Challenge and Complexity: Implementing the Principal Child and Family Social Worker Role in England

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Abstract

Following the Munro Review of Child Protection in England in 2011, the appointment of a Principal Child and Family Social Worker was recommended to provide practice leadership across child protection social work with children and families. Since this time, the experience of local authorities has varied greatly in the interpretation and implementation of the role.

Using a multi-method qualitative approach, this study considered the views and perspectives of Senior Managers in the conception and implementation, and the experience of PCFSWs in undertaking the role, to interrogate the following research questions:

- How has the role of PCFSW been implemented?
- What does the implementation tell about management, leadership and professional status?
- What does the implementation reveal about boundary spanning, organisational change, and complexity?
- What are the implications for future policy development?

The wider context of continuing changes in legislation, policy, regulation, and DfE lead reform was considered. Building on the systems approach advocated by Munro, this research was conceptualised with reference to boundary spanning and complexity theory.

The findings suggest that current policy and practice in child protection social work has evolved in a closed system, where compliance and the features of managerialism prevail. In contrast, frontline practitioners more readily operate in a complex system. Tensions between the two perspectives continue such that the

aspirations for reform instigated by Munro and articulated by the participants in this study have not been fully achieved. Such aspirations may not be achievable when one part of the wider system needs to be open and adaptive, while the authority in the system seeks to be controllable, and hence closed. These tensions are reflected in current DfE policy initiatives. Given this, it is unlikely that one role, the PCFSW, can singularly effect such change within the organisation or the wider system.

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<u>Chapter One   Introduction</u>

<u>1.1   Background and Policy Context</u>

In England in the 21st Century, statutory child protection social work is publicly funded and delivered through local authorities (Stanley and Russell 2014). Child protection social work has a unique position in public services, as unlike teachers, police, doctors and other health professionals with whom most people come into contact in the course of their lives, a small number of children and families will be involved with social workers. The tension between the state and private family life is magnified in child protection, where the dichotomy between the 'right' to live in a family without interference is countered with the expectation that the welfare state will ensure that children are 'rescued' from homes where they suffer significant harm (Featherstone et al. 2014a).

Legislation, both European and from the UK government in Westminster, influences the context in which social workers practice as does statutory guidance and policy decisions. Child protection social work is highly regulated, with government requirements for data reporting, and inspection from the regulatory body OFSTED (Jones 2015).

Within the UK, the media has become increasingly influential in shaping societal perceptions of child protection, and consequent social work practice. The deaths of Victoria Climbie in 1997, and Peter Connelly in 2007 received extensive political and media attention, with consequent policy and practice changes throughout the sector (see Butler and Drakeford 2011; Jones 2014b; Warner 2013). Following the death of Peter Connelly, the British Association

of Social Workers noted the significant increase in children being reported as 'at risk' (BASW 2013), with commentators such as Patrick Butler in the Guardian referring to 'the Baby P effect' (Butler 2011).

It is in this context that a cross government social work reform programme was introduced in England in 2009, involving both the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), with the establishment of The Social Work Task Force (SWTF 2009; SWTF 2010). While the Task Force and the subsequent Social Work Reform Board continued to look at social work as a whole profession, in response to the events outlined above, Professor Eileen Munro from the London School of Economics was commissioned to conduct a review of child protection practice. The recommendations of Munro's final report (Munro 2011b), were accepted by the incoming coalition government of the day (DfE 2011), and this has formed the basis of the reform project within local authority child protection social work in England over the last seven years.

1.2   My Motivation and Rationale

The final report of Eileen Munro's review of child protection (Munro 2011b) contained 15 recommendations. Recommendation 14 was the creation of a Principal Child and Family Social Worker (PCFSW) to bring a practitioner perspective to senior management, and bridge the gap to the frontline of social work practice. While such practitioner/manager roles have been established in other professions, this was a new role for local authority child protection social work.

I was appointed as the first PCFSW in England in late 2011, in an English local authority that had developed a strategic plan to

implement the recommendations of the Munro Review (Munro 2011b). I have therefore been professionally involved from the beginning of the implementation of this new role. I quickly became aligned to the newly formed College of Social Work (TCSW), and, supported by this (now defunct) body, I was a founder member and first chair of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker Network. Starting as a very small number of PCFSWs in 2012, the PCFSW Network has grown in the intervening years. However, the implementation and establishment of the role across England has not been straightforward, and its place within individual local authorities, the wider sector, and national policy, principally lead by the Department for Education (DfE) remains uncertain.

My experience, firstly as a pathfinder in the development of the PCFSW role, as chair of the PCFSW network for three years, and continued employment as a PCFSW, has allowed me the opportunity to consider the application of the Munro reforms (2011b) through the lens of one of its most unique and challenging recommendations. This study therefore seeks to explore the conceptualisation and implementation of the PCFSW role nationally with key actors who have direct experience of either developing the role and bringing it to their organisation, or of occupying the role and fulfilling its tasks.

1.3   Research Aims and Questions

The opportunity to undertake a professional doctorate arose out of my appointment as PCFSW in my local authority. The aspiration within my service was for social workers to have the opportunities for, and be motivated to, combine formal learning with practice. As the 'principal' social worker in my organisation, there was an expectation that I would model this at post-graduate doctoral level.

The professional doctorate route at Cardiff University is modular in the initial stages during which I was afforded the opportunity to explore academically the concept of social work as a profession. I used this learning to consider the concepts of leadership and profession relating this to my experience of being the first person in the new PCFSW role within my organisation.

While the Munro Review was widely welcomed in the sector, and ostensibly endorsed by the government of the day (DfE 2011), as this study will show, the adoption of the recommendation to establish the PCFSW function has not been smooth. I wanted to extend my intellectual understanding of the issues in implementing the PCFSW role beyond my own experience of being one, and my observations as Chair of the PCFSW network. Specifically, I wanted to explore:

- How has the role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker been implemented in local authority statutory child protection social work in England?
- What does the implementation of the role tell us about management, leadership and professional status?
- What does the implementation of the role reveal about boundary spanning, organisational change, and complexity?
- What are the implications for future policy development in statutory child protection social work?

These became the research questions which shaped the course of this study.

1.4   Thesis Structure

In Chapter Two, a review of the literature will consider social work reform in the 21st century, noting the changing role of the public

sector, and the influence of New Public Management (NPM). The impact of managerialism on social work is examined, leading to a discussion of the complexities of management, leadership and professionalism. The context of scandals and inquiries is acknowledged, as is the consequent impact on the management of risk. The wider effect of the above factors on social work practice will be examined, before introducing the role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker. While acknowledging the relative newness of this role in local authority child protection social work, examples of such professional roles in other professions will be considered.

Leading on from the literature and contextual background, in Chapter Three the design of this study is laid out. Initially methodological considerations are addressed, thereafter the rationale for the design of the study is given and the identification and recruitment of participants is discussed. The research methods are outlined, with an analysis of why and how they were used, recognising the potential impact of a number of variables affecting the role of researcher. The method of data analysis is explored with detail of the processes undertaken before additional research considerations are addressed. Finally, the limitations of this study are acknowledged.

The findings from the research undertaken are divided into two chapters. In Chapter Four, the findings from telephone interviews with 13 Assistant Directors/Heads of Service from across local authorities in England are discussed. An exploration of leadership, management and professional leadership in the conceptualisation and implementation of the PCFSW role is undertaken and linked to a discussion of the importance of 'profession'. Expectations of the role in respect of social work practice are analysed, as are those around communication and challenge. The chapter concludes with an

exploration of the aspirations of the AD/HoS for the PCFSW role in respect of organisational culture change.

Chapter Five discusses the findings from two focus groups held with PCFSWs in relation to their experience of undertaking the tasks and functions of the role. Following an exploration of their experience of activating the new post, themes of organisational context, hierarchy, role complexity, and individual agency in the role are considered. The links to practice and the frontline of child protection social work that the PCFSWs developed are analysed, particularly in regard to matters of organisational culture and change.

The final Chapter Six seeks to summarise the key findings from Chapters Four and Five and to conceptualise them through the lens of complexity theory. Complexity theory is used to identify aspects of system thinking and change strategies that could be applied to children's services and this is set out in the context of the analytic insights derived from the experiences of both senior managers and PCFSWs in implementing recommendation 14 of the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011b). This study concludes with a summary of the implications of the findings for policy as the Westminster government continues its reform project in local authority statutory child protection social work in England.

Chapter Two   A Review of the Literature

2.1   Introduction

The current idea of social work and its practice in England in the late 20th and early 21st century is necessarily of its time, located in the understandings and interpretations of the many societal influences that have shaped it. The development of social work is not one linear event (or narrative), and change and continuity are a matter of political, social and historical judgement and interpretation (Payne 2005). Significant influences in the evolution of social work practice with children and families in England since the millennium have been characterised by the language of reform, typically articulated through media reporting and government response. This ongoing discourse has implications for those who provide social work, and for those who receive it.

In this chapter, we will consider the drivers for reform in child protection social work with children and families. The Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b) provides a focus as the culmination of a number of imperatives for change in the early 21st century, and the provider of multiple recommendations for reform. The context in which child protection social work is practised will be examined in terms of its location in statutory public services, within a particular social, political and fiscal climate. An account of the public sector and New Public Management (NPM) will lead to an exploration of managerialism in social work. The concepts of profession, professional practice, and leadership within a profession are central to the current debates about reform, evident in the recommendations of The Social Work Task Force report (SWTF 2009) through to the development of a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice

Leaders (DfE 2018c). The chapter will therefore look at the concept of leadership and how that differs from management, and examine the links to social work practice and being a professional. We will see how risk and its management has become a critical feature of child protection social work, and we will consider how NPM, scandals and inquiries have influenced the risk discourse and reform, and the effect this has had on practice and practitioners.

Having considered the above, we will look at the way in which reform has been implemented with reference to the Principal Child and Family Social Worker. The role of the PCFSW in the local authority in England is a recommendation of the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011b), and is explicitly linked to concepts of professional, practice and leadership.

Initial literature considered for this research project was identified through the taught stages of the professional doctorate programme, and related to the modules undertaken, specifically: changing modes of professionalism, public sector management, and advanced social work practice. Cardiff University Library and online databases were used. Searches were not limited to the UK, nor by date.

Throughout the period of study, I kept up to date with governmental policy and guidance in respect to the ongoing project of child and family social work reform, and the concomitant media, professional and academic commentary.

The Munro recommendation for a Principal Child and Family Social Worker was conceived as a professional leadership role which would encompass direct practice. I used the Cardiff University Library and online databases to search for literature on advanced practitioners, professional leadership, and on practice leadership. This was not

limited to social work, nor to research literature based in the United Kingdom. There was limited literature available on such roles in social work, requiring consideration of the literature in respect of other professions, as will be seen below. Further literature searches extended to management and leadership in the public sector, and in social work specifically.

2.2   Social Work Reform in the 21st Century

The Social Work Task Force (SWTF) was set up by the Labour Government in 2009 as a joint unit across the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to drive and deliver a cross government social work reform programme to improve frontline practice and management (SWTF 2009; SWTF 2010). While the SWTF and subsequent Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) considered social work as a whole profession across children and family services, and across adult services, increased drivers for reform developed in the child protection sphere. This was in the context of the intensive media coverage of the trial in relation to the death of Peter Connelly, and the government and public response, particularly in relation to social work (Jones 2014b; Warner 2013). In addition to the work of the SWTF and the SWRB, Professor Eileen Munro from the London School of Economics was asked by the incumbent Labour administration to conduct a review of child protection practice. Three reports were written (Munro 2010; Munro 2011a; Munro 2011b), the recommendations of which were accepted by the incoming Coalition Government of the day (DfE 2011). An overall theme within the Munro Review was the need for the systemic valuing of professional expertise, accountability and professional judgement, to support effective social work practice.

In the Executive Summary of her Final Report, Munro (2011b) states the intention of reform in child protection being to enable professionals to make best judgements, moving from a system that has focussed on compliance to one that values and develops professional expertise, with the aim of meeting the welfare and safety needs of children and young people. The review had a particular remit to make recommendations to strengthen the social work profession. The first report in October 2010 identified four factors that had been shaping the child protection system:

- The importance that members of the public attach to children and young people's safety and welfare and, consequently, the strength of reaction when a child is killed or suffers serious harm;
- The sometimes limited understanding amongst the public and policy makers of the unavoidable degree of uncertainty involved in making child protection decisions, and the impossibility of eradicating that uncertainty;
- The tendency of the analyses of inquiries into child abuse deaths to invoke human error too readily, rather than taking a broader view when drawing lessons. This has led to recommendations that focus on prescribing what professionals should do without examining well enough the obstacles to doing so; and
- The demands of the audit and inspection system for transparency and accountability that has contributed to undue weight being given to readily measured aspects of practice.

(Munro 2011b, pp. 15-16)

Munro described a defensive system in child protection social work that emphasised procedure to the detriment of developing and supporting expertise to work with children and their families,

recommending that professionals move from a compliance culture to a learning culture. Social workers were exhorted to exercise professional judgement based upon a recognised expertise, but it was acknowledged that the knowledge and skills of social workers throughout key stages of their career needed to be 'radically' improved. The argument was made that high levels of prescription had hindered the ability of the social work profession to take responsibility for developing its own skills and knowledge base. In addition, the language of autonomy and responsibility was further used in recommendations to senior social work officials in local authorities in exercising their leadership role in this development of the profession, coupled with the recognition of the importance of practitioner perspectives at every point in the career structure.

The Final Report contained the following recommendation for a Principal Child and Family Social Worker to promote a practitioner perspective to all levels of management:

> Recommendation 14: Local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice in the local authority and who is still actively involved in frontline practice and who can report the views and experiences of the front line to all levels of management.
>
> (Munro 2011b, p. 112)

The recommendation was for a new type of role, not previously in place in statutory child protection social work in England. It makes overt the requirement for the PCFSW to have a practice focus, and indeed be involved in practice: that is to do what social workers do. Having the status and authority of senior management while being involved in practice was a new approach to bridge the frontline

experience and the senior management perspective, with the link between leadership and practice being clearly made. This proposal was made in the context of the developing role of The College of Social Work as established by the Social Work Reform Board, with recommendation 11 of the final report (Munro 2011b) concerning the development social work expertise, incorporating the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF):

> Recommendation 11: The Social Work Reform Board's Professional Capabilities Framework should incorporate capabilities necessary for child and family social work. This framework should explicitly inform social work qualification training, postgraduate professional development and performance appraisal.
>
> (Munro 2011b, p. 97)

This recommendation again identified aspects of 'profession', 'leadership', and social work having expertise and demonstrable capabilities, which was recognised to have been missing by the SWTF and the SWRB. The final recommendation by Munro (2011b), which again linked to 'profession' and 'leadership', was for a Chief Social Worker to be created in Government to advise on social work practice and inform Parliament on the working of the Children Act 1989.

While the recommendations outlined above were considered by many to be innovative and creative, limitations to the review have been identified. Blyth and Solomon (2012) concluded that while there was overall support from the government, professionals and academics for the reforms, there was little detail on the implementation with consequent ambiguity as to how this would occur. Blyth (2014) notes that many of the recommendations focused on changing social work practice, with less overt attention given to the wider multi-agency

context of child protection. Stephenson and Allen (2013) argue that an effective child protection system relies on a shared understanding of risk across health, social care, education and criminal justice agencies.

Parton (2012, p155) in an appraisal of the Munro Review of Child Protection argues that the focus is "how to ensure that the state protects children from 'poor or dangerous parental care'..… rather than with protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect in society more generally." He argues that different types abuse and maltreatment experienced by children come from many different relationships, citing peer bullying as a specific example where there is potentially high impact on the child, but falls outside of the child protection system as conceptualised in the review. A further criticism is how little children and young people are considered in accessing the child protection system.

Having outlined the call for reform, it is important to understand the context in which child protection social work is delivered in the public sector.

2.3   The Public Sector and New Public Management

To understand why child protection social work had reached the stage where the reform agenda was necessary, it is important to look at the social, political and fiscal context in which it is delivered, and how that effects what social workers do, how they do it, and how it is perceived.

In England from the mid 20th Century, child protection social work has been firmly placed in the public sector. Osbourne and McLaughlin (2002) identify four distinctive stages of development of the public sector over the last 100 years, from the minimal state, through

unequal partnership between citizen and provider, then the post-war welfare state to what they describe as the contemporary plural state. Greener (2008) states that the services delivered by the public sector are complex and often risk laden, while Beaumont (1992) recognises that the goals are typically more numerous, intangible and conflicting than those in the private sector.

The public sector changes shape over time and while it has many distinguishing features, the principal one is the dimension of political power linked to working for the state (Corby and Symon 2011). The public sector is therefore inextricably linked to Government. A defining moment in this history occurred in 1979 when an increasingly radical Conservative Government was elected in the UK. This had consequences for a (then) much critiqued welfare state by government and (some) media, refocusing away from collectivist and uniform provision to an emphasis on individual needs with greater choice as opposed to a minimum standard of service for all (Osbourne and McLaughlin 2002). A wide-ranging reform agenda affecting the public sector was introduced by the government of the time, incorporating neoliberal principles.

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.
>
> (Harvey 2005, p.2)

This new ethic of marketisation and competition found its expression in the public sector in the guise of New Public Management or NPM (McLaughlin et al. 2002). Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) understand NPM as a two-level phenomenon. At the higher level, NPM is a doctrine that the public sector can be improved by use of concepts, techniques and values imported from business; at a lower level NPM is a number of methods and practices implemented within the public sector. Shanks et al. (2014) identify two key ideological claims that underpin NPM: first that good management rather than policy and technologies determines the success of organisations; secondly, that marketisation and market mechanisms are revered and promoted.

Managerialism is defined by Lawler and Bilson (2010) as a disciplinary practice where the focus is upon individual roles and accountabilities of managers rather than upon any professional identity. The belief is that managers can operate effectively in any domain and can transfer their skills to other organisational contexts. Symon and Corby (2011) state that private sector managerialist discourses now abound in the public sector with terminology such as customer focus, business plans, benchmarks, incentivisation, leadership and management consultancy being commonplace. The current era of 'post-modernisation' (O'Brien and Penna 1998) characterised by complexity and discontinuity has four processes: political and economic decentralisation; localisation; fragmentation and de-societalisation. For Dawson and Dargie (2002) this means that NPM is not some unified entity, and there is an inherent tension between the centralisation of managerialism, and the decentralisation of marketization. Lawler and Bilson (2010) identify three core objectives within the discourse of NPM and contemporary management more generally: rationalisation, differentiation and de-traditionalisation. Management is viewed as a profession in itself and by extension managerial skills are the optimum ones, implicitly

displacing if not denigrating the status of the values and skills of public professions such as social work.

Corby and Symon (2011) describe various developments that occurred during Conservative Governments in the UK between 1979 and 1997 that illustrate how NPM was implemented. These include privatisation of key parts of the public sector; compulsory competitive tendering; proxies for market mechanisms such as executive agencies detached from government departments; educational establishments becoming independent corporations; and public sector managers pushed to replicate private sector practices.

In 1997 New Labour came to power with an underpinning philosophy entitled the 'Third Way'. A key principle was social investment in human capital, whereby the state sought to facilitate the integration of people into the market (Featherstone et al. 2014a). Newman (2002, p.77) states "…there are significant points of continuity between the neo-liberal approach to public sector reform and that of 'New Labour'." For example, their policy framework for the public sector, Modernising Government (Cabinet Office 1999), was seen by Corby and Symon (2011) as an extension of Conservative policies with regard to target setting and monitoring. Lethbridge (2011) argues that this gradually led to an expansion of private sector involvement in the provision of public services, with growing involvement of the private sector in the process of government.

Drakeford (2008) argues that there was a shifting boundary between public and private responsibility for welfare with a substantial move towards private welfare services:

> …modernisation, in the broader sense, entailed the
> onward march of marketization and privatisation across

the whole welfare frontier. It amounted to a sustained, interconnected and comprehensive paradigm shift away from public services and responsibilities and in favour of private welfare.

<div align="right">(Drakeford 2008, p. 175)</div>

Jordan (2005) notes that services previously provided by the public sector were either outsourced to private companies or were required to model themselves on commercial counterparts in relation to flexibility and consumer preferences. Specifically referring to social care, Baldwin (2008) argues that policy modernisation continued to be reflected through regulation, inspection and the maintenance of quality, with individualism as the overriding ideology for the development, organisation and management of services, with the result that the safety net of collective systems of service became much eroded.

Parton (2003) noted that under New Labour the production of welfare policy and practice evinced:

>…ever more sophisticated systems of accountability, and thereby attempt to rationalize and scientise increasing areas of social work activity with the introduction of ever more complex procedures and systems of practice and a narrow emphasis on 'evidence based practice' – whereby it is assumed the world can be subjected to prediction and calculative control.

<div align="right">(Parton 2003, p. 2)</div>

Featherstone et al. (2014a) identify the impact of globalisation upon the policy agenda of New Labour, and locate it within the sphere of marketisation, where the move was away from communities and

collective identities to individualism and consumerism. This, it is argued, has resulted in increased individualisation and personalisation with an ideology of individual responsibility rather than community and societal responsibility.

A change of government in 2010 to a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition stated a commitment to reducing the public sector, following:

> …a radical programme of public service reform, changing the way services are delivered by redistributing power away from central government and enabling sustainable, long-term improvements in services…
>
> (HM Treasury 2010, p. 8)

The rationale for the new policies reflected economic rhetoric of balancing the budget and reducing the size of the public sector deficit (Lethbridge 2011). Symon and Corby (2011) note that while commentary on the disaggregation, decentralisation and devolution of organisational structures in the public sector is not new, the Coalition Government perpetuated NPM with the decentralisation of administrative and financial responsibility running alongside strict performance management controls.

Lonne et al. (2009) argue that public sector reforms throughout the latter part of the 20th century struck at the very foundation of the welfare state in what Gilbert (2002) suggests was the silent surrender of public responsibility. He outlines the rapid social, economic and technological changes that took place concluding that we live in a more difficult and judgemental social environment, where what remains of the welfare state reflects blaming and social attitudes, with policies and services that mirror this.

We have seen from above how the public sector welfare more generally in the UK has been much influenced by neoliberalism and NPM, specifically in relation to the prevalence of managerialism in a context of increasing marketisation. In the next section we will consider more specifically managerialism in social work.

2.4   Managerialism in Social Work

As NPM has affected the public sector throughout England, so has it affected social work. Shanks et al. (2014) state that, for social work, this has resulted in administrative and budgetary responsibilities, with an increase in performance management and proceduralisation. Standardised management practices and tools have been introduced as the answer to the problems faced by state organisations. In doing this, power moves from professionals to executives and managers (Lonne et al. 2013).

Lawler and Bilson (2010) identify three elements that have been a feature of social work management in recent years. The first is around governance which calls for consistent, high-quality services, robust structures, standardised practice and procedure, risk assessment and clear accountability. Second is the marketisation of public services as being the optimum way of meeting consumer needs, although this is not straightforward in social services with regulation, quasi-markets, statutory duty and the separation between the purchaser, the provider, and the recipient of the service. Thirdly, managerialism in social work is concerned with the efficient use of publicly allocated money, an added factor to marketisation, as not only market forces determine service provision. Kirkpatrick (2006) argues that the impact of managerialism has been greater regulation of the activities of front line social workers, a reliance on strict

procedural guidance and achieving targets, and time increasingly being spent on administration. While some social work tasks may conform to this new regulatory regime, the complex nature of the relationships involved and the differing perspectives, experience and motivations within them, means that much of social work is uncertain, with unpredictable outcomes. There is no straightforward 'product' that is easily administered or bought and sold, and with multiple stakeholders, conflicting interests and endemic societal tensions in its core business, there is no straightforward unitary service to manage.

In addition to having an effect on the functions of the public sector, managerialism changes the status of those who work in the public sector. In relation to social work, it can be argued that a consequence of the shift to managerialism has been to the detriment of professional identity and authority, in that management is itself viewed as a profession in its own right, and managerial skills are often considered more important than professional expertise (Hood 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). According to Southon and Braithwaite (2000), professionals perform particular kinds of work with a high level of expertise. They argue that it is high levels of uncertainty and complexity, that distinguish professional expertise, and a degree of autonomy is required. Fish and Coles (2000) argue that by the end of the 20th century, professionalism in social work can be divided into two different views, with different sets of values, and different expectations of professional behaviour: the technical rational perspective which is a measurable competency-based approach, and professional artistry which sees the professional being part of a more complex and less prescriptive practice world, where subtle and different components of what the practitioner does becomes more than that which can be measured or classified.

The technical rational approach emphasises measurable accountability, prescription, and value for money, the ultimate aim being the delivery of a service. What a professional undertakes can be broken down to its component parts, visible and measured, and therefore all can see and pass judgement on what a professional does. Pithouse et al. (2010) note post-modern scepticism towards experts in relation to risk, a key component of child protection social work, stating that currently many and varied voices claim such expertise. In contrast, professional artistry views what professionals do as not being simply defined and predictable, but a complex mix of judgement, intuition and common sense (Fish and Coles 2000). As such, professional actions cannot be prescribed, routinised or measured, and therefore are less visible and less widely understood. In addition to the straightforward skills that are utilised in professional practice are moral and ethical matters (Fish and Coles 2000), which influence and are influenced by the values and expectations of the profession, and not just in the activities undertaken. Collins and Evans (2007) concept of 'interactional expertise' is developed by Pithouse et al. (2010) whereby it is the relationships and discourse of practice that develop the tacit knowledge and expertise that links to professional artistry. This is the essence of social work as a profession:

> Procedurally inflexible information systems that seek to control risk may run counter to the humane project of social work wherein decision-making flows primarily from knowledge(s) gained from relational work with vulnerable families…
>
> (Pithouse et al. 2010, p. 8)

As the main thrust of managerialism has been to increase the influence of managers, accordingly this implies some reduction in the

influence of professionals. This move to an ethos of organisational audit, efficiency and effectiveness has had a significant impact on social work and social workers including the erosion of a primary professional base and a reduced capacity to exercise judgement because practice has become increasingly defined by standardised formats and protocols, quantitative targets and performance measures (Cullen 2013).

Lawler and Bilson (2010) argue that externally imposed procedure reduces the role of discretion and subjective assessment characterised by professional practice. Smith (2001a, p. 288) argues that the "quantitative and objective readily assumes pre-eminence over the qualitative and subjective". Indeed, such a shift over recent years has seen professional judgement and discretion overridden by rule-governed behaviour and procedural imperatives. Further, Lawler and Bilson (2010) state that the move to NPM explicitly denotes a lack of trust in individual workers and introduces a new language of audit and accountability that does not 'fit' with the discourse of the relational and of care, (see also Lonne et al. 2009).

The Munro Report (2011b) seeks to re-balance the professional status and authority of social work with the intention to move from a system that has focused on compliance to one that values and develops professional expertise. This is sought through two related fields:

- New leadership in the profession
- Affirmation and enhancement of social work practice

Having considered key aspects of managerialism in social work, we will now explore the question of management and leadership more

generally before returning to Munro's recommendations on leadership.

2.5 Complexities in Management, Issues of Leadership and Professionalism

There is an ongoing debate (Lawler 2007; Rank and Hutchison 2000) about leadership and how that differs to management. This is significant for child protection social work reform as the concept of leadership, and leadership linked to profession is a key challenge as we shall see in this and later chapters.

Lawler (2007) notes an important shift in public sector management from the position where professionalism and bureaucracy coexisted relatively harmoniously, with managerial control not being exercised overbearingly on professional social work activity (Harris 1998). By contrast, NPM introduced an increased proceduralisation and commodification of social work, with consequent weakening of professional identity. Globerman et al. (2005) note that the impact of restructuring on the profession is loss of key social work leadership roles, which implies that these had previously been in existence. Rank and Hutchison (2000) argue the need for a refreshed leadership in social work as the role of the professional and the practice context has changed in regard to a developing culture of audit and regulation.

That said, there is no generally accepted definition of leadership, or of what new leadership might be in social work. According to Lawler (2007) leadership can be seen to have various purposes:

> Leadership might be seen in some respects as a further
> development of managerialism, especially when seen as
> having an emphasis on organizational effectiveness.

> Alternatively, it might be seen as promoting professional values and practices and, as such, as providing a potential means of transcending some of the management-professional tensions resulting from increased managerialism…
>
> (Lawler 2007, p. 132)

It is suggested that there is a distance between managerialism and professionalism with the notion that leadership might be the bridge, containing elements of both.

In critiquing the above perspective offered by Rank and Hutchison (2000), Lawler (2007) questions whether their view of leadership is simply the renaming of managerialism rather than leadership with a firm organisational focus and related to a clear description of professional components of social work. He notes that the elements of leadership that emerged from their study, in common with the more general leadership literature, were those of pro-action, values and ethics, empowerment, vision, communication. Professional social work practitioners operate within a framework of values and ethics; they focus their practice on empowerment and encourage a vision for their users through effective communication. Therefore, the question arises as to whether these are components of professionalism rather than leadership.

Intrinsic to leadership are positive relationships which good managers can engender. In addition, distributed leadership occurs where leadership functions are shared within a work group, for example where different expertise is required for different tasks and maintenance functions. In this respect, Lawler (2007) argues, it may be that practitioners do not need externally provided inspiration which leadership is assumed to provide. Indeed, the assumption that

social workers are underperforming because of lack of leadership might not be the case. In fact, greater 'power equity' may well sit more comfortably with groups of professional workers than any notions of individual 'heroic' leadership.

