# Emerald Insight

## Journal of Organizational Ethnography

## Article information:

## Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

## For Authors

## About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

# Policy implementation in the public sector

## A comparison of two methods of evaluating the impact of government interventions

Jane Ladner

*The Business School, University of Essex, Colchester, UK*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to compare the plausibility and criticality of two methods of evaluating the implementation of a new government policy within a public service organisation, and to examine the power relations revealed in each evaluation and the social realities of the membership.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Two contrasting approaches to research, based on different theoretical perspectives, were undertaken simultaneously to provide a critical account of an organisation, and its membership, undergoing an externally imposed transformation to improve child protection procedures. The first involved the use of mainly quantitative methods in the form of government sponsored social surveys. Data were triangulated with organisational inspection outcomes. The second method comprised a critical ethnographic evaluation undertaken through discourse analysis in the organisation.

**Findings** – Bottom-up agency rather than top-down structural change is the main influence on policy implementation in child protection. Critical discourse analysis provides a more plausible and credible analysis of the dynamics of organisational change and power relations than surveys.

**Originality/value** – This research poses new questions over the value of quantitative surveys as opposed to ethnographic methodologies in representing organisational practices.

**Keywords** Critical discourse analysis (CDA), Power, Agency, Child protection, Questionnaires, Structure

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

This paper focusses on a politically orchestrated transformation of a public service organisation responsible for child protection. The organisational transformation was dominated by a new government agenda: services within the organisation were required to restructure to improve multi-agency collaboration and accountability and managers were expected to lead these changes. Although this paper will refer to the implementation, progress and outcomes of the transformation, this will be within the context of power relations and political purposes and the impact that these have on both the teams and individuals within the organisation.

An analysis of the implementation and impact of the new policy was undertaken using two different approaches. The first sought to measure, in some objective manner, compliance with the government's requirements. Centrally designed surveys were used to understand progress and implementation strategies within the organisation and it was mandatory for the findings from these surveys to be communicated to government. The second took a constructivist stance using ethnographic observations to study group and individual actions and attitudes towards the organisational

changes. This research project was undertaken within the organisation and findings were not widely communicated. The two evaluations tended to focus on either end of a structure/agency continuum but both result in a critical appraisal of the processes and outcomes involved in the organisational transformation.

This paper initially focusses on the structural factors and changes that sought to shape the "right" organisational culture during the implementation process. In this context, implementation is defined as "the carrying out of a basic policy decision [...] incorporated in a statute order" (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983, p. 20). Bourdieu (1991) argued that institutions of power lie behind behaviours and cultural meanings and these limit choices, confer legitimacy and guide daily life. The institutions of power within government and in the organisation under investigation steered the change process "top-down" in a way calculated to alter learned professional and social behaviours.

In this study, the starting point was the authoritative decision made by central government and translated into a transformational policy (Matland, 1995). At a local government level, managers were charged with the implementation of this workforce transformation and professional ideologies were imposed to adapt behaviours, working environments and value systems to improve the efficiency of child protection services. These were rationalised and justified in ways that were difficult to dispute. Hegemonic control of the change agenda rested with government agencies and with local managers. They worked hard to gain the support of the local service groups and individual professionals "against a backdrop of low morale, reduced budgets, growing complexity and underlying change" (KPMG, 2010, p. 8).

This "top-down" rational approach (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973) relies on the managers' abilities to deliver policy objectives as intended and control the implementation stage (Pulzl and Trieb, 2006). Success, however, depends on sufficient resources, a system of clear responsibilities and hierarchical control to supervise the actions of the implementers (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). In common with many models of policy implementation, this evolves through discrete stages which "translate policy into action" (Barrett, 2004, p. 251; see also Brewer and deLeon, 1983; May and Wildavsky, 1978; Jenkins, 1978).

The above staged cycle assumes a cause-and-effect model where managers have control over outcomes such as group cohesion (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) and commitment (Sass and Canary, 1991). In this study, a similar staged sequence was managed. First, the government policy and consultation documents led to a new organisational strategy for change. Top and middle managers confirmed their support and the strategy was translated into identity work. The vocabulary of motives was established, the group categorisations and affiliations were defined and the procedures clarified (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The progress of the organisational transformation was monitored and evaluated and results communicated.

Central government and senior managers within the local organisation, however, can only influence micro-level organisational factors and individual members indirectly (Berman, 1978). In addition, there are often wide variations in the way that national policies are implemented and their impact at local levels (Matland, 1995). Contextual factors within each local organisational environment can influence the effectiveness of the implementation process and policy designers do not have absolute control over the process (Berman, 1978). Indeed, a considerable number of studies have shown that policy objectives and outcomes are often not related and a causal link is questionable (Pulzl and Trieb, 2006). For example, there is a history of structured reorganisations in welfare service organisations which have not proved successful (Dyson *et al.*, 2009). Deterministic

models of change, for example, do not necessarily reflect the impact of prior experiences of members of the organisation and strategies for change are often affected by their initial professional socialisation and self-interests.

