Re-Thinking the Concept of Professionalism: the Case of Housing Management

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the meaning of professionalism in the occupation of housing management. It will explore the meaning of being a professional housing manager in a profession which has some of the traits of being a *'semi-profession'* (Etzioni, 1969). It asks how housing managers view professionalism and what is its relevance, if any, to their working lives. It is primarily concerned with four key aspects of professionalism: identity, knowledge, boundaries and accountability. Analysis of these four aspects of professionalism are informed by social constructionism, ethnomethodology and ethnography.

The sociology of the professions is used as a substantive literature to illuminate fieldwork data and provide new directions for the evolution of theory relating to housing management.

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis have been used to provide detail and depth in presenting a picture of the issues under investigation. Data was primarily collected from forty-nine interviews, supported by data collected from three separate periods of participant observation.

The thesis argues that professionalism in housing management is an individualised project of the self rather than a collective project. Professionalism is expressed as an individualised response to, and a mediation of, competing managerial demands. Housing managers work upon themselves to meet the demands of their customers and their employers. The 'professional project of the self' is influenced by their backgrounds, specifically their own beliefs and values regarding what it is to be a professional housing manager. Housing managers engage in negotiating the boundaries of knowledge and emotions in order to deliver a professional service. Accountability is expressed as a component part of professionalism, *i.e.* the ability to give an account of their actions, as well a response to formal performance measures. The thesis identifies two categories of housing managers, 'pragmatists' and 'pro-activists', who are distinguished from each other in their construction of professionalism. This study suggests that the concept of professionalism continues to exert a considerable influence on the thoughts and behaviours of these housing managers.

Glossary of common abbreviations used in housing management

ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisation
ASBO	Anti-social Behaviour Order
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
FTA	Former Tenant Arrears
HA	Housing Association
IOH	Institute of Housing
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LA	Local Authority
LSVT	Large Scale Voluntary Transfer
NSP	Notice of Seeking Possession
PI	Performance Indicator
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SWHM	Society of Women Housing Managers
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
Void	Empty property

Chapter 1 — Introduction

1.1 – The research problem

Profession and professionalism evoke a range of qualities imbued with symbolic meaning. They bring to mind notions of knowledge, identity, power, status, respectability, altruism, service, and ethics. The two terms are invariably defined in terms of one another to such an extent that studies on the subject often do not differentiate between the two, although in fact, and in reality, they are conceptually distinct. Profession is usually defined in terms of formal characteristics, while professionalism may encompass a broader set of criteria focusing on the behavioural nature of *being* professional or *acting* professionally. Martyn Pearl (1997) makes a useful distinction between the greater formality of *Professional*, *i.e.* relating to a professional body, and the intuitive nature of *professional*, *i.e.* personal behaviour.

Professional:

'the acquisition of specialist knowledge through education and training, adherence to professional and personal codes of conduct, a greater or lesser degree of autonomy in their working lives, and loyalty primarily to the profession, rather than the organisation' (adapted from Elcock and Rose, 1993, cited in Pearl, 1997).

professional:

'client-orientated, objective, altruistic, ethos of service delivery' (Marshall, 1939).

The research focuses on the behavioural aspects of being professional and asks how housing managers themselves view professionalism and what is its relevance, if any, to their working lives.

This chapter sets out how the research questions were conceived within a changing social and economic context. It traces contextualising influences upon the research in the following sections. First, the social and economic context is outlined to establish the changing arena within which housing services are delivered, and the significance this has for the professionalisation of housing management. Second, substantive research questions are summarised. Third, the research is located within a theoretical framework which draws upon existing work in housing studies, as well as charting

theoretical ground from areas outside of housing management.

1.2 – The social and economic context

The context within which social housing and the management of social housing is located is defined by a variety of social, political and economic processes (Franklin, 2000: 909). For the purposes of this thesis housing management is defined as:

> *'the activity of managing government subsidised properties owned by local authorities or housing associations and occupied by rent-paying tenants'* (Franklin, 2000: 907).

The post war years saw considerable progress in tackling the housing problems of the UK with major programmes of council house building and slum clearance of the worst of the housing stock. However, these developments need to be set against a background of consensus between the two major political parties as to the inherent superiority of owner-occupation and a concomitant residual role for council housing. By the time the Conservative government came to power in 1979 a major re-structuring of the housing system was underway. The government believed that council housing was essentially 'feather-bedded' and that it played a major role in creating a dependency culture, hence it was viewed as a problem (Atkinson and Durden, 1994: 184). A series of housing acts in the 1980's achieved a number of key policy objectives that would result in a significant reduction in the size of council housing stock nationally. A second strand of the policy to reduce the power of local authorities in council housing has been to diminish their role as a major landlord. The three Labour governments (since 1997) have expanded on the Conservatives' policy of the 1980's to remove council housing from the management of local authorities. Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVTs) to housing associations as well as the setting up of Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) have fundamentally altered the structure of social housing[1] provision, which has had a knock-on effect for those who provide the housing service.

What is evident from the literature is that since the 1970's there have, in effect, been two modes of interest in housing management. There has been a dual government focus on

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[1] Social housing is defined as *'government subsidised properties managed by local authorities or housing associations' (Franklin, 2000).*

the problems associated with housing management, in tandem with a focus on the performance of housing organisations, in the shape of a fundamental re-structuring in the management and delivery of housing services. Housing organisations, in line with other public services, are now subject to a managerial regime of business planning, performance monitoring and targets (Walker, 2000) which has resulted in a move towards a more standardised service and quality assurances. Housing providers are under pressure to meet and exceed these prescribed performance standards. The more regulated framework for the delivery of the housing service has led to a more structured approach to housing management (Williams and Provan, 1991) which impacts on those carrying out the day-to-day housing management function, such as estate managers.

The growing interest in the managerial aspects of social housing has taken place alongside a countervailing trend of increased polarisation (Saugeres, 1999). While owner-occupation was increasingly regarded as offering advantages in social and economic terms council housing has become more marginalised as it is accommodating the poorer sections of society (Page, 1993; Spink, 1998). Page (1993) articulated this characterisation of social housing as follows:

> *'Most residualised areas of council housing are large estates of low-income families, with high numbers of children. They may also be associated with poor location, high building densities, utopian design, a bad state of repair and ineffective housing management. But the common ingredients seem to be scale, a large number of children and an allocation system which places people where they do not want to be'* (Page, 1993: 5).

The effect of this polarisation has been that public housing has increasingly become perceived as the tenure of last resort, (Pearl, 1997), a theme explored more fully in chapter two.

The changing context in which public housing has been delivered has also had a significant impact on housing management as a profession. Housing management as a profession has always lacked a clear definition of its role (Laffin, 1986; Cole and Furbey, 1994; Franklin and Clapham, 1997; Saugeres, 1999; Furbey et al, 2001). With the burgeoning of state involvement in the provision of public housing, it slowly developed from its roots in 19th century philanthropy to a fully-fledged occupation in its own right in the inter-war years. However, there have been many factors that have

stymied the professionalisation of housing management.

One of the major obstacles to the professionalisation of housing management has been the fragmented delivery of the housing service. Prior to the development of a comprehensive housing service in the 1970's, housing management had been split into its constituent parts, with the relevant local authority departments taking responsibility for different aspects of housing, such as finance, planning, and public health. Another barrier to professionalisation has been the lack of a discrete knowledge base that could be constituted as 'housing knowledge' (Furbey *et al.* 2001). Given the fragmented nature of housing management it could not lay claim to a specialised body of knowledge upon which the more traditional professions such as law and medicine based their professional credentials. Indeed, the prevailing view amongst councillors and others was there was not much more to the housing task than the application of *'common sense'* (Laffin, 1986: 31). The lack of a consistent and universally accepted view of the appropriate role and scope of housing management has also hindered attempts to acquire a professional status or identity for the profession (Laffin, 1986; Kemp and Williams, 1991; Saugeres, 1999; Clapham *et al.* 2000). For example, a perennial debate within the profession has centred on whether housing management is primarily about the management of property or whether it should have a more welfare-based orientation. In summary, attempts to construct a housing management profession[2] have been hampered by the outwardly routine nature of the housing task, the fragmentation of the housing function, the uncertain boundaries of the housing field and a lack of a discrete knowledge base from which to fashion a collective identity.

Nevertheless, it has its own professional association, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) – which sets professional standards and regulates membership through examinations and tests of professional practice. The recent emergence of better-trained and educated personnel has given a boost to the prospects for professionalisation within the housing field (Williams and Provan, 1991; Pearl, 1998). The professionalising agenda has been taken up by the CIH, as seen in the Institute's Charter, educational programmes, a code of professional conduct and its lobbying of government on a wide spectrum of housing issues ranging from regeneration to affordable housing.

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[2] Although this thesis is premised on housing management having few of the marks of a fully-developed
(continued on next page)

However, a major factor affecting membership of the CIH is that it is not a regulatory body, in the sense that non-qualified personnel work in housing management and a lack of CIH-accredited professional qualifications is not necessarily a barrier to advancement in the field. It cannot therefore seek market closure (Larson, 1977). The fact that a significant percentage of those who work in housing management have no formal training or professional qualifications is not just a matter of interest to the professional body.

The calibre of housing managers has been a concern to successive governments in varying degrees since the 1920's because housing managers, particularly after the Second World War, were in charge of a rapidly expanding housing stock, which constituted a major public resource. This concern was what led to the creation of the Central Housing Advisory Committee (CHAC) in 1939, whose remit was to consider the general question of the management of housing estates by local authorities with special reference to the employment of trained housing managers (Laffin, 1986: 78). Later still, the perceived crisis in council housing from the late 1970's onwards was the catalyst for a renewed government interest in housing management. The Department of the Environment became concerned about the growing levels of poverty, deterioration of the housing stock and difficult-to-let homes on council housing estates (Laffin, 1986) and it sought to promote intensive housing management practices that would begin to address these difficulties (Power, 1987).

In its 1986 report 'Managing the Crisis in Council Housing', the Audit Commission outlined its views on the need for greater professionalism in the housing service (cited in Pearl, 1993). The report states, *'The professionalism of housing management needs to be enhanced generally'* (Pearl, 1993: 3) and it endorsed the initiatives of the (then) Institute of Housing (IOH) in providing improved training and education for housing practitioners. However, the Commission pointed out that there was considerable progress to be made, drawing attention to the fact that there were fewer than 2,500 staff in local authority organisations with a recognised IOH qualification and that in general in-service training was limited (Pearl, 1993: 15). Although the CIH can demonstrate an increase in corporate membership in the intervening years, by the mid-1990's less than

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profession, I have used the word throughout, as alternating 'occupation' and 'profession' would be clumsy.

15% of the 100,000 core housing staff were enrolled with the Institute (Pearl, 1997: 219).

A focus on the problems of social housing has resulted in housing organisations being cast in the role of damage limitation and control as regards to anti-social behaviour (Franklin, 2000). Housing managers are drawn into areas of expertise, such as social welfare and policing, for which they lack the appropriate training and expertise (Furbey *et al.* 2001). Also, there is pressure from government for housing managers to have a much greater involvement in cross-cutting issues such as urban regeneration and community care strategies, which take them beyond their traditional remit of work (Franklin and Clapham, 1997; Furbey *et al.* 2001).

There is one final reason for the heightened debate on the future of housing management and the management profession, *i.e.* the changing attitudes of consumers as tenants towards their housing and its administration (Williams and Provan, 1991). Tenants are no longer viewed as the passive and compliant recipients of housing services, and this has been formalised through a series of measures designed to increase tenant participation in the management of housing organisations. Tenants participation may range from 'passive' consultation to the 'highly involved' management of housing services, such as Tenant Management Organisations (Davies, 1992). Although the merits and effectiveness of such measures has been widely debated (DETR, 1995; Davies, 1992; Steele and Somerville, 1995), they constitute a recognition of the rights of tenants to a decent standard of housing service and a say in how that service is delivered. Tenants also rightly expect that housing managers will have some skill and specialist knowledge in dealing with the complex range of problems and issues brought to them (Williams and Provan, 1991).

Hence, the perennial debate over the role, nature and scope of social housing, and those that manage its provision, has never seemed more relevant. The changing context of social housing management described above provides suitable grounds for the contention that professional practice is now more important than ever. This contention is, in itself, a suitable justification for research, but the focus of the thesis is broader.

1.3 – Purpose and significance of the research

The majority of the small number of studies that consider professionalism in housing management focus on formal professional attributes and key actor perspectives (Brion,

1995; Franklin and Clapham, 1997; Laffin, 1986; Pearl, 1997; Furbey *et al.* 2001). Franklin and Clapham (1997) consider the concept of professionalism in housing management as having limited application because of its limitations in illuminating the nature of housing policy implementation and the definition of housing tasks. Hence, they do not engage with the professionalism of housing management beyond a brief analysis of the CIH's claims to delimit the boundaries of the profession. Williams and Provan (1991) consider the professionalisation of housing management in the formal sense, as the development of the professional bodies for housing management and it's related training and education programme. Brion (1995) also concentrates almost exclusively on the professional organisation of housing managers, in her groundbreaking historical account of women in the housing service. Professionalism is analysed from the official viewpoint of the two founding professional bodies in housing management, *i.e.* the Society of Women Housing Managers and the Institute of Housing, respectively. However, this focus on key actors and the formal and institutional interpretation of professionalism, although illuminating in its own terms, does not tell us much about the nature of professionalism as articulated by those involved in the day-to-day management of social housing. Other studies also focus on the collective effort of key actors, such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, to professionalise the occupation of housing management (Laffin, 1986).

Pearl (1997) set out to explore what he terms as the 'new professionalism'. He asserts that new management skills incorporating both personal and professional skills are needed, but concentrates on the institutional regulation of such skills and training through CIH membership, housing education and codes of conduct.

Clapham, Franklin and Saugeres (2000) consider the professional influence on the construction of housing management, but again equate this professionalism with the view of the CIH. Much emphasis is given to how the *Housing Management Standards Manual* (published by the CIH) defines a professional approach, *i.e.* acting within prescribed policies and procedures, and the extent to which housing managers conform to this view of professionalism. There is an implicit assumption that whatever 'professional influence' exerts itself upon housing managers comes from the CIH, although ironically, Clapham *et al.* (2000: 72) also state that many of the housing managers interviewed were sometimes not even aware of the existence of the CIH Standards Manual in question.

Furbey *et al.* (2001) move the analysis away from a traditional approach by focusing on the professional project and individual and collective agency and suggest that a combination of personal skills and knowledge (both concrete as well as abstract) may constitute a new *'network professionalism'*. However, they base their analysis of housing professionalism on empirical evidence gathered from employers and organisations, rather than from those in the day-to-day work of housing management.

The research reported here will explore the meaning of being a professional housing manager in a profession which has some of the traits of being a *'semi-profession'* (Etzioni, 1969). Professionalism is essentially about the delivery of consistently high standards and most housing managers would subscribe to a professional approach to service delivery. However, what is clear is that perceptions of what constitutes acting professionally vary significantly (Pearl, 1997). The major issue is the growing divergence in understanding of what exactly the term *'professional'* should mean. Although there is a common acceptance by housing staff of the need to achieve high standards at all times, there is a divergence in approach on how to ensure this is achieved (Pearl, 1997). The interpretation of professionalism has been thrown into the melting pot by the increasing managerial[3] ethos of the housing sector. A performance culture is increasingly evident from the 1990's onwards, where professionalism is being defined in terms of outputs, rather than any contributions to the customer or the wider profession (Pearl, 1997). This is possibly to the detriment of non-market concepts such as a 'public service ethos' (Atkinson and Cope, 1994: 47). From a practitioner perspective, the ability to be reflective may be hampered in the context of strongly emphasised organisational objectives. Yet despite its centralising rationale the 'managerial state' (Clarke and Newman, 1997: IX) has widened the scope for housing personnel to act professionally, using more customer-centred skills and qualities (Furbey *et al.* 2001). This makes an analysis of how housing managers view their professionalism, in the light of other demands, particularly significant and justifies the subject matter of the research. How managers interpret their professionalism is important because these understandings form the basis for what constitutes good

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[3] Managerialism is defined as the drive to re-shape the internal administrative and organisational culture of the public services by importing private sector management techniques, and artificially creating competitive market mechanisms, within these services (Atkinson and Cope, 1994: 44).

practice in housing management.

Although a great deal of work has gone into costing and defining the housing management function little is known about how housing managers construct their professional roles, in a rapidly changing environment, and how this impacts on every day housing practice. Indeed, with some notable exceptions (Franklin, 2000; Saugeres, 1999; Clapham *et al.* 2000; Jacobs and Manzi, 2000) the views of the people who deliver the service are rarely heard (Franklin, 2000: 915). The thesis will address this gap in the literature. As there is currently a dearth of literature on the professional orientation of housing managers, the PhD will make an original contribution to the sum of knowledge in that area.

The next part of the introductory chapter outlines the substantive questions which inform the research.

1.4 – Substantive research questions

This research attempts something different in exploring professionalism in housing management. The basic research problem: *How is the concept of professionalism constructed in housing management?* has evolved into a series of much more specific research questions. The research process is informed by grounded theorizing (outlined in detail in Chapter Four). Glaser and Strauss' (1967) concept of grounded theory is developed out of data analysis, and subsequent data collection which is guided by the emergent theory (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Four research questions eventually emerged from this process:

1. What is the nature of professional identity in housing management (Chapter 5)?
2. What constitutes knowledge in housing management (Chapter 6)?
3. How do housing managers construct their professional boundaries in relation to users of housing services (Chapter 7)?
4. How does the need to be accountable affect the professionalism of housing managers (Chapter 8)?

Using the literature on the professions it begins by examining the extent to which housing can be constituted as a profession. To the extent that housing management does not meet the key criteria it concludes that housing management can be categorised

as a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969).

This is the starting point for an interpretative analysis of how housing managers construct their professional world. The research explores how housing managers construct their own understandings of what it means to be professional and what it means to act professionally. They do this, in part, by creating their own definitions of professional behaviour, which are divorced from any professional body or formalised codes of conduct. They then use these understandings to organise the way they think about themselves and their work and to distinguish themselves from other colleagues and situations that they regard as unprofessional.

1.5 – Theoretical framework

Professionalism in housing management has been written about mainly from a narrowly defined 'traits' perspective (p.38), which came to prominence in the 1950's (MacDonald, 1995: 2). This approach lists key characteristics of an ideal-typical profession against which occupational groups could be assessed as more or less professional (MacDonald, 1995: 3). Hence, studies of housing management have largely focused on housing credentialism and the professional body, the CIH. Housing studies to date (with the exception of Furbey *et al.* 2001) has not engaged in the emerging debates of other welfare professions, such as social work (May and Buck, 2000), personal care assistants (Ungerson, 1999), probation (Eadie, 2000) and health (Bolton, 2000), about the changing nature of professional boundaries and trust between practitioners and their clients. Traditional approaches to analysing the professions focus on discrete and esoteric stocks of knowledge which are used to buttress the power bases of the professions (Furbey *et al.* 2001). However, consumers are increasingly questioning the expertise of professionals (Foster and Wilding, 2000) and seeking other sources of information, especially noticeable in health care and the growth in popularity in complementary medicine, for example (Killigrew, 2000).

There is also increasing concern about the accountability of professionals (Foster and Wilding, 2000). On a political level this accountability manifests itself in a growth in regulations and a tightening of control over the autonomy of all professions, including those in the public services (O'Neill, 2002). Teachers, health professionals, probation and social workers are all called to account in a performance framework of indicators, benchmarks and annual reports (Foster and Wilding, 2000). This has amounted to

seismic changes in the more established professions, and also in the social housing sector. Therefore, what is not needed is another analysis of the housing profession based on traditional checklists.

Rather than studying the professional attributes of individuals, most studies of professionalism have adopted an occupational or institutional focus (Shafer *et al.* 2002: 48). Most of these analyses in housing management focus on professionalisation strategies and key actor *'top down'* accounts, as already noted (Laffin, 1986; Pearl, 1996). What is implicit here is that key actors' ideas and strategies *'flow down'* to those employed in housing management *'on the ground'*, a premise which has not been substantiated by empirical evidence. The PhD explores the nature of professionalism from the perspective of housing managers involved in day-to-day housing management *i.e.* from the bottom up. The research largely implies professionalism with a small 'p', a *'lifeworld'* sense of professionalism, which is a naive sense because it expresses the way in which professionalism is lived and acted out, (Gray and Pratt, 1991) and implicitly understood in the every day world of housing management.

1.5.1 – Social constructionism

Before the research began it became clear that the trait approach to profession was a static concept that was incapable of capturing the essence of what the interviewees understood to mean by professional. What was also evident was that a more relevant focus would be on professional*ism* as a process and as a concept that was constantly changing in response to the environment. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that reality is socially constructed through the meanings that people give to what they do and through the way in which they make sense of the world around them. It provides a basis for analysing the ways in which housing professionalism is constituted in everyday practice and places the occupational role of housing in the wider society in which it operates. Coming from a social constructionist perspective the thesis takes as its subject matter the actions and interactions of individual housing managers, how they make sense of their social worlds and the way they go on in their day-to-day working lives. Following Sibeon (1991), the essence of the approach taken was that the concept of profession is socially situated and what was needed was contextual empirical analysis rather than an assessment based on a pre-defined list of universal professional traits.

1.6 – Conclusion and plan of chapters

This thesis is primarily concerned with what constitutes professionalism in the practice of housing management. It adopts a different stance from existing studies which focus on key actors and the collective project by using an interpretative approach and exploring the meaning of professionalism from the perspective of individual housing managers, in the context of their everyday working lives.

The form of part one of the thesis – chapters 1 - 4

***Chapter 2**: Housing Management in Perspective.*

This chapter maps the history of public housing and housing management in the United Kingdom. It provides the background to the origins of housing management, what housing management is and key policy developments from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. It outlines changes in how housing management has evolved and makes explicit links between social and economic changes and their impact on the scope and role of housing management. Key developments in the education and training of housing managers are linked to these changes.

***Chapter 3**: Professionalism in housing management.*

This chapter presents a comprehensive and critical review of the literature on the sociology of the professions. It traces the shifting theoretical debates on the professions and professionalism and their relevance to housing management. In doing so it problematises the traditional trait and functionalist approaches to the professions on the basis that these analytical frameworks are underpinned by an idealised (Daniels, 1973, cited in MacDonald, 1995) concept of the role of professions in society. It presents the rationale for an alternative approach to professionalism, which focuses on individual housing managers in the context of their everyday working lives.

***Chapter 4**: Research influences and methodology.*

This chapter outlines the aim and objectives of the thesis. It introduces the four research questions. The methodological influences of ethnomethodology and ethnography on the design of the study will be addressed and methodological issues attached to the use of interviews and participant observation will be discussed. This is followed by an attempt to locate the self in the research through an account of the personal biography of the researcher and inter-personal issues that arose in the fieldwork. Subsequent sections explicate the sampling strategy, the coding framework and method of data analysis used.

Chapter 2 — Housing management in perspective

'The moment that housing, a universal human activity, becomes defined as a problem, a housing problems industry is born, with an army of experts, bureaucrats and researchers, whose existence is a guarantee that the problem won't go away' (Turner, 1976: 4).

2.1 – Introduction

This chapter will trace the development of housing management as an occupation, from its origins in the late nineteenth century to the present day. The main focus will be on how public housing came to be developed and the occupation of housing management that grew around its provision. It takes four steps to do this. First, the importance of having a historical context and the epistemological issues arising out of writing history are outlined and acknowledged. Second, the development of private sector housing (both commercial and philanthropic) to accommodate the industrial workers of the mid-to-late nineteenth century is outlined, in order to provide a context for the earliest form of social housing which was to follow. Hence, housing management in the tradition of Octavia Hill, and its pivotal role in the shaping of public housing management, is analysed. Third, the development of council housing and the origins of the debate surrounding public housing management are outlined. Fourth, the changing role of local authority housing and trends in the orientation of public housing management, from the municipal, property management of the 1950's and 1960's to the managerial approach of the 1990's will be documented. In doing so an attempt is made to show that there have been considerable continuities and discontinuities over time, and that many current issues in housing management are contemporary re-workings of perennial problems and issues. These are analytically separable, although empirical interconnections exist between them. The first of these issues relate to the role and purpose of housing management, about which there has been a considerable amount of debate. The ambiguity about the modus operandi of housing management (Kemp and Williams, 1991: 123) has encouraged two approaches to the task; one that emphasises the 'bricks and mortar' *property* management of the housing stock, the other puts more focus on the *social* aspects of housing management (Clapham and Franklin, 1994). The second concerns the changing context within which social housing is carried out and the

impact this has had on the practice of housing management.

