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**THE IMPACT OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT ON
THE ROLES OF ELECTED COUNCILLORS,
MANAGEMENT AND THE COMMUNITY SECTOR IN
IRISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT: A CASE STUDY OF
CORK COUNTY COUNCIL**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
National University of Ireland, Cork for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy (PhD).

October 2000

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**DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO MY PARENTS,
PAT AND MARY (R.I.P.) QUINLIVAN**

**Every life has its meaning. Mine sometimes seems to me
a mere kaleidoscope of events and impressions in
which the passage of time is a single instant.
The person struggling through the business of some meeting
with government officials is also the child preparing mischief.
And the meaning of life can have as much to do with the
people and experiences encountered along the way as
anything innate in character.**

**- James McDyer, P.P.
Fr. McDyer of Glencolumbkille: An Autobiography
(1962)**

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- Aodh Quinlivan, October 2000.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN TEXT

NPM	-	New Public Management
BLG	-	Better Local Government: A Programme for Change
SPCs	-	Strategic Policy Committees
VFM	-	Value for Money
FOI	-	Freedom of Information
DOELG	-	Department of the Environment and Local Government
CCC	-	Cork County Council
TD	-	Teachta Dala
NHS	-	National Health Service
IPA	-	Institute of Public Administration
ADM	-	Area Development Management
CDB	-	County/City Development Board
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
Task Force	-	Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems
TQM	-	Total Quality Management
MBO	-	Management by Objectives
IT	-	Information Technology
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
NESC	-	National Economic and Social Council

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Aim of Research

The fundamental aim of this thesis is to examine the effect of New Public Management (NPM) on the traditional roles of elected representatives, management and community activists in Irish local government. This will be achieved through a case study analysis of one local authority, Cork County Council. NPM promises greater democracy in decision-making. Therefore, one can hypothesise that the roles of the three key groupings identified will become more influenced by principles of participatory decision-making. Thus, a number of related questions will be addressed by this work, such as, have the local elected representatives been empowered by NPM? Has a managerial revolution taken place? Has local democracy been enhanced by more effective community participation? It will be seen in chapter 2 that these questions have not been adequately addressed to date in NPM literature.

The three groups identified can be regarded as stakeholders although the researcher is cautious in using this term because of its value-laden nature. Essentially, in terms of Cork County Council, stakeholders can be defined as decision-makers and people within the organisation and its environment who are interested in or could be affected directly or indirectly by organisational performance. This is an all-embracing

definition and includes all citizens, residents, community groups and client organisations. It is in this context that the term 'stakeholder' should be understood when it is occasionally used in this thesis. In this case, the perceptions of elected councillors, management and community representatives with regard to their changing roles are as significant as the changes themselves.

The chapter begins with a brief account of the background to this research. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology which is used and then concludes with short statements about the remaining chapters in the thesis.

1.2 Background to the Research Project

New Public Management has come to dominate public sector thinking at the end of the 20th century. While the development of NPM from the ashes of classical public administration will be examined in length in Chapter 2, it is appropriate at this point to outline what is meant by NPM.

Boyle (1995, p.17) describes the approach as follows:

It differs from traditional Public Administration based on bureaucratic control mechanisms, because it strives to be more like private business management and uses alternative control mechanisms, such as contracting-out, or greater devolution and team based work, derived from theoretical developments.

Douglas (1982) has categorised this phenomenon as moving the public sector organisation 'down-grid' and 'down-group'. Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.9) explain:

Going down-group means making the public sector less distinctive as a unit from the private sector (in personnel, reward structure, methods of doing business). Going down-grid means reducing the extent to which discretionary power (particularly over staff, contracts and money) is limited by uniform and general rules of procedure.

Such developments, which seek to make the public sector more business-like, are currently altering the performance of Irish public sector organisations. However, at this juncture, it is appropriate to take a step back and ask the fundamental question as to whether or not it is justified to apply management theory to the public sector?

As Boyle (1995) notes, the functions of management - planning, organisation, co-ordination, command and control - are performed in both the public and private sectors. Scarce resources have to be managed effectively and efficiently to produce the desired end result. But what is the desired end result? Herein lies the essential difference. Put simply, private sector firms exist to maximise profit whereas the public sector exists to provide services based on need as opposed to profit margin. Public sector organisations are also in the business of regulation and providing services to people who do not necessarily desire them. The value system is therefore entirely different, as Boyle (1995, p.34) observes:

In the public sector, equity of treatment, transparency and accountability are basic values. In the private sector, values derive from the business community, the boards and shareholders of companies. In the public sector, values drive from the community through the political process.

In the context of Irish local government, NPM has become a vague umbrella term for change, covering each reform idea (and the principles underpinning them) during the 1990s. These can be listed as follows:

- SMI - Strategic Management Initiative
- BLG - Better Local Government: A Programme for Change
- SPCs - Strategic Policy Committees
- VFM - Value for Money
- FOI - Freedom of Information

The Strategic Management Initiative can be regarded as the Irish variant of NPM. SMI was launched in the Irish civil service by Albert Reynolds, TD, (Taoiseach at that time) in February 1994 and was subsequently extended to local government and the wider public service in March 1996. The key themes of SMI are: improved customer service; improved quality of delivery; better management of resources; the setting of standards of service; the establishment of procedures to measure performance.

Better Local Government - A Programme for Change was published by the Department of the Environment in December 1996. Effectively, the BLG is a strategy programme for reform of Irish local government, being the culmination of various reports which had been commissioned to address the most serious problems in the system. The Programme is based on four core principles: enhancing local democracy and widening participation; serving the customer better; developing efficiency in local government; providing proper resources to allow local government to fulfil the role assigned to it.

Established from the first principle of BLG, the aim of the SPCs is to totally revamp the committee structure in local authorities. The concept is based on two important aims: enhancing the role of local councillors in policy formulation and strengthening local representative democracy by increasing the involvement of local people in meeting community needs.

To this end, each committee has at least one third of its membership drawn from external interests and sectors relevant to the committee's work.

New Zealand was the first country to effectively introduce NPM thinking into its public sector. This happened in the 1980s in an attempt to contain and restrain an overheated economy which was being dangerously fuelled by excessive public sector spending. Accordingly, from the beginning, strict financial management has been at the heart of reform in the sector. This is no different in the Irish context where efficient use of resources forms a major plank of the BLG initiative. Irish local authorities now advocate a value for money approach, with increased audit procedures and an accounting system which is being brought into line with private sector practice.

The Freedom of Information Act 1997 represents another reforming measure for the Irish public service. Its commencement date for local authorities was October 21st 1998 and already this legislation has altered the work practices and mind-sets of local authority officials and councillors alike. The Act requires the publication of two important documents: a Section 15 manual outlining what the authority does; a Section 16 manual detailing how the authority carries out its duties and arrives at its decisions. FOI was introduced for a variety of reasons: to increase government openness; to increase accountability; to improve

public participation in government; to give people access to their records and allow them to amend them if incorrect.

Each of these five elements of NPM in Irish local government will be examined in detail in chapter 3 when the history and development of the system is addressed.

1.3 Methodology

This research is based on a case study of Cork County Council over the four year period from March 1996 (when SMI was extended to local government) to March 2000. It is supported by in-depth interviews, as well as observation and access to records from the authority. Two theoretical models are used as analytical tools in assessing the impact of NPM in the council and these will be discussed in chapter 2.

Case studies are used extensively in social science research and form the basis of many reports and dissertations. They are particularly prevalent in the political science and public administration research domains as well as in sociology and organisational studies. However, as Yin (1994, p.1) notes, other methods of social science research exist including experiments, surveys, histories and archival studies. Each method has strengths and weaknesses and an argument can be made for each, depending upon three conditions.

- (a) the type of the research question;
- (b) the control of the investigator over actual behavioural events;
- (c) the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena.

Yin (1994, p.8) converts this into table form in an effort to examine the situations in which different research strategies are most appropriate (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Relevant Situations for Different Research Strategies

Strategy	form of research question	requires control over behavioural event?	focuses on contemporary events?
experiment	how, why	yes	yes
survey	who, what, where, how many, how much	no	yes
archival analysis	who, what, where, how many, how much	no	yes/no
history	how, why	no	no
case study	how, why	no	yes

In the present research setting of Cork County Council it can be seen that the case study approach is favourable. The research questions at the core of this thesis typically take the “how” or “why” format. Thus, the key questions are:-

How has NPM been adopted in the organisation?

Why did Cork County Council take the particular approach that it did in terms of SMI?

How has NPM impacted on the roles of management, elected representatives and community participants?

“How” and “Why” questions tend to be explanatory by nature and lend themselves to the case study method. Equally the case study does not require control over behavioural events. In fact, this criteria is unsuited to most research and is generally only applicable in experiments. This research also has a definite focus on contemporary events. While a certain historical retrospection is required to understand the evolution of NPM and the development of the Irish local government system, the primary concentration is on how NPM is impacting on a local authority at a specific point in time. Therefore, the case study is preferred when explaining contemporary events within their real-life context but when the relevant factors cannot be manipulated. The researcher does not seek to manipulate factors but hopes to influence the organisation or research setting based on the analysis and evaluation carried out. Furthermore, Yin (1994, p.8) observes, “the case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually found in the historian’s repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing”.

Both of these tools are used in this thesis and they highlight the fact that in conducting the case study, evidence can be collected in a variety of ways. As well as interviews and observation, other sources are documentation, archival records, participant-observation and physical

artefacts. Typically, as in this particular study, a combination of sources is utilised.

Despite its prevalence in social science research the case study is sometimes characterised as a weak and imprecise method with doubts about objectivity. Questions arising concerning lack of rigour or objectivity can only be allayed by the professional and analytical qualities of the researcher himself/herself. Robert Yin, who is cited regularly in this chapter, is the most pre-eminent scholar of the case study approach. He draws attention to three traditional prejudices against case study research (1994, pp.9-11).

(a) Confusion between case study teaching and case study research

In the world of teaching, it is not uncommon for the practitioner to alter details in a case study to highlight or demonstrate a point. Clearly, this is not permitted in case study research as an objective and neutral bias must be maintained.¹ Criticisms of the case study research approach sometimes arise from confusion with manipulations in case study teaching.

¹ It is difficult to completely eliminate bias in research but this is not a problem solely associated with case studies. Yin (1994, p.10) notes that bias can enter all forms of research. e.g. see Rosenthal (1966) with regard to experiments; Sudman and Bradburn (1982) - questionnaires; Gottschalk (1968) - historical research.

(b) Little basis for scientific generalisation

The problem of generalising from a particular case study is a complex one. Stake, (1995, p.41) points out, "in qualitative studies, research questions typically orient to cases or phenomena, seeking patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships".

For example, "what happens to relationships amongst management, elected representatives and community participants from the application of NPM changes in Cork County Council?"

This researcher believes that it is legitimate for the investigator to expand and generalise theories from a single case study. The primary aim of this thesis is to evaluate the impact of NPM on Cork County Council. This organisation has been selected as the researcher is an employee of the local authority and a practitioner perspective is utilised. Paradoxically, Cork County Council has unique characteristics as well as being representative of local authorities in Ireland who each operate under the same legal and functional system. Generalised evaluations of NPM in Irish local government can be realised from the case study. This, however, is a secondary aim of the research.²

² In their single case study, Lipset, Trow and Coleman (1956) had the goal of carrying out a 'generalising' and not a 'particularising' analysis.

(c) Takes too long and results in massive, unreadable documents

Traditionally, some case studies have warranted this criticism. Essentially however it is the researcher who dictates these matters and there is no single method or type of case study. Each is different and it is not necessary for a study to take a long time. Yin (1994, p.10) argues that it is common for the case study to be confused with an ethnography which typically require lengthy time periods. Furthermore, it is the duty of the researcher to ensure that his/her work is precise and readable and not cumbersome and incomprehensible.

Significantly, case studies can remain difficult to conduct, depending on the skill of the researcher and the particular situation being investigated. Hoaglin *et al.* (1982, p.134) note:

Most people feel that they can prepare a case study, and nearly all of us believe we can understand one. Since neither view is well founded, the case study receives a good deal of approbation it does not deserve.

Stake (1995, p.91) observes that the case researcher plays a variety of roles from teacher, to advocate, to biographer. In this study the researcher's role as evaluator is the dominant one. Stake (1995, p.95/96) asserts, "all evaluation studies are case studies. The program, person or agency being evaluated is the case. The study is, at least in part, a search for merit and shortcomings of that case".

Accordingly, the case study method can be defined in terms of a tool for doing evaluation. Again, it should be noted that in this regard, the case study can be confused with ethnography and grounded theory (Yin, 1993, p.55).

Yin (1993) has constructed a table in which he compares four evaluation methods - case study, ethnography, grounded theory, quasi-experimentation (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

Differences in Assumptions Among Four Evaluation Methods

TYPES OF EVALUATION					
		Case Study	Ethnography	Grounded Theory	Quasi-Experiment
	Design:				
1.	Assumes a single objective reality that can be investigated by following the traditional rules of scientific inquiry	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
2.	Can be used for theory-building	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3.	Also favours theory-testing	Yes	No	No	Yes
4.	Considers context as essential part of phenomenon of being evaluated	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Data Collection and Analysis:				
5.	Favoured data collection technique	Multiple	Participant observation	Multiple	Multiple
6.	Type of data to be analysed	Quantitative or qualitative	Mostly qualitative	Qualitative only	Mostly quantitative

It is apparent from this table that the case study is a valuable method of evaluation. Combining all the elements discussed in this section Yin (1994, p.59) defines the case study with confidence as:

An empirical inquiry and evaluation method which investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, addresses a situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and uses multiple sources of evidence.

This sums up the aims of this research thesis, as does Schramm (1971, p.12) who states, "the essence of a case study, the central tendency amongst all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result".

While the case study is the essential methodology of this thesis, there is also a strong element of participant/practitioner research which will be addressed in section 2.6 when the Susman and Evered (1978) model is presented. Practitioner research has much to contribute to the growing body of work on public sector management. Fuller and Petch (1995, p.9) argue that the practitioner may have advantages over the traditional researcher due to the fact that he/she will have an unequalled degree of insight into the problems of an organisation because of day-to-day experience. They note (p.9):

External researchers are inevitably at a remove from the front line and commonly need intensive discussions with practitioners to confirm or refine definitions of what is important or what makes most sense.

A further significant advantage is that practitioners will usually have knowledge of, and access to, sources of data within their organisation. The practitioner will also have a greater appreciation of the quality of the records. This is especially true in public sector organisations, such as local authorities, where the official minutes of a council or committee meeting tend to merely note the decision taken and do not capture the extent of the debate and the stances adopted.

Conversely, there are difficulties with practitioner research, primarily centred around the closeness to work practices and terminology which can cloud independent objectivity. To a lesser or greater extent practitioner research will be affected by the personal characteristics and orientations of researchers and organisational insiders (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p.75) and also the interpersonal relationships and interactions which exist between them (Gartrell, 1979).

While the question of bias can never be totally eliminated, a number of safeguards have been employed in this research. One is the use of multiple interviewees to access multiple perspectives (Aunger, 1994) which acts as a reliability test. Another such test which has been adopted

to gain multiple perspectives is informal feedback from other researchers (Guba, 1981) who are knowledgeable about the case study setting. The researcher also believes that the concern for objectivity is eased by the prolonged engagement of this practitioner study, over a four year period. Ely *et al.* (1991, p.51) comment:

with the two intertwined activities of prolonged engagement and persistent observation, qualitative researchers work to be accepted and trusted in their roles, to construct deep understandings about what they are studying, and to have some basis for deciding what is important and relevant and what is not.

The explicit aim of this practitioner research is knowledge generation and theoretical development. As such, it is educational by nature, as explained by Park (1993, p.3):

education here is to be understood not in the sense of the didactic transmission of knowledge.....but rather in the sense of learning by searching, or researching. The result of this kind of activity is living knowledge.

1.4 Chapter Plan

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature on NPM

The aim of this section of the thesis is to trace the development of public administration to the current point where it has effectively been replaced by public management. The literature on NPM will be examined and discussed, highlighting the research which has already been done in this area and pointing out gaps which this thesis attempts to redress. The chapter will conclude by introducing the two theoretical models which will be used as analytical tools at a later stage. These are the Susman and Evered Action Research Model (1978) and the Dunleavy and Hood Costs and Problems Critique Model (1994).

Chapter 3: Local Government in Ireland

As previously highlighted, NPM in Ireland covers a variety of initiatives, SMI, BLG etc. These are all aimed at reforming the local government system which has been in place since 1898. Therefore, it is important to trace the history of Irish local government and highlight the weaknesses which led to the conclusion by central government that reform was needed. The latter sections of the chapter will be devoted to an examination of the NPM changes which have been mentioned in chapter 1 and also a presentation of the case study setting, i.e. Cork County Council.

Chapter 4: Elected Representatives

Here, the role (perceived and actual) of the local councillor is analysed. An evaluation is then made on the effects, if any, of NPM on this role. This is facilitated by the use of in-depth interview material from elected representatives themselves.

Chapter 5: Management

In this chapter, the evolving role of the manager is discussed in the context of SMI, BLG and other reforms currently altering the operations of local government in Ireland. Senior managers in Cork County Council are analysed with a concentration on the relationships which are developing with elected members and the community sector.

Chapter 6: The Community Sector

Literature on the concept of 'community' is reviewed in the first sections of this chapter. The claims made for increased community participation under NPM are then analysed. Again, the use of interviews with community representatives in Cork county are the basis for forming views and judgements about the impact of NPM on civic society.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The final chapter addresses the fundamental questions which have been posed by the research, through the application of two analytical models. The SMI process in Cork County Council is evaluated and the attitudes

of the research's three key stakeholder groupings - elected members, top management, community representatives - to NPM changes in the organisation are captured. This analysis facilitates a discussion on the roles and evolving relationships of the three groupings - the primary question and research aim of this thesis. A broader focus is then taken with a discussion on the impact of NPM philosophies at a general level on Irish local government and in the public sector.

CHAPTER 2

EXAMINING NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

2.1 Chapter Aim

This chapter is a detailed one and is important in developing an understanding of New Public Management (NPM). At the outset, the development of public administration is carefully traced in parallel with management theory. In this way, the background to public management is clearly linked to organisation theory. The origins of NPM are then investigated and each factor (referred to as 'The Forces of Change') is examined and its influence described. Having outlined the evolution of NPM, the following sections of this chapter refer to current literature and academic thinking on the subject. The chapter concludes by summarising and evaluating the literature which has been produced to date on NPM as well as pointing to the remainder of the thesis and how the theoretical models are to be used.

2.2 From Public Administration to Public Management

Research in the field of public administration is challenging as it is a subject area characterised by change. The intellectual development of the subject has been described by Henry (1980, p.26) as “ninety years in a quandary”. Twenty years later, the enormity of the discipline can still give the researcher nightmares. Public administration is essentially a discipline of civilisation and Newland (1994, p.ix) states that such disciplines are about:

the struggle for knowledge: how to gain, expand, understand, and use it responsibly; how to maintain a balance of humility, hope, and informed self-confidence in the process involved; and how to channel the efforts creatively to facilitate transformational achievement.

This daunting definition reflects the fact that public administration readily employs disciplines from a variety of sources. Barrington (1980, p.4) captures this transdisciplinary compass:

Public Administration is like the practice of medicine, it is concerned with the skilled and detailed application of a variety of sciences. The sciences may be: law, economics, sociology, mathematics, politics, engineering or a host of others applicable to the problems with which public bodies are concerned.

A distinguishing feature of public administration is that it concerns people and their activities and so “inquiry into it must contend with human purposes and ways to accomplish them” (Newland, 1994, p.ix). Therefore

it also comes under the umbrella of humanities studies as a social science. Much of the literature produced to date has taken the form of anecdotal professional introspection which has led to some critics, such as White and Adams (1994), to claim that research, scholarship, and professional practice in public administration need to be improved. Since that time there has been some evidence of improvements, such as in the writings of Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald and Pettigrew (1996); Kickert (1997); Hood (1998); Premfors (1998) and Common (1998).³

It is important not to underestimate the importance of public administration. While the 'Information Age' has created a world fuelled by cyberspace, the internet and an increasing stream of techno-driven products which radically change living and working environments, this remains also an administrative age. McRae and Pitt (1980, p.2) correctly state:

With some exceptions, we are born in organisations, educated in organisations and we die in organisations. Even if we escape membership of organisations, we are unlikely to escape their influence for they are part and parcel of our society.

The link between organisation and administration is a strong one as both are concerned with ends and means.

³ The relevance of NPM ideas to third world countries are developed by Turner and Hulme (1997). *Governance, Administration and Development*.

Consequently, when one states that the organisation remains all-pervasive in society, it is logical to assume the significance of administrators as "administration is the co-ordination of men and materials within organisations for the accomplishment of identifiable purposes" (McRae and Pitt, 1980, p.7). Thus, administration in both private and public organisations is ultimately concerned with 'accomplishment of identifiable purposes'. However, the establishment and identification of these identifiable purposes is significantly different. Denhardt (1990, p.43) states that "public administration is concerned with managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values". In public sector organisations the interpretation of societal values is provided through the political system. In the private sector the interpretation is provided through a board of directors for whom profit generation is the over-riding motivation.

The awareness of public administration as a research discipline is generally traced back to Woodrow Wilson's famous essay, *The Study of Administration* (1887). Significantly, Wilson drew little distinction between the public and private administrator as ultimately they were both in the business of selecting appropriate means to accomplish given ends. However, he did separate administration and politics, claiming (p.200):

The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics... It is a part of political life only as methods of a countinghouse are a part of the life of society; only as machinery is part of the manufactured product.

The search for a science of administration in which scientific procedures were espoused became "a part of the dominant image of public administration in the Classical period" (Fry, 1989, p.2). It was fashionable to study administrative execution as distinct from policy and politics. Goodnow (1900) explained it as the direction, execution and principles of those laws relating to the government in active operation. This line of thought linked neatly with organisational theory at the time which was largely influenced by Frederick Taylor's school of scientific management. Scientific management was essentially based on the performance of routine and repetitive tasks and received a lot of support from students of the public sector. In the influential book *Onward Industry* (1931) Mooney and Reiley developed scientific management to the point of claiming that principles of organisation were of general applicability to government, military, church and industrial enterprises. This idea was developed still further in a 1937 symposium (*Papers in the Science of Administration* - edited by Gulick and Urwick) which concluded that principles of organisation were universally applicable.

The classical approach to public administration dominated until the 1940s and Waldo (1977) has identified its five basic characteristics.

- acceptance of the politics-administration dichotomy;
- a generic management orientation which assumed that the techniques of private management were applicable in the public sector;

- the search for 'principles of administration' through scientific analysis;
- centralisation of executive authority in the name of efficiency;
- a basic commitment to 'democracy'.

As Taylor's scientific management approach came to be superseded by the Elton Mayo-led Human Relations School in organisation theory during the 1940s a similar transition was occurring in the field of public administration with the advent of the behavioural approach. Mayo's famed experiments undertaken at Western Electric's Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois between 1924 and 1927 (the Hawthorne studies) developed over the following decades to become the human relations school with an emphasis on staff morale, attitudes, group relationships, perceptions and leadership. i.e. a concentration on psychological factors of organisational behaviour. During this period, the behavioural approach was challenging the classical doctrine in public administration. Fry (1989, p.4) claims that the behavioural approach "defies brief definition". Nonetheless, Fesler (1975, p.14/15) characterises the approach as follows:

It entails the study of actual behaviour usually with the individual as the preferred unit of analysis; it is multidisciplinary in focus; it calls for 'rigor' in the use of scientific procedures; and it proscribes prescription.

While the classical approach fundamentally differentiated between administration and the political environment, the behaviouralists tended to ignore the political dimension totally. The core doctrine was a

movement from the product to the person with an emphasis on decentralisation "to give more members of the organisation a sense of control over their destinies" (Fry, 1989, p.5). Hence, concepts such as motivation, social and psychological factors and group dynamics emerged to analyse and explain organisational development. Criticisms of this approach have highlighted the fact that the classical theorists sought increased productivity through direct command whereas the human relations and behaviouralist approach sought the same end result through more subtle manipulation. (Fry, 1989 - see also the work of humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow, for a commentary on the morality of the human relations school).

In the 1960s the behavioural school was expanded by the administration-as-politics approach which represented a further challenge to the traditional classical theories of public administration. This new approach was underpinned by the fundamental belief that in the world of public administration it is impossible to separate politics and administration. Dwight Waldo supported this neo-classical stance by contending in *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Hypocrisy* (1977, p.9) that "the politics-administration dichotomy is inadequate, either as a description of reality or as a prescription for administrative behaviour." The administration-as-politics approach has culminated in what has been called new public administration. New public administration was spawned in 1970s America, re-emerged in 1980s Britain as new public management (NPM) and has surfaced recently in Ireland under the guise of the strategic

management initiative (SMI). This approach advocates decentralisation, participation, customer service and communitarianism and has effectively replaced the orthodox or classical approach. Fox and Miller (1995, p.3) contend that the new approach to public administration, as led by writers such as Osborne and Gaebler (1992), means that the orthodox doctrines of public administration "have died a thousand deaths by a thousand cuts". It will be argued at a later stage that this may not be necessarily so as, in some aspects, NPM merely assigns new titles and acronyms to describe ideas which have roots in the classical period. Public administration has tended to move in tandem with broader management theory and, for example, Pugh and Hickson (1997) show the development of thought in organisational management from Weber, to Taylor, to Mayo, to Simon and to more recent writers on organisational change and learning, such as DiMaggio and Powell, Pettigrew, and Morgan. In some way this progression is paralleled by Greenwood *et al.* (1980) in terms of the management of local government which may contribute to public administration being described as a borrowing discipline (Fry, 1989, see next paragraph).

From this brief chronology of the development of public administration it is apparent that it is a complex and diverse subject matter, described by Newland (1994, p.ix) as being "more complicated than the tripartite division of ancient Gaul". There are some basic reasons for these complications. One is that public administration "is notoriously a borrowing discipline" (Fry, 1989, p.12) which drifts easily into other areas

such as sociology and economics. Secondly, public administration tends to add to its existing theories rather than substituting the new for the old. This has led to Waldo's contention that the problem now is to find the boundaries of public administration. Thirdly, the theoretical development in parallel with organisation theory has muddied the waters in a doomed search for a homogenous theory of the modern organisation. Fourthly, public administration has to reconcile its aim for administrative efficiency with the fundamental ideal of democracy. Fifthly, the field of public administration is characterised by what White and Adams (1994, p.xv) refer to as "a troubled relationship between theory and practice."

While the field of public administration remains complex, it is through research that understanding and knowledge is developed. Even so, Waldo (as quoted by Fry, 1989, p.218) may be guilty of an idealistic overstatement in his belief that "the fate of civilisation may well rest on our ability to master the functions of administration".

2.3 NPM - Origins

The 1980s in the United Kingdom were characterised by the emergence of new organisational forms and practices for public service organisations. The reforming nature of this time is generally traced back to Margaret Thatcher, who held her position as Prime Minister for more consecutive years than any previous incumbent of the twentieth century. Throughout the decade, Thatcher's Conservative government set about reforming the public sector which was seen as wasteful and inefficient.

Privatisation was one of the key strategies of the Thatcherite approach and had its roots in the bitter mineworkers' strike of 1974. This dispute caused a political stalemate in which the Conservative government was the big loser, ceding power to the Labour Party in the subsequent election. The 1974 problems proved a catalyst in moving Conservative party policy to the right and a new leader was installed, with Margaret Thatcher replacing Edward Heath. The public sector, and especially the public sector trade unions, were deemed legitimate targets as the memories of the mineworkers' dispute lingered. The late 1970s had seen a continuation in the rise of public sector disputes culminating in the 1978/'79 'Winter of Discontent' during which Edgell and Duke (1991) claim that over one million low-paid but essential public service and hospital workers were on strike for nearly three months. Accordingly, the 1979 Conservative manifesto was dominated by the issue of reforming the trade unions which were seen as the major cause of Britain's

economic problems. The Conservatives won the 1979 election and new economic doctrines were espoused, inspired by the monetarist viewpoint of Sir Keith Joseph, on whom Thatcher greatly depended. The poor state of the British economy at the time helped to further the dominance of monetarist thinking within the Conservative party. Edgell and Duke (1991, p.47) comment that "Thatcher and her political allies, most notably Joseph, rejected the whole basis of the post-war social democratic consensus". The finger of guilt was pointed at the overwhelming presence of government in business, which threatened freedom. It was also pointed, of course, at the trade unions, as observed by Swann (1988, p.225):

Excessive government meant excessive state expenditure, including that on the nationalised industries, and this acted as a burden on the productive private sector. Excessive government also manifested itself as interventions which inhibited the wealth generating powers of the free market system - the latter needed to be released.

In respect of nationalised utilities such as water and electricity, the first option for the Conservative government was to re-structure and commercialise them. However, the new Chancellor for the Exchequer soon discovered that the problem of applying financial discipline to the industries was a more difficult proposition than previously envisaged (Howe, 1981, p.4). Privatisation was an altogether more straightforward alternative, summed up by Kay (1984, p.78) when he referred to the government's "world weary anxiety to be rid of the problems of controlling nationalised industries by being rid of the industries themselves".

Of course, it was not possible to obliterate the wider public service and so a radical reform programme was commenced. Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.1) explain:

As similar restructurings proceeded in a large number of different public service settings, so it became clear that a broadly based organisational phenomenon was emerging, now often labelled as the rise of 'new public management'.

It would be incorrect to assume that this development in public sector management was simply a British movement. To begin with, it could be described as an anglophone doctrine as like-minded leaders such as Thatcher, Reagan and Mulroney advanced neo-liberalist policies in their own countries.⁴

Canada and Australia were equally committed to the cause of rolling back the frontiers of the state and, in many ways, came to dominate the development of new practices within the public sector. For example, the Irish public service has utilised models from New Zealand and Australia in altering the way it operates, through SMI and Freedom of Information legislation.

⁴ For a fascinating insight into the spread of NPM in these countries, see Savoie, D. (1994) *Thatcher, Reagan, Mulroney: In Search of a New Bureaucracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)

The influence of NPM has now spread across Europe, described by Ridley (1996, p.16) as “an almost irresistible force”. However, this has not occurred in a uniform fashion as the doctrine itself, as well as its practical implementation, has been adopted and interpreted in different ways.⁵ This will be discussed in section 2.5. At this point it is worth noting that one of the main reasons for the lack of uniformity is that NPM does not have a single, concise definition. This is reflected by Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.9):

The term ‘New Public Management’ is controversial. It is used mainly as a handy shorthand, a summary description of a way of reorganising public sector bodies to bring their management, reporting, and accounting procedures closer to (a particular perception of) business methods.

⁵ Marsh (1994) argues that NPM ideas have had a more significant impact in Anglo-Saxon political cultures than in continental Europe.

2.4 The Forces of Change

The genesis of NPM in Britain, as driven by Margaret Thatcher, has been briefly examined. While the public sector disputes of the 1970s contributed to the development of a new doctrine there were however more substantial reasons behind NPM. These have been identified as: economic considerations; New Right ideology; growing citizen expectations; the influence of theory; individual country factors and will be examined in greater detail in this section.

2.4.1 *Economic Considerations*

Hood (1991) and Boyle (1995) cite economic theory as a driving force behind the advent of NPM, particularly in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. While this is undoubtedly an accurate assessment, one can also say that economic practices (as well as theory) contributed to the adoption of new strategies for managing public sector organisations. Simply, the economies in both countries were struggling, with over-heating fuelled by rising public sector expenditure. Naschold (1996, p.34) puts the British situation in perspective:

At the start of the 1980s the situation in the UK was characterised by a long-term downward economic spiral, persistently high unemployment, together with an above-average position in the OECD rankings of government spending and welfare state spending in the narrow sense as a proportion of GDP, and public sector employment as a share of the total.

Many of these problems stemmed from the recession of the mid-1970s and the difficulties with oil prices. The public sector was immediately targeted as a prime cause of over-spending. Similarly, in New Zealand, the views which were emanating from the Treasury tallied with those of the new Labour government who felt that radical changes in the operations of the public service might reverse the country's poor economic performance.⁶ Suddenly, financial management was in vogue with new systems of accrual accounting being implemented to help assess value for money.⁷ The NPM doctrine was embraced and acted upon at a quicker pace in New Zealand than anywhere else. Wistrich (1992) cites the pressing economic imperative and the important role of the Treasury in supporting intellectual and practical coherence as the factors driving the adoption of NPM.

New Zealand and the United Kingdom were not alone in responding to economic pressures. In Australia, a broadly-based reform programme was initiated in the early 1980s but became a more urgent priority when the economy went into decline in the middle of the decade. In terms of financial management, Zifcak (1994) demonstrates that the Canberra Financial Management Improvement Programme had a greater impact than its UK equivalent - the Financial Management Initiative. Both of

⁶ See Boston (1987) for a thorough examination of this topic in "Transforming New Zealand's public sector: Labour's quest for improved efficiency and accountability", *Public Administration*, vol.65, pp. 423-442 - also his more recent work, see Bibliography.

⁷ For a good explanation, see Scott and Gorringer (1989), "Reform of the core public sector: the New Zealand experience", *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 48, pp.81-92

these initiatives were aimed at improving accounting and auditing practices in the public sector.

In America, basic economic considerations were also significant as the Carter administration enacted the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act. This was followed by the Grace Commission, 1992-1994 (Private Sector Survey on Cost Control) which was asked "to report on ways of securing better value in the civil service using private sector 'best practice' as templates (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996, p. 17).

Western, Central and Eastern European countries are not directly comparable in this regard as they typically tend to be followers of the Big 5 - United Kingdom; New Zealand; Canada; Australia; United States of America - rather than initiators. Economic factors take on a different meaning when one refers to the Central and Eastern European countries as they sought to scale-down the Marxist-Leninist state.⁸ Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p. 19) note that in these countries, "while the public sector is in retreat, the issues and processes involved are very different from the Anglo-Saxon experience".

⁸ Balazs (1993) has produced an interesting analysis of the situation in Hungary with regard to public sector reform - "The transformation of the Hungarian public administration" *Public Administration*, 71, pp. 423-442.

2.4.2 *New Right Ideology*

Ideology has been a strong force behind NPM, coinciding with the coming to power in some countries of New Right politicians. To utilise the oft-quoted phrase of President Reagan, it was felt that 'government is the problem, not the solution'.⁹ The intention behind the changes of the 1980s was to make public sector management more efficient (Chapman, 1991). This was based on an assessment that business values and methods were more productive and faith was placed in the 'invisible hand' of the market with an apparent reluctance to accept that a hand can also be used for strangulation (Streeten, 1993).

While the New Right movement and NPM gained credence and support in quite a few industrialised economies, the ideological card was played more strongly in Britain than anywhere else. Ideology can be quite a motivating force. Skidmore (1989, p.1) notes that:

Ideology has been responsible for mass murder and for the production of works of high culture, for the creation of nation states and for the overthrow of political regimes, for torture and imprisonment and for elaborate protection of human rights.

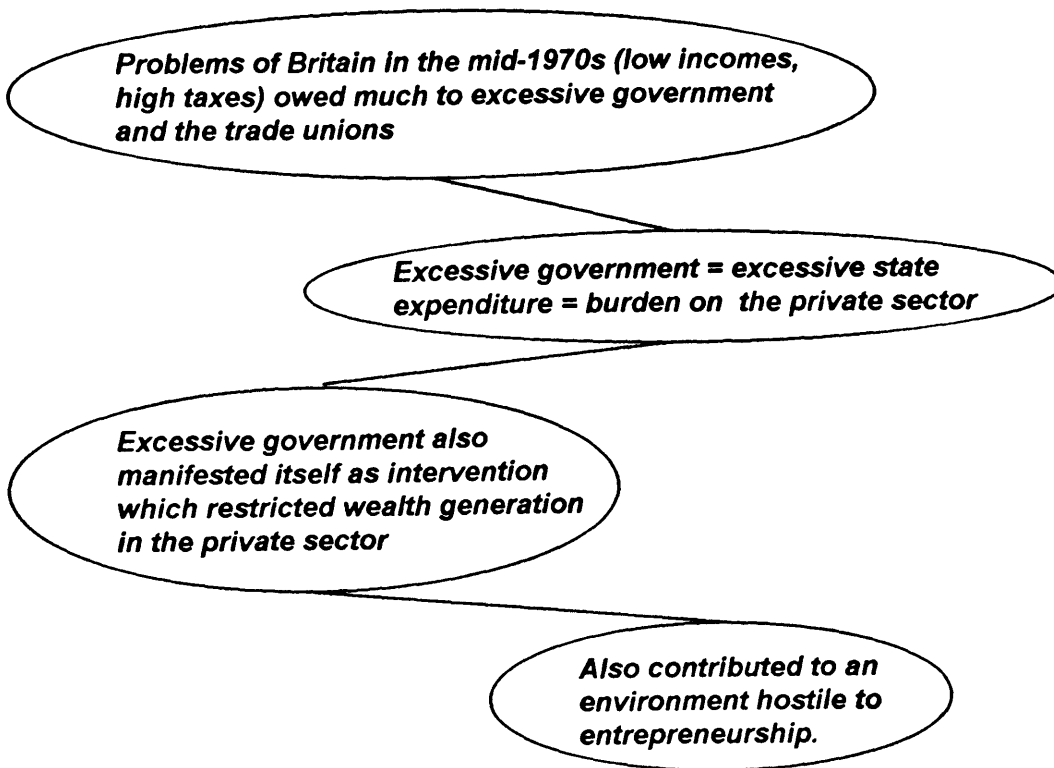
⁹ Interestingly, this position has now evolved further in the United States with the Clinton philosophy expressed by Osborne and Gachler (1992, p.23) that "we do not need more government, or less government, we need better government".

Baradat (1984, p.7/8) has stated that ideology presents a view of the present and the future, it is action-oriented, it is directed to the masses and it usually uses simple terms. This summarises the Thatcherite New Right ideology; certainly the message was simple - the state should have a minimalist role in the market place. This belief had formed over a long period of time. The growth of the welfare state and huge state intervention after the economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s and World War II became normal practice in the international industrial world. However, as times and economic fortunes changed, the government's role was questioned. In Britain, the Institute of Economic Affairs was established with the aim of promoting market ideas and opposing other groups, such as the Fabian Society, which supported state intervention. In the political arena, the economic re-think and shift to the right was being facilitated by Sir Keith Joseph and the Centre for Policy Studies.¹⁰ While a strong ideology emerged, it should also be noted that the change in policy owed a lot to the political fall-out from the damaging Conservative electoral defeat of October 1974 and the previously discussed battle with the mineworkers. In 1977, a group of leading Conservative thinkers led by Keith Joseph (also including Geoffrey Howe, James Prior, David Howell and Angus Meade) published *The Right Approach to the Economy* which coincided with the establishment

¹⁰ For an excellent commentary, see Swann (1988), *The Retreat of the State*, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf

of the Adam Smith Institute. The Josephian critique can be summarised in the following diagram:

FIGURE 1 - THE JOSEPHIAN CRITIQUE



The Conservative New Right agenda was also boosted by practical considerations - the public sector was out of control and the nationalised industries were performing abysmally. Academically, the revival of interest in the Austrian School also added fuel to the fire. That school's most noted economic writer, Friedrich von Hayek, had a profound effect on Sir Keith Joseph, with Swann (1988, p.228) remarking that "he (Hayek) saw the growing economic role of the state as carrying with it a threat to liberty and democracy".

As events transpired, the New Right policies instigated by Thatcher (and particularly the radical privatisation programme) produced mixed results and opinions are divided on the success or otherwise of the ideas. However, there is no doubt that Thatcher won the ideological battle due to an aggressive marketing campaign and a confused and lethargic performance by the Labour Party in opposition. The policies of the 1980s had a significant effect on the British public service and the economic ideology of the time developed into a powerful political ideology. Baradat (1984, p.320) states that "ideologies frequently have the power to persist in the face of facts that should raise questions regarding their validity". This certainly appeared to be the case in the latter years of the privatisation programme when some unwise decisions were made (Curwen, 1994). Effectively, the political ideology had become stronger than the economic ideology which had generated it (as also happened with 'Reaganomics' in the U.S.). It should also be observed that ideology alone, and particularly the rise of the New Right does not fully explain the popularity of NPM as the doctrine was strongly endorsed by Labour governments in Australia and New Zealand and latterly in Britain.

2.4.3 *Growing Citizen Expectations*

Another important element in the rise of NPM is social change. Ridley (1996, p.17) asserts that "populations are generally becoming better educated, individually better off (despite serious problems of under

privilege in all countries) and accustomed increasingly to being wooed as customers”.

As society has evolved, people as a whole have become self-confident and are demanding better treatment and higher quality of service from their public authorities (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995). Boyle (1995, p.3) remarks that “what society requires of its public service is changing, as is the public service’s capacity to respond”. In many ways this represents the challenge of NPM.

In local authority terms societal changes are all the more significant. Simply stated, the primary benefit of local government is the very fact that it is local and therefore closer to the people. Through NPM, this has involved a change in attitude from local authorities with the challenge being to understand local society and see the organisation “from the outside in” (Clarke, 1996, p.97). The concept and understanding of community has also changed. Advances in technology and transport mean that people do not necessarily live and work in the same areas and geographical entities are becoming less important.

Clarke (1996) argues that communities in the traditional geographic sense are being replaced by ‘communities of interest.’ e.g. race, religion, gender, single issues. In turn, this requires a change in the operations and traditional values of public sector organisations. As citizen expectations have risen, so too the language used by public authorities

has been transformed. The public at large are now described as 'customers' or 'clients' and quality of service delivery is paramount. Marketing has been borrowed from the private sector in an effort to contribute to the development of a more responsive public service. However, the public service has not found it easy to adapt to the wishes of an ever-demanding public and bureaucratic organisational cultures often resist change. Harrison (1987), as quoted by Walsh (1989, p.7) also makes an interesting observation:

During the past few decades, as our needs and wants became more differentiated and unpredictable, systems have had to become more complex in an attempt to respond to customer wants, and they have predictably become less reliable as a result.

2.4.4 The Influence of Theory

In *Towards a New Public Service* (1995) Boyle devotes a chapter to the influence of theory in the advancement of NPM. This attention by Boyle highlights the fact that the recent interplay between the public and private sectors has created a new breed of guru. The parallel development of organisational theory and public administration has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As management has replaced administration, a new 'managerialist' school of thought has emerged with organisational theorists (and their publishers) whetting their lips at the thought of re-launching out-dated ideas to the public sector. The 1982 best-seller *In Search of Excellence* by Peters and Waterman was re-visited and, a decade later, its public sector equivalent, *Reinventing*

Government was produced by Osborne and Gaebler. This book has enjoyed biblical status in the U.S. where it spawned an influential pressure group, the Alliance for Redesigning Government. It also became the working model for the Clinton administration. Suddenly, new catch-phrases emerged in the public sector, namely Management by Objectives (MBO); Total Quality Management (TQM); Market Testing. Predictably, management consultants soon appeared and consequently also, in a bewilderingly short period of time, the language of the management of change. While management theory has brought with it some positive effects to the public sector, there are also noteworthy dangers in the homogenous use of such theories. A note of caution is issued by an article in *The Economist* (1995, p.26) which states, "but, even as they borrow the theorists' more sensible ideas, politicians should remember that government and management are two different things".

The influence of economic theory on NPM also cannot be ignored. Hood (1991) asserts that the NPM movement has been shaped by the emergence of 'new institutional economics'. (Niskanen, 1971; Williamson, 1975,1985). Hood (1991, p.5) observes that "it (NPM) was built on the now very familiar story of the post-World War II development of public choice, transactions cost theory and principal-agent theory". This new institutional economics movement helped create reform doctrines (such as NPM) based on user choice, transparency and contestability etc. In particular, agency theory has led to an increased

emphasis in public sector organisations on information systems and related issues such as transparency and freedom of information, in an attempt to bridge the knowledge gap between organisations and end users. Generally, both management and economic theory have implications for the restructuring of public sector organisations and have contributed greatly to NPM.¹¹

2.4.5 Individual Country Factors

In section 2.3 reference was made to the international dimension of NPM and it is clear that there has been a general diffusion of principles. However, NPM is also noteworthy for its disparity and varied application. Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.16) state that “different variants have emerged in different countries, depending on local history, culture, and political and managerial leadership”.

While economic motives have generally remained the dominant ones, many countries have opted for moderate rather than sweeping changes. Therefore, neat classification is problematic. The British case has already been examined as a mixture of ideological and economic considerations, as Thatcher sought to instigate what Metcalfe (1993) refers to as a ‘managerial revolution’. The New Zealand reforms were prompted by spiralling public sector expenditure. In Australia, the idea of ‘freeing-up’ public sector administration and relaxing aggressive

¹¹ See Dunsire *et al.* (1988) for a critique of Public Choice Theory in “Organisational status and performance: a conceptual framework for testing public choice theories”, *Public Administration*, vol. 66

regulation were the key factors in responding positively to consumer/client demands.

Across Europe there have been a variety of other country-specific factors. Spain, for example, sought to ease itself into the European Union following the authoritarian Franco regime (Alba, 1997, Alvarez, 1999). Historical circumstances were important in Germany as the newly unified country needed a modernised system of administration (Rober, 1996). Scandinavian countries sought increased decentralisation to boost productivity (Pierre and Ehn, 1999) while Italy (Cassese, 1999) and Greece (Sotiropoulos, 1999) wanted to move away from weak administrative systems and particularistic interests. Central and Eastern European countries attempted to come to terms with the radical transition to democracy and to market economies (Hendrych, 1993).

The differing motivations noted here draw attention to a central question concerning NPM. Is it a short-term Anglo-Saxon-led New Right movement or does it represent a significant change in the management of public sector organisations ?

This issue will be addressed in the sections which follow, through an examination of recent literature.

2.5 NPM - An Empty Canvas?

Public administration has traditionally struggled to carve out an individual academic niche for itself because it has been content to borrow from others. It is now being replaced by "a proliferation of concepts, frameworks and theories" (Lane, 1995, preface).

One such example is new public management. As similar restructurings began to take place in different public service settings across the world in the 1980s it became apparent that something new was emerging. This followed on from a growth in interest during the 1970s in organisation theory, public policy and management (Gray and Jenkins, 1995). New public management was coined as a catch-all phrase incorporating all the initiatives which were taking place. Organisation theorists, public administration academics and public service officials are divided on the significance of NPM. Laughlin (1991) is critical and sees NPM as a market-led ideology invading the public sector. Others, such as Ashburner (1994) argue that NPM is a management hybrid with a continuing emphasis on core public service values. Hood (1991, p.4) comments that NPM has aroused strong and varied emotions among bureaucrats:

at one extreme were those who held that NPM was the only way to correct for the irretrievable failures and even moral bankruptcy in the 'old' public management. At the other end were those who dismissed much of the thrust of NPM as a gratuitous and philistine

destruction of more than a century's work in developing a distinctive public service ethic and culture

The question of whether or not NPM represents a short-term fad¹² is addressed by Dunleavy and Hood (1994). Based on past experiences of administrative reform they claim that there are two potential scenarios. The first is the 'incubated mode' in which reform ideas do not come into full effect until long after their initial introduction (example: 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Civil Service in Britain). The alternative is the 'acute' innovation pattern in which reform programmes peak early and then break up quickly. The verdict by Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.10) is telling, and typical of NPM:

NPM seems to have elements of both styles. While individual initiatives may have followed the acute/rapid break-up pattern, the movement as a whole looks like a case of the lagged-effect incubated model.

A more simple truth perhaps is that there is nothing particularly new in NPM as most of the ideas were put forward in the 1960s in various forms, including the Fulton Report. At that time however, there was not such a receptive audience.

¹² See Abrahamson, E. (1991). "Managerial fads and fashions: the diffusion and rejection of innovations" *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 16. In particular, Abrahamson examines how fads or fashions can harm organisations.

Riddell (1983) points out that the performance in early 1980s Britain did not match the rhetoric. Milligan (1995, p.xi) also warns of the dangers of ascribing to NPM by citing an observation made by Petronius in 210 BC, concerning the Roman army:

We trained hard but every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by re-organising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusions of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.