A different ontological stance was, therefore, required to evaluate the impact of the implementation process. "Bottom-up" theories emerged as an alternative response to the "top-down" school and theorists (Lipsky, 1980; Hjern, 1982; Matland, 1995) suggested that it was more realistic to study what was actually happening at recipient level and analyse what was happening "on the ground". An alternative methodological model was also required to evaluate the change process. Taylor and Van Every (2000) argued that change emerged from the discursive practices of the organisational membership in specific contexts. The second methodological choice, therefore, acknowledged the importance of language and discourse in the organisational transformation; one where change was considered a natural part of everyday organisational life.

In both the "top-down" and the "bottom-up" models considered above, organisational change is closely linked to power relations. In the former "top-down" model, texts and direction from central government and organisational management provided an ideological narrative to extend hegemonic influence throughout the organisational membership. This required the active consent of those subject to it (Clegg, 1989). In the latter, power was not considered to be exercised simply by hierarchical groups but in everyday social and discursive practices. In this theoretical approach, human agency rather than structure influence the receptivity or resistance to the dominant organisational discourse. Thus, "organisations […] are constructed by conversations and fragments of conversations in which many voices strive to be heard" (Coupland and Brown, 2004, pp. 30-31).

In addition, organisations are "not simply social collectives where shared meaning is produced, but rather sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organisations in ways that serve their own interests" (Mumby and Clair, 1997, p. 182). For example, professional groups may have alternative motives, interests and specialised attributes from those that are central to the management of the organisation (Glynn, 2000). An organisation such as this, therefore, operates within the constraints of structure and the agents' autonomy: the double involvement or interdependence in which social actors shape society and are, at the same time, shaped by it.

Within any organisation there are numerous hidden agendas, centres of power and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain (Thomas, 1993) and there are also resistant behaviours. Resistance to the dominant organisational discourse may be related to uncertainty, ambiguity or to suit the self-interests of the organisational member or group. A further complication which impacts on group and individual ownership and commitment to the organisational transformation is that of context. Members of welfare organisations, in particular, have experienced a continual stream of changes in policy, working and social conditions throughout their professional lives and understand the ephemeral duration and character of governments and government policy. They use their knowledge and understanding of different temporal orientations and contexts to make sense of their social construction of reality in relation to their "hopes, fears and desires for the future" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 971).

This study, however, does not prejudge or impose either post-structural meanings of interpretations or social constructionist perspectives. Three dimensions that can be used to evaluate the efficacy of both studies can be applied. These refer to the authenticity, plausibility and credibility (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993) of each set of data gathered. The authenticity of that data depends, in part, on the reflexivity of the researcher.

The plausibility of the findings is judged on the extent to which they convince the reader that they are relevant, distinctive, innovative and make a contribution to the disciplinary area. In addition, they need to connect with the readers' personal and professional experiences. The focus on criticality, in this context, is the capacity of the data to cause the reader to reframe the way in which they perceive and study organisational phenomena (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). In the following section, the context of the studies and the organisation will be described.

## The organisational change: background and context

All local authorities in the UK are constantly under scrutiny to improve their services to protect vulnerable children. Historically, these services have been crisis ridden. A series of moral panics that have made headline news continue to linger in the minds of an increasingly discerning and critical general public: those involving child abuse and "sexploitation". In 2005, the Labour Government set out their ambitions for transforming Children's Services in response to the number of these child abuse cases and to modify perceptions concerning the competence of public services to respond appropriately to these (Department of Health and Social Security, 1982; Department of Health, 2002; DfES, 2003; Laming, 2003).

The context for this paper focusses on the emergence of "Integrated Children's Services" within a small local authority during the critical five year period following 2007. During that time, Children's Services were transformed in all local authorities as a result of government legislation aimed at improving the protection of vulnerable children and young people from abuse. The Victoria Climbie Inquiry (Laming, 2003), highlighted a lack of communication and information sharing between service areas such as schools, social services, police and health as a key factor contributing to the tragedy. In order to protect vulnerable children, multi-agency integrated working was promoted. This involved previously discrete services working together in collaborative practice.

The Children's Workforce resulted and this was originally defined as a "world-class workforce that is competent and confident" (DfES, 2005a, p. 3), so as to "strengthen inter-agency and multi-disciplinary working" (DfES, 2005a, p. 4), "understand and apply good practice in sharing information" (DfES, 2006, p. 7) and "share accountability" (Children First, 2009, p. 3). Nationally, this workforce currently consists of between three and four million workers. Within the local authority under investigation, the workforce comprised approximately 5,000 people mostly employed directly by the organisation. Other professionals such as school nurses, health visitors, police child protection officers worked under the aegis of the local authority. Changes to be effected in this workforce are summarised in Table I.