2.2 – Writing the history of housing management

As this chapter attempts to recount the historical development of housing management it brought into focus the epistemological issues surrounding the writing of history. Those arguing from a post-modernist perspective[4] have taken issue with what constitutes the key task of historians and the concept of methodological rigour as the *'path to the truth'.* White (1987) states that the process of writing history involves a certain amount of interpretation and that much depends on the historian's selection of evidence and documents. For Jenkins (1991), what determines interpretation lies beyond both method and evidence, and has more to do with ideology than factual evidence. He dismisses the idea that rigorous methods are a way of achieving a way to the truth on the grounds that there are a variety of methods and approaches and that choosing any one method is arbitrary and does not lead to a purer version of the truth. Asking the question, *'who is history for?'* Jenkins draws attention to its ideological nature:

> *'...because history is basically a contested discourse, an embattled terrain wherein people(s), classes and groups autobiographically construct interpretations of the past to suit themselves...in the end history is theory and theory is ideological and ideology just is material interests'* (Jenkins, 1991).

E.H Carr (1987) also draws our attention to the historian and her or his relationship with the facts of the past. He asserts that the necessity to establish the facts does not rest on any quality of the facts themselves, but on the *a priori* decision of the historian. This involves the selection and arrangement of the appropriate facts:

> *'It used to be said that the facts speak for themselves. This is of course untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context'* (Carr, 1987: 11).

The eminent historian A.J.P. Taylor argued that an historians understanding is largely formed before the act of research or writing takes place (cited in Jacobs, 2001: 129) and

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[4] I use the term 'post-modernist' generically to denote those historians who put forward a view that historical facts have no independent existence but are in part constituted by interpretation and theory.

that much of what constitutes historical research stems from the preconceptions held by the researcher (*ibid.*).

Social scientists have long recognised the contribution that historical methodologies can make to sociological knowledge. What historians and sociologists share is not so much techniques but a conceptual approach to the subject matter (Abrams, 1982). Both historians and sociologists are engaged in not simply recording the past but need to use their interpretative skills in their work (Jacobs, 2001). C. Wright Mills (1977) has written extensively on the necessity for sociology to take on board a commitment to historical scholarship:

> *'If we want to understand the dynamic changes in a contemporary social structure, we must try to discern its longer-run developments* (Wright Mills,1977: 152).

He contended that research that did not adequately take into account past developments would be only of limited value.

The arguments that are advanced above are especially pertinent for housing research in so far as they remind us that accounts of the past are not based simply on material evidence, but on the researcher's interpretation within a particular conceptual framework. This is particularly evident in the way in which the history of housing management has been narrated. There has been a long running debate as to the nature and effectiveness of management in the social welfare tradition, as opposed to the more business-oriented approach of the IOH. This is not simply a matter of clarifying some points of historical interest. The way that this debate is written about tells us much about the power dynamics of the profession. So for example the discussions between the male-orientated IOH and the SWHM in the 1960's (Brion, 1995) concerning the nature of professionalism in housing, and related education and training, reflected underlying tensions over the declining power and influence of the latter organisation during the same period.

This chapter is written from an analytical stance that acknowledges that historical facts are constituted in part by theory and interpretation and that several different interpretations of the same historical developments are possible. Consideration was given to the credence of official reports and although primary sources were used where possible these were not simply taken at face value. The use of secondary sources was

tempered by a consideration given to competing versions of historical facts, for example, to the interpretation of the role and purpose of Octavia Hill's line of housing management, a theme explored further in the next section of the chapter.

2.3 – The origins of housing management

> *'Why should anyone wish to make a career of property management? The answer is that the work I am going to describe is not easily summarised in a short title: it is full of interest and variety, and appeals to people with widely differing temperaments, capabilities and ideas of life. The sub-titles should be: Re-housing; administration of new and old housing estates; surveying and architectural planning, and social work in connection with re-housing'* (Barclay, 1935: 3. in Cole, M.I)

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century housing was seen as an essentially private concern. The philosophy of laissez-faire dominated every aspect of economic, political and social life, and any suggestion that the state should involve itself in the provision of housing, or any other basic necessity, was *'almost beyond serious consideration'* (Whelan, 1998: 17). Tenement buildings housing several families in over-crowded and insanitary conditions were commonplace, and working class families drawn to the cities by the prospect of employment paid ever-increasing rents to private landlords. The absence of planning regulations allowed the construction of poor quality housing, which lacked basic facilities. Although appalling housing conditions were not initially seen as the responsibility of the government or local authorities there was a growing realisation by the government that an unregulated private sector would not act to address these problems (O'Leary, 1998). Hence, the chaos and disease of the Victorian city brought about by the Industrial Revolution focused attention on the need for some form of planning regulations to address rapid population growth. This was particularly in view of the fact that the rise in population had led to overcrowding, disease, low life expectancy and political unrest (Balchin and Rhoden, 1998: 123). The Public Health Act of 1848 was the first in a series of legislative acts which laid down minimum standards for clean water supplies, sewage systems and space standards for dwellings.

2.3.1 – The philanthropists

In the same period Victorian reformers, some of whom were inspired by the publication

of the 1842 report of the Poor Law Commission[5] began to raise the issue of housing for the working classes. Private citizens were forming themselves into associations to tackle the problem and charitable organisations like the Peabody, Guinness, Samuel Lewis and William Sutton Trusts soon began to develop inner city tenements for former slum dwellers (Whelan, 1998). The Model Dwellings Movement, for example, was concerned to help those who could not help themselves through the provision of a better standard of housing than was commonplace at that time (Kemp and Williams, 1991; Spink, 1998). However, many of the Victorian philanthropists saw their role extending beyond simply housing their tenants, and into exerting a benevolent influence over the lifestyle of the tenants themselves (Macey and Baker, 1965; Malpass, 1995). Although their approach was paternalistic, they helped advance standards in both housing quality and in the landlord-tenants relationship (Spink, 1998).

It is important to note that philanthropic housing providers of the day were keen to keep their housing ventures on a solid business footing, and the hegemony of the market was still very much in place when it came to housing the working-class. Hence, the aim was to build model dwellings, but on a commercial basis:

> *'It was hoped that if it could be shown that it was possible to provide working-class housing along the latest sanitary lines and still make a profit, the market would take care of the slum problem* (Whelan, 1998: 12).

Although London County Council and other local authorities slowly began house building in the mid to late 1880's, private rented accommodation still constituted ninety per cent of the entire housing stock at the outbreak of the First World War, with owner-occupation accounting for most of the rest (Balchin and Rhoden, 1998). It was tenanted property in the private sector that was the focus of attention for Octavia Hill, the foremost housing manager and social reformer of her day (Malpass, 1995). In order to understand Octavia Hill's contribution to housing management it is important to locate her work in the private sector context that has just been outlined and the social and economic climate of the period.

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[5] In 1842 the Poor law Commission published it's 'Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population and on the Means of its Improvement. It contained an unprecedented mass of information on the insanitary living conditions of the poor (Whelan, 1998: 12).

2.3.2 – Octavia Hill's approach to housing management

Octavia Hill is widely credited as being a pioneer of social housing management, (Macey and Baker, 1965; Brion and Tinker, 1980; Malpass, 1995; Brion, 1995), although ironically, she was opposed to any notion of public housing (Kemp and Williams, 1991). Hill's basic premise was that it was necessary to deal with the tenant and the dwelling simultaneously, and that no amount of physical improvements or housing reform would be sufficient, if the tenant was not of the right calibre to maintain the home to the required standard. This sentiment was memorably expressed in the following statement:

> *'It is not so much a question of dealing with houses alone, as of dealing with the houses in connection with their influence on the character and habits of the people who inhabit them. If any society had come there and put those houses in a state of perfect repair... it would have been undone again by the bad habits and carelessness of the people'* (Hill, 1884, quoted in Whelan, 1998, pp78-79).

She also argued the case for the employment of women in housing management at a time when a woman's place was firmly in the home. Much has been written about her methods, but there is not universal agreement on what those methods were. This ambiguity is not helped by the fact that Octavia Hill did not leave a detailed description of her practice of housing management, beyond periodical letters to her fellow workers. She was also loath to claim that there was in fact any method to her style of management:

> *'When I am gone, I hope my friends will not try to carry out any special system, or to follow blindly on the track which I have trodden. New circumstances require various efforts and it is the spirit, not the dead form which should be perpetuated'* (quoted in Jeffrey, 1916, Occasional Paper no.12)

This paucity of substantive material notwithstanding, housing academics and practitioners have over the years debated her specific contribution and its merits. There has been a tendency to focus attention on the moral and authoritarian aspects of her management techniques. For example, Kemp and Williams (1991) assert that Hill was:

> *'As much, if not more, concerned with her tenant's moral condition as with their housing condition'* (Kemp and Williams, 1991: 125).

For some, this moral approach was social work in another guise and it was what distinguished Octavia Hill from her private housing management contemporaries:

> *'We need to recognise that she went far beyond a property orientation to housing management: she became involved in other aspects of her tenant's lives and used her power as a landlord to exert leverage on their behaviour'* (Malpass, 1995).

This was a very intensive form of management and involved more face-to-face interaction with tenants than would have been the norm with private sector landlords and agents. While it is apparent that Hill and her co-workers were concerned about the moral welfare of the tenants, they were also focused on the improvement and maintenance of the properties in which these people lived (Smith, 1995). Indeed, it was the distress experienced as a result of visiting some of these *'awful abodes'* that provided the main motivation for the development of this particular approach to housing management. It is also too simplistic to make a charge of paternalism from the perspective of a modern sensibility. As Smith (1995) points out:

> *'...to the tenants, whose only contact with previous landlords had been through a bullying agent, who demanded rent and had no interest in the condition of the property...the trained housing managers...with local management arrangements, brought a level of stability and security hitherto unknown'* (p.38).

Hill's moral imperative entailed the strict enforcement of punctual rent payments. In this regard she was stricter than some of her counter-parts in private property management, who were more inclined to take into account working class financial insecurity (Spink, 1998). This focus on rent payments goes some way towards demonstrating that the commercial and social imperatives were not mutually exclusive, and that they were both components of early housing management. However, the debate about the merits and influence of Octavia Hill has tended to present her work in a much more polarised manner. Her supporters have highlighted the more positive aspects of her social approach, whilst her detractors have concentrated on the moral and authoritarian issues. There have been more recent signs that the reputation of Octavia Hill is being rehabilitated. It is argued that this development is part of the on-going wish of key actors, such as the CIH, to reclaim the welfare aspects of earlier housing practitioners (Franklin and Clapham, 1997), so as to broaden the scope of housing management, to fit into a more contemporary social exclusion agenda.

Whatever the merits (or otherwise) of her principles of housing management, Octavia Hill exerted a profound influence over the embryonic profession of housing management. Women housing managers trained in her *'lines'* or principles saw themselves as a distinctive occupational grouping, with the necessary qualifications and practical experience to progress the case for a housing management profession. They set about building up a professional association, the Association of Women House Property Managers (AWHPM). These women housing managers would constitute one of the two major strands of housing management in years to come. The male-dominated Institute of Housing Administration (IHA) would follow in the 1930's.

The next section will examine the development of public housing provision and the emergence of the two traditions in housing management. These provide the background and context for the development of the housing profession.

2.4 – The development of public housing management

The 1880's was a decade of important developments for the emergence of council housing. Attention was drawn to the continuing problem of housing for the poor, which eventually led to the establishment by Parliament of a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes in 1884. The Commission uncovered compelling evidence of the destitution faced by the working class as a result of poor conditions and exorbitant rents in the private sector (Malpass and Murie, 1994). For the first time the onus was put on local authorities to accept some responsibility for the housing of the working classes. The Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890 envisaged local authorities as vehicles for acquiring land and building low cost housing, using a form of what would today be called private finance (Hatchett, 1996). Councils were advised in guidance attached to the 1890 Act to provide homes which would last for at least sixty years with little maintenance. The guidance said:

> *'the type of dwelling regarded as most suitable is the self-contained house'. This type is generally more popular than the tenement dwelling contained in large blocks'* (Hatchett, 1996).

Thus, the concept of the council house, for rent to the *'respectable'* working classes, was born.

Progress was made and a number of local authorities had established a rudimentary

direct housing function by the 1920's. The housing service was fragmented and most commonly provided via existing central departments such as valuation, engineering, borough treasury and public health, with each picking up the relevant individual elements, but taking no overall responsibility for housing (Williams and Provan. 1991). This fragmentation frustrated the development of a discrete housing service and sustained a dominant focus on the property rather than the occupants (*ibid.* p.214). Housing management posts were most commonly held by men with other (*i.e.* non-housing) professional qualifications, and hence had very little interest in housing as a discrete occupation in its own right. As councils began to operate housing estates, a small number also recruited women members of organisations such as the Association of Women House Property Managers (AWHPM) to carry out the duties of estate management.

2.4.1 – Gender and housing management

Housing management was unusual in that it provided women with career opportunities in the public sphere, outside of the home, which were not seen to challenge the stereotypical view of a woman's place inside the home. The July (1920) 'Housing' journal, issued by the Ministry of Health had noted that *'property management is a profession as well adapted to women as well as to men'* and went on to commend the AWHPM, who *'rendered such admirable service in redeeming unfit property'* (Housing, 1920: 5). These women, trained in the Octavia Hill tradition, brought with them a clear idea of the training necessary to do the job, and by 1932 they had formed the Society of Women Housing Managers (SWHM) with a quarterly bulletin and training scheme (Brion and Tinker, 1980).

Although by 1935 only thirteen per cent of local authorities in Britain had appointed a housing manager, housing management as an occupation was developing at a pace. Informal meetings of mainly male, municipal housing managers were soon taking place in the Midlands, to discuss problems connected with management. The predominantly male Institute of Housing Administration (IHA, later renamed the Institute of Housing), was formed in 1938, with a distinct, public housing-orientated approach to management and its own system of programmed instruction and examination. At first, IHA meetings were attended by several members of the SWHM and membership of both bodies was not considered to be incompatible (Brion and Tinker, 1980; Brion, 1995). However, it

was not long before attitudes hardened. Relations between the two bodies deteriorated partly because of some IHA members' negative attitudes towards the basic principle of women's employment as housing managers (Brion, 1995). There was also the fundamental tension between the generic approach of the women managers and the more fragmented, property-oriented style of the local authority (male) managers. Foremost amongst critics was the enormously influential Wallace Smith, President of the IHA (1938-1946), and manager of Birmingham's housing services, one of the largest municipal housing authorities in England:

> *'For rent collection the author [W. Smith] does not oppose the Octavia Hill system, but personally prefers men as collectors and women as social workers... Experience leads him to regard women as most capable of visiting prospective tenants but less satisfactory in visiting the installed tenants, yet the latter are ones for whom a women's intelligent co-operation is needed'* (Smith, 1934).

The view that women were more suited to the welfare aspects of housing was not uncommon, but was hardly music to the ears of female housing managers who liked to present their work as *'not only that of the social reformer, but of the hard-headed business man'* (Anon., 1946: 3). Their case was not helped by the fact that the SWHM themselves had at times taken advantage of the stereotype that housing work was more suitable for women, as advocated by the following statement:

> *'There are obvious practical reasons why it is easier for a woman manager to enter the house than a man. Clearly, she has a strong advantage, and she is more willingly and fittingly admitted to confidence'* (Anon., 1946: 3).

As these two representatives bodies slowly developed it soon became clear that there were significant differences between them, in terms of attitudes towards the scope of housing management, and the most appropriate training for the job. Hence, by the end of the 1930's, although there was strong evidence of the desire to train and educate on behalf of the people working in housing (Williams and Provan, 1991), there was not unanimity as to the best way forward.

There were also fundamental differences between the women housing managers and the male, municipal housing managers as to the most desirable structure for the delivery of a housing service. The SWHM put more of an emphasis on the face-to-face interaction with the tenants and a generic service, where one housing manager would be assigned to

a *'patch'* of houses and would be responsible for all housing-related duties, from rents to property maintenance. This *intensive* contact with tenants was thought to make sound business sense, as it meant that housing managers would have an intimate knowledge of their properties and tenants and could foresee problems before they arose. This was reflected in their wide-ranging training programme. The syllabus covered surveying, economics, government, social welfare and construction, plus a compulsory period of training in a range of approved organisations.

However, there was also the local authority *'property'* perspective on housing management as previously outlined. J. Allerton, addressing the IOH Conference in 1946 outlined the two systems of management in the following terms:

> *'On the one hand, there are those who contend that ...rent collection, supervision of repairs, home visits and so forth, should be carried out by different officers of the housing department, and on the other, people who consider that estates should be broken down into small groups of houses and the person collecting the weekly rent should exercise all other functions'* (J. Allerton, IOH Conference, London, 1946).

The IOH, coming from a local authority departmental tradition were concerned to separate the rent and repairs function from the social welfare element of management. They favoured a more arms length approach to housing management with contact with tenants limited to contractual obligations, *i.e.* rent collection and repairs, on the grounds that it was more cost effective for the management of large estates. In part this was because housing was managed at the upper echelons by (mainly male) professionals such as architects, accountants and public health specialists, who were keen to promote their own expertise. They were more concerned to sustain the fragmented nature of housing than to advance the idea of a discrete housing management occupation.

This was reflected in the Institute's examinations, giving considerable weight to technical skills (Williams and Provan, 1991). The fact that there was no additional training period required points to the more limited training programme of the IHA. The Institute's view was that their members were first and foremost local government officers whose main focus was on *property* management, whereas the women housing managers primary commitment was to the tenants and *social welfare* objectives (Laffin, 1986). These two traditions have provided the framework within which debates about

the nature of housing management, and housing education and training have been played out.

2.4.2 – Housing management and the role of council housing

> *'There is the fact that concern for housing training is generated when it is felt that the management of social housing is a 'problem' and a large public investment is threatened'* (Goodrich and Brion, 1977: 62).

The way in which housing management has been carried out in practice since 1919 has to a great extent been influenced by the changing role of local authority housing (Kemp and Williams, 1991: 129). This was apparent from the initial stages, where council housing was offered to returning ex-service men, in recognition of their contribution to the First World War. As councils were then housing *'respectable'* working classes households tenants were not seen as a management problem *per se*. At the same time, attention was focused on housing management and those charged with the delivery of the housing service because of the expansion of the housing stock itself. The *Housing* Journal (July 1920) discussed the *'problem of management'* although it declined to recommend any specific scheme for the management of properties. Nonetheless, it speculated as to what the key ingredients for effective management were, and came to the following conclusion:

> *'Much of the success...depends upon the persons who have to deal directly with the tenants. For this reason it is of the greatest importance that officials should be selected who possess suitable qualifications of a personal kind, such as intelligence, common sense and tact'* (Housing, July 1920: 2)

A decade later, the housing shortage had abated and councils cast the net wider in the search for tenants. Housing was offered to slum clearance tenants, who by definition were from the less well-off sections of the working class. Hence, councils were then confronted with the problem of how to balance prudent estate management with social considerations.

The problems attached to housing the very poorest families was the impetus for the establishment of the Central Housing Advisory Committee (CHAC) which sat in 1938 and compiled the first government report into housing management (CHAC Report, 1938). The overall tone of the Report was paternalistic and seemed to imply that the

new class of *'unsatisfactory'* tenants would warrant close supervision, very much in the spirit of the Octavia Hill school of housing management.

CHAC took evidence from both organisations as to the best training for housing managers, coming to the conclusion that different circumstances required different methods, and refrained from endorsing either approach in its entirety. However, they were strongly influenced by the more generic approach of SWHM members when it came to recommending a suitable training syllabus for housing managers. Managers were to be conversant in what was termed by the 1939 Report as *'individual problems of psychology'* (CHAC, 1939: 25) and *'community education'* (CHAC, 1939: 25) and as such envisaged a role for them that was much broader than property management. Training was however, to be limited to less esoteric subjects such as household budgets, nutritional levels and the activities of community centres. Also included were technical subjects such as book-keeping, housing law and building construction and sanitation (CHAC Report, 1938: paragraph 49).

This report was distributed to local authorities and the contents recommended to them in an accompanying circular. It represented an important milestone in the emergence of housing management as a discrete occupation (Laffin, 1984: 79). Housing tasks which heretofore had not been recognised in the majority of local authorities, had been endorsed in an official government report. But these tasks and the relation between them had been recognised much earlier by the voluntary housing association sector and the SWHM managers who were employed in that sector. The major thrust of the CHAC 1939 Report was that local authorities should take on board the recommendations and learn from the example of housing managers who worked predominantly outside of local government, *i.e.* in voluntary housing associations and trusts (Laffin, 1984: 79). More generally, it was clear that there was early recognition by government of the need for housing education and training.

The next housing management report produced by CHAC in 1959 reflected the management problems raised by the expansion of housing on new, large housing estates. A significant change of emphasis was evident as the committee took the view that a fresh look at housing management was needed, which reflected the increasing affluence of the working classes. Whereas in 1939 the Committee had been concerned with municipal social housing as a social service and with tenants of little means, by 1959 this position was seen to be ameliorated by the establishment of a comprehensive

social security system. The Committee went on to point out that:

> *'tenants today are much more representative of the community as a whole and are, for the most part, independent, reliable citizens who no longer require the support and guidance which was often thought to be necessary in the past'* (CHAC, 1959: 2).

The paternalistic emphasis on the social welfare aspects of the earlier report was replaced by a more business-orientated focus on the property management of the new housing stock as stress was placed on the value of local authority housing as a capital asset. This is encapsulated in the keynote statement of the 1959 Report as follows:

> *'We believe it necessary at the outset to emphasise that local authority houses and flats represent a considerable part of the nation's wealth, and that it is the responsibility of local authorities to treat their management as an important business enterprise which must be conducted with due attention to the personal as well as the financial aspects'* (CHAC, 1959: paragraph 4).

For the first time there was a compelling case made for a unified housing service that would perform all the housing tasks under a single department.

Of particular note is the type of competencies the Report regarded as necessary for the housing managers in these unified housing departments. CHAC thought that the housing manager *'must combine a wide variety of technical skills with administrative ability'* (CHAC Report, 1959: paragraph 134). The implication was that the housing task was unproblematic and all that was required was careful administration of the properties. Hence, administration, lettings and rents were listed alongside technical competencies such as maintenance, repairs and general care of estates and their amenities. Great concern was recorded at the shortage of trained and qualified staff and the serious effects such a shortage would have upon the management of estates (CHAC Report, 1959: paragraph 136). Although the 1959 Report did not ignore the welfare aspects its case for unified housing management rested not on welfare arguments, as in the 1938 CHAC Report, but on the need for business-like management (Laffin, 1984: 82).

Progress made on the recommendations of the 1959 Report was patchy. This was apparent when six years later local authorities were asked to complete a questionnaire on the subject. The replies received from 1,135 local authorities suggested that while

there had been some progress in the development of the housing occupation the organisation of housing management still varied greatly between local authorities (Command Papers, 1967: XXXVI). Since 1959, 118 local authorities had appointed housing managers for the first time or set up separate housing departments but there were still only 63 in total which employed a housing manager. Further, the 1967 Command Paper concluded that *'arrangements for training housing management staff left much to be desired in many areas'* (*ibid.*). Clearly, full recognition of housing management as a discrete role or profession within local authorities was some way off. As Laffin (1984) has stressed *'the push for enhanced professional status continued to come from central government rather than from the local authorities themselves, who if anything, continued to drag their feet on the issue'* (Laffin, 1984: 84).