It is premature to claim as Osborne and Gaebler (1992) have done that NPM is a glorious, global revolution. Painter (1997) has been consistent in his contrary views and claims that there has been an uneven diffusion and adoption of associated doctrines. Perhaps Streeten (1993, p.235) is correct in his belief that we should not focus on the abstract notion of whether NPM is right or wrong but “ask in what contexts is the NPM likely to achieve performance improvements”. Logically these contexts may vary from country to country. The call for more business-like management of government has been an American and Anglo-Saxon one supported by what Premfors (1998, p.142) describes as “a dominant story teller”, namely the public management programme within the OECD. He notes (p.143):

the PUMA story (as many or most stories do) also identifies heroes and villains or leaders and laggards in the march to the land of the plenty. The heroes are in general the Anglo-Saxons, but in particular New Zealand, followed quite closely by the United Kingdom.

Kickert (1997, p.731) expresses no surprise at the prevalence of NPM philosophies in the United States, depicting it as the motherland of business management. His analysis of the UK however, is quite different (p.732):

Quite remarkably, Great Britain, with its long unique tradition of a highly esteemed civil service, populated by traditional Oxbridge educated 'gentlemen amateurs', an administrative culture markedly different from the United States, forms a much more 'loud and clear' example of 'public managerialism'.

The OECD interpretation emerges from its surveys of 1990, 1993 and 1995 which show that managerial reforms in the public sector are dominant amongst almost all of its 22 member countries. The 1995 report, *Governance in Transition*, confidently claims that a new international paradigm for public management has emerged. Comparative studies by others in the field though tend to dispute this analysis. Olsen and Peters' (1996) research from eight nations concludes that NPM has not been universally accepted and that there is no general wave of reforms. They note (p.13):

across the eight countries studied, there were significant variations in the discontent with the public sector and in the perceived need for radical, administrative reform.....ideas about generic management, private business and competitive markets were not adopted with the same ease in the eight countries.

Such a view is supported in the comparative work of Savoie (1994); Laegreid and Pedersen (1994); Naschold (1995); Kickert and Jorgensen (1995) and Flynn and Strehl (1996). This body of work contradicts the OECD/PUMA version which stresses uniformity.

As was argued in the previous section, individual country factors are significant. Premfors (1998, p.157/158) demonstrates that the Swedish (and Nordic) trajectory of reform is centred on “radical decentralisation of politics and administration, but within a still large public sector and an unchanged or only modestly reduced welfare commitment between government and citizens”. Rhodes (1999) compares the application of NPM in Britain and Denmark and identifies markedly different policies under the public reform label. This leads him to conclude (p.365):

there is no such thing as NPM. The need to domesticate public sector reform, to make it orderly and comprehensible, may be understandable but it does not mean that there is an essentialist account of such changes; there are only competing webs of interpretation.

Kickert (1997, p.70) reaches a similar deduction and, through a case study of administrative reforms in the Netherlands, argues that it should be possible to develop alternatives to the dominant Anglo-American managerialism - “historical and international awareness might provide a keener awareness not only of the distinctiveness of public management but also its long-standing virtues”.

NPM has many appealing characteristics, not least of which is its vague nature which makes it applicable to all political settings and bureaucracies. Holmes (1992, p.472) notes, "one can only be amazed by the commonality of not only language, but also, more importantly, purpose across a whole range of different cultures". According to Clarke (1996, p.6) this language is misleading - "it suggests that there was a single paradigm of public management and that, for some reason, we have moved to a new one. Neither is right". Hood (1998, p.195) is also pre-occupied with the claim that NPM is a new revolutionising global paradigm and commences his discussion by claiming that "the idea of world-wide convergence on a single 'modern' form of organisation is a beguiling and recurring one" and remains at the heart of the current debate. DiMaggio and Powell (1991), as quoted by Hood (1998, p.202), conclude that "organisations in general are subject to 'isomorphic' processes which cause them to resemble one another". Public sector organisations are not immune to this phenomenon and NPM changes are heavily driven by 'mimetic' processes. Metcalfe and Richards (1990) contend that NPM and its concentration on managerialism is not advancing public management but is in fact a throwback to the 1950s by crudely promoting the virtues of private sector organisational management practice. Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.251) admit the overall significance and scale of development of NPM is still unclear and that academics need to be wary of the "dangerous and ethnocentric assumption that the rest of the world is converging onto the Anglo-Saxon

model". This is a warning which reinforces the claim made by Dunleavy (1994, p.472) that the world is witnessing "the decoupling of public services production from a single-country context". Dunleavy is referring to Britain but there are significant lessons to be learned from America, one of the initial 'Big 5' advocates of NPM. Naschold's (1996, p.41) research suggests that, "the story of public sector modernisation in the USA is the story of a large number of reform initiatives, introduced with gusto, but all, in the final analysis, unsuccessful".

As has been noted elsewhere in this chapter, NPM is essentially an umbrella term or convenient acronym. In itself, it means very little but encompasses the concepts of 'managerialism' (Pollitt, 1990); 'market-based public administration' (Lan and Rosenbloom, 1992) and 'entrepreneurial government' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). NPM is a mass of contradictions. For example, Pollitt (1990) regards the stress on the control of expenditure, the decentralising of management responsibilities and the application of target-setting and performance monitoring as neo-Taylorism. Such a revival of the scientific management philosophies of Frederick Taylor represents the antithesis of the Osborne and Gaebler NPM vision. Rhodes (1996) identifies four weaknesses and contradictions in NPM and managerialism:-

1. Management adopts an intra-organisational focus

The concentration is on the traditional 3 E's and on value for money to the exclusion of managing inter-organisational links.

2. Managerialism is obsessed with objectives

This is merely a resurrection of the management-by-objectives (MBO) approach previously advanced in management theory and fails to take into account the unique characteristics of public sector organisations.

3. NPM focuses on results

In public sector settings goals are often ambiguous and there may be no consensus on the desired outcome or how to measure it. Regulatory functions serve the common good in a way which, of necessity, may over-ride the wishes of individuals.

4. Contradiction between competition and steering

The language and ethos of markets and competition is not appropriate in many public sector settings. These values may, in fact, distort and replace traditional public service values such as equity and probity and compound the difficulties of steering for management and elected representatives.

Power (1994), as quoted by Hood (1998, p.213), draws attention to another contradiction by claiming that the application of an audit mentality to scrutinise public service activities may weaken rather than strengthen the regulation of such activities “because stepping up external audit can unintentionally destroy collegial self-regulation and turn responsible professionals into cheating regulatees”. The reference by

Rhodes (1996) to the resurrection of old private sector organisational management theory also offers an insight into the apparently false world of NPM. Hood (1991, 1994) notes that it has become a self-serving industry to an army of consultants, business schools and advisers who have a vested interest in spreading them. Common (1998, p.440) asserts that the internationalisation of NPM can “be ascribed to the missionary zeal on the part of management ‘gurus’ travelling the world”.

There are other factors which contribute to the spread of NPM. Freeden (2000, p.14) argues that “we have obtained from postmodernism a sense of the fragmentary and elusive nature of political ideologies”. The ideological debate surrounding NPM philosophies has been extraordinarily muted to the point where left-wing led governments are now preaching a message very similar to the New Right economic one. The ‘New’ Labour party in Britain is the prime example with Jahn and Henn (2000, p.43) stating that it “represents a common trend which is also taking place across western Europe”. Interestingly, Ireland too is developing a similar neo-liberal ideology to that found in virtually all modern welfare states. The void created by the absence of a clear ideological divide has added to the attractiveness of NPM as a public sector movement. This has led to Rosenau (1992, p.274) asking, “are long-standing and clear-cut organisational structures giving way to new movements that are less hierarchical and more local, disorganised, and fragmented?” The decline of the nation state is another element to consider in the context of the globalisation of NPM with McGrew and

Lewis (1992, p.7) observing that “modern societies display an incredible permeability to transnational forces”. Common (1998, p.444) explains, “the shift from political accountability in public service delivery, implicit in NPM, may be a consequence of the diminished legitimacy of the state”. Local government reflects a microcosmic example of this trend as it can be argued that the legitimacy of local authorities is under threat from the increasingly complex range of stakeholders now involved in decision-making.

Despite some of the contradictions and doubts surrounding NPM, Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.225) are undoubtedly correct in their opinion that “although the rate and pace of change varies from one service-setting to another, nevertheless the general pressure for change is constant”. In examining this pressure for change however, both Hood (1998) and Common (1998) arrive at the conclusion that “the globalisation of NPM remains a misnomer” (Common, 1998, p.448) and that the NPM movement is simply a case of policy convergence. Wilensky (1975, p.xii) defines convergence theory as “the idea that whatever their political economies, whatever their unique cultures and histories, the ‘affluent’ societies become more alike in both social structure and ideology”. Such an observation supports the ‘social psychological proximity’ model developed by Rose (1993) who notes (p.107) that Britain tends to ignore Ireland and France as its neighbours - “British policymakers often look across the ocean to the U.S. or Canada, or even further away to Australia”. Certainly the ‘Big 5’ Anglophone countries (Britain, U.S.A.,

Canada, Australia, New Zealand) who initially fostered NPM form a significant core community supported by the fact that they share common legal, administrative and governmental structures and traditions. The philosophies of NPM are now also seen as attractive in other countries such as celtic-tiger driven Ireland which can be regarded as an affluent society. The future of NPM is decidedly uncertain but it has already led to significant changes which may ultimately represent its legacy. These changes may not come to be regarded as progressive or beneficial in the long term. Dunsire (1999, p.377), for example, urges caution and calls for a maintenance and a nurturing of the idea of a public sector or public service ethic which:

retains at least some of the values of collective community needs and provision of services; and to argue in the face of the economic individualists that 'citizen' is not to be emasculated into 'customer' or 'public servant' sterilised into 'contractor'.

The long term effects of NPM cannot be predicted with any great sense of confidence. *The Economist* has adopted a negative fatalist position in its presentation of public management reform, rejoicing in the debunking of all the NPM hype. It has cited two examples of what it sees as ludicrous managerialism which is sweeping the U.K. With reference to the prison service it quotes ("Leviathan re-engineered", October 1996, p.7) a British government report into an escape from Parkhurst Prison, which noted, "any organisation which boasts one statement of purpose, one vision, five values, six goals, seven strategic priorities and eight key

performance indicators without any clear correlation between them is producing a recipe for confusion”.

The previous year, (May 1995) *The Economist* (“Managing the public sector - gurus in government” pp.25-26) examined the NHS and particularly a document produced by the Value for Money unit which defined various pieces of hospital equipment. The definition for ‘bed’ contained 200 words, beginning as follows, *bed: a device or arrangement that may be used to permit a patient to lie down*

While it is all too easy and a little disingenuous to look at these specific elements of the prison service and the NHS in splendid scornful isolation, they do highlight a potential difficulty in NPM where lack of action is hidden behind glossy publications. Drucker (1973 p.126) notes that “if you don’t know where you are going then any plan will do”.

Dunleavy and Hood (1994) present a model incorporating four alternative futures for public management. While Osborne and Gaebler (1992) may claim that there is an inevitable global movement to a single NPM model, realistically, according to Dunleavy and Hood, the plausible futures are multiple. They describe four alternatives as follows:

1. Minimal Purchasing State
2. Public Bureaucracy State
3. Gridlock Model
4. Headless Chicken Model

1. MINIMAL PURCHASING STATE

This is the future favoured by many NPM advocates - including Osborne and Gaebler (1992) - in which the state plays a minimal role in the market place. It represents the logical conclusion of the laissez-faire and New Right liberalist economic policies which are at the very heart of NPM. Large scale privatisation will reduce the role of government and the public sector to letting contracts - "public service provision becomes dominated by large private corporations in the same way that has happened to groceries in fast food" (Dunleavy and Hood, p.14). Large traditional vertically-integrated hierarchical public organisations will be broken down, a process aided by advances in information technology. In essence the public sector will be dramatically scaled down with services provided by agencies, private corporations and some local authorities. To once again borrow Osborne and Gaebler's oft-quoted phrase, the role of government will be to steer rather than row, and co-ordinate a complex web of policy communities. Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.16) warn that if this vision is fulfilled in a non-diversified way,

by the development of a few giant service corporations whose expertise and market sway dwarfs the public sector capabilities of small or medium-sized states, the problem of retaining any real government steering capacity could be enormously increased

2. PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY STATE

This alternative future “implies a distinct public sector with entrenched core competencies and methods of operation” (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.14) and equates most readily with NPM model 4 developed by Ferlie *et al.* where a public service orientation is not only retained, but strengthened. The public sector learns from the private sector and applies models of best practice. However, public sector organisations continue to operate at the opposite end of the spectrum to private corporations. Differences between the two are stressed and cherished and the concept of a generic theory of organisational management is joyfully dismissed. The competencies, values and ethos of the public sector are retained and the common good prevails over individualism.

3. GRIDLOCK MODEL

While the first two alternative futures presented above are the ones most frequently highlighted by NPM commentators there are two other intermediate possibilities presented by Dunleavy and Hood. Under the Gridlock Model, there is no sharp distinction between the public and private sectors. However, over time, increasing litigation and pressures of regulation from supra-national authorities such as the European Union will lead to the development of “strong and comprehensive procedural rules” (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.14). The freedom to manage

innovatively as aspired to in public sector reform strategies will be effectively removed. The Gridlock Model has the advantage of avoiding “the arbitrariness and caprice that unbridled managerial power may bring” (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.15) but, equally, iron clad rules may lead to rigidity and unresolved disputes.

There is some evidence of the Gridlock Model in the UK where privatisation became the public face of NPM philosophies during the 1980s in particular. The need for strict regulation and control in some cases defeated the purpose of privatisation and for every governmental and bureaucratic frontier rolled back, another was established in its place.

4. HEADLESS CHICKEN MODEL

Dunleavy and Hood claim that the Headless Chicken Model is not just an abstract, theoretical possibility but is in evidence in many contemporary public sector areas. Under this vision of the future, public services are over-managed at the level of the individual organisations (due to increased managerialism) but under-managed at an overall level due to the lack of system guidance. They explain (p.14) - “no one knows their place anymore. Traditional conventions of behaviour collapse; there is growth, diversity, innovation and confusion”.

Instability and fragmentation abound (the hierarchist's nightmare) to the extent that a 'no-one in charge' structure of public management emerges. Dunleavy and Hood argue that many forces are pushing NPM in this direction, not least of which is the big differences in pay levels between the public and private sectors which "limit the degree to which really capable private sector managers with a strong track record can be brought into public bodies" (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.14). Accordingly, the rhetoric of radical public sector reforms driven by the entry of top quality personnel remains illusionary.

There are clearly advantages and disadvantages associated with the Headless Chicken model, as noted by Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.15):

The obvious strength of the Headless Chicken model is its potential to release pent-up forces of dynamism and entrepreneurship, deliver the coup de grace to ossified structures and bring innovation and competition which could not occur under more orderly approaches to public managementthe 'no-one in charge' aspects of the Headless Chicken model are likely to involve duplication, expensive mistakes and possibly Gresham's law processes in which mediocrity and corner cutting standards drive out good practice.

Dunleavy and Hood concede that the headless chicken metaphor for public management implies an unstable transitional phase rather than a likely permanent outcome. These models present the possibility that the public sector may disappear under NPM, depending on which future is realised. A contributory factor to this scenario, as has been previously noted, is that there does not appear to be strong political opposition to

NPM as the initial left-wing hostility has dissipated. Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.10) argue:

indeed, it may be that NPM is now so omnipresent in public sector organisations that it hardly amounts to a distinctive reform programme at all any more. If NPM is now everything, maybe it is nothing - certainly not a distinctive way of managing organisations.

Prior (1993, p.459) paints a more disturbing picture:

it is arguable that the fundamental change that has occurred in the public sector is not the replacement of one broadly uniform set of arrangements with another uniform set, but the fracturing of the public sector into a plethora of different sets of arrangements with very few common features. It is then questionable whether the term 'public sector' is any longer useful as a generic analytical concept.

In essence, the dawn of NPM and the re-invention of government is an encouraging development. Ideally, claims Rouban (1993, p.411), NPM and administrative reform should be "a powerful instrument for separating political accountability from administrative accountability". The public sector can learn a great deal from management theory and private sector practices. However, the dangers of blindly adopting some of these commercial practices and values should also be noted, as well as the following general guidelines.

- There is no one ideal model which can be borrowed from the private sector;
- Public sector organisations should be judged by professional rather than commercial standards;

- The complexities of managing in the public sector should be respected e.g. the political dimension, increased E.U. regulation, the rise of community-based organisations.

Exworthy and Halford (1999, p.3) are correct when they assert that "the 1980s and 1990s have marked a period of dramatic transformation right across the public sector". Equally correct though is the warning by Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.15) which cautions, "like all roads paved with good intentions, the route to market-style public management reform may end in unexpected and distressing places".

Ultimately, the debate surrounding the validity of NPM is unresolved. The conclusion reached by Common (1998, p.448) is telling:

what appears to exist is a global policy community that disperses NPM in a piece-meal fashion to receptive political and administrative elites in individual countries. Academics and consultants who are part of this community may tell us that we are witnessing a paradigm shift but the reality for the majority of countries of the world is the strengthening and maintenance of bureaucratic government.

Certainly, from an Irish perspective, it is important to examine the historical context of NPM (particularly in the UK) and assess if it is appropriate for the Irish public service, as opposed to blindly adopting the ideas and paying lip service to them. The Thatcher ideas on NPM were firmly rooted in the economics of monetarism and public choice. Jackson (1988, p.11) warns that "many policies based on simple economic maxims can be dangerous when the theory lacks empirical

confirmation". Even more worrying is the treatment of local government in the UK with Midwinter (1995, p.26) claiming that "in Thatcher rhetoric, local government was an object of outright contempt. One apologist describes it as Mrs. Thatcher's 'biggest bugbear'".

The picture which emerges from the literature is that NPM is ill-defined. Its relative lack of boundaries may be seen by some as a fundamental weakness and, by others, as an advantage. This is captured by Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.10):

Indeed, sometimes the new public management seems like an empty canvas: you can paint on it whatever you like. There is no clear or agreed definition of what the new public management actually is.

Despite the vagueness, academics and researchers alike have sought to identify characteristics of NPM. One example is the OECD (1995) which states that the new paradigm for public management is characterised by eight trends:-

- devolving authority, providing flexibility
- ensuring performance, control accountability
- developing competition and choice
- providing responsive service
- improving the management of human resources
- optimising information technology
- improving the quality of regulation
- strengthening steering functions at the centre

Another attempt to identify common characteristics of NPM is the typology developed by Ferlie *et al.* (1996) based on four distinct models.

Model 1 is called 'The Efficiency Drive' and was the earliest NPM model

to emerge, in the early and mid 1980s. It crudely sought efficiency in the public sector by importing models from private management. The motivation behind NPM Model 1 is generally seen in terms of the new Thatcherite political economy. Its core themes include the following increased attention to financial control; a stronger managerial style with management by hierarchy; a shift in power from professionals to management; new forms of corporate governance with marginalisation of elected representatives and trade-unionists. The second model, 'Downsizing and Decentralisation' enjoyed less prominence than Model 1 during the 1980s but now is seen as rising in importance. Essentially, its strength lies in the 'Post-Fordist' models of organisation which gained credence in both the private and public sectors from the late 1970s. These ideas represented a shift from the 1900-1975 period which was dominated by large, vertically integrated organisations. The key points of NPM model 2 are a move from management by hierarchy to management by contract; a split between a small strategic core and a large operational periphery leading to contracting-out of non-strategic functions; delayering and downsizing with a move to horizontal organisational structures; change from standardised service delivery to greater flexibility and variety. 'In Search of Excellence' is the title given to NPM Model 3 which has close links with the 'excellence' stream of management literature which emerged in the 1980s on the back of the previously-cited Peters and Waterman book. It introduced human relations thinking to the public sector, with an emphasis on organisational culture, change and innovation. The 'learning organisation' movement also became

prominent. The dominant characteristics of this model are an emphasis on organisational development and learning; recognition of the importance of organisational culture; radical decentralisation with performance judged by results; growth of corporate logos, mission statements and uniforms; an explicit communications strategy; more assertive and prominent human resource management function; charismatic rather than transactional forms of leadership. NPM Model 4, 'Public Service Orientation' has yet to reach its full potential as it strives to fuse private and public sector management ideas, whilst preserving a distinct public service mission. The public service orientation model (Ranson and Stewart, 1994) is a variant of NPM Model 4, which includes the following themes: a major concern with service quality; a desire to shift power back from appointed to elected local bodies; stress on the development of community work and societal learning as well as citizenship; a continuing set of distinctive public service tasks and values with an emphasis on participation and accountability.

This typology by Ferlie *et al.* (1996) has been built in incremental fashion, rather than one model replacing another and, again, it should be noted that it is based on an Anglo-Saxon perspective. In terms of their chronological development and application, the models - or phases - overlap, together representing the evolving nature of NPM. There are both similarities and contrasts in the analysis offered by Hood (1991) who concludes that the following common characteristics feature in all discussions on NPM:

- hands-on professional management
- standards and performance measures
- output controls
- disaggregation of units
- competition
- private sector-style management
- discipline and parsimony

While the research presented by the OECD (1995), Ferlie *et al.* (1996) and Hood (1991) represent valid tools for analysing public sector reform this thesis utilises two models in assessing the impact of NPM thinking on Cork County Council and these are now presented. The use of the Susman and Evered (1978) cyclical approach derives from the research setting and is a model of a methodology for examining a strategic management process. The Dunleavy and Hood (1994) model stems directly from public management theory and is used in this research to assess the attitudes of three groups in local government who have been under-analysed under NPM.

2.6 Use of Theoretical Models

The two theoretical models used in this research are complementary and offer an insight into the application of New Public Management in Cork County Council. The model developed by Susman and Evered establishes the methodological framework, within which Dunleavy and Hood provide the tool for analysing the attitudes and behaviour of participants.

2.6.1 *Susman and Evered (1978)*

The first model used is an action research one, designed by Susman and Evered in 1978. Its purpose is to trace, analyse and evaluate the SMI process in Cork County Council. Action research has had a long, if controversial, tradition, reflecting the constant tension in social science research between pure and applied science. Whyte (1991, p.8) presents both sides of the debate:

In the mainstream view, the social researcher should aim at discovering basic scientific facts or relationships and not get directly involved in linking social research to action. The alternative view is that it is important, both for the advancement of science and for the improvement of human welfare, to devise strategies in which research and action are closely linked.

Research becomes a total human experience with possibilities for action.

Schatz and Walker (1995, p.1) explain:

For some this means finding new ways of looking at what is familiar in order to change it, for others it may begin as a need for a better understanding of changes forced on the situations in which they find themselves. For many people it means finding ways to seize the opportunity to become more reflexive in their practice.

Essentially then, the normative and the positive are not mutually exclusive and the over-riding aim is to formulate situation-specific insights (Susman and Evered, 1978).

Kurt Lewin is regarded as the father of action theory. His work, in 1943, on encouraging the use of meat entrails in cooking, has been labelled as action research as it attempted to change behaviour and the researcher was a visible part of the experiment. This was an early example of hypothesis testing.

Following on from this pioneering work in America, the Tavistock Institute in the United Kingdom commenced a research programme which established a relationship between investigatory research and action. The Tavistock experiments brought together psychologists, psychiatrists and social anthropologists. Rapoport (1970, p.499/500) remarks:¹³

During and immediately after the war they conducted a number of successful experimental action-programmes in personnel selection, treatment and rehabilitation of wartime neurosis casualties and of returning prisoners of war - which consolidated a particular approach and body of research findings.

¹³ See also the work of Bion and Rickman (1943); Bridger (1946); Curle and Trist (1947); Wilson (1947) and Murray (1959).

These experiments formed the basis for the establishment of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations “which gradually led to an exposition of the relationship between investigatory research and its implications for action” (Eden and Huxham,1999,p.273). The Tavistock Institute continued to gain prominence through the 1950s and 1960s (referred to as the second and third generations of Tavistock work) with its emphasis on conducting research and advancing theory development whilst attempting to make practical and significant changes in organisations. This work continues to the present day, with ground-breaking research being conducted in Scandinavia on the democratisation of the workplace, e.g. the work of Karlsen in Norway.

The *raison d'être* for action research, as formulated by Lewin, is to combine both elements (i.e. action and research) because it was his contention (as quoted in Baburoglu and Ravn, 1992, p.19) that “a social situation is best understood if a change is introduced into it and its effects are observed”. As an appropriate research paradigm, action research is now established for educational, professional, managerial and organisational development. Winter (1996, p.14) has produced an omnibus definition of action research which outlines its main characteristics:

Action research is used here to refer to ways of investigating professional experience which link practice and the analysis of practice into a single productive and continuously developing sequence, and which link researchers and research participants into a single community of interested colleagues. It is about the nature of the learning process, about the link between practice and reflection, about

the process of attempting to have new thoughts about familiar experiences, and about the relationship between particular experiences and general ideas.

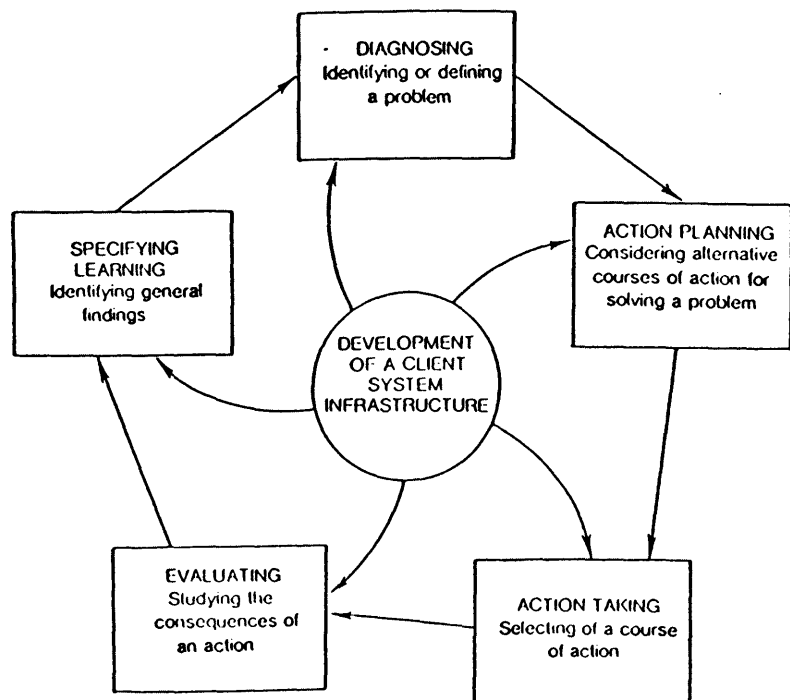
From this definition, one can see that action research is essentially based in the future (see Baburglo and Ravn,1997). While a change process is described, there is a strong element of normative planning which approaches the work of Emery and Trist (1972); Ozbekhan (1973/1974); and Ackoff (1981). This reflected by Baburglo and Ravn (1997, p.23) who state that "social action must proceed from an imagined, desirable future, rather than from a fragmented and problematic present". The role of stakeholders in such a process is of critical importance and will be developed later. Action research is an exciting and challenging social science paradigm. Its roots can be traced to critical theory and it also has implications for futures theories and theories about the learning organisation (see, in particular, Pedler *at al.*,1991 and Thuirbin,1994).

The Susman and Evered (1978) model has been chosen for this research because the cyclical process involved mirrors the continuous nature of the SMI process. The model, in fact, is similar to ones which have been recently developed for strategic management in local government and in the public sector (this point will be addressed shortly). The essential difference, and the advantage of the Susman and Evered model, is that the final phase of specifying learning emphasises the action focus.

In this case, the researcher is an established practitioner in Cork County Council, particularly in the application of NPM ideas. The results of the research will be brought directly to the organisation in an attempt to effect positive change - even though it is realised that no change may result from the intervention (Eden and Huxham, 1999, p.276). The researcher is also aware that action research must have broader implications for knowledge generation beyond the domain of the specific project. Eden and Huxham (1999, p.276) comment that "the ability of the researcher to characterise or conceptualise the particular experiences in ways which make the research meaningful to others is crucial". It is envisaged that the results of this research project (see, in particular, chapter 7) will have implications for all local authorities and public sector organisations and, indeed, all organisations undergoing restructuring or change.

The model formulated by Susman and Evered (1978) involves a cyclical process with five phases which closely resemble the steps Dewey (1933) outlined as necessary for reflective thinking (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 - SUSMAN AND EVERED ACTION RESEARCH MODEL



The first three phases of the model, i.e. diagnosing, action planning, action taking will be adopted in chapter 3 when the SMI process in Cork County Council is examined in detail. The final two phases, i.e. evaluating, specifying learning will be analysed in chapter 7, thereby contributing to a discussion on the lessons which may be learned from the application of NPM philosophies in the authority. Accordingly, an attempt is made to satisfy the primary criteria of action research as envisaged by the model. Susman and Evered provide a check-list of six characteristics which meet the requirements of action research and which are seen as a corrective to the deficiencies of positivist science as they apply to this research.¹⁴ These are listed as follows:

¹⁴ See also the important checklist of 15 characteristics of action research by Eden and Huxham (1999), adherence to which help meet the research requirements of rigour and validity. These characteristics underpin the use of the Susman and Evered model in this research.

1. Action research is future oriented:-

“In dealing with the practical concerns of people, action research is oriented towards creating a more desirable future for them” (Susman and Evered, p.589). In this case, the specifying learning phase is applied to assist Cork County Council in preparing a more effective second corporate plan.

2. AR is collaborative:-

“Interdependence between researcher and the client system is an essential feature of action research, and the direction of the research process will be partly a function of the needs and competencies of the two” (Susman and Evered, p.589). This is seen as an advantage by Susman and Evered who note (p.589):

It prevents him (the researcher) from taking the role of disinterested observer and obliges him to clarify and represent his own ethics and values so that they, along with those of the client system, can serve as guidelines against which to assess jointly planned actions.

In the present setting, the research involving Cork County Council is collaborative in that the original proposal emerged from within the organisation itself, providing the first step in the learning process. The researcher’s approach has been collaborative with permission for direct observation and in-depth interviewing as part of the methodology. Access has also been granted to records, memos and reports of the client system from which data has been retrieved.

3. *AR implies system development:-*

It is of fundamental importance that the research process encourages the development of the capacity of a system "to facilitate, maintain and regulate the cyclical process of diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, and specifying learning" (Susman and Evered, p.589). While there is no guarantee that the research into the SMI process in Cork County Council will be acted upon, the focus of the researcher's presentation will be on establishing the necessary communication and problem-solving procedures.

4. *AR generates theory grounded in action:-*

Susman and Evered (p.590) claim that in action research, "theory provides a guide for what should be considered in the diagnosis of an organisation as well as for generating possible courses of action". The main contribution to theory is that the actions taken are guided by theory. The subsequent evaluation may support the theory or may call for a revision.

5. *AR is agnostic:-*

Susman and Evered (p.590) argue:

The action researcher recognises that his or her theories and prescriptions for action are themselves the product of previously taken action and, therefore, are subject to re-examination and reformulation upon entering every new research situation

In the case study of Cork County Council the researcher has been aware that the method of research has been generated from the SMI process itself and that the consequences of action cannot be known in advance.

6. *AR is situational:-*

“The action researcher knows that many of the relationships between people, events and things are a function of the situation as relevant actors currently define it” (Susman and Evered, p.590).

The unique practitioner perspective of the researcher in Cork County Council means that actions can be prescribed on the basis of a clear understanding of how the principal actors define their current situations.

From the previous discussion it can be seen that the Susman and Evered model is a relatively simple one which corresponds with many of the strategic management models identified for the public sector. For example, Bozeman and Straussman (1990) claim that strategy involves dealing with the external environment, and the broad missions and goals of organisations. Accordingly they state (p.54) that the three major features of a strategic approach are:

- defining* goals and objectives;
- developing* an action plan that mediates between the organisation and the environment;
- designing* effective methods of implementation.

Osborne and Gaebler (1992, p.233), two of the most pre-eminent supporters of NPM, set out a similar model of strategic management in the public sector.¹⁵

- *analysis* of the situation, both internal and external;
- *diagnosis*, or identification of the key issues facing the organisation;
- definition of the organisation's fundamental *mission*;
- articulation of the organisation's basic *goals*;
- creation of a *vision*: what success looks like;
- development of a *strategy* to realise vision and goals;
- development of a *timetable* for that strategy;
- measurement and *evaluation* of results.

Specifically in local government terms, Worrall, Collinge and Bill (1996, 1998) have written about managing strategy. In this regard local government is very closely aligned with the wider public sector. This is demonstrated by the model developed by Worrall *et al.* (1996) for managing strategy in local government.

In their 1998 work, the same authors state (p.476) that the evolutionary process of a strategic approach “often begins with a recognition that muddling through is clearly not the most effective means of managing an organisation as complex as a local authority”.

¹⁵ A model very strongly based on Bryson's eight-step approach.

The Susman and Evered (1978) model should not be regarded as intrinsically of a different order to the standard public sector strategic management models mentioned above. The outstanding difference of the action research model is the role of the practitioner/researcher which is entirely appropriate in this case study, given the researcher's involvement in the application of NPM in Cork County Council. In essence, the relevance of the AR approach in analysing the SMI process in the Council centres on the 'detachment versus engagement' debate. Susman and Evered (1978, p.598/599) explain the merits of the debate by making a case for active engagement:

The positivist assumption of a detached, neutral, independent, objective researcher is incompatible with the requirements of action research. Once one accepts organisations as artifacts, created by humans for the purpose of serving human needs, then one cannot escape the realisation that actions in an organisation have moral consequences that must be faced. The success of action research hinges on understanding the values of the relevant actors since such values guide the selection of means and ends for solving problems and develop the commitment of the actors to a particular solution. Empathy, taking the role of the other, participant observation etc. may be the most effective means for making the theoretical or practical knowledge that the researcher possesses really useful and accepted by clients.

The researcher brings empathy and an understanding to the analysis of SMI in the council which facilitates future-oriented recommendations. These will be discussed in chapter 7.

2.6.2 *Dunleavy and Hood (1994)*

The second model used as an analytical tool in this research is the NPM Costs and problems Critique model advanced by Dunleavy and Hood (1994). The purpose of the model is to capture the attitudes of elected councillors, management and community representatives to NPM-induced changes in Cork County Council. The categories and labels used in the model are from cultural theory and, according to Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.10) “partly crosscut the more commonplace left/right dichotomy, a useful feature when looking at administrative reforms”.

The model concentrates on four critical perspectives of NPM, falling into the following four groups:-

- Fatalist critique
- Hierarchist critique
- Individualist critique
- Egalitarian critique

Each of these will be discussed in the chapter 7 analysis. For now, a brief overview is presented.

The Fatalist critique

The fatalist position has emerged in cultural theory with the leading theorists being Eilstein (1995), Leonardi (1995) and Mars and Frosdick (1997). In the context of NPM, the belief is that the basic problems of

public sector management (e.g. human error, bad intentions) are ever-present and cannot be eliminated. Therefore NPM, or any reform initiatives, are doomed to failure. The fatalist critique is inherently negative and does not offer solutions. Simply, it rejoices in evidence that reforming measures are not seen to be working.

The Individualist critique

The principal cultural theorists in this regard are Brennan and Buchanan (1985 - 'Virginia' public choice school) and Horn (1995). This belief holds that NPM is an unsatisfactory half-way house between the traditional structure of public administration and a system which is based fully on enforceable contracts and individual legal rights. Individualists frown on measures which fall short of full-scale privatisation and also on the bureaucratic nature of administrative systems. e.g. the permanent tenure of staff in the civil service.

The Hierarchist critique

The main fear for hierarchists is destabilisation. Such a view is often associated with the writings of Weber (1948) and more recently with the organisational management work of Schachter (1989) and Hammond (1990). Applied to NPM the view holds that reformers must be careful not to let the process of change get out of hand, thereby irreversibly damaging the overall manageability of the public service. A related fear for hierarchists is that traditional public service ethics and values will be swept away by NPM practices.

The Egalitarian critique

The most prominent writers from the egalitarian perspective are Etzioni (1993) who promotes the communitarian agenda (see chapter 6) and Wildavsky and Swedlow (1991). The egalitarian position is that NPM reform measures, with an emphasis on 'marketisation' and 'managerialism' will increase the risks of corruption in the public service. Personal interests of senior public servants may come to the fore and accordingly government will become less comprehensible, accountable and accessible to the public - in spite of claims to the contrary. Such abuses are easier in the context of decentralisation where there is increased public/private sector interaction.

Both of the models presented in this section of the thesis form the cornerstone of the research and each has a specific value in analysing the application of NPM in Cork County Council.

2.7 Conclusions

This chapter began by charting the turbulent development of public administration. This development has been inspired by a set of normative principles, put forward by John Stuart Mill, Woodrow Wilson and Max Weber. The advancement of the scientific management school of thought under Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol has also contributed to its growth, as has mainstream organisation theory. The transdisciplinary nature of public administration has become a weakness from an academic perspective. The discipline has crumbled during recent decades and has become outdated (Lane, 1995). It stands at a cross-roads and Hood's article from 1990 has a revealing title - 'Public Administration: Lost an Empire, Not Yet Found a Role ?' If one accepts Lane's (1995) contention that public administration is now being replaced by a plethora of concepts, frameworks and theories, then NPM is arguably the dominant doctrine at present. Yet, its credentials are suspect. Naschold (1996, p.2) comments:

contrary to the official view taken by the OECD as an organisation, there is no evidence of a linear homogenous trend in public sector management.....there is not just one, but rather - as a mixture of international trends and local factors - a limited plurality of development paths of public sector modernisation.

Is there a global revolution in public management taking place, in conjunction with the reinvention of government? Common (1998, p.440) poses a similar question and cautiously notes:

the changes to public management that are being catalogued around the world appear to indicate that we are witnessing a supposed paradigm shift in public administration from bureaucracy to post-bureaucracy which stresses managerial rather than administrative values. The new paradigm is often referred to as new public management.

Through the use of two theoretical models this NPM paradigm is examined in Cork County Council. The methodological framework offered by Susman and Evered presents an opportunity to assess the impact of the Strategic Management Initiative in the organisation. The Dunleavy and Hood model facilitates an analysis of the attitudes of three key participant groupings - elected representatives, senior management and community activists.

CHAPTER 3

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND

3.1 Chapter Aim

This chapter seeks to place NPM in the context of Irish local government. It begins with an evaluation of local government itself by arguing that a sub-national system of governance is essential for democratic development. The Irish system is then discussed and its distinctive features analysed. The various reform programmes which have been introduced by central government to address the deficiencies in sub-national government are presented for critical assessment, with an emphasis on the Strategic Management Initiative.

The significance of this chapter is that it provides a link between the theories of NPM (which have been presented previously) and their application in the Irish system of local government. It will be seen that this system remains rooted in a historical context with strong centralised control. The chapter also provides a stepping-stone to the sections which follow, notably in the final section when the case study setting of Cork County Council is introduced and the early steps of the SMI process discussed.

3.2 Why Local Government ?

The case for local government has been made many times before (e.g. Jones and Stewart, 1985). Advocates of local government claim that it exists in some shape or form almost everywhere in the civilised world. Collins (1954, p.114) is often quoted in support of local government, when he states, "it is the part of government that is most accessible to the average citizen, that most closely touches him and presents the most opportunities for public service. It is a school of citizenship".

The Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London (1957-1960), chaired by Herbert, also presents a strong argument (1960, p.59):

Local government is with us an instance of democracy at work, and no amount of potential administrative efficiency can make up for the loss of active participation in the work by capable, public-spirited people elected by, responsible to, and in touch with those who elect them.

While accepting that local government must occupy a subordinate position to central government, it must clearly be seen as distinct from a mere agency of the central administration. A locally elected council can make a much more positive contribution than a decentralised field agency. Essentially, the arguments for local government are based on pragmatism and tradition. The pragmatist approach is expressed in terms of effectiveness and efficiency rather than philosophy or political



ideology. Local government is required to provide public services to local communities .i.e. a functional perspective. The traditional approach emphasises the democratic significance of local government, expressed in terms of the role it plays in the state as a whole and also the local community, who are self-governed. The relationship between local self-government and democracy is noteworthy for the hyperbolic and image-laden language it evokes. Gneist (1891, p.375) has concluded, "local self-government gives community of thought to the whole parliamentary body and serves as a golden bridge which alone suffices to join state and society into a harmonious whole". Bryce (1921, p.131) refers to local authorities as "tiny fountain heads of democracy, rising among the rocks, sometimes lost altogether in their course, sometimes running underground to appear at last in fuller volume". Notwithstanding the liberal usage of poetic imagery, the uniquely democratic political qualities of local government remain significant. Its educative role is also regularly cited (de Tocqueville, 1945; Warren, 1950) in the context of political participation being necessary for a full and contented life. In the mid 1950s a debate took place concerning the justification of local government. The chief protagonists were Professor Langrod and Keith Painter-Brick and their arguments were chronicled in the journal *Public Administration* between the spring of 1953 and the winter of 1954. Langrod (1953, p.28) wrote:

Since democracy moves inevitably and by its very essence towards centralisation, local government, by the division which it creates, constitutes, all things considered, a negation of democracy.....local government and democracy triumphant represent indeed diametrically opposite tendencies.

Langrod continued by raising an associated definition of democracy whereby democracy is confused with majority rule. Money (1973, p.329) explains, "this lies behind the argument that local government is somehow anti-democratic in the sense that it can frustrate the normal will on any given issue because of its inherently local and partial perspectives". Painter-Brick strongly rejected the claims of Langrod, as did Whalen (1960) who questioned the authenticity of the selective empirical observation which was used. Painter-Brick argued the importance of local government in the democratic workings of the state, adopting the idea of John Stuart Mill that local government should handle local affairs and matters concerning the nation as a whole should be the concern of national government. Another valid point is noted by Roche (1982, p.8), "there is another purpose in local government, largely unacknowledged in our system. That is the function of providing a political counterpoise to central authority and power". This crucial function safeguards democracy, and contradicts the arguments put forward by Langrod. Whether one accepts Langrod or not, a strong case can be made for centralism, as follows:

- (a) Local government expenditure is a vital part of national macro-economic strategy and, therefore, must be controlled by central government.
- (b) The public generally expects central control due to the need for uniform and minimum standards of services and the need to check bureaucracy and inefficiency.
- (c) There is little electoral commitment to local government because local government and councillors are unpopular and the public look to TD's rather than to local councillors for most political participation.
- (d) The notion that local government acts as a bastion against excessive state control, and as a catalyst for the release of energetic community participation is over-idealistic and too ambitious a claim.

(Source: adapted from IPA, 1993)

While accepting the validity of these points, the author would argue that local government is justified for its claims to be participatory, responsive, accountable and representative. The crux however, as examined by Goldsmith (1991), is whether the reality bears any relationship to these normative claims. It is easy to justify local government on practical grounds but its theoretical justification needs to be re-stated in the context of modern society and higher public expectations. The arguments briefly outlined above are not merely representative of an ongoing academic debate but they should also provide the basis on which local government systems and reform are critically evaluated. In itself

however, the debate as to whether local government is necessary or not is beyond the scope of this thesis.

3.3 Brief History of Irish Local Government

Modern local government was introduced to Ireland with the passing of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898. Under this act, county councils and rural district councils were created to take over the functions previously administered by the Grand Juries. This legislation remains the foundation on which local government in Ireland has evolved, with only two structural changes of significance in the intervening period¹⁶ (excluding the introduction of the management system which can more correctly be regarded as an administrative change).

However, it should be noted that local government existed in various forms before 1898 and can be traced with confidence back to King John in the 12th century. While this time period in Irish history is not directly relevant to this research, it is appropriate - for the purposes of accuracy - to highlight some of the salient features which will facilitate an understanding of the present-day system. Barrington (1991, p.155) refers to the old joke that an Irishman can never answer a simple question without delving deeply into history and concludes, "but it is difficult to understand the predicament of Irish local government without a rapid

¹⁶ The two structural changes referred to are the abolition of rural district councils (which reduced the existing 460 authorities by three quarters) in the *Local Government Act, 1925* and the creation of regional authorities on January 1st 1994.

survey of how that predicament has come about". The next section provides such a survey.

3.3.1 Pre-1898

The earliest territorial reference in Ireland is the 'tuath' which became recognised as the county at the end of the 12th century under the reign of King John. A sheriff, appointed by the King, controlled each county and he became an important person with many powers, including committing people to prison.

The Normans had introduced the Grand Jury system earlier in the 12th century and now the sheriff took the responsibility for selecting the Jury members. The Grand Juries were the original county councils¹⁷ and they assumed more powers and functions over time. Initially, they only convened twice yearly for the baronial presentment sessions but, from the 17th century, had assumed administrative functions and soon the Grand Jury system was used for the construction of roads and for police work. Hegarty (1944, p.147) offers an insight into the Grand Juries:

these bodies had an important judicial function, and their local government functions related largely to the making and repairing of roads and bridges, and the collection of the Grand Jury rate or cess. The Grand Jury, though technically selected by the sheriff who was appointed by the central government, was, in practice, an assembly of the principal proprietors of land and the agents of peers.

¹⁷ In fact, the English author, Edward Wakefield (1812, p.347) described the Grand Jury system as "a sort of county parliament".

In terms of urban government, the Anglo-Norman model of establishing a network of municipalities was employed with towns granted royal charters for self-government. In the 17th century, the Stuart kings set up corporations, whose existence was decidedly un-democratic, as noted by Crossman (1994, p.6), - "by the time of the Union in 1800, most corporations bore a closer resemblance to exclusive clubs, with membership often restricted to individuals drawn from a single family, than to governing bodies". The unsatisfactory nature of urban administration at the time is summed up by Webb (1918, p.154) who refers to "the era of municipal misgovernment". Municipal reform commenced in piecemeal fashion with the Lighting of Towns Act, 1828 (creating town commissioners); the Reform Act of 1832 and the Towns Improvement (Ireland) Act, 1854. However, the distinguishing feature of urban local government largely remained in the way that "civic authority was centralised in self-perpetuating oligarchies" (Roche, 1982, p.32/33).

The situation in rural Ireland was little better and the chaotic and un-democratic nature of Irish local government at the time is captured by Crossman (1994, p.4):

parliamentary inquiries and literary accounts present a picture of a country whose power was vested in a landed elite whose members often regarded local government as a source of personal status and influence, not as a civic responsibility.

The Irish poor law system developed in tandem with the Grand Juries. While in England poor relief was provided for in the Elizabethan Act of 1601, the earliest poor law act in Ireland was not passed until 1771. The principal enactment though was the Irish Poor Relief Act, 1838 which followed from the investigations of a special commission - the Irish Poor Inquiry. Collins (1954) uses this act as the starting point for his study on local government in Ireland as it radically altered the face of administration in Ireland. Hegarty (1994, p.147) argues that the importance of the 1838 Act is that it introduced two significant elements into Irish local government - limited representation of the people and central control. Poor law boards were created to administer poor relief as the country was divided into unions. Relief in each union was provided by the boards (referred to as either poor law boards or boards of guardians) who in turn were under the control of the Dublin-based Poor Law Commissioners. Roche (1982, p.39) notes that "Boards of Guardians were the first representative local bodies in Ireland but were only part elected". Typically, power was vested in landowners while there were also ex-officio members. e.g. justices of the peace. By 1851 there were 130 poor law unions in the country and the boards of guardians were soon granted extra powers with regard to health and the dispensary system by the Medical Charities Act, 1851.¹⁸ The expansion of the poor law system, side by side with an increasingly unsatisfactory Grand Jury regime led to confusion, described by Crossman (1994, p.5)

¹⁸ At this point, the poor law system was under pressure due to the unprecedented demands placed on it by the Great Famine.

as a Frankenstein's monster patchwork of overlapping authorities and jurisdictions.

From the mid-nineteenth century it was apparent that reform of the local government system could hardly be avoided as abuse of powers, partiality and blatant corruption were its primary characteristics. There were some half-hearted reform attempts but the Home Rule struggle was the most pressing issue at the time and Roche comments (1982, p.44) that "the century drew towards its close with local administration still in a chaotic condition".

3.3.2 *Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898*

The primary purpose of the Act of 1898 was to put county government on a representative basis. The landed gentry were to lose their absolute monopoly power over local administration but their loss was tempered by a shrewd financial arrangement under which landlords were relieved of half their poor rate liability. The Act met with very little opposition in parliament as unionists viewed local government reform as a more favourable alternative to Home Rule. While the Act of 1898 is arguably the most significant legislation in the history of Irish local government, it can be seen that the structure which emerged was not radically different from that which had existed previously - rather the membership was changed fundamentally. This is reflected by Crossman (1994, p.93):

whereas before 1898 county administration had been conducted by the Grand Jury and by magistrates and ratepayers at presentment sessions, with public health matters being taken care of by poor law guardians, the new system substituted county councils for grand juries while rural district councils took over from baronial presentment sessions and boards of guardians.

