external consultations rather than one policy framework. The character of an issue to be dealt with decides whether, what level and through what instrument, participation is able to be used to reach an agreement or solve a problem. When defects occur in the planning and implementation the full benefits of good sound policy is taken away from both community and staff. Additionally, some less represented sections of the community, such as children, are at greater risk of being denied the benefits that good sound policy offers due to the absence of authentic participatory processes and genuine value for the social outcomes of increased engagement.

The next section looks towards system reforms to provide managers with the platform required to become not only value driven leaders but to come together as a leadership team to seek clarity in an effort to seek a shared organisational intent and develop a culture of good decision making.

## **Implications for organisational development plan**

Implications for managers cannot be seen in isolation to the forces of the external environment of local government. Managers exist within the environment of local government with all its systems and processes. The extent to which these processes and systems act as enablers for managers to understand their own agency in their quest to make sound and value based decisions remains at the centre of this study.

Managers took little accountability to seek out answers, more information or to question the status quo. Stories that unfolded had an absence of peer review, debate or discussion along with any signs of collegial support for each other. Rather, there was a strong focus on the individual which appears a contradiction to the conceptualisation of managers of belonging to a managers' group. While managers' meetings were held once a month these focused primarily on traditional 'housekeeping' topics and lacked team building, debate and any formal learning opportunities. Here lies the opportunity to reform the essence of managers' meetings to allow a more structured and focused time for managers to engage with the strategic objectives of the organisation, to debate, challenge and learn.

Through listening to the unique perspectives and experiences of managers and reviewing the organisation's plans and strategies, the research raises the issue of the absence of any organisational development plan. An organisational plan could provide the platform for the organisation to align itself with the community's values and the council's four year plan. The organisational plan could clearly set out the council's vision and values, what behaviours are expected, what strategic anchors will inform decision making and the way in which council staff could deliver the key actions in the council plan. The concept of an organisational development plan presents a unique opportunity to explore the nexus between the organisational intent and value system with that of the community as well as those of managers. Managers could play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of this plan across the organisation. The aim of the process is to also develop the internal capacity of the organisation to be most effective in the work that it does with the community and to be sustainable into the future.

Induction into the workplace is one of the first cues that tell the new employee about the systems and people that exist in the organisation. The culture of the organisation, the expected roles, responsibilities, values and behaviours all start to emerge either covertly or overtly. The information that employees receive during induction should start to spell out what type of an organisation an employee is working for, its priorities and what it values. Considering the significance of the role of managers as, ‘considering and taking action on decisions that have corporate significance’ (Name of council<sup>4</sup>, 2011, p. 14) a more intense and compelling induction has merit. Review of council’s employee handbook outlines training in bullying, occupational health and safety, risk management, and other business environment issues that can impact on the organisation’s success and reputation; however it is devoid of any reference to ethics or good decision-making processes as part of normal business practice. On this basis and on the documents reviewed through this study there is an opportunity to reform the induction process to include information on ethical decision making, leadership and effective communication that is particular to senior managers in the organisation. The findings of this study point to a unique opportunity to discuss the organisational development plan and the makeup of the local community including their vision and values as part of the induction process. As defined in the model, this would be beneficial in introducing the principles of community development and in reinforcing the role of local government in relation to its people.

Equipping managers with the necessary approaches and experiences to make a difference to the workplace and to the broader community is plagued with complexities and challenges. While this study offers some practical implications that can be used by practitioner and organisations, it can also act as a springboard for generating new hypotheses that require further research.

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<sup>4</sup>Name has been omitted to protect the anonymity of the organisation

## **Implications for future research**

The findings in this study are important in increasing the understanding of the influencing factors of the engagement in change and have raised three compelling factors for future research. Under the *Local Government Act* (1989, S.3D) a core responsibility of councils is one of leadership, the active participation of stakeholders in the development and coordination of local government and responsiveness to community needs. Managers find themselves often ill equipped to engage with community either through policy directives or practice during times of change. Compounding this is the internal conflict experienced in times of ethical dilemmas. The findings point to a greater investment in the training and support of managers but to what extent does investing in leadership development result in positive outcomes for community or stakeholders?