By 1959 the debate about the organisation of housing management had moved on and there was unity within the profession as to the necessity of generic management. The IOH presented evidence to the CHAC that advocated unified departments and the creation of a generic system whereby one housing manager would see to all their tenants needs. This marks a significant shift by the Institute, taking it closer to the generic approach taken by the SWHM, but for pragmatic reasons. Given the general needs orientation of housing in the 1950's, it was felt unnecessary to exert the same intensive form of management on council tenants, and the generic role would also advance the profile of housing management as a profession. The establishment of the two key principles, of generic workers, within a unified housing department, was closely linked. The IOH argument for generic workers, within unified departments was put forward for sound professional reasons:

> *'The argument for generic housing managers could be used, then, to justify the establishment of separate housing departments, which was itself a vital step towards the professionalisation of this activity. Instead of being an association of people from other professions who just happened to work in housing, the Institute was becoming more akin to a collection of housing workers seeking recognition as a valid and separate profession in its own right'* (Kemp and Williams, 1991: 134).

The change in climate in housing policy and the role of local government in the 1960's served to further the development of housing management. Some commentators came to question the simplistic assumption that the housing problem was little more than a

straightforward supply and demand equation. The influential BBC film *'Cathy Come Home'* (1969) had ignited a debate on the nature of deprivation and the rediscovery of poverty in Britain (Laffin, M. 1984: 86). Academics joined the debate and pioneered a new definition of the housing problem, which focused attention on the local, rather than the national housing market (Donnison, 1967). They argued that the national housing system should be regarded as a series of fragmented local housing systems, each subject to their own combination of problems, which were inter-related and best dealt with at the local level (Laffin, 1984).

This theme was taken up in the Cullingworth Report in 1969. It was pointed out that a wider range of people would have to be re-housed than had hitherto been the case and tenants with special needs would also have to be accommodated. The idea that local authorities would have to take responsibility for identifying these more complex housing needs, and their solutions at a local level, was given official sanction. Housing managers were presented with a new professional account which was a lot broader than property management and the landlord-tenant relationship (Laffin, 1986). The *comprehensive* housing service was one step on from the earlier idea of unified housing departments and presented new opportunities for local housing managers.

The re-organisation of housing departments to carry out the function of a comprehensive housing service became the top priority for those who wanted the advancement of housing management as a profession. Their aspirations were aided by the Bains Report whose recommendation was that:

> *'a chief officer, or director of housing should be responsible for the total housing function, including management ... improvement ... and any advisory service'* (Bains Report, 1972: paragraph 9.33).

At the same time the re-organisation of local government meant the creation of much larger housing departments. This resulted in a move towards a more centralised housing service, thought to be necessary in achieving economies of scale. At ground level, centralisation meant the gradual abandonment or withdrawal from door-to-door rent collections and the closure of estate offices (Power, 1987). This had the effect of making housing management more remote and increasingly depersonalised.

In the 1970's and 1980's the shortcomings of this large-scale and bureaucratic approach to housing management became evident. The problems facing local authorities were, by

the mid-1970's, immense. Years of under-investment in the housing stock coupled with low rent policies meant that a significant proportion of council dwellings were in urgent need of repair and improvement (Malpass and Murie, 1994). Many local authorities began to look at ways to improve their housing management delivery to tenants in the first efforts at a customer-oriented service. Initiatives to address the management problems ranged from decentralised estate offices to experiments in intensive, tenant-focused estate management (for example, the Priority Estates Project in 1979). In many cases the creation of local, accessible and highly visible housing offices began to move the housing service out of the 'ivory tower' of the town hall and back to where tenants lived (Spink, in Cooper and Hawtin, 1998). Decentralisation was thought to bring benefits to tenants, local authorities and housing managers themselves as it allowed councils to bring a local housing presence to the housing estates that up to this point had been served by a remote centre. Just as significant were the perceived benefits for housing managers themselves. It brought housing staff closer to the day-to-day realities of life on these housing estates and gave them opportunity to identify more closely with their tenants and their locality (Spink, 1998:61, in Cooper and Hawtin, 1998).

2.5 – The political, economic and social context of housing management

From about the mid-1960's both Conservative and Labour parties agreed on the central premise that owner-occupation was the preferred tenure and council housing would hence forth be an option only for those who were unable to meet their housing needs in the private sector (Atkinson and Durden, 1994). Social housing, in common with other public services, also came under increasing scrutiny. The Conservative government embarked on a programme to reduce public spending and promote the private sector. Reform of housing management was intended to loosen the grip of local authorities in providing for housing need and much tighter controls were placed on expenditure. Local authorities were further constrained by the cuts in grants and capped spending imposed upon them in the mid-1970's by central government (Atkinson and Cope, 1994). Further, disaffected tenants were offered the opportunity to purchase their dwellings under the Right To Buy policy, which was first introduced in 1980. This initiative, which enabled the sale of 1.5million better quality council houses has proved particularly significant in shaping housing management for many local authorities, who

are managing an increasingly residualised and more expensive stock (Pearl, 1997: 4).

Tenant consultation and participation was enshrined in the Housing and Planning Act (1986) in a bid to address the perceived paternalism of local authorities. From the Conservative government's point of view tenant participation had the double virtue of extending tenant choice (which fitted in with their neo-liberal agenda) whilst at the same time it served to limit the role of the state by eroding local authorities' role as a service provider (Savage *et al*, 1994: 10). At the other end of the political spectrum, pressure came from the left who believed that housing management was too autocratic and too far removed from the needs of the tenants. The belief that council housing management had failed and required radical reform was therefore a view shared by those on both the right and left of British politics.

At the same time, large housing estates began to exhibit some of the problems that would herald the challenges facing the public housing sector in the years to come. The effects of poorly designed, poorly maintained and insensitively managed stock were becoming apparent with large numbers of empty, hard-to-let properties, particularly on high-density estates and in high rise blocks of flats (Pearl, 1997: 81).

The election of the Conservative government in 1979 marked a significant shift away from the 'Keynesian'[6] approach on which economic policy in Britain since 1945 had been based (Dunn and Smith, 1994: 78). Its economic policy of controlling inflation resulted in a rapid rise in unemployment and de-industrialisation; the number of manufacturing jobs fell by almost a quarter between 1979 and 1983 (*ibid.*). In those decades housing had become increasingly polarised between owner-occupation and the social housing sector. The success of Conservative governments since 1979 in creating a *'nation of home-owners'* (Saunders, 1990) had encouraged an exodus of the wealthier and more economically active tenants from social housing (Pearl, 1997: 64). Within the context of a significant growth in unemployment, the result was a social housing sector characterised by a concentration of economically inactive or low-income households (Pearl, 1997: 64).

> *'In 1963, the proportion of households in the bottom three income deciles who*

[6] The Keynesianism approach emphasised the role of spending (aggregate demand for goods and services) in determining the level of economic activity.

were council tenants was 26.3 per cent; in 1971 it was 41 per cent; and in 1979 it was 47 per cent ' (Murie, 1983: 187).

These social changes have come about as a result of the increasing residualisation of social housing:

'Over the last 20 years successive governments have adopted policies which have moved council housing more towards a residual role in the housing system, concentrating on accommodating those who cannot afford to buy their own houses' (Malpass and Warburton, 1993: 93)

The concentration in social housing neighbourhoods of single parent families, unemployment and low income groups was seen as posing a new challenge for housing managers (Power, 1987; Page, 1983). The problems included difficult to let properties, anti-social behaviour, vandalism, and other criminal activities (Goodlad, 1998).

This has given rise to a debate centred on the concept of social exclusion. Social exclusion has been broadly defined in terms of a lack of civic, economic, social and interpersonal integration (Berghmann, 1995, cited in Franklin, 2000: 909) and has become associated with communities made up of disadvantaged individuals, especially those living on residualised council estates. The role of housing organisations in tackling the problems associated with socially excluded communities of social housing tenants appears to be one of *'control and damage limitation'* (Franklin, 2000: 909). Hence, there is a range of measures ranging from extended powers of eviction and restricted access to social housing through to the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's). It is as yet very unclear what role housing organisations should play in tackling social exclusion and where the boundaries of housing management lie.

While local authorities were the subject of vilification and increasing regulation, housing associations enjoyed unprecedented levels of growth and influence in the 1990's (Pearl, 1998: 8). However, the expectations in the mid-1980's for the expansion of housing associations did not initially materialise. Huge expenditure cuts for social housing (the new term for subsidised housing, council, or housing association) announced in the 1994 autumn budget, marked the beginning of the falling grant rates that would signal the demise of many smaller housing associations. The trend towards the amalgamation of smaller associations within larger ones either by way of merger, take-over or integration into group structure began to emerge.

It has therefore been against the backdrop of the structural changes outlined above that a new interest in the debate about housing management has developed. More generally, pressures for change in the organisation and delivery of all public services, with profound implications for housing management began to emerge. One of the major changes in the culture of the public sector in the period since 1979 has been the emphasis on the public as customer (Stewart and Walsh, 1992). The introduction of a customer culture, with its focus on choice and quality of service, was thought to bring about a genuine increase in the rights and choices enjoyed by housing service consumers (Pearl, 1997: 44), although there are limitations to the extent to which social housing tenants can be constituted as active consumers. This consumerist discourse has permeated housing organisations since the Audit Commission Report of 1986, which stated that the management of social housing was in crisis. *'Customer care'* and *'marketing and caring for customers'* are cited as essential training requirements for those in the housing sector (Housing Potential UK, 2002).

A strident management culture was introduced into local government, with the opening of the housing service (in line with other public services) to the internal market, in the form of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). The outcome of CCT, it was suggested, would be cost savings, greater efficiency and clarity about the standard and nature of the service to be provided, as a result of better monitoring and performance review (Goodlad, 1998: 8). The contract culture underpinning CCT was a clear signal of the intention to privatise housing management (Malpass, 1995). Some commentators have labelled the government led reforms as indicative of the New Public Management (NPM) agenda, which is centred on the introduction of market mechanisms and private sector management practices into public services provision (Walker, 2000).

2.6 – Housing management and managerialism

The seismic changes in the public sector professions such as social work, teaching and probation have been well documented (Foster and Wilding, 2000) and these are a consequence of the fundamental reforms in the structure and delivery of public services. Managerialism has played an increasingly important role in theses reforms and has been defined as:

'both as an ideology that legitimates the development of new organisational forms and relationships and as the practical ideology of being business-like that promises to make the new arrangements work' (Clarke and Newman, 1997: 32).

It is argued that policy makers are reforming the public sector in a *'managerialist'* mould (Laffin, 1999). This involves the promotion of private sector management techniques, such as performance indicators, with a key emphasis on efficiency and accountability, a trend which has evolved in the last two decades.

'In the mid-1980's, a University of Glasgow study of housing management found little systematic use of performance measures. By 1991 there has been significant movement towards a new performance culture in social rented housing' (Goodlad, 1998: 8).

The emphasis on quality management was encapsulated in Best Value, the flagship initiative of the new Labour Government in 1997. The focus of Best Value is on improving service quality and delivery through a critical appraisal of how services are delivered and their detailed costs (Goodlad, 1998: 10). It also places a new imperative on the need to consult and involve users of the housing service. The Best Value regime in local authorities (including housing departments) means that local authorities have to produce annual performance plans, undertake service reviews and devise action plans to ensure continuous improvement in services (Boyne, *et al.* 1999, cited in Walker, 2000).

The focus on a commercial orientation has been replicated in the housing association sector, which since 1988 has been required to compete for grant funding and which is increasingly reliant on private sector development finance. Housing associations now have to demonstrate greater accountability to central government while at the same time demonstrate that they are an attractive investment for opportunity for the private sector (Walker, 2000). Hence, they face some similar management challenges to local authorities in that they have to perform in an increasingly regulated sector while at the same time rise to the challenges of housing some of the most socially excluded sections of British society.

There can be little doubt that a managerial agenda has pervaded the social housing sector in recent years, which has had an impact on housing management. Concerns have been expressed that business pressures are *'defining out'* some of the welfare aspects traditionally provided by housing management (Walker, 2000). Franklin (2000) asserts

that the standardisation of services required under the Best Value regime mitigate against flexibility and local responsiveness and make it harder to justify the less quantifiable aspects of the housing service. Whilst there has been some analysis of the effect of managerialism on the social housing sector, there is a dearth of knowledge about its effects on housing managers themselves, a theme explored in chapter eight.

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the growth of housing as a public service and the occupation of housing management that has developed in response to that service. It traces the historical roots of important housing management issues and problems. The influence of Octavia Hill and women housing managers on the professional strategies of the occupation is outlined. Their amalgamation with the mainly male local-authority based IOH it is argued is the first concerted attempt to get recognition for housing management as a profession. The analysis of the nature of housing management: the *'social welfare'* versus the *'bricks and mortar'* property management approaches over time demonstrates that there is an on-going debate as to the nature and scope of housing management. The changing context of the delivery of the housing service provides the background and explanation for how the *'bricks and mortar'* (extensive) and *'welfare'* (intensive) models of management have been responses to changing housing needs at different points in time.

Chapter three will examine the concept of professionalism in housing management. It will ascertain the extent to which it can be said to be profession, and in the process present a framework within which to analyse professionalism in housing.

Chapter 3 — Professionalism in housing management

'Few professionals talk as much about being professionals as those whose professional stature is in doubt' (F. Katz, in Etzioni, 1969: 71)

3.1 – Introduction

The last chapter charted the development of housing management from the nineteenth century to the present day. It highlighted recurring themes around the 'bricks and mortar' property approach versus the *'welfare'* approach, gender as a historical factor in the development of housing management and the interplay between the changing role of public housing and the role of housing management. It touched upon the professional aspirations of housing management and the professionalisation strategies which emerged, such as the formation of the two professional associations, which subsequently amalgamated in 1965.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it problematises the traditional trait approach to analysing the professions by considering the limited extent to which housing management complies to the 'ideal type' of a profession, in terms of knowledge, power, ideology, and the professional project. Second, it provides the rationale for an approach that analyses professionalism at the micro-level. This focus draws attention to the importance of professionalism at the level of the individual, and the working practices that ensue from interpretations of what it means to be a professional housing manager. Hence, the chapter will focus on *process* and the nature of professional*ism* within housing management. This research follows the *'new sociology of occupations and professions'* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1994 p2) which addresses the everyday realities of work.

Rather than studying the professional attributes of individuals, most studies of professionalism have adopted an occupational or institutional focus (Shafer, *et al.* 2001). The sociological literature on professions has largely treated the values associated with professionalism – altruism, personal detachment, public service, as part of the rhetoric by which professionalising groups support their claims to power and status. But *'emerging'* perspectives view professionalism as a set of workplace practices, as a way of interacting with clients, where boundaries have been redefined in response to economic and cultural pressures (Malin, 2000). This chapter will explore

professionalism in housing management in the light of these *'emergent'* approaches.

3.2 – Popular Interpretations of "the professions"

As Becker (1970) pointed out *profession* is not the sole property of the social scientist. The lay public habitually use it to refer to certain kinds of work and not to others. In everyday discourse most people do not think of professions in terms of an abstract classification of different kinds of work, but rather as a term of *'moral evaluation'* (Becker, 1970: 90). People conventionally apply the term *profession* to certain occupations, law and medicine being the most common. By doing this, they implicitly affirm that medicine and law have reached this morally desirable kind of organisation (Becker, 1970: 91). Similarly, people have a very good idea of the occupations that they would not consider professions because they do not match the morally evaluative criteria that are commonly applied.

Although the concept 'profession' has a variety of different connotations the term is commonly defined as an indication of competence, efficiency, altruism and integrity, as well as the possession of special knowledge and skills (Friedson,1986; MacDonald,1995). Therefore to be unprofessional implies incompetence, inefficiency or unethical behaviour (Pilgrim and Rogers, 1993).

3.3 – Housing management and the professions

Housing management is both a set of activities and an occupation. Housing management as a profession is less straightforward as it has always lacked a clear definition of its role (Laffin. 1986; Franklin and Clapham, 1997; Kemp and Williams, 1991; Pearl, 1997). Given the fragmented nature of housing management (as outlined in Chapter 2) it is hard to build a cohesive professional identity for the profession. It cannot lay claim to a specialised body of knowledge upon which the ideal-type professions such as law and medicine (Becker *et al.* 1961; Larson, 1977) base their professional credentials. Also the lack of a consistent and universally accepted view of the appropriate role and scope of housing management has hindered attempts to gain professional status (Laffin, 1986; Clapham *et al.* 2000; Furbey *et al.*2001). A perennial debate within the profession, as outlined in Chapter 2, has centred on whether housing management is primarily about the management of property or whether it should have a more welfare-based orientation. In summary, attempts to construct a housing

management profession has been hampered by the outwardly routine nature of the housing task, the fragmentation of the housing function, the uncertain boundaries of housing management and a lack of a discrete knowledge base from which to fashion a collective identity.

3.3.1 – The traits approach and its relevance to housing management

The concept of professionalism is complex and often contentious (Laffin and Young, 1990). Professionalism has several levels of meaning, each which must be peeled off to reveal the next. At the first and most immediate level is the classic textbook approach, emphasising definitions and the search for key characteristics, traits or attributes of a profession (Laffin, and Young, 1990). Attempts were made to identify which occupations constituted true professions and what characteristics enabled them to collectively present themselves as a profession (Carr Saunders and Wilson, 1933, Parsons [1939] 1954). This gave rise to a definition of the professions in terms of a number of core *'attributes'* or *'traits'*. These included task-complexity, a specialist body of knowledge, altruistic service, formal educational and entry requirements, a high indeterminacy/technicality ratio and a professional code of conduct (Goode, 1957). Such an approach often results in an unproductive debate over which occupations are really professions and which are mere 'pretenders' (Laffin and Young, 1990: 8).

> *'Professions are occupations with special power and prestige. Society grants these rewards because professions have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge linked to central needs and values of the social system, and because professions are devoted to the public, above and beyond material needs'* (Larson, 1977:XI).

In return for altruism and knowledge, professions are granted self regulation and a recognition that professions are crucial to the smooth running of society, which brings with it material rewards (Larkin, 1983; Parsons, 1968; Saks, 1983). Until the late 1960's functionalist theory, with a strong emphasis on professional ethics, (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Durkheim, 1957), dominated the sociology of the professions (MacDonald, 1995). The functionalist approach assumed the key features of a profession to be those which were of significance for the smooth running of society. This led Parsons (1954: 35) to conclude that:

'...many of the most important features of our society are to a considerable extent dependent on the smooth functioning of the professions. Both the pursuit and the application of science and liberal learning are predominantly carried out in a professional context. Their results have become so closely interwoven in the fabric of modern society that it is difficult to imagine how it could get along without basic structural changes if they were seriously impaired' (Parsons, 1954: 35)

This checklist of characteristics was used to distinguish professions from non-professions and to chart the progression of an occupation along the path to professionalism (Wilensky, 1964). In the trait approach, professionalisation was seen as a process by which occupations attempted to become professions by progressively acquiring these necessary characteristics.

An emphasis on knowledge as a *'core generating trait'* of professionalism provides the starting point for most sociological analyses of the professions (MacDonald, 1995).

More specifically:

'Sociologists generally take a model of rational, formalised scientific knowledge as their starting point in the study of the epistemological base of the professions and then elaborate in relation to a number of other features of professions and their social context' (MacDonald, 1995: 157).

The service ideal is another important component of the ideology of the professions. The concept that professionals are devoted, altruistic practitioners with the interests of the client held as paramount (Marshall, 1963), is an inherent part of the ideology of the professions. However, the implicit assumption that the behaviour of individual professionals is more ethical, as a rule, than that of individuals in non-professions has seldom, if ever been tested by empirical evidence (Larson, 1977 pXI).

Later work on the professions focused on the structural conditions that gave rise to professions or inhibited occupations from acquiring the status of professions (Caplow, 1954; Wilensky, 1964). Wilensky (1964) argued that it was possible to chart the progression towards professionalism using structural criteria such as the point at which each occupation acquired a professional association, a university school and a formal code of ethics. He concluded that there was an optimal technical *'base'* for professionalism and that very few occupations would achieve the authority of the

established professions.

The existence of occupations whose claim to the status of professions was neither fully established nor fully desired led to the identification of intermediate forms, classified as *'semi-professions'* or cases of *'incomplete professionalisation'* (Etzioni, 1969). This group of occupations: nurses, teachers, librarians and social workers had the following characteristics:

> *'their training is shorter, their status is less legitimated, their right to privileged communication less established, there is less of a specialised body of knowledge, and they have less autonomy from supervision or societal control than "the" professions'* (Etzioni, 1969, Preface,v).

Housing management does not exhibit many of the attributes of a profession as classified by the 'traits' theorists. The housing task, while it is contested territory in terms of its boundaries (Franklin and Clapham, 1997) and a universally accepted definition of the housing task, is rarely characterised as being complex. In the sociological literature on the professions the possession of special knowledge and skills is represented as axiomatic to the success of the professional project (*c.f.* Larson, 1977). Yet there is a tendency to view housing management as the administrative process of allocating dwellings and collecting rents (Laffin, 1986; Williams and Provan, 1991) rather than as a unique stock of knowledge (*c.f.* Berger and Luckmann, 1967). To use the distinction drawn by Jamous and Peloille (1970), it is not regarded as having either the *'technicality'* (rules and procedures) grounded in a discrete domain of knowledge, or the *'indeterminacy'* (located in the exercise of professional judgement) levels of other more established professions. Consequently, the nature of housing management is often seen as generic (Furbey *et al.* 2001) whilst the knowledge that is required to do the job tends to be dismissed as 'common sense' rather than 'specialist' (Franklin and Clapham, 1997; Furbey *et al*, 1997; Walker, 2000). This is compounded by conflicting opinions as to whether formal, academic housing knowledge *'does'* or *'should'* relate to housing practice and if so, what this knowledge might consist of (Davies and Niner, 1987; Williams, 1987; Fox, 1980).

However, it is possible to apply the semi-profession model to housing by drawing upon the most commonly cited attributes necessary to achieve professional status. These provide an explanation for the failure of housing to fully professionalise on the basis of

the partial and incomplete acquisition of features such as legal monopoly over the housing task and strict regulation of entry into the profession. Whilst elements within housing had established a professional association, a code of ethics and declared a service orientation, there was not unanimity in these claims, as suggested in chapter 2. The lack of a coherent knowledge base that could be identified as discretely housing knowledge has stymied the attempts of the CIH to achieve a collective professional strategy. Evaluating the competence of members through examinations and tests of professional practice at the CIH is undermined by the fact that the majority of those who work in housing management do not have housing qualifications and can also gain associative membership of the Institute without housing qualifications. However, there has been a considerable shift away from the largely arid task of defining what constitutes a profession. There is general agreement that there is no standard list of attributes which, once acquired, turns an occupation into a profession (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003).

3.3.2 – Professional power and its relevance to housing management

Becker (1970: 93) offers a useful antidote to the taken-for-granted nature of much of the literature on the professions by taking as his starting point the suggestion that there are no true professions. Central to this view is that profession is not a neutral, scientific concept but a highly valued honorific title, a *folk* concept that is a part of the apparatus of the society we study. He opens up the debate on professions by suggesting that there may be a disparity between criteria of professional performance and professionals' own actions (Lively, 2001: 344). This attempt to problematise the disparity between a profession's formal standards and individual professional's practice has some resonance with the critique of professional power most evident in the 1970's.

These critiques focus on professions in terms of occupational control and power and view professions as social actors in competition with other interest groupings for resources and social status (Johnson, 1972; Wilding, 1982; Laffin, 1990; Witz, 1992). Wilding (1982) analyses the sources of professional power. Drawing on a Marxist conflict perspective he argues that the professions conspire with the state in the reproduction of labour and capital. In return for prestigious employment and status, they act to alleviate the inequities inherent in the capitalist system. The value to the state of the professions lies in their apolitical claim to neutrality and dedication to the service

ideal. In reality, professionals are far from disinterested altruists and have, in the past, had considerable power and influence over the policy agenda. Professions, however, vary in the degree of power and influence they wield. Wilding (1982) acknowledges that the classic professions such as law and medicine have high status and privileges compared with newer and semi-professions such as teachers, nurses and social workers. The professions' main functions are to legitimate state policies, to act as an expression of state concern for problems in the private sphere and most significantly, to define needs and problems (Wilding, 1982).