Crossman (1994, p.109) demonstrates this in diagram form:

FIGURE 3 -Local Government before and after 1898

<u>Before 1898</u>	<u>After 1898</u>
Municipal Corporation Town Commissioners	Borough Council Urban District Council
Grand Jury	County Council
Baronial presentment sessions	Rural District Council
Boards of Guardians	Boards of Guardians (in urban districts)

The main effects of the 1898 legislation became apparent the following year when the first elections were held in March. Landlords virtually disappeared from the system as new men entered the local government arena.¹⁹

¹⁹ From the viewpoint of women, Anna Haslam argued at the time that the act represented "the most significant political revolution that has taken place in the history of Irishwomen". Crossman (1994, pp.94-97) accurately chronicles how women were excluded from membership of the new local bodies in the original bill, but by the final draft, women who were qualified to vote were entitled to stand for election to the district councils and to the Boards of Guardians. In the first elections, "four women were returned as urban district councillors and at least twenty-six as rural district councillors" (Crossman, 1994, p.96). See Haslam (1898), "Irishwomen and Local Government Act" in *The Englishwoman's Review*, October 15th.

A noteworthy feature of the 1899 elections, as highlighted by Crossman (p.97) was the smooth changeover to the new system of local government and the increased representation due to the broadening of the franchise. She states (p.97) that this was "a tribute to the democratic spirit prevailing in Ireland". Interestingly, this contrasts with the pre-1898 mood with Roche (1982, p.46) noting that, "democratic local government, of which county councils were the central example, was a virtually unwanted gift from the Conservative government to the Irish people. There was no agitation in its favour".

Another legacy of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 is that the system changed from a haphazard landlord-dominated environment to one in which legislation became more frequent and complex and the need for officials gained prominence.

3.3.3 *Post-1898*

The period from the late 19th century to 1922 (when Ireland gained independence) has been described by Barrington (1991,p.157) as "one of spasmodic disintegration of British rule in Ireland, of increasing confusion, inefficiency and petty corruption, culminating in the breakdown of law and order". It appears that the democratic spirit referred to by Crossman became subsumed by the desire for independence. At the turn of the 19th century, Ireland's local government system closely resembled its British counterparts in England and Wales with close to six hundred local authorities of all kinds. The final piece of

British legislation on local administration in Ireland was the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919 which made proportional representation the voting mechanism in local elections.²⁰ In 1920, Dail Eireann (the underground Irish parliament) established a local government department in 'competition' with the local government board which had been set up in 1872. Most local authorities supported the fledgling department but, for a short while, there were two central authorities in existence. Relative order was restored in 1922 when the new Irish Free State government created the Ministry of Local Government and the first legislative measure of the new parliament was the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923 which effectively abolished the lingering Boards of Guardians and placed the administration of poor law on a county basis. It also provided for the dissolution of local authorities who were not performing their functions and their replacement by commissioners. This was followed by the Local Government Act, 1925 which abolished the rural district councils and greatly reduced the number of locally elected bodies in the system. Commentators such as Roche and Barrington have cited this particular piece of legislation as influential in the creation of a centralised mentality. It should be observed however that Ireland at that time had been through a period of enormous turbulence with the battle for independence from Britain, followed by a bitter civil war which split the island. A tight rein with strict centralised control was deemed appropriate for a small, divided country with a new

²⁰ PR had been introduced the previous year (1918) in Sligo on an experimental basis to protect the interests of minorities.

government seeking authority and respect. Ewen (1992, p.5/6)

comments:

it was important for the new government to obtain order and discipline. It had taken over Ireland on behalf of the people and it had to show it was capable of running the country. The ministers were more committed to restoring order, achieving efficiency and putting an end to suggestions of local corruption and abuse than they were to local democracy These actions must be seen against the background of the time and understood as those coming from men of idealistic, often austere views who had been through a revolutionary experience and were progressing towards achieving independence after many attempts over the centuries.

Essentially, the needs of the time ensured a substantial intrusion by the central administration into local government and centralism became an accepted facet of government in Ireland.

Since 1925 the system of local government in Ireland has developed at a leisurely pace and the basic structures have remained virtually unaltered. The management system has been the most significant advance with Lyons (1973), as quoted by Collins (1987, p.9) claiming of the new Free State administration, "if that government gained in maturity and competence over the years the 'managerial revolution'²¹ may take a large part of the credit". The management system emerged following the regular use of the power of dissolution. Roche notes (1982, p.53):

²¹ 'Managerial Revolution' - parallel language with that used in the 1980s with regard to Thatcherism and in the 1990s with the NPM movement.

the power of dissolution was used freely at first, and with breathtaking disregard of the antiquity and prestige of the victims. Whether dissolution was a deserved or appropriate fate is debatable, but the surprising thing was the quiet acquiescence of the citizens in these violent assaults on their civic privileges, such as they were.

Twenty-three bodies were dissolved and replaced by commissioners within the first three years of the 1923 Act. The Kerry and Leitrim county councils have the dubious distinction of being the first two authorities to be dissolved in May 1923 while the corporations in Dublin (May 1924) and Cork (October 1924) were other famous victims. The dissolution mechanism was originally designed as a temporary punitive measure to punish troublesome local authorities. However, the commissioners soon began to have a positive influence on local administration. Their reliability and administrative competence (the early commissioners were senior civil servants from the Department of Local Government) earned them praise and respect from both central government and the local electorate. The concept developed and a strong supporting lobby group emerged in Cork city, with commercial and industrial interests to the fore. Despite strong opposition the Cork City Management Act, 1929 was passed with a permanent official sharing power with (rather than replacing) the elected representatives. Dublin and Dun Laoghaire (1930), Limerick (1934) and Waterford (1939) adopted the Cork model and the system was finally extended to the entire country with the County Management Act, 1940. To the present day, it is this power-sharing relationship between management and elected members which is at the

heart of understanding local government in Ireland (a more complete discussion on the management system is contained in section 3.4.3).

By the 1940s, Barrington (1991, p.157) states that “intense centralisation and general subordination to central government” were the dominant themes and the next two decades were largely un-eventful ones in the local government arena. The 1960s brought prosperity and optimism on the back of the 1958 Programme for Economic Expansion (the first national strategy in Ireland and the first attempt at economic planning). The positive mood was reflected by the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1963 which envisaged local authorities expanding their roles into ‘development corporations’. The optimism soon dissipated and the potential of local government at this time was never realised, partly because “arteries had grown too hard and bureaucratic sclerosis had become too far advanced” (Barrington, 1991,p.158).

The following decade saw local authorities relieved of their health functions²² and also relieved of financial independence, described by Barrington (1991, p.160) as follows:

in a disgraceful political auction between the two main national political parties, rates on domestic dwellings were abolished in 1977, on the premise of meeting the cost from the Exchequer, itself in heavy and rapidly increasing deficit.

²² The Health Act, 1970 established eight area health boards to take over local authority functions in the area of health.

Rates on agricultural land were subsequently removed in 1982 following a Supreme Court case which ruled that the use of the valuation system as a basis for levying rates was unconstitutional. The loss of rates revenue as an independent source of finance has severely restricted local authorities to the present time.

The 1990s have witnessed various reform efforts, with minimal impact on the overall structure or operations of the local government system. The Local Government Act 1991 relaxed the *ultra vires*²³ doctrine and enhanced the socio-economic role of authorities. This legislation also paved the way for the establishment of eight regional authorities with responsibility for the co-ordination of local authority activity.

The following two years saw the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Roads Authority (NRA). Both are specialised central agencies which have assumed powers formerly exercised by local authorities.

At the close of the 20th century, Irish local government has a three tier structure with regional, county and sub-county levels. There are 29 county councils, 5 city or county borough councils and 75 urban district councils and town commissioners.

²³ *Ultra Vires* disallowed local authorities from acting or spending money outside the remit of what was directly specified in statute.

3.4 Key Features of Irish System

As Ireland was a member of the United Kingdom from 1801 to 1922, its public institutions are mostly based on British models, with some local adaptations. While the local government structure has not altered significantly since the mid-1920s, the system has some distinguishing characteristics, which are now presented. These are crucial in gaining an understanding of how an Irish local authority, such as Cork County Council, operates. In particular, the examination of the management system and the growth of the community sector are important in the context of this research.

3.4.1 *Central-Local Relations*

The relationship between central government and local government is an important one in terms of the efficient democratic workings of any country. In Ireland, as has been demonstrated in the preceding section, historic reasons in the 1920s were to the fore in the creation of a centralised system in which local government played a subservient role. A master-servant relationship based on suspicion has remained in place since that time, despite calls (e.g. Barrington Report 1991) for a greater sense of partnership and co-operation. In effect, little has changed over time. The Royal Commission on Local Government in England (1966-1969), chaired by Maud, concluded, after a comparative study of seven countries that in Ireland, central control was the most stringent of all (volume 1, 1967 p.13). During a 1991 local government reform debate in

the Dail (11/12/1991) Dublin TD, Carmencita Hederman, stated (p.1573/1574 of Dail records):

we have the most centralised government in the EC.....in no other western European country, not even in the United Kingdom, is local democracy treated with so much contempt as in this country. In few countries is central bureaucracy so arrogant or so incompetent as here.....Ireland is three times as centralised as the western European norm.

Irish local authorities are subject to the supervisory control of central government in many respects. The Department of the Environment and Local Government controls and directs the activities of local authorities. Harloff (1987, p.38) places its role in context by stating that it "gives technical assistance and policy guidance, and is the principal mechanism through which state finance is provided in the form of grants and subsidies in aid of local authorities".

In financial matters, prior authorisation must be received from the appropriate minister for borrowing and for the undertaking of important projects which are financed partially by state subsidies. Administrative control is more stringent and is exercised through regulations, circulars and by the issuing of general directives, where the law so provides. The 19th century legal rule of *ultra vires* whereby local authorities are forbidden from spending money other than for projects authorised by statute, has also been a powerful and negative force. The Public Services Organisation Review Group report (PSORG 1969) stated, (as quoted by Roche, 1982, p.129):

local authorities could.....be given more general powers to act in the interests of their areas, subject to appropriate safeguards. The current application of the doctrine of *ultra vires*, together with the specific terms in which local government statutes tend to be drawn, encourage rigid control over local authority activities by the Department and deter local authority initiative.

The *ultra vires* control was significantly relaxed in the Local Government Act, 1991 marking a welcome improvement in central-local relations. Local authorities now enjoy a general competence to act in the interests of their areas, although this new found freedom is tempered by the fact that the authorities have a statutory duty to have regard to central government policies and the availability of resources. Also, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government may limit the use of this power and the amounts of money spent, through regulation. Essentially, the spectre of *ultra vires* is still pervasive which, perhaps, owes much to the mentality which intense centralism has created. Barrington (1991, p.165) remarks:

Irish experience would suggest that, beyond a certain point, centripetalism and the increasing bureaucratisation it nourishes each develop a major momentum of their own that becomes extraordinarily difficult to overcome before there is a major breakdown.

It would be naive to claim that such a change is imminent, although there are some encouraging signs. A greater openness and willingness to communicate is apparent in central-local relations. Also, the June 1999 referendum, safeguarding local government through constitutional recognition, is a step forward. Ultimately though the question of

centralism and the lack of local authority independence will forever be inextricably linked with the question of finance (see section 3.4.4). Chester (1951, p.338) refers to local authorities being “forced to accept grants and swallow the additional central control”. It should also be noted that the issue of central-local relations is not as straightforward as is often presented. McNamara (1993) makes the valid point that local authorities have been slow to imaginatively exercise their existing powers and to use legislation creatively, preferring to hide behind the excuse of excessive central government control.

3.4.2 Functions

The functions of county councils, county borough corporations, borough corporations and urban district councils are classified into eight programme groups in the Public Bodies (Amendment) Order, 1975.

1. Housing and Building
2. Road Transportation and Safety
3. Water Supply and Sewerage
4. Development Incentives and Controls
5. Environmental Protection
6. Recreation and Amenity
7. Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare
8. Miscellaneous

Roche (1982) declares that this range of functions has emerged through a combination of history, accident and attachment to tradition. By international standards, the functions and powers of local authorities in Ireland are narrow. In fact, the sparse allocation of functions to local authorities is one of the distinguishing features of the Irish administrative system. A submission to the Barrington committee (advisory expert group on local government reform) in 1990 by the Association of Town Clerks of Ireland stated (1990) that the functions of Irish local authorities are the narrowest of functions for local government in the western world and that in no other developed country is their local authority so circumscribed.

This statement is re-inforced by the fact that the European average for local authority functions is 25.6, while Ireland languishes with 10.²⁴ The trend has been for local government to lose functions rather than gain them. The removal of health responsibilities in 1970 was a major change, and in 1991 Barrington (1991, p.158) commented, “nowadays, the Irish local government system is almost wholly concerned with environmental infrastructure plus limited cultural activities”. This was penned prior to the establishment of the EPA and NRA which further eroded some traditional local authority functions.

²⁴ These figures were quoted in an unpublished submission by Cork County Council to the Devolution Commission in November 1995. They are based on a study on the topic undertaken by Conor Skehan who, in turn, used a 1981 Council of Europe report (“Financial Apportionment and Equalisations”) and a 1994 Danish NALAD report (“Regional and Local Authorities in EU countries”). While the accuracy of the figures is difficult to assess, the essential point is that, comparatively speaking, local authorities in Ireland have very few real functions.

In an attempt to redress the lack of local government functions, the Devolution Commission was formed in 1995 and mandated to recommend significant additional functions which could be devolved to local government. The commission produced two reports, highlighting the concept of 'completeness' which meant that a devolution programme should not lead to a situation where local authorities have a wide range of miscellaneous or unrelated functions but rather to the development of the widest possible role for local authorities in relation to specific functional areas where the individual or local community benefits from local administration of services.

The commission also listed functions which it felt could be devolved to local government. These were based on submissions received and included: promotion of tourism; group water schemes; local airports; school transport; harbour management; consumer protection and land registry. To date, this devolution of functions has not commenced. A primary reason for this is the fact that organisational matters such as extra staffing, new systems, developments in information technology (IT) and accommodation as well as the question of additional finance were not thoroughly analysed in conjunction with the devolution issue (despite the commission drawing attention to these matters).

Many local authorities are struggling to perform their present functions within tight financial constraints and perhaps a more fundamental and radical overhaul of the entire local government system is required before

extra responsibilities are devolved to local authorities. In the meantime, the European Union principle of subsidiarity ²⁵ (whereby responsibilities and powers are devolved to the lowest tier capable of carrying them out) remains an illusion.

3.4.3 Management System

It is standard practice when the management system is being discussed to begin with Chubb's quote (1970, p.286) referring to management as "perhaps Ireland's major invention in the field of government". The emergence of the management system from the post-civil war ashes of corruption and disorientation has already been traced (see section 3.3.3). The extension of the system across the entire country by the County (Management) Act, 1940 was brought into operation in August 1942. Initially there were problems, partly because of some of the personalities involved and partly because councillors felt that they had less powers than they really did. Disharmony was evident in many council chambers and councillors generally remained unconvinced of the new system. In an effort to appease local politicians and redress the balance of power an amending act was produced in 1955. At that time the second Inter-Party Government (1954-1957) was in power and their programme for government included the claim, as quoted by Roche (1982, p.108), "to restore democratic rights in respect of local

²⁵ The principle of subsidiarity originates from Catholic social teaching and was re-stated in the papal encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1941) - "it is an injustice, a grave evil, and a disturbance of the right order for a large and higher organisation to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower bodies".

government by amending the county management acts and giving to local authorities greater autonomy and effective power in local affairs".

The adjustments to the system via the City and County Management (Amendment) Act, 1955 were relatively minor but they did offer more powers to the council members and, in so doing, harmony was restored. Managers were now obliged to keep the councillors informed of their plans in executive matters; consult with them before undertaking new works and seek their approval for the creation of new posts or changes in salary levels. Perhaps the most significant change was the section 4 procedure whereby, with a simple majority, members could direct a manager to act in a certain way regarding an executive function. As time advanced, this power was over-used and abused (particularly in the area of planning decisions) in a small number of local authorities and some cases achieved notoriety. The section 4 procedure was subsequently amended with regards to planning in the Local Government Act, 1991.²⁶

The position of county manager is filled following a national competition organised by the Local Appointments Commission (LAC). Their recommendation is then sent to the county council or county borough corporation who appoint the manager by resolution. The manager performs the 'executive functions' of the council, while the elected representatives perform 'reserved functions'. The reserved functions

²⁶ Three-quarters of the total members of the planning authority must vote in favour of the section 4 motion. Furthermore, three-quarters of the members of the electoral area (to which the planning case relates) must sign the section 4 notice.

relate to the determination of policy areas and financial matters. Roche states (1982, p.109) that the powers of the elected members “constitute a formidable armoury” covering the five main categories of finance, legislation, political affairs, policy decisions and control of the executive branch. All other functions come under the remit of the manager as ‘executive functions’. These are carried out by means of a written manager’s order and include decisions in relation to staff, fixing rent, acceptance of tenders and decisions on planning applications. In reality, as the system has evolved, the distinction between executive and reserved functions has become blurred. For example, it is primarily the manager, through his senior officials, who initiates new policies and is seen as “the powerhouse of local government” (Chubb, 1970 p.286). Local authorities throughout the country operate by means of a partnership arrangement between elected representatives and management. The quality of this relationship holds the key to the efficiency and effectiveness of the local authority. It is therefore appropriate to ask whether the management system in Irish local government can be deemed a success when there is a “universally acknowledged discrepancy between what we read in the City and County Management Acts and what actually happens” (Roche, 1982 p.113). The relationship between councillors and management has been to the fore again in recent years and the creation of a new strategic policy committee structure (see section 3.6.) is significant in its attempts to return policy formulation to the elected representatives. New measures have also been promised by the current central administration including

the direct elections of mayors and council chairpersons and “the most radical shake-up of local government in the history of the state” (the words of minister Noel Dempsey when announcing his plans, as reported in the *Irish Times* on May 14th 1999). A Local Government Reform Bill was due to be published in September 1999 but has yet to appear, delayed due to fears of resistance from county managers who see their powers diluting.²⁷

3.4.4 Finance

Local government finance is essentially concerned with two basic things: the receipt of monies (through grants, commercial rates etc.) and the expenditure of monies through the eight functional programme groups. One flow obviously dictates the other and it is the receipt of finance available to local authorities which is of concern in this section. The root cause of the financial difficulties faced by local government at the present time can be traced to the Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act, 1978 which terminated domestic rates and transferred the liability to the Exchequer. At first glance, this might appear to suggest that local authorities were simply to receive the same monies from a different source. Coughlan and deBuitleir (1996, p.66) comment:

²⁷ See *Irish Times* article of November 23rd 1999, “Cabinet drop ‘radical’ plan for council leaders” - Miriam Donohoe, p.8

however, to control the Exchequer's liability, the Minister for the Environment was empowered, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, to place a limit on the percentage increases in rate poundages determined annually by local authorities (section 10/2); this power was exercised between 1978-'82 inclusive. -

A more damaging development for local authorities occurred with the passing of the Local Government (Financial Provisions)(No.2) Act, 1983. Section 9 of the legislation stated that the central government grant need not exceed the amount required to meet the cost of derating domestic property. 'Not exceed' quickly became two of the most significant words in the history of Irish local government and the Exchequer began to pay an ever decreasing fraction of what domestic rates would have yielded. Insult was added to injury in July 1982 when, following a Supreme Court ruling, agricultural rates ceased to be a source of local authority revenue.

The removal of these independent sources of finance for local authorities created a dependency on central government grants allied to the placement of an increasing burden on the commercial sector who still have a rates liability. The commercial sector has felt aggrieved at its plight due to the extremely unsound valuation mechanism on which the rates system is based and also in terms of accountability. The 1995 NESC report on the financing of local government concluded (p.39), "as presently arranged, this tax fails the basic test of accountability". This report was ignored, and instead the central administration commissioned two new studies, which were published in June 1996. These were, (a) *The Financing of Local Government in Ireland* (KPMG) and (b) *Local*

Government Financing - International Review (a supplementary to the main KPMG study).

Not surprisingly, with regard to the commercial rates issue, the KPMG (p.8) report dealing with local government finance reached the same conclusion as NESC had done barely twelve months previously, noting:

commercial rates raise substantial revenues, the system works well and can be used to promote local authority efficiency. However, under the current system, the rates base is too narrow, there is little accountability, there is no link to ability to pay and no link to consumption of services.

The KPMG report estimated the expenditure of all local authorities for the year 2000 to be £1,451 million and stated that reliance on existing sources would only meet this burden if rates increased by twice the rate of inflation.²⁸ Accordingly, buoyancy can only be achieved through an additional local tax source. A local income tax²⁹ or a local property tax (or a combination of both) emerged from the report as the most effective options and this view was supported by the supplementary report which highlighted the efficient use of these sources in continental Europe and elsewhere. Armed with these studies, the central government published the Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act, 1997 which ignored the recommendations and introduced a new system for funding local authorities. Charges could no longer be levied in respect of domestic

²⁸ The Minister for the Environment and Local Government subsequently capped the increases allowed on commercial rates at 5% per annum (as outlined in *An Action Programme for the Millennium*). Typically, the majority of local authorities have opted for the maximum increase.

²⁹ It was recognised that a local income tax would not widen the tax base and would be difficult to implement.

water supply or sewerage disposal facilities. The rate support grant was abolished with the proceeds from motor taxation becoming a dedicated local authority revenue source. Other features of the scheme included the creation of an equalisation fund (financed by a proportion of the motor tax yield) to ensure fair treatment for all local authorities. The legislation also stated that from 1998 onwards, county and city authorities would have the power to vary the national motor tax rate, within a maximum 6% limit.³⁰ Amidst general confusion, partly due to the retrospective application of the legislation to January 1st 1997, the minister made further amendments in January 1998, announcing, (as quoted by Boyle *et al.*, 1999, p.17) that, "we (the government) have recognised the need to provide a stable, guaranteed, sustainable and increasing base of funding as a prerequisite to any reform programme".

The Local Government Act, 1998 provided the basis for another new funding system with effect from January 1st 1999. It established an independent local government fund, amounting to £590 million approximately, sourced as follows:-

£270 million - Exchequer contribution
(to be adjusted in line with inflation in
subsequent years.)

£320 million - The proceeds of motor tax estimated for 1999

³⁰ It should be further noted that the 1997 Act introduced a major financial programme based on NPM principles with extensive value for money auditing, increased use of performance indicators and a new financial management system.

The apparent advantages as envisaged by the minister are the buoyancy of the fund and the fact that it is ring-fenced, or protected, by legislation. It remains too early to assess whether the new funding system will in fact repair the damage of the past 20 years and provide a stable base for a successful reform programme. The one lesson which has emerged from the history of local government financing in Ireland is that politics is a prime consideration. People have been weaned off rates and political expediency dictates that a local income tax or local property tax are unlikely options. The sentiments expressed in the 1972 White Paper on Local Finance and Taxation (p.10) remain valid today:

local authorities should have the power to levy local taxes. Moreover, these taxes should be capable of financing a significant proportion of local expenditure, if local democracy and a sound local government system is to survive. Unless there is a direct financial relationship between a local authority and its electorate, local government will have no real meaning.

This view is supported by the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland who have called for a specific line in each individual's wage packet to show how much of their taxation is going to local government (1999, p.14).

3.4.5 *Growth of Community Sector*

The tremendous enthusiasm, drive and efficiency so frequently exhibited in local voluntary organisations, and the often vigorous community spirit at local level has so far signally failed to be transferred into local and ultimately central government.

Thus Whelan (1993, p.23) outlines a pressing problem in modern Ireland. Despite a tremendous asset existing by way of a vibrant community and voluntary sector the failure to appreciate and harness this 'community spirit' has weakened democracy. Hederman (1976, p.503) comments, "it is remarkable, in spite of being given so little opportunity down through the years to flex their municipal muscles, people still have a considerable wish to participate in the democratic processes".

Evidence of this has been the rise of powerful local bodies such as LEADER and ADM Partnerships, funded by European Structural Funds, since the mid 1980s. The proliferation of activity by the non-elected sector has had both advantages and disadvantages. While generally these local bodies make a positive contribution to social and civic welfare, they lack the credibility or status of statutory agencies and tend to be overly-dependent on committed individuals for their existence and survival. At the inaugural meeting of the Devolution Commission (September 27th 1995) the Taoiseach at the time, John Bruton TD, recognised the problem of a glaring lack of co-ordination in local development. In referring to the multiplicity of agencies and organisations, he stated, "this has given rise to a bewildering and at times illogical array of service deliverers each defending its own turf".

By the mid 1990s it was apparent that the existing arrangements for local development were beset by problems. A 1996 study by Sabel, on behalf of the OECD, drew attention to the anomalous character of many local development bodies as well as duplication of effort and a lack of collaboration amongst themselves and with state authorities. Similarly, a Green Paper by the European Union in 1993 criticised Ireland for having too many separate community initiatives while, in the same year, a report by Fitzgerald and Keegan, commissioned by the Department of Finance, referred to the dangers of corruption due to the new untried structures involving ad hoc community groups. These criticisms, from a variety of sources, highlight the danger that the enthusiasm and creative energy so evident in Irish communities may be lost in a sea of confusion and duplication, a reality exacerbated by the uncertainty of continued financial support from the EU as the country prospers. In response, various studies were commissioned and published. These included the following:-

- "New Approaches to Rural Development" - NESC (1994)
- Devolution Commission Reports (1996,1997)
- Lacey Reorganisation Commission
"Towards Cohesive Local Government - Town and County" (1996)
- "Better Local Government - A Programme for Change" (1996)
- Task Force on Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems (1998)

The NESC report, "New Approaches to Rural Development" was published in November 1994 and was followed by a seminar of the same name at Dublin Castle in April 1995 at which NESC director, Dr. Rory O' Donnell presented a paper entitled "The NESC Perspective: Local Partnership in a National Policy Context". Both the NESC report and Dr. O' Donnell's paper were consistent in their claim that "the existing structures, procedures and role of Irish local government make it an unsuitable structure in which to place current initiatives for rural and local development" (O' Donnell, p.20). Furthermore, it was argued that even reformed local government would prove inadequate due to limited effectiveness, limited accountability and the overwhelming administrative culture of local authorities (pp. 136-138 of report). The work of the Devolution and Reorganisation Commissions in 1996 investigated the possibility of devolving functions from central to local level, the commission was asked to make recommendations as to how local partnerships could be developed and how co-ordination of the efforts of existing community groups could be facilitated. The government accepted the principle set out by the commission that the existing local authority and local development systems should be brought together and simplified. It was agreed that a new integrated system for local development would be put in place with effect from January 1st 2000 (with the ending of the round of Structural Funds). In the interim, local authorities were encouraged to develop a more structured relationship with the local development bodies active in their county, with greater

attention to be given to co-ordination difficulties at the level of local and rural development.

While these reports commenced a debate on the precise role of the community sector and local development agencies, it was *Better Local Government - A Programme for Change* which re-inforced the views of the Devolution Commission and, significantly, outlined structures for partnership. BLG again outlined that the local government and local development systems would be integrated from January 1st 2000, under the umbrella of local government. In so doing, the strategy directly contradicted the opinions expressed in the 1994 NESC report. Furthermore, new committee structures (see section 3.6.3 on SPC's) were to be established with membership drawn from external bodies and the community sector as well as elected representatives. BLG has been superseded by the present administration's document, "An Action Programme for the Millennium". However, the provisions of the previous strategy have been accepted and the need for facilitation of a new partnership with the community and voluntary sector has again been stated.

The Task Force on Integration was a spin-off from BLG, established to formally draw up the model for integration of the local government and local development systems which had previously been recommended. The government approved the establishment of a broadly representative Development Board (CDB) in each city and county local authority by

January 2000, at the latest (replacing the county/city strategy groups).³¹

The circular letter, LGP 8/98, issued by the DOELG to local authorities (03/12/1998) explains the formation of the CDB's:

The local authority will lead these Boards, which will include the Cathaoirleach/Mayor, the chairs of the SPCs, one councillor representing the combined urban authorities in the county, the county/city manager, public service agencies and locally-operating development agencies. The social partners and the community voluntary sector will be there, too.

It is intended that the boards work towards the production of a comprehensive social and economic strategy for their area, in partnership with all local agencies and local communities.

³¹ This deadline was subsequently extended to March 2000.

3.5 Reform of System

The previous section has examined some of the dominant characteristics of local government in Ireland. Reform of the system has been on the political agenda for some time and has been memorably described by Barrington (1991, p.163) as "a false pregnancy that has lasted since 1971 at least". In that year, a government White Paper on Local Government Reorganisation was published and public submissions were invited on its proposals. The reform attempts dating from 1971 to the mid-1990s are significant in that an examination of many of the proposals which were rejected at the time bear similarities to NPM ideas which are currently in vogue. The main points to emerge from the 1971 White Paper were:-

- The county is not a perfect unit but should remain as the basic unit of local government (6.1.2).
- Community councils should be officially recognised and their growth encouraged by giving them a voice in decision making (11.6.1).
- The system of financing the operations of local authorities on revenue account is in need of overhaul (15.1.1).³²

The White Paper was a discussion document rather than a prescriptive one and this is reflected by the lack of detailed, specific proposals contained in it. In response to the invitation for submissions on the White

³² An Interdepartmental Committee had been set up to examine and report on local government finance. Accordingly, the 1971 White Paper did not contain specific proposals on this matter.

Paper, the Institute of Public Administration published a comprehensive document entitled, "More Local Government - A Programme for Development". It called for the scope of local government to be broadened through the devolution of functions and decentralisation. It sought greater autonomy with a genuine partnership between central and local government and argued that a three-tier system (regional-county-district) was necessary and practicable. Interestingly, it also saw the need (2.1.5 p.3) "for associating nominees of voluntary bodies with elected members at one level of authority".

While the White Paper and subsequent submissions led to a welcome and much-needed debate on local government in Ireland, none of the proposals had been implemented before the government left office in February 1972. The incoming administration produced a discussion document which largely rejected the White Paper proposals and recommended some limited changes of its own, which too were not implemented.

Between the early 1970s and mid-1980s there were no official proposals for the reform of local government. However, as previously discussed (3.4.4), there were significant changes to the system by virtue of the 'abolition' of domestic and agricultural rates.³³ The National Coalition

³³ While the term 'abolition' is generally used when discussing the 1978 Financial Provisions Act, this is strictly not accurate. Rather than being abolished, the liability for domestic rates was shifted from households to the Exchequer. This is explained in section 3.4.4.

Government (1982-1987) produced a policy statement in May 1985, "The Reform of Local Government".

This document proposed a major devolution of functions to local authorities, a relaxation of *ultra vires* and the creation of new town councils. Before the local elections of 1985, legislation had been passed regarding only one of the recommendations - the upgrading of Galway city to the status of county borough corporation. No further legislation had emerged on local government reform by the time of the dissolution of the 24th Dail. The next reform attempt was driven by the Barrington Report in 1990. The 1989 general election brought together Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats as unlikely partners. Primarily through the efforts of PD negotiator, Bobby Molloy TD, local government reform appeared on the July 1989 programme for government. It was stated that a select committee would be formed to examine and report on the operations of local government - funding, structures and functions. These terms of reference were subsequently strictly curtailed when Minister for the Environment, Pádraig Flynn TD, announced that the county was to remain as the basic administrative unit and that alternative sources of finance were not to be considered. The Barrington report was completed and submitted to government in December 1990 and was officially published in March 1991. Following the use of a guillotine motion, the Local Government Act, 1991 was passed on May 18th - based largely on

the recommendations contained in the report - before the June local elections for county councils and county borough corporations.³⁴

The approach of the Barrington group has been likened to the 1971 submission by the IPA, with many similar proposals, including the general recommendations that constitutional recognition be granted to protect local government and that a general competence be statutorily conferred on local authorities.³⁵

The government's response to the Barrington report can be judged by the Local Government Act, 1991 which soon followed. The legislation, which had been rushed through the Oireachtas before the local elections, received quite a lot of criticism for its half-hearted acceptance of the Barrington proposals. In a newspaper article of May 13th 1991, James Downey described the bill (it became an enactment on May 18th) as a missed opportunity and a "legislative monstrosity". He claimed that the message was clear - the government had no intention of setting up a system of meaningful, powerful local councils (*Irish Independent*, - "Bill that fails to impress" by James Downey).

³⁴ The local elections which were due in 1990 were postponed due to the impending reform proposals from Barrington. After the 1991 elections there was an eight year gap before the next elections in 1999.

³⁵ In fact, two members of the 1990 advisory group, were also involved in the 1971 IPA submission - Tom Barrington and Richard Haslam.

Despite criticisms, the Local Government Act, 1991 introduced some positive changes into the local government system in Ireland.³⁶ The trend continued with the Local Government Act, 1994 which primarily dealt with increased restrictions on local authority membership (in addition to Ministers and Ministers of State, the Chairman of the Dail, Chairman of the Seanad and Chairman of selected committees of the houses of the Oireachtas were disqualified) and the creation of a commission to report on appropriate changes in town government (Lacey Commission).

The efforts of reformers in the 1971-1994 period were laudable, yet the results were piecemeal and did not represent a radical overhaul of local government. Since 1995, a different approach has been noticeable as NPM ideas have been incorporated into the system. However, many of the new NPM-based philosophies merely re-state approaches which had previously been rejected.

³⁶ While rejected in 1991, subsequent government administrations have signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government and afforded local government constitutional recognition.

3.6 NPM in Ireland

Boyle (1995, p.2) states that 1994 could well be “a watershed in the evolution of the public service in Ireland”. For the first time a broader look (incorporating international developments and organisational management ideas) was taken as to how the public sector was organised and how it delivered its services. The need for change with greater transparency and accountability was highlighted by politicians in the wake of damaging scandals in the public arena. International reform initiatives were examined and gradually the infusion of NPM ideas, which had originated in New Zealand and Australia before being transported to Britain, were introduced. However, as the discussion in chapter 2 showed, NPM has been noticeable for its varied application and different country-specific interpretations. Ireland has proved no exception, and under the somewhat vague umbrella term of NPM, Irish local government has undergone significant change. Five reform ideas, with SMI as the most dominant, have been identified. SMI is the foundation-stone of reforms in the public service as a whole, while BLG is the key document with regard to local government. The other reform programmes can be regarded as by-products of these two initiatives. Each is individually important, together they represent the Irish variation of NPM.

3.6.1 The Strategic Management Initiative (SMI)

The SMI was launched in the Irish public service by Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, TD, in February 1994. He outlined that the initiative was a response to change and evolving economic and social challenges and drew attention to its successful application in Australia and New Zealand.³⁷ Initially, SMI was only applied to the civil service who were required to prepare strategy plans. A change of government did nothing to reverse the SMI trend and indeed a greater commitment was shown with Minister of State, Avril Doyle TD, charged with the responsibility of overseeing public sector change. Speaking in the Dail on January 24th 1995, she outlined that it was necessary for each government department and agency to set an agenda for change which would be "far-reaching, focused and designed to achieve results.....based on a coherent programme of action where the various elements will make a real difference to the quality of service to the public and which will improve confidence in our public institutions". The preparation of the strategic plans was the first step, based on rigorous analysis and re-evaluation. In a relatively short period of time, some government departments began to change their practices and a customer-oriented emphasis was seen. The Department of Social Welfare and the Revenue Commissioners are generally cited as success stories in this regard.

³⁷ Boyle (1995, p.3) cites an important study produced at the end of 1994 by a group of assistant secretaries in the civil service, which further highlighted the necessity for reform. *Strategic management in the Irish civil service - a review on experience in New Zealand and Australia*, report produced by the MSc (Strategic Management - Public Sector) class of 1992/1994, University of Dublin, Trinity College (November 1994).

On March 22nd 1996, Minister Brendan Howlin TD, presented the strategic plan for the Department of the Environment and also launched the initiative for local authorities.³⁸ In his launch, the minister highlighted four key points which local authorities should keep at the heart of their strategic plan processes:

1. How the local authority relates to those it serves;
2. How the local authority manages the resources available to it;
3. How the local authority sets standards of service;
4. How the local authority measures its progress.

The minister also posed the question as to why reform of the public service was required and he sought to answer it himself by arguing that societal changes and the characteristics of modern life were driving the process. He specifically drew attention to the growing demand for more and better public services; the potential of advancing technology and the public's apparent unwillingness to pay higher taxes for better services. The minister continued by advising local authorities to follow six rules in drawing up their plans.

1. A focus on the needs of public service consumers and on the quality of the service provided;

³⁸ Initially SMI only covered county councils and county borough corporations. Urban district councils were not included until the county strategy plans were complete.

2. The setting of objectives and the monitoring of progress towards achievement;
3. Delegation of responsibility down through organisations with appropriate new arrangements for accountability;
4. The introduction of modern human resource management practice;
5. Improved financial management;
6. Proper co-ordination and linkage between public service organisations.

The language used and the ideas expressed were typical NPM-speak and they bear close similarities to the models of Ferlie *et al.* which were discussed in the previous chapter. Minister Howlin stressed however that these were recommendations and that the Department of the Environment (despite issuing detailed SMI guidelines for local authorities) would be giving local government bodies autonomy in the preparation of their SMI plans. In stating this, he offered an interesting commentary on central-local relations:

It is fair to say that in the past there was a perception that documents emanating from the Department tended to be over-prescriptive in content, not permitting local discretion in implementation. These guidelines are aimed at identifying the main issues to be covered and helping to ensure consistency of approach where it is necessary. Ultimately, however, it is a matter for each local authority to identify, and address as it sees fit, its own strategic management needs.

Each local authority in the country has since produced its strategic plan, operational for five years. The process is a continuous one and subject to

constant review as well as the production of new plans every three to five years. While it is dangerous to isolate any one element of SMI, it is fair to comment that most local authorities have emphasised service quality and service delivery. This is logical as local authorities typically have much more staff-customer interaction than civil service departments. Minister Howlin encouraged this emphasis at the SMI launch when he commented:

I am therefore asking each local authority, as part of local SMI, to step up their general efforts towards improvements in the quality of services. I'm asking, in particular, that each of you should consider the feasibility of developing a specific quality initiative aimed at improving the quality of service, or an aspect of a service, which you provide. Successful initiatives could subsequently be applied to other service areas and by other local authorities.

In June 1996, the Department of the Environment hosted a Convention on Quality in Local Government which re-enforced this commitment. Cork County Council produced its strategic plan in 1997 and the way it approached the SMI process and adopted its central ideas will be assessed later. In particular, the changing roles of management, elected representatives and community activists will be analysed in the context of NPM.

3.6.2 *Better Local Government - A Programme for Change (BLG)*

BLG emerged following the publication of the three reports (KPMG on finance; Lacey on re-organisation; Devolution commission on functions) which had formed the basis of the Government's Programme for local

government reform. BLG was published in December 1996, with Minister Howlin, in his foreword, stressing the need for the renewal of local government - "reform of local government has been on the political agenda for 25 years, although real progress in meaningful change has been limited to date. It is now time for action". The programme is based on four core principles which underpin the entire document (1.15, p.10). The first is 'enhancing local democracy' to be achieved primarily through the creation of new forms of participation by local communities in the decision-making processes of local councils and also the strengthening of the role of councillors. The second is the objective of 'serving the customer better' through a focus on the needs of the customer and the timely delivery of services of high quality, measured against performance indicators. The third principle, 'developing efficiency' includes the aim of establishing a modern and progressive financial accounting system with an increased emphasis on costing services as well as the effective use of information technology on a planned basis. The final principle of BLG is the 'provision of proper resources' through the introduction of a source of revenue with in-built buoyancy and a measure of local discretion and continuing government support for the restoration of the non-national roads system.

Like SMI, the BLG document is laden with NPM concepts and ideas but not in a particularly coherent order. Perhaps it can best be described as an aspirational document that seeks to deliver too much, too soon. The emphasis on efficiency and strict financial management is reminiscent of

NPM Model 1, which is associated with Thatcherism. Interestingly however, elements of the other models are also in evidence and the emphasis on returning power to elected representatives echoes NPM Model 4 with its distinct public sector orientation. There are also interesting questions to be addressed later in the thesis on what BLG means for the manager/councillor relationship which is so important. The principle that the role of councillors in running local councils is to be strengthened can be interpreted as a rebuke against the powers of managers. Equally, if BLG, in the words of Minister Howlin, (from foreword of document) “offers local government an opportunity to re-establish itself as the legitimate voice of local communities” it begs the question as to whom or what had assumed this role.

The establishment of a new committee structure under BLG is arguably the most significant component of the present local government reform effort. SPCs are designed (2.20, p.19) to “allow councillors a more meaningful role in policy review and development”. Again, the language is significant as the executive/reserved functions dichotomy envisages the elected members exercising the policy-making role - now they are to “be **allowed** a more **meaningful** role”. The principal characteristics of SPCs are as follows:- (section 2.19 BLG).

- Each county and city authority and the larger urban authorities will be required to establish SPCs mirroring the major functions of the local authority.
- The number of SPCs will be tailored to the size of the local authority, but it should be between two and five.
- Each SPC will be supported by a programme manager for the relevant service who will operate under the general direction of the committee and submit policy review papers for the service or services in question.
- The chairperson of each SPC will be paid an allowance - his/her term of office will be for a period in excess of one year.
- The SPCs will meet at least quarterly and submit a written report to the full council.
- To assist councillors in their corporate role, to foster a higher degree of community relevance and local participation and to draw on the experience of the various sectors, **not less than one-third of the members of SPCs will be drawn from bodies relevant to the committee's work.**

The involvement of external bodies on the new committees is the most controversial element of the SPC concept, and dates back to a suggestion made by the IPA submission in 1971. In determining the external representation on the SPCs it is recommended that a broad spread of sectoral interests are involved and that there is a commitment

to fostering social inclusiveness. Guidelines from the DOELG stated that ideally six sectors should be represented in each authority's SPC configuration: agriculture/farming; environmental/conservation/culture; development/construction; business/ commercial; trade union; community/voluntary/disadvantaged.

An important consideration is that each sector should select its own nominees and the local authority should not be involved in the selection of individual nominees.

Over the course of 1998, SPCs were set up in each county council and county borough corporation but were beset with problems from the outset.

1. SPCs are expected to run co-terminously with the life of the local authority. Most authorities did not establish SPCs until late summer/autumn 1998 which afforded them no time to operate before the June 1999 local elections.
2. Some local authorities completely contravened the DOELG guidelines and selected the external members themselves.
3. The selection of programme managers was hampered by union negotiations which meant that, in some cases, officials did not service the SPC meetings.

Consequently, in circular letter LG 11/99, dated October 6th 1999, the DOELG sent local authorities revised guidelines for the establishment and operation of SPCs ³⁹ (although the guidelines are dated, August 1999). The new guidelines made only minor adjustments to the existing scheme but sought to standardise as much as possible the nomination processes across all local authorities.⁴⁰ The DOELG also suggested that the process be put in immediate motion.

In addition, there is provision for the creation of a Corporate Policy Group (CPG), comprising the Cathaoirleach of the authority as its chair, together with the chairs of each of the SPCs. The CPG will operate as a sort of cabinet and will link the work of the different SPCs (it will be supported by the city/county manager).⁴¹

The SPC system is in its infancy and it is too early to assess its contribution to local government reform. However, the concept of including outside interests on the committees is one which should increase participation and create an avenue through which community groups and the public at large can influence the decision-making processes of the local authority.

³⁹ This is the third set of SPC guidelines from the DOELG. The first were issued in November 1997 but were amended in March 1998.

⁴⁰ The most surprising difference in the new guidelines was the exclusion of local development bodies from the new SPC process. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

⁴¹ Municipal authorities are to make provision for the establishment of Municipal Policy Committees (MPC's), particularly in the case of the larger towns (1.8 of guidelines).

The reaction by elected representatives could dictate whether the SPCs will be successful and the idea that non-elected people can sit on the committees and vote is a worry for some councillors who feel that their powers are being diluted rather than enhanced (see chapter 4).

Value for Money (VFM) and Freedom of Information (FOI) are two other significant components of NPM and warrant attention. Strict financial control has been a key tenet of NPM thinking since it was introduced in New Zealand to restrain an overheated economy which was being dangerously fuelled by excessive public sector spending. VFM comprises an important component in all NPM models and is particularly associated with NPM Model 1.

In Ireland, a dedicated VFM unit was established in the DOELG in an effort to encourage efficiency in the use of scarce resources. Equally, financial management was stressed in BLG, and the need to amend the accounting systems of local authorities and bring them in line with private sector practices was highlighted (5.22, p.51 of BLG):

The first priority in establishing the efficiency approach is to have financial systems which inform management and the public as to how the local authority is performing. In common with other public service agencies, the original basis of financial management in local authorities was one of accounting for expenditure, supported by rigorous audit procedures. The Public Bodies Order, 1946 is heavily laden with archaic control procedures and while it has admittedly been amended in some respects, it still forms the basis for the local authority accounting system.

The general need for greater accountability and transparency in the public service was reflected in the obscure and deliberately-confusing financial procedures which have traditionally been the norm in local authorities. It was apparent that any reform package for local government would have to include a modernisation of the system based on best accountancy practice. i.e. incorporating full accrual and double entry procedures.

BLG outlined how the emphasis would be shifted from an accounting system to a financial management system, including the following (5.24, p.51):

- revising and modernising the existing legal basis underpinning the system;
- revising the basis of accounting, including accruals, asset valuation, balance sheets, year-end procedures etc.
- developing unambiguous accounting standards across all local authorities (including layout and content of each programme group etc.) which will allow for standard methods of costing services;
- harmonising the work of the Local Government Computer Services Board in the computerisation elements of the new financial management system;
- rationalising the present arrangements for the provision by local authorities of various financial and statistical reports to central government.

BLG also provided for the expansion value for money auditing. The VFM unit in the DOELG had previously undertaken studies in narrowly defined areas, e.g. advertising, insurance etc. It was now envisaged that its work would develop to undertake more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of a wider range of local authority processes. VFM auditing now compliments traditional regulatory auditing and takes a broader view of the organisation and how it achieves its objectives. Another element to the overall financial strategy worth noting was that local authorities were brought under legislation for prompt payments by public sector organisations. Failure to settle invoices quickly and effectively means that financial penalties will be incurred by the local authority.

Prudent financial management is an essential element of NPM and is also an essential element of local government reform. With project teams in place in each local authority across the country, the new financial management system is taking root in Irish local government. Despite some initial teething difficulties, e.g. valuing assets such as roads, bridges etc. the expectation is that the performance of local authorities can now be easily examined in the financial statements. A heavy emphasis on the costing principle will ensure that it will be possible for each local authority to track the cost of producing each unit of service over time. This will facilitate comparisons between local authorities and the creation of benchmarking mechanisms. Performance indicators can also be set, and the city/county council will be truly accountable to the

public for the monies it spends, all of which are key ingredients of the NPM movement.

In Australia, reform of the public service via the SMI took place in tandem with the passing of Freedom of Information legislation which sought to 'free up' the sector. Ireland adopted FOI in the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 which came into effect for central government from April 21st 1998 but which was not applicable for local authorities or health boards until October 21st 1998. FOI was introduced for four basic reasons:

1. Increase government openness;
2. Improve accountability;
3. Improve public participation in government;
4. Give people access to their records and allow them to amend them if incorrect.

Thus, the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 established three new statutory rights based on the above.

- A legal right for each person to access information held by public bodies.
- A legal right for each person to have official information relating to him/herself amended where it is incomplete, incorrect or misleading.
- A legal right to obtain reasons for decisions affecting oneself.

Local authorities have been required under the legislation to provide for the publication of information statements concerning their structure, functions, operations (section 15) and their rules, practices, procedures and precedents (section 16). This has proved a mammoth task for local authorities with the necessity to significantly improve systems of record management and retrieval.

In the context of NPM, the advent of FOI is very important and can be associated with NPM Model 3. Generally, cultural change has been under-analysed in the NPM movement but the cultural dimensions of FOI in Irish local authorities offer some fascinating insights. A culture of secrecy has to be overcome, and noticeably, many local authority officials decried the new legislation as a negative development and immediately looked for solace in the exemption provisions of the Act. In other words, a mentality existed which expressed itself in terms of *“how can we find a way not to release the information?”* This indicates a lack of confidence in local government which is understandable given a history punctuated by dis-order and corruption, in addition to strict centralised control.