At the forefront of the delivery of this local government's core responsibility are the staff who work at the coalface with community delivering policy, planning, development and services. The research points to managers, in particular, being anchored firmly in the unique position of follower and leader and assist in propelling forward the organisation's identity towards a persistent self-definition that makes it more enduring and resilient to change. If research supports the interdependency of the relationships between professional identity and the organisation's identity then would changes in managers' development and competencies influence the organisational identity? Further research would contribute to the current body of knowledge in the organisational identity field.

The context for this study was selected based on its distinctive bureaucratic characteristics. As a result findings generated by the study must be interpreted with the knowledge that there is a strong political and hierarchical influence. This study deepened the understanding of the ethical dilemmas

faced by managers in a rapidly changing social and political environment. Further research to explore if the deconstruction and reconstruction of realities occurs in other contexts when leaders are faced with ethical dilemmas would be of value for informing policy development and professional learning. Much is to be gained from research that looks to critique differing contexts and perspectives that contribute to a greater richness of the understanding of both policy and practice.

## Synthesis

Democracy and citizenship are the cornerstones of the identity of local government for communities. The bureaucratic nature of local government presents challenges for those who live or work within its context. Of particular attention are the managers who, taking on the roles of leaders and followers, are often charged with the responsibility of implementing change. Empowered with good intent managers struggled to achieve practices that were value informed and value led. Being cognisant of the conflict of values, managers were overcome with the persistent self-defining identity of the organisation. This led to managers undertaking a process of deconstructing and reconstructing their realities in order to make meaning of the change and to eliminate any conflict of values and ethics.

In addition, managers faced the complexities of multiple realities and interpretation of change processes by staff and communities. This often resulted in frustration and disengagement and made implementing change more confronting. Compounding these complexities were policies and practices that were unclear and confusing. Managers conceptualised their membership to the professional group called managers although no formal structures existed to support and nurture their identities. This allowed the organisational identity to prevail without account.

These are the stories that have been told, with honesty and openness entrusting the researcher with their experiences, enriching our understandings and creating new learning. This study takes us past just words and into a uniqueness born of personal experience (Guilar & Charman, 2009). If we are to create engaging leaders who are willing to journey with change in pursuit of positive outcomes for all, we need managers to know that they are not alone and the community need to know that their voices are being heard.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION LETTER TO MANAGERS**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT for MANAGERS**

'Change': exploring the impact of belief systems on the effectiveness of change

Principal Researcher: Dr Rhonda Forrest

Associate Researcher(s): Debra Mudra,

I am undertaking this research in my role as a PhD student of University of New England along with my supervisors Dr Rhonda Forrest and Professor Margaret Sims. The research we are undertaking is relating to change management in the unique environment of local government. It is within your role as a manager in local government that your experience and knowledge can assist in reaching the research goals. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential and in no way has any influence on your position in council.

This Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are **4** pages long. Please make sure you have all the pages.

### **1. Your Consent**

You are invited to take part in this research project.

This Participant Information Statement contains detailed information about the research project. Its purpose is to explain to you as openly and clearly as possible all the procedures involved in this project before you decide whether or not to take part in it.

Please read this Participant Information Statement carefully. Feel free to ask questions about any information in the document.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, you will be asked to sign the Consent Form. By signing the Consent Form, you indicate that you understand the information and that you give your consent to participate in the research project.

You will be given a copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form to keep as a record.

### **2. Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this project is:

- To study how well the council manages the process of change that needs to occur with planning staff in adopting a new approach
- Explore the processes of change management throughout this process and the impact of relationships, beliefs, views and values of staff and the community.

Previous research has shown that local governments experience change as a result of elections, new initiatives, community and business expectations and changing policy and legislative direction. However, to accept and manage these changes well, there needs to be a framework of processes and principles that reflects good governance at all levels within local government. This study aims to understand these principles and processes of local government while trying to manage changes that affect its citizens and of the organisation itself.

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a member of the integrated planning group and are responsible for key decision making in your planning role within council. Your involvement will assist in achieving the aims of the study.