The ability to define needs and problems is a fundamental source of professional power. Experts are given the right to define what the problems are, independently of the people who are experiencing the problems and without necessarily taking their views on board. This gives the professionals undue influence over the over the way these needs and problems are viewed, and by extension over the kinds of services provided to address these needs. Illich (1977) points to the disabling effect of the professions on the public. He states that the professions prop up the interests of the state by defining public issues in terms of personal problems. Our major institutions create need and turn the citizen into a client to be saved by experts, thereby creating a self-perpetuating system of dependency (Illich *et al.* 1977).

Housing management is cited as a profession with a client orientation involved in the public interest. Their claim to professional status is a means to legitimate their claim to autonomy or freedom from control by others, generally their superiors and lack of accountability to their tenants (Laffin, 1986). Gallagher (1982) refers to housing management as an example of professional definitions of need having a considerable impact on policy and the well-being of tenants. Several studies have illustrated the power and influence of housing staff, with low or only limited hierarchical or professional status within their organisations, on the actual services received by customers (Henderson and Karn, 1987: Malpass and Means, 1993). There is an extensive literature on professional's misuse of their claims to exclusive competences (Johnson,1972: Wilding, 1982: Laffin and Young, 1990). Professional power can be used to justify ignoring the rights and needs of consumers and can be used to undermine welfare policies. Social workers, planners, architects and housing managers have been criticised for their role in the development of mass housing policies in the 1960's (Power, 1987). Studies have shown how large-scale demolition and systems-built tower

blocks were partly driven by professional self-interest that coincided more with private-sector builders than local residents (Malpass and Means, 1993).

Professionals claims to competence are bolstered by the exclusivity of their professional associations. Membership of professional associations is controlled through credentialism with membership limited to those who possess the appropriate qualifications (Freidson, 1994). The emphasis on academic ability may disadvantage some groups and excludes those with no desire to, or only limited means by which they could, achieve the professional standards as set out by the CIH.

> *'This view has been particularly prevalent amongst labour local authorities in the South East, where membership of the CIH does not hold significant currency'* (Pearl,1997: 213).

3.3.3 – The professional project of housing management

The concept of a professional project has its origins in the intellectual tradition of Max Weber. The neo-Weberian framework is characterised by its emphasis upon those strategies employed by professions which are designed to advance social status; corner the market for services which are rendered unique by the tactic of exclusion; acquire new spheres of influence through usurpation and encroachment; and establish or negotiate control over work (MacDonald, 1995). Social closure describes the process by which social groups act to restrict access to privileges to those they regard as eligible. Collective attempts at social mobility based on knowledge and credentials underpin Larson's (1977) elucidation of the professional project and owe much to Weber's thought. Larson views professions in terms of the action of an occupational group in pursuing a professional project in

> *'an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources – special knowledge and skills – into another – social and economic rewards'* (Larson, 1977: xvii)

This is achieved by gaining social mobility through a monopoly on the market for a profession's expertise. Indeed, one of the main goals of a professional project is convincing the powers that be and the public that an occupation has a sufficient body of specialist knowledge to be considered a profession, and that the expertise offered is relevant to critical problems (Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988). The aspiring profession's knowledge base must not only have scientific or technical rationality, but must also

require interpretative skills which render it resistant to reduction (Larkin, 1983).

Friedson (1994) elaborates on the issue of credentialism. It acts as a social closure strategy because it excludes those who do not possess the qualifications. The other side of exclusion is inclusion and protection, conceptualised as a *'shelter'* (Friedson, 1994). The argument is that the protection afforded by qualifications will motivate people to invest time and effort into training if they can count on career security and promotion in return. A Weberian analysis situates the professions within the structure of capitalist market societies, notably their relationship with the state in achieving the *'regulative bargain'* essential to an effective professional project (MacDonald, 1995; Exworthy and Halford, 1999; Furbey *et al.* 2001).

The professional project is relevant to housing in that it provides an explanatory framework within which to analyse attempts at the professionalisation of housing management (Furbey *et al.* 2001). The CIH has employed a number of strategies over the years to advance the status of housing management. It elucidates the failure of CIH strategies to advance the professional status of housing management through the credentialism of core housing work. It failed in its long-term campaign to get a central training council for housing management, such as social workers enjoy, established (Laffin and Young, 1990). The thesis argues that this professionalisation strategy was partially undermined and contradicted by an opening up of membership to those without housing qualifications. Having initially advanced the idea of a property-based housing management profession, the CIH set about broadening the boundaries of the housing field to encompass the wider agenda of regeneration and neighbourhood management. The CIH's strategy of claiming an essential role for housing in addressing social exclusion, urban regeneration and community development can be seen as an attempt to enhance claims to special knowledge and skills. It asserts that what sets housing managers apart from others professionals is the close contact housing managers have with tenants (Furbey *et al.* 2001) and the breadth, rather than the depth of knowledge possessed by housing managers, who are required to work in a joined-up and multi-agency fashion (Allen, 2002). With the new emphasis on the multi-faceted nature of housing work in evidence since the mid-1990's, the parallel strategy of inviting members from other professions to become members of the CIH becomes more tenable:

'As a profession, housing is hard to pin down. You don't have to pass any professional exams, or join a professional body, before you can become one. You could work in estate management. But these days, you could be a lawyer or a health worker too' (Wynn, 2001: 32).

Unlike other aspiring professional bodies, the CIH has chosen not to pursue a social closure strategy in regard to membership. In fact, they have engaged in what could be described as the exact opposite: a strategy of social openness. This manifests itself in the following ways: an assortment of grades of membership and association, CIH associate membership on the basis of membership of other professions, and an opening of membership to those in senior housing management positions who do not have any housing qualifications. Martin Wynn, CIH Director of Professional Development put it in these terms:

'We've got to open up the Institute umbrella as wide as possible, hence the new associate membership for people who already have "a profession". They can still have access to the Institute through a professional interview process' (Wynn, 2001: 33).

Hence, tenant representatives, members of the RICS with an interest in housing and chief executives are all potential CIH members or potential associate members.

3.3.4 – Professional identity and housing management

The possession of special knowledge and skills is clearly axiomatic to the success of the professional project. Similarly, the ability to use this monopoly of resources to construct a collective occupational identity is equally important (Freidson, 1994; Furbey et al, 2001; Casey and Allen, 2004: 397). Johnson (1972) focuses on the role of ideology in building a culture of professionalism and shared understandings, which form the basis of a collective professional identity. Although the singular term *'professional identity'* is used, identity is not interpreted as fixed or unitary. Rather identities are understood to be relational and conditional (Halford and Leonard, 1999). For the purposes of this thesis identity, understood to infer self-identity, is a frame of reference for how individuals position and understand themselves (Jenkins, 1996; Giddens, 1991). Work has been identified as one of the central ways in which individuals evaluate themselves and are evaluated by others, thus constituting a core part of *'social identity'* and the *'self'* (Hughes, 1959). Housing managers' conception of

self is also influenced by their peers, who constitute *'significant others'* (Cooley, 1983) and by the wider public, constituted as the *'generalised other'* (Mead, 1934).

As collective identity is thought to be built on a *'sense of belonging'* (Tajfel, 1981) aspiring professions invest a lot of time and resources in building a membership base. Professional associations, a developed network of branches, discussion groups and journals all help establish and maintain the subculture and mores of an occupation. Where professionalism has been adopted as an ideology by occupations which are not fully professionalised, this sharing is very widespread (MacDonald, 1995).

Professional community affiliation refers to the extent to which a person is actively involved in the professional community and uses professional institutions as a major reference point (Shafer *et al.* 2001). Individuals who stay closely involved with their professional body through reading journals and attending conferences are more strongly influenced by the mores of that organisation (Shafer *et al.* 2001). The CIH organises branch meetings on topics of interest to housing managers, holds regional conferences, publishes branch newsletters and awards prizes to housing students. CIH conferences are used as a platform to present the housing profession to its own members and to the wider world. They are also used as a vehicle to delineate the boundaries of the housing field and in the process define the future direction of the profession. Hence, recent CIH conferences (i.e. North West Branch Conference, 2001 and 2002) have focused on regeneration, partnership working and the housing profession's pivotal contribution to addressing anti-social behaviour. CIH President for 2001, Brian Griffiths, makes explicit, the intention to extend the boundaries of the housing field in the following statement:

> *'If we are to respond positively to the new neighbourhood regeneration agenda,* ***our definition of housing management has to extend beyond the constraints of tenancy management*** *– 'to maximise the contribution that housing professionals make to the well-being of communities' – to fulfil our new mission statement'* (Griffiths, 2001: 7, emphasis added)

Friedson (1994) outlines how the professions' claim to professional standing is used as a political tool for dealing with the Government, its own members and the public. Professionalism is elaborated from its common sense usage (*i.e.* a superior, specialised occupation) to emphasise characteristics that justify standing and privilege. Ideas of

public service are important as aspiring occupations seek to gain professional status and convince others that they, collectively, are the best people to do the work. Innovation, commitment and enthusiasm are the qualities most favoured by recent CIH presidents to promote the professionalism of housing workers ('*Housing*', June, 2001: 7 and '*Housing*', June, 2002: 7).

Lively (2001: 344) makes the pertinent point that whereas the literature on the professions has been good for describing the growth and decline of particular occupations, they fail to take into account the individual actors that comprise the professions that they study. Similarly, the literature on housing management has mainly focused on formal professionalisation issues and key actors. This does not tell us anything about individual housing managers and hence, ignores the bottom up perspectives of those who work in day-to-day housing management roles.

The turn towards how individual housing managers view their professionalism reflects a renewed interest in the claims to professionalism of a wide range of occupations, including law and accountancy (Hanlon, 1998); welfare professionals (Foster and Wilding, 2000); journalists (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003); and public sector managers (Flynn, 1999), amongst others. The next section sets out the emerging literature on professionalism at the micro-level. Building on these new insights the remainder of the chapter will explore how housing managers may construct their professionalism, albeit within a particular social and economic context.

3.3.5 – Professionalism and occupational change

The appeal to professionalism as a set of positive (Lively, 2001; Malin, 2000; Foster and Wilding, 2000) and persuasive (Fournier, 1999; Evetts, 2003) ideas has undergone somewhat of a renaissance since the comprehensive critiques of the professions in the 1970's (Wilding, 1982; Johnson, 1972). There has been renewed interest in the potentially positive elements of traditional professionalism (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003). Foster and Wilding (2000) evaluate the key changes to have taken place in the position of the welfare professions since the 1970's, which have some resonance for other public service professionals, such as housing managers. They welcome the move towards a managed, democratic and accountable professionalism and

'toward a more bounded autonomy [because]....clearly it is important to know what professionals do and how effectively and efficiently they do it' (Foster and Wilding, 2000: 155).

The emergence of service users as having some power and influence is a positive step forward from the days when they were virtually socially excluded from policy and practice (Foster and Wilding, 2000). However, the attempt to cut the professions down to size is not given whole-hearted endorsement because it has neglected to appreciate or build on positive aspects of professionalism such as *'the service ethic, the principle of colleague control, and the commitment to high-quality work'* (Foster and Wilding, 2000: 157).

Fournier (1999) elaborates on the concept of professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism in areas not traditionally associated with the professions, such as management and clerical staff. She argues that the purpose of the appeal to professionalism is to keep workers, who have a certain degree of autonomy, within an accountability framework. This is embodied in the notion of *'professional competence'* which guides *'professional conduct'*, even at a distance (Fournier, 1999: 281). Professional bodies perform this disciplinary function through professional codes of conduct, but Fournier's notion has currency for those who are not members of any association and who work in organisations, such as housing managers.

3.4 – Professionalism, social constructionism and boundaries

The social construction of reality provides a useful framework for exploring housing professionalism because it provides a basis for analysing the ways in which housing professionalism is constituted in everyday practice, and places the occupational role of housing in the wider society in which it operates. The social constructionist paradigm has had some influence on research into the policy and practice of housing management in recent years (Hastings, 1996; Jacobs and Manzi, 1999; Saugeres, 1999; Clapham *et al.* 2000; Franklin, 2000; Somerville and Bengtsson, 2002). This approach starts from the premise that social life is constructed by people through interaction. Thus, the social world is not an objective reality existing outside the experiences of social actors (Saugeres, 1999: 94). Drawing on Berger and Luckmann (1967), society appears to have both a subjective and an objective reality. The objective reality refers to the structures and institutions that exist in society. As institutions have bodies of

knowledge that construct appropriate codes of behaviour this knowledge becomes objectified as being reality; *'just the way things are'*. Individuals are socialised into taking on these bodies of knowledge and forms of behaviour, learning them as objective truth and internalising them as subjective reality. Within the constructionist framework actors do not merely provide descriptions of events, they are themselves constitutive of wider policies and conflicts (Jacobs *et al.* 2000). There is an emphasis on facts as an arena of competing claims which offsets any tendency by actors to objectify social phenonema and guards against treating individual's accounts as if they were concrete realities or objective truths. This perspective has some relevance to the way that professions are actively constructed.

In Friedson's (1983) perspective, the concept of profession is viewed not as a static definition but as a shifting concept that is variable in time and space. From this perspective the concept of profession is historically and socially situated, and therefore variable. Sibeon (1991) builds on this understanding and asserts that the concept of a profession, and also rejections of the concept, are socially constructed and negotiated in the relationships that develop among a variety of social (or organisational) actors. Sibeon (1991: 26) argues that the:

> *"Existence of space-time continuities and discontinuities in ...actors' constructions of 'profession' are matters for contextual empirical assessment, not for theoretical pre-definition based on an uncontextual listing of 'universal' professional traits that are presumed to apply in all times and all places"*

Rejecting the structuralist approach, Malin (2000) argues that professionalism (within the caring professions) should be regarded as a set of boundary-setting practices. These practices create a social distance between the professional and the client, which is particularly important for those engaged in outreach work. Citing HIV workers as an example, Malin suggests that although they did not see themselves as members of a profession *per se*, professionalism is nonetheless an integral part of their attitude to their work. It provides a respectable image, communicates the importance of the work and guides relationships with service users. Being professional is more about establishing emotional boundaries and gaining clients trust within that context. A key aspect of professionalism for HIV workers is not bringing personal issues into work and also the projection of a professional image in pubs and clubs, where there is a lack of physical boundaries between them and their clients. This group of outreach workers received no

training on the meaning of professionalism but, developed an understanding of what being professional meant in the process of carrying out their work in the community (Malin, 2000).

Housing managers, like care workers, are engaged in face-to-face work with tenants. As social housing has become more residualised housing managers find themselves dealing with complex problems, which are at the boundaries of housing management and social work (Franklin, 2000). As the majority of housing managers are not members of the CIH, or any other professional body, they therefore do not receive any formal guidance on professional conduct beyond what their employing organisation requires. Further, many would not regard the CIH as the arbiter of all that is professional (Pearl, 1997). Also a lot of housing work is conducted on a one-to-one basis in people's own homes, where the formal physical boundaries of an office or interview room are noticeably absent.

Franklin and Clapham (1997) look at the way housing management is socially constructed and reproduced by housing managers and the way in which boundaries between housing management and social work are defined and maintained. They argue that it is important to look at how an occupational group defines its boundaries, in order to understand its occupational culture and ethos and its links to broader social and economic constraints (Franklin and Clapham, 1997). In common with several authors reviewed above, they stress the necessity to link the ways the workers involved construct their occupational role in terms of this wider framework. The marginalisation of social housing tenants in recent years has brought the issue of social exclusion[7] to the forefront in the housing arena (Franklin, 2000). Housing managers are being increasingly pressurised by the CIH and the government to take on a welfare role (Franklin, 2000), as well as to meet business targets based on specified outcomes (Walker, 2000; Jacobs and Manzi, 2000; Goodlad, 1998). One recent study of housing management revealed a unanimous view that the social welfare side of the job was increasing, but that there was equally concern about how far this should extend, and whether housing management should be about *'absolutely everything'* (Franklin, 2000). Some of the literature on welfare bureaucracies is relevant to housing management

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[7] Social exclusion has been defined in terms of a lack of civic, economic, social and interpersonal
(continued on next page)

because it provides a context in which to analyse the *'bureaucratic reality within which they operate'* (Saugeres, 2000).

3.5 – Professionalism and bureaucracy

Bureaucrats providing public services are described as *'street-level bureaucrats'* by Lipsky (1980), who delineate the relationship between them, their organisations and the state. On the one hand, street-level bureaucrats have a certain amount of discretion as regards the decisions they make in individual cases, but on the other hand, they are restrained by rules and regulations imposed by policy elites (Saugeres, 1999). According to Lipsky (1980) these bureaucrats impose on people their own version of reality within which people become clients to be categorised in a pre-defined way. He contends that most people enter public employment with at least some commitment to public service but this is quickly undermined. A lack of resources combined with large caseloads or extensive demands for public housing act to defeat their aspiration as service workers. Housing managers categorise their clients and their needs according to pre-defined criteria, with little interest shown in the *'total life'* of the person, *i.e.* their biographical life and social situation (Allen, 1998). Hence the need for *'people-slotting'* behaviour by which the attributes of the applicant are routinized in such a way as to match the resources available for allocation (Malpass and Means, 1993). Similarly, in housing this has, in the past, manifested itself in a reliance on racial stereotypes, which has directly affected allocations to ethnic minorities (Henderson and Karn, 1987). However, bottom-up theorists have been criticised for concentrating on the micro level of power and failing to analyse the wider social structure in which they operate (Hanff, 1993).

Adler and Asquith (1991) point to the need to look at the relationship between the macro and micro levels of power structures in welfare services. They highlight the interdependence between welfare and capital in reproducing the ideologies and institutions on which the capitalist state is based. More specifically, it is through the possession of knowledge and power that professionals, through their discretion, perpetuate particular versions of social reality and exercise social control. Professionals

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integration (Franklin, 2000: 909).

with their welfare ideologies play a crucial role in maintaining and reproducing constructions of social reality by which particular forms of social order are sustained (Saugeres,1999).

Laffin (1986) suggests that professionalism has become a distinctive feature of the modern welfare state because much of the front line service provision is not susceptible to routinized control. Discretion is, therefore, a part of the policy implementation process. It is the need to control or regulate the resulting exercises of discretion that gives substance to the professionalisation of work within organisations. Professionalism in this context, becomes both a form of social control by management and a source of autonomy from service-users.

The works of Strauss (1978), Hanff (1993), and Clapham, Franklin and Saugeres (2000) all emphasise the need to conduct qualitative research in order to understand how professionals make decisions, interact with clients and other workers and how they view their work. There is some common ground in the theories on welfare bureaucracies and professionalism in the literature reviewed heretofore. Not all the issues highlighted apply to housing management and related housing work, as welfare professions and street-level bureaucracies are very different in terms of their work, status, organisation and position in the policy network. However, there are similarities, in that they are granted a certain amount of discretion and autonomy by the state to provide public services and are subject to a structural and organisational framework which defines, to a large extent, their occupational role. Therefore, some of the approaches developed in this literature can be applied to housing management.

3.6 – Professionalism in housing management

It seems paradoxical that as the professions are being threatened by various trends of organisational, economic and political change, the notion of professionalism has gained currency (Fournier, 1999). For instance, over 90% of local government officers in a survey of four authorities placed professionalism as among the most important characteristics of an officer (Laffin and Entwistle, 1999). Professionalism holds some currency for the majority of those in the housing profession, although it is not usually synonymous with the possession of professional qualifications, hence the low rate of CIH membership.

Pearl, (1993) elaborates on some of the dimensions of *'housing professionalism'*, in a

survey of housing organisations that asked whether there were any skills and knowledge which set housing management apart from other profession. Just over half (61.7%) of the respondents answered in the affirmative, whilst a sizeable minority (41%) rejected the concept altogether. Where there was a belief that housing management was different; the reasons given included: altruism and commitment to social housing (Pearl, 1993: 22). There was an underlying belief that the breadth of knowledge and the range of skills, both interpersonal and managerial, created a unique role, not replicated in other professions (Pearl, 1993: 22). Some respondents focused on the negative aspects of professionalism. Those who rejected the idea of further professionalism (37%) had concerns about the possible loss of empathy and spontaneity with consumers. The following statement encapsulated the anti-professionalism stance:

'too often, a profession gives cult or club status, and does little to regulate and control standards in the field' (Pearl, 1993: 23).

The CIH considers itself in the vanguard of defining both the scope of the housing task and what constitutes housing professionalism. Its Housing Management Standards Manual places considerable emphasis on having detailed written policies and procedures to cover all areas of housing work. The primary purpose of these policies and procedures is to ensure that staff discretion is kept to a minimum so that tenants receive a standard service whoever is dealing with them (Clapham, Franklin and Saugeres, 2000). Professionalism is constructed around the minimisation of individual discretion and is directly at odds with the active promotion of autonomy found in most professional groups.

"In housing management, professionalism is not defined in terms of the possession and application of professional knowledge... but rather in terms of the ability to act in an 'objective and rational' and 'fair and sensitive' way" (Clapham, *et al.* 2000: 73).

Therefore this implies that housing officers can and should act professionally by gathering all the information of a case and then applying the correct procedure. This of course assumes that the bureaucratically defined reality is the one true reality. The concept of an objective reality is effectively challenged by social constructionism, as referred to earlier in the chapter.

3.6.1 – Joining the professionals?

For most people, professionalism is essentially about the delivery of consistently high standards in terms of expertise, judgement and probity and most believe a professional approach to be beneficial in housing management. However, what is clear is that perceptions of what constitutes *'acting professionally'* vary significantly (Pearl, 1997: 210). The major issue is the growing divergence in understanding of what exactly the term *'professional'* should mean. Whilst there is a common acceptance by housing staff of the need to achieve high standards at all times, there is a divergence in approach on how to ensure this is achieved. For some, it bears little relationship to affiliation to a professional body, stemming instead from individual core values and personal commitment. Others see professional bodies such as the CIH as being vital to maintain standards and sponsor good practice (Pearl, 1997). The interpretation of professionalism has been thrown into the melting pot by the increasing diversification of the housing sector. The growth of private sector involvement in providing housing management services will inevitably produce greater diversity in the profile of housing staff. It is unlikely that such housing organisations will carry out housing management in the same way as their social housing predecessors. Increasing diversification in the provision of public services necessitates a rethink on the role of professional relationships and what Stoker (1993) calls the *'new governance'* (Stoker, 1993:7-8). Professionals are now called upon to have more dynamic knowledge and skills and an external focus centred more on the client than the profession (Stoker, 1993). For housing professionals, who have tended in the past to see professionalism in terms of bureaucratic resource management, this poses a significant challenge.

3.7 – Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated some of the problems that housing management has encountered in its quest for professional status, using the literature on the professions. It advances reasons why the traits approach has little value in assessing professionalism in housing management. The professional project has some, albeit limited usefulness in providing an explanatory framework for the failure of housing management to achieve fully-fledged professional status. For this reason, emerging perspectives, which view professionalism as a set of workplace practices are considered to be much more productive. Social constructionism is just one theoretical approach that influenced the

analysis of professionalism in this research.

The next chapter will provide a full exposition of the epistemology and methodology for the thesis.

Chapter 4 — Methodology

4.1 – Aims and objectives

4.1.1 – Aim

The aim is to analyse the nature of professionalism in housing management.

4.1.2 – Objectives

1. To provide an account of the development, changes and main sociological features of the housing profession from 1916 to the present.
2. To examine professionalism in housing management, in particular identity and knowledge, using the sociology of the professions.
3. To explore how professional boundaries are constructed in housing management.
4. To examine the challenges to professionalism in the housing field.