In addition to the workforce restructure outlined above, government agencies, notably the newly formed Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), orchestrated the production of resources and materials to be used by all local authorities as strategic resources for identity work and regular evaluation of progress was built into the workforce construction. These resources included: workforce strategies, frameworks and booklets to support workforce induction, training, and narratives on aspirational working practices. The identification of this new workforce, therefore, was a heavily politicised process. Millions of pounds were spent by government to promote and monitor the implementation and progress of the Children's Workforce between 2007 and 2010. £50 K was spent annually between 2008 and 2010 in the local authority to undertake impact evaluations and results were sent to central

| Previous ways of working (low level of collaboration) | New ways of working (high level of collaboration) |
|---|---|
| Services and teams | Services and teams |
| Service agencies remain autonomous with control over own resources and budgets | Formal agreements on vision, strategy and ways of working managed by a Children's Trust/Services |
| Work towards different targets and goals | Service areas sacrifice autonomy |
| Staff managed by individual service | Joint responsibility for resources and budgets |
| | Work to shared goals and targets |
| Frontline staff | Frontline staff |
| Commitment to own service area | Commitment to partnership/multi-agency working |
| Accountable to own service area | Accountable to Children's Trust/Services |
| Variable practice depending on individual and Service area | Sharing information and communicating effectively |
| | Joint responsibility for child protection and Safeguarding |

**Table I.**
Changes to the workforce

government for scrutiny. Workforce development was also categorised in the OfSTED (local authority) inspection process.

In my position as a senior manager within the organisation I had to lead, manage and evaluate aspects of this organisational change. In addition, I was required to conduct a formal three year evaluation of the implementation of the change process using prescribed government surveys. During this three year period I also gathered ethnographic data, including the discourse used in meetings, during observations, conversations and interviews for an internal research project, and this formed the basis of the second study. I was deeply immersed in the social life of the organisation and, therefore, reflexivity is a main issue.

**The two methodologies**
The two methodologies described in this section were undertaken simultaneously to provide two separate responses to the externally imposed transformation. Both evaluations were carried out "in the field" and data were gathered from a wide range of sources including questionnaires, participant observation, informal conversations and external inspections. The first approach to data collection relied heavily on quantitative surveys and the second on those more traditionally associated with ethnography such as participant observation and unstructured interviews. The value of this study is realised in the way in which these two approaches allow comparisons between both sets of data.

*Methodology 1*
The local authority received annual funding over a three year period from government via the CWDC to evaluate the progress and development of the Children's Workforce within the organisation. The CWDC commissioned a toolkit which included a number of resources to develop strategies for use in the organisation, for example: questionnaires, card sorting exercises, focus group activities and scenario workshops. In the main, during the data collection process in this study, questionnaires were distributed during focus group activities which were overseen by managers. Focus groups were provided with awareness and identity raising activities using the toolkit prior to completion of the questionnaire.

In this study, the focus was on the evaluation of three of the performance indicators in the toolkit: members' identification with the new workforce; understanding and sharing information appropriately; improved accountability due to effective integrated working processes. During data collection, over 300 questionnaires were completed by the following: head teachers, senior managers responsible for safeguarding children, youth workers, early years, school learning mentors, teachers, voluntary services, members of multi-agency teams and children's health professionals.

Each questionnaire typically comprised approximately 80 questions arranged within a colour coded framework. The following questions are examples of those focussed on shared identity, information sharing and behaviours focussed on positive outcomes:

- Is there a common identity for the Children's Workforce in your organisation?

- Do you consider yourself to be part of the Children's Workforce?

- Do you understand when and how to share information about a child or young person within your own organisation and with other agencies?

- Is there easily accessible guidance, sources of advice and support for information sharing?

- Do you know how you are expected to act and behave as a member of the Children's Workforce?

Respondents were asked to grade their responses to each question as follows: fragmented; working towards; almost there; and fully integrated. They were also given the opportunity to write relevant comments. Findings were transmitted electronically to the CWDC but were analysed both internally and externally. Organisational inspections in the form of Joint Area Reviews (JARs) and Annual Performance Assessment (APA) were also provided as evidence and this improved cross-method triangulation. During external inspections such as the above, organisational members worked hard to present a positive picture of organisational procedures and outcomes.

I was largely responsible for the identity work (training) of the new workforce, the administration and management of the CWDC questionnaires and focus groups. Field notes were kept of these processes as well as snippets of conversations about members' commitment to the organisational change during "identity work events". In theory, my first-hand experience established the authenticity of the evidence collected.

*Methodology 2*
The second study drew on a range of traditional ethnographic data collection methods: a research diary; observation of multi-agency team meetings; and unstructured interviews. In all, 30 members of the organisation were interviewed and, as in the previous method, respondents were selected to represent all service areas and hierarchical structures. There was considerable overlap between the respondents interviewed and those who completed the questionnaire described in the previous section. The interview schedule was designed to provide data on the same performance indicators covered in the first study:

- understanding and commitment to the principles and behaviours integral to the Children's Workforce;

- understanding and commitment to, and participation in, the sharing of information on vulnerable children; and

- understanding of issues and responsibility for accountability.

The conduct of each interview was dissimilar. My relationship with each respondent produced its own particular order, and this generally depended on pre-existing relationships, status inequalities and professional backgrounds.

Observational techniques were used to evaluate the way in which members of the organisation, through interaction, attempted to develop the shared patterns of behaviours and values characteristic of the new workforce. Throughout the three year data collection period, I observed multi-agency meetings, listened, asked questions and led identity work such as induction and briefing events. This provided an unprecedented opportunity to understand the members' commitment to the organisational changes, and thus, enhanced authenticity. Events and conversations that occurred *in situ* were recorded in a research diary.