Lawler (2007) further notes the argument that an implied role of leadership is that of developing the public profile of the profession. Rank and Hutchison (2000) argue that social work has an uncertain status in the eyes of the public, often viewed with ambivalence in a sometimes hostile media and political environment. Lawler (2007) concludes that this approach casts leadership in the position of championing the profession to the outside world and suggests that this also is a role of a professional social worker rather than a leader. The emphasis would appear to be on profession rather than leadership.

Shanks et al. (2014), in a study of 22 middle managers in personal social services in Sweden, looked at professional identity and management, analysing how the middle managers reasoned about professional identity, everyday work and leadership in an era of marketisation and managerialism. Their research found that leadership as ideology and practice corresponded well with their social work identity. The managers were more professionally oriented than managerial, tended to speak of professional rather than managerial expertise, and emphasised the importance of having a social work background. However, increased budget and administrative responsibilities appeared to hinder the managers in their desire to be effective leaders, and while they aspired to lead and achieve leadership they felt ensnared by administrative duties. Many managers in the focus groups stated that they saw themselves as social workers who had gained managerial positions with social work knowledge being held in high esteem and considered an asset for

managerial work. Shanks et al. (2014) note that these findings are consistent with those of Evans (2009b) and indicate that commitment to professional ideals obtains despite the influence of managerialism.

Healy (2002) argues that social work values can provide an important counterbalance to managerial reforms in social work. Her concern is that with increasing managerialism, the values of human service may be eclipsed, particularly with under-representation of social workers in management. She argues that, with managerialism and its ideals of cost reduction and efficiency at heart, it becomes even more important for social workers to take on leadership roles to promote the progressive values of human service organisations. Conversely, Westhues et al. (2001) note the inability of social workers to promote the profession in the face of increasing managerialism, and lack of assertive professional identification within the occupation more generally:

> The application of business principles to develop and deliver human services has not created an environment supportive of social work leadership. The trend in some jurisdictions has been to replace social work leaders with 'business' oriented managers who are more comfortable with a market place emphasis…
>
> (Westhues et al. 2001, p. 42)

Cullen (2013) studied social work leadership within the context of recent public and political scrutiny of social work. A key finding was that social workers typically did not see themselves as fulfilling any explicit leadership function. However, they did claim to embody the following orientations that have links with definitions of effective leadership:

- acting with integrity;
- being accessible;
- inspirational communication and networking;
- enabling others through delegation and development of potential; and
- being prepared to take risks and make decisions.

The concept of leadership within social work, it can be argued, is inextricably linked with being a professional, and having the values, ethics, and a relationship based approach that is recognised as fundamental to the social work profession. This would seem to be more about practice and what social workers actually do, than organisations and how they are run. They are not mutually exclusive – leaders can manage, and managers can have leadership qualities/behaviours. The link between leadership, profession and practice will be considered further when we look at the role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker.

2.6   Scandals, Inquiries and the Management of Risk

Having considered the rise of NPM in the public sector as a whole, and the effects on management, leadership and professional status in social work more generally, in this section we will begin to look at the impact on child protection that preceded the reforms outlined in the Munro review of child protection. To do this, we will first look at the public and media perception of social work, and the effect of scandals and inquiries.

Scandals associated with public inquiries are identified by Butler and Drakeford (2005) as being situated in challenges to the existing order when change is on the agenda. Policy has often developed in a reactive way frequently in response to a crisis or other special

impetus incorporating competing discourses such as the boundary between the state and the family. The inquiry into the death of Maria Colwell, they argue, was timed in a period when two major reorganisations of social work services had engendered further uncertainty and ambiguity, and as a result it was social work as a response to child abuse rather than child abuse itself that became the focus of public and political debate. Parton (2004) states that post-inquiry critiques developed in the 1980s and 1990s concerning family and the welfare state lowered public and political confidence in social work and undermined support for the profession.

Following the death of Victoria Climbie in February 2000, a Public Inquiry chaired by Lord Laming (2003) reached the conclusion that it was not the structures of the child protection system that was the problem, but the effectiveness of management and leadership. The recommendations focused on a lack of trust in social work which resulted in a prescriptive response with tighter structures for scrutinising and monitoring child protection social work practice. It is argued that this approach was entirely in keeping with the continuing audit-based, low-trust culture of the new regulatory state (Stanley 2004; Parton 2004; Moran 2001; Butler and Drakeford 2011). Post-Climbie reforms took place at the height of the command and control culture associated with New Labour and NPM. Things become 'workflowed' or 'outcomed' rather than careful reflection, analysis and synthesis of face to face interactions with families (Featherstone et al. 2014b).

A Public Inquiry followed the death in August 2007 of 17-month old Peter Connelly. Warner (2013, p. 230) argues that the subsequent public and political reaction emanated from an increasingly divided society, where the middle class justified and reassured itself by identifying and vilifying an "imagined expanding and contagious

underclass". The ensuing moral panic is described as an extreme risk discourse in the context of a society of middle class risk averse parenting. Social workers are social regulators, and according to Ferguson (2004), the result of this relationship with this underclass or 'others', is that social work becomes a focus of the blaming system. Butler and Drakeford (2011) note new levels of irrationality reached in the vilification of individual social workers involved in the management of Peter Connelly's case while Warner (2013, p. 224) demonstrates that this 'demonisation' involved social workers as being portrayed as "…cold-hearted bureaucrats…", which highlighted a focus on the systems and procedures and lacked common-sense. It was noted that almost no-one picked up on the fact that it was government policy and the responses that had led to the increased bureaucracy, compliance and procedures, and reduced the professional autonomy of social work. Featherstone et al. (2014a) further argue that the failings in the case of Peter Connelly were not in sharing or recording, but in not having the culture that allowed the time and space for reflection, thought, analysis and challenge to make sense of what was being seen in the family. Lonne et al. (2009) state that escalating reports about failure of professionals to prevent child abuse leads to a focus on proceduralism.

Public Inquiries over child deaths have been situated in the political contexts of public sector management, and in turn have influenced the management of social work. Their business is with the messiest of circumstances, yet the conduct and conclusions of such inquiries give legitimacy to the belief that those circumstances can somehow be broken down to constituent parts, rationalised and controlled. As this is the prevailing ideology, the default is that the social work profession and indeed individual social workers must be in the wrong. Thus techno-rational managerialism is promoted.

Lonne et al. (2013) in considering the reform of child protection systems in Australia identified a system in crisis. Many factors were noted, including the politicisation of child protection, media and public scrutiny that engendered scandals, and the perceived failings of the system that were discovered. Persistent exposure to administrative scrutiny by internal/external bodies and the media left practitioners feeling devalued and uncared for, resulting in a high staff turnover, with a loss of practice wisdom and experience. In looking at challenges in retaining and developing expertise in newly qualified practitioners, Healy et al. (2009) identify a public culture of blame. They argue that public review processes focused unduly on the shortcomings of individual workers rather than highlighting systemic responsibility for child protection 'failures'. Overall, an individual fault-finding focus both internally and externally has led to defensive practice and to an escalation of turnover of front line workers.

Lonne et al. (2009) noted that social workers are no longer trusted to make significant decisions over case management because of past scandals and failures to protect. Audit has developed as the key mechanism for responding to this perceived failure, the public inquiry being the highest profile response. Proceduralism replaces the trust once accorded to professionals, and responds to the failure and insecurity by the managerialisation of risk.

Risk is rendered manageable by new relations of regulation between the political centres of decision making and the frontline professionals, via the introduction of multiple procedures, forms and systems for making and noting decisions, and thereby making them visible. In the process, the professionals and the people with whom they work are transformed to make them both auditable and responsible. Where the key concern is risk, the priority is liable to be making a *defensive* decision where the required procedures have

been followed rather than making the right decision (Dingwall et al. 1995; Parton 1991).

Featherstone et al. (2014a) argue that under neoliberalism social policy changed from one of wider mutual responsibility in society that supported the welfare state. The principles of managerialism with proceduralisation and governance focused on the lessening of risk, whereas the welfare state had traditionally considered the meeting of need as a priority. Indeed, they argue that the language of risk became the only language for many, with the result that social work also became preoccupied with risk. They draw on Webb (2006) in arguing that need and risk became inextricably linked, with the result that social workers became, or were assumed to be the risk 'experts'.

The political concern of the social investment state moved from managing the effects of the market to promoting and facilitating engagement to produce economically and social active citizens (Featherstone et al. 2014a). Children were placed as receiving investment for the future, which could then be measured in risk and protection factors. Preventative programmes such as Sure Start held an intrinsic notion of what was being prevented – risk to children. Levels and categorisation of risk then flow from this and move decisions and judgement away from complex and multi-faceted experience to a binary analysis of risk and protective factors. 'Prevention science' narrowed things further to 'target' families and 'evidence based' programmes that moved to individual family failings. The creation of this image of failing and anti-social families allows the continuation or increase of highly interventionist involvement, to follow the rules, and behave in the way the market wants (Featherstone et al. 2014a).

Lonne et al. (2013) note how the use of authority and power permeates down the hierarchy in organisations in a managerialist way. Politicians and civil servants exercise power over child protection agencies through accountability and reform. As a result, senior executives wield power over middle managers with performance measures, and supervisors parallel this with frontline staff by being directive and demanding over targets. In a parallel fashion, they assert that child protection workers undertake intrusive investigations with families using bureaucratic processes and minimal fact finding before moving on to the next.

2.7   Effect on Practice

In complying with risk reduction processes and related technologies in the recording of these as outlined in the previous section, Broadhurst et al. (2009; 2010) argue that system needs are met rather than those of children and families. In this section we will look more closely at the effect on practice.

Lonne et al. (2009) state that the contemporary dominance of neoliberalism in social attitudes and values that steer social welfare has led to a blaming, punitive and socially divisive ideology with the result that the focus is on social control. The argument is that child protection has come to act as a surveillance system on those sections of the community who are perceived to be dangerous, troublesome or dependent, and that child protection systems investigate and assess rather than provide assistance to those in need. 'Bad' or 'dangerous' parents and professional failures to prevent a child's death or injuries dominate current political discussion, policy and workplace practice (Lonne et al. 2013). Clients are often perceived and labelled as 'service users' to be managed, positioned as straightforward, rational beings in a way that dismisses understandings of individuals, which

acknowledge the irrational and emotional aspects of human behaviour (Ruch 2005). The relationship between the practitioner and the service user now emphasises legal and administrative requirements, tasks and outcomes rather than the human relationship and emotional aspects of an individual's circumstances. Lonne et al. (2013) propose that a child protection system preoccupied with risk, social control and proceduralism prevents the provision of quality social care and positive outcomes for children and their families, and that a reorientation towards practice priorities that include relationship-based and ethical practice is central to implementing effective change.

Pendry (2012) in commenting on the need for the reforms that took place in Hackney Council (Goodman and Trowler 2012) noted that child abuse and the need for intervention is traditionally seen as being based on a single causative factor and that as noted in the previous section, scandals and inquiries would appear to reinforce this. He references Jack (1997) and Stevenson (1998) in stating that the 'fault' is individualised and pathologised to the parent to the exclusion of any influences exerted by family and community relationships, and external stressors such as poverty or racism.

Featherstone et al. (2014a) argue that the prevailing ideologies and consequent policy decisions have resulted in social justice and community responsibility being lost in the current understanding of child protection social work with a consequent development of muscular authoritarianism towards individuals and multiply deprived families. Like Jones (2014a; 2014b), they argue that the public and media scrutiny following the processes after the trial of those responsible for the death of Peter Connelly, led to more statutory activity and administrative controls. Across UK countries, complex

processes have developed that seem designed primarily to manage institutional risk in child protection (White et al. 2010).

Focusing policy and practice on the individual child is seen by Featherstone et al. (2014a) as a radical individualisation of childhood which influences the potential responses in a limiting way whereby it creates a system which seeks an impossible 'actuarial certainty' about risks to the relative few, with the result that 'proper help' for the many who struggle and suffer either occasionally or more permanently is not factored in, or provided. Current policy focused upon individual child rescue with seemingly limited compassion or understanding towards parents are contained within a broader political approach, with the argument that the then New Labour's social investment approach placed sizeable fiscal resources into preventive developments that focused on children, but in doing so made parents even more responsible and accountable, because money had been spent, hence there was no excuse other than difficulties that lay with them. While identifying the New Labour administration's policies as being neo-liberal, Featherstone et al. (2014a) argue that under the subsequent Coalition Government and era of austerity, there is no money to obfuscate the picture, with the result that parents are overtly to blame for their own predicaments. Welfare cuts have taken on a totemic significance, with a dichotomous and divisive rhetoric of skivers and virtuous strivers. As a result, family difficulties are seen as being the parent's fault, the policy logic being that parents need to 'shape up' or children will be 'shipped out'.

Featherstone et al. (2014a) would further argue that the current child-centric risk paradigm is highly problematic ethically as children are routinely considered as individuals and excluded from relationships and communities, reduced administratively to a

managerialist unit of risk analysis. Research by Bywaters (2013) highlights the social, economic, environmental and political causes of large inequalities in what children experience in life and in welfare, with the argument that chances are limited by these factors, with potential damaging long-term consequences for some.

The prevailing ideologies, concomitant and subsequent policies, and impact on practice with children and their families have also had an effect on social workers. Featherstone et al. (2014a) argue that rigid processes strip the necessary variety and agility from the professional response – a point made clearly in the Munro Review (2011a; 2011b). While it is acknowledged that standard processes can be managed through procedural means, non-routine processes such as working with children and families in child protection are best managed by indirect means such as competence, professional values, visions and missions. Parton (2004) argues that whilst proceduralism potentially protects workers from liability, this leads to defensive practice, a phrase used critically by Munro (2011b) and which doesn't necessarily serve the interest of children and their families.

Healy et al. (2009) undertook an international comparative study where they analysed the views of employers, policy makers and researchers in Australia, England and Sweden about factors contributing to the high turnover of social workers at the front line. They found that increased administrative requirements were perceived to indicate organisational disrespect for practitioners and to decrease practitioners' job satisfaction. Increased administration necessarily means decreased direct client work and respondents perceived this to be a problem for many workers because bureaucratic practices can seem disconnected from working with people.

Trowler and Goodman (2012a) in reflecting on the way child protection social work had developed noted that the profession suffered from a conveyor belt, risk-averse mentality to the inevitable detriment of the children and families it sought to serve. As practitioners were further and further removed from any sense of their own responsibility, or capability to affect positive change, or sense of professional pride, a dangerous casualness emerged, where even automated tasks were done badly. Healy (2002) argues that social work values can provide an important counterbalance to managerial reforms in social work. Thus, in social work with children and families, democratic and humane practice is needed which takes account of varying perspectives, acknowledges different viewpoints and makes careful judgements. Hence organisation and system design has to be human centred (White et al. 2010).

2.8   Complexity of Evidence for Practice

Featherstone et al. (2014a) argue that the political and ideological constraints in what is accepted as valid knowledge mean that the generation of evidence from its origin via the media into the public domain can lead to it becoming simplified and somehow 'fact'. This simplification is necessary for incorporation into protocols and guidelines, and it is not often questioned. It is part of the process of managerialism as discussed earlier, where proceduralism flourishes. But as we have seen, the problems that social work deals with are complicated, messy and morally complex, and do not fit easily with the certainties as assumed in some managerialist perspectives.

Featherstone et al. (2014a) note that there is an emerging body of empirical work concerned with how vulnerable adults and children experience and respond to professional practices. What is experienced as helpful is a worker who is flexible, responsive, and

who builds empathetic relationships that are respectful and relevant to the lives of those using the services. Research by Morris (2011) and Morris et al. (2012) show how practitioners working with the family and who are engaged in a positive and active manner, greatly affected the perceived efficacy by families of the service offered.

In their account of reforming the delivery of child protection social work in Hackney, Trowler and Goodman (2012b) recognised that focus on performance management regimes has outweighed the value placed on direct work with families. They argue that public accountability has led to bureaucratic detailing of activity and process, rather than a focus on evidence-based intervention and positive outcomes for families.

Lonne et al. (2009) argue that the dominance of a managerialist audit culture ignores trust, complexities of the work, and the relationships children, young people, parents and carers value. The key to improving policy and practice is in understanding the crucial ethical and moral dimensions to the work. Similarly, Haynes (2015) notes that public services deal with highly complex operating environments, and argues that complex systems should be understood as highly entangled interactions of physical, psychological and social variables. It is in just such a context that the role of the PCFSW is expected to operate.

2.9   Implementing Principal Child and Family Social Workers

The Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b) was located in a political and social context that had evolved from a number of factors considered earlier in this chapter. The establishment of a 'compliance' culture has been understood in the increased prevalence of neo-liberalism, its manifestation in NPM, and

the proceduralisation that has arisen from managerialism. Child protection social work has in the main been located in the public sector in England, affected by changes that have been brought about by marketisation and managerialism. Links have been made from this to the loss of status of social work as a profession, with its concomitant knowledge and expertise. In particular, two spheres have been considered: leadership in the profession, and actual social work practice.

In the recommendation made by Munro (2011b) for the implementation of a new designated role of a Principal Child and Family Social Worker (PFCSW), the terminology 'manager, lead, and practice' are all used in the one sentence. Implicit in the recommendation is the notion that the PCFSW can bridge these different aspects. There is limited literature on practice leadership roles but research in Canada and Australia, and in other disciplines offer useful insights as we discuss next.

Following the restructuring of social work in Canada, Globerman et al. (2005) noted the impact on the profession of the loss of key social work leadership roles. The study found that professions were unable to advocate for themselves in the face of determined managerialist ideology. A new role of practice leader was developed including experienced frontline practitioners and managers. The new roles developed were complex, with responsibilities that covered:

- Scope of professional practice, which includes standards development, promoting best practices and spokesperson for the profession.

- Professional resource person for front line and administrative staff with responsibilities for professional development, and performance appraisals.

- Communicator and translator between management and front line, workload statistics and in some cases budgeting.

- Collaboration with senior management in strategic planning.

Gerrish et al. (2007) looked at Advanced Practice Roles in Nursing (APNs) in England. The APNs were seen as having a positive impact on practice by (i) having a holistic approach that recognized relationships in addition to clinical matters (ii) creating a learning environment, and (iii) improving job fulfilment through providing opportunities for personal and professional development. Important positive factors were the attributes of the APN, which involved their clinical experience, leadership qualities, and interpersonal skills. Continued clinical responsibilities (i.e. direct practice) made the APNs more accessible and relevant to frontline staff, and was viewed as being significant in their ability to influence practice.

Relatedly, Stanley and Russell (2014, p. 6) interpret the role of the PCFSW as having five key aspects:

- Being an authentic voice for frontline staff;
- To remain in practice – learn first-hand about what helps, what hinders;
- To work alongside senior management to raise practice debates and be 'a critical friend' at all levels of the organisation;
- Bring forward ideas and debates in raising practice standards at every level of the organisation; and

- Link to the national practice agenda and help to raise the profile of social work.

They argue clearly for the PCFSW to remain in practice, that is *doing* social work, an attribute that is located firmly in the realm of the professional in that you need to *be* a child protection social worker to *do* child protection social work. The argument for the PCFSW to be a senior manager relates to the status and influence of the role within organisational structures. While this might suggest more traditional leadership roles, the direct links to frontline staff, and the differing levels of the organisation suggests more relational aspects of leadership. This would fit with Lawler's (2007) notion of intrinsic leadership, identifying good relationships, shared tasks and functions, and professional responsibility. The leadership inspiration comes from the professional values and motivation which are shared with the PCFSW. In this interpretation of the role, the PCFSW does not manage staff, therefore management and leadership are not conflated (Shanks et al. 2014). As one PCFSW observed in Stanley and Russell (2014, p. 13) "…our priority is practice, improving practice and driving up standards of social work, and we are not restricted by budget concerns or 'key performance indicator' doctrine."

Gurrey and Brazil (2014) argue that culture and leadership of the organization is the most important factor in child protection settings – social workers are astute in identifying the gaps between 'the walk' and 'the talk', and when congruence is absent, culture is lost. This would suggest that practice leaders need to be authentic when they talk about practice, otherwise they are indistinguishable from managers.

In late 2012, a national network of PCFSW was instituted, facilitated by The College of Social Work (TCSW) in England. The inaugural meeting had 12 members (2012b), some of whom were full time PCFSWs, others who had the title attached to their current managerial role, while others had a newly created post, albeit for a portion of the week. This independent network of individual PCFSWs or designates from local authorities was facilitated by TCSW, funded by the Department for Education (DfE). In February 2013, TCSW carried out a survey on behalf of the network, sent to The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to ascertain the number of Local Authorities who had PCFSWs, whether they were standalone posts, an additional role for existing managers, or a designation added to an existing post. In addition, information was sought as to the hierarchical level the PCFSW was placed at within the organisation, and the involvement they had in direct practice, both key elements to the role as defined by Munro (2011b). The survey results (TCSW 2013) showed that less than a third of Local Authorities in England had a PCFSW, and most of those who did had attached the role to another senior management post, or the appointee had another managerial role within the organisation. The range of substantive or 'other' roles included Head of Service, Assistant Director, Workforce Development Manager, Head of Quality Standards and Learning and Development Lead. Consistent in all these roles is a recognised managerial role with managerial focus and tasks. Very few PCFSWs had direct practice aspects to their role, although the definition of direct practice was unclear in the survey.

In Spring 2014, a repeat survey was sent out (TCSW 2014). The information returned showed that 78 Authorities had PCFSWs. Three quarters of the PCFSWs carried out their role in addition to another role, and a third had less than 20% of their time available for the role. Thirty-eight per cent had involvement in direct practice,

although again the definition of this remains contested. (TCSW 2012b). Three years on from the Munro Review (2011a; 2011b) and over two years after the Government accepted the recommendation for the appointment of a PCFSW in every local authority, half of authorities in England responded that they had one, and those that did had different interpretations and implementations of the key aspects as specified by Munro (2011b).

Following a review of social work education conducted in 2013/2014, (Narey 2014; Croisdale-Appleby 2014), the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families in England consulted on a Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS) for child and family social work (DfE 2014). The finalised statement and government response was published in 2015 (DfE 2015b), and has subsequently been revised as a post-qualifying standard for child and family practitioners (DfE 2018a). The knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker is expected to demonstrate is in addition to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) established by the SWRB, and held by the TCSW (2012a) until its demise in September 2015. In the foreword to the government's response, the Chief Social Worker outlines the intention that the statement be a catalyst for bigger changes in child and family social work as set out by the Secretary of State in October 2014 (Morgan 2014). These changes are being focused on practice supervision, practice leadership, and an approved child and family status. In particular, the role of the practice leader has significance for PCFSWs.

> Third, a new role of social work practice leader - a senior
> leadership position focused 100% on the quality of front-
> line practice in a local area, accountable for the quality of
> that practice, alive to brilliant practice, alert when things
> are going wrong. A role that will complement the

corporate leadership role of the director of children's services, allowing a wider pool of leadership talent to be considered for those roles while the rigorous focus on social work practice sits with the new practice leader.

(Morgan 2014)

Currently in 2018, there is still much debate within the sector in regard to these reforms. There remains a lack of clarity as to who the practice leader will be, and how they fit with the PCFSW role.

2.1.0 Summary

The role of the PCFSW within current statutory child protection social work in England would not appear to be widely embedded seven years after the recommendation made, and six years after government acceptance of the recommendation. It was conceived as a pivotal component of child protection social work reform. This thesis, in exploring the development and implementation of the role, and the experience of those who first held the post, aims to engender a greater understanding of the progress of social work reform in the second decade of the 21st Century in England.

The methodology and methods for this research are outlined and discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3   Methodology and Methods

3.1   Introduction

I was appointed as the first Principal Child and Family Social Worker in England less than a year after the Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b) was published. In this role I was instrumental in the establishment of the national PCFSW Network, and was the Chair from 2012 until 2015. The conception and implementation of the PCFSW role, both as a recommendation from Munro (2011b), and a key element of reform, has played a significant part in my personal and professional life. Being the Chair of the national network gave me an overview of how the role appeared to be implemented and was developing across the country. The data available through the College of Social Work survey as discussed in Chapter Two gave early information with regard to the implementation of the PCFSW role with an indication of some of the inconsistencies and complexities around local authorities meeting Recommendation 14 (Munro 2011b). My observations from chairing the network over a three-year period, and the consideration of the findings in the TCSW survey is the starting point from which I developed the following methodology for my research and will be discussed in more detail shortly.

In this chapter I set out the rationale, content and critique of the qualitative research design that was adopted to explore the implementation and other practice and organisational complexities of the role of PCFSW. I consider first the methodological foundations of qualitative enquiry and thereafter outline my multi-method qualitative design.

3.2   Methodological Considerations

Cooper (2008) argues that good social research is framed by conceptual and theoretical considerations. In designing research, Gilbert (2008, p.35) argues that there are three basic choices to be made by the researcher: "quantitative versus qualitative; cross-sectional versus longitudinal; and case versus representative". Quantitative and qualitative approaches are often considered to differ in respect of their epistemological foundations (Bryman 2012), although more recent debate within the social sciences has developed about how the methodological positions can operate together in knowledge building, as in psychology (Henwood and Pidgeon 1996; Mitchell 2004) and social work (Connolly 2001; Smith 2001b). In considering methods for my research, I made clear epistemological and ontological choices related to the nature of my research as will be outlined below.

Qualitative research is described as knowledge construction (Gilgun and Abrams 2002), and a way to re-present authentic experiences (Silverman 2015). Constructivism is defined by Gilbert (2008, p. 506) as a perspective that views all knowledge as constructed, and depends on convention, human perception and social experience. My interest in the PCFSW as a complex new role conceived and implemented by one set of actors, and experienced in the doing of it by another set of actors, lead me to such an ontological approach. I believe that in social research, phenomena are not fixed and external, but are constructed from relationships. The knowledge to be gained about the PCFSW role was constructed by those actors involved in it, and they were therefore approached as the subjects of my research.

Gilgun (2015, p. 743) argues that in qualitative study, descriptive research is the foundation for the creation of interpretations and theories. The selection by the researcher of descriptive material to present in their research is the first level of analysis, the second being the researcher's commentaries on the descriptions, the content of which can be drawn on from a variety of resources. Within this interpretive process, the data is organised into themes and categories (Bryman 2012). The next stage of analysis is the construction of theory: the development of working hypotheses that represent what is interpreted in the data and situating this conceptual material into related research and theory (Gilgun 2015). Thus the researcher reaches a position of developing theory through induction, which is defined by Gilbert (2008, p. 27) as the "technique of moving from a set of observations to a theory".

As the PCFSW role is a new one, there is limited prior research in the field. I therefore was not starting from a position of testing a hypothesis, or theory-based qualitative research (Gilgun 2014). My approach came from a position of interpretivism, and the understandings and meanings given to their experiences by the participants in my research. The methods selected fitted with my qualitative methodology, an approach which is explorative and discursive seeking to understand the complex terrain occupied by the PCFSW role, and the relationships and issues therein. I now consider the context and rationale for identifying the research participants for this study, before looking at the selection methods used.

3.3   Identifying Participants

In Chapter Two, I charted the origin of the PCFSW role in the context of statutory child protection social work in England in the second decade of the early 21st Century. I acknowledged the attempts by the

PCFSW network in conjunction with The College of Social Work in England to get a sense of the implementation of the PCFSW role through the medium of two surveys sent out to local authorities. The surveys were sent to the senior manager understood to be responsible for strategic and operational functions in children's social care, and specifically social work at that time. The first survey was sent out in 2013, a year after the PCFSW network was set up but still in its infancy, and was sent to children's services only.

In Spring 2014, three years after the publication of the Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b), a second survey questionnaire was sent directly to Directors of Children's Social Care, and through the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). This survey was a repeat of the original, and sought to test the progress that had been made across the sector in relation to the development and implementation of PCFSWs in children's services. Despite the targeting of the questionnaire, responses were received from a wide range of respondents, including PCFSWs themselves in some authorities, and it is assumed these were delegated by the Director of Children's Services to complete the survey. In the report prepared by TCSW (2014) there were 78 clear responses related to the PCFSW role and these are examined in some detail in the survey report provided to the network. The lack of rigour in the devising and distribution of the survey questionnaire and subsequent analysis of the data precludes consideration of it as secondary data analysis in this study. However, as was discussed at the beginning of the chapter, it provided insights into the role and its implementation that prompted further research.

In developing an understanding of how the role had been established and operated, it became apparent that there were two groups of actors critically placed who could help answer this:

a) The senior managers in local authorities who made the decision to create the PCFSW, and took actions to introduce it (or not) to in their authority.

b) The PCFSWs who had been appointed and were undertaking the functions and tasks of the role.

Having recognised the above, the next stage of my research design was to consider how to engage both groups of actors in my study. The following section addresses how the research participants were selected and recruited, before we move on to consider the research methods used.

3.4   Selection and Recruitment

a) Sampling senior managers

Section 18 of the Children Act (2004) requires every local authority in England to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DfE 2013). The DCS has professional responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services and is responsible for securing the provision of services which address the needs of all children and young people, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and their families and carers. Their responsibilities are wide, and as a result of this there is usually an Assistant Director or Head of Service (AD/HoS) who is responsible for the strategic and operational running of children's social services. To gain an understanding of what actions were taken in relation to the implementation of a PCFSW or otherwise in an authority, it was necessary to access AD/HoS in authorities across England as key players.