4.2 – Introduction to methodology

A great deal of work has gone into costing and defining the housing management function (Walker, 2000; Pearl, 1997; Kemp and Williams, 1991). However, little is known about how housing managers construct their professional roles in a rapidly changing environment and how this impacts on every day housing practice. There is a dearth of literature on the professional identity of housing managers, to which this study addressed itself. This research aimed to explore professionalism in housing management, in terms of identity, knowledge, boundaries and accountability.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, it will address the influences that affected the design of the study, presenting the advantages and disadvantages associated with interview methodology and participant observation. Second, it will examine the sampling decisions, access arrangements and the procedures involved in the collection of data. Third, this will be followed by a discussion of the data analysis framework (*i.e.* grounded theory) used. Each section is linked with a commentary outlining the decision-making process at each stage. The aim is to provide a rationale at each juncture, in order to establish a record of the research and to provide the basis for either

replication or elaboration.

4.3 – Influences and contributions

This research is influenced by three existing traditions within sociology. Ethnomethodology informs the epistemological approach of the study. Ethnography informs the research strategy. Grounded theory guides the coding and analysis of data. The sociology of the professions is used as a substantive literature to illuminate fieldwork data and provide new directions for the evolution of grounded theory in housing management.

4.3.1 – Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology is a distinct sociological perspective which studies the methods people use to make sense of the world around them. Hence:

> *'Ethnomethodologists look for processes by which people make sense of their interactions and the institutions through which they live'* (Feldman, 1995)

The perspective suggests that sociologists' methods of making sense of society are no different and by no means superior to those of 'ordinary people'. In ethnomethodology the role of the sociologist is to describe and explain how people create and perpetuate the everyday worlds they inhabit. It takes as a starting point Garfinkel's influential 1967 text, that contains insights which are useful in illuminating the world of work. Garfinkel suggests that what keeps society working is nothing more than a collection of everyday realities and shared meaning:

> *'Familiar scenes of every day activities, treated by members (of society) as the 'natural facts of life', are massive facts of the members' daily existence both as a real world and the product of activities in a real world. They furnish the 'fix', and 'this is it' to which the waking state returns one, and are the points of departure and return for every modification of the world of daily life'* (Garfinkel, 1967: 35)

This perspective focuses on how we maintain a *'world in common'* through shared *'realities'*. People who work in social housing management are intimately involved in developing and maintaining a world in common. The process approach is particularly pertinent to this research when we reflect on Becker *et al.*'s (1961) assertion that there is no such thing as a true profession. There are only occupations commonly regarded as

professions and those which are not. It is therefore much more productive to study the actual processes by which individuals claim or appropriate the description *'professional'* to describe themselves.

Accounts of work and the meanings attached to such terms as *'being professional'* are not independent of the situations in which they occur (Garfinkel, 1967: 10-11). This focuses attention on what members make of the situations within which the accounts are articulated. The account itself, for example, given in a research interview, is a crucial part of the occasion. People do not consciously think about the set of mainly routine tasks that constitute work. When they do, they are actively making sense of it, understanding it, but most importantly rationalising it. It is a concern with these rationalisations which has led to the ethnomethodogical influence upon this research. A set of research methods which can capture reflexivity was therefore necessary for generating research data, developing theory and presenting meaningful conclusions to contribute towards the production of housing knowledge. Garfinkel proposes that actions-in-context be analysed by *'doing, recognising and using ethnographies'* (1967: 10).

4.3.2 – Ethnography

Ethnography is a descriptive and analytical technique and perspective. It is the art and science of describing a group or culture (Fetterman, 1998). It deals with the processes operating within groups rather than between groups. As a set of methods,

'it bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1).

Others suggest that ethnography is not a method, but a perspective (of the subject) and a strategy (of the researcher). It is best described by Giddens as follows:

> *'...a particular piece of social research is ethnographic [if] it is written with the aim of describing a given cultural milieu to others who are unfamiliar with it'* (Giddens, 1984: 285, quoted in Franklin, 1990: 93).

The ethnographic perspective seemed particularly appropriate to understanding the meanings and backgrounds of housing managers and to make sense of them as a particular occupational grouping. The ethnographic influence guided the decision to use a qualitative research method, *i.e.* semi-structured interviews, and the recording of oral

data in verbatim transcripts. A semi-structured interview is defined as an interview where:

'The researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered...but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply'. (Bryman, 2004: 314).

4.3.3 – Interviews – as ethnography

Interviewing has been regarded as the most common form of data gathering which may be used for a variety of purposes and assumes several different forms (Yin, 1994). It was anticipated that qualitative interviews would provide a rich source of information about the motives, beliefs and actions of the housing managers. For an ethnographer, the interview is viewed as a tool to aid the reflexivity of the interviewees (Garfinkel, 1967). Non-directive interviewing in which the interviewee is allowed to talk at length in his or her own terms facilitates the open expression of the respondents. An ethnographic perspective on the interviews addresses questions such as *process (e.g.* how you *become* a housing manager), understandings and grounded experience, pertinent to the study. Ethnography also recognises the importance of context (the *world* of housing management) and gives an insight into how respondents weigh things up in forming their views (Barbour, 2001). For many people, work is something they do without much reflection. Hence, the ethnographic research focus on the mundane world of work is designed to bring to the surface what is taken for granted.

More specifically, the ethnographic nature of the interviews was designed to facilitate an opening up of the world(s) of housing as constructed by the managers themselves. The underlying assumptions and motivations of the housing managers are brought to the fore. An analysis of the interviews was intended not only to extract people's motivations and reasons for actions (May, 1993) but also to situate these rationales in context, within the social setting of work.

Although interviews can be close in form to conversations, they are never simply conversations because the researcher has a research agenda, and must therefore retain some control over the interview situation (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The interviews in this research were semi-structured, using a general interview guide, with key themes explored at each interview. However, the interview guide used was much less specific than a structured interview schedule and referred to the brief list of topics to be covered (Byrman, 2004). Given the ethnographic nature of the research it was

important to allow for some flexibility within the interview format. Although the interviews were guided by an inventory of issues which were to be covered this was not rigidly adhered to, and the open-ended tone of the interviews allowed for reflection and discussion, guided by what the interviewees thought was relevant to the concept of professionalism. As the interviews progressed these topics were supplemented and amended in the light of what had been deemed important by the interviewees themselves. Therefore, lines of thought identified by the interviewees in the initial interviews were incorporated into the interview guide and presented to the remaining interviewees for their consideration (Bryman, 2004).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) make an important distinction between standardised and reflexive interviewing. Ethnographers do not usually decide beforehand the exact questions they want to ask, and do not ask each interviewee exactly the same questions, though they will usually enter the interview with a list of issues to be covered (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 152). A more flexible approach is taken where the interviewer will move between non-directive and more directive questions in the course of any one interview, depending on the function of the questioning, interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, and how the interview is progressing.

No presumption was made beforehand as to what professionalism might mean to the housing managers in the sample. Rather, interview questions were designed as triggers to stimulate the interviewee into talking about *their* concepts of professionalism in housing management. At the beginning of the interview, each interviewee was asked to describe their housing management career to date. The interview guide covered motivation (or lack of it) to go into housing, the role and purpose of housing management, identification with other housing officers, interactions with tenants, knowledge, their interpretation of professionalism, public image, attitudes towards the CIH, housing education and their future in housing management. There was no effort made to stick to any particular pattern in asking the questions and it was an exploratory style of interview. Respondents were asked to read the transcript of their interview (also an ethnographic approach to the research) and were invited to make further comments. Two interviewees responded and made further comments after reading their transcripts.

A common, but misplaced criticism is that there is often little of sociological significance in ethnographies because research is based on such small numbers of cases

or observations. Franklin (1990) reminds us however that it is not the task of the ethnographer to generate research with validity for a wider universe, but to construct an internally coherent case study which discovers the variables which have an explanatory value in specific cultural contexts (Franklin, 1990: 108). In other words, in ethnography the goal is sociological, rather than statistical, validity.

4.4 – Data Gathering

The empirical research in the thesis consisted of two related elements: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. A total of forty-nine interviews were conducted with housing managers in a diverse range of jobs and at all levels of seniority, as outlined in detail in section 4.5.2. Interviews were arranged for approximately an hour. The actual duration was agreed by both parties to be the point at which the account was deemed sufficiently full (Patton, 1990). In two cases the interviews lasted for an hour and forty-five minutes, but on average interviews lasted around one hour. The interviews took place in a variety of locations and it was left up to the interviewee to suggest whether the interview would take place at their place of work or not. Interviewees were asked, at the end of each interview, if there was anything else relevant that they thought had not been covered. This provided the space for more discussion and on several occasions the tape recorder was turned on a second time to recommence the interview.

Participant observation was carried out with four housing managers over a two month period, in November and December, 2002. This consisted of 'shadowing' two rent arrears housing managers and two estate managers, in all aspects of their day-to-day work for a period of approximately three days each. I accompanied them on estate visits, home visits, tenant interviews at the housing office and also observed court rent arrears hearings, on two separate occasions.

4.5 – Sampling

4.5.1 – Sample strategy

In relation to sample size in qualitative research designs, Patton (1990) asserts that

'the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative enquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size' (Patton, 1990: 63).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also address the issue of sample size in qualitative research and conclude that the limit of sample size is determined by data redundancy:

'If the purpose is to maximise information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 72).

Patton (1990) informs us that all sampling decisions, with regard to both sample size and sampling strategy, are dependent upon and underpinned by previously identified units of analysis. The appropriate sampling strategy is one which generates adequate and relevant information of sufficient quality (Lin, 1976). The two key questions framing the decisions around the sample strategy in this research were: what to sample and who to sample?

4.5.2 – The sampling frame

As the research is interested in a broad spectrum of views on housing professionalism the entire housing profession is a potential sampling frame. However, for the purpose of empirically investigating how housing professionalism is constructed and reproduced it is useful to think in terms of housing management as an *'network'* (Callon, cited in Sibeon, 1991). Housing management's network includes the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), National Federation of Housing Associations (NFHA), relevant government departments such as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, relevant universities and tenants' organisations, as well as housing managers. In this study the principal sampling strategy was guided by the wish to interview rank and file housing managers. More specifically, it was guided by the aim of getting a balanced selection of housing managers at all levels of management. As the research sought to explore the views of rank and file housing managers rather than get an 'official' view from the CIH or any other body, the fact that the sampling frame was exclusively made up of housing managers was appropriate.

Delimiting the sample to the North West of England was justified on the grounds that

what was of primary importance was positions in housing management (rather than geographical location) and that this spectrum was adequately represented within this boundary. In any case, following the ethnographic nature of the research, the goal is internal coherence (as stated in page 62) rather than an attempt at the representativeness of the sample.

How housing professionals' boundaries are constructed in relation to other professionals and service users is crucial to the research. This may vary depending on the amount of contact with other professionals and tenants on a day-to-day basis. How much of the work is directly involved with hands-on housing management, and how much is housing-related (housing advice, and regeneration work, for example) may also be significant. Therefore, the sample was grouped into 3 main categories: *core* housing managers, *strategic* housing managers and *peripheral* housing managers. Core housing managers were defined as those working in the day-to-day management of housing estates, which entails a high degree of contact with tenants. Estate managers, voids officers, rent arrears and housing allocations officers are all in this category. Strategic housing managers are defined as those whose work involves housing management at the strategic level and whose contact with tenants was limited. Area housing managers, research managers and performance managers make up a large proportion of this group. Peripheral housing managers are defined as those whose work is housing-related, but is not estate management, and who have variable levels of contact with tenants. Regeneration managers, housing advisors and supported housing managers are all in this category.

It was considered possible that external factors, such as education and training, may impinge on constructions of professionalism in housing management, as it has done in other professions (Smith, 1992:40; Coffey and Atkinson, 1994: 26). Membership of the CIH and the possession of housing qualifications are indicators of exposure to the academic and wider environment. On this basis, the sample included a small number of CIH members and those studying for a housing qualification.

It was decided that the following target numbers of interviews would accurately reflect the breadth of the housing network:

Housing Managers	Target number of interviews	Actual number of interviews
Core	25	28
Strategic	18	14
Peripheral	10	7

This brings the total of interviews completed to 49

The thesis set out to explore how people working in a variety of housing management positions constructed their working lives and what the meaning of 'being professional' was within this context. The compilation of the sampling frame was begun by renewing contacts with a number of housing managers in the North West of England known to the researcher, (including some of those in the organisation where the researcher had carried out an MSc work placement) and requesting interviews by telephone. From there, snowball sampling was used as initial respondents were asked to recommend others that might agree to be interviewed. Requests for interviews with housing managers were also made by correspondence and e-mail and at the North West CIH Conference (held in Bolton, March, 2000).

The sample was drawn from a range of five organisations. The first three were (a) a local authority, selected as a large, municipal housing provider, located twelve miles from Manchester, with a decentralised estate management system and an ageing stock portfolio. b) a housing association, with a wide range of properties throughout the north west, from inner-city Manchester to the more affluent Cheshire and c) a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) organisation in Cheshire. The other two organisations were (d) a medium sized housing association with a portfolio of properties throughout the North West of England, with a significant amount of supported housing stock and (e) a small LSVT in Manchester, which had transferred from the local authority just prior to the start of the research.

Interviews were carried out between May 2000 and March 2002. The interviewing process ceased when it was felt that interviews were not yielding any new insights or information, *i.e.* when the data was saturated. It was decided at this point that some of the issues that had been highlighted in the interviews, especially those to do with professional boundaries and interactions with tenants, needed to be further explored.

The interviews had served a useful purpose in bringing to the fore how housing managers viewed themselves in relation to their occupational identity, professional orientation and how they conducted themselves in their day-to-day working lives.

A recurring theme emerging from the interview data was how they viewed their professionalism in terms of establishing a good relationship with tenants and the emotional strategies involved in doing this. Housing managers frequently referred to their efforts to convey the impression that they were empathetic and could relate to the predicaments the tenants found themselves in. In the literature on the professions this is what is referred to as boundary (un)making practices (Malin, 2000). Guided by the emerging analysis from the interview data, it became more important to explore the extent to which the boundary (un)making practices alluded to in the interviews were rhetoric or reality. Other aspects of their professionalism such as following policies and procedures, the use of discretion and being accountable were also areas the researcher thought benefit from further exploration and analysis. It was thought that a combination of different sources of data would be productive, as noted in the following comment:

> *'there are distinct advantages in combining participant observation with interviews; in particular, the data from each can be used to illuminate the other'* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

For these reasons it was decided to embark upon a 2-month period of participant observation with a number of housing managers. As the researcher had already highlighted the areas of particular interest through a close analysis of the interview data, she felt able to go into the participant observation phase of the fieldwork well-equipped to pick out the more salient points of what might be observed. The following section will outline the issues that were considered before making that decision, the advantages and disadvantages of participant observation and the anticipated rewards of using this particular research method.

4.6 – Participant observation

Participant observation may be defined as:

> *'The process in which an investigator establishes a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting, for the purposes of developing a scientific understanding of that association'* (May, 1993:114).

Participant observation as a form of ethnography leads to an empathetic understanding of a social scene (May, 1993). The methods of participant observation, which on the surface are nothing more than just looking, listening, generally experiencing and writing it all down, are in one sense relatively straight forward to carry out. Spending some time immersed in the social scene of housing would add new depth and a *'live'* context to the material already gathered in the interviews. The aim was to observe and experience interactions with housing managers that could be used to build up theoretical understanding of how housing managers constructed themselves in their day-to-day work environments. However, the researcher was aware that it was going to be difficult to observe ordinary social scenes and record them in meticulous detail. As Becker (1970) comments:

> *'It takes a tremendous effort of will and imagination to stop seeing things that are conventionally 'there' to be seen...it is like pulling teeth to get...[researchers]...to see or write anything beyond what 'everyone' knows'* (Becker [1970], cited in Coffey, 1999:21).

The research was interested in understanding how housing managers *conduct themselves* in their world of work, what being professional means to them and how this manifests itself. Housing managers (in the sample) had related in the interviews that their professionalism was about their attitudes, knowledge, boundaries, (other) working practices, accountability and knowledge. Therefore this pointed to a focus on the *meanings* given to these themes, such as cultural norms and people's definitions of professionalism in the work place. It was also intended to focus on practices of interaction with tenants and other users, as this was emerging as one of the main arenas of professionalism in housing. For this reason, encounters with tenants would be a rich source of data as to how housing managers *proceed* with doing the job and *being professional* in practice.

As the researcher had already worked in the housing field, and knew some of the housing managers in the sample, there were a number of issues that had to be

considered. The following section will outline general themes to do with locating oneself as a researcher in the field, and present issues pertinent to the particular research situation.

4.7 – Locating the self

The conventional wisdom of ethnography has been premised on the duality of observer and observed. The role of the ethnographer is to adopt the role of *'naive stranger'* (Coffey, 1999: 19). The denial of the self is seen as an epistimological necessity and the researcher is depicted as a stranger or as marginal. I was guided by Coffey's (1990) assertion that it is not only desirable, but also impossible to deny that the personal and the social are integral to the research process. Much attention in ethnography is paid to the tension between strangeness and over-familiarity, often to the detriment of a proper consideration of fieldwork relationships and negotiations. I wanted to locate myself in the research process, in order to make sense of my role and my interactions in the field.

I was not an objective being, separate from the research process, and recognised that it would be epistemological blindness to conduct the research as if I did not have any effect on what I was observing, and what I was observing did not have any effect on me. Rather, my subjectivity, and the role it plays in the research process, is acknowledged. As Pheonix highlights:

> *'Researchers are not objective observers of social contexts and interactions, but are members of society who have specific social locations and who bring together particular orientations to bear on the research'* (Pheonix, 1991 p91)

4.7.1 – Personal biography

My perspective was that the course of the fieldwork I was embarking on would be shaped by who I was at the outset. In my case *'strangeness'* would be hard to establish or maintain because I was familiar with the social housing sector. My particular interest in this research comes from the fact that I worked in housing management for a period of time, just prior to embarking on the PhD. This was during the study for an MSc degree in Housing Practice. Having completed a year's study of the more academic and esoteric aspects of housing management I was employed for a year (as part of a placement), in a local authority housing department. I worked as an estate officer, for which I was given very little training. This caused me to reflect on how the academic

world of Housing Studies could be assimilated into the real world of front-line housing management. It was an excellent insight into an occupation and its culture (admittedly from the restricted view of just one particular housing organisation, in a particular time and place). As my tenure there was relatively brief and because I was a total newcomer to that kind of work, I did not at any stage feel like a fully integrated member of that occupation.

However, in the twelve months I was there I built up very good working relationships with the majority of my colleagues at the housing department. I was accepted as one of the team, with only the occasional light-hearted remark such as *'when are you going to get a proper job and stop being a student?'* to mark me out from my fellow workers. Whilst I was there I had made a conscious effort to fit in and not to come across as a student. I worked closely on a housing team with three other housing officers. Sharing an unexpected and tragic event, the suicide of one of these three housing officers, six months into my placement, made me feel that I really was one of the team. When it came to deciding about the participant observation, I reflected on issues of detachment and over-familiarity.

4.7.2 – The inter-personal field

I was inclined to believe that my familiarity with the housing world would be a positive advantage. In one organisation (now a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer [LSVT] organisation) I was re-visiting ex-colleagues, amongst others. In the other four organisations, although not known to them beyond a brief introduction during the interview process, I still regarded my past experience in housing management as an advantage. I could observe from the strategic position of knowing the basics of the housing management task. Familiar with the jargon, I could communicate in the vernacular of housing managers and not be thrown by acronyms, such as Notices of Seeking Possession (N.O.S.P's) or Former Tenant Arrears (F.T.A.'s). However, this was accompanied by the difficulty of how to render a familiar world strange. There are some well-documented examples of over-identification during fieldwork and the consequent way this can lead to a skewed perspective of a cultural setting. Dire warnings from social research textbooks alerted me to the dangers and I was left in no doubt that my biggest challenge would be to *'strenuously avoid feeling at home'* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993: 115). This is considered vital to maintaining a

critical and analytical perspective on what is being observed (Marshall and Rossman, 1999), therefore I knew I needed to stand back a little to counter the familiarity I already had.

I also wanted to acknowledge the reciprocity of the research situation. Housing officers are busy people, who often work in stressful situations. They were taking time out to answer my questions and allow me to observe them in their work. Hence, they were giving something of themselves, with no evident benefit and because of this I wanted to reciprocate in some way. Whilst conducting interviews I hoped that at times I did this by giving them an opportunity to off-load and by being a good listener.

As I did not know the majority of interviewees I was keen to impress upon them that I understood their circumstances. I made a point of letting them know early on in the introductions that I had been a housing officer. I am not sure if they would have been less open with me if I had not, but it appeared to provide a springboard to conversation at the beginning of the interview. I also engaged in a little *'impression management'* (Goffman, 1971: 203) by presenting myself in what I thought was an appropriate *'housing manager'* way. This consisted of wearing suits or trousers and shirts, with low-heeled shoes and little jewellery. There was an unwritten code in the housing department where I had worked, that you should look presentable but not too dressed-up, especially when visiting tenants in their own homes. I therefore followed that piece of in-house practice-wisdom (Sibeon, 1991) when undertaking fieldwork. Standing at a bus stop after one of the interviews I was drawn into conversation with a young man and his female companion. His first question to me was; *'are you a copper?'*, followed by the comment *'well, if you're not a copper, you're a social worker'*. So perhaps my clothes were too sensible after all!

4.7.3 – Ethics and ethnographic fieldwork

In the interview phase of the research I was confident that all participants had freely given their consent to take part in the interviews, even where requests had come via their line managers. However, when it came to considering participant observation, where some time would be spent observing housing managers on estate visits, and in people's homes, the ethics and power relations involved were thrown sharply into focus. As Coffey (1999) remarks:

'There are ethical dimensions to the relationships we have to the people studied, observed and interviewed' (Coffey, 1999: 74)

Informed consent is not just an academic or an intellectual concept (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). I would be accompanying housing managers into tenant's homes with no prior warning or prior consent given, as housing managers do not usually plan their visits well in advance. Entering someone's home, by any standards, is an invasion of their privacy. I would ask the tenants for their permission to my being there and stress the confidentiality of the encounter, but given that there is an inherent power imbalance between the housing manager and the tenant I had to question the legitimacy of consent in those circumstances. I also thought about how I would introduce myself to the tenants. I would be a little disingenuous if I did not make it clear that I was conducting research, yet I did not want to alienate them by making them feel that they were being unduly scrutinised. In a situation like a rent arrears interview, which is likely to be a tense encounter, I did not want to add to their stress and make them feel uncomfortable. I decided that the least intimidating explanation would be that I was a PhD student studying housing management and that I was observing the housing manager for the day. This is a true statement without giving the full explanation for the purpose of my being there.

The other ethical aspect I was concerned with was the dissemination of the findings, which is a consideration, not just for ethnography, but for all social research (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). One of the aspects of professionalism explored in the research was the existence of what I have called *'institutionalised illegalities'* in housing organisations. This is defined as instances where an organisation's policies and procedures are illegal and where the consequent practice of housing management is illegal. Examples that I came across in the interviews are written up in Part Two of the thesis as a crucial part of the boundaries negotiated between being professional and following accepted practice and procedure. In view of the confidential nature of the interviews I would not be comfortable with disseminating those particular findings further.

4.7.4 – Field notes

Most research methodologies tend to reflect on the practical (access) and personal (self) aspects of fieldwork as outlined in the previous section. Another concern I had was of a

more epistimological nature, to do with my subjective relationship (as a researcher) with the practice I was studying. I tried to bear in mind my relationship with the practice of housing management when reading the transcripts or field notes I had collected in the interview phase, and in the next phase of participant observation. Bourdieu (1977) problematises the act of observing social life at one remove:

> *'in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, he [the social scientist] constitutes practical activity as an object of observation and analysis, a representation'* (Bourdieu, 1977, quoted in Jenkins, 2003: 48).