### Addressing reflexivity and subjectivity

I was charged with the management and evaluation of aspects of the organisational change process and I argue that this enhanced the authenticity of the study; a result of having "been there" in the field. In addition, as a member of the organisation, I had an enhanced understanding of the power relations, the day-to-day lives of the membership and an understanding of the organisational environment. This introspective reflexivity refers to the way in which the ethnographer is involved in the production of the data. I argue that this has provided a more faithful account which has enabled me to "unpack the production of social reality" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 82). My situated knowledge of the organisation and understanding of the political nuances and influences within the workplace provided an enhanced perception of the complexities and subtleties of the change process.

My involvement in the collection of evidence for both studies has been described. The way in which this has impacted on the data collected is more contentious. In the first study, I was responsible, in part, for the legitimation of the new organisational ideology and the identity work for the respondents surveyed. My involvement in this process, and my understanding of organisational life, caused me to question the efficacy of the data collected from the survey. The value of the second study was the way in which the data provided evidence of insightful interpretations, incorporated contextual understandings and indicated the profoundness of the analytic scheme thus supporting readers to make sense of the discourse (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). The evidence collected reflected the way that individual social actors conceptualised the organisation in a way that was decentred, fragmented, evolving and incomplete (Kvale, 1992; Wetherell and Maybin, 1996). I argue that the different methods of data collection, and the triangulation of data, enable differing interpretations of organisational reality to be made.

The final issue concerns the use of reflexivity as a social critique (Finlay and Gough, 2003). A main aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of the change process on the organisational members. The voices of members of the workforce; those that contribute to the construction of organisational realities have to be appraised and power relationships demonstrated. My influence on the data collected from the questionnaires has been documented and the issues of power and control during the focus group activities and identity work undertaken prior to this data collection process have been considered. In the second investigation, during the interviews, I deferred to the expertise of each respondent so as to allow the often contradictory and multiple voices to be heard.

### Data analysis

In the first evaluation, responses to the questionnaire for each performance indicator were rated using a Likert scale. The analysis of results was based on the mean scores

derived from aggregated answers to each question and across all responses in a given area or participant group. In addition, a breakdown of the scores in both single and multi-agency teams was also recorded. Relevant comments taken from the JAR and the APA were also recorded.

In order to examine the data from the second evaluation, the theoretical/methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Fairclough (1992, 2001), was used. This involved the description and interpretation of text and social practices. Theoretically, this approach is characterised by realist social ontology which considers both abstract social structures and concrete events as part of social reality (Fairclough, 2011). A range of discourse types was examined to determine the extent to which members understood, and were committed to, the new organisational workforce. This involved an evaluation of how far members were enacting the genres (ways of doing) and identifying with the styles (ways of being) of the organisation. Quotes from the observations and interviews were recorded and four themes emerged which were then examined:

- commitment to the new organisational workforce;

- understanding of multiple identities;

- understanding when and how to share information appropriately; and

- understanding accountability.

CDA was also used to review the way in which human agency is "temporarily embedded in the process of engagement" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 963), that is, informed by past professional experiences, but also orientated towards future political landscapes. This helped to make sense of the way in which organisational members made practical decisions about their future actions in response to presently evolving situations. Members of this organisation had historically been subject to political changes, budgetary deficiencies, job insecurity and a high media profile and their responses to this often hostile and anxiety-riven environment were evaluated.

## Outcomes
### Evaluation 1
The CWDC Toolkit was considered by managers in the organisation to be high quality and a sound basis for the delivery of professional development via the focus group meetings. The questionnaires, however, were not received so well by the workforce. They were generally considered to be repetitive and over-long. "Meanings" were considered to be difficult to understand. A considerable amount of data were collected from the questionnaires. The key headlines resulting from this data, on each of the performance indicators, now follow.

The initial questionnaire, administered in 2008 indicated that all respondents understood the need to improve child protection and were strongly committed to this. Managers felt that the organisational changes had been well led, with a strong sense of purpose and had been internalised by many in the workforce. Organisational members, however, were not quite so positive. There was a wide spread of opinion about the purpose and vision underpinning the policy and whether these had been effectively shared and understood. By 2010, however, more than 70 per cent of respondents (approximately 230) agreed that there was a shared vision amongst the workforce; a significant improvement over the two year period.

Responses to questions specifically related to the sharing of information were felt to be encouraging and positive. In 2010, the sharing of information amongst professionals was rated as the strongest and most improved indicator. These results were confirmed by the findings of the JAR: "Integrated workforces are being successfully developed to deliver services within localities" (JAR, Point 95, unpublished). The Annual Performance Assessment (unpublished) stated that: "Good systems are in place to share information".

The accountability systems were evaluated and judged to be improved by 2010. In 2008, the workforce judged that they were "working towards" effective accountability procedures but by 2010 these were judged to be "fully integrated". Professional behaviours had also improved substantially according to 70 per cent of respondents in 2010.