With 152 local authorities in England, it was not feasible to interview an AD/HoS in each one, hence a mix of snowball and purposive sampling was undertaken. As outlined below, by using PCFSWs to gain access to AD/HoS, a very specific form of sampling defined as 'snowball' by Bryman (2012) was used. This was coupled to purposive sampling which Kara (2012) defines as a method by which the researcher uses their own judgement about which participants will have the most to contribute to the research. This provided further challenges to me as an insider researcher (Robson 2011) as I potentially had professional knowledge of and acquaintanceship with possible participants. Issues of potential bias will be discussed later in the chapter. Gilbert (2008) argues that purposive sampling is used to select participants according to the project's goals - they are selected for inclusion because of a particular characteristic, or identified variable. Gaining insights from AD/HoS is particularly relevant as they have a unique position in the implementation of the PCFSW role. Bryman (2012) argues that the researcher should be strategic in identifying participants, ensuring that there is a variety in the resulting sample reflecting differences in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question. Hence, respondents from different regions and types of authorities were sampled, as indicated below.

The College of Social Work (TCSW 2014) survey had indicated that there were variations in how the role of PCFSW was being implemented in authorities, and the data suggested that these differences had an effect on how the role was being operationalised and experienced. It soon emerged from the survey that the implementation of the role had fallen into two categories: those for whom being the PCFSW was their sole role, and those who had the role designated to them in addition to another senior management role they already held. The former I classified as a 'standalone' PCFSW, the latter was classified as a 'hybrid' PCFSW. A third category

was authorities in which there was no PCFSW, and I classified them as 'none'. Examining the TCSW survey data it was possible to identify that there were 19 authorities with standalone PCFSWs and 50 authorities with hybrid roles and five with no PCFSW, from a survey response population of N = 74 out of a possible 152 authorities with children's services responsibilities. The TCSW survey data were not representative of all authorities and it is not known how many actually occupy one of the three categories below but it is probable that most PCFSWs are likely to be in hybrid positions:

Table 1: Configuration of PCFSW role from TCSW (2014) survey

N = 74

How is the PCFSW role configured in your service	No.	%
Standalone	19	26
Part of wider responsibilities - Hybrid	50	67
None	5	7

At the point of recruiting participants for my research, I was the chair of the PCFSW network. Through engaging with this network representing all 152 local authorities, I was able to implement my snowball and purposive sampling strategy, by gaining direct access to AD/HoS through their PCFSW. As the network was aware of my area of research, and had demonstrated an interest in both the subject matter and the findings, there was a willingness by members to contribute by engaging the involvement of the senior manager in their authority. Through the established communication channels of the network, the research outline was circulated, and when individual PCFSWs brokered engagement with their AD/HoS, I made direct

contact via my local authority email address. While not conscious of it at the time, on reflection, my focus on trying to engage research participants probably influenced my choice of using my 'professional' email address rather than my university one which would have been more appropriate in my role of researcher. It is likely that this will have had some influence on the decision of participants on engagement with the research. The research outline, permissions, consent forms and other papers relating to the research were sent directly to the AD/HoS respondent as the next stage in their engagement.

There is no agreed sample size in the literature on cross-sectional explorative qualitative research (Guest et al. 2006; Mason 2010), however Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) conclude that the sample size should not be so small as to make it difficult to achieve data saturation, the point where no new data emerges regarding categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The target of fifteen senior managers to participate in telephone interviews equalled 10% of all possible authorities, and just under 20% of the number of authorities who responded to the College of Social Work survey. With three classifications of authority relating to their PCFSW: standalone, hybrid and none, selecting fifteen interviewees allowed a sample of five participants for each classification. There was a contingency plan to recruit more participants if necessary, but when the interviews were completed and transcribed, it became quickly apparent as later chapters will reveal, that data saturation had surfaced within this purposive sample.

Identifying and engaging participants in authorities where there were PCFSWs was more straightforward than where there were none. One explanation for this was because my access to senior managers was through PCFSWs, so in authorities without one, there was no conduit.

There was no formal record held of local authorities who had a PCFSW in England, and as not all PCFSWs were part of the national network it could not be assumed that authorities who did not have representation at the network did not have a PCFSW. Members of the network were asked for local knowledge in identifying neighbouring authorities where there was not a PCFSW. PCFSWs who responded to this were also able to identify someone in a management role with whom I could get in touch to inform them about my research, and ask if they could broker access to the AD/HoS. In this way I was able to recruit three AD/HoS in local authorities where there was no PCFSW. Although this was a smaller sample size than for the other two categories, the data obtained from the three authorities was consistent in content. Rapley (2007) says, actual practice can deviate from the ideals of interviewee recruitment, and can often happen on an ad-hoc and chance basis. My recruitment of AD/HoS was not ad-hoc, but there was a degree of chance in who responded and some degree of self-selection. My target sample of 15 senior managers for the telephone interviews reduced to 13 as follows:

- 5 AD/HoS from local authorities who had a standalone PCFSW
- 5 AD/HoS from local authorities who had a hybrid PCFSW
- 3 who did not have a PCFSW

Tables 2 to 5 below demonstrate the diversity in the authorities represented by their AD/HoS.

Table 2: Standalone Authorities

Authority	Description	Population at ONS 2016 mid-year estimates	Length of interview
A	Unitary Authority	555,000	26 mins

B	Metropolitan District	205000	24 mins
C	Non-metropolitan county council	900,000	14 mins
D	Non-metropolitan county council	750,000	19 mins
E	Non-metropolitan county council	550,000	17 mins

Table 3: Hybrid Authorities

Authority	Description	Population at ONS 2016 mid-year estimates	Length of interview
1	Non-metropolitan county council	1,500,000	33 mins (breaks in reception)
2	Metropolitan Borough	450,000	14 mins
3	Non-metropolitan county council	700,000	22 mins
4	London Borough	350,000	19 mins
5	Unitary Authority	150,000	22 mins

Table 4: Authorities with no PCFSW

Authority	Description	Population at ONS 2016 mid-year estimates	Length of interview
X	Non-metropolitan county council	1,500,000	17 mins
Y	Unitary Authority	220,000	14 mins
Z	London Borough	200,000	17.mins

b) Sampling the PCFSWs

Having collected data from the strategic actors involved in the decision to create a PCFSW, the research turned to those who had been appointed in the role. Again, a purposive sampling strategy was intended to identify participants for focus groups who occupied hybrid and standalone positions but ultimately convenience sampling (Bryman 2012) became necessary.

Cronin (2008) argues that purposive sampling is an appropriate method of recruiting participants to focus groups as the main goal is to gain insight and understanding from representatives of the target population. However, I was not able to recruit PCFSWs to the focus groups in the way I had been able to recruit participants for the telephone interviews and had to rely on more opportunistic methods. Kara (2012) defines convenience sampling as the researcher choosing the first participants they can find who are willing to help, while Bryman (2012) notes that a convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility. This approach indeed was necessary as the logistics of assembling PCFSWs together proved difficult, and it became clear after several attempts that the impediments of geography, travel and busy diaries precluded any reliable arrangements to convene as a representative group. I therefore looked to use the pre-existing timetable of the eight PCFSW network regional meetings that were in place at that time, meeting on a quarterly basis. There was no specific agenda for these meetings, and they were used to consider regional issues for the PCFSW role which then fed in to the national network through the regional Chairs.

Hardwick and Worsley (2011) state that it is quite common for social work researchers to access an existing group, or 'piggy back' as Kreugar and Casey (2000) have termed it. Kitzinger (1994) argues that the researcher is more likely to get a realistic discussion in groups where participants know each other, including challenging statements from people they know, perhaps reducing the element of self-presentation that can influence data. As I was seeking insight into the experience of starting in and undertaking the role, the advantages of using an established group as outlined above seemed relevant to the data I was hoping to obtain. While I might not have been part of these established groups, I did know to varying degrees the participants in their professional capacity, and again there was the potential risk of bias from being an insider researcher, which will be discussed further later in this chapter.

My request to the regional Chairs was to have an hour scheduled at the end of their meeting to hold a focus group. This would fit in with their business agenda, and have an opt out for those that did not want to stay and be part of the group. The Chairs of three regional networks responded, one in the north, one in the middle of the country, and one in the south. This spread of geography was accidental and opportunistic (Bryman 2012). I discovered that having the agreement of the Chairs did not necessarily mean that their network members would engage, which became apparent with the scheduled focus group in the north. A short time before this regional meeting and research focus group was due to happen, I was informed that there would be almost no attendees. This focus group was cancelled, and the constraints of time, geography and busy diaries precluded it from being rescheduled.

Table 5: Focus Groups

Group	Region	Participants	Length of focus group
1	A. large geographical area with a high number of rural counties	5	72 mins
2	B. smaller geographical area with a mixture of rural and urban authorities.	10	65 mins

The focus groups were held in different regions to maximise the potential to capture possible variation in implementation and function, and took place six months apart due to their routine timetabling. As will be seen, the two focus groups contain marked similarities as well as some divergence and data saturation was considered likely albeit a third focus group would have been welcome.

As has been discussed, The College of Social Work (2013; 2014) administered two surveys on behalf of the national network of PCFSWs. The data obtained gave a snapshot in time of the development and implementation of the PCFSW role across local authorities in England. This data was made available to me as Chair of the national network and published by The College of Social Work. It provided insights into the organisational and practice complexities of this new role which merited further exploration. Having considered the methodology and sampling for this research, we now turn to the methods used.

The method used to elicit data from the AD/HoS in relation to the establishment and introduction of the PCFSW role was the telephone interview. Bryman (2012) states that despite the time-consuming nature of interviewing with the necessary transcription and analysis, as a method in qualitative research it is more readily accommodated into the researcher's personal life. Thus, the transcribing and analysis of data could be undertaken at home to suit other commitments, and the telephone interviews could be undertaken with minimum time commitment of the researcher and the interviewee. Transcription will be discussed further in the section on data analysis later in this chapter.

Interviews are typically viewed as the quintessential tool of qualitative methods (McLaughlin 2012). However, an interview is neither inherently qualitative nor quantitative - it depends on the structure of the interview, and the nature of the questions being asked. There are a number of different types of interview used in social research (Bryman 2012; Babbie 2013; Kara 2012; Hardwick and Worsley 2011). Bryman (2012) notes that structured interviews are designed to maximise the reliability and validity of measurement of key concepts. The questions are deductive, testing theory and hypothesis. Qualitative interviews by contrast are more inductive, with a greater emphasis on exploration and the formulation of research ideas. As my research is on a new role within the context of new reforms, I was not testing out hypotheses, but rather exploring the perspective of key players, to elicit insights and develop thematic concepts.

Semi-structured interviews, as implied, provide a degree of structure by virtue of the interview guide, which outlines fairly specific topics to

be covered. Bryman (2012) notes that while there is leeway in this approach in ordering questions or expanding or perhaps deviating temporarily, by and large all the questions will be asked via similar wording with interviewees to allow reasonable comparison. Closed questions were used to allow comparison and open questions were asked to get into the reasoning underlying some of the closed answers (Kara 2012). For example, for all those authorities that had a PCFSW I asked an open question to elicit the respondent's view, notably at the start of the interview:

Why did you decide to have a PCFSW?

A closed question for comparative purposes:

How long have you had one?

A closed question with an open addition for comparative purposes and to explore the answer:

What level are they in the organisation, and why?

This mix of questions generated valuable comparative material and the basic topic flow of the interviews with senior managers was the same. The notable exceptions were in the interviews where there was no PCFSW, as questions around the process of implementing the role, or an evaluation of the benefits of the role clearly could not be asked. The additional questions pertaining to not having a PCFSW were asked across all three interviews with the AD/HoS from the local authorities in that particular category (see Appendix C for interview guide).

3.6   Telephone Interviews

Bryman (2012) notes that, while telephone interviewing is common in survey research, it is less common in qualitative research. Within the literature, there are suggested benefits and challenges to telephone interviewing that can be summarised thus:

- Access to geographically dispersed groups
- Access to time challenged actors
- Saving of time and costs
- Potentially more candid answers as respondents are not face to face with the interviewer
- More usable data as both researcher and interviewee are more focused on the topic
- Useful when the researcher already has an 'in' with the respondents.

(Bryman 2012; Fielding and Thomas 2012; Irvine et al. 2010).

As a lone part-time researcher the question of time-costs was important and there were evident economies to be obtained by avoiding travel to undertake face to face interviews with a highly dispersed sample. The route I took to recruiting the telephone interview respondents through the PCFSWs, and the Chair position of the PCFSW national network gave me an 'in' with the AD/HoS sample that I might not otherwise have had. Also, and not insignificantly, the telephone is a mode of communication with which AD/HoS are very familiar and likely comfortable with. Nonetheless, there are a number of disadvantages such as:

- Making the interaction 'natural'
- Can be more readily cut off
- Unable to see body language, so important nuances may be lost

- Technical difficulties with poor lines or recording – this was the case in two of my interviews.
- Unlikely to go beyond 25 mins

(Bryman 2012; Fielding and Thomas 2012; Irvine et al. 2010)

Overall, there was no sense that the interviews were significantly less 'natural' than they might have been face to face. There were brief technical difficulties in two interviews, although data were obtained from both of them. The nature of the interviews, and the interview schedule prepared was planned for interviews of around 20 minutes, which fitted in with the broad timescale of interviews by this method.

Fielding and Thomas (2012) recognise some of the difficulties that can get in the way of a frank discussion that is desirable in qualitative interviewing of this kind. An example given is rationalisation where respondents offer only some official rhetoric without evaluative or emotional insight. They note that respondents may avoid giving answers that are inconsistent with their preferred self-image. Thus for senior managers within an organisation being asked about the implementation of a key aspect of a national reform programme, it might be that some responses reflect an idealised or aspirational view rather than a more reflective and authentic appraisal. Notably, one respondent chose to read extracts from the job description when asked what the PCFSW does within their organisation in the interview rather than offer a more informed insider perspective:

> *Well, I've got the job description in front of me, so I don't know if it would be useful for me to provide that to you?*
>
> Hybrid LA '3'

As a researcher I had to recognise 'the line' when it arose and find other ways of asking the question that might prompt a different more

revealing response. In all of the interviews I was conscious of using verbal probing techniques. Non-verbal prompts as suggested by Fielding and Thomas (2012) were not available to me apart from silent pauses during the phone conversation to indicate a willingness for the respondent to continue. During the process of transcription and analysis the matter of potential and actual bias was noted where these seemed likely to occur and are discussed later in the chapter.

3.7   Focus Groups

In exploring in some depth the wholly new role of the PCFSW and to generate comparative sources about participants' individual and shared experiences, the focus group provided a ready and effective resource. Social workers are familiar with group work as both an encounter with other professionals and as a vehicle for intervention. It seemed therefore especially appropriate and compared to individual interviews with a far-flung sample, would save time and money. More importantly however were its technical advantages. Kitzinger (1995, p. 299) describes focus groups as a "form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data", while Powell and Single (1996, p. 499) define it as:

> A group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research.

Cronin (2008) acknowledges that focus groups generate very different data than that generated through individual interviews, with Morgan (1997) pointing out that it is the interaction between participants that is the 'hallmark' of the focus group. In my research, using focus groups gave insight not just into the individual experience

of doing this new role, but how PCFSWs responded to and compared their experience with that of others. The data suggests that PCFSWs experience the role as an isolated one, and they seemed to relish the opportunity to discuss this with other PCFSWs in a group. Their knowledge and expertise around the subject, alongside their ease in being in the group setting meant that they at times interjected and probed each other's accounts, which both added to the richness of the data, and released some pressure from the researcher as moderator.

For Hardwick and Worsley (2011) there are very clear connections between social work practice in relation to working with groups and acknowledging the empowering effect that focus groups can have, which is congruent with social work values.

In holding focus groups, consideration was given to the number and size of groups to be convened. Bryman (2012) suggests that just one group is unlikely to meet the needs of the researcher as there is always the possibility that the responses are particular to just that membership. However, too many groups can be a waste of time and resources, with saturation point soon reached (Calder 1977; Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Morgan (1998) suggests that the typical group size is six to ten members, with smaller groups when the participants are likely to have a lot to say on the topic. However well a focus group is planned, a familiar difficulty is participants not turning up on the day. The numbers in my potential focus groups were partly determined by the regional network hosting them. For example, numbers of authorities in each regional network vary, but most would be between 12 and 15. This would seem to be near the maximum number acceptable both in terms of managing the group, but also the impact on recording and transcribing (Bryman 2012). By aiming to hold focus groups with three regional networks I had

potential access to some 45 PCFSWs which would represent almost a third of the 152 local authorities in England. I anticipated, correctly, that it was unlikely that this number would turn up on the day.

Focus Group 1 was held in a large geographical region in the south of England with a predominance of rural authorities. Five participants attended, and the group lasted for one hour and twelve minutes. Focus Group 2 was arranged three months later with another large regional network in the north of England, and as stated earlier was cancelled due to attendance. Bryman (2012, p. 15) rightly states that "research is full of false starts, blind alleys, mistakes, and enforced changes to research plans". Focus Group 3 was held six months after Focus Group 1. This was with a regional network that consisted of large urban local authorities as well as rural authorities in the middle of England. Ten PCFSWs took part and it lasted for one hour and five minutes. Thus, in all, focus group data was obtained from 15 PCFSWs, their collective number representing 10% of the many varied local authorities in England. That said, McLaughlin (2012) notes that focus groups provide an understanding of the range and depth of opinions, attitudes and beliefs, rather than a measure of the number of people who hold a particular opinion, a focus on quality rather than quantity.

The nature of focus groups generally means that a moderator is required and I undertook this role. The benefits to my being the moderator were an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, which can help the management of the focus group. However, the potential for role blurring was significant, particularly in respect of that between researcher and participant. Cronin (2008) identifies guiding principles in addition to the communication skills needed to moderate a focus group. Two of these I found challenging:

- Be a moderator and not a participant
- Be prepared to hear unpleasant views or views you do not agree with.

Given my peer status amongst PCFSWs and former position of Chair of the network, I found the role of moderator challenging. In such groups, I am usually a participant, and to refrain from being a participant was difficult. In addition, I have views on the subject matter that I would normally contribute to the discussion and had to consciously stop myself from doing this. This was particularly difficult when views that I did not agree with were expressed as I would normally have presented a counter argument.

Morgan (1997) distinguishes between low, medium and high level moderation. I moderated at medium level, guiding the discussion via my interview schedule, interjecting as necessary, and occasionally asking clarifying or probing questions. I do not believe that low level moderation would have been as effective as there was a risk that the group would go off topic. Both focus groups were already established groups who were used to having discussion and debate, within existing group relationships and dynamics. This proved helpful in that they were able to take an aspect and discuss it openly and freely, but with moderation keeping it on track. A high level of moderation and control might not have allowed the rich depth of discussion that flowed.

Bryman (2012) notes that all research is constrained by time and resources. Time has been significant throughout this research process. It affected my choice of research methods, and in this phase of the research my resort to convenience sampling to access two focus groups of PCFSWs. Time was also significant in my style of moderating – I had a finite period to cover all the areas in the

interview schedule, hence the need for a medium level of moderation.

The questions identified for the focus groups (see Appendix D) took the semi-structured format and were partly informed by the thematic analysis of the data obtained from the telephone interviews with the AD/HoS. The questions for the PCFSWs sought to elicit their thoughts, feelings and understanding of actually 'doing' the PCFSW role and contrasted these with the ambitions held by the local authority and its senior management for the post in question. For each question, there were a number of sub-questions designed as probes either to encourage response if it was not forthcoming, or to probe for further meaning. In the main, these were not needed, often being covered in the answers given within the groups.

3.8   Interviewer Effects

There is a significant body of literature considering interviewer effects, and the impact that the person leading the interview potentially has on the research process and data collection (Sudman and Bradburn 1974). It has been shown that response rates and extensiveness of response can be affected by the competences of the interviewer (Fielding and Thomas 2012). In my telephone interview with the AD/HoS, I felt that I had to draw deeply upon my social work skills in interviewing developed over the years as a social worker specifically due to:

- The limitations of interpersonal interaction in telephone interviews
- The senior status in the organisation of the respondents, and
- The potential for respondents to rationalise and give an idealised view of the organisation.

In reflecting upon my performance in the role of research interviewer, I found it useful to consider success criteria devised by Kvale (1996) and summarised below:

- Knowledgeable - the interviewer is thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview. My experience of being a PCFSW and being part of the national network made me knowledgeable and was recognised as such by the respondents in both samples. Being knowledgeable added value to my encounter with the AD/HoS as I had to establish credibility early on and it would allow me some legitimacy to probe their implementation of the new post and the aspirations they held for it. By contrast, I felt that this capacity may have been an inhibitor in the focus groups, as I may have been perceived by peers as being more expert than most in doing the role.

- Structure and Clarity. For both methods, I prepared an interview schedule, based on my research question. The interview schedules were semi-structured with short questions.

- Gentle/Sensitive/Open/Remembering. In these aspects my social work interviewing skills came directly into play. McLaughlin (2012, p. 38) states that traditionally the worlds of the social worker and the researcher have been seen as mutually exclusive and esoteric activities, but it is now widely acknowledged that they have much in common. Hardwick and Worsley (2011, p. 2) recognise social work as a 'highly complex and sometimes apparently contradictory pursuit', and note both the values and skills that social workers have. Ruch (2005) attributes social work practice to facilitating a relationship, that contains an awareness of the individual and diverse knowledge sources. I believe I used this approach, as a researcher.

- Steering/Critical/Interpreting – as I had an interview schedule for the telephone interviews, which was sent to the respondents in

advance, there was less need to steer the interview. This skill in steering tended to be required more in the focus groups, which is to be expected when facilitating discussion with a group of people (Bryman 2012). In both methods, I was not overtly critical, but did at times probe responses further. As stated above, I was aware of my inclination to contribute to the discussion, particularly if I did not agree with a viewpoint, but in the main I was successful in reining in my inclination to contribute and qualify. Recognition of this contributed to my decision to undertake verbatim transcriptions, and I used the supervisory process for my research as a check and balance in this regard.

3.9   Research Identity

Davies (2007, p. 6) states that when an actor becomes involved in conducting research they are a researcher, which according to Kara (2012) is a separate role and identity to others the individual might hold. Prior to undertaking this research, I already had an occupational and professional identity as a social worker, and as a Principal Child and Family Social Worker. It was important therefore to consider the impact of this on the study in that I might for different reasons be perceived as both insider and outsider, and these identities may have different effects on the research encounter.

Robson (2011) identifies 'insider' and 'outsider' research, where the researcher is part of the system they are researching, or outside of it. This is not dichotomous, and my researcher role is not clear cut. As a researcher, I was an 'outsider' in that I was not researching my own service or organisation. However, I was an 'insider' by virtue of my professional links to the roles and identities and professional networks being studied.

Kara (2012) makes a comparison of insider and outsider research, considering the pros and cons of both approaches which the researcher should be aware of when designing and undertaking their research. Being aware of the compromises of insider research did influence my choice of method. For example, the proximity I already had to the research subject ruled out ethnographic approaches. I would not have had the social distance necessary to prevent me making assumptions and thinking 'as usual' within such settings. Instead I believed I had to travel through the negotiated 'distance' of the interview and focus group by actively seeking and recording others' views and perceptions in the process of data gathering and analysis.

Bryman (2012) considers reflexivity in the conduct of social research whereby social researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions. Considerable time was spent by myself and with supervisors in exploring potential bias in undertaking research in an area where I was professionally involved. Specific methods such as the piloting of interview schedules were designed to offer some mitigation against researcher bias, as was the full transcription of audio recorded data. While conducting the telephone interviews and the focus groups, I was actively conscious of stopping myself contributing to the conversations and discussions. This was easier on the telephone, whereas I had to be aware of my body language when in the room during the focus groups.

3.1.0 Analysis of the Data

To reiterate, in the fieldwork for this research, data were gathered through

- Thirteen telephone interviews with AD/HoS (see Tables 1-3 above)

- Two focus groups with regional networks of PCFSWs (see Table 4 above)

Both methods of data collection were digitally recorded on a MP3 recorder, the recordings from which were downloaded onto a secure server, immediately following the telephone interviews, and on my return from the focus groups. When they were downloaded, they were given a code which enabled me to identify them, but which kept their identities anonymous. These sources will be destroyed as per the requirements of Cardiff University and outlined in my ethics application (contained in Appendix A).

I personally transcribed all the data as soon as possible after the fieldwork had taken place. Bryman (2012) highlights the benefits of undertaking your own transcription as a researcher as it increases familiarity with the data and prepares for the process of data analysis. My method of transcription was by listening to the recordings and repeating the data to a voice recognition and transcription programme on my computer. I then listened to the data again, and manually corrected the recorded transcription. Initially it took me an hour to transcribe five minutes of data, but this improved with experience. The focus groups were the last data collections that I transcribed, and my transcribing experience by that point was much needed in capturing multiple elements of group conversations with a number of actors who needed to be identified in regard to their organisational type and PCFSW function. There were inevitably parts of the recording that were less clear, and I returned to them many times to try and establish what was said. Undertaking the transcription close to the event assisted in recollecting who and what was being said. Gaps were left in the transcripts when words could not be identified with confidence. Two recordings of telephone interviews were of lesser quality, one because of researcher error not

setting the equipment up properly, and the other because the AD/HoS had asked to be called when she was on a train journey as that is when she had free time, and there were frequent breaks in the recording due to telephone signal failure. Despite these difficulties, useful data were obtained from both interviews.

Both samples were small enough to allow verbatim transcription. Fielding and Thomas (2012) highlight one of the advantages of verbatim transcription being that you do not know what will be the most significant points of analysis when you are actually doing the transcription, and you therefore do not lose any data that later may become significant. This proved to be the case in this study. Bryman (2012) highlights the enhancements to the integrity of transcribed data – it opens it up to the scrutiny of other researchers, and can assist in countering any accusations that an analysis might be influenced by values or biases of the researcher. My experience of doing the transcription in the repetitive way that I did was that I became very familiar with the data, and in this process began to make connections and identify analytic themes early on.

According to Babbie (2013), the key process in the analysis of qualitative social research data is coding, the classifying or categorising of individual pieces of data. The aim of data analysis is the discovery of patterns among the data that lead to understandings of social life, and the coding and relating of concepts is key to this process. Bryman (2012) identifies coding as the first step towards the generation of theory in all qualitative data analysis, and particularly in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 1983). Strauss and Corbin (1990) drawing on their grounded theory approach, distinguish between three types of coding practice: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is described as a process where data are broken down into discrete parts which are

then compared for differences and similarities (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and is the initial classification and labelling of concepts in qualitative data analysis (Babbie 2013). Axial coding involves the regrouping of data, using the open code data looking for more analytic concepts. Selective coding seeks to identify the central code in the study that the other codes may relate to. Charmaz (2006) distinguishes between two types of coding – initial coding and focused coding, where initial coding is very detailed generating as many ideas as possible to capture the data, and focused coding entails emphasising the most common codes, and those that are considered the most revealing about the data.

As has been stated above, my data comprised of 13 transcripts from telephone interviews, and two transcripts from focus groups. I felt that this amount of data was manageable for manual coding and did not necessitate a computer-assisted method such as NViVO. I believed that there were advantages to this approach. The first is that it would further increase my familiarity with the data. Secondly, with the amount of data I had, I felt that the time required to learn and operate a computer-based programme would be better used considering my data. I also felt that I was more accountable for my coding and categorising by doing it manually.

While not fully realising it at the time, on reflection my analysis of the data took a thematic analysis approach from the outset. My research question and method of enquiry had been informed by my review of the literature, and my access to the College of Social Work (2014) survey questions and data. As the PCFSW was a new role being established in the context of new reforms so there was no previous research or data specifically in this area to which I could refer. Thus I undertook preliminary open coding of the College of Social Work

survey data and this generated initial indicators and concepts around the creation and implementation of the PCFSW role:

- Acceptance of the recommendations for the role
    - Number of authorities who responded
    - Whether the respondent had a PCFSW
- Commitment to the role
    - Configuration of the role – standalone or hybrid
    - Time dedicated to the role
- Reality of doing the role
    - Involvement in direct practice
    - Roles PCFSW has responsibility for
    - Achievements attributed to the implementation of the role
    - Challenges to the implementation of the role

The early coding suggested the need for new qualitative data about implementation. While the College of Social Work (2014) survey had not been compiled for the purposes of this research, the data obtained from it informed the questions in the interview schedule for the AD/HoS. From this data it was possible to identify the two main role-types which I classified as standalone and hybrid respectively, and this shaped the recruiting of participants for the telephone interview. Five authorities with a standalone PCFW, five authorities with a hybrid PCFSW, and five authorities with no PCFSW were selected. This purposively varied sample allowed me to explore what differences there might be to both the rationale of creating the role, and the management perception of its implementation and aims.

The transcriptions from the telephone interviews with the AD/HoS were manually coded. Initially themes were pulled out linked to the questions in the interview schedule for the different categories of authority – standalone, hybrid, or none. For standalone and hybrid

authorities, most questions were the same, with the exception of AD/HoS in hybrid authorities being asked what other role their PCFSW had. I was therefore able to code for each question, and make a comparison between standalone and hybrid authorities. I was able to generate codes and early themes in respect of the following categories:

- Creation of the role
- Rationale for model of role
- Functions of the role
- Facilitation of the role
- Challenges to the role
- Benefits of the role
- Continuation of the role

Chapter Four will reveal fully the ways in which these comparative sources have informed the analysis.