### **3. Procedures**

Initial participation in this project will involve:

- The signing and returning of the consent form.
- The involvement in one individual semi structured interview at an agreed date and time.
- The interview will be audio taped and then the conversation will be written down. The interview should take about 1 hour to complete.
- The questions will enquire about your beliefs, experiences and values relating to change.

### **4. Possible Risks**

Your participation in this project is not intended to harm you in any way.

### **5. Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information**

During the study, project documentation will be stored in a secure, locked filing cabinet in the Community Development Wing of the City of Wodonga. The researcher's computer is password protected. Computer back up of the project documentation will be provided by the City of Wodonga's Information Technology and Records Department.

Any information obtained in connection with this project that can identify you will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.

Following the completion of the study, the project documentation will be kept for 5 years after which time it will be destroyed. The paper documentation will be shredded and audio tapes will be destroyed. The Information Technology Services Department of the City of Wodonga will delete data information from the computer.

In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. All published data will be in de-identified form.

### **8. Results of Project**

You will be informed of the results of the project in the form of a short report upon its completion. Upon your request, a summary of any research papers published in academic journals can be sent to you.

## **9. Further Information or Any Problems**

If you require further information or if you have any problems concerning this project, you can contact the researchers Debra Mudra on 02 6022 9272 or after hours on 0419 521 511 or Dr. Rhonda Forrest on 02 6773 3830

## **10. Participation is Voluntary**

Participation in this survey is voluntary, anonymous and all information collected will remain confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of this study. There will be no identification of participants used in the reporting process of this research. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage.

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with those within the City of Wodonga.

Before you make your decision, the researchers will be available to answer any questions you have about the research project. You can ask for any information you want. Sign the Consent Form only after you have had a chance to ask your questions and have received satisfactory answers.

If you decide to withdraw from this project, please notify us before you withdraw.

## **11. Ethical Guidelines**

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE09/157, Valid to 02/10/2010)

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services  
University of New England  
Armidale, NSW 2351  
Telephone: (02)67733449 Facsimile (02) 67733543  
Email: [ethics@une.edu.au](mailto:ethics@une.edu.au)

Participants should retain a copy of the, 'Information sheet for Participants'.

## **12. Reimbursement for your costs**

You will not be paid for your participation in this project.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our research.

Debra Mudra  
Dr. Rhonda Forrest  
Professor Margaret Sims

**APPENDIX 2: CONSENT LETTER TO MANAGERS**

## CONSENT FORM - MANAGERS

**Full Project Title:** Change: exploring the impact of belief systems on the effectiveness of change

Principal Researcher: Dr Rhonda Forrest

Associate Researcher(s): Debra Mudra

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I (the participant) aged 18 years or older, have read and understood the Participant Information Statement sheet and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I freely agree to participate in this activity according to the conditions in the Participant Information Statement and realise that I may withdraw at any time.

I understand and agree that the interview I am consenting to participate in will be audio taped and later transcribed.

I will be given a copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form to keep.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published or presented in public form, provided my name is not used.

Participant's Name (printed) .....

Signature              Date

Declaration by researcher\*: I have given a verbal explanation of the research project, its procedures and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher's Name (printed) .....

Signature              Date

\* The researcher must provide the explanation and provision of information concerning the research project.

*If you would like to receive any papers that may arise from this research, please provide your email address:* \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION LETTER TO COMMUNITY**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT for community members**

'Change': exploring the impact of belief systems on the effectiveness of change

Principal Researcher: Dr Rhonda Forrest

Associate Researcher(s): Debra Mudra,

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I am undertaking this research in my role as a PhD student of University of New England along with my supervisors Dr Rhonda Forrest and Professor Margaret Sims. The research we are undertaking is relating to change management in the unique environment of local government. It is within your role as a community member that your experience and knowledge can assist in reaching the research goals. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential and in no way has any influence on your relationship with council.

This Participant Information Statement is **3** pages long. Please make sure you have all the pages.

### **1. Your Consent**

You are invited to take part in this research project.

This Participant Information Statement contains detailed information about the research project. Its purpose is to explain to you as openly and clearly as possible all the procedures involved in this project before you decide whether or not to take part in it.