Feedback from the CWDC about the progress of the local authority as a result of the final survey undertaken in 2010 was very positive. The outcomes of the surveys, demonstrated that the organisation performed well in comparison with other local authorities. In summary, data indicated that managers had a clear understanding of the Children's Workforce and the core principles of this new approach to multi-agency working. Integrated working practices were judged to be progressing well. Respondents also commented positively on the progress made in the key performance indicators on information sharing and improved accountability systems (report to Children's Trust, 2010, unpublished). In the following section, the implementation and change process from the second study is presented.

*Evaluation 2*
Data demonstrated that respondents were keen and committed the improvement of child protection. Their attitudes towards the organisational changes, however, were not as compelling or cohesive as that presented above. The headlines are presented below.

The concept of the Children's Workforce did not appear to be fully embedded within the wider organisation and there was some confusion about the membership and function of this workforce. One head teacher described the initiative (i.e. the Children's Workforce) during a training event as a "load of old nonsense" (field notes). Although conceding the need for change to working practices to safeguard children more effectively, only four respondents interviewed (13 per cent) understood the concept of the Children's Workforce. Even these respondents claimed that their main priority was to their profession and the new organisational workforce was not a significant issue for them. All interviewees claimed that their self-identity was based primarily on their professional identity.

Respondents demonstrated more commitment to, and understanding of, the protocols, procedures and principles of their professions rather than those of the Children's Workforce. Teachers felt that their primary function was to impart knowledge. Few wanted to be fully involved in child protection procedures and did not consider this to be part of their responsibilities unless there was a disclosure by a pupil.

Despite working together on acute child protection cases, social workers and health workers did not feel comfortable working together unless there were prior well established inter-agency relationships. There was little connectivity with the new organisational discourse and these service areas remained largely autonomous, despite being accountable to Children's Services within the local authority.

Members of multi-agency teams appeared to be relaxed about sharing information. Most professionals, however, felt that there were issues around the sharing of information

associated with a lack of understanding, different perceptions about protocols, cultural norms, power relations and value systems. Confusion over professional protocols also impacted on professional accountability. Respondents were generally ambiguous over the issue of accountability.

Finally, interviews revealed that the members of this organisation were highly sensitive to the changing contextual dimensions within the workforce environment. Many had experienced changing political, budgetary and social contexts throughout their professional lives. This was particularly evident when they discussed the way that this impacted on the sharing of information and accountability. Respondents were also critical of, and concerned about, the social and cultural struggles over resources, professional status and protocols emanating from competing service areas within the organisation. Apprehension and nervousness associated with child protection practices were evident and some interviewees could cite actual examples of distressing situations with clients. Members of the workforce used defensive strategies and also chose, and shifted, between orders of discourse in their response to contextual and environmental factors.

## Discussion

The authenticity of both studies has been established; an assurance was made that both investigative experiences were genuine and first hand. Researcher reflexivity has also been considered. Consideration of the persuasiveness of the data are dependent on the plausibility of each data set and their capacity to convince.

Denzin (2009, p. 139) argued that qualitative researchers are disadvantaged within the evidence-quality-standards discourse (Feuer *et al.*, 2002; Lather, 2004; National Research Council, 2002; Thomas, 2004). Hammersley (2005, p. 3) concurred and observed that "qualitative research tends to suffer by comparison with quantitative work because there is a myth that quantitative researchers have clear-cut guidelines which are available for use by policymakers". The first evaluation included quantitative metrics, data transparency and rigorous peer-reviews from inspection agencies. In contrast, the dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough, 2001) used in the second evaluation provided an interpretive repertoire of discourse through which organisational members constructed their accounts of social reality. Through the analysis of text, observation and participants' reflective accounts, their resistance, concerns, anxieties, ignorance and ambiguity to the dominant discourse were located.

The first evaluation captured the causal relationship between the new ideological concepts, hegemonic control and the associated changes in behaviours and values endorsed by a majority of organisational members' surveyed. Data provided a generally positive, improving and persuasive picture although hegemonic control was not complete. The Hawthorne effect (Landsberger, 1958) could be offered as a contributory factor in this context. The impact of external inspection and the managerial control of the survey process may have enhanced individuals' motivations and, therefore, responses. These findings are generally in line with those produced nationally; most local authorities generated positive outcomes in this survey. For example, LARC (2008, p. 4) reported that each of the 14 similar organisations surveyed identified "impacts of integration on processes, structures and cultures, suggesting that the process of culture change is well underway". The CWDC (2009, p. 8) reported that the implementation of the organisational changes had been adopted and were making a difference.

In contrast, the empirical data from the second study indicated that agency rather than structure was the dominant factor in the construction of social reality for the members of this organisation. Members appeared to pick and mix their commitments,

their ideologies and their chosen ways of working to suit the often contradictory, complex and ambiguous environment in which they worked. Although organisational members had come into contact with the new organisational discourse, many kept their distance, albeit self-consciously. They related superficially to the discourse, and more particularly the values expressed within that discourse, but many did not actually engage in it.