As has been discussed, data from senior managers who created and implemented the PCFSW role represents a particular organisational perspective. To obtain a perspective from the role holders and to test some of the working hypotheses emerging from the telephone data, field research was undertaken with PCFSWs in the form of two focus groups. The schedule for the focus groups was developed in part from the insights and working hypotheses from the telephone interview data.

An additional question regarding the PCFSWs' recollections of being appointed to, being new in, and carrying out the functions of the role was included. This helped to explore initial and subsequent understandings of and actions in this new role, and this in turn

allowed more focused comparison with AD/HoS conceptions and rationales for the post.

To repeat, both focus groups were recorded and transcribed. A similar process of data analysis was undertaken to that outlined in respect of the telephone interviews above. Open coding of the full transcripts was completed for both focus groups with a time lapse of six months between them due to the difficulties in holding the second focus group as described earlier. Axial coding was undertaken when both coded transcripts were considered together. The key findings of the selective coding are discussed in Chapter Five.

Additional Research Considerations

Earlier in the chapter we discussed interviewer effects and research identity when considering the research methods used in this study. We now turn to consider additional aspects of validity in qualitative analysis, ethics, and limitations of the study.

3.1.1 Validity in Qualitative Analysis

Bryman (2012) notes that while reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher, their relevance has been contested for qualitative research. Gilbert (2008, p. 32) defines validity as accurately measuring a concept, and reliability as consistency from one measurement to the next, both terms being more akin to quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) provide an alternative which they argue takes into account the epistemology and ontology required for qualitative research. The primary criteria proposed are trustworthiness and authenticity, with further sub-criteria which enhance this approach. Yardley (2000)

outlines an alternative list of four criteria that reflect similar themes to Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The research design I developed was qualitative, explorative and based on small samples of participants drawn from a much larger population which presented difficulties in establishing external validity or statistically representative status as in quantitative terms. Also, the nature of the research question is located in a particular point in time, relating specifically to the reform agenda in child protection social work in England in the second decade of the twenty first century. The Munro review and recommendations (2010; 2011a; 2011b) will not be new again, and therefore the study cannot be replicated.

Bryman (2012) notes how values reflect the personal beliefs and feelings of the researcher. He argues that it is not possible to keep the values that a researcher has totally in check at all stages of the research process. It is therefore incumbent on the researcher to be reflective and reflexive throughout the process, be aware of bias, and mitigate against it when possible. I believe I was reflective and reflexive throughout. I engaged fully with the supervisory process with my academic supervisors, and experienced challenge which I accepted and took action from as appropriate. I challenged myself in aspects, including the recognition of the potential I had to influence the interviews and focus groups, and the actions I took to mitigate this. Decisions such as recording and transcribing the data verbatim, doing this very soon after the fieldwork, and making the full transcripts available to my supervisors were practical ways of enhancing the credibility of the analysis.

Gilgun (2015) argues that the interpretations, that is the analysis, gain their credibility through their connections to the descriptive

material. Throughout I have sought to stay as close to the verbatim accounts of the participants to enhance the credibility of the analysis undertaken. It remains that the analytical process is unavoidably subjective to some degree, and that the research rationale acknowledges this.

3.1.2 Ethics in Research

Ethics is a very familiar concept for social workers. The International Federation of Social Workers has a Statement of Ethical Principles for social work internationally (IFSW 2012), and in the United Kingdom the British Association of Social Work holds the Code of Ethics for Social Work (BASW 2012). The regulator for social work in England, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC 2016) holds the Standard of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. Fox et al. (2007) note that research ethics are different from service ethics, with four main areas for consideration being identified by Diener and Crandall (1978): harm to participants; lack of informed consent; invasion of privacy; involvement of deception. I will consider these below.

As my research concerned actors in their role within an organisation, there were less issues of ethical risk than if the research subjects were those who receive services, which is often the case in research within social work (Hardwick and Worsley 2011). That is not to say that there were no risks, particularly for those tasked with maintaining the reputation of their organisation such as the AD/HoS, or those in isolated roles such as the PCFSW.

As my research was part of my professional doctoral studies, an ethics proposal was submitted to the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee with approval being received in May 2015 (see Appendix A). My research proposal was

also sent to the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) research group in England. Approval was received July 2015 (see Appendix B).

My access to research participants was through the PCFSW national network which does not have an ethics process. However, my research was discussed in national meetings, and recorded in minutes which were distributed to all members. In recruiting participants, research outlines were sent to all PCFSWs who, on my behalf, approached their AD/HoS, and on identification of these individuals, copies of the research outline, the approval letter from the ADCS, and a letter of consent for signature were sent directly to the respondent by email. Prior to starting each telephone interview, I checked with each participant that they understood the research and its parameters, were assured of anonymity, and that they consented to the interview. This was recorded, and was in addition to the email/signed letter of consent they had already agreed. Throughout I had made participants aware that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed by myself and stored on a secure server.

In respect of the PCFSW focus groups, agreement was sought through the Chairs of the regional networks. They provided me with the email addresses of all their members, who were then sent information with regard to the research and the focus group. As the focus group was being held after a scheduled regional network meeting, individual PCFSWs had the option to attend or not. They received the consent letters in advance, and I took some with me on the day to make sure they had the opportunity to consider consent. The documentation made clear that the group would be recorded, and I gained additional verbal acknowledgement before the group started.

In undertaking the recording, transcription and data analysis, the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents was ensured. The transcriptions of the telephone interviews were anonymised by assigning a letter/number to distinguish them, as in Table 1 to 3 above. Similarly, the regional networks that hosted the focus groups were anonymised, and the individual respondents assigned a letter to distinguish them. Any data that could identify them, or their authority, was adapted in the transcriptions to a non-identifying letter. The ethics requirements of both Cardiff University and ADCS Research Group ensured that requirements of data protection were met.

The participants were involved in this research in their professional role. As can be seen above, anonymity and confidentiality were assured. The risks highlighted by Diener and Crandall (1978) were therefore minimised.

Kara (2012) notes that ethics permeate the whole research process, and not just the activity around data collection. Thus, there are ethics in what is written and read, with the onus on the researcher to represent as faithfully as they can the work of others. There are ethics in the analysis of data – for instance Kara (2012) highlights the acknowledgement and use of all the data, and not cherry-picking what meets the researcher's preferred viewpoint. Such matters are discussed further in the following section on analysis.

3.1.3 Limitations

There are evident limitations in the research design. The PCFSW is a new role, with little if any research being recorded about it that could help inform a study such as this (Stanley and Russell 2014). There is no reliable data source for the number of authorities who have one.

Access to respondents was therefore reliant on my professional network as a social worker and as a PCFSW myself. Not all PCFSWS and not all authorities could be identified or approached and hence there are obvious limits in terms of external validity as discussed above.

I was limited by time in undertaking my research. A significant factor was the part-time nature of my studies. All research time had to be negotiated with my employer or undertaken in my own free time. As a mature student with family commitments, this was a continual balancing act, and influenced the study design and research process. As discussed earlier, the time and travel difficulties of geography and forming groups of very busy professionals reduced the opportunities to convene more focus groups.

3.1.4 Summary

The PCFSW is a new role local authority children's social care. The recommendation for its development was made in the context of wider reforms proposed for statutory child protection social work in England (Munro 2011b). My practice experience as Chair of the PCFSW network from 2012 to 2015 was that the implementation of the role was piecemeal. A research design was developed that sought to understand the implementation of the role using a number of data sources. Using the data from TCSW survey as a starting point, the research used qualitative methods to understand the perspectives of key actors in the establishment of PCFSWs. Telephone interviews were held with ADs/HoS to gain insight into the rationale for implementing and aspirations for the role for those who were responsible for introducing it in their organisation. The findings from these interviews will be considered in Chapter Four. Two focus groups were held with PCFSWs in the role to understand their experience of

making this recommendation a reality, and the findings in this regard will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four   View From the Top: A new approach to organisation and culture change

4.1   Introduction

Thus far the focus of this study has been placed on the Principal Child and Family Social Worker (PCFSW) role and its positioning in the context of key practice reforms and administrative changes called for in statutory child protection social work in England in the early 21st Century. In particular, I have noted how the Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b) was identified as a significant component of these reforms, commissioned by the UK Government in response to media and public interest in a small number of high-profile cases involving the death of children. In addition to this political and social context, the changing role of the public sector in England in recent years was examined, recognising the variable effects of New Public Management and its key elements of managerialism and marketisation on social work professional identity, status and related notions of practice expertise.

Munro (2011b) made a number of recommendations to improve the child protection system, of which Recommendation 14 entailed the creation of a PCFSW in each local authority in England to focus on social work practice and provide essential leadership and advocacy that would re-position effective interventions as the primary organisational objective as opposed to risk averse defensive practice, administrative compliance and screen work. In essence the PCFSW role is intended by government as a tangible change agent (DfE 2011) and this chapter will address the critical matter of its implementation as this will reveal much of the way local authorities have sought to deal with an externally imposed addition to their

management system and practice culture. The chapter will first consider briefly data about PCFSWs generated by The College of Social Work (TCSW 2013; TCSW 2014) which undertook a survey of all English local authorities to establish how this important new post was activated. The chapter will thereafter examine key findings from telephone interviews undertaken with a purposive sample of Assistant Directors/Heads of Service (AD/HoS) for children's social care across 13 local authorities in England.

The AD/HoS role within the local authority is critical to the enquiry, as the occupants are key figures in the PCFSW implementation process. Lord Laming (2003) in his recommendations in the enquiry following the death of Victoria Climbie focused on the role of senior managers, emphasising their responsibility, and outlining actions specifically for them within the organisation. This together with a stronger more interventionist regulatory framework for child protection has placed increasing pressure on senior managers to 'get it right' for vulnerable children (Featherstone et al. 2012). In the current OFSTED Single Inspection Framework, one of the four sections on which a judgement is made is on Leadership (OFSTED 2017). The reputational and career risks are high for those in the most senior leadership roles in children's services (Community Care 2013) and it is in this challenging climate that the most recent reforms proposed by the Westminster Government focus on 'Practice Leaders' (DfE 2015b; DfE 2018c). Within local authority children's services in England, leadership rests formally through statute with the Director of Children's Services (DCS), but with the direct operational responsibility for children's social care often delegated to an Assistant Director (AD) or Head of Service (HoS). It follows then that they have typically been the key actor within the local authority, instrumental in making the decision to create and implement the PCFSW role. Their views will be considered shortly. First, I turn briefly

to key findings about the PCFSW garnered from the College of Social Work survey.

In Spring 2014, a survey questionnaire from TCSW was sent to Directors of Children's Services in every local authority in England (TCSW 2014). This survey sought to establish the progress that had been made across the sector in relation to the development and implementation of PCFSWs. Responses were received from Directors or those delegated by them to complete the survey, including PCFSWs themselves in some authorities. In total, 74 responses were received back by TCSW in relation to children's services, and specifically to the PCFSW role, equating to 49% of the possible 152 authorities. Of the responding authorities, 93% had a PCFSW, equating to 45% of all LAs in England. A small number of authorities who responded (N=5) did not have a PCFSW, with one stating they had no intention to appoint (See Chapter Three, Table 1).

We have previously stated that 'standalone' was defined as the role of PCFSW being the only position the post holder held within the organisation. Around a quarter of the responding LAs had a standalone PCFSW, whereas in two-thirds of LAs the role was held by a manager as part of their wider responsibilities within the organisation. I defined this arrangement as 'hybrid'; authorities with no PCFSW were defined as 'none'. Respondents to the TCSW survey were given a free text box to indicate the types of other roles, if any, held by PCFSWs. However, while the 2014 TCSW survey provided some initial data on how the role of the PCFSW was being implemented at a point in time, the survey format and closed nature of most questions placed limits on the responses offered. It was therefore essential to investigate more deeply the rationale for and experience of creating PCFSWs in standalone and hybrid contexts first from the perspective of those whose task was to initiate the post, and

thereafter in Chapter Five from those who actually occupied the role. Hence, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 13 AD/HoS in local authorities across England as outlined in Chapter Three. The telephone interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and a thematic analysis was undertaken. Key themes arising from this analysis are outlined below and will be addressed sequentially in this chapter:

- Leadership and Management
- Professional Leadership
- Importance of Profession
- Practice
- Communication and Challenge
- Organisation Culture and Change

As a starting point each respondent was asked for their rationale for creating the PCFSW role. The responses were framed in terms of functions the respondents identified for the new post holder to undertake, and tasks they wanted them to do. When asked to elaborate on the core tasks associated with the role most respondents cited one or more of the functions coded from the interview data into themes common (or not) across the three configurations as outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Core Tasks of the PCFSW

	Standalone N=5	Hybrid N= 5	None N = 3
Represents the frontline to senior management	X	X	X

	Standalone N=5	Hybrid N= 5	None N = 3
Policy and strategy, participation and influence	X		
Undertake direct practice	X		
Have a lead in practice standards	X	X	X
Promote practice development	X	X	X
Enhance professional status	X	X	
Leadership for the social work profession	X	X	
Workforce development including recruitment and retention of social workers	X	X	
Regional/National links with the sector and government	X	X	
Supervision practice	X	X	
Outward face to partners and stakeholders	X	X	X

There are eleven core fields identified which illustrate the breadth and complexity of the PCFSW role in the understanding of those who implemented it. All eleven core tasks were identified in standalone authorities (although as we shall see in the next chapter, not all standalones identified their work in regard to all these tasks). There were no additional tasks identified by hybrid authorities or those who had no PCFSW that were beyond those also being undertaken by standalone PCFSWs. The majority of the eleven core tasks were also undertaken by the hybrid PCFSWs, with the exception of 'policy and strategy participation and influence', and 'undertake direct practice'. These two aspects would seem to reflect the spectrum of organisational perspectives in local authority statutory child

protection social work – at one end the development of strategy and policy to direct the work being undertaken in the organisation, and on the other end direct practice, the actual doing of the social work task. This is of course not binary, but it is perhaps significant that this spectrum was notable in the data from standalone authorities, but not in the other two categories. The span of organisational engagement by the PCFSW envisioned by the senior managers certainly indicates the complexity of the role.

For those authorities with no PCFSW at the time of research, the following rationales were given: financial restraints in creating a post; being unable to find the right person for the role; and a belief that their organisation was doing the core tasks that a PCFSW would do anyway. They were therefore asked what role and tasks they would envisage a PCFSW undertaking should they have one, and who currently fulfils those identified roles and tasks. Their responses therefore were hypothetical relating to what they thought a PCFSW would do, in contrast to standalone and hybrid authorities who were able to outline what their PCFSWs did do. It is likely that at least some of the other seven functions and tasks in Table 6 were being met by the organisation in some way, however the respondents did not correlate them with the PCFSW role.

We have seen from the above that there are different types of PCFSW broadly configured as standalone and hybrid, but with multiple motives, functions and overlaps in their construction and activation. The role would seem to be a multi-layered one developing in organisations that are themselves complex. Descriptors of the role often included the terms 'leadership' and 'management' but interviewees did not define or qualify these terms. Leadership and management appeared to be invoked interchangeably, with some differences in emphasis in standalone and hybrid authorities.

Significance was also attached to the notion of 'profession' which too was rarely defined but appeared to be taken for granted as some self-evident common-sense category. We will now consider the accounts provided by AD/HoS participants in greater depth. First, we look at the place of leadership and management in their conceptualisation of the role.

4.2   Leadership and Management

In considering the expectations of what the PCFSWs would bring to the organisation, the AD/HoS referred both to management and leadership. The PCFSWs were positioned typically in what might be termed a conventional management structure, and there was clear rhetorical use pertaining to the significance of management as part of the PCFSW function across all interviews. The terms leadership and leader were also used, but there was less specificity in their use, with other allied concepts such as 'influence' as in the quote below where it is introduced to illustrate a critical capacity anticipated in the incumbent:

> *I think people are developing models that are making a real difference, and to me that sort of having someone with that status as a middle manager, but without having to be a manager, but having both the influence with senior managers and social workers has made a real difference.*
>
> Standalone LA 'B'

In this data extract a differentiation is made between position and influence, where position appears to be aligned to formal identity as a manager, but influence seems aligned with some other ability that implicitly suggests leadership based upon qualities other than

managerial/administrative competence. Indeed, the fairly unique nature of the role as 'influencing' and 'subtle' is brought out in the extract below, as is the potentially insecure nature of such innovative posts in times of austerity when organisations must shrink:

> *As the pressure grows to contract as an organisation, it is difficult to keep posts that are so subtle in some ways because actually they are big influencing roles.*
>
> Standalone LA 'B'

Given the contested definitions of leadership and management in the literature, it is perhaps not surprising that the senior managers appeared to have difficulty in distinguishing leadership and management in their account of their aspiration for the PCFSW role. Lawler and Bilson (2010) assert that there is no enduring and universally accepted definition of leadership, and that while the debate over management is less extensive, leadership remains a much contested concept (Grint 2005). While both management and leadership roles are recognised as being needed for an effective organisation, Lawler and Bilson (2010) note the growing consensus that leadership has more focus on the future and change, and dealing with uncertainty and instability, whereas management is seen as being focused on efficiency, regulation, planning and performance. This echoes Northouse (2016, p. 13) who argues that leadership has been a concept understood since the time of Aristotle, while management as a 'science' emerged at the turn of the 20th century, created to run organisations effectively and efficiently. Kotter (1990) contrasts the order and stability function of management with that of leadership which it is argued is about seeking adaptive and constructive change.

The responses of the AD/HoS reflected the potential limitations of forming a binary understanding of leadership and management in the complexity of the PCFSW role. Indeed, Bolden (2004) argues it is unhelpful to see managers and leaders in a binary way. While the narrative in interviews leaned towards leadership and the link towards reform and change, for the senior managers this appeared to be more aspirational - what they hoped the PCFSW would do. Often the management aspects they outlined seemed more achievable, and what in reality appeared to happen. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from a hybrid authority interviewee who after outlining what he hoped the PCFSW would do acknowledged the priority of pre-existing management tasks in the hybrid role, which deviated from his aspirations for the post:

> *Again, the other side of the coin is fundamentally I want our current postholder to manage the day shift and that's largely what she is ultimately paid by the council by and large to do………She picks up on those things that she is comfortable with that she was involved in working with anyway, so it's……a sort of bolt on really to the 'main job' which I don't think does it justice personally.*
>
> Hybrid LA '2'

In order to grasp better the mix of management and leadership which appears to vary in proportion to standalone or hybrid types and where individual qualities are perceived as critical to transforming practice, it will be helpful to consider trait theories of leadership, and relatedly, transformational models of leadership.

Trait theories of leadership (Lawler and Bilson 2010) focus on innate qualities of recognised leaders that separate them from the rest of a population. It is the individual who is seen as being outstandingly

influential and effective, and the traits and characteristics they hold that have been analysed to develop an understanding of leadership. The focus is on the individual rather than the role that they hold. In outlining what they think has assisted the implementation of the role, most of the AD/HoS highlighted the individual qualities of the PCFSW:

> *The person themselves, they have to have the trust and confidence of the front line…… So, the person in the role and their status if you like, their iconic biography.*
>
> Standalone LA 'A'

> *I think there's a little bit about the person in the role as well, very willing and able to learn from other things, to learn from these things, to look at research, very good at research and sharing that across the service.*
>
> Hybrid LA '5'

> *I think people almost uniformly saw her as the right fit for the role......I think being able to say you can walk the talk.....She's got the experience, her communication style is right but she also has the ear......I think all of those factors making the person the right fit has really facilitated the role, definitely.*
>
> Hybrid LA '4'

While the above data extracts indicate the considerable emphasis placed upon individual qualities, such traits however do not of themselves constitute the ingredients of successful leadership, albeit the importance of personal capacities is signal within what is often termed a 'caring profession'. Indeed, critiques of the trait approach to leadership (Northouse 2016) indicate there is no agreed set of traits. However, a fundamental expectation of the PCFSW post is that it will

help transform or significantly change practice. Here, the identity of the PCFSW as inspirational change agent surfaces in the above extracts and finds some similarity with the notion of transformational leader. Northouse (2016) states that transformational leadership is defined as the process of how certain leaders are able to inspire followers. Transformational leaders are 'change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to meet higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them, and who give meaning to organisational life' (Northouse 2016, p. 190). He notes that this approach places strong emphasis on morals and values. Transformational leadership in social work (Tafvelin et al. 2014; Lowe et al. 1996) is recognised as a key mode of leadership in times of change (Bass and Riggio 2006). Dimensions of leadership are on qualities and behaviours, and for Northouse (2016), it is the engagement and connection between these that leads to the transformation.

Placing PCFSWs as agents of change appeared to be an aspiration of most AD/HoS and is illustrated in the extract below from an interview with a senior manager in a hybrid local authority. In setting out the rationale for the development and implementation of the role, sources of 'inspiration' were cited: "*we were very inspired by the Munro Review*", in that it contained "*things that we believed in*". In the appointment of the PCFSW the aspiration was for a "*voice to have authority, and we wanted them to actually be an influential force*". The AD/HoS added:

> *So, if you want it to be different why would you just*
> *appoint more of the same. So, it wasn't a case of saying*
> *if only we had more senior practitioners we would have*
> *better practice, it was actually saying we wanted*

something different, we wanted to make a difference through that role.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '3'</div>

However, having set out these aspirations for the role, when asked what the PCFSW did, the AD/HoS offered to read out the job description they had in front of them. When asked to recount the understanding of what the PCFSW actually did rather than read the job description, the AD/HoS described workforce development tasks, audit activities, and other tasks that would not be different to those required of a manager. This would again suggest that behind the idealised rhetoric of inspiration and change, the role may be conventionally located within basic administrative systems and tasks, notably so in hybridised contexts and that the romantic narratives of 'transformation' 'change' 'leader' may in some authorities disguise a more prosaic pathway towards implementation and task orientation. For example, in hybrid local authority '1', the interviewee who in discussing the assignment of the PCFSW role to an existing senior manager described the development in the following way; *"we merged improvement work with their Munro improvement work stream".* In articulating their implementation of the functions of the role in this way, it is unclear whether change was being sought, or whether they wanted to do what they already do better.

In ascribing their concept of leadership primarily in regard to their vision for change throughout the interviews, the senior managers accorded with Hayes (2014) who states that leadership is widely regarded as the key enabler of the change process. Kotter (1999) argues that managers are the people who are in the best position to provide the leadership required to ensure that a change will be successful, but that they need to realise they have a dual responsibility of keeping the system operating effectively (the

management function) while revitalising and renewing the system to ensure that it will remain effective over the longer term. Hayes (2014) argues that the pace of change is increasing, and as a result transformational change is more and more managed, with the implication that leadership and the provision of a sense of direction has become a more important part of managerial practice.

Hayes (2014) notes that in many organisations there has been a move from deep hierarchies to new organisational forms where cross-functional teams, networks and communities of practice require an approach to leadership that is capable of being disassociated from organisational hierarchies. Gilley et al. (2009) observe that the 'top' might develop the vision and mission, but middle management often develop the plan that gives it life, with frontline managers who actually do the implementing, so all contribute to the leadership process. Otoxby et al. (2002) argue that a system of leadership in the form of a distributed network of key players who each provide leadership in their part of the organisation is necessary, sharing a clear, consistent and inspiring common vision.

Developing the network aspects of distributed leadership, the concept of a 'boundary spanner' is useful to frame some of the complexities of the PCFSW role. The term 'boundary spanners' was originally used in the 1970s to describe people who operate at the boundaries of their organisation, mediating between it and the wider environment (Aldrich and Herker 1977). Oliver (2013) referencing Nissen (2010, p. 366) defines boundary spanners as those whose role is to 'work between systems whose goals, though superficially complementary, may carry inherent conflicts requiring mediation, negotiation and strategy'. While the definition of a boundary spanner refers to systems, for the PCFSW, the role is in the main within the organisation. The bridge between leadership and management, the

networking requirements, and the movement across hierarchies would suggest that the PCFSW is indeed a boundary spanner. We will explore this further in considering other aspects of the role.

The expectations and experiences across most local authorities reflected the complexity of the PCFSW role insofar as it is required to fulfil managerial and leadership tasks. However, this varied according to the type of PCFSW – standalone or hybrid. The hybrid PCFSW continued to be expected to fulfil the ongoing traditional managerial aspects of their pre-existing role, including managing staff, with it being less obvious where they were able to demonstrate leadership around PCFSW functions. Standalone PCFSWs did not have the same requirement to undertake management tasks to the same extent, or in the same way, with a greater emphasis being placed on 'profession', 'practice' and 'change', as will be discussed later in the chapter.

We have seen that the PCFSW role is a complex one that incorporates leadership and management, both sought after by the AD/HoS in their interpretation of the post. Throughout, the respondents referred to 'profession' as an integral part of the role, and in the next section we will consider the PCFSW as a professional leader.

4.3   Professional Leadership

I can see that someone who is representing the front line……in terms of a professional perspective about what would work…would be really beneficial.

I am a qualified and registered social worker but I don't practice – people see me as a senior manager not as a social worker per se …. not like the PCFSW representing

social work, social workers, the profession within the authority in a very authentic way.

<div align="right">Standalone LA 'A'</div>

As the above extracts suggest, it is the case that the interviewees' allusion to 'profession' added an additional complexity to the PCFSW role. Haynes (2015) argues that the general management model now used in public services and developed from imported ideas in business and the private sector is of limited relevance to the complex systems underpinning public services in the early 21st century. Such systems often require individuals to step out of prescribed role, and at different times be professional, manager and leader. The key according to Haynes (2015) is to allow each function to come to the fore at the appropriate moment and to accept there will be overlap between these roles, and potential tensions and conflicts too. This complex and subtle intertwining of roles and identities was noted by participants from standalone and hybrid authorities:

So, when I talk to teams they might be telling me one thing but actually will be will be having very different conversations with B (PCFSW) who is just very respected as a very knowledgeable and very experienced social worker. So…… even though she's got a status in the organisation, she isn't perceived as a manager in that same sort of hierarchical structure by social workers, and it seems to make a very big difference.

<div align="right">Standalone LA 'B'</div>

We could see that the principal social worker was a really good role to have in terms of representing both the profession and the professionalism of social workers but also to stand up for quality of practice in an environment

where there are loads of different drivers and pressures on people, and there's lots of business that managers have to deal with as well as focusing on the quality of practice.

Hybrid LA '3'

Lawler and Bilson (2010) note that the individual as a leader is seen as having some capacity to influence other people due to one or more of a range of factors: their personal charisma; the strength of their relationships with people around them; their specialist knowledge, expertise or reputation; their personal integrity or trustworthiness. Such capacities which provide the basis for influence are different from the manager working from a defined location within an organisational hierarchy where others are prepared to defer because of the authority delegated to the position and thus the position holder. What the above extracts suggest is that the leadership qualities of the PCFSW stem not just from personal factors albeit these are important, but from their experience, knowledge and expertise, in essence, from perceived professional competences. This aspect of professional leadership however is not without complications as while these qualities and competencies might be positively viewed, they have to be applied in what Haynes (2015, p. 15) describes as 'business sector models'. Thus, he notes that the public service environment is characterised by intricate systems and complex accountabilities that cause difficulty when simplistic managerial and leadership models are applied.

By contrast, Exworthy and Halford (2002) recognise the strong links between the managerial and the professional in public service, using the terminology 'managerial professionals'. They argue that such managerial professionals are a buffer zone between managerial philosophy and professional culture: they make sense of business

sector models that are increasingly applied; they select which managerial models are appropriate and demonstrate that they are at least implicitly meeting the senior management agenda if not explicitly engaging with it. This aspect of the PCFSW role as a 'buffer' between tiers, spanning boundaries and having credibility at different levels, is recognised in this extract from an interview with one standalone authority:

> *Well I guess that for me what's really critical about that role is that practice-led approach the post takes………..the principal social worker here is just below assistant director and so at tier 4 (senior management level) in the organisation, and the reason it is at that level is because you know that's the level at which we determined that the post could have most influence both with peers but also still have credibility at the front line but would also have an opportunity to work with strategic leadership and with senior leaders in order to create some real change.*
>
> Standalone LA 'C'

This blurring of the lines between managerial and professional leadership roles is acknowledged by Haynes (2015), as a feature of new managerialism in the public services where many have evolved a path into management from a professional base. He argues that this is recognised within social work where there are strong and continuing ties to professional roots, leading to management practice informed by allegiance to professional ideals. For PCFSWs, it may be that within different authorities the degree of allegiance to professional leadership differs, and that in standalone authorities a stronger emphasis is enabled because of the singularity of the role and its dedication to practice change. Whereas, in hybrid authorities, there may be less space to activate professional leadership functions

because of other management tasks and commitments that may bear upon both opportunity and identity. In exploring this working hypothesis, interviewees were asked what the term profession and professional leadership meant to them.