Please read this Participant Information Statement carefully. Feel free to ask questions about any information in the document. The phone number can be found in item 9 of this information statement.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, please complete the survey. By completing and returning the survey, you indicate that you understand the information and that you give your consent to participate in the research project.

You will be given a copy of the Participant Information Statement to keep as a record.

### **2. Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this project is:

- ⊕ To study how well the council manages the process of change that needs to occur with planning staff in adopting a new approach

- ⊕ Explore the processes of change management throughout this process and the impact of relationships, beliefs, views and values of staff and the community.
- ⊕ Previous research has shown that local governments experience change as a result of elections, new initiatives, community and business expectations and changing policy and legislative direction. However, to accept and manage these changes well, there needs to be a framework of processes and principles that reflects good governance at all levels within local government. This study aims to understand these principles and processes of local government while trying to manage changes that affect its citizens and of the organisation itself.

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a member of the local community in the municipality that is central to this study. Your involvement will assist in achieving the aims of the study.

### **3. Procedures**

Initial participation in this project will involve:

- The involvement in one individual survey.
- The survey should take about 30 minutes to complete.
- The questions will enquire about your beliefs, experiences and values relating to a change.

Your completion and returning of the survey will imply consent to participate.

### **4. Possible Risks**

Your participation in this project is not intended to harm you in any way.

### **5. Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information**

During the study, project documentation will be stored in a secure, locked filing cabinet in the Community Development Wing of the City of Wodonga. The researcher's computer is password protected. Computer back up of the project documentation will be provided by the City of Wodonga's Information Technology and Records Department.

Any information obtained in connection with this project that can identify you will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.

Following the completion of the study, the project documentation will be destroyed. The paper documentation will be shredded and audio tapes will be destroyed. The Information Technology Services Department of the City of Wodonga will delete data information from the computer.

In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. All published data will be in de-identified form.

### **8. Results of Project**

You will be informed of the results of the project in the form of a short report upon its completion. Upon your request, a summary of any research papers published in academic journals can be sent to you.

## **9. Further Information or Any Problems**

If you require further information or if you have any problems concerning this project, you can contact the researcher Debra Mudra on 02 6022 9272 or after hours on 0419 521 511 or Dr. Rhonda Forrest on 02 6773 3830

## **10. Participation is Voluntary**

Participation in this survey is voluntary, anonymous and all information collected will remain confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of this study. There will be no identification of participants used in the reporting process of this research. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage.

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with those within the City of Wodonga.

Before you make your decision, the researchers will be available to answer any questions you have about the research project. You can ask for any information you want. Complete the survey only after you have had a chance to ask your questions and have received satisfactory answers.

If you decide to withdraw from this project, please do not return the survey.

## **11. Ethical Guidelines**

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE09/157, Valid to 02/10/2010)

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services  
University of New England  
Armidale, NSW 2351  
Telephone: (02) 67733449 Facsimile (02) 67733543  
Email: [ethics@une.edu.au](mailto:ethics@une.edu.au)

Participants should retain a copy of the, 'Information sheet for Participants'.

## **12. Reimbursement for your costs**

You will not be paid for your participation in this project.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our research

Debra Mudra  
Dr. Rhonda Forrest  
Professor Margaret Sims

**APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONNAIRE TO ADULT COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

**Questionnaire on change management for community members**

**Part 1: Values and beliefs**

**Question 1:** Do you believe that the community has rights in relation to council decision making?

Yes       No

**Please comment:**

**Question 2:** Do you believe that children have rights in relation to council decision making?

Yes       No

**Please comment:**

**Question 3:** To what degree do you think that the community, including children, should influence council's decision making?

**Please Comment:**

**Question 4:** What does community consultation mean to you?

**Please comment:**

**Question 5:** Do you believe that council consults well with the community

Yes       No

**Question 6:** When council consults well with the community, what do you experience?

**Please comment:**

## **Part 2: Relationships**

**Question 7:** Do you believe that your views are shared with other community members around the level of decision making the community should have?