In effect, Bourdieu asks the researcher to take not just 'one step back' in order to objectify the social world under analysis, but 'two steps back' in being aware of the distortion that is an inevitable consequence of the act of objectification (Jenkins, 2003: 50). In the case of this research the act of constituting the social world of housing management as an object of analysis (through a process of detachment and distancing) was likely to produce a distortion of the very social reality that I sought to understand. Following Bourdieu (in Jenkins, 2003), I was also mindful of my position, not only as observer, but as a competent actor in my own right. Just as housing managers were not wholly guided by the cultural rules and norms that surround them, nor were they *'comprehensibly knowledgeable'* (Jenkins, 2003) about all aspects of their social world. Crucially, neither was I. This awareness allowed me to bring my own experience into the analysis and attempt to metaphorically step into the shoes of the housing managers I was studying, while still maintaining an objectivity in the process. I was motivated to keep a fieldwork diary by the importance that Bourdieu places on being reflexive about the research methods, codes and thematic analysis that I was undertaking. The diary helped me distinguish between what was actually present in the data and what was an artifact of the research process itself (Jenkins, 2003).

I started a fieldwork diary in time for the North West Housing Conference in 2002 and have kept it up until the research was completed. I wrote up observations after each interview, which helped me to recall their circumstances, as I went along. Observations were recorded in an A4 hardback note pad, with a margin on the left-hand side. In these margins I made memos to myself about issues and events I wanted to look at further, made notes on theoretical issues I thought were relevant, and highlighted particular observations. When I was directly quoting someone I used the double quotation mark ",

and used the single quotation mark ', if it was a paraphrase. I recorded the physical environment, the time, the circumstances, how I was feeling, whom I was with, the event under observation, the language used, interactions and other aspects of the scene.

I found that the act of writing up the diary at the end of the day prompted reflections that might otherwise have gone unrecorded. For example, this was particularly useful when at the CIH housing conferences 2002 and 2003. I had been grappling with the concept of a collective identity and how it was constructed in housing management. Having a diary enabled me to record the minutiae of the conference proceedings which was a rich source of data of how housing managers presented themselves, both aesthetically, in discourse and in interaction with one another. This provided a context for collective identity in the research interviews and provided a 'check and balance' for what I as a researcher imagined that identity to be, what the interviewees were articulating in the interviews and what was observed at first hand.

The diary was most useful when I recorded rare moments of insight and links to theoretical issues, rather than simply the mundane details of the fieldwork, although the former type of diary entry was more the exception than the rule. I struggled to keep the diary going on a continual basis and hence, it was not as comprehensive as I would have wished. With the benefit of hindsight I realised just how useful mental notes to myself (which later led to fresh insights) were. In this sense, keeping a fieldwork diary was a learning experience, and is now an integral part of my research 'armoury'.

4.8 – Analysis of interviews

As was specified earlier (p.70) all the interviews (with the exception of one, due to a technical fault) were recorded. Most interviewees seemed to be unaware of the tape recorder once the interview commenced. Indeed, on more than one occasion, I was also unaware of the tape recorder and allowed the tape to run out before switching it over to the other side! The process of analysis began during the fieldwork, when the themes that were emerging out of the interviews were pursued in greater depth in later interviews.

Taping the interviews meant that I could concentrate on what was being said, hence giving more opportunities for active listening and engagement with the person. Notes

on non-verbal cues and gestures were also made which added to the depth of the interview. Because of the ethnographic nature of the study it was considered vital that the interviews recorded what the housing managers were saying in *their own words.* Data gathered from note-taking, where the researcher might be tempted to substitute her own words for those of the person being interviewed would be less suitable for this type of study.

4.8.1 – Coding

It was necessary at this point to employ some techniques which could be used to analyse the raw data. The approach to the coding was guided by Weston *et al.* (2001: 382) who assert that:

> *'Coding is not what happens before analysis, but constitutes an important part of the analysis'.*

Conventional methods of achieving this involve the coding of open-ended replies in order to permit comparison (May, 1993). Coding has been defined as:

> *'the general term for conceptualizing data; thus, coding includes raising questions and giving provisional answers (hypotheses) about categories and about their relations. A code is the term for any product of this analysis (whether a category or a relation among two or more categories).* (Strauss 1987: 20)

Content analysis of the data can be determined inductively, deductively, or by some combination of both (Strauss, 1987). Attride-Stirling (2001:385) indicates that an inductive approach begins with the researchers immersing themselves in the data in order to identify themes. In a deductive approach researchers use some categories suggested by a theoretical perspective and the data provides a means for assessing a hypothesis. The research began with the perspective that a combination of an inductive and deductive approach would be the most realistic approach to the data, each informing the other, but with the emphasis on the inductive nature of the study. The development of inductive categories allows the researcher to link or *ground* these categories to the data from which they derive (Berg, 1989). It is reasonable to assume that general insights and questions about what was being studied would be partially induced from the literature already read and my previous experience in the field (outlined in the previous section). It was this interplay of experience, inductive (with the emphasis on

the inductive) and deductive reasoning that led to a decision to deploy the *grounded theory* approach to the analysis. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967):

> *'To generate theory...we suggest as the best approach an initial, systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research. Then one can be relatively sure that the theory will fit the work. And since categories are discovered by examination of the data, laymen involved in the area to which the theory applies will usually be able to understand it, while sociologists who work in other areas will recognise an understandable theory linked with the data of a given area'* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 2-3).

Although adhering as closely as possible to the principles of grounded theory, this researcher does not claim that these principles were wholly applied. I did conduct an extensive literature review and was aware of the themes and issues that might emerge from any exploration of the concepts surrounding professionalism, both in housing management and in other substantive areas of work. Reviewing the literature from several theoretical perspectives I began looking for concepts that would illuminate a deeper understanding of how professionalism was constructed in housing management. I could not therefore assert that all explanations or theories are derived from the data set itself rather than from this researcher's prior theoretical knowledge.

I had an *a priori* knowledge of housing management before I started the fieldwork. However, once in the field, I was open-minded as to where the interviews might lead, as already indicated in the section on the research interviews. I also did not have a fixed theoretical mind-set or hypothesis that informed the collection of the data. As the process of analysis began I moved more into the grounded approach as I discovered codes working through the transcripts. Bryman and Burgess have criticised the use of grounded theory as *'an approving bumper sticker'* invoked to confer academic respectability rather than a helpful description of the strategy used in analysis (cited in Barbour, 2001: 1115). My aim was to avoid this criticism by presenting a step-by-step account of how theoretical insights have been built up. An explanation of the coding rationale is outlined in the next section.

4.8.2 – Generating the codes

The transcripts were analysed using the *'constant comparative method'* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This involved *'open'* coding each interview. A first reading produced a

list of broad areas relating to professionalism:

- Motivation
- Knowledge
- Working practices
- Boundaries
- Presentation/Image
- Gender
- Professionalisation
- Identity
- Housing *'field'*
- Service ethic
- Commitment
- Accountability

This procedure is described as an unrestricted coding of the data (Berg, 1989). During the second reading of the transcripts I began to pursue several themes that were explicit in the research questions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967): How is professionalism in housing management constituted? What are the indicators for *being* professional? How does this professionalism *manifest* itself? What is the process of *becoming* a professional housing manager?

Using the research questions as a frame of reference I read through each transcript and noted when the housing managers made references to how they viewed housing professionalism, either on a personal level or at the level of practice. *Becoming* and *being* professional were the first two categories of the coding system. Using these categories, I then read through selections of the housing managers' transcripts, noting themes that emerged more than twice in relation to each of these two categories (Weston *et al.* 2001). I developed a draft lexicon to help demarcate each theme by identifying words that tended to be markers (or indicators) of *becoming* or *being* professional.

Four codes were tentatively identified. Two codes related to becoming professional:

Identity and *motivation*; two codes related to being professional: *boundaries* and *knowledge*. I systematically compared indicator to indicator, looking for similarities, differences and degrees of consistency of meaning between indicators. This generated an underlying pattern from which emerged four related meanings of housing professionalism. These codes and their properties were:

1. *Identity* [motivation, commitment, routes into housing, career]
2. *Knowledge* [common sense, on-the-job, oral, contextual, portfolio]
3. *Boundary (un)making* [service ethos, initiative, emotional labour, distance, engagement]
4. *Accountability* [visibility, formal, informal, collective, personal, managerial].

In addition, two sub-codes for *boundaries* emerged as I recognised that these were constructed in different ways as regards *service* and *emotions*. Two sub-codes for *knowledge* also emerged as I identified the *nature* and *acquisition* of knowledge as key factors. In addition there were two sub-codes for *accountability*; *to managers* and *to tenants*. As the coding proceeded and different ideas emerged from reading the transcripts I continually made notes, which I kept in a separate folder. These theoretical memos to myself ranged from one-line questions to half paragraphs about various aspects of the data and were later related to the emerging concepts. I created a rolling document on the computer which consisted of each individual transcript coded page by page (see **Appendix 1** for a sample page). The codes from each interview transcript were then transferred into a *'coding frame'*. This enabled the empirical consistency of the codes – and the concepts emerging from them – to be judged across interviews. The coding frame consisted of each of the codes and sub-codes, with their exact location in each of the individual transcripts, denoted by interview number and page number. This was augmented by quotations from the relevant interviews using the 'cut' and 'paste' facility on the computer (see **Appendix 2** for a sample section of the coding frame). A relationship between the codes and the concepts that had already been generated during the fieldwork was established. Where necessary concepts were amended or the codes were used to generate new concepts.

The beginnings of properties of the codes were therefore established and I then continued to make comparisons of further indicators to the codes until I was certain that each of the codes were verified and saturated. Where professionalism as a concept was

problematised by interviewees this was also explored and coded for.

Working through the codes it became increasingly clear that there were two types of housing managers that were distinguishable from one another in a number of ways. I have categorised these two types of housing managers as *'Pragmatists'* and *'Pro-activists'* respectively. Pragmatists are defined as those who view housing management as *'just a job'*. They are all situated in front-line housing management and acquire all the necessary skills and knowledge from their immediate work environment. Pro-activists, by contrast, aspire to having a career in housing management and have a more keenly developed sense of themselves as housing professionals. They are situated in both front-line *and* more senior positions and are distinguished from pragmatists by their attitudes to their day-to-day work, their careers and the external environment. A detailed description of these pragmatists and pro-activists is outlined in **Appendix 3** (p. 239).

Many of the themes that were spoken about by the interviewees were predictable and already present in the literature on professionalism (see Chapter 2). Hence, it was not surprising when some interviewees referred to professionalism as the desire to present a competent image, or a wish to keep a distance between themselves and their tenants. I was surprised however, by the theme of emotional engagement and management of boundaries because little I had read in the housing management literature had referred to these issues. What was also entirely unexpected was the emphasis housing managers put on their own pursuit of knowledge and their sense of accountability to tenants and other users of the housing service. Melia (1997) claims that most researchers use a pragmatic variant of grounded theory, whereby they can achieve added value by identifying new themes from the data alongside those that could have been anticipated from the outset (cited in Barbour, 2001: 4). I hope to *'add value'* by exploring these two different sorts of insights and their potential to illuminate professionalism in housing management in the presentation of my findings.

The form of part two of the thesis – chapters 5 - 9

Part two of the thesis, which consists of the main findings and the conclusions are presented in Chapters Five to Nine. These chapters reflect the empirical strength of the findings. The chapter outlines are as follows:

***Chapter 5**: The nature of professional identity in housing management.*

The sociological literature states that a cohesive, collective identity is a pre-requisite for development of a profession (Larson, 1977; Freidson, 1994). Hence, this chapter sets out to explore what the collective identity in housing management might consist of. The findings suggests that there is a lack of a collective identity due in the main to the marginality of housing management as an occupation. The question is then posed: given that housing management does not have a socially legitimated or discrete public identity, how and why do people become housing managers? This prompted a focus on the process of *becoming* a housing manager and routes into housing management. The identity of housing managers, their motivations, attitudes and aspirations are clearly set out.

***Chapter 6**: Professionalism as knowledge in housing management: its origin, nature and use.*

This chapter departs from conventional views of *'stock of knowledge'* and the taken for-granted assumption that housing management is about *'common sense'*. It explores knowledge as it is actually acquired, used and experienced by housing managers. Several key findings are reported. Knowledge is identified as a key component of housing managers' professionalism, but in a way that represents an individualised response to the demands of managers and tenants. The chapter presents an exposition of what this knowledge is and how it is deployed. First, knowledge is fragmented and diverse. Second a *'learning orientation'* is valued over and above formal qualifications and validity is given to both informal and formal pathways to knowledge. Pragmatists mainly use experiential 'know how' in the performance of their work and have an information-seeking approach to knowledge and training. Their quest for knowledge is confined to within the organisation. Pro-activists adopt a more cosmopolitan approach to knowledge. They acquire a broader base of knowledge, above and beyond what is necessary to carry out their occupational role. They are characterised by their

individualised approach to acquiring knowledge and training.

Chapter 7: *Professionalism as the management of boundaries: service and emotions*

This chapter focuses on how housing managers negotiate the competing demands of providing a housing service within an increasingly regulated management culture. More specifically, it establishes that the management of service and emotional boundaries (Malin, 2000) are at the heart of professionalism for the housing managers in this research. It analyses how ideas about professionalism are propagated through on-going reflexive practice and are manifested through the management of boundaries in three areas: organisational, embodied, and emotional boundaries. This highlights how understandings of appropriate professional behaviour guide practice on an every-day level, in housing management, which is not traditionally categorised as a profession.

Chapter 8*: Professionalism as accountability*

This chapter reports on accountability as another distinct manifestation of professionalism in housing management. Key findings relating to the performance culture are presented. First, I set out to assert that the weakly held collective professional identity of housing practitioners has proved fertile ground for the adoption of a managerial ethos within the housing sector, albeit with varying degrees of modification and resistance. This is substantiated using a key finding from the data, *i.e.* accountability as a component of professionalism. Second, processes of accountability are used to sustain a positive sense of self that is itself largely in keeping with (and constitutive of) a professional identity.

Chapter 9*: Conclusions and directions for future research*

This chapter reports on the findings and theoretical conclusions of the thesis. It analyses the contribution the research makes to the sociology of the professions. Professionalism in housing management is constructed as a mediated, individualised *'project of the self'*. It challenges the notion that housing managers' professionalism is undermined by the managerial agenda, in the light of the changing forms of reflexive practice presented in chapters 5-8. It critically reviews the research process and reflects on the research methodology and methods used; alternative research methods and the temporal scale and pace of the interview transcription process are analysed. Directions for future research are suggested as the *'professional project of the self' potentially* has wider applications, in other professions, worthy of theoretical and empirical analysis.

Finally, the meaning of professionalism, as articulated by the managers in this thesis, is set within a broad policy context and the implications for the practice of housing management are considered.

Chapter 5 — Identity - becoming a housing manager

5.1 – Introduction

The last chapter outlined the epistemology and methodology for the research. It clearly set out the aims and objectives of the thesis by posing a series of research questions to be addressed (Chapter 4: p. 75). Three traditions within sociology; ethnomethodology, ethnography and grounded theory are identified as key influences and their contributions to the thesis are duly charted. The rationale for the methodology and research methods used were fully explicated along with an exposition of the advantages and disadvantages of the methods used. This was followed by a reflective consideration of the self in the research field. A detailed account of the data analysis framework was presented. Two types of housing managers; pragmatists and pro-activists were identified.

This chapter addresses itself to an important theme within the literature of the professions, *i.e.* identity. It takes five steps to do this. First, it explores the extent to which housing management can be characterised as having a collective identity, considered vital to the professional project (Larson, 1977). Freidson (1994) suggests that the existence of a shared professional identity is a key criterion for arguing that a profession exists at all. Hence, it analyses the extent (if at all) to which interviewees accounts revealed shared understandings of housing management as a profession and the barriers to a collective identity. Second, it analyses the process of *becoming* a housing professional within the context of an underdeveloped collective identity. To this end, it outlines the routes into housing management in terms of individual biographies and motivations. Third, having established how and why people become housing managers it goes on to explore the formation of identities within housing management. Specifically it looks at identities within the work context and in relation to the general public, other professionals and tenants. It suggests that housing managers are keen to counter-act the negative image of housing management by presenting themselves as caring, yet effective professionals. Fourth, the extent to which their identity incorporates the professional community of housing managers is explored by focusing on attitudes towards the CIH and towards housing managers in other organisations. It emerges that housing managers have ambivalent attitudes towards the

profession which is matched by individualised and aspirational career ambitions. This is substantiated by an expose of the career trajectories that *'make up'* (du Gay, 1996) the housing managers in the study.

5.2 – Barriers to a collective identity

The thesis began by problematising the proposition that housing management is a profession because it does not exhibit many of the traits traditionally associated with achieving professional status. The uncertain status of housing management was borne out by the housing managers in this study. They had different opinions as to whether their work could be viewed as a job, a career, an occupation or a profession, which was a function of both their professional aspirations (or lack of them) and their identification with housing management itself. Some housing managers had made little or no investment towards a career in housing management and unequivocally viewed it as *'just a job'*. Conversely, those who did view housing management as a profession had invested the most in terms of career paths and education. However, even for the latter group, their conviction of housing management's professional standing was relatively weak. They expressed this uncertainty as to its professional credentials in terms of an on-going process of professionalisation, *i.e.* housing management was perpetually in the process of *becoming* a profession. It had, they felt, made great progress towards professionalisation and several managers cited the existence of the CIH, academic housing courses and professional qualifications as evidence that it was being taken more seriously as a profession. However, these assertions were invariably tempered by a recognition that the lack of a clear cut role for housing management was a major obstacle to its advancement as a profession.

In most professions there is a clearly understood basic professional role – teacher, doctor, engineer, or social worker. That role is usually defined by, and requires, specialised knowledge and skill. There is no clearly identified professional role in housing, although some would argue that the housing estate manager has become such a role (Stewart, 1988). These housing managers had a range of views as to whom or what was denoted by the term *'housing manager'*. They were unclear as to who is denoted appropriately by the term mainly because the diversity of the types of work designated by the nomenclature *'housing manager'* varied enormously. Celia, an estate manager, reflects on the comparison between teaching, a profession with a clearly defined

occupational role and housing management, which was broad and diverse, in the following words:

'It's [housing management] just so broad. And I don't, you know because I kind of feel like with teaching it's very clear, it's very obvious what they do and what a teacher is. If someone's a geography teacher, then they teach geography and it's a narrow spectrum. I just think that housing is so broad and not only as a housing officer working here, but you go to a different organisation and a housing officer will be doing something totally different to what I'm doing (Interview 16).[8]

This diversity in a housing manager's role was reflected at an organisational level and the range of different jobs and levels of seniority that came under the general category of *'housing management'*. In one organisation the term encompassed *'senior housing officers'* who were neighbourhood wardens on the lower levels of management. In another organisation this title was restricted to estate managers, who by definition were middle management.

There was also a lack of agreement amongst the housing managers in this study as to where the boundaries of housing management lie. Some had a very broad interpretation of housing management which incorporated *'estate managers'*, *'housing assistants'*, *'regeneration managers'*, *'housing surveyors'*, *'neighbourhood wardens'* and *'rent officers'*. For these managers all of those connected with the provision of the housing service, however peripheral to the core estate management task, was thought to make up the profession of housing management. Others had a more proscribed view and restricted their definition to *'estate managers* and *'rent officers'*, *i.e.* those directly involved with the estate housing management task. Despite their differing positions, the interviewees testify to one certain agreement; the term *'housing manager'* is at best a contested one, which substantiates Franklin and Clapham's (1997) findings. This would suggest that the very ambiguous nature of the housing management task itself is the first stumbling block to the cultivation of a collective identity.

Another barrier to a collective identity was the perceived invisibility of housing management itself. These housing managers struggled to explain to others exactly what

[8] All quotations are followed by the interview number in brackets. A full list of the interviews conducted is set out in Appendix 5.

it was that they did for a living. They were acutely aware of how marginal housing management was to the majority of the public, who had no direct need or experience of social housing:

'My children will come home and say 'oh so and so was talking about their mum and dad, they're a nurse' and I think well I work in housing and so does my husband, but it's like, 'what's housing'. There's nothing. I mean, they're probably the only children in their school that will know what a housing manager does, or even what housing is. And surely that's where it all starts, having a public image, and there isn't one and yet, isn't housing the most important thing' (Interview 42)

Their marginality as a profession was attributed by this manager to the fact that social housing was only relevant to twenty per cent of the population (*i.e.* the percentage of the population who occupy that tenure), and that consequently, the vast majority of people had no awareness or knowledge of housing management as an occupation, let alone a profession. Pauline, the housing manager in the above statement expresses a sense of frustration at the general lack of knowledge about what social housing *is* and what a housing manager *does*. She correctly identifies having a socially legitimated public identity as a major asset for any aspiring profession. These housing managers perceived the public image of housing managers as being that of little more than *'clerks'*, *'bureaucrats'* and *'pen pushers'*. For some housing managers family and acquaintances reinforced this negative image. Daniel, a senior housing manager, articulates how housing management is viewed by others and the mismatch between these perceptions and the reality of the job:

'My father-in-law thinks it's a cushy number, again because his view of councils was that they were a cushy number. You could finish early, didn't have to do too much, you know, push paper around, got no responsibility at all and he's never really come to terms with the fact that that isn't what it's about. Ehm...I think people have a different impression now of the housing trust. I know people who think about what it is recognise that it is a big business. But, as to what people really think about us as a profession is very difficult to tell. I think it's probably not quite what it used to be. I mean if it was portrayed on television or you saw a documentary on television about housing then it was just another shirt and tie, local government office, pushing paper and drinking tea and that really upset me because it wasn't like that at all' (Interview 10).

There is a flavour here of how this housing manager struggles to reconcile his own experiences of what housing management is, with what he perceive others think that housing management is. Daniel does not want housing management to be seen as being a *'cushy number'* with *'no responsibility'* because for him that is far from the reality of being a manager of what is effectively a *'big business'* (Interview 10). A common refrain was that housing management was a complex and skilled occupation which required a diverse breadth of attributes and skills. Yet, this view was not shared by the vast majority of people that housing managers came in contact both within, and outside of, their immediate working environment. One housing manager expressed the not uncommon view that housing management was categorised as

> *'Just a customer service job, the same as if it was telebanking or something similar'* (Interview 4)

Housing managers have definite ideas as to where they sit in the hierarchy of the professions and how they are perceived by *'significant others'* (Cooley, 1983). This feeling of being in a much misunderstood and devalued occupation was compounded by the experiences these housing managers had in their interactions with other professionals, most notably social workers, expressed graphically in the following two statements:

> *'Oh we are the 'Sunday Sport' [a tabloid newspaper]. That's how they regard us. We're 'Kwik Save'. We're 'Netto' [economy supermarkets]. Wherever you want to put us, we're at the bottom. Especially with the likes of social workers'* (Interview 9)

> *'Social workers tend to think that we're right wing and only interested in getting the rents in and that we're uncaring, I think. Solicitors tend to think that we only care about ourselves or keeping the housing going, and that we don't really care about our customers'* (Interview 39)

Social workers are a group of professionals that are near to the boundaries of housing management and therefore, not surprisingly, loom large in housing managers' accounts of how they are seen by other professionals. Bearing in mind that helping people was one of their primary motivations, the fact that they were seen as uncaring was especially galling for these housing managers.

However, their claims to professionalism were also questioned for more structural

reasons. There was a general consensus that other professionals were particularly sceptical about housing managers claims to professional competence and status because they (housing managers) were thought to lack the credentials that were obligatory for other professions. The evidence for the low regard they were held in by social workers and other professionals such as surveyors was clear in their interactions with them. Housing managers felt consistently either put down or ignored at meetings and felt that their opinions were rarely deferred to or taken on board. Indeed, their presence at inter-agency meetings was often interpreted as a token gesture as they were not taken seriously by others around the table. There is a palpable sense of injustice felt at being treated in such low regard, in the following account of a housing manager, in attendance at a training course which was shared with social workers:

> *'I went on this training course recently – it must have been organised by Social Services – it was to do with dealing with difficult customers. Most of the people involved were housing benefits, social workers. A comment was made – not prompted by anything I said – something like; 'Social workers are professionals'. The implication was that housing people weren't professionals. I would actually count myself as great a professional, if not more so, than some social workers, but it is that kind of attitude – 'We're [social workers] professionals and then there's housing'. Housing is very much seen as second class'* (Interview 1)

There was unanimous agreement as to the lack of status and lack of respect from most other professionals. This lack of status and a lack of respect that is owed to housing management (but is not forthcoming) pervades the identity of housing managers.