4.4   Importance of Profession

It was noted in Chapter Two that the effect of New Public Management (NPM), and specifically managerialism in social work has led to a diminishing of professional identity and authority with the increasing acceptance of management as a profession in its own right and managerial skills being highly valued, with a resultant devaluing of the skills of social work (Hood 1991). The Munro Review (2010; 2011a; 2011b) made clear statements with regard to the importance of 'profession' for social work. Indeed, the notion of reclaiming for social work its professional identity and purpose was evident in the rationales provided by interviewees for creating the PCFSW. This aspect of the PCFSW post-holder refocusing on professional social work as distinct from 'doing' management is illustrated in the extract below:

> *We could see that the principal social worker, there was a really good role to have in terms of representing both the profession and the professionalism of social workers, but also to stand up for quality of practice in an environment where there are loads of different pressures and drivers on people, and there's lots of business that managers have to deal with as well as focusing on the quality of practice.*
>
> Hybrid LA '3'

The project of returning social work to some former professional status is something of a powerful and positive rhetoric within recent policy debates and reform (SWTF 2009; SWTF 2010; Munro 2010; Munro 2011a; Munro 2011b; Goodman and Trowler 2012). Thus, it was not surprising to detect a clear sentiment within accounts about refocusing on 'profession' as some totemic notion around which change could be generated. This was highlighted by standalone and hybrid authorities as demonstrated in the excerpts below:

> *We could see that the principal social worker was a really good role to have in terms of representing both the profession and the professionalism of social workers.*
>
> Standalone LA 'A'

> *Having a strong voice for social work, and that is at every level. I think it has been good culturally for people to feel that the social work profession is important and valued.*
>
> Hybrid LA '3'

Within such accounts there was no comment of what was meant by profession or being a professional. Such terms lay as some un-explicated 'good' and rarely linked to specific outcomes or pre-defined impacts that might indicate PCFSW activity and effectiveness. All respondents tended to closely link practice and culture change with what they were articulating as the 'professional' difference a PCFSW would make. We will consider the significance of these issues later in the chapter.

Oliver (2013) asserts that framing social workers as boundary spanners offers a professional identity that is congruent with core values and reflects what social workers do. She argues that

professional identity is formed through a process that is contextually responsive and dynamic, with mental assignation to group reinforced by emotional significance. Thus, social workers identify with their profession, and develop a professional identity. This is particularly important for social work which can often be seen as a contested occupation. Unlike doctors or teachers that are widely 'known' professions, Oliver argues that the concept of a boundary spanner assists in capturing role ambiguity, indistinct boundaries, and contested discourse over expert status. By virtue of being social workers, PCFSWs share these experiences, which indeed are heightened by their status as experts and the expectations placed on them in a new and emerging role.

What was apparent in the interviews with the AD/HoS, though was an assumption tacit for the most part, that professionals were those who have knowledge, expertise, technical skills, experience from which to make reflective judgements. Such views mesh with relevant literature (Haynes 2015; Noordegraaf 2007), but most distinctive in both lay and formal theory is the aspect of 'practice'; that is, a professional applies expertise in their practice and therefore the PCFSW as professional leader might also expect to claim some expertise and recognition in this regard. It is towards this aspect of practice that we now turn.

4.5   Practice

So far, it is apparent that the PCFSW role is complex with managerial and professional functions often blurred but the role is often accompanied by strong expectations around change and professional renewal. Yet, intrinsic to all   interviews, was the notion of practice – what social workers actually 'do' – and the PCFSW post-holder was expected to display some authority here by dint of their own

closeness to practice or direct engagement in practice. The respondents all invoked their particular understandings of what 'practice' meant in their setting in order to distinguish what was different about the PCFSW role to other roles they might have in their organisation:

> *For me, what is really critical about that role is the practice-led approach the post takes…. what we wanted was a post that was going to open the capacity and reach in terms of being able to drive forward practice development in a way that was going to get some consistency and some momentum for change really.*
>
> Standalone LA 'C'

> *The principal social worker is going to be……the guardian of good practice – somebody that knows what good practice is and promotes good practice throughout the organisation.*
>
> None LA 'Y'

The term 'practice' was not homogenous in its articulation across interviews, having different meanings and emphases. However, it was evident that most AD/HoS identified practice development and improvement as a pivotal function of the PCFSW role and analysis identified three related categories beneath the domain of 'practice':

➢ Developing practice

➢ Standards of practice

➢ Undertaking practice

Developing practice

As we have seen in Chapter Two, knowledge, skills and expertise are recognised in the literature as being critical components of profession. Munro (2011b) linked knowledge and expertise to professionalism, and saw this as a key area for reform in child protection social work practice. All participants saw the area of development of practice as being integral to the PCFSW role.

To develop practice, two functions were consistently identified as being linked to the PCFSW function - 'workforce development' and 'learning and development'. Workforce development tended to be used to describe tasks around recruitment and retention of social workers, and a formal structured learning process that was linked to a form of career progression. Learning and development was used to cover more informal learning opportunities that were less structured and linked to career progression, although the line between them was not always clear in the responses. Across standalone and hybrid authorities it was apparent that the PCFSW was likely to be given the lead to one or both of these pre-established functions while not necessarily holding some formal title denoting this fact:

> *We decided that actually what we needed to do was to bring together workforce development and the principal social worker role……. they also have responsibility for learning and development.*
>
> <div align="right">Hybrid LA '1'</div>

> *The central job is to support the development of the quality of practice….to develop a sort of overarching framework in the*

> *way we delivered practice …. improving quality of practice…. working with workforce development to secure the best training options for staff.*
>
> <div align="right">Standalone LA 'B'</div>

The workforce development aspect is predominantly around student social workers and Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs), specifically in relation to their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), a probationary year for NQSWs introduced by the Government in England in 2012 to support their transition from education into practice (DfE 2015a).

Following the DfE funded review of social work education undertaken by Narey (2014), and the DH funded review of social work education undertaken by Croisdale-Appleby (2014), much Westminster government attention has been given to the education and training of social workers. Government backed initiatives such as Step up to Social Work and Frontline fast track programmes for graduates, and the introduction of Teaching Partnerships have been prioritised (Community Care 2016). These external drivers to improve social work education, particularly the practice placement experience of those learning to become social workers, have required local authorities to give greater consideration to the learning and early career experiences of social workers (DfE 2015a; DfE 2016a). Having a PCFSW involved in the ASYE ensures that someone who is qualified and part of the profession represents the authority in this area. This point was made by an AD/HoS who had appointed a PCFSW in a hybrid role:

> *What she is doing for us is she is overseeing and monitoring the manner in which we look after our newly qualified staff. She is keeping a weather eye on our*

recruitment and retention of qualified social workers, and is helping to make links between our social work fieldwork teams and the availability of training and development opportunities.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '2'</div>

While the workforce development priorities were identified by interviewees as collecting around early career social workers, many senior managers felt that development was less a concern for more experienced social workers. It is not clear if this was because the external policy drivers and training structures are not in place as they are for students and ASYE, or because of the financial constraints acknowledged by all. While there is a framework that is recognised for early career social workers, there is not a recognised one for experienced practitioners with the result that their learning has tended to be through an employer-based learning and development programme rather than a formal accredited route. The most recent DfE reforms for children and family statutory social work in England include the development of a National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) for child and family social workers undertaking statutory social work practice (DfE 2016c), incorporating proposals for a continuing professional development (CPD) framework for experienced social workers. This proposal post-dates the interviews conducted for this research. Indeed, in the draft Working Together document, the DfE (2018d, p.11) has for the first time acknowledged a formal role for the PCFSW, specifically linked to learning:

Principal Social Workers have a key role in developing the practice and the practice methodology that underpins direct work with children and families.

Across the interview data, PCFSWs were linked to learning in a variety of ways, from the development of a 'core curriculum' training programme, to the instigation, promotion and oversight of practice learning groups, various forums, and other such methods of integrating learning. Links to higher education were not just about transactions of learning (student placements, trainees undertaking qualifying courses, or the commission/purchase of post-qualifying learning), but also in the incorporation of research utilization into staff learning and development. This ranged from identifying and disseminating research on best practice to selecting formal learning programmes or models for the organization by appraising their evidence base. While evidence-based practice can be a contested notion (White et al. 2010) the involvement of the PCFSW in commissioning and facilitating such models based upon their expertise and knowledge lent further credibility to their claims to be close to practice and what practitioners need to know:

In terms of practice development…(the PCFSW is) very much the lead on our core curriculum for social work because that's about practice development, that's about raising the quality and consistency of social work.

Standalone LA 'A'

The workforce strategy for me feels a very important role. But the other thing he does is he actually works with practitioners where they are, so he spends time with them in their area teams, he does things like action learning sets. He will advise on the kind of training that people need so we might commission a piece of training…..he made sure the training we commissioned was the best we could find, he made sure that everybody who needed it did it, and then he set up action learning

sets in each of the area teams to make sure that the skills people learned were then being reinforced in practice through the use of those learning sets.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '3'</div>

Inextricably linked to the idea of developing practice was the notion of standards of practice – that there was a level of practice that could/should be achieved. It is to the PCFSW role in this aspect of practice that we turn now.

Standards of practice

Quality assurance in many respects fits in with a managerial approach, such as the approaches to performance management and proceduralisation outlined by Shanks et al. (2014). Also, new governance requirements in social work management identified by Lawler and Bilson (2010) that are thought to promote consistent high quality services, such as standardised practice and procedures, resonate with the quality assurance role, as do the accountability and greater regulation of frontline social workers via concomitant guidance, targets and administration (Kilpatrick 2006). In this context of audit culture and performativity that still characterised much of public services at the time of the interviews, it can be noted that auditing of practice quality was considered by many interviewees to be part of the PCFSW role. The concept of developing or improving practice suggests that there is a standard for it to be measured against, and some authorities referred to this:

It was felt that [the PCFSW] would really add to the capacity of the organisation and improve standards and outcomes for children by having that kind of relentless focus on practice.

He is the person that is very up-to-date at all times with what is expected of social workers in terms of national standards, in terms of knowledge and competence, skills.

Hybrid LA '3'

The development of practice quality standards, but practice quality standards that makes sense to the front line and that will actually be used to look at practice in a constructive way, and a learning not blaming way, is very much down to the Principal Child and Family Worker.

Standalone LA 'A'

However, most authorities were not clear on what the standard might be. The aim was to 'improve practice', and audit was often the method by which it was measured. The implication was that the PCFSWs would know what 'improved practice' would look like by virtue of the authority they had to evaluate the practice of others. As we shall see in the next chapter, this form of circular thinking does not adequately capture the complexity of the PCFSW role and its variable impacts on practice quality.

The benefit of the PCFSW being involved in audits was the addition of the practice aspect which for authorities was a new emphasis in contrast to experiences of audit being about compliance and a tick box culture. The PCFSW was also seen as a key link in extending the outcome of auditing to learning, with an expectation that the PCFSW would have a role in applying that identified learning:

I've emphasised, if you like the training and development aspects of the role, in terms of the promotion of practice

and quality assurance type issues, that's been a gap. She is involved….in overseeing what we do in relation to case file audits for example….and she is a significant part of the group that takes a look at the results of the audit work to try to glean learning from them.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '2'</div>

Much like the workforce development and the learning and development roles, many, although not all, authorities have a quality assurance lead who has responsibility for audit and scrutiny of practice. These roles are not necessarily held by social work professionals. The PCFSW was linked by respondents from differing authorities through quality assurance being a recognised element of their wider role. This entailed close working with another manager who held a specific quality assurance role, or the PCFSW might be in a Hybrid post where the quality assurance managerial post was one of their prime functions and had the designated PCFSW role attached to this.

For some authorities there appeared to be role overlap around quality assurance functions, although in others it was seen more as being part of a coalition of influence. For example, in the first extract below there is seen to be a close connection between the head of safeguarding who had a quality assurance role in this authority, and the PCFSW in terms of the challenge of raising standards:

I think there is an alliance between the Principal Social Worker role and the head of safeguarding because previously it is that person who has always been the person who has had to deliver that challenge.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '1'</div>

In the extract below, the PCFSW is the head of the service for both workforce development and quality assurance, both of which are seen as legitimate roles for the PCFSW role to be aligned to:

> *We did debate whether or not it should be an individual with no other responsibilities and just that or whether it should be somebody more operational, but we have a service called (names an internal social work improvement scheme), and within that service we have got a whole lot of quality assurance mechanisms, but we've also got our workforce development programme, and we just felt as though there was a real logical fit because we are really changing our quality assurance, our approach and making it more of a conversation and voice and it felt like there was a really good fit with those, with QA, workforce development, and the kind of improvement function of the head of that service.*
>
> Hybrid LA '4'

Within standalone authorities, there was a sense of the PCFSW role being complementary to the quality assurance role, rather than replicating it. They were cognisant of the quality assurance processes but were not responsible for them. It was what happened next that they became involved in – how the information obtained was used for staff and service development. The occupier of the PCFSW role typically has an additional perspective based upon the experience of being a social worker which informs their understanding of practice, and their advising on the standard of the practice, and to facilitate practice development.

Undertaking practice

Munro (2011b) recommended that the PCFSW would be somebody who is still actively involved in frontline practice and this section will address this expectation. So far, we have considered the PCFSW as a professional leadership role, with the component parts that might make it so, including knowledge and expertise, authority from both hierarchical status and from direct links to and a mandate to speak for the frontline. Practice can be seen as the link between these factors, although, to reiterate, there was not a shared understanding of what this term meant. Some AD/HoS were clear that PCFSWs should be involved in 'doing' practice as this gave them the unique practitioner status that distinguished them from other managers. Others were clear that their PCFSWs did not need to 'do' practice to be 'involved in it' and could develop and evaluate it in other ways. These two positions featured across accounts:

> *Representing social work within the authority and part of that is around being directly involved in practice themselves so they are genuinely a social worker, a practising social worker…. representing social work, social workers, the profession within the authority in a very authentic way.*
>
> Standalone LA 'A'

> *It would be really good if they could work on the most horribly difficult cases because you know you will often have them, but actually that became kind of unworkable and not ok really because what you needed to do is realise that those kind of things always happen……and we needed to provide the framework that people could be highly confident and take risks so….we've never given our*

principal social worker casework to do and we've never got them to do investigation of difficult complaints or be you know the kind of expert social worker.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '1'</div>

While these different orientations to practice occur, it is the case that all PCFSWs are involved in standards of practice and facilitate different ways of developing practice. This appears to come from a professional perspective that is different to other managers who may undertake similar functions. However, there remains a sense from several respondents that enhanced authenticity comes from 'doing' practice rather than commenting on it. Thus, those respondents who highlighted their PCFSW doing practice also claimed a more direct, reflective and experience-based influence for the PCFSW because of that proximity:

It's about his skills as well, because [name] is somebody who is very measured and thoughtful and calm….. People know he has got that substance of a very good practitioner, and that he's got very sound judgement. And so you know he is somebody that all people at all levels respond to and respect.

<div align="right">Hybrid LA '3'</div>

Central to what we might term the 'moral authority' of practice was the perceived proximity to the frontline that being involved in practice gave the PCFSW as alluded to in the quote from LA 'A' Standalone above, with the use of terms such as 'genuinely' and 'authentic'. The PCFSW being a link to and voice for the frontline featured highly as a reason for creating the post, and direct reference was made by the AD/HoS to Recommendation 14 in the Munro Review (2011b).

We will now consider the task of communication that the senior managers were aiming for in the creation of this role.

4.6   Communication and Challenge

Amongst most interview respondents there was recognition that Munro's Recommendation 14 entailed a profound change in lines of communication in that the PCFSW would 'report the views and experiences of the front line to all levels of management' (Munro 2011b, p. 112). Rather than the top down direction that is often experienced in hierarchical organisations, communication that is multi directional was advocated. In particular, there was a clear message that the frontline's involvement in the 'doing' of practice together with their views was what was particularly being sought by the PCFSW. The legitimacy of their views, and the need for them to be heard comes from their position of being the actors who undertake direct social work practice. In positioning the PCFSW as both part of the management of the organisation, and as an actor close to practice, the AD/HoS were explicitly attempting to bridge a perceived communication void and create a direct link from the frontline to senior management. Such an overt communication channel in which boundaries within the organisation were spanned was viewed as being innovative and yet to exist in most organisations.

Hayes (2014) observes that communication has an integral role in organisations. It aligns the stakeholders in the organisation, as it is the method by which a shared understanding is provided. In considering change processes, he notes that communication is often experienced as top-down. Allen et al. (2007) argue that effective communication is two-way, and upward communication is essential as it provides managers with valuable information that clarifies the

need for change and helps develop and implement plans. Beer (2001) identifies the poor quality of upward communication as one of six 'silent killers' that block change and learning. It is therefore understandable that the senior managers would ostensibly promote multi-directional communication.

In both hybrid and standalone authorities, the PCFSW role was seen as instrumental in creating and maintaining links and channels of communication between the frontline and senior management:

I felt as though there was something important about an individual with that role who is visible and seen, and particularly around issues around communication it just felt as though an individual needed to have that role if we are going to satisfy the element of really maintaining a link between the front line and senior management table.

Hybrid LA '4'

How do you genuinely know that you are listening to social workers, and how do they genuinely feel listened to without a PCFSW.

Standalone LA 'D'

We are an authority that has learnt some very sobering lessons about what happens when the frontline becomes disjointed from senior leadership………. the kind of thing that (names PCFSW) has been able to really influence and help are particularly some of the views of the frontline and fitting those into the processes of improvement that we have had.

Standalone LA 'C'

Munro (2011b) highlighted that feedback loops for learning and growth within the organisation require communication that is circular, and not linear. Benefits identified in having a PCFSW are that organisations have developed *"feedback loops that oil the wheels and make it work"*, (LA 2 hybrid) and that the frontline is better connected to senior leadership:

> *And then communication, it's traditionally that we've had that communication channels from senior management to more junior staff, maybe it's a newsletter or something like that, but this is another kind of string to the bow of a different way of communicating with staff, it's less top-down and more lateral.*
>
> Hybrid LA '4'

An authority that does not have a PCFSW observed:

> *I think the bit that is not being done correctly is the formal feedback loop into senior manager decision-making – that is the bit we need to develop.*
>
> None LA 'X'

Intrinsic to the interviewees' understanding of communication from the frontline was the expectation of challenge. This challenge might be to the individual AD/HoS, or to the organisation more generally, with the PCFSW being a 'critical friend', a phrase that was repeated often in the interviews. Vecchio (2006) states that candid communication in the workplace is not easy to find, particularly when the direction of communication is flowing from subordinates to management. However, he argues that managers, like subordinates, need feedback including constructive criticism to reinforce strengths as well as exposing weaknesses that can affect the whole team, and

that all parties stand to benefit when lines of communication are open and multi-directional.

For the AD/HoS, the PCFSW could with some legitimacy present this upward challenge particularly because it was linked to their proximity to practice and the frontline. Other members of the leadership in the organisation may have aspects of profession and practice, and indeed be social workers, but it is the link with the frontline, mandated, earned, or both, that according to some respondents gives the authority to challenge:

> *Frontline stuff is going to be in your face every day and I think that [name]…. has brought a degree of challenge and a degree of scrutiny which has been really beneficial particularly to some of the improvement work we've been doing which we wouldn't have had if we hadn't had a PSW in post.*
>
> Standalone LA 'C'

The need for challenge to senior management to be in some way removed from the existing hierarchy was articulated by one AD/HoS who said, *"how do I argue with or challenge myself?"* (LA 'D' – Standalone). In this context, the PCFSW was seen as external to the senior management team because of their proximity to practice.

This notion of challenge as part of the role and a valued process was identified as being something 'new' within their organisational world. It was apparent from several interviews that upward communication had not been previously encouraged or accepted if offered, and it was a step into the unknown for most authorities to actively seek it. Some respondents acknowledged that they found it hard to receive the challenge they purported to seek, and openly recognised this

difficulty in their management team. Yet, having a PCFSW was viewed as being a way of bridging this communication gap, whether in hierarchical strategic levels in the organisation, or between operational management and practice:

> *I think if we can get this role right then it is a real resource for me and my managers because we have got a critical friend who is the champion for quality of practice, if you like, in a way that doesn't have to be compromised by the reality of budgets and that goes with staffing, and can hold us to account in a positive way.*
>
> Standalone LA 'E'

Within standalone authorities, when asked about the barriers encountered in implementing the critical communication role, a number of respondents identified the reactions of their management teams both at frontline and senior level, particularly in relation to the challenges the role brought:

> *I think some of the barriers….it is about challenge and driving up practice, and there were some forums where that challenge was difficult. It was a challenge to the team managers, and (names PCFSW) has had to work through some of those challenges.*
>
> Standalone LA 'D'

Challenge from a perspective that had not been previously facilitated was seen by the senior managers as being an important component of cultural change in the organisation. It is towards this notion of change and culture and the role of the PCFSW that we move next.

4.7   Organisational Culture and Change

In Chapter 7 of her final report, Munro (2011b, p. 107) focuses on the organisational context for reform, and notes the need for change, moving away from a 'blaming, defensive culture'. The development of a 'blame' culture in child protection social work over a significant number of years is well documented (Butler and Drakeford 2011; Featherstone et al. 2014a; Jones 2014a; Warner 2013). Schein (1990) defines organisational culture as the pattern of basic assumptions that are invented, discovered or developed by a group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Hayes (2014) argues that these assumptions underpin work practices and ways of relating with others that are often referred to as 'the way things are done around here'. Lawler and Bilson (2010, p. 146) give a definition of organisational culture which is 'used to refer to factors such as beliefs, behaviour, values and practices, which together establish the environment for professional practice and service delivery.' The links between PCFSWs and organisational culture and change were identified throughout most telephone interviews. The AD/HoS recognised the 'culture' references in the Munro report, particularly in respect of compliance, and a 'tick box' approach which reflected what they saw negatively as proceduralisation and bureaucratisation in 'the way things are done' in their organisation.

All the respondents identified their organisations as being involved in a change process. It is often recognised that change is the only constant in organisational life (Elving 2005). Jabri (2012) argues that change is a ceaseless movement rather than the isolated snapshots of traditional business models of change. He identifies classifications of change such as transitional change which is a steady and consistent movement from the current to the desired state, with a

plan from beginning to end. Transformational change is a more fundamental shift in the way change is introduced, typically involving multi-level leadership-driven changes in structures and systems. A further classification recognised in the literature is episodic versus continuous (Weick and Quinn 1999), with episodic change being infrequent, discontinuous and intentional, while continuous refers to change that is ongoing, evolving and cumulative. For some of the AD/HoS, the focus was on significant structural change, others focusing more on what they termed cultural change within their services. The drivers to change which they all referred to suggested that the change was 'transformational' and perhaps 'episodic', and the creation of a PCFSW was very much seen as an agent in the change.

Interviewees frequently referred to 'culture' and cultural change without necessarily being clear what was meant by this. Jabri (2012) argues that organisational culture is often treated as a concept useful for interpreting organisational life and behaviour. 'Culture' is used as a shorthand for 'the way we do things' in an organisation, constructed through values and assumptions, which become norms that are shared. Certainly, the AD/HoS appeared to want to change the way things were done, such as moving away from 'procedures' as an end in themselves, to re-focusing on practice. Their organisations needed a change in approach to do this, and they hoped the end result would also be a change in culture - a change to the way they do things.

While many stated they had started making these changes, they saw the introduction of a PCFSW to be a central resource in this process The link to profession and to practice that the PCFSW was seen to hold gave an added dimension to the changes that were being advocated. The PCFSW was able to bring challenge to the

organisation because of the legitimacy of perceived proximity to the frontline and practice:

> *It has been a focus on practice and actually being very clear. I think there's been a change of culture in our organisation over the last few years.*
>
> Hybrid LA 'O'

In one authority that did not have a PCFSW, the work that was viewed as being instrumental to culture change was distributed among existing senior staff. However, it was perceived that this had not been successful because of their other operational commitments. What existing managers do was somehow seen as being different to that which engenders innovation and change:

> *The roles and tasks linked to culture change have been shared out amongst the service leaders, and that's been a challenge really because they have responsibility for overseeing operations.*
>
> None LA 'Y'

The factors that contributed to culture change via the PCFSW role according to interviewees was primarily a focus on a learning culture. Jabri (2012, p. 128) defines a learning organisation as one where both individuals and groups 'responsively expand their capabilities to create the results they truly desire, continually learn how to unlearn and co-learn together, and share common goals that are larger than individual goals'. Hayes (2014) argues that collective learning is especially important in complex environments because senior managers may not be the best placed to identify opportunities and threats, and other members of the organisation who are involved in boundary spanning activities have valuable input into strategy

formulation. Those leading change have an important role to play in enhancing the collective ability to act more effectively, recognising the contributions of others, and creating conditions that allow reflection on experience, and identify opportunities to improve.

It is the PCFSWs position as a boundary spanner, often referred to as a bridge by the senior managers, that appears to be the key as to why they were viewed as being crucial to culture change. We have discussed how they are seen as a bridge between the frontline and senior management, between practice and policy, and as seen in the data extract below, between learning and the organisation:

> *Helping improve social work practice on a practice level,*
> *and I feel B has been instrumental in helping us do*
> *that……. but also in promoting a learning culture both*
> *within the organisation and with partners and*
> *continuously helping us reflect and learn from practice at*
> *all levels.*
>
> Standalone LA 'B'

The senior managers certainly had an awareness of 'the way we do things' in their organisation, and a vision of how they wanted this to be different. They understood that there were a number of complex factors that would need to be considered if change was to be effected. The breadth of the tasks they assigned to the role, as outlined in this chapter, placed the PCFSWs in a unique boundary spanning position, not previously available in their organisations.

4.8   Summary

In contemporary child protection social work in England, there is recognition by those who lead and manage services in local

authorities that change has been required. This change has been instigated by government and influenced by the Munro Review (2010; 2011a; 2011b). The role of the PCFSW was conceived as an agent of that change, although the establishment and implementation of the role was experienced differently across the country. Interviews with ADs/HoS from 13 authorities across selected regions of England has given deeper insight into the rationale for creating the post, be it hybrid or standalone.

It is clear that in conception and implementation, the role is complex in that it may be linked to other senior roles in the organisation and simultaneously assume some direct practice component. The professional leadership and change management elements, together with being the voice of the frontline, add to the layered and demanding nature of the post. The personal qualities needed to communicate up and down the organizational structure as well as claim some expertise with which to define good practice and help set standards, learning and a receptive culture signify, collectively, a role of marked complexity. And these features, as we shall see in the following chapter, have much significance for related matters of PCFSW status, authority, identity and relationships. To conclude, expectations of the role from those who created it appear to be high. We now turn to the PCFSWs themselves to understand their experience of doing the job.

Chapter Five   The 'Principled' Principal Social Worker: issues of role, status, leadership and identity

In terms of compliance culture that was set up – it was against my principles and I am a principled social worker, not just a principal social worker.

AB (S) – FG 2

5.1   Introduction

Thematic analysis thus far has drawn from the perspectives of senior levels of management, those who made the decision to initiate the PCFSW role, and have ultimate management responsibility for its implementation within an authority. To further understand the activities of the PCFSW as a practice leader, the perspectives of those who occupy the role was sought via focus groups held with PCFSWs who were members of two different regional networks in England. As there is typically only one PCFSW in most local authorities, the individual post holders are distributed throughout the country, with the consequence that bringing sizeable groups of PCFSWs together can be problematic. Fortunately, pre-existing regional networks with established scheduled meetings provided an opportunity to conduct focus groups with staff from a range of rural and urban authorities, but by no means representative of councils across England. As outlined in the methods chapter a focus group was held in a region covering a large geographical area with a high number of rural counties attended by five PCFSWs, and a subsequent one was held in a smaller geographical network with a mixture of rural and urban authorities attended by ten PCFSWs. Both groups contained PCFSWs who were either standalone or hybrid. The questions were framed to

promote guided conversations that were linked to topics in the literature review and also to issues derived from the thematic analysis of data obtained from interviews with senior management, as outlined in Chapter Four. Issues of role, status, leadership and identity were drawn out, being considered both in the context of the role's embeddedness in aspects of organisational authority, and sociologically in the moral realms of values and identity.

5.2   Starting in the Role

The initial telephone interviews with the AD/HoS suggested that the PCFSWs in their authorities had been in post for a widely different range of time. Similarly, in the focus groups the PCFSWs advised that they had been in post from between 1 month and 4 years. Most (n=11) were the original post-holder, although some (n=4) had taken over the role from a previous incumbent. Notably, those who were taking over the role from someone else perceived their experience of the role of PFCSW as being different to that of their predecessor, in that the remit and scope of the tasks had changed over time. For all the PCFSWs, they experienced a fluidity which was understood as being a feature of both the newness and the uncertainty of what in some places was an evolving role about which there was little in the way of detailed job-description. Such unspecified or loosely defined functions are likely to lead to some discomfort but also opportunities for discretion to shape an organisational world (Dworkin 1978; Evans 2009a). All the PCFSWs in the two focus groups stated that their experience on taking up the post was that there was no clear role or plan for them:

> *I came from a completely different world, team manager*
> *in a really small local authority, came to a massive city*
> *and I was asked what am I going to do. I thought okay -*

no one else had been in post, job description was non-existent……..I've made it up as I go along, I have created the world now….. I just felt absolutely lost, no direction at all, and then you go to a senior leadership meeting with an expectation that you are going to deliver something but no one was told you what they are expecting you to deliver.

KM (S) – FG 1

The linguistic conventions within social work settings where stress and uncertainty abound are often characterized by the rhetoric of anxiety (Ferguson 2011). Thus, some described the experience of being "terrified", with the role being "daunting" and feeling "absolutely lost". Others viewed it as an opportunity to decide for themselves their key tasks and workload, "I largely do what I want to do" (CD [S] FG1), "I've made it up as I go along, I have created the world now" (AL [S] FG1) and even those who had expressed concerns also spoke of their excitement in regard to the freedom and discretion they found to activate the role as they deemed appropriate, a seemingly far cry from notions of an oppressive bureaucracy that is often conjured from the literature (Evans 2009a; Noordegraff 2007).