The benefits to the public should come in terms of improved participation. Community groups and the general public will be able to understand the workings and operations of the local authority and know how decisions are reached. Accordingly, they will be better informed and able to participate more fully and contribute to the local authority. As client

relations improve, due to the benefits of greater openness and accountability, the quality and consistency of decision-making will be enhanced. An unwanted side effect of FOI is that while local administration may improve, it does not necessarily equate with better local governance as discretion in decision-making will be prohibited. Therefore there may be a contradiction in NPM Model 4 as the distinctive public sector orientation may be tempered by strict procedures and tight controls.

* The five reform measures discussed in this section represent the variants of NPM in Ireland. The effect of NPM on Irish local authorities will be analysed in the chapters which follow, with a case study of Cork County Council. The evolving roles of management, elected members and community participants will be assessed. The case study setting of Cork County Council is now presented.

3.7 Cork County Council - Historical Review

As discussed in the previous sections, the birth of modern local government in Ireland can be attributed to the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898. On foot of this legislation, local elections took place on April 6th 1899. Just over two weeks later (April 22nd) the newly formed Cork County Council held its first meeting in the Grand Jury Room of the Courthouse.⁴² The inaugural meeting of the council, timed for 12 noon on a Saturday, attracted enthusiastic interest. This is reflected by an account of the meeting in the Eagle and Cork County Advertiser of April 29th as reproduced by Cadogan (1999, p.3):

The doors were thrown open at a quarter to twelve, when there was a rush for seats in the public gallery, which, when the business had commenced, was thronged to inconvenience, whilst the vacant spaces in the chamber was also fully taxed by visitors.

After the excitement and formality of the first meeting, the elected representatives and staff of the council settled down to their work and the enormity of the task at hand became apparent. Cork is a maritime county and the largest in Ireland with an area of 7,454 sq.km. Its coastline stretches for 1094km which represents 20% of the national figure, while the county is comprised of 5,429 townlands.

⁴² This first meeting was replicated by the sitting members of Cork County Council on April 22nd 1999, i.e. exactly 100 years later.

The daunting nature of administration in this large jurisdiction helped to focus the minds of the first members and they set about the challenge with zeal, establishing a number of working committees. Cadogan (1999, p.46) recounts that "one of its immediate social problems was providing for the large number of rural applicants for housing". In 1902 the second local elections for Cork County Council took place while, by 1906, the first competitive examinations for recruitment of clerical staff were being held. Political issues dominated during the 1916-1923 period. Following the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Proclamation of a Republic by Pearse, Cork County Council pledged loyalty to the British crown on April 28th (as quoted by Marnane, 1986, p.140 - resolution adopted on May 11th 1916):

We the Cork County Council, representing about one-tenth of Ireland, in special meeting assembled, to consider the present crisis in our country's history, having already assured His Majesty of our loyal support in the government of the country, deplore the recent outbreak in Dublin. We regret that the extreme penalty of death has been exacted in so many cases. We know that a feeling of bitterness has been created in people who have no sympathy whatever with the Dublin outbreak.

Four years later, in 1920, this resolution was retrospectively revoked by the Chairman of the council, Donal Og O Ceallachain. In the same year, the War of Independence escalated in county Cork with the deaths of MacCurtain (murdered) and McSwiney (hunger strike) and the burning of Cork. With the ending of the war in 1923 relative harmony returned to the council and a period of stability was enhanced by W.J. Broderick who commenced a 30 year tenure as Chairman in June 1927. By 1932, the council had recruited for permanent posts its first female clerk-typists.

Another milestone was reached a decade later (August 26th 1942) when Joseph F. Wrenne was appointed as the first county manager. A year later, northern, southern and western committees of the council were formed, paving the way for a divisional structure which remains in place to the present day.⁴³ The financial year 1945-'46 saw Cork County Council's expenditure exceed £1m for the first time and another historic event took place in 1955 when Veronica Hartland became the first woman elected to the council. The present headquarters of the local authority, Cork County Hall, was completed and opened on the Carrigrohane road in 1968. The intervening period has witnessed many changes in personnel, in financial arrangements (e.g. rates and service charges sagas) and in work practices. In April 1999 the centenary of the council was celebrated with a meeting at the original venue in the city Courthouse. Local elections were held the following month and sixteen new councillors took their places in the historic council chamber, "bringing to 525 the number of past and serving members" (Cadogan, 1999, p.48).

Cork County Council is a major organisation in the county with an annual expenditure in excess of £120m.⁴⁴ Forty-eight elected representatives are supported by a staff of over 2,300, headed by county manager,

⁴³ By an order under section 5 of the Local Government (Amendment) (no.2) Act, 1934, dated December 29th 1934 the county of Cork was divided into three rural sanitary districts of north, south and west Cork. This divisional structure remains in place today, with a manager (overall assistant county manager) for each division. See Appendix C at end of chapter.

⁴⁴ The budget provision for expenditure in 2000 under the eight functional programme groups is £121,038,502 (source: County Manager's Report and Estimate, p.4).

Maurice Moloney.⁴⁵ Community development, economic and industrial growth and environmental protection remain the driving motivations for the authority.⁴⁶ Since the mid-1990s the facilitation of these aims has been enhanced by an increased emphasis on strategic management and planning, in tandem with an application of NPM thinking. These developments are contained in the next section.

**** Note:** See Appendix A for a summary of the organisation and its internal structure.

⁴⁵ Maurice Moloney is the sixth Cork county manager. The list is as follows: Joseph F. Wrenne 1942-1954; Eoin Callanan 1954-1960; Michael N. Conlon 1960-1978; Patrick Dowd 1981-1992; Noel Dillon 1993-1998; Maurice Moloney 1998-

⁴⁶ For a more comprehensive account of Cork County Council's history, see Marnane (1986, 1999).

3.8 NPM and Cork County Council

It has been asserted in this chapter that the application of NPM in Irish local government has taken the form of five reform initiatives. The catalyst, undoubtedly, was the Strategic Management Initiative, a NPM-inspired model borrowed directly from New Zealand. The Cork County Council adoption of the NPM ethos - with a particular emphasis on SMI - is now examined. Susman and Evered's (1978) action research process model presented in chapter 2 is utilised. Susman and Evered identified five distinct phases:-

1. **DIAGNOSING** - Identifying or defining a problem.
2. **ACTION PLANNING** - Considering alternative courses of action for solving a problem.
3. **ACTION TAKING** - Selecting a course of action.
4. **EVALUATING** - Studying the consequences of action.
5. **SPECIFYING LEARNING** - Identifying the general findings.

In this section, Cork County Council's SMI will be analysed under the first three phases. The latter two evaluation phases will be considered in the final chapter.

3.8.1 Diagnosing - Identifying or Defining a Problem

A distinctive feature of local government in Ireland is strong centralist control. Accordingly, it is not surprising to note that SMI was a top-down

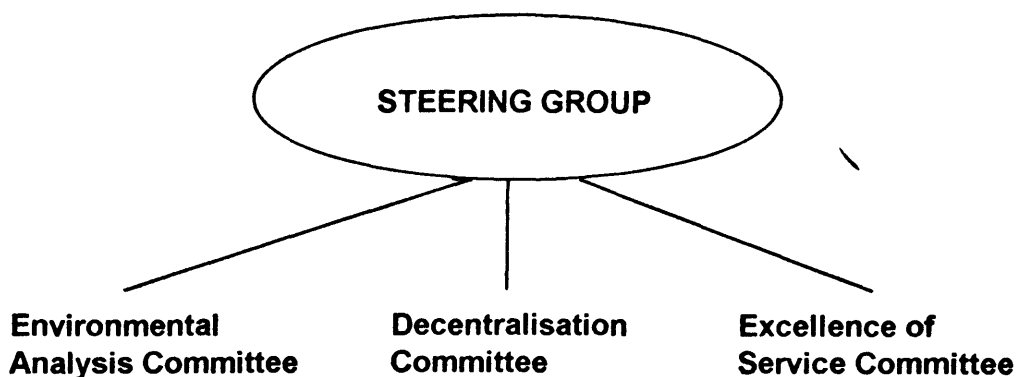
programme imposed on local authorities by the central administration. Unfortunately, this fact did not initially create much enthusiasm for the process as many local authorities regarded SMI as an imposition and an inconvenience. Also it was seen as a potential reforming measure for the wider public service, transferred to local government as an after-thought. In other words, SMI was not viewed as a specific measure designed for local authorities arising from weaknesses in the local government system. When Minister Howlin launched the SMI for local authorities in March 1996, the diagnosis was effectively being made by central government. Rather than identifying or defining problems, the minister sought to encourage local authorities to react to societal changes and the characteristics of modern life. He emphasised service quality and customer relations in tandem with the effective use of resources and increased accountability.

It could be argued that, from the outset, SMI was weakened by the fact that the diagnosis of what was required did not come from within the local authorities themselves. Equally however it should be noted that within the broad parameters set by the Department of the Environment, there was scope for each local authority to proceed with its strategic plan as it saw fit - based on a diagnosis of the organisation.

3.8.2 Action Planning - Considering Alternative Courses of Action for Solving a Problem

The management of Cork County Council undertook its own organisational diagnosis and established a committee structure to design and implement a strategic plan.

**FIGURE 4 - SMI COMMITTEE STRUCTURE
IN CORK COUNTY COUNCIL**



The results of the management's internal diagnosis can be gauged by the three committees it established and the emphasis placed on certain issues. The title 'Environmental Analysis Committee' is slightly misleading.⁴⁷ The terms of reference of this group were to examine how the council could develop relationships with external bodies such as the DOELG, EU, community associations and EU funded organisations.

⁴⁷ Subsequently the name was changed to the Partnership Committee.

The functions of the other two committees are self-explanatory. The Decentralisation Committee was to examine the possibility of decentralising the council's services and the associated issues of finance, resources and staff. The role of the Excellence of Service Committee was to investigate how the provision of public services could be improved, incorporating internal staff considerations. Each of the three committees had a membership of approximately twelve, chaired by an Assistant County Manager and including staff members from all levels of the organisation and from offices across the county (i.e. it was not restricted to staff in the headquarters of the County Hall).⁴⁸

The Steering Group was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the SMI process and comprised the County Manager, the Assistant County Managers (as chairpersons of the three constituent committees), the County Secretary, County Engineer and the Professor of Management from the local university who was retained to facilitate and direct the initiative.

3.8.3 Action Taking - Selecting a Course of Action

Each committee undertook a course of action designed to satisfy its terms of reference and contribute to the strategic plan for the organisation. The Environmental Analysis Group held a series of

⁴⁸ This included the researcher who had the role of secretary to the Excellence of Service Committee.

meetings with external bodies who impacted on the day-to-day operations of the council. (and created a framework for contact with others.) These included government departments, the National Roads Authority (NRA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Industrial Development Agency (IDA), Bord Failte and representatives from the community sector.

The Decentralisation Committee conducted an evaluation of existing office accommodation, the potential for the effective utilisation of advances in Information Technology (IT) and the need to restructure administrative procedures. Additionally it studied various models and case studies of decentralisation and consulted other local authorities.

The primary aim of the Excellence of Service Committee was the setting of quality initiative targets in each service delivery area with the development of appropriate performance indicators to effectively monitor progress. The committee also recognised that an external focus on the customer to the neglect of an internal focus on staff would be detrimental to the organisation. Consequently, an ambitious consultation programme was undertaken to encourage staff participation and assess the level of morale. The committee also investigated the telephone and communication system within the organisation and, crucially, hired a market research company to conduct a comprehensive customer service survey - the first structured measurement of public opinion within the Cork County Council area. Between December 5th - 18th 1996, 504 adults

across 42 separate sampling points throughout the county were interviewed.

On the basis of the work of the three committees, as overseen by the Steering Group, Cork County Council produced in the summer of 1997 its corporate strategy for the period 1997-2002. As stated previously, an evaluation of the Corporate Strategy and the initiatives mentioned in this section will be undertaken in the concluding chapter in the context of the overall impact of NPM.

3.8.4 *The Other Variants*

Arguably the impact of SMI on local government is more significant than that of the other variants of NPM which have been previously discussed. The Programme for Change, Strategic Policy Committees, Freedom of Information legislation and Value for Money all develop concepts which emerged through SMI.

Cork County Council viewed the four principles espoused by BLG as extensions of the SMI themes and sought to implement them through the corporate plan, which states (p.9), “we have incorporated the main elements of the change programme in our Corporate Strategy”.

The new SPC committee structure however has a stand-alone value which warranted separate consideration. In strict adherence to the initial

Guidelines from the DOELG, the council advertised for external representatives and held briefing and selection meetings with all the applicants from the various sectors in November 1998. At these meetings the sectoral interests selected their representatives to serve on the committees. While the DOELG envisaged each local authority establishing between three and five SPCs, a special allowance was made for Cork County Council because of the size of the county and the existence of a divisional structure. Seven SPCs were created as follows:

FIGURE 5 CORK COUNTY COUNCIL
STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

<u>Divisional</u>	1. <u>SPC - North</u> Housing, Sanitary, Social, Cultural, Recreational, Urban co-ordination	Membership 13 Councillors 2 UDC members 8 External bodies
	2. <u>SPC - South</u> Housing, Sanitary, Urban co-ordination	Membership 12 Councillors 4 UDC & Town comms. 8 External bodies
	3. <u>SPC - South</u> Social, Cultural, Recreational	Membership 11 Councillors 3 UDC & Town comms. 7 External bodies
	4. <u>SPC - West</u> Housing, Sanitary, Social, Cultural, Recreational, Urban co-ordination	Membership 12 Councillors 3 UDC & Town comms. 8 External bodies

County	5. <u>SPC</u> Planning and Economic Development	Membership 12 Councillors 6 External bodies
	6. <u>SPC</u> Road Transportation and Emergency (incl. Fire)	Membership 12 Councillors 6 External Bodies
	7. <u>SPC</u> Environmental Protection and Waste Management	Membership 12 Councillors 6 External bodies

Unfortunately the life-span of these committees proved short as the DOELG used the local elections in June 1999 as an opportunity to re-launch the SPC concept and solve some of the difficulties which had arisen with the first attempt. Cork County Council has again commenced an advertising and selection process with a new draft scheme. The aim is to have the SPCs operational from the summer of 2000.

The Value for Money (VFM) ethos has been apparent in the council over the past number of years. In consultation with local authorities, the Value for Money Unit in the DOELG has produced a series of reports - 18 had been published by the end of 1999. Through the Internal Audit and County Secretary's Departments of the council, the reports have been circulated to the different sections of the organisation with a view to implementation and the efficient use of available resources.

The preparation for the advent of the Freedom of Information Act 1997, with effect in local authorities from October 21st 1998, proved a big challenge for Cork County Council. A Freedom of Information Officer and an Assistant Freedom of Information Officer were appointed to assist the council in this regard.⁴⁹ A series of educational meetings and briefing sessions were held to explain the significance of the legislation to staff members and to try and engender a positive culture towards the dissemination of information. An FOI steering committee oversaw the preparations, with a particular emphasis on effective records management and retrieval systems. Also, council officials played active roles in the national committee of FOI officers and also in a sub-committee examining the exemption provisions under the legislation.

⁴⁹ The researcher acted in the role as Assistant FOI officer.

3.9 Conclusions

It is difficult not to agree with Barrington's (1991, p.164) assessment that the history of local government in Ireland is a sorry one. From the Grand Juries to municipal governance, to town commissioners, to the first authorities of the Irish Free State, there are repeating themes of inefficiency, partiality and abuse of power. Certainly, development has been haphazard, at best.

The theme of centralist control remains a powerful one, despite recent improvements in relaxing the doctrine of *ultra vires*. As Barrington notes (1991, p.166), "the dominant model of central-local relations is the agency one" with the trend being the sidelining of local government away from local responsibility and autonomy.

Within local authorities themselves, there is also a constant tension (often beneath the surface) between management and elected representatives. At the present time, the pendulum is swinging back towards the councillors with the BLG and the Action Programme for the Millennium advocating an enhancement of their role. Yet the capacity and the willingness to assume greater responsibility is not always evident amongst the country's local politicians. O' Halpin (1991, p.17) characterises the manager/member relationship in the following way, describing managers as "skilled technicians, applying the antiseptic

standards of scientific administration to matters previously dealt with in the unsavoury gutter of local politics”.

Since 1971, repeated efforts have been made to reform and reorganise the local government system. Little of substance has been achieved however. One reason for this is that there is no great public interest in local government, let alone its reform (Coyle, 1993). This realisation has transferred itself to central government and politicians know that there are no votes in local government reform. Therefore, the tendency is not to disturb the status quo and fundamentally address the pressing problem of local authority financing. A local tax (income or property) equates to political suicide.

NPM ideas have infiltrated the local government system since the 1995 adoption of SMI and the potential for development is significant. Yet, the fear remains that the true scope of NPM will not be understood and rather it will become lumbered with the label of a failed reform programme. This would be to understate the power of NPM as an international public service movement. Equally, however, as was discussed in the previous chapter, NPM has yet to prove itself and opinion is divided as to whether it represents a passing fad or a long-term phenomenon.

Either way the realisation is there that local government in Ireland is undergoing a period of significant change. Local authorities are facing

the challenge of adapting to changing societal values and needs, and reflecting these demands in their strategy plans. The temptation for many will be to make only cosmetic alterations to their operating practices and allow their glossy strategy plans and guidelines from the DOELG to gather dust. The corporate strategy, 1997-2002, of Cork County Council reflects this by quoting Ansoff in its conclusion (p.26) -

Whereas the first pillar of strategic management is strategic planning, the second is the capability of an organisation to convert written plans into market reality.

Meanwhile, the main stakeholders - management, elected representatives and community participants - face the challenge of re-defining themselves and their positions in the changing and evolving system of local government.

The case study setting of Cork County Council has been briefly explored in the latter sections of this chapter. While some of the council's approaches to the application of the NPM ethos in recent years have been unique, they should be viewed in terms of adherence to national policy guidelines from central government within a homogenous local government system. Accordingly, while the evaluation which follows in the next chapters should contribute to an understanding of Cork County Council and some of the key power-brokers within the organisation there will also be scope to generalise to the overall adoption of NPM in Irish local government. In this way the case study is also contributing to a

wider understanding of social and political phenomena and the NPM movement itself.

The thesis now moves on to an analysis of the three key stakeholder groups identified in Cork County Council.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION - ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

4.1 Chapter Aim

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how the elected members of Cork County Council are adapting to a period of change in Irish local government, driven by new public management.

Existing literature in the area is utilised to foster an understanding of the role of the local councillor and his/her motivations and perceptions. The evolving role of the elected representative as described by NPM literature is also discussed and contrasted with the language found in *Better Local Government - A Programme for Change* and in the documents surrounding the Strategic Management Initiative.

Finally, through interview data from members of Cork County Council, the role of the councillor is examined in the context of relationships with management and the community sector as well as the degree of involvement in SMI and the preparation of the authority's corporate plan.

4.2 Putting a Face on the Local Councillor

There has been little research on the local politician in Ireland. A brief flurry of activity in the mid-1970s resulted in work by Sacks (1976) and Bax (1976) which highlighted a culture of brokerage and clientelism. In addition, Zimmerman (1976, 1977) examined the role perceptions of the local councillor and managers in two significant research papers. A decade later, Carey (1986) re-visited Zimmerman's research in a paper entitled 'Role Perceptions Among County Councillors' which was based on data collected in 1982 from interviews with members of one county council.⁵⁰ Collins (1987) produced *Local Government Managers at Work* which again analysed the manager-councillor relationship. In reference to the level of interest and research into Irish local politics at that time, he commented (p.52), "an increasing amount of case-study, anecdotal, survey-based and anthropological material is available though political science has been poorly represented". There has been little improvement in the situation during the intervening time period with the local councillor again returning to a position of under-analysis, apart from some minor studies conducted by the General Council of County Councils (GCCC) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) e.g. Kenny (1999).

A more substantive body of research on this subject has been produced in Britain with Elcock (1986, 1991, 1994); Barron *et al.* (1991) and Rao (1994) leading the way in terms of fostering an understanding of the

⁵⁰ Carey interviewed 20 county councillors. a sample size similar to this research.

elected representative in UK local government. Similarly, Martlew (1988) has contributed to the area with significant work on the Scottish local councillor. While this research from Britain is valuable - particularly in terms of councillor motivations - it is not directly transferable to an Irish setting. The unique nature of Irish local government has been chronicled in chapter 3 and the role of the city/county manager is a peculiar characteristic of the system. Accordingly, while references to the relationship between administrators and councillors in Britain are of some value, they do not equate to the manager/councillor relationship in Ireland. This leaves researchers on local councillors in Ireland with very little in the way of substantive and contemporary literature on which to base their work. To overcome this deficiency, literature from Britain is used and applied where it is deemed appropriate, especially in the area of councillor motivations.

An understanding of the local councillor in Ireland can be gleaned from 'The County Councillors' Song' which appeared in the *Leinster Leader* newspaper on May 1st 1900.

THE COUNTY COUNCILLORS' SONG

*I am a County Councillor, a very public man
To benefit the people I'll do everything I can;
In all my waking moments for their welfare
I will scheme
and in the arms of Morpheus of improvements
I will dream.
A local legislator and a man of high renown,
I am the County Councillor, the greatest man in town.*

A full 100 years later there is much in this little song which still rings true as it draws attention to the dual role of the local elected representative. On the one hand, the community representative - 'to benefit the people I'll do everything I can'. On the other hand, the policy-maker - 'a local legislator and a man of high renown'. The impression is also given in the verse of a person who will scheme for the benefit of his constituents. This impression lingers today with the 'gombeen-man' notion of the councillor as a 'Mr. Fix-it' who is not adverse to bending the rules slightly. It is hardly surprising therefore to record that the perception of the local elected representative is poor. Tierney (1982, p.7) succinctly captures this point, when he notes, "there is an underlying feeling, common to most of the electorate, that local politicians are 'on the make', probably dishonest, and little interested in the spending of other people's money". This judgement is harsh and the councillor will draw little solace from the fact that opinions on politics and politicians generally have diminished even further since Tierney's statement, on the evidence of opinion poll data and low election turnouts.

4.2.1 The Role of the Local Councillor

As outlined previously the elected members of a local authority carry out reserved functions. To borrow Elcock's (1986) terminology the elected members in any local authority are the supreme decision-makers. Decisions taken are formally those of the council while management and staff are ultimately responsible for enacting policy. Much of the research

on Britain to date has concentrated on the motivations of the local councillor. Five different - but not mutually exclusive - motivations have emerged:

1. The desire to influence a local authority's policies.
2. A desire to help individual citizens (Grievance-chaser motivation).
3. The need to find an alternative route to self-fulfilment.
4. A perception that the council is the centre of social life.
5. Status and prestige.

Kerley (1994, p.178) sums up by concluding:

many people are elected with a generalised commitment to 'serve the community' with no clear idea about what exactly that service will involve. Serving as a councillor is one of the few jobs in local government that does not have a job description.

Such an observation can also be legitimately applied to the Irish councillor. Despite the vague nature of the job in question, more than 1,800 candidates offered themselves for election in June 1999, apparently willing to forsake personal time, business opportunities and privacy. The councillor is a part-time politician but research by the GCCC indicates that many councillors spend up to 34 hours per week on average serving their local communities. In a Seanad debate following the June 1999 elections, Senator Coogan stated,

It is easier to define what is not the role of the councillor. He must be an expert on water pollution, sewerage, waste and its disposal, recycling, incineration, road maintenance and repairs, planning, housing and many other issues.

In the same debate, Senator Kiely offered a similar argument:-

The county councillor is a full-time social worker. If somebody wants to find out about the carer's allowance, local improvement schemes, group water schemes, planning matters etc. the councillor is expected to provide all that information to the person he or she is representing. Over the years, councillors acquire an enormous amount of knowledge and they become experts in their own fields, yet they are not properly rewarded for that work.

(Note: Both Senator Coogan and Senator Kiely have considerable local government experience)

The picture being built up thus far of the local councillor is not a very attractive one. It presents an image of a social worker with a vague job description spending over 30 hours a week as a part-time politician trying to solve community problems while being a policy expert on a wide variety of subjects and issues. Add in the extra work associated with party politics, the lack of an adequate reward structure and a general distrust by the public. This is a lethal combination and clearly constitutes the councillor as the busiest, if perhaps not 'the greatest man in town'.

In terms of the councillors' own role perception one again has to refer to the studies by Zimmerman and Carey. Zimmerman's 1976 study (in which 49 councillors were interviewed) identified four types of role definition:

1. The councillor as a 'watchdog' for the ratepayer;
2. Conveying the needs and views of constituents to the officials and conveying their response to the constituents ('Messenger Boy' role).
3. A service role, involving activities on behalf of constituents such as arranging for house repairs or the installation of a street light;
4. Representing the views of the constituents in the policy formulation process.

The final role definition regarding policy was given little prominence by the councillors interviewed in Zimmerman's study. One Dublin city councillor is quoted as saying (1977, p.242):

Given a choice between policy-making power and a handful of special areas requiring an enormous commitment of time and interest to these at the expense of most other matters, as against retaining the current situation of policy impotence, but plenty of knowledge and help in the local implications of decisions, I believe the vast majority will opt for the latter.

Ten years later, Carey (1986, p.306) challenged Zimmerman's work by arguing that the four role types identified did not provide "very clear guidelines for examining the role perceptions of the group. It omits the political party as a significant identification and does not distinguish between different role orientations". Carey broadened the study by taking her starting point as the range of role orientations, divided into five categories. Yet, her findings did not differ in any significant way from Zimmerman, leading to her conclusion (p.315) that while the study

updated the view of the county councillor as a 'parish pump' politician,⁵¹ "the typical councillor sees himself as a delegate, a facilitator with strong area-based loyalties". The language employed (e.g. delegate, facilitator) may have differed from Zimmerman but the underlying meaning and role perception of the local politician remained unaltered. With regard to the policy-making function, Carey found that even fewer councillors than in the Zimmerman study defined their role in terms of policy formulation.⁵² She attributed this (p.315) to "the continuing demise of the power of the local authority and the subsequent burial of policy orientations underneath more demanding constituency orientations".

⁵¹ 'The Parish Pump' is presumably a reference to Tierney's 1982 book of the same name in which he discusses the Irish local politician.

⁵² It is difficult to understand Carey's assertion with regard to the perception of policy-making. In Zimmerman's study, 4 of 49 councillors made direct reference to policy-making. Carey's study produced a figure of 2 from 20 councillors. There is very little difference therefore between the two research studies.

4.3 NPM and the Political Dimension

In the world of NPM the realm of the public service manager/administrator is changing in tandem with a stress on financial management and on the role of the consumer. Where does the elected representative fit into this picture?

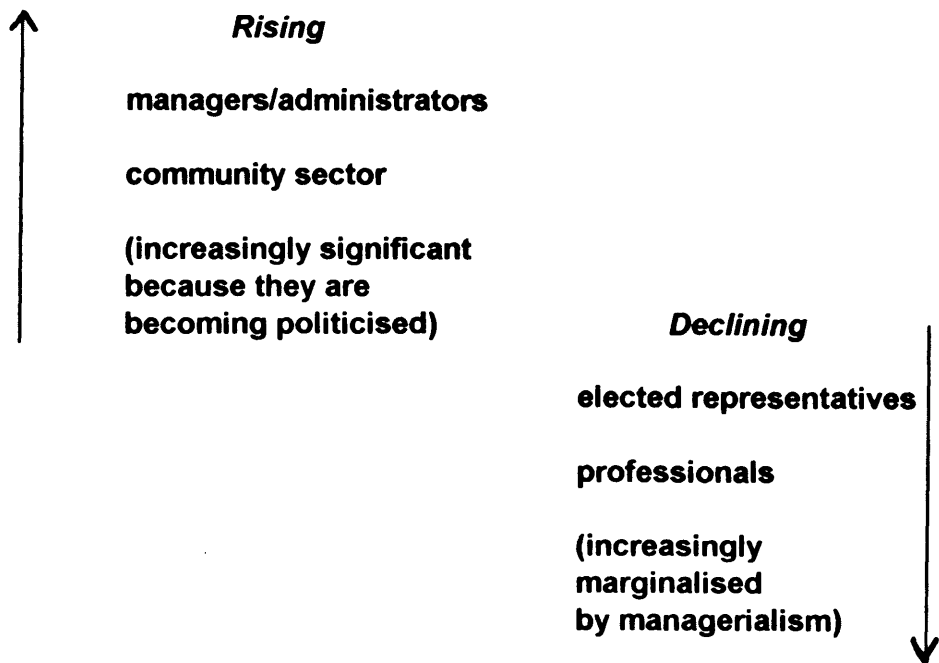
Ferlie *et al.* (1996) refer to a shift in power from professionals to management and devote a chapter to the general impact of NPM on professionals. Yet, there is little analysis of the democratic function other than a statement that under NPM Model 1 (The Efficiency Drive) there has been a tendency to marginalise elected representatives. This is the full extent to which the political dimension is discussed. Questions with regard to democratic deficiencies are left unasked and accordingly unanswered. This reflects a large gap in NPM literature. While NPM can be described in part as an ideological movement imposed by politicians at the level of central government administrations, the impact on the elected representative at the level of the organisation is under-analysed. In this way, NPM appears to advocate a return to the classical period of public administration with a strict politics/administration dichotomy. Contradictorily, it can be argued (e.g. Hughes, 1994) that the rise in managerialism resulting from NPM will lead to an enhanced role for administrators in policy-making and the distinction between administration and politics will become blurred. Politicisation will occur

whereby managers will be held more responsible and accountable than politicians for policy successes and failures. This will logically bring the manager/administrator into the public and political arenas and his/her independent bias as a public servant will be open to scrutiny. This has particular relevance for the civil service and the question of accountability. In Ireland, through the advent of freedom of information legislation and public enquiries/tribunals that have sought to make senior bureaucrats accountable for their actions, civil servants have lost a degree of anonymity and are associated by name with various policy initiatives. Accordingly, they are now entering the political arena in a way which compromises their traditional neutrality (see Boyle, 1998).

There are dangers also with regard to abuse of powers and corruption. This can be traced to the neglect of the elected representative under NPM. If a void has been created by the marginalisation of elected representatives it is logical to assume that it is being filled by the administrators. In local government this also manifests itself in a wider concept of public accountability with an increasing emphasis on non-elected agencies and community links. Local authorities are therefore moving from positions of power to positions of influence (Isaac-Henry, Painter and Barnes, 1997, p.253) and the elected member is not a significant figure in this repositioning context. Through various partnership models (e.g. SPCs, which will be dealt with shortly) an unelected elite are also becoming politicised. As Caiden (1994, p.126) notes, "all public administration is political: it is an instrument of politics

and political values dominate". The shifting balance of power and influence can be represented by the following diagram:

FIGURE 4 - DEGREES OF INFLUENCE



The neglect of the elected representative in NPM literature and thinking - and the logical rise in managerialism - can also be criticised on the grounds that it represents neo-Taylorism. Pollitt (1990, p,56) has argued that NPM philosophy ignores developments in organisational behaviour and is a direct descendant of scientific management.

the central thrust, endlessly reiterated in official documents, is to set clear targets, to develop performance indicators to measure the achievement of those targets, and to single out, by means of merit awards, those individuals who get 'results'. The strengthening and incentivising of line management is a constant theme. There is far less (if any) official acknowledgement of the complexities of workplace

norms, beliefs and aspirations..... or of the equally complex issues of cognitive and motivational biases in decision-making..... and inter-institutional interdependencies.

One of the 'complexities of workplace norms' in the public sector is the political dimension, but it is steadily decreasing in importance. This is logical because if NPM is based on the premise that public sector organisations should resemble their private sector counterparts, it then makes sense to ignore the primary difference between the two which is the political ingredient.

Further evidence is provided by Jennings (1995) who states that internationally the major initiatives to reform government are built around a shared set of NPM notions shared by practitioners. Again, the elected representative is noticeable only by absence. In a similar vein, Pierre (1995, p.207) notes that elected politicians are less permanent features and less knowledgeable in the mechanics of governments than the bureaucrats - "hence the latter tend to accumulate influence over public policy and the implementation of political programmes".

This highlights a contradiction in NPM thought - first, a desire to empower staff and create flexible, dynamic public sector organisations but secondly, a movement towards a more defined prescription of roles and increased managerialism. Dandeker (1990, as quoted by Flynn, 1999, p.23) argues:

management is inextricably connected with the development of bureaucracy and indeed derives its importance from the need for strategic planning, co-ordination and control of large complex decision-making processes.

At the level of the customer, there is also a trend to bypass the elected representative. New forms of information exchange are being developed with a high dependence on electronic orientated technologies.⁵³ The role of the elected representative as a mediator between the consumer and the faceless bureaucratic organisation is becoming less significant. As NPM generally brings bureaucrats into the public domain and freedom of information removes the mystique from decision-making processes, the need for a political interpreter is reduced.

To date, NPM literature has been weak on the evolving role of the elected representative. However, the political dimension is an important element of this research as the elected representative fights for a role in the joining of political ideology, economic theory and perspectives from private sector management.

⁵³ See Bellamy and Taylor (1992); Bellamy, Horrocks and Webb (1995).



4.3.1 Irish NPM and the local councillor - the language of SMI and BLG

It has previously been asserted that in Irish local government, the primary vehicle through which NPM has gained expression is SMI. Other manifestations of NPM philosophies include *Better Local Government - A Programme for Change*; the strategic policy committees; the value for money principle and the Freedom of Information Act. While the role of the elected representative has been under-assessed in the wider NPM movement, it is the purpose in this section of the chapter to examine how the local councillor fares under Irish NPM. Accordingly, references to the councillor's role are highlighted.

Strategic Management Initiative (SMI)

SMI is weighted in favour of the service user with a strong emphasis on service quality. When Minister for State with responsibility for SMI, Avril Doyle, spoke on public sector changes during a Dail debate in 1995 she stated that an agenda for action in each organisation should be "far-reaching, focused and designed to achieve results based on a coherent programme of action where the **various elements** will make a real difference to the quality of service to the public and which will improve confidence in our public institutions." The local elected representative is one of the various elements in local government reform but SMI did not prescribe any precise role for the councillor in the process. This was

reflected in Minister Howlin's speech at the SMI launch when he made constant reference to "the local authority" without specifying the function of the board of directors. SMI in the wider civil service was dominated to a large extent by the question of clarifying responsibilities and accountabilities between ministers and civil servants but no such clarity was provided for in SMI in local government.

Better Local Government - A Programme for Change (BLG)

The language of BLG is quite encouraging for the local politician. In the opening section of the document, weaknesses in the local government system are listed. Included is the following reference:

the policy role envisaged for councillors has not been fully realised because, as part-timers, they have found it difficult to fulfil this role in the absence of well developed support systems. The system as a whole can therefore lean more in favour of the permanent officials (Section 1.7, p.8)

The core principles of the strategy are contained in section 1.15 of BLG and have previously been discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis. It is worth noting again however that under the heading of 'Enhancing Local Democracy' there is a commitment to strengthening the role of councillors in running local councils (p.10). This commitment is explained in more detail in the second chapter of BLG where the following aims are outlined:

- strengthening the corporate position of councillors within local government, supported by the active involvement of sectoral interests;
- improving administrative support and back-up for carrying out their corporate role;
- widening the remit of local government (Section 2.15, p.16).

The mechanism through which these aims were to be achieved was a new committee structure.

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

Section 2.19 of BLG charts how through the SPC network, the councillor's policy-making role is to be enhanced and developed. Support is offered by way of the Corporate Policy Group (CPG - section 2.21) which comprises the chairperson of the authority and the chairpersons of the individual SPCs to "act as a sort of cabinet and provide a forum where policy positions affecting the whole council can be agreed for submission to full council" (p.19). The language of BLG with regard to the SPCs has previously been analysed (see chapter 3, pp.144-148) and arguably the most contentious section is 2.20 which states that councillors are to be allowed a more meaningful role in policy review and development.

4.3.2 The language of the politicians

To analyse the current thinking with regard to the role of the local councillor, three source references are utilised.

- (i) Speech by Mr. Brendan Howlin, TD (Labour Party), Minister for the Environment, at the regional presentation on Better Local Government - A Programme for Change, January 31st 1997.
- (ii) Fianna Fail Manifesto for the 1999 local elections - *Your Future Our Priority*
- (iii) Fine Gael Manifesto for the 1999 local elections - *A New Patriotism Locally*.

The speech has been chosen because the Minister for the Environment at the time represented the Labour party and it may be seen as a reflection of that party's stance on local government (also the *Better Local Government* document remains the foundation-stone on which local government reform is being built). The Fianna Fail and Fianna Gael manifestos were chosen on the basis that they are the two largest political parties in the country, with a particular domination in local government where they account for 74% of the total seats between them (this figure rises to over 84% in Cork County Council). Therefore, it is likely that reforms to the local governments system will have to be driven

by these parties and their manifestos from the 1999 election offer an insight into their present policy positions.

Brendan Howlin TD - Labour Party

- “The law at present envisages that the councillors are the policy makers and the county managers the implementers of that policy. While this is fundamentally correct, the reality is that, in practice, the councillors do not have sufficient opportunity or backup to fulfil their role as the board of directors”.
- “My proposals will fundamentally change the decision making process within local government by affording councillors the opportunity to play a much fuller role in policy formulation. But councillors will also have to accept that the strategic policy committees offer new challenges and new responsibilities”.
- “I know that some councillors have expressed concern at the involvement on the new committees of interest groups and local development organisations, primarily on the grounds that such representatives are not elected. At national level we have achieved much success through developing policies in partnership with our social partners. My proposals involve a corresponding role at local level for local community and consumer interests while maintaining the primacy of the elected mandate”.

Fianna Fail Manifesto

- “Fianna Fail believes policies need to be initiated and decided to a greater extent by local authority members”.
- “Fianna Fail believes in giving resources to local authority members to help them carry out their work. In order to ensure that members are in a position to undertake these responsibilities, we intend to:-
 - allow local authority members to be paid an annual stipend
 - give full access to research resources, modern communications and IT facilities to assist work on behalf of constituents
 - establish training programmes to be put in place at local and national level to improve the quality service provided
 - we believe that elected members should solely concentrate on local government, and from 2004 it will no longer be possible to be a member of a local authority and the Dail or Seanad
 - we are also introducing an initial two year term of office for chairpersons/mayors, and will subsequently introduce direct elections for these positions”.

Fine Gael Manifesto

- “We believe that we must strengthen the role of councillors, elected by the people, in all aspects of the work of local authorities and, in particular, in ensuring that physical planning is consistent with

sustainable development, the protection of our environment and the enhancement of the quality of life”.

- “We believe that more of the executive powers of local government should be vested in the elected members. The current concentration of executive powers in the hands of non-elected officials is undemocratic”.
- “We propose that each local authority establish a committee of elected members similar to Dail Eireann’s Public Accounts Committee, with the powers necessary to receive a full accounting of every item of the authority’s expenditure”.

The central point from these sources is that there is consensus amongst the large political parties that the role of the local councillor needs to be enhanced, through an increased role in policy formulation and development. This is unsurprising as BLG was produced by the Rainbow coalition government of Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Democratic Left and was subsequently retained by the new government administration of Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats. It is in this context that the situation in Cork County Council in terms of the elected representatives’ perceptions of their own role, their involvement in SMI and their relationship with management and the community sector is now discussed.

4.4 Members of Cork County Council - A Profile

Cork County Council is the largest local authority in Ireland with 48 councillors, elected from 10 wards, as follows:

<u>County Electoral Area</u>	<u>Number of Seats</u>
Bandon	3
Bantry	5
Blarney	4
Carrigaline	7
Fermoy	4
Kanturk	5
Macroon	3
Mallow	4
Midleton	6
Skibbereen	7

A new council was formed in June 1999 following local elections. The previous council had presided for an eight year period, 1991-1999. The 1999 elections presented a chance for young blood to enter local politics, supported by a publicly-funded Gratuity Scheme which offered a retirement package for councillors who wished to step down.⁵⁴ Eleven sitting members of Cork County Council did not put their names forward again for re-election and so, on June 11th, 96 hopeful candidates sought places in the 48 seat chamber. The lowest number of candidates seeking

⁵⁴ The scheme was designed to reward long-serving councillors. They were offered £750 per annum for each of their first twenty years of service as councillors, plus £500 per annum for another twenty years, leading to a maximum potential payment of £25,000.

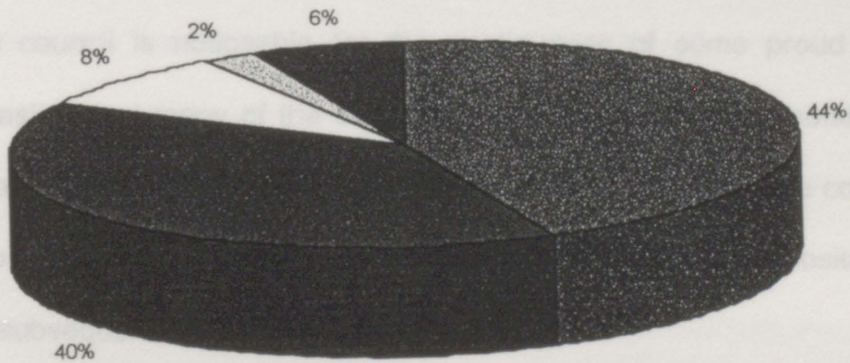
election was in Macroom, where five people contested three seats. The highest number was in Midleton, where fifteen candidates battled for six places.

The results threw up some surprises with sixteen new members earning a place on Cork County Council. One shock casualty was Fianna Fail veteran, Jack Roche, who had held a council seat for 22 years. By standing for election, he forfeited the gratuity scheme offer and therefore lost a sizeable retirement package.

The election re-affirmed the dominance of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael as the two leading parties as they accounted for 40 seats between them. Cork county can be regarded as following very traditional voting patterns, with Kenny (1999, p.14/15) noting, "the most remarkable example of stability occurred in the largest county council outside of the cities - Cork - where there was but one seat change out of its total of 48 seats" (see Appendix B for an examination of the change in political ownership of local government seats, arising from the 1999 election).

FIGURE 7 - CORK COUNTY COUNCIL BY POLITICAL PARTY

Fine Gael	43.75% (21 members)
Fianna Fail	39.58% (19 members)
Labour Party	8.33% (4 members)
Progressive Democrats	2.09% (1 member)
Non-Party	6.25% (3 members)



This compares with the national results of (from 883 seats):

Fianna Fail	43.26% (382 members)
Fine Gael	31.37% (277 members)
Labour Party	9.40% (83 members)
Progressive Democrats	2.83% (25 members)
Sinn Fein	2.38% (21 members)
Green Party	0.91% (8 members)
Workers Party	0.34% (3 members)
Non-Party	9.17% (81 members)
Others	0.34% (3 members)

(Source: Kenny, 1999, p.14)

Six seats were filled by women, representing 12.5% of the chamber. Nationally, 132 women were elected to city and county council, just under 15% of the total number of seats (at the 1991 election the figure was 103 successful female candidates, or 11.7%). Five of the councillors returned to the council were sitting TDs while two are senators.

The council is noticeable for the continuance of some proud family dynasties and many of the councillors are following in the footsteps of parents and grandparents. Equally some of the members were co-opted onto the previous council during its term and retained their positions in the subsequent election.

Another feature of Cork County Council is the relatively minor role played by party politics. While certain votes and decisions (e.g. elections of chairperson) are conducted on the basis of block party voting, most other decisions are decided by geographical loyalties. In battling for the allocation of county funds, divisional characteristics are important and it is not unusual to see councillors from the western and northern divisions joining together in opposition to members from the southern division. It can be difficult to reconcile the different needs of the divisions because many of the areas contained within the south Cork jurisdiction, such as Ballincollig and Carrigaline, are urbanised and the problem is to keep pace with economic growth through housing, sanitary and infrastructure provision. By contrast some of the remote areas of north and west Cork

face different problems stemming from rural depopulation and relatively stagnant local economies.

4.4.1 *Own Role Perception*

Councillors' own role perceptions were presented in section 4.2.1 based on the research of Zimmerman (1976) and Carey (1986). This demonstrated the fact that councillors generally saw themselves in the 'messenger boy' role, conveying the needs of their constituents to local government officials. On the basis of this research and the previously discussed NPM literature, semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 members of Cork County Council over a two year period from the spring of 1998. These form the basis of the following four sections and the researcher also draws from his experience in the County Secretary's Department of the organisation which necessitated attendance at full council and committee meetings.

Interviews with the elected representatives of Cork County Council highlighted that the role of grievance-chaser totally overshadowed that of policy-maker. The over-riding aim for the councillor is to assist local people and to enhance their electoral area. One interviewee, who is also a sitting TD, observed:

I campaigned (for local election) on the basis of being a local representative rather than a law-maker which is what the electorate demand as well. Ireland has public representatives - we don't really have politicians. We have glorified social work and glad-handling passing as politics.

The reference to 'glorified social work' is an interesting one as it echoes Professor Zimmerman's studies. The councillors who referred to this term typically did not regard it as an inherent criticism of their role in which very few see themselves as policy-makers. A logical question which then arises is - who are the decision-makers in Cork County Council? Is it likely to be a small group of leading members, mirroring Corina's (1974) 'politico administrators' or Newton's (1979) 'policy brokers'?

While some councillors emphasise the need for balance between the constituency and policy roles, others unashamedly do not think beyond the former. This owes something to the routes which people took to local politics as many were community activists who felt that a council position would give them greater scope in community affairs. Some councillors commented that they were motivated by social problems at the local level and had no involvement in politics prior to standing for election. Often they were 'prevailed upon' to seek a council seat. For some of the councillors this resulted in offering themselves to the public as independent candidates. For others, it was more pragmatic to join a political party and avail of the party election machinery and expertise.

One councillor divided his colleagues in the chamber into three distinct categories. There were the *community councillors* who were motivated by local constituency affairs; there were *career councillors* who saw local politics merely as a stepping-stone to national politics and there were a

category of councillors described as *dodgy* who were driven by self-interest and status (he declined to comment on how many of his colleagues could be placed in each group).

It was also apparent that many of the councillors interviewed had no strong perceptions of their role prior to election. Unsurprisingly the exceptions were those candidates who came from a political background and had seen the operations of a local politician at first hand, often within their immediate family circle. Amongst the councillors who recognised their wider role as policy-makers for Cork county, there was also a clear understanding that if they were side-tracked by grievance-chasing matters, it was because they were reflecting the electorate's wishes. That was what their constituent's wanted and the message was clear - neglect your constituents and lose your seat. Consistent with the lack of a clear understanding of their role before election was a huge under-calculation of the amount of time required by the job.

A degree of frustration with their role was also evident amongst virtually all interviewees. This typically stemmed from the local government system itself but also the wider political culture in Ireland. One councillor referred to the role of the local politician as one of "continuously prostituting ourselves" while another complained, "we spend 90% of our time on fire brigade action". This was exacerbated by the understanding that the electorate, for the most part, voted personality instead of policy.

A further frustration was highlighted by a councillor who spoke of the lack of demarcation between local and national politics and the temptation for TDs "to parachute in and take the glory".

There was unanimous consensus that the abolition of domestic rates in the 1970s was the single most important contributory factor in the demise of local government in the country. Councillors were also concerned with how their role was perceived by the public and the negative image of politics generally. They did not believe that the public regarded them as men and women of importance. A contributory factor to poor public perception was the low quality and un-structured nature of council meetings. One member commented:

In my time in the chamber the quality of members has diminished and is likely to get worse. The quality of debate is also poor - why waste time on national issues about which we can do nothing?

4.4.2 Relationship with Management

While frustration with their relative lack of powers and (occasionally) the trivial nature of their role was apparent amongst the councillors interviewed, this generally was not reflected in a negative analysis of management. Councillors tended instead to cite the local government system itself, financial dependence, the electoral system, political culture, central control and the European Union as the root causes of their problems. The dominant theme which emerged with regard to the working relationship with the county manager and his three assistant

county managers was that an effective partnership was in place. All interviewees were aware that the role demarcation provided for in local government legislation was not being adhered to but they were generally happy with the working relationship which had emerged. One councillor commented, "we aren't in a position to be policy makers, so we have no great difficulty with the partnership which exists".