Housing managers also took their cues as to their collective status from the users of the housing service itself, *i.e.* tenants. There was almost unanimous agreement that there had been a decline in the amount of power that housing managers have in relation to tenants and that they [housing managers] could no longer command the respect that was shown to them in the not so distant past. The tenants use of bad language in service interactions was seen as a sign that housing managers were not given the respect that was extended to other professionals, such as health professionals and bankers, for example:

'You get an awful lot of abuse and bad language thrown at you. You don't get that in banks. I've worked in a bank and the customers don't start effing and blinding at you. Well, they do here and I think that speaks volumes for the way we're seen by the tenants and other people. If they had any regard for us they wouldn't speak to us like that would they? They wouldn't talk to a doctor or a nurse like that. It's the way people see us, ...quite low down the social scale I'd say' (Interview 20)*.

The negative image of social housing tenants themselves was also thought to reflect in a negative way on the collective image of housing managers and was hence perceived as another stumbling block to a socially legitimated identity. The stigma attached to social housing was thought to have a knock-on effect on the way others viewed those who worked in social housing:

'I mean over the last sort of, 10 maybe 15 years the image of housing has had a dramatic impact on the housing profession. You're looking at a rundown council estates or RSL[9] *and you know whenever, I always find it fascinating that whenever they talk on television, like you know, nobody ever says "Joe Bloggs or Jill Jones; owner occupier from this estate" But they're always very quick to say, particularly in bad news stories, you know murders, "council tenant" yah. And you think well why? Why mention it. And that has a knock-on effect for the image of housing as a profession, definitely'* (Interview 14)

'I think people think about blocks of council flats and they automatically think, bad payers, that's the image of social housing. Most people think 'why are you doing that as a career when you were working in Cultural Services...giving guided tours around the museum and you didn't have to have contact with people [social housing tenants] like that. Even my husband has difficulty in understanding it because he thinks that council tenants are the lowest of the low and I imagine he's not on his own there. So it makes you think what does that say about the people who work in housing? (Interview 31)

There was a general feeling that as social housing became more residualised in terms of its customer base housing management as a profession was easier to marginalise. This made the task of asserting claims to becoming a profession all the more difficult.

To summarise thus far, housing management struggles to establish a coherent and cohesive collective identity for both exogenous and endogenous reasons. These include: the ambiguous nature of the housing task itself, the marginality and invisibility of the profession and the perceived lack of respect and status afforded to housing managers from other professionals and the users of the housing service itself. It would appear that housing management suffers from a negative public image and is thwarted at every turn from building up a collective identity.

5.3 – Becoming housing managers: routes into housing management for pragmatists and pro-activists

The fact that housing management lacks a coherent collective identity prompts two pertinent questions. Given that housing management does not have a socially legitimated or discrete public identity, how and why do people become social housing managers?

The housing managers in this study, like those in other occupations, come to housing management with a variety of biographical resources, resulting in an array of *'vocabularies of motive'* (Mills, 1940: 909). However, there were clear patterns which exerted a strong influence on the subsequent development and maintenance of occupational identity.

5.3.1 – Pragmatists' routes into housing management

The first group, in common with many housing managers, had *'fallen into'* housing management. These housing managers are termed *'pragmatists'* as they invest their identities primarily in the practical aspects of the job and the security permanent employment can bring them, rather than any notion of a collective identity.

There was no sense that any of these managers had actually set out to work in housing management. On the contrary, they most commonly ascribed their employment in housing as being a combination of convenience and serendipity. Of this group, some had originally worked in junior clerical posts, such as housing repairs and housing enquiries before progressing on to jobs in estate management. Reasons given for

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[9] Registered Social Landlord

working in housing management were of a mainly practical nature, such as:

> *'It wasn't a conscious decision to go into housing. I applied for the job as a means of getting back into the workforce after being at home for 15 years'* (Interview 27)*[10]

> *'I thought that it sounded quite interesting and you didn't need any qualifications'* (Interview 26)*

They view housing management as *'just a job'* and as a means to acquire financial resources, not as an end in itself.

> *'I think you've got to have a commitment to working in housing to make it a career. It is just a job, at the end of the day, for me personally it is. If I sort of went up the ladder, it would be more a pay incentive rather than a commitment to wanting to do this'* (Interview 7)*

However, this is not a negative appraisal because they invest a considerable amount of their identity in being able to do that job well. They generally see themselves as broad-minded and down-to-earth people who function well in a demanding front-line service role. Pragmatists regard their successful management of the day-to-day environment in housing management as the most valid measure of their competence and do not aspire to anything more challenging. They are mainly concerned with what is practical in any given situation rather than with theories or ideals. For them, housing management is demanding, but requires common sense rather than knowledge, a theme explored further in Chapter 6. Their view that housing is *'just a job'* informs their attitudes to the concept of housing as a profession.

They do not subscribe to the notion that housing management is a profession and hence labour less from the mismatch of an identity that is not socially validated, than is the case for other housing managers. In other words a pragmatists' view of housing management concurs with what they perceive most people think of it in any case – *i.e.* a skilled occupation in the same category as, for example, social services or housing benefit workers.

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[10] An asterix (*) indicates that the interviewee is a pragmatist. See Appendix 5 for the Interview Table.

5.3.2 – Pro-activists' routes into housing management

The second group, the *'pro-activists'* (some of whom also had a serendipitous route into housing) by contrast, attach definite ideas and aspirations to housing management as a career and/or profession. They are distinguished from the pragmatists in that they view housing management as a personally worthwhile and socially useful career. Their vocabularies of motives ranged from a primary commitment to: a diverse and people-oriented career, public service and *social* housing to housing *management*, regardless of whether it was private or public sector.

Several pro-activists were attracted to housing management by the idea that it seemed to be first and foremost an interesting and diverse *'people'* job. Some were graduates who had pursued degrees that had *'qualified them to do nothing'* and they were looking to get into a career rather than just a job. Terence is a pro-activist who was keen to get on a career path in the general area of management and it *'just so happened'* to be in housing. He did not really begin to identify with housing until he had been in the job for a couple of years. He describes his initial motivation in these words:

> *'I didn't really get a good feel for housing in the early stages. I just saw the job of trainee manager and I thought well that's a career path I can get on. It took a while before I could really say that I was committed to housing as such.'*
> (Interview 23)

Peter describes a not untypical beginning to a housing career in the following trajectory:

> *'A brief outline? Right, it starts way back in 1979 I worked, having left college, and having gone to the probation service, I was managing a resource centre, which was effectively a place for recidivists to go instead of the public houses. Well it was as well as. And as I was doing that work I was also involved in some of the resettlement schemes, although they weren't called resettlement schemes then. And I got interested in housing and applied for a housing post in Manchester, as an estate management officer and was duly appointed in September 1979'* (Interview 3).

However arbitrary their routes into housing management these pro-activists developed an identification with housing management over time, that was characterised by one housing manager as:

'Catching the housing bug' (Interview 33)

Unlike pragmatists, who without exception had adventitious routes into housing management, some pro-activists actually choose housing management as a career. A significant number of pro-activists cited *'helping people'* as a primary motivation for embarking upon a career in housing management. Some of them had come from other jobs and disciplines such as science, surveying and banking which were seen as technical and boring and which did not offer the same level of contact with people. These were managers who already had a professional background in another discipline but were choosing housing management because it offered more opportunities for individual self-fulfilment. They consciously made a choice to move into housing because it was more in keeping with their aspirations to engage in worthwhile employment. Pro-activists generally are not interested in having *'just a job'*, even one that pays well. Hence, several managers mentioned how they had not even considered jobs in retail management or insurance for example, because these occupations were not seen as people oriented. They were looking for something that would provide them with individual satisfaction as well as economic security and enhancement. In contrast to pragmatists, they had high expectations for job satisfaction and fulfilment. They were also attracted by the diversity of housing roles which presented opportunities for career advancement in several different directions.

Some pro-activists who chose to go into housing management came from family backgrounds which were rooted in the idea of public service. A small, but significant number of them had had family members who worked in housing management or related areas, such as town planning, surveying or architecture. It was instilled in them from an early age that jobs in the public service were a viable career option for them and that local government was a socially validated employer. They had a positive image of housing management prior to embarking upon it as a career and chose it as one of a number of public service options because service to the public was seen as an end in itself. The fact that they had family role models was a significant motivating factor because they were socialised into thinking that it was possible to carve out a professional career in the public service. Hence, the positive image of housing management and related occupations that they were imbued with from their families served to counterbalance the more negative collective image that they encountered from the general public.

Other pro-activists saw housing management as a vehicle for social change and were politically motivated to embark on a housing career. This motive is linked to conceptions of an occupational self that sees work as a means to promote wider social values (Allen Collinson, 2004) such as equity and equality. For Alice, a Supported Services Area Manager, her commitment to *social* housing was her primary motivation in going into housing management:

> *'I was interested in social housing 'cos I do see it as an essential resource for people and I'm quite committed to its provision and it is a very vulnerable resource because you know, there aren't that many people now in social housing, ... The job may not have a great image outside of housing, but if you're doing the best you can, being professional... then I think that's pretty good'* (Interview 34).

Similarly, Cheryl, a senior manager, saw her work as a means to express her identity as an activist committed to social and political change. She was politicised by the *'selfishness'* (Interview 20) of the Thatcher years and wanted to be part of the local government challenge to conservative public policies through working for a local authority, decentralised housing service.

> *'I thought of myself as a housing officer working on the decentralisation crusade, bringing services out to the local communities.'*
>
> *'Why was that?'*
>
> *'I identified very, very strongly, incredibly strongly, with... in terms of what the council was trying to do, in terms of the politics of the city and where the city was in terms of being anti-Thatcherite... and trying to fight against the move away from people not being part of society and that the individual was more important than the community and that we don't have to care about the people who are at the bottom end of society. I identified very, very much with what the council was trying to do'* (Interview 13)

A couple of pro-activists were tenants who acquired their initial experience in housing as *'amateurs'* doing voluntary work for their own housing organisations. They were already seriously committed by virtue of their unpaid work and were socialised into the world of social housing, but as tenants. This motivated them to get on the *'inside'* of housing management because they saw that they had a lot to offer, both in terms of their

user (of the housing service) perspectives and the experiential skills they had built up from being a tenant activist and housing co-op secretary, respectively. Mary and Jane, respectively, describe how they were motivated to make their voluntary work into a career:

> *'Well, I was working voluntarily in housing as a tenant activist and I was putting all the time in and was making a decent contribution to the housing board. I decided somebody better start paying me for doing it'* (Interview 5).
>
> *'Pretty soon after I started living in a co-op property I got involved just because it's the thing to do, you know. I can contribute in some way. You know, I started off collecting rents for them 'cos the person collecting rents wasn't doing a particularly good job. They had a lot of arrears. I started off doing that and sorting out their arrears policy, getting some kind of procedure going. They were all very informal and hit and miss, whether or not something was done. So I started doing that and then starting doing the secretary's job... My husband died last year and I returned to work this year in the civil service. Then I thought I'd try to get a job in housing rather than go back to my old job and I found it dead easy so that's how I ended up working here'* (Interview 4).

It has been demonstrated thus far that housing managers come to housing management with a variety of motivations and through a number of different routes. The research found that this exerts some influence on how they relate to housing management as an occupation subsequently and the identity work they engage in when presenting their work to others. Therefore, the next section will explicate how their backgrounds, beliefs and the context in which they work shape their work identity and professional aspirations.

5.4 – Identity in context

Becker (1970) underlined the importance of occupational titles in conveying the characteristics of an occupation to a wider audience. How that audience receives and responds to that title reflects back to the bearers and is taken on board by them, thereby exerting an influence on their occupational identity (Becker, 1970). The housing

managers in the study revealed a complex narrative in relation to their *self-ascribed* occupational titles that was a reflection of how they saw themselves and how they wanted to be seen by others. It was also a function of the perceived invisibility of housing management to *'outsiders'.*

It was apparent from the way they described their jobs to friends, acquaintances and strangers that there was a considerable amount of identity work being carried out. When asked what they did for a living housing managers deployed a number of different approaches to answering what on the surface should be quite a straight-forward question. Pragmatists who saw housing management as *'just a job'* and hence who were not trying to convey a particular image usually gave one line replies such as:

'I'm a local government officer' (Interview 40)*

'I work for the council on the housing side' (Interview 26)* or

'I work for a housing association' (Interview 45)*

Also, they were conscious of the negative image of housing, and chose not to go into too much detail about their work, as a consequence of any anticipated criticism:

I try not to go into it too much 'cos there is this thing about it, isn't there? Like evictions, they think of evicting people straight away (Interview 32)*

Pro-activists, who saw themselves as having a career, or as members of a profession (however tenuous they felt that claim to be) were also conscious of the less than desirable image of housing, but were more motivated to present a positive image because they invested more in their work identity. Unlike the pragmatists who kept their description of their jobs to a minimum, pro-activists went to some lengths to give a favourable account of themselves and their work. Their job self-descriptions were also shaped by what they considered to be the proper purpose and meaning of social housing. Hence, they gave more elaborate explanations, not of the job itself but how they chose to interpret that job. For example, those managers whose identities were intimately bound up with *social* housing management gave priority to these aspects in their explanations of their work. These managers were concerned with presenting an image of housing management as a social service because it was this aspect of the job that they valued most. Rather than describing the day-to day practicalities of what housing management involved they concentrated instead on conveying a particular image of the wider role of housing management. They frequently referred to housing

management as a type of *'social work'* and characterised their main role as that of helping people. Aware that a less favourable interpretation of their work could be made, they strenuously avoided giving any details of what their jobs actually entailed, as did the pragmatists. However, unlike pragmatists who usually left it at that, pro-activists coped with any anticipated negative reactions by going into detail about the welfare side of their work.

> *'I say I'm a housing officer. And then they look at me blankly... Then I sort of say that I help people in housing need. I help people once they're in their homes because people automatically think 'oh that's lettings isn't it, you give people properties'. And I say 'well no, that's not what I do. I help people to settle in to their homes'* (Interview 16)

Celia, the above housing officer, feels that her job title alone does nothing to convey what her job is. She is keen to stress that for her housing management is about helping people so she makes it clear that it entails much more than allocating properties.

These pro-activists attempt to present themselves as kind and caring because they perceive that what little public profile they do have constructs them as being hard edged and tough:

> *'I think...that they think we're quite tough. My son's friends, when I was working at the estate office, said, 'your Mum works in Sunnyside, she must be tough'. And I think he felt I was. And I think they think we're quite hard edged. I don't think they see that part of your role is almost like social worker, at times, because the people we deal with are vulnerable'* (Interview 42)

The *'impression management'* (Goffman, 1971) that went on, *i.e.* focusing on the welfare aspects of housing, also involved down-playing the less attractive part of their job, *i.e.* rent collection and arrears management. Chloe, a housing officer, admits that she does not usually talk about rent arrears as being part of her job because it is associated with taking people to court and evicting people and presents the possibility of a *'spoilt identity'* (Goffman, 1971). She prefers instead to talk about all the other aspects of estate management, which she perceives as being more interesting, and which present her in a much more favourable light:

'When I was generic people always seemed quite interested really in the different aspects of the job. Now I'm specialised in rent arrears I don't like to talk about it (laugh), they say "oh do you take people to court" and I don't know, I don't talk about it. I just talk about my previous estate management job, when I was doing everything'. (Interview 44)

Some pro-activists who identified more with the management of social housing privileged the management aspects of their job, as articulated by Cheryl, a director of a housing association:

'I say I'm a director of housing, which means that I'm responsible for 4 to 5000 people, providing housing services for people living in rented and leasehold properties across Northern England. They still don't necessarily know what HAs do and they think maybe I'm some sort of estate agent, which ironically enough, is an area we're moving into anyway, so I suppose it's not completely wide of the mark. And if they haven't glazed over, and are actually genuinely interested, then I go into "I manage people, who are managing people who are managing people who are managing stock, providing repair services and rent services and trying to develop the services, and try and delight the customers and keep on moving that service along and ahead of their expectations. And a lot of the time it feels like we're just working really hard to try and keep up with their expectations and how they're changing. At that point, they definitely have glazed over and it's time to talk about Madonna. (laugh), to show them I am an interesting person, rather than a housing bore' (Interview 13).

Cheryl invests a considerable amount of her identity in being an effective and dynamic manager within an organisation that is providing a responsive service to customers. She is quite content to be mistaken for *'some sort of estate agent'* (Interview 13) because this fits in with her self-image as a manager in a *'cutting edge'* organisation, which is adopting some of the best practices from the private sector.

Derek, a performance manager, espouses an even more enthusiastic conversion to the managerial agenda when he describes himself as working, not for a housing organisation, but a housing *company*. He puts some distance between himself and housing management preferring to articulate an image tied up with performance management, where the housing aspects are almost incidental. His job self-description

is notable for its focus on the detail of performance management, an area he clearly aspires to do well in because it opens a number of employment possibilities beyond the housing sector. Again, he positions himself as having a considerable amount of institutional power:

'I say I work for a housing company. If they say "what do you mean?", what I then say, is what I do, rather than what the company does. I say that my job is no longer to collect rents. My job is now, to check that the organisation is doing the things that it says that it's going to do. So if we prepare a corporate plan and we say we're going to do 6 things, my job is to tell our Board whether we're doing those six things or not, and my job is to tell the Board how well we're doing those six things' (Interview 30).

Some pro-activists are unambiguous converts to the managerial agenda. Their self-images are at least partially influenced by previous occupational experiences and these subjectivities shape their managerial outlook. Gareth, an area manager, positions himself as being a major force for innovation throughout his housing career. He uses his previous experience as a trade union representative in his attempts to shape and re-inscribe the housing sector in a fashion that ties in with his self-image as an innovator in the management field:

'I was able to bring all my trade union beliefs into management. You know, the way I'd always wanted to be managed was then a challenge for me to manage this organisation, in that way. And that's always fascinated me. That's one of the big things, is...one of my beliefs is actually organisational development rather than housing or anything else' (Interview 12).

He constructs an exciting vision for a cutting edge housing service and links his own identity as a forward-looking public servant to the rhetoric of continual managerial improvement. Gerard, another manager, also articulates a managerial identity (Alexadiou, 2001). His ideas about professionalism are shaped by his construction of what a professional housing service is, *i.e.* customer focused and *'value for money'*:

'I mean, going through this Best Value review for me, suits my moral thinking down to the ground, kind of thing' (Interview 47).

These pro-activists draw on a managerial ideology to present themselves as forward looking and ambitious and they feel relatively powerful within this context. The

managerial agenda is central to their identity and they view it as a personal project to be part of a housing service that is *'fit for the 21st century'* in the words of one manager (Interview 9). Some pro-activists are focused on pushing managerial change through their respective organisations and a central part of their identity is bound up with the success of this project. They are confident in their skills and see themselves as having significant resources with which to bring about this organisational change.

Both pragmatists and pro-activists can be characterised as striving to develop and maintain a work identity that is socially validated by peers, managers and tenants. Pragmatists want to be seen as competent housing managers by their colleagues and tenants and do not have any grand designs for their work beyond that. Pro-activists also want to be seen as competent housing managers. However, they also want to be taken seriously as professionals, by other professionals, and the general public. In many professions this kind of aspiration is often expressed through membership of a professional organisation and an affiliation to a community of fellow practitioners (Dingwall and Lewis, 1983). Hence, the following section seeks to ascertain the extent (if any) to which their construction of themselves as housing professionals incorporates an identification with the *'professional community'* of housing managers.

5.5 – Professional identity

Pragmatists do not perceive housing management as a collective professional entity because as already stated they do not have any aspirations for it to be anything other than an interesting job, which is borne out by their attitudes to housing managers in other organisations and towards the CIH. Their primary work identity is embedded in the much smaller occupational world of their organisation and the colleagues they work with on a day-to-day basis. Pragmatists struggle to make a connection between themselves and housing managers in other organisations, even those they might regard as having similar jobs, because their identity is very much rooted in the immediacy of their day-to-day working situations and not with a professional community, further afield. They look for validation from their managers and tenants, not from an external body such as the CIH, an organisation which simply has no relevance for them because they do not aspire to progressing in the housing field. Consequently, their attendance at CIH conferences, for example, is a non-issue because in the words of one pragmatist:

'It doesn't seem appropriate for someone as lowly as me. I wouldn't see the point of going' (Interview 31)*.

The identity *'options'* available to them focus on their position in the housing hierarchy, as they experience it in the junior levels of housing management, and the contribution they make to their particular *'patch'*. Hence, their identity is not informed by any imagined contributions to the wider community, or to the professional world of housing management which is for others who do want to get ahead in housing, but is not for them.

By contrast, pro-activists do pay lip service to the idea of a housing profession and professional membership of the CIH for a variety of reasons. Professional membership of a professional organisation is a powerful draw for pro-activists because they are conscious of the power both material and symbolic, that professional status can bring. They also want to position themselves as professionals in their area of expertise and therefore perceive housing qualifications as a necessary pre-requisite to professional status. In this regard, they are much more vulnerable to the power and kudos that accrue from having credentials and being members of professional bodies than pragmatists. They take their cues as to the value of having professional and other qualifications from a wide variety of sources, ranging from their managers and other professionals to less esoteric sources such as job advertisements. There was a general perception that membership of a professional body was taken as a sign of status by the wider public. The CIH, as the major professional body, is consequently a major referent.

However, their identification with the CIH is largely influenced by their own experiences of it and the attitudes others in housing management have towards it, which by and large are mainly negative because of the perceived lack of kudos that the CIH has with a wider audience. Nonetheless, it does have some measure of credibility as the only professional body for housing managers. Although there was general doubt expressed as to the inherent value of housing credentials, there was a widespread perception that having degrees and CIH membership was a fillip to career advancement and financial rewards. The fact that they have qualifications is therefore an important component of pro-activists' identity because as aspiring senior managers they want to position themselves as having been through a process which is validated by a certificate. Having qualifications conveys their commitment to their careers and to their pursuit of

building a knowledge portfolio. It also gives them a certain amount of credibility with other professionals, thereby going some way towards addressing the perceived inherent power imbalance between these housing managers and those perceived as vested with more authority such as social workers, teachers and the police.

Corporate membership of the CIH was gained for largely instrumental reasons, *i.e.* for better pay and promotion prospects. Terence, a housing association manager articulates how he positions himself in relation to the professional body:

> *'It's a badge really, I suppose. That sounds awful to admit, but I still did want the badge, because if I am in housing... I want it to... if there is some recognition and I don't think we are at this stage, but if there is going to be some recognition of it[housing management] as being a professional career in its own right, then I want to say to people 'well, if it is a profession, then I'm a member I've got this. I still want it when I apply for jobs 'cos you know, it's still specified for certain jobs, not only is it desirable, sometimes you've got to have a degree, you've got to have the professional qualification or increasingly now, they're asking for management qualifications, so I'm looking at that the IOM. That's my next one anyway'* (Interview 23).

He is not alone in expressing his doubts as to the general status of housing management (*'if it is a profession'*), while at the same time wanting recognition of his CIH membership to present to a wider audience. However, his commitment to the CIH is contingent on how useful it is for his career and he is already directing himself more towards the Institute of Management.

The power gained through acquiring professional credentials is far from coherent however, and is mediated through the less than enthusiastic support they receive for their professional ambitions within their own organisations. Many CIH qualified pro-activists felt undermined by the fact that they received no recognition or status from their managers as a result of gaining their housing professional credentials, as expressed by Deborah, an estate manager, in the following comment.