Yes       No

**Please comment:**

## **Part 3: Governance**

**Question 8:** Do you believe that council shows leadership during change that takes place in the community?

Yes       No

**Question 9:** What leadership role do you think council should play in the change process?

**Please comment:**

**Question 10:** What within council makes change difficult for you?

**Please comment:**

**Question 11:** Have you felt engaged throughout council's recent decision making that has impacted on you?

Yes

No

**Please comment:**

**Question 12:** What is needed to make you feel connected and engaged throughout any change process?

**Please comment:**

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.*

## **APPENDIX 5: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARENTS**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT for parents**

Change: exploring the impact of belief systems on the effectiveness of change

Principal Researcher: Dr Rhonda Forrest

Associate Researcher(s): Debra Mudra

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This Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are **4** pages long. Please make sure you have all the pages.

I am undertaking this research in my role as a PhD student of University of New England along with my supervisors Dr Rhonda Forrest and Professor Margaret Sims. The research we are undertaking is relating to change management in the unique environment of local government. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential and in no way has any influence on your relationship with council.

### **1. Your Consent**

Your child is invited to take part in this research project.

This Participant Information Statement contains detailed information about the research project. Its purpose is to explain to you as openly and clearly as possible all the procedures involved in this project before you decide whether or not you wish your child to take part in it.

Please read this Participant Information Statement carefully. Feel free to ask questions about any information in the document. The related phone number can be found in item 9 of this information statement.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree for your child to take part in it, you will be asked to sign the Consent Form. By signing the Consent Form, you indicate that you understand the information and that you give your consent for your child to participate in the research project.

You will be given a copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form to keep as a record.

### **2. Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this project is:

- To study how well the council manages the process of change that needs to occur with planning staff in adopting a new approach
- Explore the processes of change management throughout this process and the impact on relationships, beliefs, views and values of staff, the community and children.

- Previous research has shown that local governments experience change as a result of elections, new initiatives, community and business expectations and changing policy and legislative direction. However, to accept and manage these changes well, there needs to be a framework of processes and principles that reflects good governance at all levels within local government. This study aims to understand these principles and processes of local government while trying to manage changes that affect its citizens, including children and the organisation itself.

Your child is invited to participate in this research project because he/she has been involved in previous projects and consultations with council relating to issues that affect children and therefore have the opportunity to share these experiences. Your child's involvement will assist in achieving the aims of the study.

### **3. Procedures**

Initial participation in this project will involve:

- The signing and returning of the consent form.
- Your child's signing a consent form after explanation from your child's teacher.
- The involvement in one small group discussion or story writing activity.
- The small group discussion will be taped recorded and then transcribed verbatim
- The activities should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.
- The questions will enquire about your child's beliefs, experiences and values relating to changes that occur within their local community that affect them.

The researcher will be under direct supervision of your child's teacher while the research is undertaken and the researcher has a Working with Children's check.

### **4. Possible Risks**

Your participation in this project is not intended to harm your child in any way.

### **5. Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information**

During the study, project documentation will be stored in a secure, locked filing cabinet in the Community Development Wing of the City of Wodonga. The researcher's computer is password protected. Computer back up of the project documentation will be provided by the City of Wodonga's Information Technology and Records Department.

Any information obtained in connection with this project that can identify you will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.

Following the completion of the study, the project documentation will be destroyed. The paper documentation will be shredded and audio tapes will be destroyed. The Information Technology Services Department of the City of Wodonga will delete data information from the computer.

In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. All published data will be in de-identified form.

## **8. Results of Project**

Where children and parents consent, the information they contribute will be accessible through an appropriate report upon completion.

## **9. Further Information or Any Problems**

If you require further information or if you have any problems concerning this project, you can contact the researcher Debra Mudra on 02 6022 9272 or after hours on 0419 521 511 or Dr. Rhonda Forrest on 02 6773 3830

## **10. Participation is Voluntary**

Participation in these activities is voluntary, anonymous and all information collected will remain confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of this study. There will be no identification of participants used in the reporting process of this research. If you do not wish your child to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide for your child to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage.

Your decision not to allow your child to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will have no negative consequences.