Some members also admitted that they were glad to have a county manager to make some tough decisions,

There was a belief that the SPC structure would make councillors more responsible and accountable for policy matters - "up to now it has been all too easy to hide behind management" stated one member.

This view was reinforced by another who noted that while the balance of power was generally with management, the elected representatives themselves had been happy to cede power:

Ultimately councillors themselves have to accept a lot of the blame. In this chamber, there are only six or seven members driving the council. Some councillors make it seem to the public that they can fix things when often they can't. At the end of the day, we have been well served by the management system. What's the alternative?

While the majority of councillors interviewed were happy with the relationship with management, it should be noted that there were a few dissenting voices. Interestingly, these opinions tended to be expressed

by the younger members of the council. In fact, two of the three youngest members of the 1991-1999 council were totally disillusioned with local politics and subsequently did not seek re-election. In this sense the motivation behind the gratuity scheme in attracting younger adults into local government did not succeed in Cork County Council. With some of the youngest members of the existing council withdrawing from politics, or losing their seats, the overall age profile of the council remained relatively unaltered after the 1999 election.

One of the aforementioned councillors angrily argued that all powers resided with management and that the chamber was full of “management men” who always sided with the executive. Another member offered two examples of planning matters whereby the public and the councillors favoured one outcome but the opposite happened. This was a minority view however and there was no general evidence of tension, or a power struggle, between elected representatives and management. Councillors generally fought struggles with management over specific issues concerning their own areas. They won some of the arguments and lost others but felt that this was all part of the operation of an effective working partnership.

4.4.3 Relationship with Community Sector

Many of the interviewees referred to the creation of the SPCs in explaining their relationship with the community sector. The majority of councillors supported the new committee structure, arguing that the co-ordination of local development initiatives would be enhanced and that it was appropriate for 'outside people' to see how the council operated. One member stated, "the SPCs are a good idea and the councillors who are critical of the lack of a mandate are missing the point". The issue of the absence of an electoral mandate amongst the electoral representatives on the SPCs was the main reservation expressed by councillors. This was summed up as follows by one councillor:

I have mixed feelings about the SPCs. Partnership at a local level is, in itself, a good thing and has worked well here with the VEC (Vocational Education Committee) and also of course at national level. However, in theory, decision-makers should have an electoral mandate and power should come with responsibility. We do not know how effective the SPCs are going to be and everybody is afraid of the unknown.

Another councillor stated that he was a strong supporter of the SPCs and the idea that power should be shared with the maximum number of people from local communities. He added however that the external representatives "must share the pain and the glory". He was alluding to the fact that the external representatives on the committees should think beyond the interest of their own organisation or sector and be prepared to make unpopular decisions in formulating policy.

Councillors expressed feelings of goodwill towards the community sector, with one observing:

The amount of voluntary input in Ireland is unrivalled anywhere and community development is one of the jewels in the crown here.

There was a strong belief in the voluntary community sector and that the council should channel money to groups and communities who were prepared to do something for themselves. It was argued that, "there will be a huge multiplier effect for every pound given to these bodies" meaning that the money would be spent in local economies and would indirectly benefit many people.

It was apparent during the interviews that the councillors were clearly distinguishing between the voluntary community bodies and the local development and partnership companies. The same levels of support and goodwill towards the voluntary bodies were not matched with regard to the latter organisations. While admitting that many of the local development companies were doing good work, there was a feeling of resentment that these groups were largely unaccountable and lavishly spending EU funds - in some cases duplicating the efforts of the local authority. There was also a fear that the financial basis of these organisations would be eroded and that the council would have to intervene and bear the liability.

4.4.4 Role in the SMI Process

It was evident from the interviews that the elected members of Cork County Council played a minimalist role in the SMI process for the organisation. Some members appeared to have no knowledge of SMI while others confused the initiative with the formation of SPCs and BLG. One member noted that SMI was “totally over the heads of the councillors”.

A viewpoint shared by many of the interviewees was that they were aware of SMI but had no real interest in becoming involved. This is reflected by the following similar quotes from three councillors.

- “We had no real input in the process. Often we have as much input as is good for us”.
- “Councillors could have been involved if they wanted to be. In reality, only around five of the members were interested”.
- “We were involved as much as we wanted to be”.

Clearly the thinking behind SMI was not understood and significantly, virtually all councillors expressed the opinion that the process had failed as it had no positive impact on the general public. One councillor, who had been involved in SMI, commented:

SMI had great potential as a concept but ultimately it disappointed. It should have encouraged people to use councillors as an intermediary between themselves and management. Instead people go to the manager and the executives directly.

Another councillor described SMI as a failure, joining the long list of failed local government reform efforts down through the years. He had first taken a seat in Cork County Council in 1985 when he was aged 21. Fourteen years later he decided not to contest the 1999 elections because he had become disaffected and disillusioned with local government. His retirement from local politics broke a proud family line in the council chamber, dating back to the first council in 1898. Prior to the elections he was quoted as follows in the *Irish Times* ("Roads and housing exercise the voter" - Dick Hogan, June 1999):

In the past few years this has become almost a full-time job. I have a young family and I'm in farming as well and it has become more and more difficult to deal with everything. But aside from that, I am concerned about the fact that ever since I joined the council we have been promised meaningful local government reform. It has never happened and we have few powers and even fewer discretionary funds to help local communities.

The interviews also revealed that new councillors, elected in 1999, had not been made aware that a corporate plan covering the period 1997-2002 was in place. In other words, the board of directors of the organisation had no knowledge of a strategy document which is supposedly a blueprint for the development of the local authority into the future.

4.5 Conclusions

Catherine II ('The Great') was once quoted as saying, **"a great wind is blowing and that gives you either imagination or a headache"**.

The elected representative in Irish local government, whether he/she is aware of it or not, has a headache looming. Local authorities exist in a complex environment which has been subject to an ever increasing pace of change over the past five years. The exact scope and influence of NPM has yet to be established but, according to Hughes (1994, p.278), can be seen as "a new paradigm of public management which puts forward a totally different relationship between governments, the public service and the public". The local councillor in Ireland has traditionally played a valuable role in this area by bridging the gap between the public service and the public. However, NPM is pushing the boundaries and the strategic planning associated with it has heightened the tension between greater managerial autonomy and greater democratic control. Isaac-Henry *et al.* (1997, p.256) note:

what is essentially at issue for local authorities is organisational (re)positioning in the light of a changing environment - given that their effectiveness now often depends on influencing and working through others rather than on direct action.

This statement can legitimately be applied to local councillors who now find themselves in a position where they have to carve out a place in a new working relationship involving a host of actors from government agencies to local development companies. It is apparent that friction

exists between the pressures for change in the role patterns of councillors and their established traditional role. An analysis of Cork County Council suggests that many elected members have yet to come to terms with the reality of new local governance. Others recognise that "a great wind is blowing" but the manifestations of change are not seen as desirable by them.

Essentially the councillors' role is not evolving despite the fact that everything and everybody else in their immediate environment is changing. It should be seen as worrying that there is little difference in the role perceptions of councillors from Zimmerman's studies in the 1970s, to Carey in 1986, to this present work. Grievance-chasing remains the dominant influence and the local authority member is a political favour peddler, consumer representative, social worker and messenger boy. The net effect of the members of Cork County Council standing still while everyone else is advancing, means that they are in fact moving backwards and can be classified as a 'losing group' in the world of NPM.

This analysis has wider ramifications in terms of local representative democracy. The public delegate responsibility for public decision-making to politicians at election time. However if the same politicians are being marginalised and rendered ineffective, where is the ultimate power? It can be argued that the citizen is at least twice removed from power and is suffering as a result of the marginalisation of the elected

representative. One such scenario is that citizens probably lack the relevant information when they are making their reasoned choices at election time. It was James Madison who argued that it is necessary that people possess the "virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom." Otherwise, it is likely that "men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs, may, by intrigue, or corruption, or by any other means, first obtain the suffrages, and then betray the interests, of the people" (as quoted by Riemer, 1986).⁵⁵

Other writers, such as Weber (1946) have argued that the elected representatives are not in charge either as they cannot control the bureaucrats and public servants. In turn, the public servants, according to Niskanen (1971, p.275) cannot contend with the complexities of modern legislation and regulations and are "at the mercy of self-serving special interests and bureaucrats." Public policy is likely to be formulated as a result of an amalgamation of all of these actors, with the local elected representative becoming a bit-player subsumed by the totality of interests.

⁵⁵ Of course, the 'interests of the people' remains a problematic concept and countless studies on modern voting, from Berelson (1952) to Carpini and Keeter (1991) have been summarised by Iyengar and Reeves (1997, p.816) who argue that the low level of political knowledge has lent credence to the charges that popular control of government is illusory. At election time manipulation by the image-makers and propaganda-merchants is dominant and many voters acquire their information from political advertisements and ten second sound bites during news summaries. Posner (1995, p.52) draws parallels with the jury system in law, "as law and society become ever more complex, the jury's cognitive limitations will become ever more palpable and socially costly". Essentially court cases then often descend into emotional appeals where style and presentation dictate over knowledge.

Another, more plausible, scenario suggests that the general public do not lack the information and knowledge to make reasoned choices. In fact, through higher education standards, IT advances and mechanisms such as FOI, the average citizen is in a position to bypass the elected member and make direct contact with officials in the public sector organisation. It will be seen in chapter 6 that the community sector is aware of this also and they tend to deal with management and officials rather than councillors. The executive arm is regarded as being at the heart of power and, as discussed previously, this arm is becoming increasingly politicised.

Leach *et al.* (1994) argue that the political dimension in local government is obviously affected by the pressures for organisational change. This is not borne out in Cork County Council where the councillors believe that their role remains unaltered despite a changing environment. It is a tradition in Irish political culture that the intervention of an elected public representative is necessary if a citizen desires to obtain something from a local or national authority. The citizen's view of this has evolved, the councillor's has not.

In Cork County Council the relationship between the elected members and management is healthy. In a British context, Young (1987, p.1) has described the relationship between members and managers as a "delicate and subtle" one. Again it should be noted that the term 'manager' in British local government differs from the Irish interpretation.

Nonetheless, "delicate and subtle" is an accurate description of the relationship in Cork County Council. However, within this relationship, it is the manager who is the dominant force, supporting Zimmerman's contention that the specialist bureaucrat has the advantage over the nominal power-holder. Collins (1987, p.60) explains, "there are few rewards for the politician in competing with the manager for control over most areas of policy. Nor do the public put pressure on councillors to fight on a broad policy front".

Under NPM and managerialism this situation has been reinforced, with Kerley (1994) posing the question - do members manage or are members managed? In Cork County Council there is only one answer to that query - the members are managed and they are happy in that subordinate role. Occasionally a murmur of discontent can be heard reflecting the scepticism of members towards paid officials who have no electoral mandate.⁵⁶

Generally however the councillor is passively losing power, influence and credibility. Some members within Cork County Council recognise that a conscious choice will soon have to be made with regard to a changing role pattern with an emphasis on strategic planning and policy formulation.⁵⁷ The language of BLG, the objectives of the SPCs and the government proposals to abolish the dual mandate and provide for direct

⁵⁶ Kerley (1994) refers to an anecdote concerning Lyndon Johnson. As newly elected vice-president, he was desperately impressed by the team of intellectuals and executives assembled by Kennedy for his administration. He did however comment to a friend, "I'd feel a whole lot better if just one of them had run for sheriff once" (see Halberstam, 1973).

elections of chairpersons all point to an enhanced role for the local councillor.

The reality may be somewhat different however as the elected representative may become lost in a web of partnerships through the SPCs and County Development Boards and find an extra managerial layer created by the proposed Directors of Services.⁵⁸ A small minority of members of Cork County Council are ready to fight for a role in this changing environment, the majority don't feel the wind blowing at all.

⁵⁷ See Worrall, Collinge and Bill (1998)

⁵⁸ The Director of Service (or Programme Manager) has been designed for a senior administrator (possibly at ACM level) to serve the SPC's and ensure that the policy formulated is effectively implemented.

CHAPTER 5

MANAGEMENT - THE EXECUTIVE DIMENSION

5.1 Chapter Aim

The city/county manager is a central figure in Irish local government. In this chapter, the evolving role of the manager is discussed in the context of SMI, BLG and other reforms currently altering the operations of local government in Ireland. This discussion is facilitated by an assessment of NPM literature and the role outlined therein for the public sector chief executive.

Finally, management in Cork County Council is profiled with a concentration on the relationships which are developing with elected members and the community sector.

The purpose of the chapter is to link the discussion in the previous chapter, with regard to elected representatives, and to enable the thesis to advance to an analysis of the third key grouping identified, community sector representatives.

5.2 The Manager in Irish Local Government

Boston *et al.* (1996, p.98) note, "the quality of public management depends crucially on the calibre of the people recruited to serve in leadership positions". In Irish local government the city/county manager is the leader. The elected representatives may, theoretically, have the power but the manager has the authority. As "the most singular feature of local government in Ireland" (Tierney, 1982, p.37) the management system has been the subject of much scrutiny and academic endeavour. Chubb (1970), Roche (1982) and Tierney (1972) each dedicate portions of their respective books to the subject while one again has to refer to Zimmerman (1977) and his study based on role theory techniques. However, the most comprehensive account of local government managers (as opposed to the management system itself) is provided by Collins (1987).

More recent work has been produced by the Institute of Public Administration via *City and County Management 1929-1990 - a retrospective* (1991) and by Boyle (1996). Boyle's work is currently the most significant research on local government management as it incorporates the changes which have taken place since Collins.

Research of great importance has also been produced by Coolahan and Dooney (1996)⁵⁹ and (together with Boyle) will be discussed in section 5.4 when the influence of NPM thinking on management in Ireland is assessed. In this section, the traditional role of the local authority manager is presented, with a concentration on the research of Zimmerman and Collins.

The manager is a full-time administrator, whose primary function is to discharge all day-to-day business and implement policy formulated by the elected members. Coolahan and Dooney (1996, p.197) are correct in their statement that, "under the Management Acts there is an exact legal division between the functions of the manager and those of the elected council". It has already been demonstrated that, in practice, the position has become blurred (see chapter 3, pp. 25-28). Effectively, the executive functions of the manager are those that have not been prescribed as the preserve of the elected council (i.e. reserved functions). Executive functions (performed by the manager by order) include decisions on applications for planning permissions, acceptance of tenders, fixing rents, making lettings, and decisions in relation to staff. One of the most important dynamics of local government in Ireland is the tension between management and elected members.

⁵⁹ Coolahan and Dooney (1996) have written about the public manager in Ireland in a context wider than local government. For an analysis on the role of the manager/chief executive in the state-sponsored body sector, see O' Halpin (1979).

This is predominantly a positive tension which drives many local authorities (including Cork County Council) and can be paralleled with the concept developed by Waldrop (1992) and by Adam and Noble (1999) who refer to the 'edge of chaos', where order and disorder co-exist and maintain the life of a complex system. Waldrop (1992, p.12) explains that the edge of chaos "is the constantly shifting battle zone between stagnation and anarchy, the one place where a complex system can be spontaneous, adaptive, and alive".

To describe the manager/councillor relationship as a 'battle zone' constitutes an overstatement but there has been a constant shifting in the power relations. In chapter 3, the development of the management system was outlined. It arose from a desire to bring order to a local government system within which elected representatives were seen to be abusing power. The Management Act of 1940 shifted the balance of power excessively towards the executive, leading to the remedial amending legislation of 1955⁶⁰ which gave councillors renewed strength, through the section 4 mechanism. Again this power was mis-used by the elected arm, leading to its curtailment in the Local Government Act, 1991. Importantly however, the legislation also provided for a general enhancement for the role and status of elected councillors. This trend has since been continued through reform initiatives such as BLG - ironically within a NPM framework with a strong emphasis on

⁶⁰ A radical overhaul of the management system was proposed in a local government bill in 1950 which proposed to substitute for management a system of administration by small executive committees and county officers. The bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Dail in 1951. See Roche (1982, p.108).

mangerialism. The relationship therefore is a complex one which is not always harmonious. This is alluded to by Tierney (1982, p. 27/28):

In effect, he (local government manager) controls the initiative within the authority and, without in any way infringing the law, he may, should he choose, frustrate the intended purpose of the elected representatives..... Such improper conduct by a manager is hard to prove, but the belief is widespread among councillors that it happens.⁶¹

It should be noted that Tierney, at the time, was a Dublin county councillor and his chapter devoted to the management system bears the title, 'The Dead Hand' and amounts to an assault on the system.

Zimmerman's research involved interviews with 25 local authority managers, with a concentration on their perceptions of their own roles. Regarding policy Zimmerman (1977, p.242) notes, "Irish managers all agree that they are the major initiators, with few proposals developed by the councils". In support of this contention, he quotes (p.242) a former Dublin City Commissioner:

due to the highly technical nature of some of the work, the wide scope of activities involved, the quality and quantity of the documentation issued, and the time restraints under which the elected representatives operate, the scales of the partnership are weighted towards the manager.

⁶¹ Tierney constantly refers to managers in the male form, which reflects the traditional dominant image in local government. This situation has been slowly changing, with the promotion (although still a very low percentage) to senior management positions. In Cork County Council, one of the assistant county managers is female.

All of the managers interviewed by Zimmerman seemed to understand the distinction in law between the functions of elected representatives and management, observing that in practice decision-making tended to be shared. Zimmerman (1977, p.243) observes, "this was attributed in part to the fact that councillors generally are not fully aware of the precise legal distinction".

Collins (1987) delves deeper into the role of the manager, moving beyond the amateur-professional view offered by Zimmerman as an explanation for the dominance of the executive arm in policy-making. He argues (p.76) that the manager is "the most powerful element in the local authority", whose survival is dependent on being accepted as a leader by his/her council. He also notes that local authority managers benefit from the combined strength provided by the County and City Managers' Association (CCMA) which offers a forum for shared knowledge and assessments.

Collins' final conclusion (p.212) on the management system is that:

county and city management has been one of Ireland's most successful institutions. The managers thrive as respected authority figures in their local communities. The most important conclusion of this study, however, is that if this institution is to continue to make a dynamic contribution to our national development the policy role of the manager requires further definition. The elected element of local government should be seen as an active policy partner enhancing the manager's expertise, integrity and drive.

This verdict was a valid one for the mid-1980s, as had been the judgement by Marshall⁶² twenty years earlier when he commented that, under Irish conditions, the management system was working well. Collins argues that between the two studies, Irish society had changed dramatically and that local government and the management system needed to be reassessed. This claim can equally be made today, as from the mid-1990s potentially radical changes for local government have been developing, inspired by NPM thinking. These changes impact on the local authority manager and will be discussed in the sections which follow.

⁶² Hedley Marshall wrote *Local Government Administration Abroad*, which was included in the 1967 Maud Committee Report on the management of local government. His comment with regard to Ireland is attributed to February 1965.

5.3 NPM and the role of the Chief Executive

Barlow *et al.* (1996, p.3) acknowledge that while NPM is discussed and analysed across Europe and elsewhere, and the term 'managerialism' is to be found in each of these discussions, "relatively little is known about the people actually handling the transition from classical public administration to NPM - the 'new public managers'".

Managerialism and NPM are now being integrated in different ways into governmental systems across the world, sometimes glossing over problematic definitions. Within the public sector, 'public manager'; 'public administrator' and 'public official' tend to be used interchangeably. Farnham *et al.* (1996) have attempted to clarify matters by coining 'new public managers' to describe the chief executive of a public sector organisation, operating in the world of NPM.

New managerialism was first developed by Pollitt (1990) and has enjoyed common currency over the past decade. In modern public sector literature, there is an apparent infatuation with 'management' and with associated acronyms such as TQM (Total Quality Management) and MBO (Management by Objectives). A spotlight has been turned on the financial manager, the operational manager, as well as the management consultant - the latter compared by Clark and Salaman (1996) with the witchdoctor in terms of knowledge, role and behaviour. The nature of the managerial task for the strategic manager at the level of chief executive

of the public sector organisation however has not been made as clear as one might have expected it to be.

The NPM typology developed by Ferlie *et al.* (1996) is indicative of the contradictory analysis of the role of the new public manager.

They state that NPM Model 1 is characterised by a shift of power to senior management at the strategic apex of the organisation with a stronger managerial spine based on a clear hierarchy.

Under NPM Model 2 new management styles are developed such as management by influence and generally looser forms of contract management.

NPM Model 3 concentrates on leadership qualities and the ability of the manager to inspire the organisation with a new vision. Interestingly it is observed that top management are not necessarily accorded a privileged role in the change process.

Finally, NPM Model 4 stresses the return to power of the elected body, displacing, to some extent, the administrator and the manager.

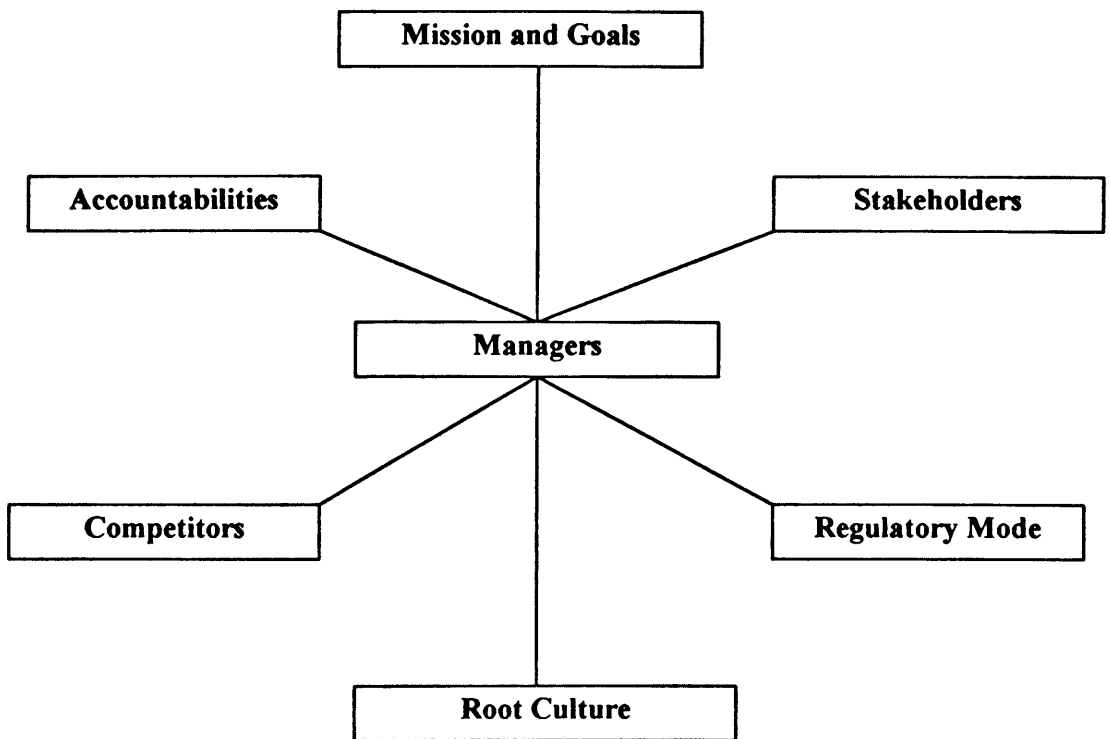
It is apparent that the strategic manager has yet to define a clear role under NPM. This relates to the core function itself with Reed (1989, p.17) defining managing as “a set of diverse and inter-related social practices

concerned with assembling and controlling the dispersed pattern of social relations within which work is performed and reviewed”.

Accordingly, management is a complex task, and there are added differences in the public sector. Goals and objectives are clearly defined in the private sector with success typically measured in quantitative results. In this environment, managers need to be opportunists. By contrast, Farnham and Horton (1993) reflect that management in the public sector tends to be bureaucratic, incrementalist and particularist. If one accepts the thesis of NPM as adopting private management practice integrated with traditional public administration (NPM Model 4) one comes to an understanding of the unique nature of the manager in the public sector. Ultimately though managers “are appointed as agents for achieving the goals of the organisation” (Farnham and Horton, 1996, p.27) and, for public managers this necessitates a need “to build and maintain coalitions of support” (Pollitt, 1990, p.21).

The working environment and the organisational contingencies of both public and private managers are multi-dimensional. Farnham and Horton (1996) develop this point in diagram form (see Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8 - The Organisational Contingencies of
Public and Private Managers**



The public sector manager has to skilfully operate in this environment which occasionally involves satisfying competing forces. Formally the goals of the organisation are set by law and politicians with a welfare and social orientation are often influenced by lobbyists and external interests. Policy decisions are taken by elected representatives and ultimately, as argued by Gunn (1987), goals may be vague and unattainable. Common (1998, p.446) observes that as governments try to commit themselves to ambitious goals:

pressure to reform within the political environment means that policy learning may occur without a coherent intellectual understanding of causes and effects, and without a complete mastery of the means considered necessary and sufficient to attain the ends.

The manager therefore has to balance the demands of his/her political masters with organisational reality and NPM (and its associated literature) has yet to produce a solution. Depre, Hondegheem and Bodiguel (1996, p.292) admit, "the relationship between politicians and public managers hinges on power. Whether NPM has changed the power balance remains an open question". They continue by explaining (p.292):

there is evidence to suggest that the fundamental democratic problem of control by elected politicians is not solved by NPM. In fact, new public managers present more of a threat to democracy because of the managerialist culture.

This analysis relates to the power relations concept developed by Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.23) who draw attention to the changes to "established patterns of roles and relationships within small elite groups at the highest tiers of local public service". Despite tensions, there is no obvious reason why managerial effectiveness and democratic accountability cannot be compatible.

The role of the new public manager as leader is also significant (NPM Model 3). Leadership has many dimensions such as directing individuals, creating a shared vision and empowering people. NPM is radically altering the operations of the public sector organisation and effective change management is dependent upon leadership. Often this entails the leader maintaining a high profile as the organisational change element must be the leader. High profile is the exception rather than the

rule in the public sector. Again, it should be observed that NPM does not provide a neat convergence of opinion on the question of leadership. A previously-cited quote by Ferlie *et al.* (1996) highlights that their research reveals that NPM-induced changes are occurring without a dominant role by top management. Theoretically, change must gain support and ownership at all levels of the organisation (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1988, 1990). The literature on leadership is summed up by Stacey (1990, p.126) who notes, "no leader can operate in a vacuum. No leader can realise any vision without a team which shares that vision and has the ability to put it into practice".

The leader/chief executive must direct the organisation and there is an appealing logic to the contention of Bartlett and Ghoshal (1994) that, "if employees are to put out extraordinary efforts to realise company targets, they must be able to identify with them" (p.84).

Under NPM the managerial role is increasingly developing into a dual task (van der Erve, 1989, p.9) - one of designing a vision and one of facilitating organisational acceptance and response. This duality is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve for the new public manager as the environment in which he/she works is in a state of flux.

Pollitt (1993) refers to a mood swing in the UK during the 1980s away from a stress on 'manager power' (i.e. free to manage) to greater stress on 'consumer power' (free to choose). In tandem there were ministerial

attacks on the excessive existence of managers, particularly in the NHS. Chapman (1991) is in agreement, alluding to the relatively unconstrained 'can do' management style preferred in the 1980s which led to unexpected complications with individual managers concentrating on building their own personal power base. An additional complication for the public sector manager under NPM has been the rise of non-governmental organisations and agencies (quangos). To adopt the language of Osborne and Gaebler (1982) the manager must incorporate the quangos as valid partners and be seen to 'steer' rather than 'row'.

NPM and new managerialism is altering the landscape for the public sector chief executive who is operating under increasingly complicated conditions with new relationships being formed with a variety of different power-brokers (including more middle managers and management consultants). Perhaps the prevailing wisdom remains that, "good management means understanding the peculiarities of particular institutions" (*The Economist*, 1996, p.7).

5.3.1 NPM and the Chief Executive in Local Government

In the preceding section it has been argued that NPM philosophies are significantly changing the environment in which the new public manager operates. Yet, the chief executive or strategic leader of the public sector organisation has not been analysed in any great depth in NPM literature. Rather, he/she has been placed under the all-embracing label of

managerialism which fails to distinguish between the strategic manager, the operational manager, the middle manager or the higher level civil servant or bureaucrat.

The situation with regard to local government is now briefly examined in an international context (section 5.4 deals with the effects of NPM on the Irish local authority manager).

The issue of terminology arises when one considers international local government. 'Chief Executive' is used commonly in British local government (see Boynton, 1986), and indeed in local agencies while the term 'manager' has always been used in Ireland to distinguish the chief executive from the high-ranking administrative officer. Ridley (1996, p.21) notes:

elsewhere in Europe it is hard to find such changes. There may be new, managerially-oriented officials in some top posts, some with managerial-type powers in certain respects, but it is hard to distinguish them in formal organisation charts.....a question of language perhaps, or deeper cultural resistance to such labelling?

Kerley (1994) attempts to analyse the evolving role of the local authority manager in Britain but again he fails to distinguish between the strategic and operational manager. His analysis seems primarily geared towards the latter, who equates with the departmental head or administrative officer in Irish terms. There is much validity however in his comment (p.55):

for many managers in local government, the competing demands of the job are made far more difficult to reconcile by the strains of external change, which forces organisations to reshape themselves almost constantly.

Interestingly, Kerley applies the Mintzberg managerial principles to the British local authority manager. Mintzberg famously studied the managerial function based on the experiences of senior managers (in both the public and private sectors) in North America. He found ten key elements:-

1. Figurehead
2. Leader
3. Liaison
4. Information Monitor
5. Information Disseminator
6. Spokesman
7. Entrepreneur
8. Disturbance Handler
9. Resource Allocator
10. Negotiator

The balance between each of these principles varies between the specific job of the public sector manager. Nonetheless they are applicable to the city/county manager in Irish local government and many will be re-visited in the conclusion to this chapter.

Boyle (1996) examines some of the international trends with regard to local government management and cites Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett (1994) who highlight the emergence of new ideas in the UK about effective management in local government. Included is a move “from an emphasis on hierarchical decision-making to an approach stressing delegation and personal responsibility” (as quoted by Boyle, p.13). This involves a cultural change from stability and uniformity “to one that cherishes innovation and diversity” (p.14). However, it is this same diversity which also leads to anxiety amongst management who fear destabilisation and fragmentation, referred to by Isaac-Henry *et al.* as ‘balkanisation’.

Boyle also discusses Germany with Kickert and Jorgensen (1995) maintaining that reforms driven by NPM are taking place, primarily at the level of the municipalities. It appears though that the role of the chief executive vis-à-vis power relations with elected representatives remains unchanged. Rober (1996, p.185) states, “there are considerable doubts whether local politicians can exercise effective control over the chief executive officer and his professional staff. In practice the position of top administrators is extremely powerful”.

This perhaps reflects the fact that Germany has had a low degree of transition to NPM, with unification being the dominant theme over the past decade.

Elsewhere in Europe the situation varies which is consistent with the view that NPM is enjoying a variety of applications in accordance with country-specific factors.

In *New Public Managers in Europe* (1996, p.294) Depre, Hondeghe and Bodiguel attempt to reach some general conclusions. In particular they make the following two observations:

- Resistance to NPM is sometimes located at middle-management levels where officials fear for their jobs and positions, promotion possibilities, security of tenure and employment privileges.
- NPM has strengthened the position of public managers who now constitute a new and potentially powerful professional group. In order to maintain equilibrium it is necessary to strengthen the position of elected politicians.

These two points are fascinating ones in that they draw attention to the fact that the most pressing problem for the modern local government chief executive is to transfer his/her NPM vision throughout the organisation. The primary communication blockage is at the middle management level - ironically much increased through NPM and the managerialist culture. Also significant is the fact that despite a changing climate for the local authority chief with a shift in locus encompassing quangos and governmental agencies, the manager is still the dominant figure in the relationship with elected local politicians. Therefore it

appears that NPM Model 4 has yet to have a major influence with the suspicion that it will be very difficult for the elected representative to wrestle back power from the managerialist regime created by NPM.

This trend is also to be seen in the 'Big Five' Anglophone countries who have been largely responsible for NPM (see chapter 2). Most notably, in British local government, Barlow *et al.* (1996, p.114) state that, "a managerial revolution is taking place, albeit at a different pace in different authorities". Isaac-Henry and Painter (1991) conducted an extensive local authority survey and concluded (p.86), "what is now almost universally accepted are the arguments for a managerial ethos and culture, and therefore recognition of the importance of basing organisational practice on sound management principles". Importantly, Barlow and Harkin (1996) supply evidence that the top managers in British local government are responding positively to their new business-oriented role. Accordingly it can be argued at a broader level that the trend towards devolution in Britain with assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as a directly-elected mayor in London, may create extra politicians with high public profiles but behind the gusto and media proclamations, power will reside with the new public managers.

The experience from abroad of the local authority chief executive and the internationalisation of NPM (even in a disparate way) suggests that Dunleavy (1994) may be correct in his assertion that a dominant international management cadre will emerge, "located in monopolistic

organisations servicing the state or providing public services directly to consumers" (Barlow *et al.* p.122).

5.4 NPM in Ireland - Changes for City/County Managers

The NPM literature referred to in the previous sections provides a valuable insight into the way that the managerial role is evolving internationally. However, as has been noted, much of the research fails to distinguish between the strategic and operational manager and the term 'new public manager' coined by Farnham *et al.* (1996) covers a wide group of people, within which the local authority chief executive is but one player in the public sector.

Specific applicability to the Irish system of local government is therefore problematic due to the singular nature of the Irish city/county manager model. Research into the evolving role of the Irish local authority manager under NPM influences is scarce, apart from Boyle's *Local Government Management at a Time of Change* (1996). Coolahan and Dooney (1996) also contribute with their research into the new public manager in Ireland.

Boyle (1996, p.2) commences his publication by arguing that the dimensions of change in Irish local government are legislative; European Union; environmental; political; citizen and managerial. He examines each in turn and, under the political dimension heading notes that the role of the local authority manager is changing (p.6):

managing the relationship with elected members has become more complex, with a need to develop a team-based approach to running the local authority. In general, managing the political aspects of running local government has become more demanding and challenging.....managers must operate with an awareness of the pressures acting on elected members, and the consequent implications for how business is transacted.

He cites the decision by Dublin City councillors to establish a special sub-committee to prepare a brief for the city manager job as indicative of the fact that the manager is no longer as independent of the members he/she once was. It is not clear whether this example is specific to the authority in question or whether it reflects a significant change in the manager/member relationship nationally.

Coolahan and Dooney (1996, p.212) adopt a contrary stance by arguing that while NPM is somewhat changing the culture and climate in public sector organisations, "relations between the new public manager and politics remain unchanged, both sides seeming to be happy with the present situation". In local government terms the 'present situation' dates back to Chubb's (1970, p.286/287) view that the manager is regarded "as increasingly the major source of initiative in a local authority and the powerhouse of local government".

Boyle acknowledges that the pace of change in local government differs between various jurisdictions e.g. major urban areas such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick in contrast with the countries on the western seaboard. The geographical area of Cork County Council is a microcosm

of this problem with major differences in needs (and solutions) between the south Cork urbanised areas and the remote parts of north and west Cork.

Despite national variations, Boyle (1996, p.16) stresses:

however, there are a number of themes which arise from the presentation of issues to date in this report that most, if not all, local authority managers will have to address in the coming years if local government management is to respond effectively to its current environment.

These themes represent the evolving role of the city/county manager and, as will be seen in section 5.5, occupy the minds of management in Cork County Council. Included in the themes are an emphasis on evolving a new role in community leadership, a focus on strategic management, and effective management of the political interface

From the above, it is clear that the role of the city/county manager is both complex and challenging. Most of the changes are driven in some form or other by NPM, typically through SMI and BLG.

5.4.1 SMI and BLG - Impact on Management?

SMI in Ireland was created by top managers in the civil service who, according to Hurley (1995, p.3), became increasingly conscious of a changing international public service environment and sought to take steps "to meet the challenge head-on". Hurley outlines how in 1990/1991 the Senior Management Networks run by the Civil Service Training Centre devised a new strategic approach to corporate planning in the civil service and presented their ideas to the secretaries conference. A pilot exercise designed to contribute to more effective management was initiated in 1992 in the Department of Energy as well as in Industry and Commerce. Deemed to be successful, the Taoiseach Albert Reynolds T.D. in 1994 set all government departments the task of preparing strategy statements as part of SMI.

A primary pressure identified by senior management in the civil service at the time was "the intrusion of short-term pressures on management at the cost of the time needed for policy formulation - in essence, the urgent often squeezing out the important" (Hurley, 1995, p.4).

In March 1996, SMI was launched for local authorities by Minister Howlin. While a specific role for the city/county manager was not prescribed the minister emphasised that commitment from the highest levels in local authorities was required. He stated (p.8 of speech):

inevitably, but rightly, a lot of the work on Local SMI will fall on the individual county and city managers. You will need to show strong personal commitment to the process to ensure that it is implemented successfully.

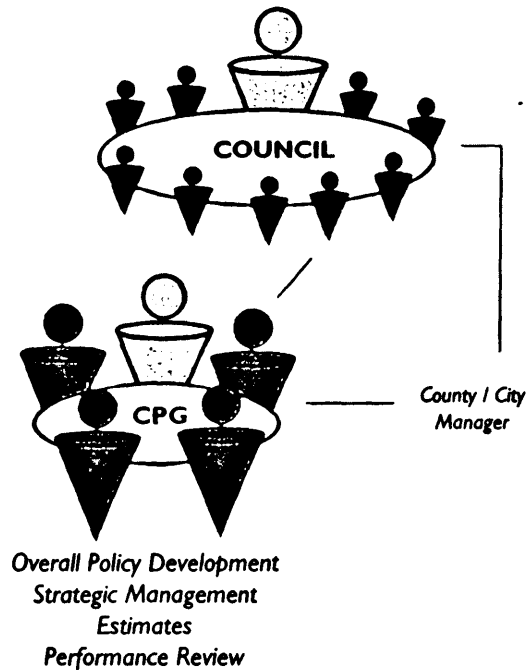
BLG is a strategy document which places a strong emphasis on improved quality of service provision and also on an enhancement of the role of the elected member. The implications of BLG for city/county managers is not stated in clear terms. The first chapter notes some of the weaknesses of the local government system, one of which being the fact that (p.7):

day-to-day pressures arising from the wide range of essential public services for which they are responsible mean that councillors and senior management are directed from the broader, longer-term issues concerning the future role of the local authority and the direction it should take.

Again, the phrase 'the urgent may crowd out the important' is used (p.7).

With regard to the new committee structure, section 2.1 states that the county/city manager is to 'service' the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) which comprises the chairperson of the authority and the chairpersons of the individual SPCs. No precise definition of the servicing role is provided and the diagrammatic representation of the committee shows the manager literally hanging on by a thread.

FIGURE 9 - CORPORATE POLICY GROUP (CPG)



The management system itself is briefly discussed in chapter 6 of BLG (sections 6.7 - 6.9). The opening statement (p.58) sets the tone:

the county management system is now well over fifty years old and the city management system even older. The role of manager, as envisaged when the system was established, is very different from what is needed as we approach the twenty first century.

The expectation that the new role for the local authority manager will then be explicitly stated in BLG soon dissipates over the next two sections as the concentration moves to management "below the level of county manager and assistant manager" (6.8, p.58). In line with the thinking behind the SPCs an ambition is outlined to "create a tier of management with clear and unambiguous responsibility for the programmes of the local authority" (6.9, p.58) - in the process 'freeing' the city/county manager to concentrate on strategic issues. This is the

extent to which the role of the city/county manager is outlined in BLG. The managers themselves were quick to react, through the CCMA, which produced a response to BLG in the form of a discussion paper prepared by the Donegal county manager, Michael McLoone, in March 1997.

BLG was cautiously endorsed with a reference in section 5.16 (p.21) to grasping "the opportunity that the Programme for Change offers to bring local government to the forefront of best public service management practices".

Mention is also made of the necessity of a positive and decisive response by the CCMA and its members - "bullets may need to be bitten sooner rather than later" (p.1). It is not clear exactly what is meant by this statement.

Valid concerns were also voiced by McLoone. In comparing the problems of the county manager to that of the private sector chief executive, he states (section 1.1, p.2):

the problem is that there are no set of agreed principles or concepts with which to redesign or re-engineer the organisation. It is difficult to find the right working tools. The field of organisation and management development is littered with quick-fix fads and solutions, panaceas from 'one minute' managers to self regulating teams and quality circles all searching for excellence, sometimes by just 'walking around'.

This is a fascinating comment. On the one hand it is a pertinent criticism of BLG with its aspirational aims lacking precise working tools. On the other hand it can also be seen as a criticism of organisational theory, SMI and, accordingly, NPM.

Section 3.1 (p.8) attempts to explain the impact of BLG on management:

the first major implication of implementing the Programme for Change at county level will be to increase the level of work and extend the range of responsibilities of the county manager role. He will have to lead the changes, plan and negotiate their introduction and deal with all the downstream consequences within both the system of local government and the system of local development. The full implementation of the programme of renewal can only be accomplished if the Manager is free to concentrate on managing the strategic and corporate agenda. (i.e. if he is not dragged down in day-to-day operational issues too frequently). To enable this to happen the Manager needs to be fully supported by a high calibre team of general managers.

This is arguably the central point of the discussion paper - the creation of the general manager or programme manager tier. McLoone's declaration in section 5.13 (p.20) has a prophetic ring to it:

the pressure to establish these posts (Programme Managers) quickly without considering fully their implications for creating the new management structure in the local authority may come from moves to establish the SPCs.....it would be a mistake in my view to rush the establishment of the Programme manager posts.

Ultimately the implementation of BLG through the SPC committee structure has floundered due to industrial relations (IR) difficulties in the establishment of the post of programme manager/director of service. McLoone is correct in his assertion that the undue haste with regard to

the creation of a new tier of management (representing a radical change to the structure of local government in Ireland) was ill-advised. The public sector unions were always likely to have their say while the general lack of consultation with managers prior to BLG was also problematic. These problems logically meant that the goal of allowing the city/county manager to concentrate on strategic issues has not been realised.

5.5 Management in Cork County Council - A Profile

Including the present incumbent, Cork County Council has been served by six county managers. The first manager was Joseph F. Wrenne who was appointed in 1942 and held the position until his retirement in 1954. Wrenne had joined the council in 1906 as one of the first three clerical officers appointed by competitive examination.⁶³ Managers in the council have traditionally enjoyed long tenure with Wrenne being followed by Eoin Callanan (1954-1960); Michael N. Conlon (1960-1978); Patrick Dowd (1981-1992) and Noel Dillon (1993-1998). The current county manager is Maurice Moloney who was appointed in 1998.

The manager is supported by three assistant county managers (ACMs) with executive jurisdiction over the divisions of north, south and west Cork. The next most senior officer is the county secretary - a post traditionally seen as a stepping stone to the position of city/county manager. At the present time the council is short one ACM with the position being held on an acting basis by the IT officer. There are difficulties in filling the ACM post due to the continuing IR problems surrounding the new director of services grade. The precise positioning of the directors of services on the management hierarchy could have major implications for the ACMs and the county secretary.

⁶³ Wrenne was also a successful playwright, under the pseudonym Maurice Dalton. His most popular play was *Sable and Gold* which enjoyed a three-week run in the Abbey Theatre in 1918.

The issues raised in this chapter were discussed during detailed semi-structured interviews took place with the county manager and two of his ACMs (the acting ACM was not interviewed), as well as the county secretary and senior officers (administrative officer level) who have been centrally involved in SMI and the wider reform efforts. One officer was the co-ordinator of the council's SMI process while another holds the position of Director of Community and Enterprise. In the sections which follow, the interviewees are referred to as 'officials'.

In addition, interviews were held with the former county manager (who was in office when the council's Corporate Plan was adopted) and with the external management facilitator who assisted in the SMI process.

5.5.1 *Evolving Role*

Mirroring the commentary in Boyle's *Local Government Management at a Time of Change* (commissioned as part of a CCMA research programme) the interviewees were very aware of the major changes taking place in the local government system at present. They were less sure however about the implications of their own role. This was succinctly expressed by one interviewee in the following terms:

It's an exciting time to be in local government. SMI-type advances are occurring globally and, even here, civil service departments such as the Department of Health have improved significantly. Local government though has not yet seized the opportunity.

In terms of the strategic role all interviewees agreed that there was a need for more forward planning but, as another noted, "it's difficult for people to think strategically if their heads are down". Day-to-day pressures dominate and one officer stated:

This is an organisation under stress and the stress and anxiety is evident on people's faces every morning as they come up the building in the lift.

The officer maintained that, in his opinion, there were three stages to the 'organisation under stress' syndrome:

Stage 1 - Staff under extreme pressure, working through lunch etc.

Stage 2 - Huge increase in stress-related health problems and sick leave.

Stage 3 - People leaving the organisation and difficulties arising in terms of attracting new staff.

It was suggested that Cork County Council, at the very least, had reached Stage 2, making it very difficult for management to formulate strategic plans and share ownership of the plans with a staff operating under constant pressure.

The interface with the elected arm would continue to be a central function of management with one officer making the case - "the manager has to



be very political, with a small 'p'. I think we work well here because there isn't a rigidity which some managers tend to evoke".

In discussing the changing nature of local government relationships the officer continued by stating:

Nationally, the current managers are probably less arrogant than the last generation of managers but the people that they are dealing with are less likely to take too much of that arrogance anyway.

The role of policy initiator was also mentioned, with one interviewee commenting, "management is filling the policy void left by councillors - managers are not always happy or willing to take this role".

Another officer stated that his role had evolved in three main ways in recent years and he envisaged a continuation of these trends, through the development of the following functions:

- (i) *Community Leadership Role*, with managers now more actively involved in the community and in harnessing community effort;
- (ii) *Manager of the Political Interface*, by convincing councillors of their need to change to survive.
- (iii) *Local Development Co-ordinator*, through mechanisms such as the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme, offering a link into local communities.

The concept of helping to develop effective partnerships was also strongly in evidence amongst the interviewees - partnership not only at the community level but also, for example, with Cork Corporation in terms of developing a joint strategy to protect the green belt around the city while also satisfying housing and infrastructural pressures.

An area of concern for the future management role was the proposed direct elections of a council chairperson. While interviewees were careful not to criticise the proposal (demonstrating their small 'p' political awareness) there was some concern expressed:

If a directly elected chairperson had a tenure in excess of one year there would be a conflict of profiles with the manager. Elected representatives do not seem to want this either as high-profile, non-political candidates may dominate.

It was also argued that there was an apparent confusion at central government level with different variations emerging and the idea presently shelved until 2004.

If they are proposing executive chairpersons then I presume you shouldn't have any manager. I don't think you can have both.....what of the functions of the county manager?

5.5.2 Relationship with elected members

The interviewees were positive about the elected members in Cork County Council and were keen to promote the effective working relationship which had developed. There was awareness of the difficulties of the councillors' role and acceptance, for example, that it was long overdue that the elected members should receive appropriate payment for their efforts.

However, some interesting observations emerged, with the former county manager commenting:

When people are elected they move from community follower to community leader. However most still stay as community followers. Accordingly, councillors typically take the short-term popular and politically-expedient stances.

A degree of exasperation was expressed by one official who remarked that at meetings, "we (management) want to talk about strategy and SMI and they want to talk about potholes". It was asserted that councillors like to sustain a myth of power in local communities but, to a large extent, they had abdicated power.

One official acknowledged that management of the political interface was a challenge due to the large number of councillors (48). He stressed however the importance of involving the elected arm in strategic matters and developing an understanding with all of the organisation's

stakeholders - "the involvement of councillors and other stakeholders, for example clients, will at least stimulate the need for change". The subtle nature of the relationship was also alluded to in the following statement:-

Sometimes members want to be told in public, 'that's a manager's function' - sometimes they don't, and if you pick the wrong one you create all sorts of problems.

It was argued that a weakness in the local government system itself, fuelled by the media, was the perceived adversarial nature of the manager/member relationship with councillors sometimes just seen as people who object to things been done.

It is a weakness in the system that elected members could well regard themselves as being perpetually in opposition with a tendency to blame officials.

Ultimately, while arguing that the working relationship with elected members was positive, the interviewees acknowledged that it was a relationship which needed constant attention and fine tuning. Neither the manager nor the councillor was static in the changing local government environment. One official noted:

It's coming to a point where councillors are going to have to make a conscious choice between developing a policy/strategic role or staying with the traditional representational role.