For some, not having a clear plan for the post was perceived as a failing of the leadership in their authority. There was typically an expectation that a plan for the PCFSW should be there in detail, and if there wasn't one, it was because the leadership was lacking in some way, whether this be through not understanding the role, or not investing time in depicting the duties, the scope of authority and the accountabilities of the post. This assumption that there would be a management view of where the role would fit in – that someone else would tell them what it was they were going to do – would seem

to reflect a somewhat normative view of the place of hierarchy. This sentiment might find congruence with the compliance ethos in local government services described by Munro (2011a) and other commentators (White et al. 2010; Jones 2014a) who consider that the social work profession has lost much of its autonomy or spheres of decisive authority. Despite being appointed to, or assigned a role to represent the profession, it appeared, certainly initially, that PCFSWs did not anticipate the space and discretion to act that they discovered, and perhaps for which they were not ready.

Lipsky (2010) in considering those who work in public services, identifies discretion as a critical dimension of much of the work of 'street level' workers. It is recognised that on the one hand the work is scripted to achieve policy objectives that originate from the political process, but that within this, flexibility, improvisation and responsiveness is also sought by professionals. Flynn (2002) discusses the discretionary nature of the work of professionals, noting that while aspects of the knowledge and skills used might be systemised and proceduralised, the necessity of working in individual cases means that outcomes are often uncertain, and therefore discretion is required in interventions. This exercise of professional judgement as opposed to applying a bureaucratic rule is described by Rueschemeyer (1983, p. 48) as 'the irreducible core of autonomy'. Pithouse (1987) in a study of practices in a children's services area office suggests that bureaucratic restrictions on the day-to-day autonomy of practitioners is limited. PCFSWs are experienced social workers and are familiar with various spheres of discretion at the front-line intervention level, and in their first line manager roles. Interestingly, the accounts given in the focus groups suggest that their former experience of discretion did not appear, initially, to become part of their expectations when transferring to their new role within an organisation.

While for many it felt that the autonomy they first experienced stemmed from a lack of organisational clarity about the ambitions for the post, as they settled in to the job, a sense of a more authentic autonomy began to develop for some. Thus, rather than simply taking advantage of whatever their circumstances permitted because no-one was really paying attention, they actively sought positional visibility by taking responsibility, proactively making transparent decisions and setting tasks, and publicly linking this to the language of social work values. Such actions find some resonance in the ideals of an ethical public management whereby holders of public office follow principles such as selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, and honesty (Flynn and Asquer 2017; Lethbridge 2002).

There appeared to be a difference in the experience of PCFSWs between those occupying standalone and hybrid roles. Those in hybrid positions tended either to be occupied by people who were appointed to a joint position to which the PCFSW role was attached, or they were already in such a position in the organisation, and were given the PCFSW designation and task. Such hybrid arrangements have tended to be linked to pre-existing senior manager roles in workforce development, quality assurance, or learning and development, although on occasion the PCFSW designation had been attached to a Head of Service or Assistant Director (as we have seen in the data provided by The College of Social Work survey (2014). In the focus groups, hybrids described the origins of the PCFSW aspect as being an add-on rather than a deliberately conceived choice – they "absorbed the role", it was "tagged on", an "additionality":

I have been given that role, but it feels a bit tagged on and I'm not quite sure what it means for me in terms of what I do differently.

<div align="right">LK (H) – FG 1</div>

My first experience of it was that I took all of my previous job with me, because I was the performance improvement manager then, and there wasn't anybody to hand that over to so I was having to do the sort of carving out of the role while still maintaining everything that I had done previously. And so, part of my task was to try and shed some of that in order to concentrate on the principal social worker role.

<div align="right">AM (H) – FG 1</div>

By contrast, for standalone PCFSWs, there was more of a sense of the role being 'carved out' rather than being seen as an 'additionality':

It came out of a restructure, clear where the previous principal social worker was a hybrid role, and this was a standalone role and the PCFSW role itself had been vacant for about 6 to 8 months. And it was for me to shape and carve out.

<div align="right">AB (S) – FG 2</div>

I definitely largely do what I want to do. I don't think, my Director knows what I am doing broadly, but I don't have much supervision and I try to keep out of their way, largely, and just get on with it.

<div align="right">CD (S) – FG 1</div>

This is perhaps to be expected as it was a new role. As discussed in Chapter 4, the role is socially constructed, and inter-subjective in its meaning. For those in standalone positions, the less obvious linking it to an existing role gave greater scope for the post-holder to shape it in their own preferred way from the raw material of the organisational fabric around them. This apparent unstructured autonomy is unusual in public bureaucracies, and particularly in social work in England today, where governance tends towards robust structures, clear lines of accountability, and standardised routines (Lawler and Bilson 2010; Simmons 2007). There did seem to be an additional sense of authenticity, or perhaps implicit moral superiority, around the depictions of the standalone role, which will be considered in respect of practice later in this chapter. Complexities of the role will also be considered later in this chapter in respect of the status apportioned to standalone or hybrid positions within the organisation. The PCFSWs very much located their experience in the context of their organisations, and it is to that aspect that we now turn.

5.3   Organisational Context

We have acknowledged in Chapter Four that the ADs/HoS located the creation and implementation of the PCFSW role in a period of change. The move to a wholly new role was experienced by a number of PCFSWs as being further complicated by organisational change, in their view characterised particularly by the senior management team being in a state of flux and with staff churn more generally. This would seem not untypical of authorities in England at this time. For example, the DfE (2016b) recorded a 27% rise in children's social work vacancies in England; Curtis et al. (2010) found that the average career length for a social worker is 8 years; and contemporary commentators have noted the instability of children's service leadership (Community Care 2013). A common experience

recounted in the focus groups was that the Head of Service or Director was in an interim appointment. As the direction for the PCFSW role typically came from this senior management position, the transitory nature of interim appointments at that level was understood to contribute to the perceived uncertainty as the person who had established it had often moved on:

> *And when I arrived the AD (Assistant Director) was an interim who had got a clear roadmap for me in terms of what I needed to do and didn't really want me to have the opportunity to look and see what I felt needed to happen……that AD very quickly left and was replaced by another interim, we had a permanent DCS (Director Children's Services) arrive and I was given greater opportunity to set the agenda. But actually I was expected when I first arrived to just do X,Y & Z .*
>
> LH (H) – FG 2

This sense of organisational flux is not untypical of the institutional landscape more generally in UK local government. Flynn and Asquer (2017) note that a feature of the public sector since the mid-1970s has been re-organisation, which they suggest has been a continuous aspect of local government since this time. Change management theory identifies different paradigms for organisational change (Hayes 2014). Weick and Quinn (1999) consider organisations that produce continuous change that is evolutionary and gradual, whereby through improvisation, translation and learning, positive organisational change is achieved. Gersick (1991) argues that in change, organisations experience the punctuated equilibrium paradigm where longer periods of stability that feature incremental change are 'punctuated' by short periods of transformational change. In studies of companies, Nadler and Tushman (1995) suggest that patterns of

both types of change develop, with the rate of change increasing. The organisational change described by PCFSWs did not appear to be experienced as being incremental, but within a pattern of brief periods of stability punctuated by frequent re-alignment and re-structuring of management systems. In such conditions, it is unrealistic to expect that the singular appointment of the PCFSW is going to significantly mitigate against the effects of a service system in a state of chronic disequilibrium.

Within the context of reorganisation, a feature would appear to be the diversion of attention from the outside to the inside, from the service users to the organisation itself. We have seen in the previous chapter that a stated aim of senior management was to shift the service focus to children and their families as per the principles of Munro (2011b), an aim also shared by the PCFSWs. However, in the re-organisation around the Munro reforms as typically experienced by PCFSWs coming in to post, the focus in their view appeared to have been largely an internal one, with the conflicts and challenges being around the service structure, rather than the service users. On this point, Flynn and Asquer (2017) observe that administrative and managerial reorganisation is likely to affect the front line less than middle and higher managers and by extension those realms of the organisation where PCFSWs and senior managers sit. It is worth considering whether such reforms are unintentionally widening the gap between front line and service users and management perhaps to the detriment of all but particularly the recipients of the service. As Flynn and Asquer (2017, p. 9) state, 'constant reorganisation has consequences for public services. First it diverts people's attention away from the outside to the inside, from the service users to the organisation'.

When considering the organisational context, the PCFSWs were aware of the location of the role within their organisations, and the consequent implications they believed this had on their ability to fulfil the expectations of it. These matters will be considered in the next section.

5.4   Hierarchy and Role Complexity

The recommendation in the Munro Report (2011b, p. 13) for the PCFSW role was that they should be 'a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice in the local authority and who is still actively involved in frontline practice'. Local authorities are invariably hierarchical with tiered structures of Director, Deputy or Deputies and below them a line of senior managers, usually with functional responsibilities and line management of a further tier of managers (Goodman and Trowler 2012). As noted earlier, the PCFSW role has been positioned differently within similar hierarchical structures within cognate local authorities (TCSW 2014). Thus, for some PCFSWs their standalone status was incorporated into a senior level of management, for others, the method by which they were able to enjoy senior status as PCFSW was by attaching it to another senior management role, often the primary role that they occupied.

In regard to role initiation, the majority became 'live' at senior management level, one outlier was the local authority that sought implementation of the PCFSW role by internal election by frontline staff. Such mechanisms for appointing staff are untypical in UK local government. In this instance the successful candidate was a front-line manager with a direct practice component to their remit. However, it was reported that this way of identifying a PCFSW was not ultimately successful because the incumbent was part time and the practitioner aspect of their role had priority. Such evident

limitations were compounded by the lack of ease and familiarity in engaging with senior levels in the organisation when acting in a more operational capacity.

The Munro (2011b, p. 13) recommendation for the role was that it should be positioned at senior manager level and have the lead within the organisation for practice. It would seem unlikely that a first-line manager would enjoy similar status and authority. Here we might consider the views of Worral and Cooper (2007) who refer to a Chartered Management Institute's survey of 1,500 UK managers. They note that public sector organisations scored highest on bureaucratic, reactive and authoritarian measures as opposed to accessible, empowering, innovative and trusting ones. This would suggest that local authority children's services, by virtue of being located within such organisations, might reflect such practices which inhibit those accessible innovative ones that may encourage an atypical appointment. Similarly, Lawler and Bilson (2010) note classical management and strategic management models which reflect the above more authoritarian scores are prevalent in social care organisations. It would seem likely therefore in such organisational structures that a PCFSW would not be appointed at a level outside of a traditional top down management system as they would have additional challenges in fitting in and generating change.

The hierarchical position of the PCFSW role in the organisation and the pay grade it was placed at appeared to be significant for some PCFSWs as an indicator of status, but not others. There was a sense, certainly for some, that in their local authority, the point where a role was placed in the hierarchical structure was a proxy for status. This understanding of status did not appear to be linked to one component, with different emphases being given to managerial roles, leadership, profession, and personal status. The PCFSWs in hybrid

positions tended to have higher managerial status in the organisation, but this status was in their view attached to their 'other' role, rather than their PCFSW role:

I am the voice, and I think previously I think the principal social worker role she sat in the senior leadership team but wasn't the same grade, and I think by that very nature she didn't have the influence and the voice in that group, so they've actually raised the grade of it, but unfortunately it's definitely a tag on.

VK (H)– FG 2

Standalone PCFSWs were typically placed at less elevated levels in the organisation, which gave them a lower standing in managerial hierarchical terms relative to hybrids. This point can be noted in the following extract which raises implicitly the issue of voice and leadership in respect of these two positions:

For me being standalone I am lower than the rest of the senior leadership team but I sit in that senior leadership group and I don't feel at all different.

AB (S) – FG 2

Standalone PCFSWs appeared to be more able to articulate what could be considered leadership aspects of their role. As discussed in Chapter Four, there is no accepted clear definition of leadership, and it is often conflated with management (Lawler and Bilson 2010; Grint 2005; Northouse 2016), with the latter tending to be seen conceptually as being concerned with organisational function whereas leadership denotes aspects of personal identity and capacity. The overlaps and differences between the two can be seen in the accounts of participants which merge or invoke the separate aspects

of these twin elements of their role when trying to capture the complexity of their position. While all PCFSWs acknowledged the broad span of their tasks, hybrids were clearer about the responsibilities of their pre-existing senior management role taking priority, and by extension those duties linked to the PCFSW role having less time and attention paid to it and ergo deemed to be of less significance to the post-holder. By pointing this out, they themselves seemed to see the manager role and the PCFSW role as being differently weighted in practical and moral terms, thus the PCFSW function would seem to be viewed as subordinate and unlikely to stand as their prime identity in the organization – thus who they 'are' in the system 'is' their senior management designation, within which lay the secondary status of PCFSW:

I now sit within the senior leadership team. So, in terms of influence, just thinking about the PSW which is still very much a tag on, but the influence comes within the senior leadership team.

VK (H) –FG 2

French and Raven (1986) distinguish between 'legitimate' power and 'referent' power. Legitimate power stems from the position someone is given in an organisation with legitimate authority, whereas referent power is based on the individual, and the general acknowledgement of their personal influence. In relation to the organisation and position, Grint (2005) identifies a difference between those who are leaders, and traditional managers who solely work from a basis of positional authority; the authority that they have is because of their position within the organisational hierarchy. This suggests that leaders have something more than 'just' a managerial role. Hybrids gave the sense that they wanted to be understood as more than the traditional management role they were aligned to and the positional

authority attached to it. For standalones, it was something other than hierarchical position that they felt gave them their authority or influence. For all PCFSWs there was a notion of an alternative moral authority linked to professional identity (Haynes 2015), and the values associated to social work that pertained to the role. This appeared to contain levels of subjectivity to it, with their understanding of self and their identity contributing to how the role was interpreted. We shall consider this further below when we consider the individual in the role.

PCFSWs came to the role by different routes. Some were appointed from within the organisation, others from outside. PCFSWs could see benefits and challenges from both of these routes:

> *I think the first day was of course welcoming action and what have you, and subsequently it was all about so what are you going to do for us what is your plan? Thinking, well actually I don't have a plan, I need to be around a bit because I didn't come, I came from outside, so it wasn't a post within, and I think that question would have been different from someone actually recruited from within internal saying what is your plan, the local authority and the person would have an idea in terms of what they think they should be doing what the issues are. I had come from an entirely different world, worlds apart, and asking what my plan was as a principal social worker that was quite daunting.*
>
> AL (S)– FG 1

The difference between being known and established, and being new and untested were experienced simultaneously by a participant in one authority who occupied the PCFSW post across Adult Services

where she was not known, and Children and Family Services, where she was already established:

> *I would say that probably due to my relationship and reputation, the influence has been a little bit easier in children's services than in adult services where I am brand-new, building a reputation, and building relationships more than anything with their senior leadership team. Because I think influence comes out of the confidence and the credibility which I am building in one area but is already established in the other.*
>
> <div align="right">LoH (S) – FG 2</div>

All new entrants to an organisation need to acclimatise and map their surroundings in terms of tasks, rules and participants. Furthermore, for those PCFSWs coming from outside the organisation there was a dichotomy between being new, so having to 'learn' the organisation, yet being some sort of 'redeemer' with a plan they could simply 'plug-in'. There was a sense that they wanted to 'know' the organisation before they could meet the expectations that had been placed on them for bringing about change. The expectations about what needed to change and how, appeared to be those of the senior management team – none of the PCFSWs referred to the expectations of social workers or other frontline practitioners having been collected as part of the preparations made for the new arrival.

The sense of being a 'redeemer', of bringing enlightened change that will generate better practice would seem to 'fit' with a heroic model of leadership (Gill 2006; Lawler and Bilson 2010). Such expectations were perceived by the PCFSWs to be held by senior managers who hoped this approach to leadership would assist them in negotiating what for any was the unforgiving external world of regulation of

children's social services in England where there is thought to be a culture of failure in many authorities and a fear of failure and its consequences in those that are coping reasonably well (Featherstone et al. 2014a; Jones 2014a). Almost all participants spoke of OFSTED inspections that resulted in local authorities being placed in an 'intervention' category whereby the Department for Education had imposed external oversight and monitoring of children's services. Most spoke of their local authority being in a process of restructuring change to achieve service improvement. The reputational and related career risks for senior management in contemporary children's services is a subject of some commentary, particularly in the wake of some high profile sackings (Jones 2015; Shoesmith 2016) and as it is middle and senior managers who are increasingly held responsible for failings, it may be understandable that a heroic model of leadership is more appealing in relation to their expectations of the PCFSW.

5.5   The Individual in the Role

As we have seen in Chapter Four, the AD/HoS were consistent in their view that the 'type' of individual who held the PCFSW role was integral to its success. In the focus groups, the PCFSWs agreed with this point. When asked what key attributes of the post holder contributed best to the task, several PCFSWs closely linked notions of the 'self' to the role, such as AM (H) in FG1 who states "*I would say that reflects a lot about who I am, as much as what the job is*", and AL (S) also in FG1 who states "*the role, what I think it's meant to be and my personality are almost one and the same thing.*"

Gordon and Dunworth (2016) recognise the 'use of self' as being a key concept whereby social workers use their personality, identity, values and beliefs to build relationships and conduct interventions

with those they work with. Ward (2010, p. 52) argues that the ability to understand and make use of the self is 'the means through which we experience and conduct our practice'. Thus, the professional self constantly evolves and develops from life and practice experience. Harrison and Ruch (2007) argue that the professional and personal self are not binary and that both the 'who' and 'what' they are make up the social worker. Gordon and Dunworth (2016, p. 3) note that the social worker as a practitioner 'is positioned as an actor with agency to be creative and flexible, rather than a rule follower, or passive achiever of tasks'.

Understanding the concept of self as it may relate to being a social worker is important to PCFSWs as in their view they are social workers foremost, and throughout expressed their professional identity as being such. Halford and Leonard (2002) explore this further in the construction of 'self', considering particularly the way that work and identity are understood. They argue that an individual identity is not fixed but is continually in the process of being constructed subject to changes in relations, practices and discourses which surround individuals. They take this further in observing that people perform a range of identities in and out of work, with Hall (1996) suggesting that there are not singular identities, but multiply constructed identities that are never unified. Thus, according to Halford and Leonard (2002), individual identities shift over time and space where each individual is subject to diverse and sometimes competing discourses which constitute their identity. Referencing Nippert-Eng (1996), they conclude that 'people carve out their identities in different places and at different times, with decision making about where to place the boundaries and with whom, and how to enact and maintain these, being a more or less continual process' (Halford and Leonard 2002, p. 118).

PCFSWs appeared to distinguish different versions of self. Many PCFSWs described a sense of 'self' or traits that they considered significant but which in their view ran contrary to their perception of what the organisation, or certainly the senior managers, were looking for in the post-holder:

They thought they would have someone you could tap on the head a bit and go 'just run along and do this, just run along and do that', and of course when they got me, that's absolutely what I'm not like, which has upset a few people.

KM (S) – FG 1

But actually what they saw as your strength ends up being the problem for them. They like the fact that you are, you know, very committed, very dedicated, you know all the things they say, which they don't realise that once in post that it is the bit that have to actually, that is the challenging bit of your role. So, it's quite interesting that what they saw presumably in some people in terms of employing the individual is the same attributes that they use against the individual to say yeah, you know, a bit too loud or you know, you don't do as you are told.

AL (S) – FG 1

I had an interesting conversation fairly early on with an interim manager, who, senior manager, who I think expected me to be a Rottweiler, and I had to say if that's what you're expecting it's never going to happen, that isn't my work style and you won't find a sort of wake of distressed people behind me – hopefully what you'll find

is people coming with me because they understand what
it is that I am saying and why.

<div align="right">AM (H) – FG 1</div>

Within the above accounts can be detected allusions to assertiveness and charisma as elements of PCFSW leadership. Models of leadership which focus on aspects of the individual include the heroic leadership model which recognises the ability to influence and personify organisational purpose or ethic and drive others towards change, as being inherent in the individual (Gill 2006). Bryman (1992) outlines trait theories in leadership that focus on personal qualities of leaders, and approaches that depict leadership in terms of behaviours and what leaders do, which can be learned. In distinguishing between 'legitimate' power and 'referent' power held within an organisation, French and Raven (1986) define referent power as being based on the individual and the general acknowledgement of their personal influence whether based on experience, reputation or charisma. Bryman (1992) defines charisma as a particular kind of relationship between a leader and followers, whereby the qualities that are attributed to leaders by their followers and the adherence to the leader's mission result in the 'devotion' of the followers to the leader. It is important to note that this is linked to notions of individual charisma and not because of their status or position.

In identifying attributes of self that they believe enhance the role but might be in conflict with the organisation or their manager, PCFSWs alluded to values, as AM did in the quote above when outlining her work style. Social work is a values-lead profession (Banks 2006; IFSW 2014) and the values expressed appeared to bridge a link between who they were, being social workers, and the role of the PCFSW being part of the profession. In the extract below, AB saw his values as standing in some contrast to the culture of the organisation

he is working in, and linked these to an understanding of his professional 'self':

> *In terms of compliance culture that was set up – it was against my principles and I am a principled social worker, not just a principal social worker.*
>
> AB (S) – FG 2

We have seen in Chapter 4 how the understanding of profession was very much linked to practice, and indeed there seemed to be an authority ascribed to the PCFSW because of their proximity to practice. In the next section we will consider the importance of practice and the link to the frontline from the perspective of the PCFSW.

5.6   Practice and the Link to the Frontline

A clear task of the PCFSW role as outlined by Munro (2011b) is to be a link between senior management and practitioners on the front line of practice. This involves being 'actively involved in frontline practice and reporting the views and experiences of the frontline to all levels of management.' This was an aspect that the ADs and HoS felt was successful, being delivered in a way that it had not previously, and which they saw as being beneficial to the organisation. PCFSWs acknowledged the expectation to represent the frontline, but for many, it was the area where they felt there was the biggest gap between expectation and reality.

Many PCFSWs perceived the elevated position they held within the hierarchical structure of the organisation as being a barrier to authentic representation of social workers. They described being 'distant' from frontline practitioners. This distance seemed to be

physical, and they described making particular arrangements to be spatially in the company of social workers as some kind of special task. They believed that their being positioned in higher management might suggest to others in the organisation that their focus was on strategic work, which was also seen by them as being removed from the operational end of practice:

I think there's the danger of being sucked into strategic leadership and losing contact with the frontline practitioners. You know there's so much to do at this level and real space to influence and working across children and adults we can't do it all ourselves. So, there's lots of working with systems, management teams, advanced practitioners that exist already within the system. But absolutely carving out time to be with social workers ………. is quite difficult.

LoH (S) – FG 2

Managerial distance from the frontline is not unusual in social work organisations. Pithouse (1987) identified the benefits perceived by staff in a decentralised social work area office of being at a geographic and social distance from the main organisation, a state that was actively exploited by some front-line team managers. Thus it is possible that senior management may operate at a distance from the frontline, but that the frontline may welcome this insofar as it may reduce senior management oversight or intrusion. In such circumstances, the PCFSW role might have less impact if it is viewed as some external and/or regulatory device of higher management. Thus, where negative views of management prevail it is possible the PCFSW will be seen as 'them' rather than 'us' - as manager rather than the authoritative leader of 'we' the believers in the professional mission. Therefore, PCFSWs may feel it difficult to align with either,

and like others who engage across boundaries (Aldrich and Herker 1977; Oliver 2013) continually have to negotiate their membership of both. The complexities of the role in this aspect will be conceptualised further in Chapter 6.

We have seen that the hybrid nature of the role for some PCFSWs was experienced as a barrier to their ability to represent the front line. This tended to be because the 'other' role that hybrids held tended to take priority, and that was typically focusing on strategic high level managerial activity such as quality assurance or workforce development:

> *The development and looking at standards of practice, that's probably the key part of my job, and I spend far more time doing that, the auditing you know all about practice governance rather than being involved with direct practice.*
>
> HM (H) - FG 2

Invariably the PCFSWs linked their conceptualisation of the frontline with what social workers as practitioners do, namely practice. In describing their links with the front line, or their proximity/distance to it, they often conflated this with their own links and distance/proximity to operational practice. While there are other qualified professionals and other social care practitioners undertaking practice in a social services department, the PCFSW is the principal social worker, a role specifically created to promote support and enhance the quality of social work practice. Social work practice is what makes the PCFSW fundamentally different from other public service professionals, and it may be argued that it is this that differentiates the PCFSW identity from any other training, leadership or management role in the organisation. Someone who is not a social

worker cannot be a PCFSW, and being a social worker is inherently linked with what social workers 'do', that is the performance of practice. However, the reality is that most PCFSWs don't do practice in any regular sense which makes for some difficulty as the link is claimed, but often in an insecure or tenuous way.

Payne (2006) states that every social worker when they practice social work does more than just this - through doing social work they represent, embody, incorporate, and therefore *are* social work. Munro (2011b), when making the recommendation that the PCFSW be 'actively involved' in frontline practice, did not make explicit what being 'actively involved' meant, particularly in regard to its future shape and purpose in English local authorities. Perhaps predictably, the experiences of the PCFSWs were varied in this regard, and their perception of how they engaged with practice very much corresponded with the relationship with practice that the AD/HoS identified for them in Chapter 4:

- Developing practice
- Standards of practice
- Undertaking practice

The PCFSWs all described developing practice, and upholding the standards for practice, including quality assurance responsibilities, as part of their role:

> *We've started doing this kind of quality assurance meeting where we have head of service, service managers, team managers, right down to social work assistants and practitioners where we'll do a themed audit at social worker involvement look at lessons learned and then feed that back into bespoke pieces of training.*

Notably, the PCFSWs who gave accounts of actually doing direct practice, were almost exclusively standalone:

I do direct work so social workers will come out and see me with children and families, I manage the learning and development team find out what it is from audits and appraisal systems about staff need, and I listen to the staff about what they want.

KM (S) – FG 1

Direct involvement in practice seemed in their view to generate a level of authenticity in the PCFSW role and lend a sense of legitimacy to their views. However, it is not practice per se that signifies legitimacy but the identity of practitioner – one who can and does engage with the 'real work' of social services. Payne (2006, p. 53) states that what social workers mean by practice is what they do in 'interpersonal interactions with other people'. The interpersonal nature of practice involves intervention in the lives of others, forming relationships with clients, and using the worker's own 'self' along with specific knowledge and skills. This involves intimacy, with the suggestion that distance from this intimacy of practice is distance from 'being' a social worker. Thus, for PCFSWs, the further you are from practice, the further you are from being a social worker. Standalones, by not having their role tagged to another managerial role, and by being the PCFSWs that were more likely to 'do' practice, appeared, in their accounts at least, as somehow more allied to social workers than their hybrid colleagues, and perhaps enjoyed a more compelling claim to legitimacy in their pronouncements about the work of the department:

*Well I think, personally I've found it useful because when
I then talk to social workers I can still say I know what it
feels like otherwise it feels a bit like who are you to say,
you know you've been out of practice for however many
years.*

<div align="right">KM (S) – FG 1</div>

The apparent enhanced legitimacy of doing direct practice seemed to be acknowledged by hybrid PCFSWs who in the main were rarely engaged in such activities. Direct observation of practice, managing those who did direct practice, or spending time with social workers tended to be how they fulfilled this aspect of the role:

*I don't do any direct practice. The links I have with direct
practice is through direct observations. So, every month I
spent half a day in the team, go out and observe their
meetings.*

<div align="right">HM (H) – FG 2</div>

*A little bit of frontline practice contact but not very
much…… so mostly workforce development, I also
manage quality assurance and policies, so the QA role.*

<div align="right">LoH (S) – FG 2</div>

The identity as a practitioner, and the apparent referent legitimacy and moral authority associated with this appeared to be important to PCFSWs. There were evident links with professional values and identity, and it highlighted an alternative approach to status and position from traditional managerial ascriptions.

5.7   Challenge to the Status Quo

Hayes (2014) in the context of change management states that leaders need to be sense makers of the world around them. Ancona et al. (2007) suggest that to do this successfully, leaders should use multiple sources, taking into account different people and different perspectives. Although the expectation to represent the frontline was recognised by PCFSWs, and in the main welcomed by them, there appeared to be scepticism on their part as to whether the senior management team really wanted this, or would listen to any challenging representations on behalf of staff at the 'sharp-end':

> *Is it that you don't want to hear? I feel like there's a sense of they do want to hear, but they want to hear through their management system so that they can manage what they hear themselves.*
>
> LoH (S) – FG 2

There was a sense that in some authorities, lip service was being paid by senior management to the concept of PCFSW representing the frontline. One reason may be to do with the nature of local government structures and the prevalence of rational-objective management and mechanistic rule-based, rigid and inflexible systems, restricting the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and restraining creativity and innovation (Lawler and Bilson 2010). It is unlikely that such a negatively skewed organisational model exists in this pure form, but that elements of such a type may to a lesser or greater degree obtain. It was also the view of some that the notion of a PCFSW as a conduit for management engagement with the front-line was something of a cynical manoeuvre by the leadership to demonstrate their progressive management ethos to an external audience, particularly to gain some approbation from bodies such as

OFSTED. Matters of organisational image are critical in a potentially hostile environment and some appeal by an organisation to its value driven mandate can be a powerful defence against criticism (Thompson 2013). This point was made thus:

> *The big tension from me is senior managers like the idea of a principal social worker, they don't necessarily like it when it happens, they don't really want to be challenged, the don't really want to know, they just want to say to OFSTED and other people 'we've got a principal social worker so we know what it's like on the front line' - when you tell them they don't want to hear it generally.*
>
> CD (S) – FG 1

In considering the link to the frontline, PCFSWs highlighted the importance of their effective communication within the organisation. Thompson (2013) states how the importance of communication cannot be overemphasised, and that if managers are not communicating, they are not managing. We have discussed the integral role communication has in organisations, albeit often experienced as a top-down process (Hayes 2014), the need for two-way communication (Allen et al. 2007) and the block to change and learning that poor quality upward communication produces (Beer 2001). An unwillingness to 'hear' or receive messages is of course not the preserve of management and it was evident that those at lower levels could also frustrate or impede the ambitions of the PCFSW such as first line managers:

> *I think that hasn't happened yet because I think I've been used by senior managers to pass down their messages and also been quite blocked by team managers, so they're quite defensive and if I challenge*

some of what they've done I've been blocked in getting to social workers, so that hasn't really happened in my authority.