These findings correlate with other judicial reviews and enquiries into safeguarding practices (Cleveland, 1987; Laming, 2003) and a significant number of research papers (Little and Sinclair, 2005; Howarth and Morrison, 2007; Dyson *et al.*, 2009; Stuart, 2012). These describe breakdowns in communication across professional and service areas as a root cause of inadequate child protection services. Cooper *et al.* (2003) argued that the structural reform of welfare organisation in isolation was not enough to effect improvement in these services. Cooper *et al.* (2003) also stressed the need for cultural change within welfare services based on improving trust, negotiation and authority.

The second evaluation was also useful because it demonstrated the way in which organisational members made practical and normative judgements about their behaviours and values in response to their understanding of different temporal orientations: historical, political and social. This helped them to make sense of who they were and what they wanted to be (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). By calling on these past experiences, in times of uncertainty, they were more able to construct their own future categories of action and value. Respondents were well able to articulate their anxieties for the future in relation to "fluid and shifting fields of possibilities" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). These projections were characterised by a high degree of indeterminacy.

The members appeared to make practical and normative judgements about their choices of action in response to evolving situations taking place in the present. Their choices were often made in an environment of ambiguity, uncertainty and conflict in response to fast changing and emergent situations. Frequently, this required prudence, self-centred calculation, expediency and pragmatism due to the high risk environment in which these professionals work. The over-riding situational context which drove agentic orientation appeared to be that of "self" and the relief of professional anxiety. This was the main factor which impacted adversely on members' receptivity to the new organisational discourse. The second evaluation, therefore, appears more convincing as it facilitates criticality and enables the reader to discover "what is hidden in the organisational closet" (Barley, 1983).

Finally, in order to make sense of the empirical data, it is necessary to revisit the premise that critical researchers assume that cultural life "is in constant tension between control and resistance" (Thomas, 1993, p. 9). Data from the first evaluation indicated that the new organisational ideology was used to "create ideas, images of acceptance and acquiescence of the status quo" (Madison, 2005, p. 54). Ostensibly, a majority of the workforce were conditioned to believe that the interests of the organisation were aligned with their self-interests and they became complicit in their own subordination (Gramsci, 1977). Over time, however, other more powerful contextual factors or ideological narratives appeared to prevail; particularly those related to the individual professions. Organisational members then demonstrated "degrees of manoeuvrability, inventiveness and reflective choices […] in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 964). This was reflected in the second set of data.

## Conclusions

There are many approaches to organisational research, and in particular, implementation studies. Neither research method in this paper claims to be valid or reliable. I do, however, claim to have reported each set of findings objectively. The findings of each evaluation do not triangulate. The persuasiveness of each, however, rests on its capacity to convince or resonate with the reader.

The successful implementation of new government policy "top-down" depends initially on a universal agreement that reform is required. Both sets of data demonstrated conclusively that organisational members understood the need for the systemic improvement of child protection services and were committed to this. They subscribed to the government rhetoric for "strengthening protection for the most vulnerable" (DfES, 2005a, b). In this organisation, "top down" approaches (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975; Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980) were controlled by managers who facilitated the constitution of the new organisational culture. This conformed to the rational model approach (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973) which underlined the linear relationship between agreed policy goals and their implementation. This approach relies on "adequate bureaucratic procedures to ensure that policies are executed as accurately as possible" (Pulzl and Treib, 2006, p. 91).

Organisational members routinely experienced these bureaucratic procedures in the form of targets, impact evaluations and performance measurement (often termed new public management). It is possible that the positive responses in the first set of data accurately reflected the views of the respondents. On the other hand, it may have indicated an adroitness to manage or manoeuver the dominant discourse so that members presented themselves/their service area or the organisation more positively.

Throughout the first decade of this century, and in line with the policy outlined in this study, the UK government made a number of proposals for improving various aspects of Children's Services "top down". Many small scale evaluations undertaken since that time have offered sceptical accounts of this model of policy implementation, for example: improving inter-professional trust (Howarth and Morrison, 2007; Stuart, 2012), reducing bureaucracy (Gupta and Blewett, 2006), improving professional development (Oliver, 2010), collaboration (Percy-Smith, 2006). Furthermore, throughout the duration of this research, a substantial number of children continued to be sexually exploited in Rotherham, Nottingham, Derby, Oxford and Bristol in the UK. The Improvement of child protection remains a national priority. It is a major challenge, therefore, to accept the findings of the first evaluation unequivocally.

The second evaluation recognised the importance of the constructivist approach and focussed on "private languages [...] differing interpretive abilities, and other factors (that) mediate how identity is formulated, culture is understood, and behavioural responses are chosen and implemented" (Thomas, 1993, p. 14). Data confirmed that organisational members were committed and conscientious but were more likely to construct their own realities on the constitutive elements of the historical, political, social and cultural contexts (Van Dijk, 1997). These factors, when linked to self-interest, were the prevailing influences which impacted on their connectivity with the organisational discursive strategies.