5.5.3 Relationship with community sector

In common with the elected members, many of the management interviewees channelled questions on the community sector into a discussion on SPCs and the County Development Board (CDB). There was unanimous support for these committees, representing a unique model within which an effective local development partnership could prosper. The managers, in particular, highlighted their increased role in community affairs and in enhancing the efforts of existing groups. One commented:

We can't have crisis planning anymore. Equally, we can't have haphazard links with the community which is the way things have been up to now with most local authorities.

It was felt that it was crucially important to develop the national partnership model and structure the partnership properly at local level. There was also an acknowledgement that the effective workings of the SPCs and the CDB was dependant on a lot of adjusting at the political level. One official sounded a note of caution about the new structures:

In particular I think the councillors will be very wary of the SPCs for a while. The false start in 1998 was a total disaster and there is a danger that we could have another one, especially if training and support mechanisms are not put in place. Local government is on show with the SPCs and the CDB and, in our case, I'm not sure that the penny has dropped at all amongst our management team about the importance of getting things right.

Furthermore it was noted:

There will be an empowerment of community groups on these committees and you could take the view that it's an attempt to bring local government into the mainstream activities which have been lost with the various LEADER groups etc.

A fear was expressed that with the funding of some local development companies in doubt the local authority would have to intervene and would be discredited for their performance - in comparison to the local development agencies who had been regarded as the people to get things done locally when funding was not a problem. An official remarked:

This partnership approach is the way forward and is accepted by national government and the E.U. After all, the government had an opportunity through the National Development Plan to abolish the local development bodies and return the volume of work back to the local authorities but they chose not to do so.

The interviewees were anxious to praise the local development companies and community groups for the very good work that had been done, noting that the challenge was to build on their expertise.

We need to build on what they have, rather than to supplant what they have done. Funding might be a problem down the line but we have to accept that risk and keep local government centre-stage.

This final point was the dominant one to emerge - while a local partnership model was desirable, the local authority should be the primary player.

5.5.4 SMI process

There was an acceptance amongst interviewees that SMI in Cork County Council failed. Officials noted:

“SMI has largely failed. SMI was not understood”.

“We have a plan but in terms of implementing it, there's been very little done in that particular area”.

The former county manager observed simply, “it didn't work because it didn't change anything” and the external facilitator stated, “SMI in Cork County Council was a failure and fell down at implementation level”.

Two of the interviewees stopped short of describing the process as a failure, with one arguing that it was not understood. The other sought to accentuate positive aspects - “SMI has focused us. It gives us a better appreciation of where we are”.

Explanations were offered as to why SMI had not been effective in Cork County Council.

EXPLANATION 1

One viewpoint was that the imposition of the initiative from central government was a fundamental problem, with reform ideas never emerging from within local government itself.

EXPLANATION 2

BLG was also cited as a contributory factor, a strategy document which had muddied the SMI waters and duplicated many of its ideas. With the implementation of BLG being hampered by IR disputes, the SMI drive had become lost. A degree of resentment was expressed at the lack of consultation with management regarding BLG, with one official remarking that it had suddenly “fallen from the sky”.

EXPLANATION 3

The retirement of three of the management team (county manager and two ACMs) at critical junctures also delayed and possibly de-railed the process, with the final Corporate Plan being rushed through at the end of the former county manager’s reign. One manager commented, “changes in management should not have hindered SMI but I think they probably did to some extent”.

EXPLANATION 4

Excessive time pressures imposed by central government and the DOELG were seen as adding to the SMI problem. One official argued:

The whole SMI was affected because of the way it was driven at national level whereby you have to be seen to do something within a particular time-frame and, come hell or high water, you get a document in place.....not necessarily relating to the requirements of the local authority itself.

EXPLANATION 5

The need for an outside leader to direct the process was mentioned by most of the interviewees. While an external facilitator had been employed, confusion surrounded his precise role. The initial intention had been that he would facilitate the process, enabling the authority to formulate its own strategic plans. Others however saw the role as that of an outside management consultant who would personally prepare a corporate plan. Tension existed due to this confusion, although officials are insistent that an external supervisor is important.

We have to put in a driver to manage change and SMI because I don't think we have the capacity to do it ourselves. Because of the patterns of culture which are ingrained, unless someone is prodding this thing from outside, there's unlikely to be any change.

While there is some validity in the individual and collective explanations offered by management officials in Cork County Council it should be noted that the officials may not demonstrate a totally objective view. In this regard, the opinions expressed by the two interviewees - the former county manager and the external facilitator - increase in importance. The key point to emerge from these two interviews with regard to the failure of SMI was that ultimately there was no intention to implement the Corporate Plan. The former county manager cited cynical elements within the organisation who "just didn't believe in the process".

The commentary offered by a member of the SMI Steering Committee, who has an objective position, paints a fascinating picture:

There was a buzz in the organisation at the start and a desire to achieve change but somewhere along the line this was perceived as being dangerous and there was a curtailment. The emphasis shifted to the signpost and not the destination. Initially I got the impression that it was going to be more than a paper exercise but that is the way it ended up. At some stage there was a desire to stop change.

The conclusion was that:

the process was captured by political constituents within the council. The corporate strategy was not an agent of change - in the end, the civil service mentality won out.

The reference here is not directed towards the elected representatives but rather to internal managerial politics and power struggles within the organisation (this point will be developed further in the concluding chapter).

With regard to the role of the councillors in SMI an interviewee accepted that they had not played a very active part - "councillors needed to be educated about SMI because it was difficult for them to participate in a process which they didn't understand".

Given the problems associated with SMI in the council it is perhaps surprising to record that the external facilitator was upbeat about the prospects of re-visiting SMI. This optimism was shared by all interviewees with one official commenting, "the underlying philosophies of SMI are sound. SMI has been a learning process and a strategy

document is there". Another noted that it was now necessary to build on the existing strategy with a view to moving forward to a new plan - "to be fair there are aspects of it, particularly with regard to VFM, being worked on from other angles". This point also emerged from another official who expressed the view that the principles of SMI and BLG were being applied in the organisation, although not in a programmed or structured way.

5.6 Conclusions

It should be clearly stated that the focus of this chapter is the evolving role of top management in Cork County Council, what Ferlie *et al.* (1996) refer to as the strategic apex of the organisation. The application of NPM philosophies impacts on everybody in Cork County Council, including the engineer, the front-line member of staff and the middle/operational manager. All are worthy of further research but that is beyond the scope of this research thesis which seeks to contribute to an understanding of the roles of the strategic managers, elected members and community sector representatives.

It has been asserted in this chapter that NPM has failed to distinguish top strategic managers as a specific group. One exception to this statement is Asquith (1994, p.12) whose PhD thesis had the stated aim of assessing "the chief executive's role in implementing and managing change in local authorities, within the constraints imposed by internal managerial politics and the broader political environment". Often it is the internal managerial politics which dominates an organisation and hinders change and development.

Asquith emphasises the leadership role of the chief executive who must emerge as the dominant organisational change element. He also

stresses the distinction between strategic planning and corporate planning.

Corporate management is based on planning the co-ordination and control of an organisation's activities over the long term, from the centre and through a prescribed corporate plan. In Britain the Mallaby (1967); Maud (1967) and Bains (1972) reports represent the corporate management model in local government. The main criticism of corporate planning is that it is mechanistic by nature and inward-looking with a concentration on internal operations as opposed to service delivery to the public.

The disenchantment with corporate management led to a shift to strategic management in the 1980s in line with general NPM thinking at the time. Strategic management promoted an analysis on key issues with target setting and evaluation. Caulfield and Schultz (1989, p.61) explain, "strategic planning moves a local authority from focusing on the routine of service delivery onto being concerned with and about direction and achievement".

Strategic planning and corporate planning are not mutually exclusive but the division between them needs to be understood. This clearly did not happen in Cork County Council where a **strategic** management process produced a **corporate** plan which in turn failed to give rise to **operational** plans and implementation. This lends credence to the

viewpoint that SMI in Cork County Council was on a road to failure from its inception because the fundamentals of strategic management were not understood.

Osborne and Gaebler (1992, p.130) note that, "clarity of mission may be the most important single asset for a government organisation". This clarity must stem from top managers in an organisation and yet must not be seen as simply the preserve of management. Such a balance can be difficult to strike with Worrall, Collinge and Bill (1998, p.491) noting that in the UK some local authorities "have designed strategic management superstructures, usually managed in the chief executive's department, that exist almost independently of the rest of the organisation".

Historically strategic planning in local government has been regarded as the property of senior managers rather than the elected members of the council. Cork County Council is one such example where there was no political ownership of the corporate plan. Worrall *et al.* (1998, p.487) conclude:

strategies in local government cannot be drafted in a vacuum if they are to carry weight in the organisation but must be developed through a process of deliberation in which the key power holders will 'own' the outcome.

The harsh but accurate judgement of Cork County Council is that the corporate plan 1997-2002 **was** produced in a vacuum, finally and

hurriedly written by officials who had lost sight of the destination in favour of the signpost. Ownership of the strategy was not an issue as the plan was never distributed to staff and there was no commitment to implement.

For the city/county manager in Ireland, managing the strategic process is an onerous responsibility, described by Whittington and Stacey (1994) as a non-trivial task. Rittel and Webber (1973) state that the local authority manager has 'wicked' problems in which it is impossible to disentangle symptoms from problems; the problems are continually changing; and, intervention irrevocably changes the problems at hand (as quoted by Worrall *et al.* p.473).

Cork County Council can take comfort from the fact that it is not unique in struggling with strategic management. Research by Worrall, Collinge and Bill (1998, p.472) indicates that while approximately 60% of UK local authorities have corporate strategies, they would contend, "this does not necessarily imply that a strategic approach is being enacted in all these organisations".

Interestingly, as noted in the previous section, one official in Cork County Council has observed evidence of the process in reverse, i.e. the enactment of a strategic approach in the absence of an accepted, programmed approach.

A complete analysis of SMI in Cork County Council will be made in chapter 7. However, at this point it is clear that the process lost its direction and enthusiasm partly as a result of fear of organisational fragmentation. Top management must accept full responsibility for the SMI failure. Under the Mintzberg managerial functions it is evident that there was no effective information dissemination. Drucker (1974, p.483), as quoted by Kaagar (1999) offers a useful insight:

it is the recipient who communicates. The so-called communicator, the person who emits the communication, does not communicate. He utters. Unless there is someone who hears there is no communication. There is only noise.

The modern local authority manager in Ireland faces many challenges in leading his/her organisation. Vroom and Jago (1988, p.42) are correct in their statement that "managerial leadership is no longer maintaining the status quo. Old habits must be discarded if one is to respond to today's challenges and opportunities".

The manager must direct his/her organisation and must be prepared for a changing evaluation environment with performance-based contracting. Depre, Hondegheem and Bodiguel (1996, p.288) observe that while most new public managers come from inside their organisations, "the number of outsiders, however, is rising and in several countries the recruitment of public managers from the private sector is no longer an exception".

At an internal level the manager must continue to maintain coalitions of support while demonstrating political sensitivity. This must be balanced with the creation of new partnership relationships with a variety of external actors who demand increasing attention, e.g. community sector, EU. However it is a complex equation because line managers and public officials generally are becoming managerialised under NPM while the voluntary and community bodies themselves are also being managerialised by playing more prominent roles in delivering a mixed economy of welfare provision, a role fostered through the national partnership model.

In this regard, the conclusion by Farnham and Horton (1996, p.49/50) is particularly apt for the Irish city/county manager:

this is resulting in the professionalisation of management and a synthesis between management in the public and private domains. However, public managers can never be totally divorced from the political dimensions and the constitutional accountabilities of the organisations they manage and work in. For public managers, it is the legacy of politics which ultimately underpins their role, not the market place.

CHAPTER 6

COMMUNITY SECTOR

6.1 Chapter Aim

In this chapter the third key grouping of the thesis will be analysed. The idea of community is one which has occupied the minds of sociologists and anthropologists over a long period of time. Community studies are notable for a lack of consensus due to the contested nature of community itself as a concept. The community sector does not enjoy a very prominent position in NPM literature as the new right and laissez-faire economic principles underpinning NPM tend to promote an individualistic perspective which does not rest easily alongside the ideals of collectivism and community.

Despite this apparent contradiction, NPM in Irish local government, as applied primarily via SMI and BLG, advocates a partnership model for effective local development. Through the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) and County Development Board (CDB) structures the community sector is afforded a more formal role on policy formulation and decision-making.

This chapter examines some of the tensions which exist between NPM philosophies and communitarianism philosophies. The community sector

in Cork county is assessed in the context of changing relationships with the local authority. This assessment is grounded in an understanding that the community and voluntary sectors have a long and valued tradition in Ireland.

6.2 The Concept of Community

Today we are inclined to confuse bigness with greatness. Yet within the small, the delicate and the defenceless lie beauty, grandeur, nobility, civilisation and exalted humanity. We take the small community to be the source that will give blood transfusions to the nation.

- Canon John M. Hayes,
Founder of Muintir na Tire
as quoted by Maher (1961, p.37).

'Community' is a contested concept. Fowler and Orenstein (1993, p.38) note that understandings of what community means are all but innumerable and that researchers should "accept from the start that a completely shared definition of community does not exist". Tierney (1982, p.80) offers the opinion that it is "one of those nice comfortable words which is appropriated by many different groups, with many different and sometimes conflicting meanings" In a similar vein, Butterworth and Weir (1970, p.58) observe, "community tends to be a God word. In many circumstances, we are expected to abase ourselves before it rather than attempt to define it".

Perhaps understandably, due to the problematic nature of the key term, sociologists, utopians and reformers who write community studies find themselves open to some healthy scepticism in academic circles. The damning verdict by Glass (1966, p.48) was that community studies were "the poor sociologists substitute for a novel". Her castigation of community studies is based on a history of research in the area which reveals "a penchant for a descriptive narrative style" and "a pervading

posture of nostalgia" (Bell and Newby, 1971, p.21/22). This style, though easy to read, has resulted in much research of dubious quality being dismissed as "mere pieces of documentary social history, contributing little to our knowledge of social processes" (Bell and Newby, 1971, p.13).

Notwithstanding this criticism, Thorns (1976, preface) describes the quest for community as "a fascinating area at the heart of society". Devereux (1993, p.63) correctly argues that for social scientists, "community remains a long-standing intellectual question".

In this regard, the previously-cited assertion that understandings of what community means are innumerable is not quite accurate. While Bell and Newby (1971, p.27) note that the quest for a definition of community has resulted in "quite a thriving sociological industry" Hillery Jr. (1955) has managed to attach a figure to it. His famed research analysed **ninety-four distinct definitions**. His unencouraging conclusion (p.20) was that all definitions of community involve people - "beyond this common basis, there is no agreement".

Despite Hillery's conclusion that there is an absence of agreement, much can be learnt from his analysis. The idea of geographical area is significant in most definitions although Bell and Newby (1971, p.29) remark that "a community cannot be an area and not be an area, though significantly Hillery found that no author denied that area *could* be an element of community". Consideration of territory and the spatial

component of community has provoked debate and controversy since Ferdinand Tonnies' book *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* was first published in 1887. Tonnies argued that at the heart of the community concept is the sentimental attachment to the conventions and mores of a beloved place but, not surprisingly, no consensus has emerged. Bell and Newby (1971) however have identified three components of community which are to be found in the majority of Hillery's definitions:-

- area
- common ties
- social interaction

These three elements tie in neatly with the omnibus definition by Sussman (1959, p.1/2) which has become recognised as the most complete one available:

a community is said to exist when interaction between individuals has the purpose of meeting individual needs and obtaining group goals..... a limited geographical area is another feature of community.....the features of social interaction, structures for the gratification of physical, social and psychological needs, and limited geographical area are basic to the definition of community.

Even if one accepts this all-embracing definition, the concept of community remains complex because it is associated with equally vague terms such as democracy, participation and citizenship. John Dewey (1927, p.148), for example, passionately believed that democracy was

not a form of associated life but “the idea of community life itself”. Barber (1984, p.117) constructs the notion of ‘strong democracy’ which he defines as follows:

it rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature.

Barber (1994, p.216/217) also promotes the view that citizenship and community are two aspects of a single, political reality - “men can only overcome their insufficiency and legitimise their dependency by forging a common consciousness”. He cites George Bernard Shaw (p.130) in support of his argument. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1957) Shaw wrote:

when a man is at last brought face to face with himself by brave individualism, he finds himself face to face, not with an individual, but with a species, and knows that to save himself he must save the race. He can have no life except a share in the life of the community.

Debates about individualism, collectivism, participation and citizenship are largely beyond the scope of this thesis but references to each will be made in the coming sections of this chapter. In *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (1942, p.73/74) Gandhi extravagantly attempted to tie them all together by using the metaphor of the democratic circle:

life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

At this point of the chapter and for the purposes of advancing to an assessment of community under NPM, it is not necessary to enter the wider debate about the democratic aspects of community life and participation. An acceptance of the Sussman definition and of the three key components identified by Hillery Jr. (area; common ties; social interaction) is sufficient for an understanding of 'community'.

6.3 NPM and Community

In the previous section it was established that a satisfactory universally-accepted definition of community in sociological terms remains elusive, with Bell and Newby (1971, p.27) noting that, "sociologists have frequently launched into defining community with a will bordering on gay abandon". It is interesting to note that such a criticism can also be made with regard to attempts to define NPM. The lack of a shared definition, allied to the appropriation of different meanings by different groups of people is something which both 'community' and 'NPM' share. Examining the two concepts in tandem is therefore something of a challenge. Perhaps one should adopt Stacey's (1969) view that if institutions are locality based and inter-related then a **local social system** is worthy of analysis but not community which she classifies as a non-concept. Researchers should concentrate on institutions and groups and their inter-relations in specific localities. It is as if this solution has been approved by NPM writers because very little reference is made to community in NPM literature. Instead a greater customer orientation is espoused with a concentration on improved public service delivery. Ferlie *et al.* (1996) outline that one of the core themes of NPM Model 4 is an emphasis on community development and assessment of social need. Beyond this bland assertion however, the point is not developed. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) list ten principles which equate to success in governmental and public sector organisations. The second principle

(the first is the necessity to steer rather than row) is to empower communities rather than simply deliver services. This point is the exception rather than the rule in NPM literature where the tendency is to concentrate on service delivery and, in Ireland, NPM has generally not been used to empower local communities (this point will be developed in section 6.4). Rhodes (1987, p.71) concisely sums up the fundamental dilemma by arguing that through NPM and new ways of looking at local government an opportunity exists for “emancipating the individual and creating a free society through citizen participation”. He observes however that such an aspiration is daunting and the inevitable trend is for improved methods of service delivery to dominate instead.

A related problem in discussing community development in the context of NPM is that a large proportion of the research is British-based and reflects an apparent obsession with Quasi-Autonomous Non Governmental Organisations or quangos. In a 1979 conference paper, Hood remarked, “now, like the frogs of Egypt, quangos suddenly seem to be everywhere”. In the twenty-plus years which have followed, quangos have developed to a point where now there are ‘communities’ of multiple agencies in any given policy field. The UK model is one of piecemeal growth of unaccountable institutional power. An influential 1994 report in the UK by Weir and Hall (p.42) referred to “the inadequate official framework for (non-elected) bodies.....their varying status and inconsistent arrangements for accountability, scrutiny and openness”.

Furthermore Painter (1997, p.248) states that non-elected agencies "have also exhibited a narrow stakeholder base".

The challenge therefore for NPM is to effectively accommodate quangos, non-elected agencies and community sector organisations in a partnership framework with traditional public sector organisations. In this regard it is of interest to note that Britain has the highest transition to NPM in Europe as well as a very significant increase in quangos. It can be argued that the fragmentation caused by NPM philosophies has created voids which are now being filled by a non-elected sector. Painter (1997, p.249) notes that "new forms of public consultation and community participation are emerging. Some are impressive; others inevitably smack of tokenism".

One of the impressive initiatives is in the British NHS where constituency action teams have been established to assess and deal with primary health care needs. These action teams include representatives of local authorities, the voluntary sector and doctors and nurses (see Painter, Isaac-Henry and Chalcraft, 1994). Again, as with so much in NPM, contradictions are apparent. The British patient has generally not been well served by the NPM-inspired philosophies which place a strict emphasis on value for money as well as enhancing the role of the manager/administrator to the detriment of the professional.

In the realm of local government certain tensions can exist between the local authority and quangos and non-elected agencies (NEA's) in the creation of new partnership forms of governance. Painter (1997, p.253) astutely observes:

as far as the possibilities for co-operation are concerned, obviously much depends on attitudes on either side of the fence. Relationships can be adversarial, especially where agencies are seen as part of a calculated attempt to undermine local government, or where newly-created institutions are eager to assert their independence over the local authority.

The British Local Government Management Board (LGMB) conducted a research study in 1995 into local authority approaches to non-elected agencies (see Isaac-Henry *et al.* pp.254-255) and found striking differences. Four categories of local authorities emerged:

PASSIVE

- failed to respond to the growth of non-elected bodies;
- either reacted too slowly or simply did not know what to do.

ORGANIC

- tended to rely on informal networks to exert influence over outside agencies;
- key determinant of success was the quality of inter-personal relationships.

HIGH PROFILE INITIATIVE-TAKING

- publicly appeared to be pro-active in establishing formal relationships with NEA's;
- motivated to a large extent however to monitor/scrutinise and assume control.

STRATEGIC

- saw the necessity to respond to new challenges;
- concentrated on adapting the local authority to operate effectively in a changing environment.

(See Table 3).

TABLE 3

Local Authority Approaches to non-elected agencies in Britain

TYPES OF APPROACHES				RESPONSES
Passive	Organic	High Profile Initiative-Taking	Strategic	
•				Resigned to loss of responsibilities to NEAs
•	•			In the process of realising just how important NEAs have become and their increasing impact on local government
•	•			No overall policy on NEAs has been considered
•	•	•		No overall policy on NEAs because thought best to have policies on issues as they arise
		•	•	Lobby and challenge NEAs on important issues
	•	•	•	Informal Liaison between officers/members of the authority and NEAs
	•	•	•	Extensive development of informal networks as basis for developing partnership working
		•	•	Setting up quango 'watches' and quango data banks
			•	Focus on changing role of local government to fit the changing environment
			•	Plans for changing structures and practices to implement new strategic policy

Source: Local Government Management Board, 1995 - as reproduced by Painter (1997, p.255).

Guthrie and Dutton (1992) argue that through the use of IT the relationship between the public sector and the community sector can be greatly enhanced. They develop the concept of a community information system which they describe (p.574) as “a process comparable to legislating public policy on citizen participation”. In similar vein, Kerley (1994, p.197) argues:

councils will hope to create information systems which will enable them to scan their working environment effectively; in effect to keep an eye on the various organisations the council must relate to and which relate to the members of the communities which the council serves and represents.

New frameworks for local government impact fundamentally on the main power-brokers in local authorities, namely elected politicians and managers. In the January-March issue of *Public Money and Management*, a futuristic spotlight is turned on public management in 2010. Farrell (2000, p.31) states that “the existence of an effective means of citizen participation within public service decision-making forums will be one of the biggest challenges for public managers in 2010”.

It is not yet clear whether NPM will help or hinder the fulfilment of this challenge. This is because NPM itself has been created on a philosophy of individualism over collectivism, a concept now discussed.

6.3.1 NPM - Individualism or Communitarianism?

When examining NPM and its impact on community participation and local development it is apparent that an underlying tension exists. Simply stated, the New Right economic doctrine on which NPM is founded favours individualism and warns against collectivist policies and the excessive role of government in the market-place. In chapter 2 the economic forces of change which led to the New Right laissez-faire policies were discussed. At that point it was noted that in Britain Sir Keith Joseph was influenced by the resurgence of interest in the Austrian School of Economics led by Friedrich von Hayek. Barry (1981, p.90) describes Hayek as “a rigorous defender of methodological individualism against collectivism” and it is clear from Hayek’s own writing that this is an accurate assessment (e.g. *The Constitution of Liberty*, 1960).

The beliefs of the Austrian School were readily embraced in the United States and Britain during the 1980s when the market place became sovereign and self-interest emerged as a dominant theme. Liberal right wing theory was espoused which emphasised individual rights and characterised the individual as a disembodied self uprooted from cultural meanings and community attachments.

In response, communitarianism emerged in the 1980s, primarily in America and latterly in Britain, the two main proponents of the New Right

and NPM ideologies. Communitarianism rose to academic prominence (and became established within community studies) through the work of Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer. Its dominant theme is that individual rights need to be balanced with social responsibilities and that people are shaped by the values and cultures of communities. Today the main communitarian writers are Francis Fukuyama, Mary Ann Glendon, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Amitai Etzioni. The latter is regarded as the figurehead of the movement and his philosophy was summed up in *The Spirit of Community* (1993, p.10) - "to take and not to give is an amoral, self-centred predisposition that ultimately no society can tolerate". Communitarians rally against the unbridled greed and rampant, irresponsible individualism which they feel is the legacy of the new right liberalism. Fox and Miller (1995, p.33) contend that communitarianism is not a new concept, rather it is "a full-blown philosophical school strongly rooted in ancient (Aristotle), medieval (St. Thomas Aquinas) and contemporary (e.g. Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988) thought". Its major tenet follows Aristotle's dictum that "a person is a social/political animal, the full development of which can only occur in a well-ordered community (polis)" (as quoted by Fox and Miller, p.34). Individual self-interest must give way to the 'common good' with d'Entreves (1992, p.181) explaining, "they (communitarians) view human agency as situated in a concrete moral and political context and stress the consultative role that communal aims and attachments assume for a situated self".

Communitarianism challenges the view that fundamental individualism (referred to as 'hyperindividualism' by Leo, 1991) is the primordial force in life "co-ordinated by the invisible hand of the market" (Fox and Miller, 1995, p.34). Rather it stresses the importance of community as a precondition for happiness.

One of the core aims of communitarianism is to correct the imbalance between rights and responsibilities. Etzioni (1993, p.9) states, "claiming rights without assuming responsibilities is unethical and illogical". Glendon is another communitarian writer who consistently argues that people have a moral commitment to encourage one another to live up to their social responsibilities. She criticises (1991, p.77) the greedy right's culture of today's world whereby "buried deep in our rights dialect is an unexpected premise that we roam at large in a land of strangers, where we presumptively have no obligations toward others except to avoid the active infliction of harm".

In summary, communitarianism is committed to creating a new moral, social and public order based on restored communities.

Not surprisingly, communitarianism has its critics and has been dismissed as 'neopuritanism.' In August 1991, the respected *Time* magazine carried a cover story on the new movement - the title read, "Busybodies: The New Puritans." The inside story (p.20) referred to

communitarians “humorously imposing on others arbitrary (meaning their own) standards of behaviour, health and thought”.

It cannot be denied that communitarianism has totalitarian tendencies which Fox and Miller (1995, p.35) claim people may find “insufferably boring”. Boredom aside, there appears to be a valid argument, as developed by the *Time* magazine article, that communitarianism is based on busybodies imposing their high-browed moralism on a passive generality whereby “mind-numbing conformity becomes the price of membership” (Fox and Miller, p.35).

Perhaps Fox and Miller (1995, p.38) have their fingers on the pulse of the dilemma when they note, “communitarianism may be essentially an idealistic stained-glass-window nostalgia no longer viable as a real option in the mass societies inexorably created by advanced and post-industrial capitalism”. A weakness in communitarianism is that it tends to gloss over the issue of public apathy. DiPalma (1970, p.200) claims that citizen apathy is rife in Western society and “is fostered by political and social marginality”. The indifference in matters of governance makes a mockery of the communitarian model. Yet there is an element of the ‘chicken and egg’ or causality factor involved. It can be argued that if people demonstrate apathy it is precisely because they have been marginalised or denied information. Fox and Miller (1995, p.38) raise another fascinating point:

perhaps we are the arrogant ones, we professional political junkies, policy wonks, and government watchers. Imagine the range of human endeavour we also neglect.....perhaps the communitarian fulfilment by the governmentally apathetic could come not from governing in the usual sense of self-government, but from participation in the other myriad forms of self-through-community actualisation available to them, including car racing, dog clubs, RV clubs, church activities.....and so on ad infinitum.

The majority of people in today's society do not find happiness through involvement in politics but rather through family life, friendship, leisure pursuits and work and Kymlicka and Norman (1994, p.362) are correct in their assertion that "those passive citizens who prefer the joys of family and career to the duties of politics are not necessarily misguided". Real communities of such people exist everywhere and it is important that the desire to encourage civic participation does not fall back into the extremities of civic republicanism whereby failure to participate in politics makes one "a radically incomplete and stunted being" (Oldfield, 1990, p.187).

The communitarian agenda offers an interesting perspective on liberal society dominated by individualism but appears to imply, as Baber (1995, p.222) states, "a lack of individual autonomy and the freedom to choose.....it does not leave any, or enough, room within communities or traditions for distance, criticism, rebellion, conflict and change". Konner's (1993, p.249) summation of communitarianism may ultimately be the most accurate, "it appeared to be one part church sermon, one part

reassertion of old values, one part political campaign and one part social movement”.

It is evident from the preceding debate that the ideals of communitarianism do not rest easily with the New Right individualist philosophy which underpins NPM. Communitarianism is a reaction to liberalism and the rights culture, rather than to NPM itself. Nonetheless there are significant parallels with local governance and the Osborne and Gaebler principle of empowering local communities. While a basic contradiction appears to exist it is not inconceivable that the conflicting elements of communitarianism and NPM can be merged. One country which is attempting to bridge the gap is Britain. The New Labour government has done little to move from the Conservative policies of NPM and privatisation. Rather it has continued the process as is evident from the *Modernising Government* White Paper. Cabinet Office minister, Mo Mowlam, may have been speaking from a NPM handout when she stated on March 7th 2000,

we are committed to bringing all public services up to the level of the best and delivering what users want in an efficient and effective way. Working together, I am sure that we will be able to build on the improvements which have already been made and provide high quality public services that are truly responsive to the needs of their users.

Yet the New Labour government are moving at the same time in a communitarian direction. While the main focus of attention with regard to the changes made by Prime Minister Blair to Labour's traditional Clause

4 surrounded the removal of the preference for big government, another point was largely ignored. The new Clause 4 recognises the importance of community, of a society in which "the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe". This standpoint was seen in the subsequent general election which featured the communitarian motto, 'Responsibility for all, responsibility from all.' Noting the New Labour emphasis, the London Times (June 21, 1997) remarked:

communitarian culture is needed to replace the welfare state notion of entitlement - that once one pays one's taxes, the State will attend to one's needs from cradle to grave - with the realisation that for the ship of state to progress, everyone must pull the oars.

The British government is attempting a difficult balancing act by continuing the trend set by successive Conservative governments in reducing the scope of government while also deepening support for what the state will continue to have to do. The 'NPM' doctrine of delivering more effective government is being maintained but without the centralist tendencies favoured by Thatcher. There is also a movement away from the Thatcherite notion that community welfare can be derived from an aggregation of the individual welfare constituents of each person.

The scope for change enjoyed by Blair reflects the key point of this section. While community development and the new strand of communitarianism contradict the foundations on which NPM is constructed, the vague nature of the key terms involved is emerging as a strength. Both 'NPM' and 'community' are appropriated different

meanings by different people. They do not have agreed definitions which polarise them. Rather they are blank pages (or 'empty canvasses' to use the language of Ferlie *et al.*) on which virtually anything can be written. Therefore, if used imaginatively and interpreted broadly there is no reason why the ideals of community development cannot be satisfied under NPM. In this way, the vision of Osborne and Gaebler may be satisfied.

6.4 Community Sector in Ireland

Does community exist in Ireland? Again, such a debate is constrained by the realisation that an uncontested definition of community is not forthcoming. In Ireland, many people retain a romantic picture of a country rich in culture, tradition, neighbourliness and community spirit. Some fundamentals of this picture remain accurate, particularly in rural Ireland where religion, education and sport continue to promote the community aspect of life.

The realisation also exists however that as a nation, progress cannot be achieved by clinging to a nostalgic image of the past. Harris (1984) argues that community does not exist in Ireland but ideologies of community do while Lee (1986, p.44) claims that the Irish sense of community has been "sacrificed on the altar of state centralisation". Urban life is increasingly characterised by anonymity, reflecting Massey's (1994, p.430) assertion that, "in a city one's neighbours are not necessarily one's friends, and vice versa".

Therefore the challenge is to re-assert and re-define community in a modern context for a vibrant and confident nation.

The purpose of this section is not to re-open the question of community again but rather to examine what is understood by the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. This task is more difficult than might first be apparent as a myriad of organisational types and development programmes and initiatives are in existence. The scope of the sector is also impressive with approximately £500m. per annum being provided in funding by the Irish state and EU sources. Keyes (1997, p.67) notes, "it is estimated that half the adult population of Ireland are members of a voluntary sector organisation. One in five define themselves as voluntary workers".

The 1997 governmental Green Paper (*Supporting Voluntary Activity*) produced by the Department of Social Welfare as part of the national anti-poverty strategy states (p.1), "since the early 1990s, a debate has been taking place on the role of the voluntary and community sector in Irish society". Through that debate the relationship between the community/voluntary sector and the state "has been increasingly defined in terms of partnership" (Watt, 1996, p.9). The logical question - *who are the partners?* - will be addressed shortly. An equally pertinent question though is, *from where did the partners emerge?* Obviously the state and state agencies remain primary participants in any partnership model. The mechanisms through which the local development participants have emerged however is through a variety of programmes. The position up to 1999 was that seven programmes had been established to promote local development. Walsh *et al.* (1998, p.38) observe, "all but one of the

programmes was or is EU promoted or funded, typically through the structural funds”.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES⁶⁴

Area Programme for Integrated Rural Development (1998-1990)

- established by the Department of Agriculture in 1988 on a pilot basis.
- objective was to improve employment opportunities, quality of life and sense of community in rural areas, primarily through the promotion of local enterprise.
- superseded by LEADER.

LEADER I and II Community Initiative (1991-1994, 1995-1999)

- administered by the Department of Agriculture with EU co-funding.
- main features are “the development of a partnership dynamic, local animation and capacity building, and multi-dimensional planning” (as quoted by Walsh *et al.* p.39).
- LEADER I funded seventeen projects over four years, covering half the rural population.
- LEADER II encompassed all of rural Ireland with 34 groups approved for on-going funding.

⁶⁴ For a more complete account, see Walsh *et al.* (1998) from whom this summary is sourced.

Global Grant for Local Development (1992-1995)

- joint initiative of the EU and the national government to promote local socio-economic development.
- twelve local partnerships were initially established with a fund managed by an intermediary company, Area Development Management (ADM), which included representatives of the different interests on its board.
- successor of the initiative is the Integrated Development Programme, under the CSF.

Local Enterprise Programme (1993-1999)

- LEP was initiated in 1993 by the Department of Enterprise and Employment to support micro-enterprises at the local level.
- programme is delivered through city/county enterprise boards (CEB's) which comprise representatives of state agencies, local authorities (both elected and executive), social partners and voluntary groups.
- programme is directly managed by government, with external technical support for training and advice, organisational development and information exchange.

Programme of Integrated Development in Disadvantaged Areas (1995-1999)

- a component of the Local Development Programme and is targeted at designated disadvantaged and other areas.

- programme managed nationally by ADM which assesses applications on the basis of local plans.
- a national committee and external evaluation exist to monitor the programme.

Urban Community Initiative (1996-1999)

- an EU programme designed to address the needs of distressed urban areas, combining employment and training initiatives with measures to improve the environment and community structures.
- three Irish locations selected, two in Dublin city and one in Cork city.
- national programme co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (1995-1999)

- a special EU initiative to promote social and economic development in Northern Ireland and the border counties in the Republic of Ireland.
- in the southern border region ADM and the Combat Poverty Agency are responsible for administering the measures under the programme.
- programme has been extended from an initial three years to five.

These programmes, and the community sector generally in Ireland, have been the subject of many reports and studies, all heavily emphasising the dual aims of integration and co-ordination. In chapter 3 many of these reports were discussed, e.g. NESC (1994); OECD (1996); Lacey (1996); Devolution Commission (1996,1997) and the Local Development Task Force (1998). It is the latter document which is currently the most

significant, in tandem with the National Development Plan, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and the White Paper on Rural Development. The Task Force report identified the key players in local development as the local authorities, city/county enterprise boards, Partnership companies (including ADM -supported community groups), LEADER II groups and locally operating state agencies. The report offered an assessment (p.9) of these bodies within the existing structures and cited an OECD review which described Partnership organisations as “extraordinarily innovative but they may have been better at creating new things than at building stable institutions that embody and extend their innovations”.

The Task Force evaluation of the LEADER II groups is equally insightful (p.9):

however, as one of a number of local development structures, the possibility exists of overlap with other programmes and, in overall terms, of duplication in administrative costs. LEADER has a broad remit in terms of community development in the form of animation and capacity building and also in grant aiding local projects. In relation to enterprise support, however, the groups do not always have a strategic focus, and implementation of the local plan may, in some cases, be on the basis of support for a series of unrelated project activities.

Accordingly the Task Force recommended the establishment of broadly representative City/County Development Boards (replacing County Strategy Groups) with the aim of developing a “strategy for social, economic and cultural development for the city/county, not later than

2002, in full partnership with all interests" (circular letter LGP8/98 from the DOELG, December 3rd 1998). In an interesting development the government also decided that the Task Force (under the chairmanship of Noel Dempsey, TD, minister for the Environment and Local Government) remain in place to oversee the implementation of the CDB process.

In April 1999 the Task Force produced specific guidelines for the formation of CDB's with representation from four sectors:-

- local government
- local development
- state agencies
- social partners

The recommended allocation of positions to these sectors is contained in Table which follows on the next page (reproduced from the Task Force Guidelines, p.13).

**TABLE 4 - CITY/COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD
RECOMMENDED COMPOSITION**

Sector	Members	Number
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC Chairs • Cathaoirleach/Mayor • County/City Manager • Urban Representative 	Typically 7
Local Development	<p>Two representatives for each of the following three types of local development bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County/City Enterprise Board • LEADER II Group(s) • ADM-supported Partnership Companies and ADM-supported Community Groups 	6
State Agencies	<p>As appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Board • FÁS • Teagasc • VEC • Enterprise Ireland • IDA Ireland • Regional Tourism Organisations • D/CSFA Regional Officer • SFADCo/Údarás 	Typically 7
Social Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers and Business Organisations (one member) • Trade Unions (one member) • Agricultural and Farming (one member) • Community and Voluntary Organisations (two members) 	5
TOTAL		Typically 25

The Guidelines also provide for the CDB process to be supported at area level with the creation of a Community Fora to link the work of the CDB with the local community groupings. Furthermore, the post of Director of Community and Enterprise (at Assistant Manager level) has been created, as well as community liaison officers.

Presently the CDBs and the SPCs are the vehicles through which the efforts of the community sector in Ireland are being harnessed in a bid to foster effective local development and governance and in section 6.5 they will be discussed in the context of Cork County Council. These advances and initiatives are taking place at a time when the very survival of many local development bodies is in doubt due to the ending of some of the EU programmes in 1999. The future for many local development bodies is unclear although arising from the European Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals, and the outcome of the Berlin summit, it is now known that four Community Initiatives will operate in the period 2000-2006: INTERREG, LEADER plus, EQUAL and URBAN. Each initiative will be financed by a single structural fund and the total amount allocated to community initiatives in the 2000-2006 programming round is 5.35% of the total structural funds budget of 195 billion euros i.e. 10.4 billion euros (source: National Development Plan, 2000-2006).

6.5 Community Sector in Cork County

A strong community sector exists in the county of Cork. Over the course of interviews with representatives from the sector, three broadly-based classifications emerged. First, there are the local community groups and associations which typically represent a town or village across a wide range of local issues. They include community councils, many of whom are affiliated to Muintir na Tire. A second category are issue or policy-specific organisations which cover a diversity of interests from environmental matters, to housing, to transport etc. The final category are local development bodies which themselves divide into LEADER groups, Local Development Programme Groups (some funded through ADM) and County Enterprise Boards.

For the purposes of this research the community sector is broadly defined as incorporating these three classifications. It should be noted however that this is not a universally accepted definition of the community sector. The grass-roots community councils referred to above and the issue-specific voluntary organisations would typically not include the local development bodies under a community sector heading.

As part of the process for the establishment of the County Development Board, Cork County Council advertised in November 1999 for relevant organisations to apply for inclusion in a register of community/voluntary organisations. By the end of March 2000 (at which point the deadline had

passed) 456 groups had registered, representing ten diverse sectoral interests.

- agriculture/farming
- economic and social development
- anti-disadvantage
- disability
- culture/heritage
- environment/conservation
- youth organisation
- recreation/sports
- resident associations
- community development

In addition there are sixteen local development bodies across the county, divided into three enterprise boards, seven LEADER groups and six local development programme area groups⁶⁵ (See Appendix C for details).

The inaugural meeting of the council's CDB was held on March 20th 2000, with a full membership of 36. There are nine local government representatives - the county manager, council chairman, SPC chairpersons and a UDC member.

⁶⁵ All but one of the Local Development Programme Area groups also operate LEADER programmes. There is no partnership company in Cork.

There are eleven representatives from the local development sector (i.e. selected from the sixteen local development bodies) covering all areas of the county. The local state agencies provide ten board members, including a nominee from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Garda Síochána. There are six members from the social partners with one each from employers/business organisations, trade unions and agriculture/farming organisations plus three representatives from community and voluntary organisations.

The CDB is chaired by a nominated member of Cork County Council (chosen from amongst the seven SPC chairpersons) and all board members enjoy equal status, i.e. the county manager is a board member in the same way as everyone else.

In summary, the membership of Cork County Council's CDB is as follows:
(See Appendix D for more details).

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Members</u>
Local Government	9
Local Development Bodies	11
State Agencies	10
Social Partners	6

Total	36

Included in the social partners sector are three representatives from the community and voluntary sector. The path through which these representatives arrived on the CDB is an interesting one. The Director of Community and Enterprise attended selection meetings with the registered bodies in each of the council's ten electoral areas. At these meetings, two representatives from each area were elected. Subsequently a meeting of the twenty representatives was called. The group was divided into the county's three divisions, and one representative from each division was elected. Therefore there is a direct link from the three CDB members to the group of twenty representatives and from there to the 456 community and voluntary groups. This linkage is very important as the CDB will only succeed if a valid support structure is in place underneath. The Community Fora group of twenty can act as a sounding board with regard to many issues and it also helps to relieve some of the pressure from the three CDB members who would find it exceedingly difficult to report back to 456 different associations. Also, it is envisaged that the CDB structure will be replicated at a lower extended area committee level, at which point the two elected representatives from each electoral ward are in place. A strange anomaly however exists whereby the state agencies have been excluded by the national Task Force from the area level committees.

Logistically it is a difficult task for the community and voluntary groups to organise themselves and present a unified front with regard to policy issues and public service needs in the county (as expressed through the

three CDB members). To this end, each registered body in the county has been issued with a questionnaire which asks it to identify and rank its main areas of policy concern. This information will be collated by the Director of Community and Enterprise.

The process of selection for the other sectoral groups on the CDB were more straightforward although some of the social partner groupings had difficulties in selecting one representative. Dan Wallace, TD, Minister of State at the Department of the Environment and Local Government, attended the inaugural meeting of the council's CDB and heralded it as the beginning of a new era for local governance. He stated to the board:

the establishment of the CDB is a tremendous opportunity to get meaningful co-operation and co-ordination between State and local development agencies operating locally. This process goes far beyond anything attempted heretofore. In many ways it's nothing short of a radical departure in local governance.

The council's SPC structure is in place to the extent that the number and function of each committee has been agreed and chairpersons have been elected from the councillors. However the previous false start with regard to the SPCs (see chapter 3) and the issuing of a third set of Guidelines from the DOELG (which exclude local development bodies) has caused confusion. Additionally, the process of appointing programme managers/directors of services has remained a major unresolved IR difficulty. The council's external interest nomination and

selection process is scheduled to take place in early May with meetings commencing soon thereafter.

Detailed interviews took place with representatives of Cork county's community sector across the three categories of local community groups, specific-interest organisations and local development bodies. This researcher also gathered information from informal discussions with community and voluntary representatives and through observation and participation in nomination and selection processes in the council. In the sub-sections which follow the interviewees are referred to as 'community representatives' although a distinction is sometimes made where a specific point is made with regard to local development bodies.

6.5.1 Relationship with Cork County Council, Management and Elected Representatives

It is not possible to simply classify the relationship which exists between the local community sector and Cork County Council as being 'good', 'bad' or 'indifferent'. By its very nature the community sector is diverse and fragmented and accordingly each of the above descriptions is appropriate depending on to whom you are talking. The majority of interviewees however stated that there had been a noticeable improvement in relations with the council over the past number of years. One community representative noted, "I have noticed a big change in the last four years. Before that County Hall was closed doors, untouchable."

This is a view shared by representatives of local development bodies.

Their comments reflect the fact that difficulties had previously existed.

This is apparent from the following two statements:

there has been tension but the situation has improved in recent times. Certainly three to four years ago, Cork County Council would have loved to have closed us down.

we have an improving relationship with Cork County Council. At the start it was a very strange relationship with a lot of talk but no action. The level of trust has increased significantly in the last number of years, although some elected representatives still regard us (local development bodies) as having a slush fund which they would love to have.

The views expressed by representatives of community and voluntary organisations varies quite substantially. Some interviewees noted that they had not seen any perceptible difference in the relationship with the council. Obviously geographical location of the representatives is an important factor - in towns and villages where the council had initiated projects (typically under the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme) community representatives were quite fulsome in their praise. Conversely in towns and villages earmarked as potential landfill locations or overlooked in the Renewal schemes, opinions tend to be negative. Equally, with regards to issue-driven organisations the relationship is defined by the perception of the council's efforts in that specific area. A representative from the housing sector, for example, alluded to "a good partnership and working relationship". This view would not necessarily be

shared by representatives from the environmental sector who are frustrated by lack of progress in initiatives such as Agenda 21.

One point of common consensus however is that too much is dependent on personal relationships. Many interviewees cited individual planners, architects and engineers with whom they enjoy a fruitful working relationship. They also noted that changes in personnel often results in a completely different relationship with the council. One exasperated representative remarked:

it's all down to personalities. We are part of the local government change process and some of the old style administrators and staff generally find it difficult to see that we are an important part of where they are going in the future.

The planning service area was highlighted repeatedly in this respect. Again a variety of opinions emerged. One community representative observed:

I couldn't say one bad word against the council. Any time I've sought help, I've got it and they bent over backwards with the Development Plan.

This, though, appears to be a minority view. While interviewees noted the council's consultation process as part of the 1996 County Development Plan, there was a view that this was a token effort. One representative from a local development body claimed that a community survey in the area revealed that the major local angst was towards the

Planning Department. The County Development Plan was described as “anti-people and anti-rural development.”

It also emerged from the interviews that the relationship with the council is typically defined through a planner, architect or engineer, i.e. through professionals. There is little contact with top management while, where possible, administrators are avoided due to their bureaucratic tendencies which often delay projects. While some of the county councillors sit on community councils or the boards of local development bodies the elected representatives generally tend to be by-passed in the community sector/council relationship. This is simply explained by the fact that community sector organisations are anxious to keep party politics out of their activities where possible. Interviewees respected the political dimension but equally were anxious not to see community or development processes politicised (or captured by one party). It was also apparent that elected representatives were not considered to be the primary power-brokers in decision-making.

The relationship therefore between the community sector and the council in Cork county is a complicated one. No clear trend is evident concerning the community and voluntary organisations. A more defined relationship is obvious with regard to local development bodies. This can be accurately described as ‘tense but improving’. One local development body interviewee admitted to initially being terrified by the prospect of

coming under the local government umbrella but stated that the fear had now dissipated. Another interviewee remarked:

the language up to quite recently with regards to us (local development bodies) was one of confusion. We were the ones who were confusing the community. We were the ones who were getting in the way. We were the ones to be cut down, to be rationalised.

An improvement in the relationship is now emerging, driven in many ways by the formal structures, i.e. SPCs and CDB, which have been created. These are now discussed.

6.5.2 SPCs, CDB and the Evolving Partnership Role

Amongst the community sector, a certain amount of confusion was evident concerning the new local government partnership structures. One interviewee argued that the Council appeared to have two distinct strategies reflecting, in his opinion, the lack of a clarity of purpose. The 'false start' of the previous SPC effort in 1998 has added to the confusion, doing little to inspire confidence amongst community representatives that the new initiative will be a success. One interviewee from a small local community group stated:

it's too early to assess the SPCs but there is a danger that they will be hijacked by councillors. I was initially optimistic about the SPCs but I'm not so sure now, having read the small print. Is it just creating six more layers of red tape?