<div align="right">LK (H) – FG 1</div>

We have seen in Chapter 4 that ADs and HoS felt that having a PCFSW meant that they (senior management) had (or would have) access to a more informed understanding of the frontline than they had before. Several stated that they experienced a new communication flow from the bottom up that assisted in organisational reform and cultural change. Carnall (2007) suggests that many studies show managers of all kinds prefer informal and verbal engagement, spending 45% of their time communicating outside the formal structures in which operational and strategic decisions are made as the benefit of this is that the information gained is rich and qualitative. The shared perception of both focus groups would seem to be that this type of communication had been lost in the recent history of their organisations. The apparent consequence in the local authority social services in which the participants operated is that senior managers would seem to be either reliant on or willing to delegate this activity to the PCFSW. In this sense, PCFSWs enjoy some discretion over communication and rule observance; like other key participants in public services (Lipsky 2010), they can shape the flow and content of information exchange or in some instance impede the message itself. That said, respondents generally felt that the dominant direction of communication in the organisation was still from the top down. However, it was evident that some moderation or filtering of the message was available to some of the PCFSWs who would seek to negotiate the matter in question if it did not 'fit' their idea of best practice:

If it was something that was good practice, yes, but if I thought it was something that I didn't think was good practice, I'd have that discussion in the senior management team until we agreed what message I was delivering.

MH (S) – FG 2

Significantly, it tended to be the standalone PCFSWs who articulated the use of discretion in negotiating and shaping top-down messages from senior management. They appeared to enjoy more autonomy than their hybrid colleagues in regard to taking a position over practice or service users, particularly in contexts of conflict over professional virtue or values, rather than over managerial aspects of their role. However, as Flynn (2002) notes professional autonomy is contested, variable and contingent on many factors. Indeed, the accounts provided suggested no consistency in the way PCFSWs actualised their powers of discretion in relation to time, place and issue when challenging the 'message' from senior management.

We next look specifically at culture change, as this was a particular feature in the narratives of both the AD/HoS, and the PCFSWs.

5.8   Culture Change

In Chapter Four we identified the organisational context for reform as highlighted by the ADs and HoS, and located the imperatives for change as outlined by Munro (2011b) in her final report. Reference was made to the literature on organisational culture and change, with a focus on the perspectives of the senior managers who had accepted responsibility for change, and were implementing initiatives to bring about that change. We will now consider culture change from the perspective of the PCFSWs.

In considering the organisational context for supporting effective social work practice, Munro (2011b) outlines ten characteristics of an effective local system for child protection social work, two of which specifically refer to teaching culture and learning culture. The DfE (2016a) have continued with a clear reform agenda in children's social care, of which the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice Leaders is a key document (DfE 2015b, p. 9). Section 2 of that document states that Practice Leaders will be able to 'create a culture in which excellent practice is expected and celebrated'. We have seen that the creation of the PCFSW role has been in the context of a national reform agenda, and locally within what has been described (both in the telephone interviews and focus groups) as periods of reorganisation and change in each authority. AD/HoS viewed creating the PCFSW role in their organisation as an acknowledgement of the need for culture change, with the PCFSW cast as a cultural catalyst who would operate in the areas that were identified as influencing change, focussing on social work as a value-led profession, and social work practice that would challenge the compliance ethos deemed inimical to effective performance. The commonly cited locus for change within organisations was typically one of organisational culture. This was reflected in a comment from one PCFSW and shared more widely:

> *I mean we're an authority like many others who have been on an improvement journey and see organisational culture as central to that, so really, really central.*
>
> LoH (S) - FG 2

In both focus groups, the PCFSWs shared the view that their role, as intended by senior management, was to play a part in cultural change within their organisation. While they described a lack of

specificity in their job description, their accounts clearly indicated an expectation, explicit or implicit, that they were intended to make a contribution to the culture of the organisation, and particularly to identify and help tackle areas that were felt to be problematic and in need of change, such as compliance culture and blame culture:

> *I am still in a position of actually trying to influence that punitive approach. So, if they're saying well if that practice isn't good enough then we should just sack them, and I'm like actually no this is a system here, the culture is created, as has been said in this meeting today, has created a profession of social workers that are behaving in this way because the system has modelled them in that way. So, no we will not approach it in that way, we will tackle it and look at the whole system on the case, and will deal with it like that and we'll learn from it in order to shape how we go forward and change the culture.*
>
> MH (S) – FG 2

The PCFSWs spoke of an approach to child and family social work which accords with that given by Featherstone et al. (2014a), that is, a service which is humane and relationship based, where ethical practice is not prejudiced by a risk-averse practice context. Participants spoke of relationship based social work as inevitably disjunctive within a compliance and rule performance culture. When asked to elaborate on these claims and to outline the leadership that they had demonstrated in respect of cultural change, examples given included:

Well I think it's about bringing it back, trying to get everyone to see, to think about that one question, what is it that I did today that made a difference to any family.

<div align="right">CD (S) – FG 1</div>

I think one of the things that I have noticed in the role having an impact is where a lot of workers knew what to do, most of them knew how to do it, but they had lost sight of why they were doing it. It probably links back to what you were saying in terms of, so the potential, the newly qualified could to tell you what the statutory visiting pattern was, but wouldn't have a blinking clue why we have got a statutory visiting pattern, you know, that actually that reflected good practice. You know it's not about a minimum you know, but actually should be something you're putting your energy into because you want a relationship with the child. So, I think that is one of the areas where our role does have quite a big influence, reminding people why they are doing it.

<div align="right">AM (S) – FG 1</div>

Change to organisational culture is sometimes seen to come from a strategic leadership approach, where it is a visionary leader who determines the culture (Lawler and Bilson 2010). This is a limited if not illusory notion and reveals little of the complexity of distributed leadership in large contemporary spatially diverse public service systems that interface and co-produce with other organisations (Bryman 1992). Thus, Munro (2011b) while recognising the role of organisational leaders in bringing about change, also sees leadership being valued and encouraged at all levels throughout the organisation, with the need for the whole system to understand and support that change. Prima facie, PCFSWs appear to be in a position

to bridge both these aspects by being part of the leadership that sets the strategic vision while also the link to frontline practice throughout the organisation. We have however seen earlier in this chapter how participants often described some disparity between the rhetoric of the strategic vision of senior managers, and the PCFSW experience of putting this in to practice.

In their approach to matters of culture and change, PCFSWs typically aligned themselves with professional and practice aspirations and associated narratives around the signal importance of relationships. They made links between the aspirations for relationships that practitioners have with the children and families they work with, and relationships within the organisation. It wasn't evident in their accounts where they saw the focus of cause and effect - whether better relationships would result in culture change, or would be an outcome of it, rather, their narratives depicted some circularity in that positive relationships were both the medium and the objective:

> *In terms of relationship based social work in (names authority). and I think getting, actually, the leaders to understand that actually what we do with children and families is exactly what we should do with each other and stop emailing each other, and take time to actually build those relationships rather than continue to work in silos.*
>
> LH (H) – FG 2

This to some extent mirrors the aspirations that the senior managers outlined in the interviews in Chapter Four – while they were viewing better relationships with practitioners and the frontline as being integral to culture change, the PCFSWs appeared to extend this to relationships with those that receive the services provided by their organisations. However, we have noted that the reality of exposure

to the frontline and the interface with practice as experienced by PCFSWs has been limited.

5.9 Summary

Having looked at the conceptualisation and implementation of the PCFSW role from the point of view of the responsible senior leaders within a number of local authorities, in this chapter we looked at the role from the perspective of those actually undertaking it. While many of the aspirations for the role were shared by participants in both focus groups, the reported experience of actually putting the role in to practice by PCFSWs was very different.

The experience of starting in a newly conceived role in a complex organisation raised dilemmas of autonomy and discretion for many PCFSWs. While recognising their role as being a leadership one, many spoke of their hesitation in embracing fully that function. They described both expectations of and frustrations with senior management. On the one hand there was their claim that they should have had more guidance from senior managers in the purpose of the role, yet at other times they felt hindered in what they could do by the hierarchy. In particular, hybrid PCFSWs described the ongoing challenge of occupying two roles, one of which was overtly managerial and was held prior to the PCFSW task and which in the context of organisational expectations, appeared to take precedence.

Positional authority appeared to be linked to hybrid PCFSWs by nature of their prior and ongoing senior management role, whereas standalones articulated what might be considered as referent or moral authority. This linked to their claimed identity and perception of self of being a social worker first, as opposed to being a senior manager. Their shared self-conception as champions of the

professional mission was based upon their explicit links to the frontline and relationship-based practice having high currency both as a virtue in itself and as means of generating a better organisational culture.

We have seen that the PCFSW is a complex, and sometimes contested role located in a context of practice and organisational change. In Chapter 6 we will consider a framework that takes in to account this complexity and seeks to bridge the contested elements of this unique human service function in contemporary children's services in local authorities in England.

Chapter Six   Dancing Across The System: towards complexity

> *I dance across the system so I have a foot in lots of different camps.*
>
> <div align="right">LM – Focus Group 2</div>

> *It's absolutely key for me personally because you do have to move right across the organisation and outside of the organisation, so you have to be quite chameleon-like to be able to work in lots of different groups and able to deliver sometimes really hard-hitting messages but leave people intact at the same time. So I would say that reflects a lot about who I am, as much as what the job is.*
>
> <div align="right">AL – Focus Group 1</div>

6.1   Introduction

For over a decade, statutory child protection social work in England has been concerned with a need to reform, prompted by a number of drivers referred to throughout this study. A cornerstone of this reform has been Eileen Munro's Review of Child Protection, and the 15 recommendations made in her Final Report (2011b). The role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker was one of the recommendations of Munro, and this research has focused on the implementation of this professional practice leader role. In this final chapter the key findings are summarised and their implications for practice and policy are considered.

In Chapter Four we noted the recognition from senior managers within local authority child protection services of the need for change, and specifically their conception of the PCFSW as an agent of change. Interviews with AD/HoS from 13 authorities across selected regions

of England gave deeper insight into the rationale for creating the post as either hybrid or standalone in its type and purpose. In Chapter Five we looked at the role from the perspective of those who have experienced making it a reality, the PCFSWs themselves.

There were a number of commonalities that bridged across the conceptual understanding of the senior managers, and the experience of the PCFSWs in implementing the new role. For both parties there was the acceptance that nationally and locally their organisations were experiencing a time of austerity and associated resource scarcity, flux and change, and that to navigate this there needed to be a different approach to the bureaucratic compliance mode that had predominated much of recent practice. The antithesis to this 'compliance' was generally framed as a return to profession-led principles of practice, and the way of doing this was to spend time with those who work at the frontline and 'do' practice.

While the rhetoric for both sets of actors identified practice as being important, the reality appeared more contested. The senior managers were clear that the link to the frontline, and the PCFSW involvement in practice was an important part of their vision, and one they believed was happening. The PCFSWs articulated frustration at the dichotomy between wanting to spend time with the frontline and actually engage more closely in practice-related activities, while the reality was that they experienced significant restriction in doing so, the responsibility for which they located with their senior managers.

The senior managers said they wanted to hear challenge from the PCFSWs, while acknowledging that this could be difficult for them. The typical experience of PCFSWs was that the opportunities to challenge were often not there, and that when challenge was offered it tended not to be welcomed, or necessarily accepted. The PCFSWs

felt that senior managers believed that they were open to challenge, but their behaviour and actions did not seem to reflect this. Even if there was a senior manager open to challenge, often the response of other managers in the hierarchy of the organisation was perceived as a barrier to the communication and change sought. As a result, PCFSWs were in their view not authentically located at the frontline in practice-related activity and nor were they passing challenging messages back up the hierarchy effectively. Nonetheless, there were, predictably, key variations in the experiences of PCFSWs across the three categories of standalone, hybrid and in authorities without such a function:

- In authorities without a PCFSW there was not a clear connection between senior management and practice or the frontline. While the AD/HoS identified routes for aspects of reform, these typically did not involve proximity to the frontline or practice, or the challenge that this might engender.

- In hybrid authorities, having a designated PCFSW role was viewed by senior managers as an acknowledgement that reform was a priority. As we have seen, being in a hybrid role meant that PCFSWs found it difficult to focus on the new and different functions, and it was their pre-existing managerial tasks that ultimately took precedence. When the existing managerial role incorporated part of the envisioned tasks and functions of a PCFSW, such as those around quality assurance or learning and development, these appear to have been achieved. However, aspects of the role such as direct practice, proximity to the frontline, and the challenging communications these brought to the hierarchy tended to feature less. This was a potentially contested area between the senior managers and the hybrid PCFSWs in that the senior managers did not necessarily feel that

proximity to practice needed to be part of the role, yet for the PCFSWs the distance from practice and the frontline was a barrier that prevented them from achieving the full expectations of the role as set by Munro. It was difficult for hybrid and standalone actors to evaluate the extent to which having a PCFSW was effecting change, and whether the influence they had was because of their prior managerial status as opposed to the authority/influence associated with this new role.

- In standalone authorities there appeared to be greater discretion to carve out more fully the PCFSW role. The decision of the AD/HoS to make the role standalone gave opportunity for a wider remit with no overt tie to any pre-existing managerial position in the organisation. As a result, there was a sense that the role allowed for more time and opportunity to link to the frontline, and more discretion to be involved in practice. While some standalone PCFSWs did undertake direct practice, this was not the case for all of them, with many describing being involved in managerial tasks that impeded their wish to 'do' social work within their role. So, while standalone authorities appeared to facilitate greater proximity to the frontline and practice, the reality experienced by most PCFSWs was that this was nevertheless limited in its occurrence.

What seems clear in the findings is that the PCFSWs encountered continuous negotiation over their status and remit – characterised by a unique degree of fluidity and complexity that required them to "dance" across the service system, as stated by a participant in Focus Group B. In this, their role can be aptly described as that of a boundary spanner and change agent working in complex organisational systems. These fundamental elements of role and

context will now be briefly summarised by reference to key findings discussed in earlier chapters and will conclude the dissertation study.

6.2   The Boundary Spanner

The findings from this research would suggest that the role of PCFSW carries with it both complexity and uncertainty in relation to organisational location, remit and relationships. A conceptual framework in which to locate this might best be termed as that of boundary spanner as conceived by Aldrich and Herker (1977) and developed by Oliver (2013), Nissen (2010) and Green and McDermott (2010). The concept of boundary spanner as a way of social workers holding on to a complex identity is delineated by Oliver (2013) in the way that it assists in capturing role ambiguity, indistinct boundaries, and contested discourse over expert status. While PCFSWs have these tensions by virtue of being social workers, they also have additional tensions by nature of the requirements of the role. As we have seen in preceding chapters, they are simultaneously and at different times professional and manager, social worker and leader, practitioner and challenging commentator on practice. In Chapter Four, the tensions and commonalities of leadership and management were acknowledged, with the recognition that PCFSWs were expected to be both, to varying degrees, depending in significant part on factors such as the model of PCFSW being implemented. Haynes (2015) model of professional, manager and leader in 21st century public services, whereby different functions come to the fore at particular moments seems particularly relevant to the PCFSW, who was expected to span across all in a way not seen in other senior roles in the organisation.

The importance of communication and challenge as a significant new constituent of organisational engagement, was highlighted by both

the AD/HoS and the PCFSWs. In positioning the PCFSW as both part of the management of the organisation, and as an actor close to practice, the AD/HoS were explicitly attempting to bridge a perceived communication void and create a direct link from the frontline to senior management. The limited success experienced by the PCFSWs in delivering challenge, or having it positively received within the organisation was noted in Chapter Five.

The notion of boundary spanner has been useful in conceptualising the role of the PCFSW. It is a way of understanding many of the tensions and conflicts in the role, in professional identity, and in the context of the organisation and wider systems in which the role operates. To consider further the layers of complex interactions and relationships associated with this unique position, we necessarily turn to complexity theory.

6.3   Complexity Theory

Complexity theory is a meta-theory drawing on multiple disciplines (Stevens and Hassett 2007). Byrne (1998) describes complexity thinking as based on the idea that the social world is intersecting dynamic and open complex systems with causal powers running in all directions across and within those systems, the resulting interactions leading to the emergence of new and unforeseen properties. Building on the idea of the PCFSW as a boundary spanner, complexity theory can offer a way of conceptualising the key findings of this research study.

For Meyer et al. (2005), human life and the social world exists in an environment subject to volatile unanticipated changes and shifting boundaries necessary to prevent stagnation. Walker and Salt (2006) argue these systems are complex, adaptive, and self-regulating,

always evolving in the direction of greater complexity. Inherent is the interdependency of the components of single systems, and the interdependency of different systems. As the social world is complex, causality is not linear, and causal effect cannot be assigned to any intervention without assessing the whole context of that intervention, nor can we understand things simply in terms of their components. As a result, when we intervene in multiple complex systems, we have to recognise that the same outcome may be generated in more than one way (Byrne 2013).

To apply complexity theory to the understanding of the role of the PCFSW, it is first important to examine how it might apply to organisations as the context in which the PCFSW is located.

6.4   Complexity and Organisations

The creation (or not) of the role of PCFSW has been located throughout this research in the context of organisational change. Complexity theory argues that human organisations are multi-dimensional, each dimension influencing each other changing the organisational environment in a continuous co-evolutionary process (Mitleton-Kelly 2003; Byrne 1998; Hood 2014). The creative and dynamic feedback between the numerous elements and individuals is the defining aspect of the organisation in any one time and space, and these define how it further evolves and emerges (Haynes 2015), therefore organisational sustainability is not a continuation of the status quo but a continuous dynamic process of co-evolution with a changing environment.

In considering their responsibility for statutory child protection within their local authority organisations, the senior managers and the PCFSWs used the language of systems, and recognised ecologically

the multi-dimensional layers of complexity. They were clear about feedback and its importance, particularly in the desire for communication with the frontline, and the challenge that they anticipated that this would bring. The AD/HoS articulated aspirations to change the status quo. However, the experience was not of a continuous dynamic process – in fact the tensions and difficulties for the PCFSWs appeared to be around flexibility in what appeared to still be a linear, one directional approach (top down) to change from their senior managers.

By extension of this definition of human organisations, complex problems are also multi-dimensional and cannot be addressed by focussing on only a single dimension (Mitleton-Kelly 2011). In understanding the social world as complex, methods organised around simplicity have very limited value and then only in very special circumstances (Byrne 1998). Leaders need to understand and work with, not constrain, their organisations as complex social systems (Mitleton-Kelly 2011).

In their reform project, there was a danger that the senior managers were taking a single dimension approach to what was a complex problem. Appointing a PCFSW, and recognising the boundary spanner aspect to their role, demonstrated an acknowledgment of the systemic nature of the organisational difficulties. The articulated requirement of the PCFSW to be involved in practice could be interpreted as recognition that a new approach was needed to venture to significant boundaries of the child protection system, where the organisation meets the outside world, namely direct practice with children and their families. The emphasis of all the senior managers on the links to the frontline and the feedback from that location, particularly in the form of challenge, suggests an understanding of the multi-dimensional co-evolutionary process.

However, the fiscal, cultural and ideological constraints on the organisation were acknowledged by both sets of actors. The senior managers' perspectives had more of a focus on external constraints – the DfE, OFSTED, Council priorities – while the PCFSWs reported experience was of internal constraints such as a continued compliance culture, and managerialist approach. The prominence of such constraints was likely to affect the ability of the organisation to adapt to the complexity in the ways assumed by complexity theory. While external and internal constraints were recognised, the activities around the organisational change project focussed with greater or less success on the internal ones, perhaps because that is where both sets of actors felt they had more influence. The question remains as to how much change could take place if the external constraints did not alter.

A universal feature of complex systems is self-organisation, the spontaneous order that arises from the individual elements to create something greater than the sum of its parts (Plowman et al. 2007; Johnson 2009; Holland 1998). Complex systems are evolving entities, and in their dynamic state are far-from-equilibrium which prompts the impetus to self-organisation. Although organisations can be deliberately pushed into a state of far-from-equilibrium to bring about new order, attempting to design new order in detail risks limiting the possibilities for self-organisation. Change managers can unintentionally constrain emergent behaviour by attempting to control outcomes. Mitleton-Kelly (2003) argues that organisation redesign should instead focus on creating the conditions that enable the emergence of new ways of working.

In respect of the reform project advocated by Munro (2010; 2011a; 2011b), it may be argued that the implementation by the senior managers did not reach the far-from-equilibrium needed in complex

organisations to create significant change. The difficulty in moving from compliance culture and hierarchy limited the possibilities for self-organisation. While the rhetoric of change was clear, the level of control exercised over the sphere of discretion and influence for the PCFSW may have constrained the desired emergent behaviour in the organisation. The data from PCFSWs suggests that this might be the case, illustrated by the different experiences of hybrid and standalones, where there was a difference in the perception of the origin of their personal authority, and the scope of tasks and functions they were able to undertake. Thus, the hybrid PCFSWs were more likely to feel it was business as usual in the re-configuration of their management role, whereas those in standalone authorities expressed a qualitatively different experience of discretion, influence and ambition.

Haynes (2015) argues that business managerial models are 'an economy of logic' and appeal to managers even though they are inadequate logical accounts of social complexity. People seek simple accounts in a highly complex environment as a method of dealing with complexity and uncertainty. For a limited time, simple models may appear to be doing rather well, but in the longer term, their inability to deal with complexity is increasingly highlighted by contradictions and tensions such as those highlighted by the actors in this research. While appearing to be a complex response in terms of the understanding of systems and boundary spanning, it may be that the implementation of the PCFSW role for many authorities was a simple linear response unable to meet the dynamic evolution of a complex adaptive system.

Having considered complexity theory in outline and its application to the organisation, we now turn to its application to social work practice.

6.5   Complexity and Social Work Practice

There is a growing literature on the application of complexity theory in social work practice, recognising that social workers work at the borders of evolving systems, effecting their social, ecological, biological, economic, and political dimensions (Stevens and Cox 2008; Adams 2005; Green and McDermott 2010). Social work knowledge and ways of explaining the world, skills and practice are substantially constructed in and through the environments in which life is lived (Green and McDermott 2010), and the contextual nature of social work places it between different systems such that societal problems cannot be understood outside the contexts in which they occur (Healy 2005).

In considering the perceived failures of social work to protect children, Stevens and Cox (2008) note that a traditional linear pattern of one dimensional response has continued virtually unchanged for many years, with the prevailing belief that this limits the margin of error on behalf of practitioner discretion – the compliance approach referred to throughout this study. They argue that such approaches to risk give rise to a blame culture which acts as an attractor that pushes the organisational system to the edge of chaos, which echoes the findings of the Munro enquiry into child protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b). As social workers practice daily at the edge of chaos, Stevens and Cox (2008) argue that policy makers and practitioners must depart from one dimensional models and look to complex adaptive systems because prediction and prevention of abuse can never be assured.

Hood (2014) argues that mechanistic and procedural responses to complex problems are often counterproductive. Professionals who are

employed to treat such problems as solvable must use the best evidence available to them to inform their judgement but will not be able to base their decisions entirely on guidelines and procedures. Indeed, professional expertise is valued precisely because experienced practitioners can adapt and draw on different kinds of knowledge to act decisively in complex situations (Fook et al. 2000). PCFSWs are arguably such experienced practitioners, with valued expertise, who can use best evidence to inform their judgement. However, the apparently endemic emphasis on standards and outcomes in the operational sphere of their endeavour would suggest a continued linear approach, whether through choice by the individual, or direction from the senior management. However, increased proximity to the frontline, and the closer to direct practice the PCFSW gets, the harder it is to avoid the complexity recognised by Steven and Cox (2008) in social work practice.

For Hood (2014), there appears to be a divergence between frontline practice and the linear causal thoroughfares of official discourse, in which he argues integrated work processes and their outcomes have come to substitute for the myriad interactions of people. Hood claims that it is a matter not so much of top-down versus bottom-up paths to reform, but engagement at all levels with the inherent messiness and ambiguity of everyday practice. This, it can be argued, leads back to the initial conception of a PCFSW, the aspirations the senior managers had in creating and implementing the role, and the spheres of influence the incumbents hoped to navigate – the communication across the organisation, particularly from the frontline, and the involvement in practice in a way that is not process driven, or one step removed. As Haynes (2015) notes, managers need good holistic understandings of the systems they work in. They need the qualitative insights of others involved in the system, in particular the perceptions of professional staff and service users.

The complex adaptive system has boundaries of instability and attractors – although the complex system may be at the edge of chaos, it will not move outside certain boundaries as the actors within adapt (Hood 2014). Therefore, actors and organisations need to develop a sense of the dynamism of the system with a high degree of tolerance to working with boundaries of instability and uncertainty. PCFSWs can contribute to this system of self-regulation where the requirement is to understand and hold the boundary as by virtue of their role, they are boundary spanners. Such an approach to change was examined by Mitleton-Kelly (2011) in a case study of a hospital where there was facilitated self-organisation, exploration-of-the-space-possibilities, active feedback, co-evolution and emergence where staff had permission to self-organise, experiment and included cross-directorate projects which helped to bridge the tight boundaries between specialities. The nature of the outcomes were emergent, context dependent, and arose through interaction which was more than the sum of its parts. Changed behaviour continued to actively respond and develop, becoming embedded within the organisational culture through a different way of working, relating and thinking. Such outcomes are akin to those aspired to by the AD/HoS in this research, reflecting the rhetoric of their rationale for creating PCFSWs, yet seemingly unaccompanied by theories of adaptive change in complex systems.

6.6   Summary and Implications for Policy

To return to the research questions outlined in Chapter One, this study has considered the Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b) in the context of the culmination of a number of imperatives for change within child protection social work practice in England in the 21st century. In particular the implementation of the

Principal Child and Family Social Worker initiative has been examined from the perspective of senior managers who introduced the post, and from PCFSWs who occupied and activated the role. We have seen in Chapters Four and Five that the role developed in different ways across local authorities, adapting to various local organisational factors. In exploring the aspirations and experiences of the respondents their complex relationships regarding management, leadership and professional identity soon emerged. While it could be seen that there were some commonalities regarding their leadership and management functions which were rarely binary but often blended, by contrast occupying a standalone or hybrid status made a difference in the perception as to where the PCFSW was placed on a management/leadership spectrum. The link to senior management in the hybrid category, and the perceived proximity to practice in the standalone category were identified as important factors in determining the types of PCFSW orientation to hierarchy and to the frontline. In all of this, most PCFSWs appeared to share an uncontested notion of 'practice' as a key connection or defining character of professional identity and purpose.

In Chapter Six, the findings in relation to the implementation of the PCFSW post and the experience of undertaking the role have been conceptualized with reference to boundary spanning and complexity theory, thereby addressing the third research question explored in this study.

The findings from this research would suggest that current policy and practice in local authority statutory child protection social work has evolved assuming one sort of system - the closed, controllable expert one, while frontline practitioners have been necessarily operating within another sort, the open adaptive one. Those in positions of authority with control over policy would appear to be more likely to

operate in the ideal, expert system while those who 'do' practice, who are at the intersection of the organisation and the children and families subject to their services, operate in a real complex system. Utilising such dichotomous terminology is perhaps overly polarising, and each organisation/authority will be somewhere on the spectrum between closed controllable systems and open adaptive ones. However, the findings from this study would suggest that tensions between the two perspectives continue, such that the aspirations for reform articulated by the participants in this study have not been fully achieved. Indeed, such aspirations may not be achievable when one part of the wider system needs to be open and adaptive, yet the hierarchy or authority in the system seeks to be controllable, and hence closed.

Nonetheless, most participants to this study acknowledged the dichotomy between a closed and controllable system, expressed in the terminology of compliance, bureaucracy and managerialism, and the complex adaptive one, expressed in the terminology of direct practice, practitioners and challenge. The creation of a PCFSW function can be seen as a way of trying to reconcile the two, perhaps unrealistically so in expecting this singular initiative to span such organisational scale and complexity. Yet, in creating a PCFSW there is, implicitly at least, recognition of many of the factors of complexity; it inevitably comprises a role that ostensibly is placed to adapt and facilitate:

➢ Recognising the importance of knowledge and expertise in the professional role.
➢ Focusing on relationships and the communication therein as being a critical component of the PCFSW task.

➢ Being close to practice, and those who undertake it at the frontline, and understanding of chaos and complexity inherent in child protection work with children and families.

➢ Boundary spanning across the levels of the organisation as a complex system, with the capacity to provide feedback and challenge as part of continued evolution.