Before you make your decision, the researchers will be available to answer any questions you have about the research project. You can ask for any information you want. Sign the Consent Form only after you have had a chance to ask your questions and have received satisfactory answers.

If you decide to withdraw your child from this project, please notify me before you withdraw.

## **11. Ethical Guidelines**

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE09/157, Valid to 02/10/2010)

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services  
University of New England  
Armidale, NSW 2351  
Telephone: (02)67733449 Facsimile (02) 67733543  
Email: [ethics@une.edu.au](mailto:ethics@une.edu.au)

Parents should retain a copy of the, 'Information sheet for Participants'.

## **12. Reimbursement for your costs**

You will not be paid for your participation in this project.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our research

Debra Mudra  
Dr. Rhonda Forrest  
Professor Margaret Sims

**APPENDIX 6: CONSENT FORM - PARENTS**

## CONSENT FORM - PARENTS

**Full Project Title:** Change: exploring the impact of belief systems on the effectiveness of change

Principal Researcher: Dr Rhonda Forrest

Associate Researcher(s): Debra Mudra

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I, (the parent), have read and understood the Participant Information Statement sheet and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I freely agree for my child to participate in discussions that will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim, and/or story writing according to the conditions in the Participant Information Statement and realise that I am free to withdraw my approval at any time.

I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form to keep.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published or presented in public form, provided my child's name nor any other identifying information will not be used or published.

I understand that the nature of the research sufficiently well to make a free informed decision on behalf of the person under 18 to consent to it.

I am satisfied that the circumstances in which the research is being conducted provide for the physical, emotional and psychological safety of the person on whose behalf I am giving consent.

I agree for my child (printed name) ..... to be involved in the activities outlined in the information sheet provided.

Signature              Date

*Note: All parties signing the Consent Form must date their own signature.*

**APPENDIX 7: INFORMATION LETTER TO CHILDREN**

### **Letter for Children**

I am a student who is writing a report about children and the way they would like to be involved in issues that change in their town. Things like the changes to the main street, the removal of the railway line and the new playground. My supervisors, Dr Rhonda Forrest and Professor Margaret Sims will be helping me to write this report. If you are happy to talk to me, we would like to hear what you have to say. You don't have to talk to us if you don't want to.

This letter is asking for your permission to talk to us about these things. You have the right to refuse to talk to us. That's okay.

We will ask you to talk to us or write a short story about what you think about some of the changes that have happened in your town.

We will have a tape recorder so we can remember what you and your friends say. You can leave the group at any time if you don't want to talk.

We will transcribe your words on the tape and your name will not be written down on this transcription. My supervisors, Rhonda Forrest and Margaret Sims, and I will hear the tape. When we have all the words from the tape transcribed, we will erase the tape. The word file will stay on the computer.

Your story writing will be yours to keep. We will ask you if we can photocopy them so we can read the words. We will look back to what you told us about your town so we can tell

other people so that you can have your say again at another time. When we tell other people what you think we won't use your real name.

Your teacher will be in your classroom while you are talking or writing a story.

We have asked your parents if it's okay if we talk to you and they have said yes. Now we want to know if you would like to talk to us about your experience in the town.

We will keep everything you say private but if we think that you might not be safe we might have to tell some other adults who can help me make you safe.

If you've started to talk to us and you decide that you no longer want to talk, that is okay, you can stop, we won't mind.

If you have any questions or would like to talk about this, ask your Mum, Dad or teacher to phone the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

*Research Services*

*University of New England*

*Armidale, NSW 2351*

*Telephone: (02)67733449 Facsimile (02) 67733543*

*Email: [ethics@une.edu.au](mailto:ethics@une.edu.au)*

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE09/157, Valid to 02/10/2010)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our research.

Debra Mudra

Dr. Rhonda Forrest

Professor Margaret Sims

**APPENDIX 7: ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN**

### **Assent form for children**

#### *Changes in your town*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information in the letter and would like to take part in this study. I understand that I can change my mind at any time and ask not to participate.

I agree that while my ideas and story writing may be written down or tape recorded, my name and any other information that may identify me or my family will not be used.

If you would like to talk to me please sign your name here:



Signature (Young person): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_