A representative from an issue-specific voluntary group who had an SPC place under the 1998 scheme spoke in favour of the process but added:

I think that the process of selection is less focused on the task of the SPCs than on the sectoral representation which is not that relevant.

She also added that a lot of pre-selection networking was taking place due to the fact that sectoral representatives choose their own nominees. While fearing that her own organisation might get squeezed out, she conceded, "that's democracy at work, I suppose".

The views of community and voluntary groups concerning SPCs can be summed up as follows: overwhelming endorsement of the concept but sceptical about the prospects of practical change. There is also an awareness that the fundamental IR problems with regard to the creation of Directors of Service posts to service the SPCs remains unsolved.

Amongst local development bodies huge anger and resentment was expressed at their exclusion from the SPC process which was described as a "totally weird decision". Indeed the exclusion of local development bodies is inexplicable, as it represents the major significant material change between the old and new Guidelines issued by the DOELG.

State and Local Development Agencies should not be included as nominating bodies to the sectors and should not be represented on an SPC. (DOELG Guidelines, 1999, section 5)

Little explanation has been offered other than the fact that they are to be accommodated instead on the CDBs. In reality this cannot be justified as the CDBs effectively replace County Strategy Groups. Under previous arrangements local development bodies had representation on County Strategy Groups and on the 1998 SPCs. There is also a glaring lack of consistency in so far as the agriculture/farming, trade union and business sectors have been granted places on both the SPC and CDB forums. It should also be noted that the CDB is in effect a co-ordinating body for the Cork region aimed at ending duplication in local development. By contrast, the SPCs are directly involved in the sphere of policy formulation in local authorities. The message from the DOELG is clear - it is happy for local development bodies to be involved at a broad level in terms of service co-ordination but it does not want them involved in local government business. The view of local development bodies is encapsulated in the following statement by one representative:

in terms of increasing understanding, acceptance, co-ordination and complementarity we opened our doors to representation from our local authorities on the basis that this would be in some way reciprocated directly into their processes. Now we're being shoved into the CDB and told 'that's it, thanks very much' but the CDB is not a local authority or local government, it's just a process of increasing co-ordination. This decision is alien to partnership, trust, respect and equality. Everything that was there 3 to 4 years ago (i.e. mistrust, lack of respect) has fed this current model. I think it's the weirdest thing that has ever happened in the community development process.

It is an understatement to say that the local development bodies feel aggrieved and the conspiracy theorists amongst them have some

ammunition. A number of interviewees alluded to the potential involvement of the CCMA and certain managers in the governmental decision to exclude them from the SPC structure although there is no evidence of this. The issuing of the SPC Guidelines by the DOELG in November 1999, but bearing the date August 1999, is also remarkable. It would be considered rude and disrespectful for any organisation to circulate a document while maintaining a date of a few months earlier. For a government department to do so is staggering. Adding fuel to the fire of the local development bodies is the fact that in some jurisdictions LEADER companies have been invited to sit on SPCs, e.g. in Dublin County.

As for the CDB itself, cautious approval would appear to be the order of the day. One local development interviewee remarked:

I think that the concept and process is brilliant but deliverability of the whole process is problematic. We have 36 people sitting around a table trying to co-ordinate services to 295,000 people and get respect from the ground up. The CDB is built on a warped model, it's like a regional board and is needed at the level of co-ordination but in its reality, how will it allow for participation and better delivery at a local level? I don't think it has a hope.

The precise role of the local government sector on the CDB is also a cause of concern. It was argued that a proper partnership forum had to emerge, "the parent model will not work. Local authorities need to be involved as a partner but not as a controlling force".

Another representative observed:

the CDB brings the council not only into local development but in charge of it. Local government has suddenly become the key partner and the centre of overall economic, environmental and social development. Nobody sees them as that, other than themselves.

Other interviewees referred to the fact that the chairperson is a nominated councillor as opposed to being directly elected by the board itself. It was asserted that this sent a wrong message to the community sector from the outset. The issue of funding for the CDB was also raised as each body represented is expected to contribute. It appears that while many of the local development agencies are happy to promote the ideal of partnership they would rather not operate as partners in the sense of supplying financial resources.

In this regard, concern was expressed about the role of the three CDB members representing the voluntary and community sector. One interviewee argued that it was unreasonable for three people from the sector to emerge from the Community Fora of twenty which in turn was formed from the official register of over 450 organisations. It was asserted that this register only captured a fraction of the community and voluntary activity in the county which in turn fed into a population of almost 300,000 people.

how can you get consensus from the community/voluntary sector? How is the CDB going to be fed from the bottom-up principle and actually be

inclusive at the implementation level? All of this is diluting down to nothingness. Their position (i.e. the community and voluntary representatives) is impossible.

Broadly speaking the community sector is in favour of the new forms of partnership emerging in local development and governance. However, it is clear that tensions persist and that there are significant teething problems, most noticeably surrounding the contentious issue of the exclusion of local development bodies from the SPC framework. Community activists also doubt the sincerity and commitment of local government to the processes and question the willingness of managers and councillors alike to grasp the opportunities and challenges of an equality-based partnership.

6.6 Conclusions

NPM is largely silent on the issue of community development. This is perhaps unsurprising if one considers the underlying ethos of individualism which dominates much of the economic foundations of NPM. In local government there has been a strong and consistent temptation to justify its very existence on instrumental and practical grounds. NPM has continued this trend as it has been designed to reflect changes in patterns of economic interaction between people as well as the technical requirements of services delivery. In other words the concept of 'community' has not been used in determining local government structure. Barnett and Crowther (1998, p.426) explain, "thus local government structure has been determined by functional requirement, with the economic welfare of communities being equated with total welfare".

NPM is being employed to continue this role, effectively disguising the fact that local government should be viewed in terms other than instrumental ones. It is all too easy for local authorities and public sector organisations generally to construct strategies for the welfare and benefit of communities without offering opportunities for the community sector to participate in the process. Such a philosophy is apparent in Cork County Council, compounded by an arrogance which suggests - *we know what's best for the community better than it knows itself*. Elements of the model presented by Painter (1997) are also readily apparent. Cork County

Council has tended to adopt an organic approach with its local development strategy determined by the quality of informal inter-personal relationships. In recent years, with the introduction of NPM philosophies and various reform initiatives being imposed by central government, the council has adopted the language and posture of a high profile initiative-taker. While publicly the intention is to promote the authority as proactive the desire to monitor and control local development activity through a formal structure is a dominant motivation. Thus, the model developed by Nyland (1993) whereby community-managed organisations move along a continuum ranging from autonomy, to partnership, to state control is a distinct possibility. Indeed, some interviewees expressed similar fears for their organisations.

There are other interesting perspectives. Gilbert (1987, pp.56-80) argues that the benefits of popular community participation have been vastly exaggerated and in many cases the interests of the weaker groups in society have been damaged. In this way governments have used community participation to maintain existing power relations. Applied to the Irish local government example of SPCs and CDBs it can be argued that the influence of powerful and 'troublesome' community/local development organisations will be diluted through the formal new structures which allow for participation at some level by a plethora of external interests. There are 36 members on the CDB while 163 places are available on the council's SPCs, with 55 for external representatives. Many participants and a host of new committees and sub-committees

would suggest the creation of talking shops where consensus will be difficult to reach. The evidence from Cork County Council indicates that management are happy to keep the community sector at arm's length on a variety of committees while continuing to operate un-perturbed in traditional manner. Botes and van Rensburg (2000) cite a host of literature which argues that formal channels of community participation have not always generated major benefits for local communities. This is reflected in research by Constantino-David (1982); Gilbert and Ward (1984); Morgan (1993) and Rahman (1993). Morgan (1993, p.6), as quoted by Botes and van Rensburg (2000, p.45), contends that:

participation is often constrained at the state level by partisanship, funding limitations, rigidity, the resistance of local and national bureaucrats, and the state's inability to respond effectively to the felt needs of the populace.

There is also a danger that more visible, articulated and educated groups will emerge as development partners without any serious attempts to identify less obvious partners. On the CDBs, for example, there is potential for huge gaps to emerge between the sectors. The state agencies and local development bodies (perhaps to a lesser extent) will bring huge expertise and everyday working knowledge to the board. The voluntary/community sector may well find themselves overpowered while the local government sector will have part-time politicians, often unprepared for meetings (and, to an extent, resentful of 'partnership' to begin with) and management who may not be committed to the process.

Botes and van Rensburg (2000, p.49) also refer to the possibility of "gate-keeping by local elites" which has been evidenced in Cork county through pre-SPC networking. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that community participation through the SPCs and CDB is regarded by management as little more than part of the information gathering process in bureaucracies.

The challenge, accordingly, for the community sector organisations is to re-model and reposition themselves so as to avoid the perils identified by Nyland. In this respect one is primarily conscious of the local development agencies. Grass-roots community bodies are entering the SPC and CDB structures with low expectations and little to lose. One suspects they will continue regardless. Local development bodies however have generally not enjoyed positive relations with local authorities and have been perceived as a threat. They enter the new local governance partnership processes with scepticism and fear. Fortman and Roe (1993, p.146) refer to the necessity for community and local development organisations to maintain independence and to defend against outside demands and incursions. The fundamental problem however for the local development bodies in Cork county is that their very future is uncertain. Understandably this makes it difficult to concentrate on re-positioning and entering new forms of partnership. The funding arrangements through the EU are shrouded in confusion. While funding for LEADER plus is in place for 2000-2006, competition for a

slice of the pie will be fierce, compounded by a new national LEADER programme. A couple of interviewees highlighted rumours from Europe that the so-called BMW (Border, Midlands, West) region in Ireland will dominate the allocation of resources and the bodies in Cork county are noticeably anxious. An overall co-ordinated strategic vision seems to be lacking at both a European and national level. Most of the local development bodies are engaged in medium to long-term projects which typically are not completed in four or five years. Resources need to be coming in at the same time as they are running out but there is no evidence that the lessons of LEADER I and LEADER II have been heeded. In fact it is apparent that the gaps between funding (and the lifetime of programmes) is increasing and it is difficult for the bodies involved to find a balance between arguing for their survival and being expected to continue and produce results. This was summed up by one interviewee who commented:

there's something very strange going on and there's a very short term vision. The architects of all this stuff seem to have a longer term vision but the people who are implementing it in terms of budgeting aspects seem not to have learnt that you do not stop and start community development - it's a continuum.

There is little doubt that the new committee structures and partnership processes present challenges for management and elected representatives in Cork County Council as well as for the community sector. There is consensus that the changes required can have positive

effects. As one council official (previously cited) noted, “we can’t have crisis planning anymore”.

At the very heart of the SPCs and CDB is the concept of community development. Individually and jointly the words are difficult. With regard to ‘community’ Lash and Urry (1994, p.3) note that people have an ever increasing choice of communities to “throw themselves into”. Barnett and Crowther (1998, p.432) comment:

thus an individual considers him/herself to be a member of a community for a particular purpose and a member of a different community for different purposes with community identity being defined in terms of commonality of interest for specific purposes rather than being an overriding part of a definition of self.

The problem with ‘development’ is that it implies progress and seems to demand that something be done. While the new structures discussed in this chapter are in their infancy there is little to suggest that the community sector in Cork county will be developed and that something will be done in an equal partnership with Cork County Council.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Chapter Aim

This is the concluding chapter of the thesis and addresses the fundamental questions which have been posed by the research, through the application of two analytical models which have been described previously. In section 7.2, the SMI process in Cork County Council is analysed using an action research model formulated by Susman and Evered. In effect, this is the collaborative element of the thesis with the researcher as practitioner tracing the SMI plan and prescribing future-oriented actions to the client. The other model is more traditional, with the researcher as objective observer and Cork County Council not filling the role of client. Accordingly the Dunleavy and Hood Costs and Problems Critique model is also applied in section 7.2. This model captures the attitudes of the research's three key stakeholder groupings - elected members, top management, community representatives - to NPM changes in the organisation. This analysis facilitates a discussion on the roles and evolving relationships of the three groupings - the primary question and research aim of this thesis (section 7.3).

The focus is broadened in section 7.4 with the case study material of Cork County Council providing the basis for a discussion on the impact of

NPM philosophies at a general level in Irish local government and in the public sector.

The concluding section begins with a concentration on Cork County Council and the lessons which it should consider, based on its application of NPM-driven changes over the past four years. The potential future directions in which NPM might develop in Irish local government and the public sector are then considered.

7.2 Application of Models

In this section, two models are discussed in the specific case study context of Cork County Council.

TABLE 5 - USE OF THEORETICAL MODELS

<u>Model</u>	<u>Section of Chapter</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
<i>Susman & Evered the Action Research Model</i>	7.2.1	Cork County Council	<i>To evaluate the SMI process in Council with a view to prescribing recommendations for action to the client.</i>
<i>Costs and Problems Critique Model (Dunleavy & Hood)</i>	7.2.2	Cork County Council	<i>To comprehend the attitudes of three key stakeholder groupings to the advent of NPM philosophies.</i>

7.2.1 *Susman and Evered Action Research Model*

The first three phases of the action research model presented by Susman and Evered (1978) were previously discussed in chapter 3 in the context of SMI. It was noted at that time that a fundamental problem for Cork County Council (and all other local authorities) was that the diagnosing phase (whereby a problem or problems are identified and defined) was conducted by central government and not from within the local authority itself. While this did not preclude Cork County Council from approaching SMI in a pro-active manner it created a mentality amongst some top managers that SMI was an inconvenient imposition.

Susman and Evered (1978) argue that all five phases of their model are necessary for a comprehensive definition of action research. They note however (p.588) that "action research projects may differ in the number of phases which are carried out in collaboration between the action researcher and the client system". For example, Chein, Cook and Harding (1948) use the term 'empirical action research' when the researcher evaluates the actions undertaken by the client system and feeds data back into it. That is an accurate description of this thesis where evaluation is the fundamental methodology.

Evaluation is the fourth phase of the Susman and Evered model and is defined as studying the consequences of action. Evaluation theory has become an important academic field and textbooks, such as that produced by Rossi and Freeman (1993) are well-respected. McKeown (1999, p.52) states that the two main types of rationale for evaluation are accountability and learning. He continues by observing:

it is a curious fact that despite the widespread support for evaluation, there is also deep-seated resistance to it within many organisations. The reasons for this are complex and diverse, but it is possible to find a pattern to the resistance based on some core beliefs held by organisations in different sectors.

To this end, McKeown examines the private, public and voluntary sectors and produces the following table (p.54):

TABLE 6

Myths in Organisations which resist Evaluation

<u>Type of Organisation</u>	<u>Resistance to Evaluation</u>
<i>Voluntary</i>	<i>The myth of good intentions: "we mean well"</i>
<i>Statutory (Public Sector)</i>	<i>The myth of competence: "we know best"</i>
<i>Private</i>	<i>The myth of private property: "we mind our own business"</i>

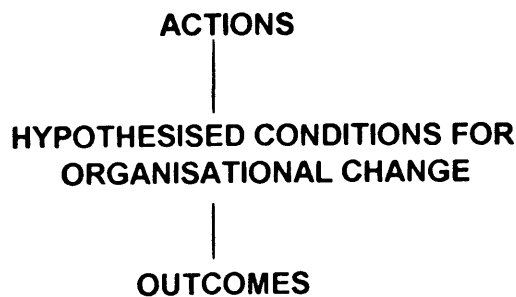
Local authorities are cited by McKeown (1999, p.55) as examples of statutory organisations who "believe so strongly in their own legal and technical competence that evaluation of activities within their sphere is often seen as unnecessary". The myth of "we know best" was evident during interviews with management in Cork County Council. In fact one interviewee used the exact phrase when explaining the formulation of a particular policy, despite research indicating that an alternative course of action would have been more appropriate. Interviewees also referred to the difficulties of evaluation and measurement of performance in local government due to the complex and often ambiguous nature of objectives.

Adapting a framework developed by Susman (1983) the following questions have been asked by this research:

- (1) Did the actions taken bring about the conditions necessary for change that led the organisation to hypothesise about desired outcomes?
- (2) If the hypothesised conditions were brought about, were the desired outcomes produced?
- (3) If the desired outcomes were produced, how confident can the organisation be that it was the hypothesised conditions that produced them?
- (4) If the desired outcomes were not produced, what aspects of the process should be re-examined?

FIGURE 9

***Evaluating Phase of the Susman
and Evered Model***



The core problem with regard to Cork County Council's SMI was that the corporate plan produced did not lead to the necessary series of operational plans at departmental level. Thus an unbridgeable gap was created between the action planning and action taking (implementation)

phases. This breakdown in the model makes it impossible to conduct the evaluation envisaged by Susman and Evered. It is more appropriate (and indeed more interesting and more difficult) to study the consequences of inaction.

Essentially, at the most basic level, the hypothesised conditions necessary for change were not brought about. The correct climate was not created because there was no shared ownership of a coherent vision by the stakeholders in Cork County Council. The term 'stakeholder' is defined by McKeown (1999, p.57) who notes that "it is derived from the concept of shareholder in the corporate sector but is broader in its implications because ownership is not the only form of stakeholding in an organisation". Increasingly in the public sector it is becoming an important management skill to understand the interests, objectives and tensions of stakeholders "so as to create synergy and a common purpose" (McKeown, p.58). There are multiple stakeholders in Cork County Council. Internally there are the elected members, top managers, middle and line managers, front-line staff, professionals (e.g. engineers, solicitors) and sub-contractors. Externally the stakeholders are the public-at-large of Cork county, communities, individual customers, central government, state agencies and local business. This is not an exhaustive list and may be further divided into sub-groups.

Over time, SMI in Cork County Council became increasingly defined in terms of top management to the exclusion of other groups. A linkage was

broken with the other stakeholders and crucially their support waned. The inaction following the production of the corporate plan has led to disillusionment and cynicism amongst some stakeholders.

Susman and Evered (1978, p.110) quote Suchman (1971) to explain the situation when the hypothesised set of conditions initially envisioned are not produced - "as a result, it is not possible to evaluate the intended hypothesis. The validity of the hypothesis remains untested, but the feasibility of bringing about the intended conditions is seriously questioned".

A fundamental failing of the SMI process in the council was that the foundations for action were not laid. The model envisages hypothesised conditions for organisational change. These conditions were not hypothesised and logically were not created, due to the fact that the internal culture of the organisation and issues such as staff morale were largely left un-examined. It can therefore be argued that, even if the corporate plan led to departmental operational strategies, positive action and change would not have occurred because the necessary conditions were not present. This lends credence to the point admitted by some management interviewees (and alluded to by the external management facilitator) that SMI was not understood in Cork County Council.

The fourth phase of the Susman and Evered model, as applied to this research, amounts to an evaluation of the SMI process itself in Cork County Council, as opposed to an evaluation of the actions taken as a result of strategic planning. While the model has broken down, this does not preclude an analysis of the final phase - specifying learning.

In explaining their model, Susman and Evered (1978, p.111) state, "although this phase of action research (i.e. specifying learning) is discussed last, one should not infer that learning does not begin until this phase". Ideally, the diagnosing, action planning, action taking and evaluating phases should transform a problematic situation into one that is 'settled' (Dewey, 1938, as quoted by Susman and Evered, p.112). While this did not happen in Cork County Council the SMI process described has been a valuable experience from which lessons can be learnt for the future and it is a role of the action researcher to bring his/her observations and recommendations to the organisation. These recommendations will be outlined in the concluding section of this chapter.

The concept of the 'learning company' emerged in the private sector in the 1960s through writers such as Gardner (1963) and Lippitt (1969). During the late 1970s Argyris and Schon - who have connections with the action research approach - developed the idea of a 'learning system' and this work was continued by Morgan (1986) and Pettigrew and Whip (1991) who "widened the debate about organisational learning, corporate

culture, and strategies for change" (Jones, 1994,p.3).⁶⁵ An emphasis has recently been placed on the self-development of employees by Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1991) while Total Quality Management (TQM) has emerged as an important tool in fostering a learning organisation.

The learning organisation has been defined in many ways with Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne (1988) describing it as "an organisation which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself." Gaines (1990) simply states that the learning organisation "is a lot of people learning" while Ball (1991) notes that it "may be just another label for 'good practice'".

The essence of the term is to examine the consequences of action (or inaction) and adapt strategies accordingly for the future. In this way, learning is a continuum which integrates perfectly into the cyclical nature of the Susman and Evered model. Shared ownership of an organisational vision again becomes an important element of this reflection. Nonaka's (1991) research, as quoted by Jones (1994, p.356) into the Canon company identified that "knowledge creation takes place at all levels, with shop floor workers often being the most productive and that all employees must engage in the reflective process".

⁶⁵ See Jones, A.M. (1994) and his doctoral thesis, "Creating a Learning Organisation" for a thorough examination of this topic.

Virtually all writers in the field of organisational learning “testify to the need for greater communication between people and for more flexible and horizontal management structures in organisations, thus reducing bureaucracy” (Jones, p.358).

In Cork County Council, a first favourable starting point is that the organisation is not in denial about SMI. Management are not afraid to express their disappointment at the failure of the process and the impotence of the corporate plan. All interviewees were consistent in their belief that SMI was a valuable experience for the Council. Also, while the personnel changes amongst senior managers was cited previously in this research as a contributory factor to the unsuccessful nature of SMI, this may now be seen as advantageous. A new management team is in place which is not burdened by the experience of the 1997 corporate plan. While two of the managerial replacements have come from within the organisation it is significant that the county manager is new to Cork County Council and has not been influenced by the internal politics which hampered the initiative previously.

The need to re-visit the existing corporate plan with a view to preparing a new strategy is an active priority of Cork County Council, according to management. It is clear that the new approach is centred around hiring external consultants to examine the workings of the Council. While this in itself is a necessary step, it is not yet clear how management plan to

'drive' the process internally and bridge the strategic/operational gap. The temptation may be to leave the production of the second Corporate Plan to the external consultants. If this is the case, then Cork County Council will not have learnt any lessons from 1997.

The researcher is also not satisfied that that a pro-active and innovative mentality exists amongst top management. One interviewee who referred to the organisation as being "under stress" described the crisis situations in both the Planning and Motor Tax Departments. He indicated that it needed something to go wrong (i.e. planning decisions to issue by default) and for systems to fail before the problems could be dealt with through appeals to the DOELG for extra funding and staff. There seemed to be a reluctance to solve the problems through internal strategic management decision-making.

Overall Assessment of SMI in Cork County Council Utilising the Susman and Evered Model

Through the application of the Susman and Evered action research model the following problems can be identified regarding SMI in Cork County Council:

- (i) An imposed diagnosis i.e. internal issues and problems were not identified as the starting point.
- (ii) A failure at the Action Planning stage to distinguish between the aims of the strategic plan and individual operational plans.

- (iii) Action Taking - no underlying commitment to implement. There was no shared ownership of the Corporate Plan, which was not distributed to staff.
- (iv) The internal organisational conditions necessary for change were not hypothesised and subsequently were not created.
- (v) Confusion at the precise role of the external management facilitator.

The SPECIFYING LEARNING phase of the model, whereby general findings are identified is, in part, being satisfied by this research. In this way, a client system infrastructure is established with the client organisation (i.e. Cork County Council) benefiting from the research of a practitioner and developing a framework to address the problems identified at all phases of the model (see section 7.5.1 for an assessment of the lessons to be learned by the council in this regard).

At this point, through the application of the Susman and Evered model, it can be concluded that Cork County Council failed on many of the preparatory steps prior to the production of a strategy. The corporate plan accordingly was not based on any firm foundations and implementation became an impossible task. Such a contention is supported by the external facilitator who is quoted earlier in this work (chapter 5) as stating that the organisation lost sight of the destination in favour of the signpost itself. The strategy became the central focus and the preliminary steps of analysing, diagnosing and goal-setting were bypassed.

7.2.2 NPM Costs and Problems Critique Model (Dunleavy and Hood)

This model was produced by Dunleavy and Hood in 1994 and, as its title implies, concentrates on criticisms of NPM. The four critical groupings of the model - fatalist, individualist, egalitarian, hierarchist - are borrowed from cultural theory, “where they are used to capture a wide range of people’s attitudes” (Dunleavy and Hood, p.10). This is precisely the purpose of the model in this research i.e. to capture the attitudes of elected representatives, management and community sector participants in the context of NPM driven change in Cork County Council. Dunleavy and Hood argue that while the four broad criticisms of NPM are contradictory, much can be learnt from their use as analytical tools. This point and the use of cultural theory in public management is developed further by Hood in *The Art of the State* (1998). In this book, he notes (p.7):

it (cultural theory) aims to capture the diversity of human preferences about ‘ways of life’ and relate those preferences to different possible styles of organisation, each of which has its advantages and disadvantages but is in some sense ‘viable’.

In applying the Costs and Problems Critique Model to Cork County Council, it is apparent that strands of all four groupings are present in some form.

The fatalist critique is an inherently negative one which holds that the basic problems of public sector management are omnipresent. Certain elected representatives and community participants exhibited classic fatalist views. Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.11) stress, “fatalists are particularly vigilant for evidence that little is changing underneath the raft of new acronyms and control frameworks promoted by NPM, and quick to proclaim the collapse or failure of much-hyped systems”.

A significant proportion of community sector interviewees can be classified as fatalists. While acknowledging that initiatives such as SPCs and the CDB are new there is an underlying cynicism which suggests that the present NPM-based reforms will fail like so many of their predecessors. The confusion which was apparent amongst the majority of grass-roots community interviewees suggests that policy documents such as BLG are regarded as empty rhetoric which may in fact be used to crowd out other debates that, in their eyes, are more legitimate.

The fatalist perspective was less obvious but nonetheless present amongst some of the elected representatives in Cork County Council. This particularly manifested itself in connection with SMI. Councillors were largely ignorant of SMI and seemed happy to dismiss it as something which would not impact on the workings of the organisation.

The researcher is also very conscious from his personal work experience and observation in Cork County Council that a culture of fatalism dominates amongst staff generally. While this grouping are not of primary concern in this research the significance of cynical fatalist opinions in the organisation suggests that any reform measures driven by the strategic apex of the organisation will struggle at implementation level. Hood (1998) refers to the satirical Dilbert cartoons created by Adams (1996) which caricature managers as idiots. It is claimed by Hood (1998, p.146) that such a belief "often prompts an attitude of private and underground detachment in the face of public enthusiasm for this week's favoured managerial path to salvation".

Such an attitude is prevalent in Cork County Council and had been fuelled by the failure of SMI. Top management in the organisation have been made vulnerable by promoting and over-selling SMI and then failing to deliver effective reform. In simple terms, hopes were raised and then dashed, leading to an even deeper cynicism. Understandably, staff are not enthused by SMI and NPM reforms when their own primary criticisms with regard to over-crowding and lack of adequate accommodation, for example, are unresolved. Reference is again made to a quote by a member of the Council's management team who observed, "this is an organisation under stress" (see chapter 5).

Not surprisingly, top management and officials in Cork County Council spoke the language of NPM and expressed confidence in the various

reform initiatives which have been undertaken. Interestingly however, a few comments made during interviews suggests that a “closet fatalist” (Eilstein, 1995, p.71) perspective lingers in some quarters. This was typically expressed in an exasperated tone denouncing the fact that NPM reforms have derived from central government and have been imposed on local government.

There is evidence in Cork County Council to suggest that Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990, p.79) are correct in their assertion that, “organisational designs which are intended to have quite different effects, such as the dismantling of hierarchies aimed at increasing individualism, may unintentionally produce an increase in fatalism instead”.

In some ways the fatalist critique is tempting for many practitioners and observers of local government in Ireland as it offers an opportunity to satirise and criticise without offering solutions or new workable reforms. As Hood (1998, p.165) notes, “certainly, in terms of behaviour and attitudes, fatalism is a major and commonplace element in public service organisations”. Cork County Council is not an exception to this statement.

The individualist critique is at the very heart of the New Right laissez-faire ideologies which underpin NPM. Individualist ideas such as government by the market (Self, 1993) dominated the Thatcherite

governments from 1979 onwards and remain significant in public management debates. Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.11) observe:

hence individualists will be sharply critical of the managed aspects of NPM markets, and of arrangements which are only quasi-contracts rather than contracts fully enforceable at law by citizens. Individuals will dismiss corporatisation measures which stop anywhere short of full-blooded privatisation.

The individualist vision of public management promotes performance-related pay and rewards as well as free and open competition for the provision of public services. Whilst today such an approach is associated primarily with Thatcherism, this individualist perspective can be traced to such luminaries as Woodrow Wilson, Frederick Taylor and Adam Smith. Wilson strongly advocated an individualist distinction between politics and administration while Taylor supported a scientific approach to work with appropriate performance-related rewards. Similarly, Smith proclaimed in 1937 (p.678) - in a statement described by Hood (1998, p.104) as "one of the all-time classic dicta of public management"- that, "public services are never better performed than when their (public officials) reward comes only in consequence of their being performed, and is proportional to the diligence employed in performing them".

Rosenberg (1995, p.559) claims that the design principle of Smith is "to put each individual under an optimum degree of psychic tension, to encourage maximum effort". Good performance is rewarded, "achieving a

wider collective benefit through the pursuit of personal self-interest" (Hood, 1998, p.104).

The individualist critique of NPM has little or no prominence amongst the three key groupings analysed in this research. In particular, the management group is noticeable for a strong sense of self-preservation. Officials are aware of international trends (most prominent in Britain) which emphasise privatisation, pay-related performance and the abandonment of career tenure. Management interviewees stressed the importance of maintaining distinct public sector values and of not 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater'. There was an understandable reluctance to pursue NPM philosophies to their logical conclusions as this would inevitably lead to a debate about the very necessity for local government. It was apparent that there was little confidence that local government would survive such a scrutiny. This commentary compliments the views expressed a member of the Council's SMI Steering Group who referred to an element of fear stifling the initiative to the extent that the traditional bureaucratic civil service mentality emerged triumphant. Elected representatives were equally fearful with a majority arguing against privatisation of services on the grounds that minorities in the community might be placed at a disadvantage by 'cherry-picking' activities. It was also re-iterated that the functional range of activity by Irish local authorities is narrow and needs to be preserved rather than diminished.

The individualist viewpoint was also not supported by community representatives even though a small minority alluded to benefits from the privatisation of public services. The dominant view which emerged is that community representatives have grown accustomed to dealing with the bureaucratic structures and administrative rigours of the Council. The Council is a permanent support mechanism and presence in the community and any disintegration of it would be damaging.

The evidence of this research with regard to Cork County Council suggests that while elements of NPM are seen as laudable, the individualist approach is too radical and has far-reaching consequences which are not appealing to management, elected members or community sector representatives. Hood (1998, p.119) describes the critique as “the contemporary re-launch of individualist ideas with fresh metaphors for new times”. Cork County Council may not yet be in tune with these new times and, for example, with the comparative ‘league table’ mentality to performance adopted in Britain.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Such an approach is now common-place in the education and health systems while also developing in the local government sector. e.g. league table of 238 authorities by *The Independent on Sunday* (09/04/2000).

The egalitarian critique holds that NPM reforms based on marketisation and fragmentation will increase the risk of corruption in the public sector. In this way, it is a very pessimistic position and is “the most ‘left’ view in the cultural theory typology” (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.12). Interestingly, the doctrine of communitarianism discussed in chapter 7 has distinct egalitarian themes with the stress “on mutuality and participation and the hostility to government ‘usurping’ community functions” (Hood, 1998, p.121). Equally it has become fashionable in management theory and organisational studies to promote team-working and the empowerment of front-line staff. These are egalitarian perspectives against the assumed “self-serving behaviour of those at the top of big organisations” (Hood, p.121).

The egalitarian critique which draws attention to the potential of corruption is topical in Irish local government with the Flood Tribunal⁶⁷ hearing revelations of abuse of power and bribery on an almost daily basis. In the context of Cork County Council, many community representatives demonstrated egalitarian critique tendencies but corruption itself was not an issue. Rather, interviewees expressed concern that changes in the authority driven by NPM would produce unintended results. Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.12) explain, “so NPM risks making government less comprehensible, accountable and

⁶⁷ Tribunal of Enquiry established by the government to examine irregularities in planning matters.

accessible to its citizens, despite proclaiming contrary aims and objectives”.

Community representatives in county Cork admitted to a certain confusion with regard to County Strategy Groups, Strategic Policy Committees and County Development Boards. A significant minority argued that these new reforms represented a token effort at consultation and participation, disguising a lack of improvement in the delivery of services by the Council.

Management and elected representatives in Cork County Council did not uphold the egalitarian critique of NPM - rather they spoke a pro-egalitarian language with a stress on partnership, networking and staff and community empowerment. In this way it was apparent that management, in particular, have been influenced by the current mainstream contemporary approaches to ‘reinventing government’ as developed by Osborne and Gaebler. There was also an awareness that the decentralisation of services favoured by the egalitarian agenda would only succeed if proper resources were in place to ensure that quality of service delivery was not diluted. No reference was made by Council interviewees (either management or elected) to the critical egalitarian claim that abuses such as corruption and mal-administration “are easier in the decentralised accountability framework of NPM” (Dunleavy and Hood, p.12).

The hierarchist approach to public management has a long history and is traditionally associated with the bureaucracy theories of the German sociologist, Max Weber (1948). Hood (1998, p.96) states that “hierarchist attitudes to public management are long lived and tenacious”. Applied to NPM, the hierarchist holds that “NPM reformers must be careful not to let the process of change get out of hand, irreversibly damaging the manageability of the public service” (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.11).

Management and senior administrators in Cork County Council demonstrated a strong allegiance to the hierarchist critique. With reference to the last quote by Dunleavy and Hood, the mention of ‘NPM reformers’ is significant because it is clear that in the Council management themselves are not the reformers. The NPM philosophy imposed on local authorities is a Dublin-based civil service model which, in itself, is an interpretation of the international NPM movement. Accordingly there is little loyalty or commitment to NPM beyond the dutiful and unimaginative application of reforms imposed by central government e.g. SMI, FOI, SPCs etc.

The attitudes of management in Cork County Council reflect the statement by Hood (1998, p.175) that, “hierarchists believe orderly rules of behaviour and authority structure are needed to avoid chaos, and have little faith in imminent self-organising or self-steering processes”.

Therefore, reforms such as SMI must be guided and controlled with great care. One reason is that order must be maintained while another is that the attention and skills of senior officials and policy-makers should not be diverted away from the day-to-day problems of service delivery.

This point was re-stated by the elected representatives who cited the overwhelming daily pressures of the organisation as making it impossible for both themselves and for administrators to dedicate time to the broader picture of public management and long-term planning. The distinction between strategic and operational planning became blurred in the midst of public service delivery issues of quantitative importance. Interviewees regularly cited the need to maintain a central steering capacity to offset "the risk of erosion of traditional public service ethics as a result of NPM changes" (Dunleavy and Hood, p.12). Hood (1998, p.96) draws attention to the fact that "if institutional success is measured in sheer longevity and tenacity, hierarchism as an approach to public management cannot be written off". This tenacity was in evidence amongst the Council's management in the face of potentially destabilising NPM changes and proposals to provide for a directly elected chairperson. It should be observed however that the hierarchist agenda was not being promoted simply as a mechanism to protect and enhance personal power - it was supported by a sincere belief in the management system itself.

Community sector interviewees were typically unconcerned by the existence of a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure in Cork County Council. They regarded this as both logical and comforting. However, interviewees referred to the need for a clearer hierarchy and chain of command to be made obvious to the public at large to enhance accountability and access to decision-making. In this regard, the constant changing of personnel was unhelpful.

The dominance of the hierarchist critique amongst management offers a clear understanding of how NPM philosophies are being applied. Hood (1998, p.97) argues that "the model (hierarchism) is currently out of fashion". The evidence suggests that being in fashion is not a motivating force for Cork County Council.

Evaluation of the Costs and Problems Critique

Model in Cork County Council

This model provides an understanding of the attitudes of the three key groupings of this study towards the adoption of NPM in Cork County Council. The elected members generally are happy to maintain the existing status quo despite occupying an apparently subordinate position to management. They cite the individualistic critique and state the dangers of losing traditional public service values by moving too far



towards the ideology of the New Right. In this regard, privatisation is presented as a doomsday scenario.

Representatives of the community sector are egalitarian in their support of new partnership relationships with the Council. While they are willing to work through the new SPC and CDB structures there is an underlying fatalism which fears token consultation.

Management are the most complex and interesting group. During the SMI process seven key figures emerged - the county manager, three assistant county managers, the county secretary, an administrative officer with responsibility for SMI and the external facilitator. Amongst these seven, three sub-divisions were apparent. On the one hand there were the visionaries/idealists who advocated NPM. Another category can be described as apathetic in that they failed to understand the fundamentals of NPM and regarded it as an inconvenience. The final category was the hierarchist camp with one dominant figure who saw the dangers of NPM and feared fragmentation and loss of control. Each of these people spoke a pro-egalitarian language but with varying degrees of sincerity. An internal political struggle developed that resulted in the SMI process being hijacked by hierarchists. The idealist and apathetic camps were weakened by impending retirements and the anxiety produced centred on whether a corporate strategy would be produced within an appropriate time-frame, as opposed to the quality and workability of the plan. The strong hierarchist voice easily swayed the

apathetic while the idealists splintered and their influence was diluted. The external facilitator became increasingly frustrated by the process and was unable to exert influence over the hierarchists.

Eventually this latter category seized control and elicited support from other members of the seven on the basis that the aim was to produce an effective corporate strategy to facilitate change in the organisation. A plan was hurriedly produced, adopted with minimal debate by full council and was then effectively buried. The confusion caused by the three changes in personnel amongst the management team meant that there was no outcry in the strategic apex of the organisation at the unsatisfactory nature of the process.

Ultimately, the hierarchist view was triumphant. Hood (1998, p.51) refers to this view as 'Bossism' which he describes (p.53) as, "a general cast of mind which links 'accountability' with a ladder of authority and responsibility, and sees control by some sort of oversight as the stock answer to the many problems and failures which continually appear in public management".

In turn, 'oversight' is the approach to control which aligns most naturally to the hierarchist view and "implies a ladder of authority, conscious oversight and inspection, formal power to approve or reject, to pronounce on disputes or complaints, to forbid, command, permit and punish" (p.51).

In Cork County Council the bossist/hierarchist element cast itself as the protector or gamekeeper of the organisation, stifling the NPM approach which it perceived as a threat.

7.3 Elected Representatives, Management and Community

Participants - Roles and Relationships: Traditional and Evolving

Painter and Isaac-Henry (1997) accurately capture the essence of this research's fundamental question. With regard to NPM and public sector reforms generally, they remark (p.306), "stripped of rhetoric the reforms are about power structures and therefore the changing relative position of different stakeholder groups. It is a matter of whose values and interests prevail in the final analysis".

The three stakeholder groups analysed in this thesis are elected members, top management and community sector representatives and each has been discussed individually in chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

It was noted at that time that there are many apparent contradictions in the application of NPM in Cork County Council and in Irish local government. Elected councillors appear to be a 'gaining' group with central government strategies repeatedly stressing the aim of enhancing their role. In Cork County Council however it is apparent that the majority of members are happy to maintain the present status quo, dominated by the representational role. In essence, at a strategic level, the Council is being driven by a core group of six/seven councillors who understand the ramifications of the current reforms and the changing environment.

Councillors are also wary of the new partnership structures created, such as the SPCs and CDB, and fear that even their representational role is now being threatened by non-elected community members.

Top managers in the Council face different challenges. Despite the apparent wind change in favour of the county councillors, they remain confident that they will continue to be the main power-brokers in the authority. Management understand and endorse the new partnership structures but are happy to keep the community sector at arm's length under the auspices of the Director of Community and Enterprise. They feel that the community sector can now be more effectively controlled as it becomes integrated into the local government system. Management, however, have two main fears: one is that NPM processes such as SMI will disrupt the established hierarchy and chain of command and lead to fragmentation and destabilisation. The second fear concerns the proposals for directly elected chairpersons or mayors. A powerful elected politician with executive powers threatens the very existence of management.

The community sector in county Cork can be divided into grass-roots community and voluntary groups and local development agencies, such as LEADER companies. The former group can be described as 'gaining'. They are somewhat bemused by the increased attention being given to them and the participative exercises involved in the establishment of the SPCs and the CDB. While sceptical about the eventual impact of such

initiatives they are happy to be involved and see what benefits, if any, accrue. It was noted in the last chapter that they are entering the partnership model "with low expectations and little to lose". On the other hand, local development bodies are justifiably fearful with their new position in local governance. They have been deliberately excluded, without the courtesy of an adequate explanation, from the policy making process in the SPCs and have been placed at a distance from the local power structure in the same environment of the CDB, essentially a co-ordinating body. The anxiety levels of the local development bodies are also being increased by the confused and uncertain nature of their future funding arrangements.

It is logical that the changing relative positions of the three stakeholder groups will correlate to the degree of transition to NPM in the Irish public sector. In the next section it will be argued that the degree of transition is moderate and so the changes in power relations and influence may not be as dramatic as in other countries. The evidence in Cork County Council suggests that there is a resistance to NPM policies with both management and elected representatives happy to maintain their traditional relationship. While NPM at its very core endorses managerialism, NPM model 4 presented by Ferlie *et al.* (1996) stresses a strengthening of the elected arm. This leads to their conclusion (p.232) that "the dynamics and power shifts apparent within the new public management may be more complex than commonly supposed".

It is interesting to speculate as to whether an organisation such as Cork County Council can resist and effectively ignore global NPM trends. Hardy (1985) and Dufour (1991) argue that it is possible and they refer to the 'local implementation gap' in explaining how the wider ideals of reform may not translate into local practice. Equally it should be noted that NPM is not an agreed and unified concept and so it can be difficult to impose in a consistent manner. There is an incentive to interpret NPM in a way which can justify every action, or indeed inaction. Kamensky (1996, p.248) notes that, "the politics of reinvention are seen as less attractive because reinvention entails the distribution of authority". This comment applies in equal measure to elected representatives and managers, and Kamensky also cynically claims that it is not wise for politicians to improve government too much. Pollitt (1995) points out that NPM is hard to evaluate, and so politicians are likely to have incentives to distort the benefits of NPM implementation (as quoted by Common, 1998, p.446).

The manager/member relationship remains the basic axis around which Cork County Council revolves. Members are being driven towards a greater concentration on a policy-making and monitoring role. Kerley (1994, p.190/191) notes, in relation to the United Kingdom but with an Irish applicability, "this imposes a discipline on members which is not always at first, apparent nor necessarily welcome".

Many elected representatives in the Council seem to be unaware that the local governance system all around them is evolving and no clear pattern of change is obvious in the balance between management and members. The relationship is also defined by finance. Worrall, Collinge and Bill (1998, p.490) observe, "it is clear from our discussions with many local authorities that the desire to be 'more strategic' increases as resources get tighter and politicians become increasingly insistent that their priorities are met".

The argument is that the more cash-strapped an authority the more likely it is to adopt a longer term strategic focus to utilise scarce resources more effectively. Again the position in Ireland is not clear-cut. The so-called Celtic Tiger is fuelling the economy generally but with public infrastructure decaying and the public sector continually under-resourced it may be that a period is dawning, once referred to by Painter (1997) as private affluence and public squalor. Undoubtedly these are factors which contribute to the management/member relationship and to the substantial challenge of formulating strategy and policy.

Of the three groupings under analysis it is management which is the most vulnerable at the present time because the "vast network of waxing and waning groups and strategies" (Vester, 1990, p.4) is making authority more complex. Local government managers are suffering from

the British phenomenon that while NPM has been very influential there, “the Thatcher premiership brought with it no coherent philosophy on managerialism and management in government” (Isaac-Henry, 1997, p.8). NPM is making the need for effective management even more necessary as the discussion of policy matters and the decisions which flow from policy are gradually becoming more open and transparent. Dargie (1998, p.173) claims that “the local government chief executive is a negotiator and a disturbance handler”. Top managers in Cork County Council have yet to show that they have been properly schooled in the ways of power and in dealing with external components as a function of management.

Influenced by the writings of Machiavelli, Andrews *et al.* (1999, p.227) claim that a powerful leader should have three elements:

1. A structural position providing a power base.
2. A cultural setting which consists either of the imposition of a uniform culture or of divisions based on strong group exclusivity.
3. A personality which allows the leader to take advantage of their resources.

These characteristics are not necessarily desirable and are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve under NPM. The county manager in Cork will struggle in the future to meet these criteria. While tradition and a hierarchical chain of command should provide a dominant structural

position, the directly elected chairperson (who will possibly have a five year term and significant executive functions) will challenge this dominance and will become the figurehead of the organisation.

The cultural setting of the Council is complicated and a huge failing of SMI was to ignore internal culture. No attempt was made to encourage ownership of the corporate plan and an already deep-rooted fatalism was strengthened. The third point above, relating to personality, is a function of the previous two points and the capacity of the leader will be determined, in part, by how individuals interpret their settings. Ultimately the 'leader' of Cork County Council in future years is likely to be the chairperson and not the county manager.⁶⁸ The county manager role is likely to revert to being "leader of the officers of the authority and principal adviser to the Council on matters of general policy" (Bains, 1972, p.125).

The dilemma for the county manager is that while he/she will become less of a powerhouse and figurehead there will still be a day-to-day onus to develop a more "sophisticated and accurate information and communication system" (Kerley, 1994, p.191) to co-ordinate the emerging network of structures and relationships. Interestingly, as has been noted previously, there is little demand from councillors for the

⁶⁸ The directly elected chairperson may not even be an existing member of the authority but a high profile local personality.

establishment of a directly elected chairperson. This mirrors the UK position with Rao (1999, p.258/259) stating:

the case for elected mayors as a focus for community leadership was made first by Michael Heseltine in his 1991 and 1993 consultation papers. Enthusiasm has been more marked among independent commentators than within local government itself.

At the present time in Cork County Council the relationship between management and the elected Council is a relatively harmonious one. The main challenge is in the relationship with the community sector, local development bodies and external interests. Flinders and Smith (1999, p.207) argue that the relationship needs to be one "based on co-operation rather than friction. A relationship that combines the efficiency and specialism of quangos with the democratic legitimacy and local knowledge of elected councillors".

This is a normative statement with which very few local government commentators or stakeholders would disagree. Hughes (1994) argues however that it might not be easy to achieve the relationship described by Flinders and Smith. He notes (p.214) that one of the key differences between the NPM approach and traditional public administration is the extra managerial attention "paid to matters affecting the organisation, but which are outside its immediate control".

It is the element of control which is the crucial factor. Managers are happy to promote the new local government partnership models on the basis that they will gain some measure of control over the community sector and, in particular, local development agencies. Hughes (1994, p.221) sees an inherent danger in such an approach, "perhaps the extra focus of public managers on external constituencies should be regarded unfavourably because of its subversion of the political process and for moving away from the notion of an apolitical career service".

While there is legitimacy in this comment public servants were already politicised under the traditional model of public administration as the politics/administration dichotomy was naïve and unworkable. Massey (1993, p.11) explains, "the administration of political decisions, which is the role of the public service, is itself a political activity and is indivisibly linked to the political decision-making process".

In many ways, the degree of acceptance of NPM can be gauged by the relationship with the community sector. An opportunity exists to demonstrate commitment to NPM principles of openness, consultation, inclusion, empowerment and accountability. Referring to quangos in the UK, Flinders and Smith (1999, p.210) claim that they have "an, as yet, untapped potential. They can be used as tools to reinvigorate politics by

offering more opportunities for involvement and participation. Embrace them, don't destroy them".

The relationship between the council and local development bodies in the area has been one of unease and distrust. The local development agencies are powerful as they have the ability to make decisions about the distribution of resources to different people. Essentially, the Council has felt that its role has been usurped by unaccountable bodies. It is not clear if the CDB will prove the appropriate vehicle to heal existing rifts. Potentially however it may unleash a number of advantages which local development agencies offer to a partnership.

- a mechanism for giving a greater push or profile to an area of activity;
- a capacity for concentrated and effective effort with respect to a particular issue;
- a tool for involving non-partisans in decision-making on the basis of their expertise or involvement in voluntary or community activity.