The practical implications which arise from both evaluations are based, in part, on the contradiction between "top-down" and "bottom-up" models of policy implementation. Elmore (1980) advocated that policy makers should initially consider the policy instruments and available resources for policy change (forward mapping) as well as identifying the incentives and challenges (backward mapping); a hybrid theory which synthesises the two approaches to implementation cited above.

In this way, policy implementation analysis is enhanced by incorporating the structural aspects of management strategies, benefits and costs and the impact of human agency on values, attitudes and behaviours.

In conclusion, this study requires the reader to consider and re-examine their personal and intellectual assumptions regarding methodologies for evaluating the impact of policy implementation. Both evaluations provide a rich and complex understanding of the social world of the organisational membership and a critique of the organisation. This aspect of criticality challenges the reader to re-examine their understanding of the way they research organisational life and opens up possibilities for future research.

## References

Alvesson, M. and Willmott, H. (2002), "Organizational control producing the 'appropriate individual'", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 619-644.

Ashforth, B.E. and Mael, F. (1989), "Social identity theory and the organization", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 20-39.

Barley, S.R. (1983), "Semiotics and the study of occupational and organizational cultures", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 393-413.

Barrett, S. (2004), "Implementation studies. time for revival? personal reflections on 20 years of implementation studies", *Public Administration*, Vol. 82 No. 2, pp. 249-262.

Berman, P. (1978), "The study of macro- and micro-implementation", *Public Policy*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 157-184.

Bourdieu, P. (1991), *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Brewer, G. and deLeon, P. (1983), *The Foundations of Policy Analysis*, Brooks Cole, Monteray, CA.

Children First (2009), "It's all in the sharing of resources and accountability", Society Guardian, 30 November, available at: guardian.co.uk/children-first/sharing-resources-accountability (accessed May 2016).

Clegg, S.R. (1989), *Frameworks of Power*, Sage, London.

Cleveland (1987), "Inquiry into child abuse in Cleveland", Cleveland Report, HMSO, London.

Cooper, A., Hetherington, H. and Katz, I. (2003), *The Risk Factor: Making the Child Protection System Work for Children*, Demos, London.

Coupland, C. and Brown, A.D. (2004), "Constructing organisational identity on the web: a case study of royal Dutch/shell", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 8, pp. 1325-1347.

CWDC (2009), "Drilling down: results of the integrated working self assessment", CWDC, East of England.

Denzin, N.K. (2009), "The elephant in the living room: or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence", *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 139-160.

Department of Health (2002), *Learning from Past Experience: A Review of Serious case Reviews*, Department of Health, London.

Department of Health and Social Security (1982), *Child abuse: A Study of Inquiry Reports 1973-1981*, Department of Health and Social Security, London.

DfES (2003), "Every child matters", Cm. 5860, The Stationery Office, London.

DfES (2005a), "Children's workforce strategy. Every child matters; change for children", DfES, Nottingham.

DfES (2005b), "The common core of skills and knowledge", DfES, Nottingham.

DfES (2006), "Information sharing: practitioners' guide. Every child matters; change for children", DfES, Nottingham.

Dyson, A., Farrell, P., Kerr, K. and Mearns, N. (2009), *Swing, Swing Together: Multi-Agency Work in the New Children's Services*, Routledge, London, pp. 141-154.

Elmore, R.F. (1980), "Backward mapping: implementation research and policy decisions", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 94 No. 4, pp. 601-616.

Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. (1998), "What is agency?", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103 No. 4, pp. 962-1013.

Fairclough, N. (1992), *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Fairclough, N. (2001), "A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research", in Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (Eds), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications Ltd 2001, London, pp. 162-186.

Fairclough, N. (2011), *Critical Discourse Analysis. Discourse Studies*, Sage Publications, London.

Feuer, M.J., Towne, L. and Shavelson, R.J. (2002), "Science, culture and educational research", *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 31 No. 8, pp. 4-14.

Finlay, L. and Gough, B. (2003), *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences*, Blackwell Science, Oxford.

Glynn, K. (2000), *Tabloid Culture: Trash Taste, Popular Power and the Transformation of American Television*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Golden-Biddle, K. and Locke, K. (1993), "Appealing work: an investigation of how ethnographic texts convince", *Organization Science*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 595-616.

Gramsci, A. (1977), "Gramsci's general theory of Marxism", *Telos Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, Vol. 1977 No. 33, pp. 27-30.

Gupta, A. and Blewett, J. (2006), "Change for children? the challenges and opportunities for the children's social work workforce", *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 172-181.

Hammersley, M. (2005), "Close encounters of a political kind: the threat from evidence-based policy-making and practice movement", *Qualitative Researcher*, Vol. 1, pp. 2-4.

Hjern, B. (1982), "Implementation research. the link gone missing", *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 301-308.

Hogwood, B.W. and Gunn, L. (1984), *Policy Analysis for the Real World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Howarth, J. and Morrison, T. (2007), "Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: critical issues and key ingredients", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 31, pp. 55-69.

Jenkins, W.I. (1978), *Policy-Analysis. A Political and Organisational Perspective*, Martin Robertson, London.

KPMG (2010), "Tough choices ahead: the future of the public sector", KPMG International, Chicago, Vancouver.