However, the expectations for the PCFSW role have not always taken account of this complexity and often appear to have been linear and singularly causal – that creating this role was going to change X, Y and Z. We have seen that such linear causality does not exist in complex adaptive systems, and indeed in this study each PCFSW role was conceived and implemented differently, in varying contexts, with a variety of tasks and functions attached. In addition, many of the functions of the role, and the tools used to fulfil them have been linear, for example audits, implementations of 'models' of practice, and training provision. The findings of this study would also suggest that the PCFSWs' spheres of influence have been linear, often linked to the managerial role, not actually being at the frontline or doing practice, and the reality of communication continuing to be experienced as top down without the opportunities or acceptance of challenge aspired for. Complexity theory would suggest that actors, if forced into closed controlled systems self-organise and implement their own street level solutions – hence PCFSWs need to be close to the complexity of practice. The experience of PCFSWs within this study would suggest that they have to a greater or lesser degree self-organised and adapted within their organisations.

The final research question for this study was to consider the implications for future policy development in statutory child protection social work. The final report of the Munro Review of Child

Protection was published in 2011 (Munro 2011b). In completing this study some seven years after the review in mid 2018, it can be suggested that recent policy decisions in child protection in England would seem to have reverted arrangements to more traditional and linear service systems. Thus, recent policy espoused in 'Putting Children First: Delivering our Vision for Excellent Children's Social Care (DfE 2016a), indicates that the Westminster government through the Department of Education is implementing a number of policy aims for local authority child protection practice that appear to align to the closed controllable system, these comprise:

➢ The designation of Practice Leaders, who are senior managers in a hierarchical role at AD/HoS/DCS level, without the link to frontline, and not directly involved in practice. It is difficult to determine what makes this Practice Leader role any different from any other senior management role, nor how this will impact upon the now established PCFSW role (see also DfE 2018c).

➢ The Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for child and family social work developed by the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families (DfE 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) are defined as assessment and accreditation criteria for social workers supporting vulnerable children and families. These comprise a list of competencies to be met by social workers at different hierarchical levels undertaking statutory child protection practice. These centrally located governmental policy developments take precedence over the Professional Capabilities Framework developed by the Social Work Reform Board, and currently held by the social work professional body, the British Association of Social Workers. This is an example where it could be argued that the techno-rationality of competencies to be assessed against has superseded the professional artistry mode of a capability framework.

➢ Leading from the development of the KSS, the DfE is implementing the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) (DfE 2016c) whereby in addition to qualification, registration, achieving the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), child and family social workers will be tested and if successful be accredited to practice. The NAAS will use a series of tests in controlled situations, and not through assessment or observation of social workers and their practice. Again, this would seem to be evidence of the expert controlled system, as opposed to the complex adaptive one where actual social work practice is located.

➢ The investment by the DfE in the development of social work qualification routes that are children and families only. Criticism of models such as Frontline is around the emphasis appearing to be training for a job rather than learning for a profession. The move from generic across the life course learning to a more specific children and family child protection emphasis could be argued as reverting to a more one-dimensional approach, whereas the reality of family life is experienced as more complex.

➢ The advent of the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care. which is in early stages of development, funded by the DfE. Its goal is to 'improve outcomes for children and their families by developing a powerful evidence base, and supporting its translation into better practice on the ground' (Goodwill 2017 p3). While a welcome investment in practice development, it is important that the application by local authorities of learning arising from this initiative, and indeed the learning itself, takes account of the complexity of the organisation and the implications of this for introducing change, a challenge that also needs a sound evidence base of what works best to introduce and embed new and better practices.

The above list of recent policy developments in statutory child protection social work in England would seem to indicate that the impact of the Munro Review of Child Protection (2010; 2011a; 2011b) has been minimal or at least muted as an influential policy driver. As we seem destined to continue on well-trodden pathways that have delivered limited success to date, future policy developments should consider the reasons why changes have not happened as aspired to, as outlined in this study. In a quote attributed to Einstein (uncited) he once said: *Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*

While my motivation for undertaking this research was linked to my experience as a Principal Child and Family Social Worker and my wish to understand why there were apparent difficulties in implementing this recommendation, it became clear that this particular post provided a lens through which the wider reform project could be viewed. In this regard, the findings can be seen to reach beyond a particular occupational position and add to our wider understanding of leadership and management, organisational culture and change, and the meaning of profession in child protection social work in England today.

This study will be made available to the PCFSW network membership and hopefully assist in the collective understanding of the challenges encountered in undertaking the role. The study will also be made available to the Association of Directors of Children's Services in England, particularly as the observations on organisational culture, complexity and change in child protection social work are intimately relevant to their strategic and operational interests. Lastly, it is intended that the thesis will lead to academic and occupational publications that will help inform ongoing debates within government,

academia and children's services about the direction that reform takes in the ever changing policy and practice terrain that is child protection and family support.

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Appendix A   Cardiff University Ethics Application

Cardiff School of Social Sciences
Head of School - Professor Amanda Coffey FAcSS

Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol Caerdydd
Pennaeth yr Ysgol Yr Athro Amanda Coffey FAcSS

STAFF, MPhil/PhD & PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH PROJECTS	
Ethical Approval Application Form	
Must be submitted at least TWO WEEKS before a School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) meeting to: *Deborah Watkins, Research and Graduate Studies Administrator* *(Email: WatkinsD2@cardiff.ac.uk / Tel Extension: 79051 / Room 0.23 Glamorgan Building)*	

SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

Please tick relevant project type:	**Staff Project** Yes	**Student Project** Yes x
Title of Project:	Principal Child and Family Social Workers: A new kind of professional leader?	
Project Start Date:	June 2015	**Project End Date: May 2016**
Name of Researcher(s)/ Student:	Marion Russell	
Signature of Lead Researcher/ Student:	**As above**	**Date: 24th April 2015**
Student Number:	C1266401	
Student's Email Address:	marniesclan@btinternet.com marussell@cornwall.gov.uk	
Supervisors:	**1 Prof Andy Pithouse**	**2 Dr Alyson Rees**
Supervisors' Signatures:	**1**	**2**
Project Funder:	**Sponsored student: Cornwall Council**	

Before completing, please now read the Application Guidance Notes at the end of this form

SECTION A: PROJECT SUMMARY

1.	**Below,** please provide a general description of your dissertation project

The Principal Child and Family Social Worker: A new kind of Professional Leader.
A mixed methods qualitative study of the new role of PCFSW in child protection in England.

Social work with children and families is part of the state. It has become increasingly affected by neo-liberalism through
    -marketisation
    -managerialism

This has affected the 'status' of the 'profession' of social workers, in that the relationship of professional/client has become one characterised by market and management. As a result, what social work does is bureaucratised and proceduralised. Distance is created between social workers and those that are affected by what they do

This is manifested in form-filling, IT work systems, and physical/geographical separation from the messiness and realities of the lives of children and families, all recognised in England by the Social Work Reform Board, and The Munro Review of Child Protection.

A number of recommendations were made to address this change, and perceived deficit. A key recommendation, accepted by the Westminster government of the time, was the creation of a Principal Child and Families Social Worker. The PCFSW was envisaged as a Practice Leader, with elements of both practice and leadership.

In 2014, the Westminster Coalition Minister for the Department for Education announced 'reform' to social work with children and families, including the new status of Practice Leader. This has not been defined. It may be that the PCFSW disappears before becoming established.

This study is to look at the role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker in England, it's implementation, if implemented what PCFSWs do and whether that makes a significant contribution to the reform agenda, if not, what does that tell us about the reform agenda.

2.	
	What are the research questions ?

A mixed method qualitative study into the new role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker will address the following question:

1. Firstly – have PCFSWs been appointed in all LA's in England?
This question will set the scene in terms of the implementation of the role as recommended by Munro.
Data will be taken from the survey of ADCS and PCFSW network in early spring 2014.
This question begins to look at the idea of professional leadership as opposed to managerialism, organisational culture, and reform.

2. If they have been appointed, how is their role configured in their organisation

- Is the role stand alone or hybrid
- What percentage of time is allocated to the role
- To what existing roles has the PCFSW been attached
- Why were they appointed in the way they were

This set of questions aims to further consider implementation, and begin to look at experience in doing so. It is anticipated that challenges will also be identified.
Themes around professional practice, leadership and managerialism are expected to arise. Further insights into organisational culture may emerge, as will the fiscal imperatives and impediments within child protection social work today.
It is further anticipated that risk and risk aversion will feature.

3. If there is no PCFSW or designate,
  - why not.
  - Does their organisation demonstrate practice leadership?
  - How?

Similar themes to above, with organisational culture and risk being a particular area to explore.
Further understanding of components of professional leadership, and how practice fits in to this will be explored.

4. Where there are PCFSWs, how has the role been implemented
  - Tasks – what do they do, and what don't they do? (function)
  - Rationales – why do they do it/why don't they do it? (identity)
  - Outcomes – what difference does it make? (culture)

This question will explore professional leadership, and the role practice has in it. Themes of technical rationality and professional artistry will be considered. The drivers for and challenges to relationship based social work are key themes

5. Practice - Can what PCFSWs do be linked to practice?
If not, what is it?
In drilling down to what PCFSWs actually do, the involvement in or avoidance of direct practice will be explored. This will develop the themes of professional leadership, and the components of it – to be a leader in social work, do you have to do social work. This links back to potential differences between leaders and managers, and key to the perspective taken will be consideration of risk.
6. Leadership - Does what PCFSWs do demonstrate Leadership?
  If not, what is it?

  This links to question 5, but will more explicitly explore what a professional leader is, how aligned with being a manager it is in child protection social work in England today, and how that fits in in the models of management in the public sector. |

3.	Who are the participants ? Directors of Children's Services/Heads of Service in England Principal Child and Family Social Workers in England
4.	How will the participants be accessed ? I am currently Chair of the Network of Principal Child and Family Social Workers in England. I work closely with The College of Social Work in England, and the Office of the Chief Social Worker. I have links through this to the ADCS. I have co-written two surveys previously with TCSW sent to ADCS and the PCFSW network. Access to participants will be through ADCS, the PCFSW network, and TCSW
5.	What sort of data will be collected ? Data from existing TCSW PCFSW surveys will be used as a starting point. Structured telephone interviews with 15 DCS/HoS – qualitative data Survey of current PCFSWs or designates Focus groups – qualitative data
6.	How and where (venue) are you undertaking your research? 1. Telephone interviews 2. Electronic Survey 3. Focus Groups at PCFSW Regional Network meetings
7.	What research methods will be used ? 1. Telephone semi-structured interviews – recorded, transcribed, thematic analysis 2. Electronic Survey – thematic questions arising from TCSW data analysis and semi-structured telephone interviews 3. Focus groups – semi structured questions arising from further data analysis

8.	What arrangements will be made to ensure anonymity and confidentiality ?		
	1. Telephone Interviews – letter of information, and electronic written consent gained. Confidentiality in data – thematic analysis with no identifying information. Analysis and discussion will be on themes		
	2. Survey will be anonymous through electronic provider such as Survey Monkey. Email contacts through TCSW. PCFSW network sent information, and participation will be opt in.		
	3. Focus Groups – while existing network and meetings will be used, participation in focus group will be voluntary and on an opt-in basis. By the time the focus groups are being held, I will no longer be Chair, and will have less apparent authority. Information on the research will be distributed, and signed written consent gained. Data will be anonymised, and will not be attributed to individuals or regions.		
	All data will be collected and analysed by myself. Emails and Survey will be administered through my employer IT, as they are my sponsor, and I am known in the network, with the TCSW and with the Office of the Chief Social Worker through my role there. Data will be stored on my home computer under password protected files.		

SECTION B: RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

9.	(a) Does your project involve children or young people under the age of 18?	**Yes**	No
	(b) If so, have you consulted the University's guidance on child protection procedures, and do you know how to respond if you have concerns?	Yes	**No**
10.	(a) Does your project involve one-to-one or other *unsupervised* research with children and young people under the age of 18 ? If **Yes**, go to 10(c)	**Yes**	No
	(b) If your project involves only *supervised* contact with children and young people under the age of 18, have you consulted the head of the institution where you are undertaking your research to establish if you need a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check? If **Yes**, and you do need a DBS check, then go to 10(c); if you do not need a DBS check, then go to Question 11.	Yes	**No**
	(c) Do you have an up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check ? (*Please give details below if you have a pending application*)	Yes	**No**
11.	Does your project include people with learning or communication difficulties?	**Yes**	No
12.	Does your project include people in custody?	**Yes**	No

13.	Is your project likely to include people involved in illegal activities?	Yes	No
14.	Does your project involve people belonging to a vulnerable group, other than those listed above?	Yes	No
15.	Does your project include people who are, or are likely to become your clients or clients of the department in which you work?	Yes	No

SECTION C: CONSENT PROCEDURES

16.	Will you obtain written consent for participation ?	Yes	No
17.	What procedures will you use to obtain informed consent from participants ? Telephone interviews – email written consent and verbal confirmation recorded in phone call Survey - statement in sending out that undertaking survey is optional, but undertaking is giving consent Focus Groups – written material and consent forms will be sent out in negotiation of focus groups, prior to focus groups, and paper copies taken on the day		
18.	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed ?	Yes	No
19.	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary ?	Yes	No
20.	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reasons ?	Yes	No
21.	Will you give potential participants a significant period of time to consider participation ?	Yes	No
22.	Does your project provide for people for whom English / Welsh is not their first language?	Yes	No

SECTION D: POTENTIAL HARMS ARISING FROM THE PROJECT

23.	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?	Yes	No
24.	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation?	Yes	No

| 25. | **Below, please identify any potential for harm (to yourself or participants) that might arise from the way the research is conducted** (see related guidance: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchethics/guidance/index.html) |
| | PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE BOX BLANK |

I have had a specific role as Chair of the Network, which can be considered to have authority. I will no longer be in that role. The subject of the study is an ongoing professional debate with senior practitioners/leaders who are currently participating by virtue of their role. It is accepted that we have different views on the matter, and making them known should not be problematic.

| 26. | **Below, please set out the measures you will put in place to control possible harms to yourself or participants** (see related guidance: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchethics/guidance/index.html) |
| | PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE BOX BLANK |

Confirmation of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research.

SECTION E: RESEARCH SAFETY

Before completing this section, you should consult the document 'Guidance for Applicants' – and the information in this under 'Managing the risks associated with SOCSI research':
http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchethics/guidance/index.html

| 27. | Are there any realistic safety risks associated with your fieldwork? | **Yes** | No |
| 28. | Have you taken into account the Cardiff University guidance on safety in fieldwork / for lone workers ? | Yes | **No** |

SECTION F: DATA COLLECTION

The SREC appreciates that this question will not in general relate to research undertaken in SOCSI. However, for further University guidance and information on the Human Tissue Act, please see:
http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/humantissueact/index.html

| 29. | Does the study involve the collection or use of human tissue (including, but not limited to, blood, saliva and bodily waste fluids)? | **Yes** | No |
| | If **Yes**, a copy of the submitted application form and any supporting documentation must be emailed to the Human Tissue Act Compliance Team (**HTA@cf.ac.uk**). A decision will only be made once these documents have been received. | | |

SECTION G: DATA PROTECTION[1]

30.	(a) Are you collecting sensitive data ?	Yes	No
	If **Yes**, how will you employ a more rigorous consent procedure ?		
	(b) Are you collecting identifiable data ?	Yes	No
	If **Yes**, how you will anonymise this data ? The data will be codified in a thematic analysis, and therefore will not be identifiable or attributable to individuals		
	(c) Will any non-anonymised and/or personalised data be retained ?	Yes	No
	If **Yes**, what are the reasons for this and how you will handle the data ?		
	(d) Data should be retained for at least five years or two years post-publication. Have you noted and included this information in your Information Sheet(s) ?	Yes	No
31.	**Below,** please detail how you will deal with data security		
	Data will be held on Cardiff University secure storage system.		

If there are any other potential ethical issues that you think the Committee should consider please explain them on a separate sheet. It is your obligation to bring to the attention of the Committee any ethical issues not covered on this form.

Appendix B   ADCS Ethics Application and Approval

ADCS
Leading Children's Services

Application form for support from the ADCS research group

Name of organisation:
Individual Applicant – Marion Russell

Address of organisation:
3ʳᵈ Floor West Wing **New County Hall** **1 Treyew Road** **Truro** **TR1 3AY**

Name, email address, and qualifications of person applying for approval and of other researchers involved in the project.

(please give highest level of relevant qualification and specify who will be making contact with children's services departments on behalf of the project)

Applicant:

Name:	Email address:	Qualifications:
Marion Russell	**marussell@cornwall.gov.uk**	**MA Hons, MSW** **Research for Professional Doctorate**

Other researchers:

Name:	Email address:	Qualifications:

Title of project:
(this must be the title you use when making contact with children's services departments)

Principal Child and Family Social Workers: A new kind of professional leader?

Subject area to be covered:

The Principal Child and Family Social Worker: A new kind of Professional Leader.
A mixed methods qualitative study of the new role of PCFSW in child protection in England.

Social work with children and families is part of the state. It has become increasingly affected by neo-liberalism through
        -marketisation
        -managerialism

This has affected the 'status' of the 'profession' of social workers, in that the relationship of professional/client has become one characterised by market and management. As a result, what social work does is bureaucratised and proceduralised. Distance is created between social workers and those that are affected by what they do

This is manifested in form-filling, IT work systems, and physical/geographical separation from the messiness and realities of the lives of children and families, all recognised in England by the Social Work Reform Board, and The Munro Review of Child Protection.

A number of recommendations were made to address this change, and perceived deficit. A key recommendation, accepted by the Westminster government of the time, was the creation of a Principal Child and Families Social Worker. The PCFSW was envisaged as a Practice Leader, with elements of both practice and leadership.

In 2014, the Westminster Coalition Minister for the Department for Education announced 'reform' to social work with children and families, including the new status of Practice Leader. This has not been defined. It may be that the PCFSW disappears before becoming established.

This study is to look at the role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker in England, it's implementation, if implemented what PCFSWs do and whether that makes a significant contribution to the reform agenda, if not, what does that tell us about the reform agenda.

Purpose:

Thesis for Professional Doctorate at Cardiff University

Cntd…

Methods to be used:
(please give outlines of the questionnaires or interview schedules, sample populations and any other relevant information)

Data from existing TCSW PCFSW surveys will be used as a starting point.

Structured telephone interviews with 15 DCS/HoS – qualitative data

Survey of current PCFSWs or designates - electronic

Focus groups of PCFSWs – qualitative data

-

A mixed method qualitative study into the new role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker will address the following question:

1. Firstly – have PCFSWs been appointed in all LA's in England?

This question will set the scene in terms of the implementation of the role as recommended by Munro.

Data will be taken from the survey of ADCS and PCFSW network in early spring 2014. This question begins to look at the idea of professional leadership as opposed to managerialism, organisational culture, and reform.

2. If they have been appointed, how is their role configured in their organisation

- Is the role stand alone or hybrid
- What percentage of time is allocated to the role
- To what existing roles has the PCFSW been attached
- Why were they appointed in the way they were

This set of questions aims to further consider implementation, and begin to look at experience in doing so. It is anticipated that challenges will also be identified.

Themes around professional practice, leadership and managerialism are expected to arise. Further insights into organisational culture may emerge, as will the fiscal imperatives and impediments within child protection social work today.

It is further anticipated that risk and risk aversion will feature.

3. If there is no PCFSW or designate,
   - why not.
   - Does their organisation demonstrate practice leadership?
   - How?

Similar themes to above, with organisational culture and risk being a particular area to explore.

Further understanding of components of professional leadership, and how practice fits in to this will be explored.

4. Where there are PCFSWs, how has the role been implemented
   - Tasks – what do they do, and what don't they do? (function)
   - Rationales – why do they do it/why don't they do it? (identity)
   - Outcomes – what difference does it make? (culture)

This question will explore professional leadership, and the role practice has in it. Themes of technical rationality and professional artistry will be considered. The drivers for and challenges to relationship based social work are key themes

5. Practice - Can what PCFSWs do be linked to practice?
If not, what is it?
In drilling down to what PCFSWs actually do, the involvement in or avoidance of direct practice will be explored. This will develop the themes of professional leadership, and the components of it – to be a leader in social work, do you have to do social work. This links back to potential differences between leaders and managers, and key to the perspective taken will be consideration of risk.

6. Leadership - Does what PCFSWs do demonstrate Leadership?
   If not, what is it?

   This links to question 5, but will more explicitly explore what a professional leader is, how aligned with   being a manager it is in child protection social work in England today, and how that fits in in the models of management in the public sector.

Research Ethics:

How are you addressing the ethical implications of your work – eg informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality?

Please see Ethics approval attached from Cardiff University
-
All participants will be given information about the research.
Informed consent will be sought – for the telephone interviews a form will be sent to participants in advance (attached)

For PCFSW survey – within electronic survey will be clear statement and requirement of consent at beginning.

All data will be anonymised, processed individually by me, and stored securely at Cardiff University

Does your research involve potentially vulnerable groups, such as children? If so, what particular precautions will you be taking?

No

If fieldwork (interviews, group discussions etc) is to take place with children or vulnerable adults, have all the staff who will undertake these been CRB cleared?

n/a

Timetable:

July/August 2015 – Telephone interviews
Sept/Oct 2015 - Survey

Overall cost of project:
(please include funding sources and commissioners)

None – this is individual research for doctoral thesis

Connections with other pieces of research already completed or underway:

None

Children's services departments to be approached:
(details of how many and which)

15 DCS/HoS
PCFSW network

Potential value to children's services departments:

Understanding of the implementation of Munro reforms, what has worked, what hasn't, and an exploration of some of the reasons why

Likely areas and scale of costs to children's services departments in supplying data or otherwise enabling the project to proceed
(for example, time needed for staff to complete questionnaire)

Plans for the dissemination of findings:

Doctoral thesis
Likely to lead to publishing of journal articles in peer review journals

Address to which invoice for fee should be sent, if different from above:

As above

Signed: *Marion M Russell*

Name in block capitals: Marion Russell

Date: 3rd July 2015

Marion M Russell

Marion Russell

rd
3   Floor West Wing New County Hall
1 Treyew Road Truro TR1 3AY By email 20 July 2015 Dear Marion,

Request for ADCS research approval – Marion Russell
- Principal Child and Family Social Workers: A new kind of professional leader?

ADCS ref: RGE1500703

I write on behalf of Sue Wald, Chair of the ADCS Research Group regarding your request for research approval for the above named project.

The Research Group has considered your request and given its approval believing that the results of the project will be useful to local authorities. We would be grateful if when contacting local authorities you would quote the reference above.

Some points have been raised for your consideration...

The group believe that this may be useful but that as systems have moved on so much that we are not sure how many LAs will have this role or be able to use the research to reshape it by the time it is finished. The group would suggest strongly that heads of service or ADs to be interviewed as there is uncertainty around DCSs having the detailed knowledge about impact. As the interview schedule is high level, the project may become more exploratory. Overall, we are happy to approve as the project may be helpful for some LAs.

The Group's encouragement to respond to the survey will be communicated to ADCS members in local authorities in England in the next edition of the ADCS weekly e-bulletin which is produced and circulated on Friday afternoons. A list of approved research projects can be found on the ADCS website. The Research Group wishes you well with the project.

As mentioned in the ADCS Guidelines for Research Approvals, please send the Research Group a copy of the full report and the summary of your main findings when the research is complete.

If you have any queries about this feedback, please contact me in the first instance. Yours sincerely

Gary Dumbarton, **on behalf of Sue Wald, Chair of the ADCS Research Group**

The Association of Directors of Children's Services

Research Group, The ADCS Ltd, Piccadilly House, 49 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2AP
Tel: 0161 826 9484 Email: research@adcs.org.uk Website: www.adcs.org.uk/research Registered
in England & Wales. Company Number: 06801922. VAT registration number: 948814381.

Appendix C   Letter to DCS/AD/HoS and Interview Questions

Dear Colleague

I am the Principal Child and Family Social Worker for Cornwall, a post I have held since December 2011.

Since October 2012 I have been the Chair of the National network of Principal Child and Family Social Workers, facilitated by The College of Social Work.

I am currently doing a Professional Doctorate at Cardiff University, and my research is around the implementation of the Munro reforms, specifically in relation to the Principal Child and Family Social Worker.

Using the data from TCSW survey last year as a starting point, I am beginning to look more closely at the reasons why authorities might or might not have appointed PCFSWs, and the experiences they have in both respects.

For the next part of my research, I am hoping to conduct telephone interviews with 15 DCS/HoS as follows:

- o 5 who have a full time standalone PCFSW
- o 5 who have a hybrid PCFSW (as part of another role in the organisation)
- o 5 who do not have a PCFSW

The interviews will be semi-structured, and I will send the questions beforehand. I would anticipate the interviews would last 30-40 minutes. They will be recorded and transcribed by me to allow thematic analysis. All data will be made anonymous and stored securely within Cardiff University's data repository. No participants will be identified in the research.

If you are willing to be take part in this and be interviewed, please contact me as follows:

marussell@cornwall.gov.uk
01872 326955 / 07772565717

It would be helpful if you could indicate which category your PCFSW falls in to.

Thank you for considering this

Regards

Marion

Dear Colleague   (Standalone Role)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project.

I would like to undertake a 30-40 minute telephone interview with you with regard to Principal Child and Family Social Workers.

This is a mixed methodology research project, part of which is interviewing a small number of DCS/Heads of Service to gain a deeper understanding of why the role has or has not been established in different local authorities.

The interview will be semi-structured – below are the questions that I would like to cover.

- ➢ Why did you decide to have a PCFSW?

- ➢ How long have you had one?

- ➢ Why did you create a standalone post?

- ➢ What level are they in the organisation, and why?

- ➢ What does the PCFSW do?

- ➢ Is there anything you would like them to do that they don't? Why is that?

- ➢ What has facilitated the role, and what has hindered it?

- ➢ What do you think are the benefits of having a PCFSW in the way that you do? Are there any downsides to this?

- ➢ What overall difference do you think having a PCFSW has made in your organisation?

- ➢ Will you continue to have a PCFSW? Why?

- ➢ Is there anything you would like to add?

I look forward to talking to you soon

Best wishes

Marion Russell
PCFSW Cornwall

Dear Colleague   (Hybrid Role)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project.

I would like to undertake a 30-40 minute telephone interview with you with regard to Principal Child and Family Social Workers.

This is a mixed methodology research project, part of which is interviewing a small number of DCS/Heads of Service to gain a deeper understanding of why the role has or has not been established in different local authorities.

The interview will be semi-structured – below are the questions that I would like to cover.

➢ Why was the decision made to have to have a designated PCFSW?

➢ How long have you had one?

➢ Why did you configure the PCFSW role in this way?

➢ What role in the organisation is the post aligned to?

➢ What level are they in the organisation, and why?

➢ What does the PCFSW do?

➢ Is there anything you think is part of their role that they don't do? Why do you think that is?

➢ What has facilitated the role, and what has hindered it?

➢ What do you think are the benefits of having a PCFSW in the way that you do? Are there any downsides to this?

➢ What overall difference do you think having a PCFSW has made in your organisation?

➢ Will you continue to have a PCFSW? Why?

➢ Is there anything you would like to add?

I look forward to talking to you soon

Best wishes

Marion Russell
PCFSW Cornwall

Dear Colleague   (No PCFSW)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project.

I would like to undertake a 20-30 minute telephone interview with you with regard to Principal Child and Family Social Workers.

This is a mixed methodology research project, part of which is interviewing a small number of DCS/Heads of Service to gain a deeper understanding of why the role has or has not been established in different local authorities.

The interview will be semi-structured – below are the questions that I would like to cover.

➢ Have you made an active decision not to have a PCFSW?

    o If yes, what are your reasons?

    o If no, why don't you have one?

➢ If you had a PCFSW, what role/tasks would you envisage them undertaking?

➢ Who in your organisation currently fulfils these role/tasks?

➢ Have you experienced culture change in the organisation in the last 3 years?

➢ How has this come about? What roles have been key in this?

➢ Can you see any benefits to having a PCFSW?

➢ What would be the downsides to having a PCFSW?

➢ Will you appoint a PCFSW in the future?

I look forward to talking to you soon

Best wishes

Marion Russell
PCFSW Cornwall

Appendix D   Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions – Principal Child and Family Social Workers

1. Experience of being in a new post

   ➢ What were the first few months in post like – your initial impressions?
   ➢ What sort of preparation did you have?
   ➢ Were there clear guidelines/parameters of the role?
   ➢ How much did you carve out the post?
   ➢ How did your initial experiences match with your expectations

2. To what extent do you think your attributes, what you bring as an individual, contributes to the role?

   ➢ How much does trust, respect, confidence in you feature? By whom?
   ➢ How much does the authority/position of the role contribute to you carrying it out?
   ➢ Do you exert influence in your role? How wide does it go?
   ➢ How easy is it to move across the different functions of the role?

3. What does it mean we w say represent the front line – what does that look like?

   ➢ PCFSWs are talked of as a bridge – how does that work from the top down, as well as from the bottom up?

4. Practice.
   In my research so far, there seems to be 3 ways PCFSWs engage with practice:
   -   Development
   -   Standards
   -   Doing it

   ➢ What does engagement in practice mean to you?
   ➢ Where do you engage in practice?

5. Where does your role fit with organisational culture and change?

   ➢ Give examples where you feel you have shown leadership in this
   ➢ How did your influence mean things went one way rather than another way?

6. What have been your achievements in the role?

   ➢ What would you have liked to have been different?
January 2016