(adapted from Stoker, 1999)

Ultimately the evolving roles and relationships of elected members, top management and community representatives in Cork County Council is part of a wider NPM process. The relationships which are being reshaped at the present time offer an insight into the future of local government in Ireland. Significantly it is the management group which is

being most effected initially as, in many ways, the elected councillors are unaware of the NPM influences. Depre *et al.* (1996, p.295) observe, "maybe after the emergence of 'new' public managers, the emergence of 'new' politicians will follow". The managerial function is becoming increasingly complex as NPM has generally failed to clarify the often unclear and confused objectives of public sector organisations. Massey (1993, p.193) alludes to the difficulties of management in the modern NPM-driven organisation when he comments, "it is the stuff of political compromise, the meat and drink of servicing a pluralistic, sophisticated and complex electorate, the seamy side of politics".

In Cork County Council it is clear that the three key stakeholder groups identified have yet to really come to terms with the realities of new local governance. The initial reaction has been to resist and hope that the NPM reform agenda is a passing fad. Perhaps it will take some time for the changes envisaged by the reforms to fully make an impact.

7.4 NPM in Irish Local Government and the Irish Public Sector

The analysis of Cork County Council in the previous sections offers an insight into the application of NPM philosophies in the Irish public sector.

Depre, Hondegheem and Bodiguel (1996, p.284) assert:

in Ireland, there is a trend towards NPM but it is slow. There has been no fundamental structural change in the machinery of government, only a shift in organisational climate towards a more result-oriented approach. At present, NPM is located mainly in the state-sponsored public enterprises, the local authorities and, to a lesser degree, in the health boards.

The evidence from Cork County Council supports the contention that the application of NPM is slow-moving. Surprisingly however, Depre *et al.* appear to discount NPM advances in the Irish civil service. This is difficult to explain as SMI in Ireland was essentially created and fostered by senior civil servants (see chapter 5). The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Revenue Commissioners are promoted as examples of SMI success while legislation such as *The Public Service Management Act, 1997* and the *Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Compellability, Privileges and Immunities of Witnesses) Act, 1997* has helped to clarify accountability in the civil service. Boyle (1998) demonstrates how governance and accountability changes are impacting on the civil service.

Notwithstanding the questions raised concerning the civil service⁶⁹ the research produced by Depre *et al.* is valuable. They studied nine European countries according to the degree of transition from traditional public administration to NPM and from public administrators to public managers. In doing so their comparative criteria are based on the pace of application of NPM principles; the extended period of time involved; whether all areas of the public sector and all management levels are involved; and if there has been extensive change in managerial techniques, organisational structures and culture.

The countries are then classified into four categories, according to the degree of transition to NPM. Ireland ranks sixth, in the 'medium' range with Britain at the top (high transition) and Germany and Spain at the bottom (low transition).

The authors state that the differences between the countries can be explained by constitutional, legal, political and cultural variables. Britain stands alone as the country with the highest transition to NPM, transformed by the Thatcherite governments of the 1980s and the acceptance of the New Right ideology. The Irish case is interesting as a placement in the 'medium' category implies that it displays some of the characteristics of NPM but in a limited way. If one supports the argument

⁶⁹ The study by Depre *et al.* is based on individual case studies of nine countries. The Irish research is provided by Coolahan and Dooney (1996, p.1996) who observe, "in the civil service, the classical public administration continues in that managers assist in the formulation of policy by making recommendations to ministers and are then also responsible to their ministers for its implementation when that falls to their departments".

offered by Depre *et al.* (1996, p.287) that "Anglo-Saxon states are more oriented towards NPM than continental Europe" due to the cultural and language factors, then Ireland's lowly position is unexpected. Certainly, it raises some fascinating questions. For example, is Ireland suffering from proximity to (and comparisons with) Britain? While the British NPM - based reforms in the public sector can be traced to 1979, NPM in Ireland is a more recent phenomenon, dating from the mid-1990s. Why is Ireland behind? Is it more cautious or simply slower? One potential answer is supplied by Depre *et al.* who state (p.287) that, "a further important factor in explaining the receptiveness of countries to NPM is the degree to which public organisations are exposed to the market and consumers". For public sector organisations in Ireland concepts such as consumerism, value for money and marketing have only just begun to impact on their operations.

There is a more fundamental truth however which suggests that the Irish government and public sector are correct to err on the side of caution. Simply stated, NPM has yet to prove itself. Some claims made in the name of NPM are grossly exaggerated but an analytical approach shows that acceptance of the NPM doctrine and application of its principles are not necessarily things to which the Irish public service should be aspiring. A high degree of transition to a doctrine which is contested and un-proven is a risky strategy. Perhaps the 'medium' category and the middle ground is safer territory for now.

In terms of Irish local government the case study of Cork County Council indicates that NPM has yet to make a significant impact, perhaps representing the incubated mode idea developed by Dunleavy and Hood. The new structures of Strategic Policy Committees and the County Development Board have yet to reveal their full potential and the obvious dis-satisfaction of local development bodies does not augur well for the future. The use of Freedom of Information legislation to elicit documentation from local authorities is quite low. While improvements in records management and retrieval are apparent there is little to suggest that FOI is altering the operating practices of local authorities. Value for money is now an accepted principle but difficulties remain in implementation. The NPM discourse surrounding VFM is now so dominant that it has effectively silenced the wider debate about local authority financing. The message from the DOELG to local government over the past few years has been consistent:- *use your own resources more effectively and eliminate wastage in the system*. The obvious implication, though rarely stated explicitly, is that central government is not going to resource the changes in local authorities demanded by NPM. Local authorities are also being encouraged to generate their own finance. The 16th report of the Value for Money Unit (DOELG), published in October 1999, deals with treasury management, defined (p.69) as “the management of the local authority's cash flows, its borrowings and its investments, the management of the associated risks, and the pursuit of the optimum performance or return consistent with those risks”.

As argued throughout this thesis the primary mechanism through which the NPM doctrine has been imported into local government is SMI. The failure of SMI in Cork County Council can be attributed to the lack of commitment to implement and the inability to satisfy the twin requirements of strategic and operational planning. The excuse offered that the publication of BLG confused the objectives of SMI is a feeble one, as evidenced by the fact that some authorities around the country have enjoyed success with local SMI. Donegal County Council is a model of best practice, combining a radical decentralisation programme with advances in IT. Sligo County Council has embraced the partnership approach advocated by NPM through its social exclusion policies while Meath County Council is addressing local customer needs in new and vibrant ways. Humphreys, Fleming and O' Donnell (1999, p.55) claim that Meath is at the cutting edge of change at local government level and "the proposals contained in *Better Local Government* have been acted upon in a dynamic and innovative manner". These examples, though laudable, only serve to highlight the fact that there is a significant inconsistency of NPM application in Irish local authorities. This mirrors the international NPM evidence which is noticeable for its non-homogenous and disparate trends.

The research of Coolahan and Dooney, as incorporated into a comparative European study by Depre *et al.* clearly demonstrates that Ireland is a long way behind Britain in terms of NPM application. The

typology model developed by Ferlie *et al.* (see chapter 2) is a descriptive one, characterising the NPM movement through four evolutionary phases over the period from the early 1980s to mid-1990s. It appears to be based on the British experience and the authors note, "a contest for interpretation is apparent between proponents of these four models, and the degree of influence they achieve in the field may wax or wane over time" (p.10).

Since the Irish public service and civil service only became influenced by NPM philosophies in the mid-1990s it might be logical to assume that Ireland is based in the first model, called *The Efficiency Drive*, which was dominant in the early 1980s. However, closer examination reveals that the Irish system exhibits characteristics of all four models and is not uniquely linked to any single one. This is not entirely surprising when one considers the previous quote by Ferlie *et al.* which highlights that the degree of influence of each of the models is in a state of flux. A simple explanation comes from the fact that although the typology presented is chronologically based, the models do not replace one another. Rather they build on one another to the point where NPM Model 4 represents the evolution of the other phases. With regard to Ireland, another point is deserving of consideration. Even though NPM philosophies have only been introduced in the past five years, the semi-state sector has been the subject of significant restructuring over a longer period of time. European Union competition policy has fostered a new culture with free markets, deregulation and the curtailment of monopolies.

Irish local government, in particular, exhibits some of the themes of all four models. *The Efficiency Drive* (Model 1) is the most crude phase with the adoption of private sector management theory in a generic fashion. At its heart however, is a strong emphasis on financial control and auditing procedures. These elements are now very in the Irish local government system as new accounting practices are in place and the value-for-money ethos is accepted. Downsizing and decentralisation are the core themes of NPM Model 2 but they have yet to achieve prominence in Ireland. Decentralisation is a term which can be attributed with different meanings by different people. Boyle (1995, p.13) says that it denotes "the aim to establish decentralised structures which require managers to actively manage the resources at their disposal rather than administer set procedures according to pre-established rules". The latter seems to be the interpretation of decentralisation in Ireland. The civil service has been to the fore in decentralising but its efforts can be more accurately described as geographic relocation with little or no power being devolved to the new field agencies. Decentralisation in the context of local government is limited, with the main considerations being financial resources and IT. Donegal County Council has previously been cited as an authority with an innovative decentralisation programme while it can be argued that Cork County Council has a decentralised structure with its long-established divisional breakdown. Interestingly, research conducted by Landsdowne Market Research for Cork County

Council as part of the SMI process revealed that there was no popular demand for decentralisation amongst the public.⁷⁰

NPM Model 3, *In Search of Excellence*, “represents the application to the public services of the human relations school of management theory” (Ferlie *et al.* p.13) and is the least identifiable in Irish local government. A strong emphasis in the model is placed on innovation, the management of change and the concept of the ‘learning organisation’. Charismatic leadership with the projection of a shared management vision are also important. The evidence of Cork County Council suggests that the external concentration on improved quality of service delivery to the public overshadows internal considerations. Ferlie *et al.* describe (p.14) the recognition of organisational culture as “a form of glue”. Equally, however, the failure to recognise organisational culture (as in Cork County Council leads to a distinct lack of cohesion and the strengthening of the fatalist perspective.

NPM Model 4 is the *Public Service Orientation* and “represents a fusion of private and public sector management ideas” (Ferlie *et al.* p.14). Ferlie *et al.* themselves conclude that models 1-3 are inadequate but that the advantage of model 4 “lies in its sensitivity to the distinctive public sector context” (p.243).

⁷⁰ In December 1996, 504 adults across 42 sampling points were interviewed. On the question of decentralisation, 54% of those questioned stated that they would not be in favour of such a programme by the council.

Its key indicators are a major concern with service quality, a shifting of power back to elected local bodies, promotion of the concept of citizenship and the maintenance of distinctive public service values. Even though NPM Model 4 is the most complete phase of the typology, Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.243) admit:

in our view, the public service orientation model veers too far in the presumption of difference. It relies heavily on political science notions (such as citizenship), and does not adequately explore the nature of public sector organisations as organisations.

Application of the typology model favours the view that Irish local government and the wider public sector is not moving progressively through the four phases identified. Instead, a more variegated pattern of ad hoc application of NPM is emerging. Indeed the aims of BLG and of the proposed new Local Government Bill indicate that model 4, with an emphasis on the enhanced role of the elected arm, is being adopted. This is reflected by the fact that the Local Government Bill is widely predicted to contain provisions for the payment of salaries to councillors and the direct elections of mayors and chairpersons, as well as encouraging more participative democracy.

In the world of NPM, very little can be stated with absolute certainty. However one truism in Irish local government is that the three key groupings identified by this thesis are operating in a changing landscape.

While in many ways the Irish reforms tend to favour the elected representative it is also apparent that top management and community participants are becoming increasingly politicised. There are significant challenges ahead for all, not least of which will be a realignment of power relationships against the backdrop of revelations of corruption and malpractice in local government.

To date, the piecemeal application of NPM philosophies in Irish local government has not given rise to a wider debate about the role of local government itself. This represents a lost opportunity and the “temptation to tinker” (Terry, 2000, p.5) has dominated, to the detriment of far-reaching reforms. This is particularly true in the area of local authority financing, discussed in chapter 3.

NPM has yet to make a major difference in Irish local government and in the wider public sector. However, there is a growing awareness amongst managers, civil servants and, to a lesser extent, politicians of the world-wide agenda of public sector reform. Ireland is in an advantageous position because, having joined the NPM club late, it can now study the developments taking place elsewhere and utilise best practice models and avoid the pitfalls of others. In time, it can then develop its own brand of NPM suited to the Irish public service. There is little to suggest however that this is the strategy being employed. Rather NPM is being largely ignored. When this is not the case its application tends to be somewhat grudging and generally uncoordinated.

Coolahan and Dooney (1996, p.213) conclude that in Ireland there is “an irreversible trend towards public management if at a somewhat slower pace than its advocates wish”. There is no doubt that the latter part of this statement is true. However, the claim that the public management trend is ‘irreversible’ can be challenged.

7.5 The Future

The concluding section of this moves from the specific to the general. First, Cork County Council is discussed in the context of what lessons it can learn from its NPM experiences over the four year period from March 1996 to March 2000. Secondly, the future path which NPM is likely to take in Irish local government and the public sector generally is debated.

7.5.1 Cork County Council - Lessons to be learned from NPM

a) The need to distinguish between strategic planning and operation planning:-

In the analysis of the application of SMI in Cork County Council it was stated that no distinction was made between strategic and operational planning. Hughes (1994, p.180) notes that “strategic management aims to integrate the planning function with the overall management task” while Montanari, Daneke and Bracker (1989, p.305) observe that the strategic development must include implementation and control. In other words a corporate strategy must have a distinct action orientation which will involve practical changes within the organisation at operational level. Essentially, in Cork County Council, there was no commitment to implement and the formulation of a strategy was a largely cosmetic exercise. Nutt and Backoff (1992, p.201) correctly claim that implementation can be difficult in the public sector as “publicness brings with it constraints, political influence, authority limits, scrutiny and

ubiquitous ownership". While this is a valid observation, it should not be viewed as an excuse for Cork County Council or any other organisation in failing to deliver an adequate corporate strategy.

b) The pivotal role of the strategic leader as the principal change agent:-

A huge body of research, including van der Erve (1989), Norton (1991) and Thompson (1991) highlights the fact that the chief executive plays a crucial role in both the generation of the organisational culture and the creation of a strategic management framework. While accepting that no strategic change agent can operate alone (Filkin, 1990) the chief executive/county manager is the most powerful actor within local government. Bryson and Crosby (1992, p.31) define public leadership as "the inspiration and mobilisation of others to undertake collective action in pursuit of the common good". This effectively clarifies the fact that leadership and leaders are not the same thing. Bryson (1996, p.8) argues that leadership of a strategic management process in a public sector organisation "is a collective enterprise involving many people playing different roles at different times". In the case of Cork County Council, the county manager failed to convince his management team of the benefits of SMI and NPM. Asquith's (1994) research into the role of the chief executive in strategic change clearly shows that the co-operation and support of the chief officer team is of vital importance. His qualitative study indicated that "fragmented chief officer teams were detrimental to the change management process" (p.270). The county

manager at the time of the SMI process presided over a divided management team and he was personally weakened by an impending retirement when there was an expectation that an extension of his term of office would have been sanctioned by the DOELG (on the recommendation of full council).

The geographical structure of Cork County Council is also significant with the divisional breakdown in effect creating three separate authorities with a manager in each. This makes overall control and unity difficult to achieve. This contributed to the ease with which the hierarchist voice in the management team emerged as the dominant actor over time and took advantage of the internal political struggle which included a re-positioning of key personnel anticipating a succession battle to the upcoming county manager role.

c) The role of the elected council:-

Asquith (1994, p.270) claims:

the ability of the chief executive and the chief officers to manage change is constrained by the extent to which elected members believed they should be involved in the operationalisation of change strategies once they (the elected members) have adopted a strategic political framework.

There was no evidence of this dynamic in Cork County Council. The elected members played a minimal role in SMI and had no commitment to it. Accordingly there has been no political outcry or pressure applied in the absence of implementation.

d) The role of staff:-

A fundamental implementation issue is to convince staff that a strategic focus will be beneficial to all involved in the long run. Hughes (1994, p.182) states that "it should be possible for the plan itself to anticipate opposition, and to involve people from all levels of the organisation". Initially there was an attempt to consult staff with regard to SMI and to involve as many people as possible. However, this initiative was stifled and a valuable opportunity was lost to gain an understanding of the internal culture of the organisation. Early enthusiasm soon disappeared when it became apparent that there was no underlying commitment from management towards the SMI process. Accordingly an entrenched fatalist view is now dominant amongst staff in the Council, making any resurrection of SMI exceedingly problematic. Hughes (1994, p.182) argues, "organisations contain people. They have a culture, and convincing people or changing cultures are processes that need to be managed and not assumed".

The strategic planning process in Cork County Council focused on the steps involved without consideration of the people involved - "people, as we now know, are as, if not more, important to the success of strategic planning than the mechanics of the planning process" (Eadie, 1989, p.171).

e) The community sector and external constituents:-

McCaffery (1989, p.195)) asserts there should be an importance attached to stakeholders in the strategic management process.

stakeholders are decision makers within the organisation and its environment who have an interest in organisational performance and can help or hinder the choice and implementation of strategies. Stakeholders must be brought along for the strategy to succeed.

The message from McCaffery is that external stakeholders need to be managed in a way that will permit them to assume ownership of the strategic plan. The partnership model which is now becoming omnipresent in the Irish public sector highlights the fact that:

managing in the public sector now has far more to do with the managing of interest groups than it did in the past. Instead of being regarded as something of a nuisance, interest groups are increasingly and actively wooed. The bureaucracy relies on interest groups in making policy (Hughes, 1994, p.223).

Chubb (1983, p.13) continues the theme by arguing that in modern policy-making, "the bureaucracy is not a passive recipient of group demands, but....actively encourages, impedes, and otherwise manipulates group participation".

The management of Cork County Council appear to understand that the community sector, in particular, represent a valuable resource and potentially important allies in the formulation of policy and difficult decision-making. At this point it is too early to assess the impact of the

SPCs and the CDB but an attempt is being made to bridge the communications gap with the community sector. The Council's Register of Community and Voluntary Organisations is being used to keep relevant interests notified of activities. In this way, community bodies in the county are now performing a vital communications function and are being used to carry messages to the public-at-large.

f) Top-down or bottom-up?:-

The design of a strategic process for Cork County Council has proved a difficult exercise. The correct balance between the imposition of a top management vision and a bottom-up approach has not been struck. As the SMI process progressed it became the preserve of top management and existed independently of the rest of the organisation. Of course the correct balance is not easy to find as major cultural change is necessary to merge the concepts of public service orientation and customer service orientation. Furthermore, Worrall, Collinge and Bill (1998, p.477) note:

however, there is a clear possibility that, taken too far, the bottom-up approach leads to organisational fragmentation, loss of coherence and policy/programme synergy and the creation of an organisation without a clearly defined common purpose or identity.

This is all part of the learning challenge posed by NPM to Cork County Council and to the strategic apex of the organisation. The danger of failing to find the appropriate balance is outlined by Worrall *et al.* (1998, p.491):

without the design of effective interfaces between the strategic loop and the operational loop in organisations.....there will always be a dissonance between strategy and operations. In all too many cases in local government, incremental budgeting ensures that inertia prevails and the impact of strategising on operations is severely reduced.

Elmore (1982) uses the terminology of 'forward mapping' and 'backward mapping'. He states (1982, p.9) that the forward mapping process:

begins at the top of the process, with as clear a statement as possible of the policy maker's intent, and proceeds through a sequence of increasingly more specific steps to define what is expected of implementers at each level. At the bottom of the process, one states, again with as much precision as possible, what a satisfactory outcome would be, measured in terms of the original statement of intent.

The primary difficulty with forward mapping is "its implicit and unquestioned assumption that *policy makers control the organisational, political, and technological processes that affect implementation*" (Elmore, 1982, p.20). In Cork County Council, the elected representatives, as the theoretical policy makers, had only a minor influence (and no control) over the implementation stage of SMI.

The alternative approach, according to Elmore (1992, p.21) is backward mapping which begins at "the very bottom, or 'street level', with a statement of the specific behaviour at the lowest level of the implementation process that generates the need for policy". The essential point for Cork County Council is that the top-down or bottom-up approaches (or forward and backward mapping to use Elmore's

terminology) are not antithetical and designers of a strategic planning process should be prepared to use both".

g) The role of the external facilitator:-

The idea of an external, objective and independent facilitator/consultant to steer the strategic process in Cork County Council is central to its success. The process which led to the production of the 1997 Corporate Plan was hampered by the fact that some members of the management team abdicated responsibility and used the external facilitator as the leader of SMI. This was compounded by the fact that the facilitator was placed in an unenviable position, pulled between the three competing forces (i.e. idealist, hierarchist, apathetic) amongst management to the extent that his role was compromised and his influence diluted. The fact that an outside consultant has been hired to oversee a strategic process does not absolve management of the organisation from the production and implementation of the eventual plan.

h) The mentality of imposition:-

The NPM philosophies now apparent in the Irish local government system have been driven by central government and the civil service in response to international trends. Accordingly, reforms such as SMI, SPC's and the CDB have not emerged from within the local government system itself. In Cork County Council this has led to an unenthusiastic management response and a mentality of imposition. This represents a

lost opportunity for the Council because the inherent vague nature of NPM means that innovative strategies can be drawn up, as has happened in other authorities. Such a pro-active approach however is lacking in Cork County Council as reform strategies are obediently but unimaginatively applied.

7.5.2 *Irish local government and the public sector - prospects for NPM*

It was established in section 7.4 that the degree of transition to NPM by Irish local government and the public sector has been moderate and inconsistent. This may not be surprising given that NPM is a recent development, most readily associated with UK policy in the 1980s. The transition of the Irish public sector to NPM commenced in the mid-1990s and so the analytical time-frame involved is short. In chapter 2 the alternative futures model, developed by Dunleavy and Hood (1994) was briefly discussed. The authors commence their model (p.13) with the assertion that “unless ‘history is over’, the future direction of public management reform is likely to follow a zig-zag course in the cross-fire of contradictory criticisms”.

Of the four alternatives presented, the minimal purchasing state and the public bureaucracy state represent the two extremes of NPM development in the future. The application of NPM in Irish local government and in the public sector as a whole has been moderate and piecemeal and there is no evidence to suggest that either of the above

two alternative futures will emerge. The Irish public service has the advantage of being behind the pace set by the international NPM reform agenda. Accordingly it is in a position to examine experiences in other countries and learn from them. It is therefore likely that in the short-to-medium term Ireland will tend towards one or other of the intermediate possibilities i.e. Gridlock Model or Headless Chicken Model. This reflects the realisation that between the polar positions of the fully public or fully private organisation, other versions are developing. Tomkins (1987) has produced a typology which shows the inter-relationship and interdependence which can exist between the public and private spheres:

1. Fully private
2. Private with part state ownership
3. Joint private and public ventures
4. Private regulated
5. Public infrastructure, operating privately
6. Contracted out
7. Public with managed competition
8. Public without competition.

An examination of the Irish local government and public sector systems suggests that the Gridlock Model is the most likely future for NPM application. After all, the Headless Chicken position is a transitional one

which is not capable of being sustained, given its 'no-one in charge' characteristic.

The revelations and accusations of corruption and malpractice which have dogged politicians (both national and local) and public servants alike in recent years indicates that a Headless Chicken position will not be tolerated by the Irish electorate. The inevitable tendency therefore will be towards comprehensive procedural and ethical rules to curb the temptation of greed and personal gain. It is expected that the Local Government Bill will contain such provisions regarding ethics.

Another factor which supports the contention that an intermediate model will develop in Ireland is the question of resources. Local authorities, in particular, are wondering why they should commence an extensive strategic planning process when there is no guarantee of resources being made available in advance.

It is also evident that there is no catalyst for urgent change as government departments, local authorities and public sector agencies do not collapse, irrespective of performance. Despite the increasing emphasis placed by NPM on outputs and service delivery, local authorities operate without the threat of market discipline and sanction. In addition, Tuohy (1996, p.12) claims that, "there tends to be uncertainty at national level, and even at Departmental level, about the future vision of the public service".

In addition, there are structural impediments to change which effectively amount to resource allocation issues once again. Another consideration is that the public sector is not in control of its own future. Bryson (1996, extract) expertly sums this up:

when it comes to important public problems, we live in a world where no one is fully 'in charge'. Consider key issues... (like) child care, drugs, employment, competitiveness, unemployment and social exclusion, financial services and local development. It is clear that in each of these areas the government, civil service and broader public service are not in charge. Put differently, you cannot 'service' your way out of these challenges. If you think you can you are only kidding yourselves. You can be a partner in addressing these problems, and maybe at times a 'senior partner', but you cannot solve these problems yourselves.....there needs to be a set of strategies for enabling the public broadly, that is the public, private and voluntary sectors, and the citizenry as a whole... The key point is that the government must extend the opportunities for democratic participation by citizens in all aspects of public life.

As NPM progresses, new models of application will be drawn up and utilised. This is the 'empty canvass' scenario observed by Ferlie *et al.* and may be the great strength or weakness of NPM.

At this point in time however an intermediate future is likely. Evidence to fate suggests that this will be the Gridlock position, or a variation of same. Kunda (1992) demonstrates how bodies of managerial thought rise and then fall. This may well be the fate of NPM but the canvas should not remain empty for long as new organisational forms, roles and cultures emerge.

7.5.3 Concluding Comments

This thesis has attempted to interpret the NPM debate in terms of Irish local government, primarily through Cork County Council as a case study. The NPM agenda requires all involved, as commentators, academics, or practitioners to think beyond local government to local governance. NPM is offering an opportunity for local authorities to re-create themselves in the role of community leadership. However, Gray and Jenkins (1995, p.81) note that the political dimension of the new public management is often swept away by the language of its reforms. This reflects a weakness also in the theoretical development of NPM in which it is apparent that much still remains to be explored, particularly research studies dedicated to local government. This should provide a particularly rich area of future research as local government is uniquely positioned to test NPM due to its proximity to the public and the daily provision of essential public services. There has been a tendency in much NPM literature to date to concentrate on central government and civil service departments which operate under different tensions and pressures to local authorities.

The impact of NPM philosophies on three important stakeholder groupings in Cork County Council has been examined in this work. Each group is distinct and has been under-analysed in NPM research. The role of top management has been effectively swamped by the all-embracing concept of 'managerialism' which has drawn little distinction

between management at the strategic apex of the public sector organisation and middle/line management. The NPM debate on the political dimension has concentrated on central government and the changing nature of the role of departmental minister or national parliamentarian. Consequently the elected representative at local level has been ignored even though the elected representative/chief executive relationship is central to public sector renewal. The community sector, under NPM, necessitates much further research. Existing literature focuses on the 'customer' and also on external interest groups as important public sector stakeholders but fails to deal adequately with the concept of community and the possibilities for effective democratic participation presented by NPM.

Fascinating issues for comparative research arise from the NPM debate. Theory development is difficult in this field because of the relatively short period of time in which NPM influences have been apparent and also due to the disparate nature of NPM application. Ferlie *et al.* (1996, p.250) propose a basic research question - "how does one define transformation?" while the application of NPM models to individual organisational settings is also under-developed. Equally, a large proportion of the international comparative research has been insular in that it concentrates on the 'Big Five' Anglophone countries. Continental Europe in particular offers a rich and diverse tapestry of public sector renewal from which innovative NPM theories can flow.

Two further areas of research in local government derive from the present study - the evolving roles of (a) professionals and (b) front-line staff under NPM. This requires an examination of organisational culture in public sector organisations, which opens up a host of exciting possibilities. The growth, or demise, of public sector trade unions is also worthy of analysis.

This thesis argues that it is naïve and unrealistic to formulate a one-fits-all organisational management theory encompassing the public and private sectors. Equally it is overly-simplistic to assume that there is one general NPM public sector theory. In Ireland, vast differences exist between civil service departments, local authorities, state-sponsored bodies and Health Boards. For example, the state-sponsored bodies are increasingly operating in a competitive commercial environment and are now being driven by the realities of the market-place. The civil service has been to the forefront of the Irish SMI process and this is likely to continue through the immediate pressure of government ministers and national politicians. It may well be that the future for NPM in Irish local government will be a different one, with transition to the reforming ideas at a more modest pace.

POST-SCRIPT

- On May 8th 2000, Minister Noel Dempsey published the long-awaited Local Government Bill. One of the central aims of the Bill is to enhance the role of the elected member and the direct election of local authority chairperson or mayor is provided for, commencing with the next local elections, scheduled for 2004. It is also proposed that the dual national/local mandate will cease from 2004.
- On the day that the Bill was published (May 8th), the following resolution was passed at a full Council meeting by the members of Cork County Council:-

"That this Council call on the Minister for the Environment to remove the proposal to have directly elected executive Chairpersons of local authorities from the forthcoming Local Government Bill".

- Minister Noel Dempsey addressed a special SMI/Modernisation Launch in the Custom House on May 12th. He published a strategy document, "Modernising Government - The Challenge for Local Government" which called for local authorities to produce corporate plans for the 1999-2004 period by the end of September 2000.
- Newspaper reports in late May suggested that the Flood Tribunal was moving south to investigate planning irregularities in Cork County Council (*Irish Independent*, "Flood Team open probe on Cork planning scams claim", 24/05/2000; "Tribunal's probe team to focus on south-west", 29/052000).
- In mid-June, the sole Progressive Democrat councillor in the chamber joined Fine Gael, thereby further increasing the dominance of the two main political parties in Cork County Council, bringing their joint total to 41 seats.

APPENDIX A - CORK COUNTY COUNCIL: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

CORK COUNTY COUNCIL - THE ORGANISATION

Cork County Council was established under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898.

The first meeting of Cork County Council was held in the City Courthouse on April 22nd, 1899.

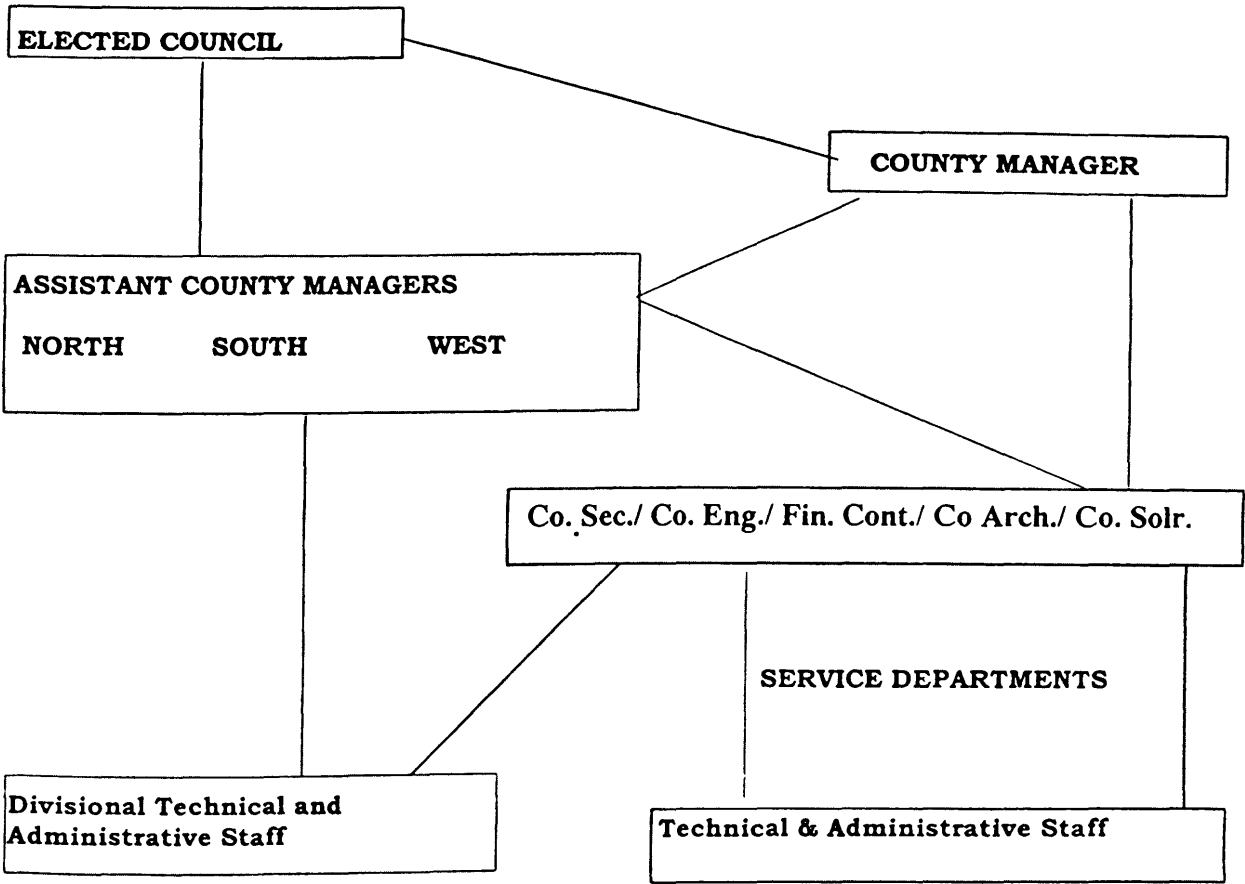
Since its official opening on April 16th, 1968 Council Headquarters have been located in the County Hall, Carrigrohane Road, Cork.

Cork County Council operates under the following eight programme groups:-

- **Housing & Building**
- **Road Transportation & Safety**
- **Water Supply & Sewerage**
- **Development Incentives & control**
- **Environmental Protection**
- **Recreation & Amenity**
- **Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare**
- **Miscellaneous Services**

Appendix A continued

**CORK COUNTY COUNCIL
STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS**



Key to abbreviations:-

- Co. Sec. - County Secretary
- Co. Eng. - County Engineer
- Fin. Cont. - Financial Controller
- Co. Arch. - County Architect.
- Co. Solr. - County Solicitor

Appendix A continued

structure and operations contd.

Cork County Council operates as a partnership between administrative / executive / technical staff and the Elected Representatives.

The Councillors perform the RESERVED FUNCTIONS exercised by resolution. These are functions reserved to the Council, which broadly equate with the making of policy. They include the adopting of the annual estimate, the borrowing of money, the making of a development plan, the adoption of a scheme of letting priorities (for housing) and the declaration of a road to be public. The various Acts relating to the functions of local authorities prescribe the functions which are to be reserved to Councillors.

The EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS exercised by Manager's Order, are performed by the Manager and relate to day-to-day administration, e.g. the actual letting of houses, the granting or refusal of planning permissions and the control of staff. All those functions that are not specified to be reserved to the Council are the Executive Functions.

Appendix A continued

structure and operations contd.

Divisional Nature of Cork County

By an order under section 5 of the Local Government (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 1934 dated 29th. December, 1934 the County of Cork was divided into three rural sanitary districts of North, South and West Cork. This divisional structure remains in place to this day - while some services are centrally administered from the Council's County Hall headquarters, most operational aspects of the authority's operations have been decentralised to the divisions. Accordingly, Cork County Council can legitimately claim to be three local authorities in one, with an individual manager responsible for each division.

The divisional bases for Cork County Council are as follows :

North Cork - Annabella House, Mallow, Co. Cork.
(022) 21123

South Cork - County Hall, Carrigrohane Road, Cork.
(021) 276891

West Cork - Kent Street, Clonakilty, Co. Cork.
(023) 33328

The Divisional Headquarters are in turn supported by a strong network of Local Area Engineer's Offices.

**APPENDIX B - CHANGE IN POLITICAL OWNERSHIP OF SEATS,
ARISING FROM THE 1999 LOCAL ELECTIONS**

<i>County Council/ City Corporation</i>	<i>Number of seats</i>	<i>Change of seats</i>	<i>% change</i>
Limerick Corporation	17	6	35.3
South Dublin	26	8	30.8
Kildare	25	5	20.0
Monaghan	20	4	20.0
Cork Corporation	31	6	19.4
Dublin Corporation	52	10	19.2
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	28	5	17.9
Meath	29	5	17.2
Fingal	24	4	16.7
Cavan	25	4	16.0
Longford	21	3	14.3
Tipperary North Riding	21	3	14.3
Donegal	29	4	13.8
Waterford Corporation	15	2	13.3
Sligo	25	3	12.0
Kilkenny	26	3	11.5
Louth	26	3	11.5
Tipperary South Riding	26	3	11.5
Kerry	27	3	11.1
Galway County	30	3	10.0
Offaly	21	2	9.5
Leitrim	22	2	9.1
Waterford County	23	2	8.7
Wicklow	24	2	8.3
Laois	25	2	8.0
Roscommon	26	2	7.7
Limerick County	28	2	7.1
Galway Corporation	15	1	6.7
Clare	32	2	6.3
Carlow	21	1	4.8
Wexford	21	1	4.8
Westmeath	23	1	4.3
Mayo	31	1	3.2
Cork County	48	1	2.1

Source: Kenny, L. (1999, p.15)

APPENDIX C - LOCAL DEVELOPMENT BODIES IN CORK COUNTY

Enterprise Boards

West Cork Enterprise Board

South Cork Enterprise Board

Cork North Enterprise Board

LEADER Groups

Comhdhail Oilean na hEireann

Ballyhoura Development

Blackwater Resource Development

East Cork Area Development

IRD Duhallow

Meitheal Forbortha na Gaeltachta

West Cork LEADER Co-op

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AREA GROUPS

Ballyhoura Development Ltd.

East Cork Area Development

IRD Duhallow

Bantry Integrated Resource Group

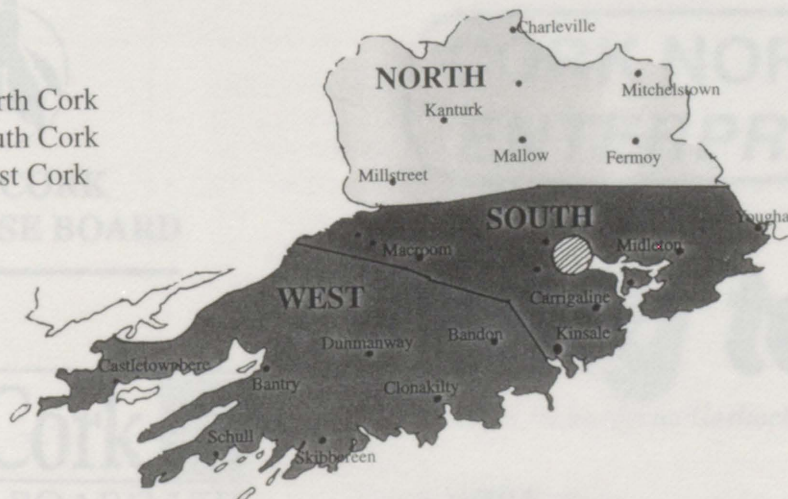
Avondhu Development Group

Meitheal Forbortha na Gaeltachta Teo

Appendix C continued

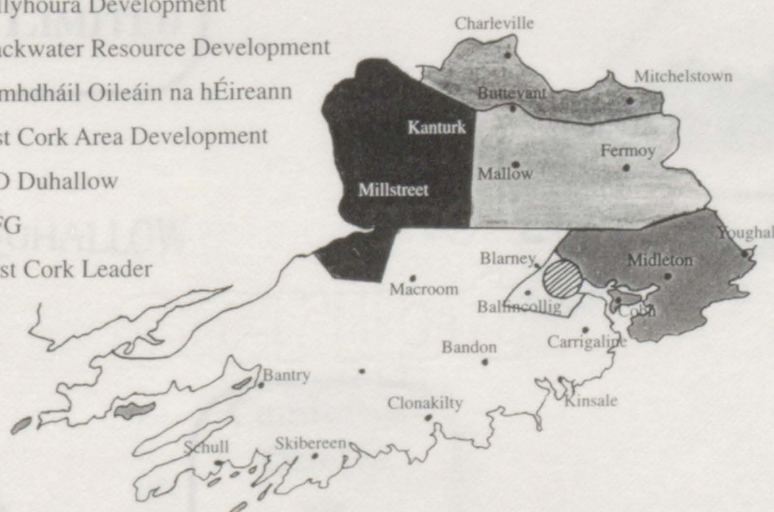
COUNTY ENTERPRISE BOARD AREAS

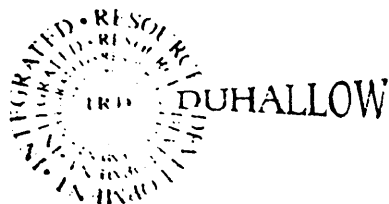
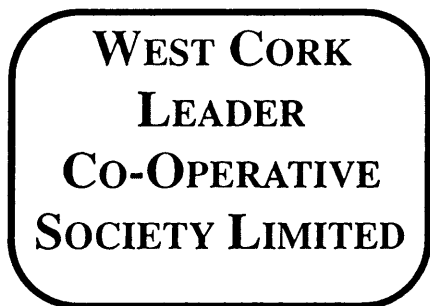
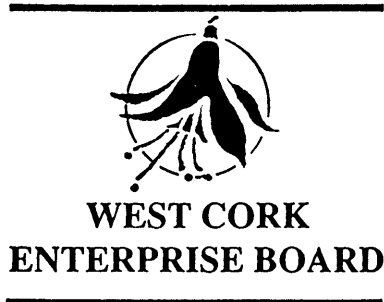
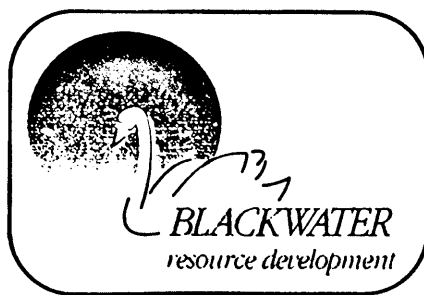
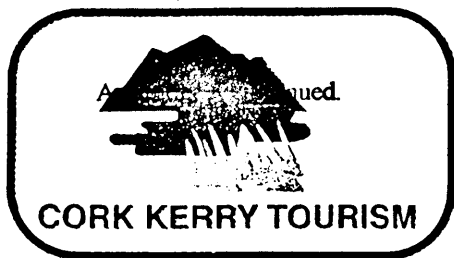
- North Cork
- South Cork
- West Cork



LEADER AREAS

- Ballyhoura Development
- Blackwater Resource Development
- Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann
- East Cork Area Development
- IRD Duhallo
- MFG
- West Cork Leader

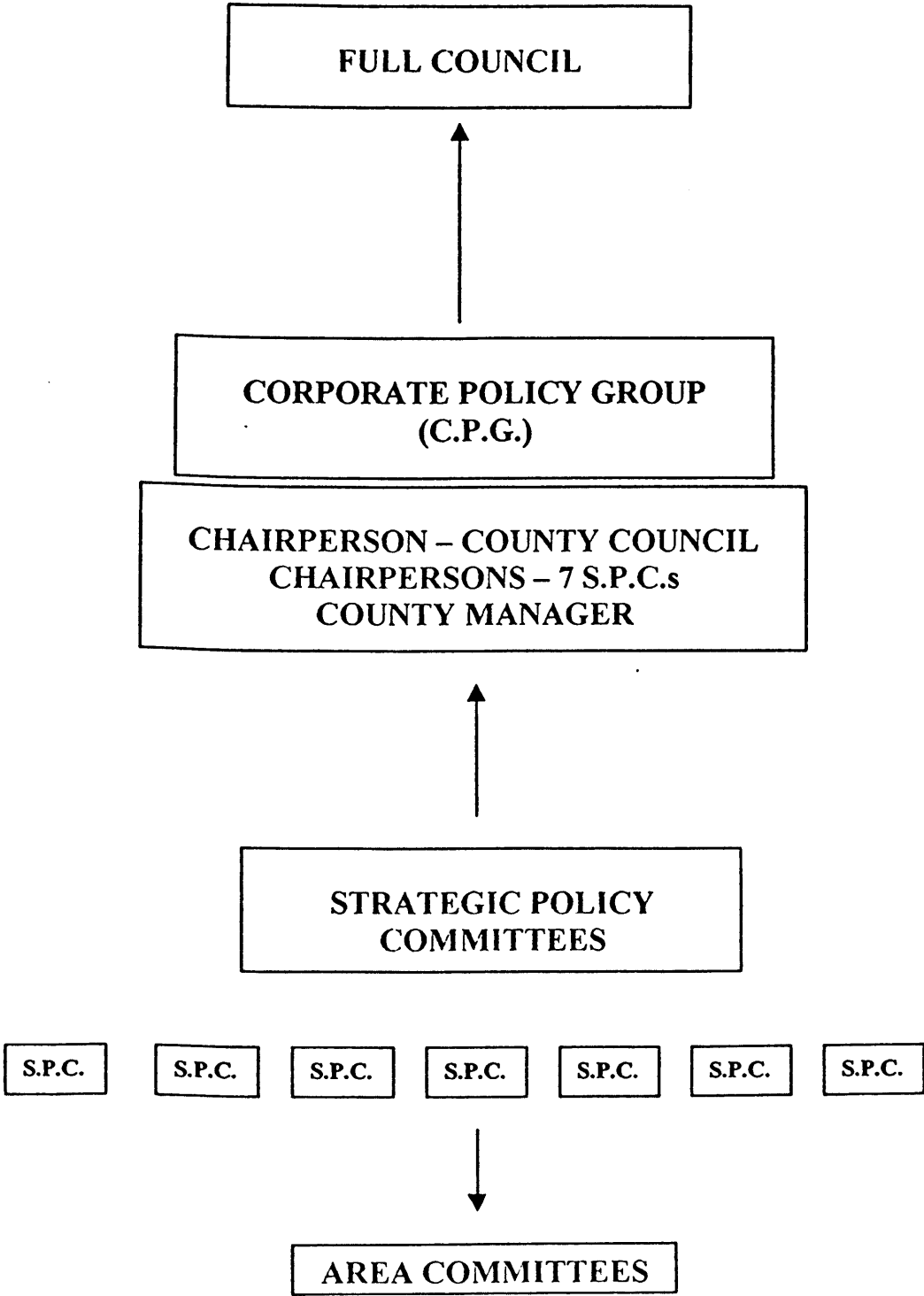




APPENDIX D - MEMBERSHIP AND SELECTED REPRESENTATION ON CORK COUNTY COUNCIL'S COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

SECTOR	MEMBER	
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr. Gerard Murphy, • Mr. Tomás Ryan, • Mr. Maurice Moloney, • Cllr. Tadgh O'Donovan, • Cllr. Paula Desmond, • Cllr. Vivian O'Callaghan, • Cllr. Dan Joe Fitzgerald, • Cllr. Barry Cogan, • Cllr. Michael Doran, 	S.P.C. Chairman & Chairman of C.D.B. Chairman, Cork Co. Council Co. Manager, Cork Co. Council S.P.C. Chairman, Cork Co. Council S.P.C. Chairperson, Cork Co. Council S.P.C. Chairman, Cork Co. Council S.P.C. Chairman, Cork Co. Council S.P.C. Chairman, Cork Co. Council Urban Representative
Local Development Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. John Deasy, • Mr. Rochie Holohan, • Mr. James Brennan, • Mr. Derry Fitzpatrick, • Mr. Tadgh Curtis, • Ms Carmel Fox, • Mr. Ryan Howard, • Ms Maire Ní Léime, • Mr. Ian Dempsey, • Mr. Liam Ennis, • Mr. Liam Chambers, 	West Cork Enterprise Board Cork North Enterprise Board South Cork Enterprise Board I.R.D. Duhallow Blackwater Resources/Avondhu Dev. Group Ballyhoura Development East Cork Area Development Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta West Cork Leader Bantry Integrated Dev. Group Comhdháil Oileán na h-Eireann
State Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Ann Doherty, • Mr. Paddy Carleton, • Mr. John Verling, • Mr. Barry O'Brien, • Mr. Brian Quinlan, • Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick, • Mr. Frank Donaldson, • Mr. Ollie Keenaghan, • Mr. Dónall MacGiolla Bhride • Inspector Liam Horgan, 	Southern Health Board FÁS Teagasc V.E.C. Enterprise Ireland I.D.A. S.W. Regional Tourism Authority Dept. of Social, Community & Family Affairs Udarás na Gaeltachta Garda Síochána
Social Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Fiona Hayes, • Mr. John Bowen, • Mr. John Joe Kelleher, • Mr. Donal Kelly, • Mr. Sean Kelly, • Mr. Oliver Sheehan, 	Employers/Business Organisations Trade Unions Agriculture/Farming Organisations Community & Voluntary Organisations Community & Voluntary Organisations Community & Voluntary Organisations

APPENDIX E - STRATEGIC POLICY STRUCTURE IN CORK COUNTY COUNCIL



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