Kvale, S. (1992), *Psychology and Postmodernism*, Sage Publications, London.

Laming, H. (2003), *The Victoria Climbie Enquiry 'Victoria Climbie Report calls for radical Change in the Management of Public Services for Children and Families'*, HMSO, London.

Landsberger, H.A. (1958), *Hawthorne Revisited: Management and the Worker, its Critics and Developments in Human Relations in Industry*, ERIC No. EDO24106, Harvard.

LARC (2008), "Evaluating the early impact of integrated children's services", Round 1 summary report, LARC, NFER The Mere Upton Park Slough.

Lather, P. (2004), "This is your father's paradigm and government intrusion and the case of qualitative research in education", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 15-34.

Lipsky, M. (1980), *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY.

Little, M. and Sinclair, R. (2005), *The Evolution of Family Support; History and Prospects in 'Forty Years of Research, Policy and Practice in Children's Services*, Wiley and Sons Ltd, Chichester, pp. 119-130.

Madison, D.S. (2005), *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics and Performance*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Matland, R.E. (1995), "Synthesizing the implementation literature. the ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 145-174.

May, J.P. and Wildavsky, A. (Eds) (1978), *The Policy Cycle*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Mazmanian, D. and Sabatier, P. (1983), *Implementation and Public Policy*, Scott, Glenview.

Mumby, D.K. and Clair, R.P. (1997), "Organisational discourse' ", in Van Dijk, T.A. (Ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction*, Sage, London, pp. 181-205.

Nakamura, R. and Smallwood, F. (1980), *The Politics of Policy Implementation*, St. Martin's Press, New York, NY.

National Research Council (2002), "Scientific research in education", in Shavelson, R.J. and Towne, L. (Eds), *Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC, pp. 18-20.

Oliver, C. (2010), *Children's Views and Experiences of Their Contact with Social Workers: a Focused Review of the Evidence*, DERA, IoE.

Percy-Smith, J. (2006), "What works in strategic partnerships for children: a research review", *Children and Society*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 313-323.

Phillips, N. and Hardy, C. (2002), *Discourse Analysis: Investigating the Processes of Social Construction*, Sage, London.

Pressman, J. and Wildavsky, A. (1973), *Implementation. How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Pulzl, H. and Treib, O. (2006), "Implementing public policy", in Fischer, F., Miller, G.J. and Sidney, M.S. (Eds), *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics and Methods*, CRC Press, London, New York, pp. 89-107.

Sass, J.S. and Canary, J.D. (1991), "Organisational commitment and identification: an examination of conceptual and operational convergence", *Western Journal of Communication*, Vol. 55 No. 3, pp. 275-293.

Stuart, K. (2012), "Leading multi-professional teams in the children's workforce: an action research project", *International Journal of Integrated Care*, Vol. 12, pp. 1-12, available at: www.ijic 2012-1

Taylor, J.R. and Van Every, E.J. (2000), *The Emergent Organization: Communication as the Site and Surface*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, London.

Thomas, G. (2004), "Introduction: evidence: practice", in Thomas, G. and Pring, R. (Eds), *Evidence-Based Practice in Education*, Open University Press, New York, NY, pp. 1-20.

Thomas, J. (1993), "Doing critical Ethnography", *Qualitative Research Methods*, Vol. 26, a Sage university paper, Newbury Park, London.

Van Dijk, T.A. (1997), "The study of discourse", in Van Dijk, T.A. (Ed.), *Discourse as Structure and Process*, Vol. 1, Sage, London, pp. 1-34.

Downloaded by TASHKENT UNIVERSITY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES At 01:58 11 November 2016 (PT)

Van Meter, D. and Van Horn, C. (1975), "The policy implementation process. a conceptual framework", *Administration and Society*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 445-488.

Wetherell, M. and Maybin, J. (1996), "The distributed self: a social constructionist perspective", in Stevens, R. (Ed.), *Understanding the Self*, Sage/Open University Press, London.

**Further reading**

Corley, K.G. and Gioia, D.A. (2004), "Identity ambiguity and change in the wake of corporate spin-off", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 49 No. 2, pp. 173-208.

Du Gay, P. (2000), "Entrepreneurial governance and public management: the anti-bureaucrats", in Clarke, J., Gerwirtz, S. and McLaughlin, E. (Eds), *New Managerialism, New Welfare?*, Sage, London, pp. 62-81.

Hardy, C., Palmer, I. and Phillips, N. (2000), "Discourse as strategic resource", *Human Relations*, Vol. 53 No. 9, pp. 1227-1248.

Joint Chief Inspectors (2002), *Safeguarding Children. A Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children*, Department of Health, London.

Laming, H. (2009), "The Protection of Children in England", a progress report, HMSO, London.

Motion, J. and Leitch, S. (2009), "The transformational potential of public policy discourse", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 30 No. 10, pp. 1045-1061.

**About the author**

Jane Ladner has worked in senior management in schools and a local authority. She is an OfSTED Inspector and currently works in the UK and abroad as an Educational Consultant. Jane Ladner can be contacted at: janeladner@hotmail.co.uk