> *'I don't think that, as a whole, there's any more recognition as an organisation, of people who are members of the CIH...no more status given. It doesn't exactly inspire confidence does it? Makes you think "what the bloody hell did I bother for"'* (Interview 8)

Hence, senior managers were seen as having a crucial role in signalling the relevance of professional housing status (CIH membership) which in many instances was not forthcoming. This was because many managers were themselves members of other professional bodies which they considered more legitimate and more appropriate for a career in housing management. Other generic areas of management were seen to have more weight and these managers looked to other professional bodies which they felt empowered them more in their careers:

> *'I work in housing and I actually think I'm actually closer to being a management professional, if we're going to talk about anything. And I actually get more from the Institute of Management, in terms of the status that I have in this organisation, about how I develop the people in the organisation, understanding culture and organisational health, morale, all those kinds of things that are relevant to my job. I've learnt that through my diploma in management studies. In terms of my professionalism, if we can talk about professionalism, rather than profession, then it's the Institute of Management that I look to'* (Interview 10).

Pro-activists have a weakly held professional identity as it pertains to the professional body and become members of the CIH, by and large, for mainly instrumental reasons.

However, their ambivalent attitude towards the housing profession is no barrier to the pursuit of individualised careers in housing management and in housing-related careers. Pro-activists make individualised and personal choices about their careers and do not expect or seek help or collective action from professional bodies such as the CIH. The following section will explicate how the construction of careers in housing management is very much part of pro-activists' professional identity.

5.6 – The construction of housing careers

Careers are not perceived as *determined* by cultural and structural forces. Rather such forces are *mediated* in their impact by processes of social interaction; cultures and structures are *experienced*; individuals respond and react in diverse ways (Evetts, 2000 p63). These different responses largely depend on individual variables ranging from socio-economic background, gender and age to skills, as well as capacity to cope with changing work requirements and also personal interests (Kirpal, 2004: 215).

Developing a career in housing management is not something pragmatists see as being

part of their work identity for a variety of reasons. They display a marked reluctance towards the concept of having a career because they do not possess the inclination or the resources to engage with the higher echelons of management, which is a pre-requisite for advancement. Pragmatists articulated a certain pride in staying on the front-line, and remaining hands-on housing managers.

> *'I wouldn't like a career as management, that sort of thing. I want to stay as I am. I'd rather be a soldier than an officer'* (Interview 18).

They were disinclined to play the *'management game'* in the words of one interviewee, who added that he did not want to get involved at the management level because he wanted to remain in hands-on housing:

> *'I could manage an estate office, but I can't do the gobbledy gook that managers have to through at meetings. How should I put it...urban regeneration and talking about getting funding. I think housing officers need to be hands-on with people'* (Interview 28).

This reluctance is influenced by socio-demographic factors, specifically age and educational background. Pragmatists were realistic about their prospects of being promoted in view of the fact that the majority of them did not have any qualifications beyond GCSE level. They differentiated themselves in this regard from pro-activists, who were coming into housing management equipped with credentials that would enable them to move upwards through the organisational structure. Age featured strongly as another factor in the *'static non-career'* trajectories of pragmatists. Several pragmatists referred to the fact that they were of a different generation to the current cohort of (younger) housing managers, who were a lot more ambitious than they were. The sense from pragmatists was that it was right that these younger, more ambitious housing managers should try to get ahead by getting professional qualifications to further their careers, but that this strategy was not for them. While they could appreciate the material benefits that promotion would bring, they were reasonably content with the benefits they accrued from being at the junior to middle levels of management. Indeed, most pragmatists expressed a surprising level of satisfaction with their pay scales (despite a widely held view that housing management is not well paid), for example, because they considered their salaries to be an adequate fit to their skills and work experience. Hence, one of the main motivations for seeking promotion, *i.e.* a

better salary, was noticeably absent from this group of housing managers.

By contrast, the majority of pro-activists identified strongly with housing management as a career, which contrasted with their doubts and ambiguities as to housing management's status as a profession. The majority of pro-activists construct having a career, rather than *'just a job'* as a significant part of their work identity. They see their careers as an important vehicle for bettering themselves (financially and otherwise) and as a positive expression of their personal and professional development. Some managers in this group developed a commitment to housing management over time, as they began to realise that housing could provide them with a meaningful (albeit marginalised) career. A small number of pro-activists started in housing with just O-levels or GCSEs and had worked their way up to middle management positions. Maxwell, a housing manager, describes his career trajectory as follows:

> *'Because my career in housing started in making tea and coffee for the director and then I've worked my way through, and then I've worked in all different areas of housing, different locations I think I could turn my hand to almost anything in housing. I think it was really good experience to start where I've started from. If I didn't enjoy it I wouldn't still be here'* (Interview 43).

However, a housing career is not something that is out there to be discovered, but is viewed as something that has to be actively constructed. Unlike teaching, for example, which has a clear path to promotion and advancement, housing management is a much more diverse occupation with a number of specialist areas such as regeneration or supported housing, and a multiplicity of career options. Hence, pro-activists are engaged in making strategic choices about their careers based on a number of factors. These relate to the degree to which there is a match between their personal ambition and work identity and the structural conditions of their work organisation and environment (Kirpal, 2004)

Housing managers who identified most strongly with bringing about changes *within* the housing service and who felt successful at doing so, had positioned themselves mainly within a linear (*i.e.* an advancement from junior, to middle to senior management) housing career. Their ability to cope with changing managerial skills and demands had resulted in career plans that followed a *'traditional'* (Dif, 2004: 313) career trajectory within housing management. Features of this traditional career model include a

relatively high level of commitment to the organisation in return for employment security and internal promotional mobility (Dingwall and Lewis, 1983). Jeanette, an area housing manager, describes a typical career within housing management in the following account:

> *'I started off as a part-time admin and repairs clerk with the city council...found that it was an interesting job, applied for the next full-time job which was as a housing assistant...stayed at that for nine months and in the meantime started on the HND (Higher National Diploma). Then someone left and I got the job as housing officer... And I thought then that I had actually found, and I still think this, something that I want to make my career and I want to continue in it until I retire really...became team leader after a bit. I must have been mad! Then I acted up to area housing manager to cover maternity leave and got really good experience so when that job was eventually up for grabs I went for it and got it'* (Interview 6)

For Peter, a senior manager, the organisation and his contribution to it is the primary focus of his professional ambitions because it fits in with his self-image as performing a socially useful function in the public sector. Hence, he feels empowered more by carving a career within local government, which is given greater priority over advancement as a professional housing manager. In other words, his primary identity is aligned with local government, a sentiment expressed in the following statement:

> *'I really wouldn't say I was a housing professional because when I first started I didn't have any qualifications anyway. I suppose on reflection, you start thinking in more grand terms once you've qualified in something or other and I suppose I did once I'd qualified. I thought 'ah well there's more of a structure behind this and more of a kudos' But at the same time I think of myself first and foremost as a local government officer and that's where I want to have a career'* (Interview 3)

His professionalism and work identity is centred on providing a socially useful service in the public domain. As such his career aspirations are closely aligned with notions of public service, which he acknowledges as *'maybe slightly old-fashioned'* but *'worthwhile'* nonetheless.

Horizontal as well as vertical mobility was crucial to these managers as a means to gain valuable managerial experience within organisations that they identified as being

'decent', which sometimes involved moves between the public sector and an RSL (Registered Social Landlord) or *vice versa*. Derek, a performance manager reflects on his decision to make a move from an RSL to a council earlier on in his career:

> *'Because of CCT and stock transfer, it was seen that it was more normal to leave a LA and join a HA, I was quite happy to come the other way. But when I took the housing job at XX in 1993, I knew what I was walking into, 'cos I'd checked out the LA very carefully before I even applied for the job and everything that I'd been told was that they were good at their job and they were not a negligent landlord'* (Interview 30).

Pro-activists display varying degrees of commitment to housing management itself. A small, but significant number of pro-activists have acquired qualifications and work experience that is orientated towards a more generic managerial career. They view the skills and knowledge they have gained through housing management as a springboard to an individualised career mobility project. They position themselves as having the resources to move beyond housing management altogether taking with them the transferable skills built up from generic housing management towards careers in other management areas. Their portfolio of generic, and hence transferable, managerial skills and knowledge are such that they feel empowered to move out of housing management and into other managerial areas if the opportunity arises, in an onward and upward career trajectory.

Gordon, a resident liaison manager, is a pro-activist who has moved from front-line housing management to resident participation. He visualises a career trajectory that may encompass a move into regeneration work or possibly a health related inter-agency type role if the opportunity arose. He sees himself as being in a relatively powerful position as a result of the portfolio he has built up since being in housing management. A move towards a development and regeneration role chimes with his self-identity as a city dweller who is interested in urban issues in general and who sees regeneration work as a means of getting involved in some of the more exciting re-developments going on around the city.

A significant number of pro-activists (some, although by no means all were women) for whom their work identity was one of a number of options articulated the idea of the *'staggered'* career. Their home identity in the form of their families and child care

arrangements were given precedence at certain stages during which they engaged in career breaks or were consciously choosing to let their careers take a back seat for a period of time. For these managers their flexibility and mobility was intimately related to their life outside work. Hence, they were making calculated decisions about housing management based on how they could accommodate competing demands both within and outside work. Housing management was viewed as an occupation with a flexible work environment which was a contributory factor in their career decisions.

> *'I'll be perfectly honest with you, as I was in my interview with the HA, the property industry regardless of how things have moved on, and there's quite a large percentage of women in it, most people that I've graduated with, and who've worked in the private sector, come to this point in their lives, when they have a family and similar to accountancy and the legal professions, the industry isn't geared up for any sort of flexible working. Now, the housing sector has always seemed to have a lot of women in it, in housing management, and it's almost like a quasi-public sector. I think HAs are somewhere in between private and the public sectors and they've got a more flexible working approaches and it's purely from that selfish point of view that I went into housing and why I'll be staying in it for the foreseeable future'* (Interview 33).

Hence, these managers were committed to staying in housing management for instrumental as well as other more vocational reasons and were constructing their careers to coincide with their particular stage in the life cycle. Flexibility as regards their work environment was given precedence over career mobility for this group of pro-activists. The crucial point to be made is that pro-activists see themselves as having a *career* in housing management and do not identify with the *'housing profession'* to any great extent.

5.7 – Conclusions

Conceptions of identity for housing managers were contingent on a number of factors including biographical resources, the area of housing management they worked in, their socialisation since embarking on their chosen occupation and their attitudes towards the nature and purpose of housing management itself.

On one level there was a degree of homogeneity in terms of how the occupational self was viewed. Housing managers articulated a set of common, shared understandings of

their individual and collective positions of relative marginality and invisibility. Identity was predicated to a large extent on the tension between their own conception of housing management and the way they were perceived and treated by the *'generalised other'*.

In contrast to this relative homogeneity there was a degree of differentiation in individuals' strategic responses to the positions in which they found themselves. These differences were rooted in biographical differences, varied work experiences, the meaning they attached to housing management as an occupation and its identity salience. They positioned themselves in a variety of ways with differing levels of identification with the work itself, their organisation and the wider professional community of housing management.

The findings point to a range of both occupational identities and degrees of identification with housing management itself. Pragmatists saw housing management as a job and did not aspire to a career. Pro-activists articulated aspirations towards vertical and horizontal mobility and flexible careers, both within and beyond housing management.

We can conclude that although occupational identity was strong, this did not translate into a collective occupational identity because of the widespread perception of the low status and marginality of housing management. Housing managers had an instrumental view of the CIH and would continue to acquire professional qualifications, but only insofar as these would advance their careers and employability prospects.

The chapter has provided an analysis of the process of *becoming* a housing manager in terms of motivations and routes into housing management, the formation of identities and the construction of professional housing careers. The remainder of the thesis addresses itself to the meaning of *being* a professional housing manager.

Chapter 6 — Knowledge as professionalism in housing management

'Housing management lacks a hard technical cognitive base and does face serious difficulties in convincing others that it has special competencies; its existing occupational tasks tending to be seen by lay people such as local councillors, as simply the application of common sense' (Laffin, 1986: 31).

6.1 – Introduction

Having outlined the process involved in *becoming* a housing manager this chapter turns to a primary component of *being* a professional housing manager, *i.e.* knowledge. All of the housing managers in this research stated that being knowledgeable was fundamental to their professional*ism.*

As was stated in Chapter Three the progress of the professional project in housing management has been hampered by the lack of a discrete and esoteric/theoretical knowledge base. Hence, the case for a regulated entry into the occupation has historically been weak (Laffin, 1986). However, all the housing managers in this study cited being knowledgeable as a defining aspect of their professionalism, but in a way that represented a highly individualised approach (*i.e.* a personal choice to work on the professional self) to their working environment and their professional ambitions. Having established the lack of a collective identity and the absence of professional socialisation involved in the process of becoming a housing manager this chapter explores how and why knowledge is considered by these housing managers to be a central component of their professionalism.

Braverman (1974) concludes that increased lay knowledge threatens professional claims to knowledge to the extent that it can be regarded as having a de-professionalization effect. Conversely, the housing managers in this research felt that it provided them with enhanced motivation to become *more* professional because they increasingly needed to be knowledgeable about a wide range of areas in order to meet the demands of customers. This is an unexpected finding given that knowledge does not feature prominently, if at all, in the literature on professionalism in housing management. Indeed, within housing studies there has been little attempt to explore the nature of knowledge used in housing practice because it is either presumed to be generic or to be

common sense, *i.e. 'what everybody knows'* (Laffin, 1986). Hence, in contrast to other semi-professions such as nursing (Smith, P. 1993; McLeod, M. 1996; Graham, I. 1993), teaching (Clandinin, 1985) and social work (Sibeon, 1996; Secker, 1993), knowledge and the way it is used in housing management remains unanalysed. This chapter addresses this dearth in the literature.

Given that there is a lack of a common route into the profession and low numbers of housing managers who have housing qualifications we can conclude that housing management does not have a collective *'stock of knowledge'* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) that is acquired through *educational* means. This prompts a focus on the working environment to begin to understand how knowledge is constructed and how this knowledge is mobilised in housing managers' conceptions of professionalism. Therefore, this chapter explores what has heretofore remained hidden from view, *i.e.* knowledge as it is practised in the day-to-day working lives of housing managers. More specifically, it will analyse what *being* knowledgeable means for professionalism in housing management. By contrast with traditional perspectives on professional traits which focus on formal, academic knowledge bases, here knowledge is viewed, not as a static concept, but as an on-going accomplishment and process. Hence, both formal and informal sources of knowledge are explored.

To this end it addresses three questions: where does knowledge in housing management come from, how is it constituted and in what ways is it mobilised to further professional goals?

6.2 – Nature of knowledge

When asked to set out what constituted knowledge in housing management housing managers responded with a mixture of puzzlement and uncertainty. However, when probed further they identified housing law, know-how and 'contextual knowledge' as forming the main *'stock of knowledge'* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) in housing management. *'Know-how'* was chosen to describe the knowledge that the housing managers drew upon which was derived mainly from common sense, their own life experience and the expertise that is built up over time from the experience of doing housing management work. *'Contextual knowledge'* describes both formal and informal knowledge used which is over and above what is necessary to carry out the routine work of housing management.

'Know-how' such as organisational policies and procedures, as well as *'on-the-ground'* local knowledge, were seen as forming the main body of knowledge for front-line housing managers. Housing managers discerned that there were increasing pressures to acquire a broader base of knowledge that varied according to the nature and seniority of the housing work. Generic knowledge such as strategic management, financial planning and partnership working were seen as increasingly important for middle to senior managers, but were not at all relevant to front-line estate managers.

> *'There's often a body of knowledge relating to your organisation, in terms of the procedures, the policies that you have as an organisation and there's also the practical day-to-day knowledge you have of your areas, and the people and the problems as well, so there's different levels I would say. There isn't a body of common knowledge... I think it depends at what sort of level you work at'* (Interview 34).

Hence, while there was a perceived core body of know-how focusing on organisational procedures which everybody used, the higher up the ladder of management, the more it was necessary to acquire knowledge that was not specifically housing related and that came from a variety of different sources. Beth, a supported housing manager points to the fluidity of what a housing manager needed to know and the extent to which this had changed over the years:

> *'There's the law. There's building technology, social administration, yes it's lots of things and each one of those things is developing. If you look at...I mean we've talked about the law and we talk about medicine. No doubt, there's developments in medical and legal knowledge, but what you see in housing magazines today is very different to 10 years ago and it's probably a totally different person that is needed today as there was 10 years ago, in terms of their qualifications and skills, so there's lots of flexibility required. It's moving all the time, isn't it, because what you use in housing, law etc. is in effect different aspects of other professions. You have to know a bit about all sorts of things, don't you?' (Interview 38).*

The housing managers above articulate the fragmented and fluid nature of knowledge which mitigates against the notion of having a collective and discrete body of knowledge, one of the foundations for the professional project (Larson, 1977).

While there was a variety of opinions as to the spectrum of knowledge that was required

at different levels of management the one discipline that was considered essential for all managers was housing law. Without exception this was the one subject that was thought to be an integral part of their work. However, knowledge of housing law, or the lack of it, engendered different responses and for different reasons, in pragmatists and pro-activists. While a complete absence of formal legal training prompted pragmatists to acquire just enough knowledge to enable them to deal with discerning tenants as and when necessary, for pro-activists their greater awareness of the law motivated them to gain qualifications in housing law. The differing approaches to knowledge of these two categories of housing managers will be analysed later in the chapter.

6.3 – Role models and oral culture

New recruits to housing management typically have no housing qualifications or previous housing experience and come from a wide variety of backgrounds as was outlined in the previous chapter. This research found that the most common way new people acquired the knowledge to do the job was invariably by *ad hoc*, informal, on-the-job training and observation of more experienced housing managers. On-the-job training usually consisted of shadowing experienced officers. An oral culture was evident where new recruits were guided by colleagues through the most basic housing procedures. For most officers at the level of estate management, the *'recipe'* knowledge base centred on carrying out *'the basics'* of the housing task, such as rent arrears, repairs, allocations, neighbour nuisance *etc*. They went through the process of getting to grips with the basics as soon as they went into the job and were on a steep learning curve initially. This was described invariably as *'being thrown in at the deep end'* (Interview 36).

Inexperienced officers relied on more experienced colleagues to demonstrate the correct procedures in carry out the various housing tasks. As a result, housing managers could be in post several months before they felt the necessity to read the organisation's procedures for themselves. The following description is typical of how housing managers pick up basic housing knowledge:

'Day to day, sat in the office with two colleagues, especially when I came here and the two people that had already been here for years and years. On a daily basis I would say to them "what would you do with this, what would you do with that" and I'd go to the manager a lot of the time. A lot of the time, I'd go straight to the manager. When I was new to the job, if I had a serious neighbour nuisance or something, I'd go to him and say "I've got this, what do I do?". And now of course, something similar comes up, I've done it before, I know what to do with it. But in the early days, definitely, it was very much a case of asking colleagues with years of experience what they did' (Interview 44).

The above officer's experience of becoming familiar with her job highlights a central aspect of learning in housing management, *i.e. 'on-the-job'* training, which has important consequences for the constitution of knowledge in housing management. The lack of a formal, discrete knowledge base creates the space for an oral culture on major social issues such as neighbour nuisance, not just matters of organisational procedure. This oral culture lends itself to the creation of discrete occupational worlds, even within the same housing organisation, which has consequences for the *'stock of knowledge'* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) in housing management.

An example of this was how knowledge of a social issue, domestic violence, was constructed in one LSVT housing office. A day course on domestic violence was advertised for members of staff and a discussion ensued as to whether it would be productive for team members to attend (Field Work Diary: February 2002). The general opinion of both senior and middle management was that that it was a common sense issue and that most people had a reasonable idea of how to handle the housing consequences of such cases because the homelessness team dealt with them regularly. Hence, there was no urgency about going on the course. In other words, domestic violence was considered to be something that everyone knew about and did not merit any further education or training. Only one estate manager, Lottie, offered a dissenting voice in the research interview that followed:

'I don't think I do know enough about it [domestic violence] to be honest. I mean, I don't know anyone directly who has been through that, no-one in my family or anything, and I'd like to find out more about it. Just to be sure that we're doing what we're supposed to be doing. It's funny because in the other area team there wasn't such a big deal made of going on in-house training courses as long as they didn't cost much. You just put yourself forward for things that you thought were relevant and within reason, if there was enough staff to cover, you were able to go. Here, there's a different attitude where you have to justify absolutely everything. There's a feeling that a lot of the social service type training days are a waste of time' (Interview 35)*.

The above statement reveals how two area teams within the same housing department could construct what was *'relevant'* knowledge for housing management quite differently. In one area team it was considered useful to go on courses about asylum seekers, domestic violence and other broader issues. In the other area team these courses were characterised as *'social service type'* training and by implication were considered not so relevant to housing management.

6.3.1 – The pragmatists

Pragmatists typically worked in generic (although there were also specialised rent officers) area teams, with responsibility for everything from allocations to neighbour nuisance. They relied very much on their colleagues and used them as a source of knowledge and to bench-mark their own work:

'You do pick it up as you go along. I'm lucky in that I'm surrounded by 4 or 5 people, who are doing the same job as me, so there's the team work element. They ask me something. I ask them something and you pool your resources and get on with it as best you can. And policies and procedures, it's a question of learning them, and they're changing all the time anyway, so I'm up to speed with everybody else, I think' (Interview 28)*.

The above comment highlights the importance to pragmatists of *'the team'* in managing the demanding and sometimes chaotic everyday world of housing management. The team is accessed as a source of support and the best way to overcome any particular problem was to *'pool your resources'*. So although they work on their own *'patches'* in a reasonably autonomous fashion they come back to the team for guidance when

something out of the ordinary arises. The team is then used as a forum in which to bounce ideas and access advice when difficult decisions have to be made. However, individual managers made their own decision as to whose judgement was likely to be trustworthy, linking back to the earlier point about the choice of particular role models. They discriminated between the 'good' managers whose opinion they could trust and whom they asked for advice and those whom they instinctively did not consult because they were not viewed by them as *'knowing their stuff'*. This reliance on role models arises as a consequence of the lack or absence of a housing profession as was established in the previous chapter.

Pragmatists had a positive opinion of on-the-job training and spoke about how they had identified role models for good practice early on in their careers, and how they tried to model themselves on these colleagues. Managers that *'knew their stuff'* and put it into practice was a quality admired by a number of pragmatists. One housing manager spoke of the things she noticed about how her manager did her job; she (the manager) did not patronise the tenants and conveyed information to people *'at their level'*. Another was impressed by her manager's empathy towards the tenants and her organisational abilities. Practical competence and organisational abilities were most frequently cited as the characteristics of a good housing manager. Pragmatists' reliance on role models can be largely attributed to their lack of external (to their organisations) education or training.

6.3.2 – The pro-activists

Pro-activists, most of whom had been exposed to external influences, through formal learning and networks, were more aware of the limitations of this way of accessing knowledge and information because trainees were reliant on colleagues to pick up good practice in a very informal and *ad hoc* manner:

> *'I think you can reach the required level of expertise by actually working within the housing environment, depending on whom you work with. The danger with that, of course, is if you don't work with the right people, you're not shown the right things in the right way. And sitting next to XX is okay, if XX is good, but if XX is not good, then you've got a problem straight away'* (Interview 23).

The point made by this housing manager about the importance of working with *'the right people'* brings to light the contingent nature of oral culture. Some pro-activists

expressed misgivings about housing expertise that was based solely on in-house, on-the-job training and practice because it very much depended on whom the new recruits were being trained by. Several pro-activists were concerned that this way of training managers was a source of bad practice in their organisation:

> *'You can get a certain amount of experience out of being thrown in cold, but I think you can possibly pick up bad habits, you can get set in your ways and you can end up doing things the same. So I think you need regular training, enlightened training where you meet people with different ideas, that can influence your ideas. Doing it off the ground you tend to take on the ideas of the...substructure rather than having other ideas that come from outside and that can be limiting. You don't get growth and everybody stays the same and a bit rigid and a bit bureaucratic'* (Interview 39)

The above manager expresses the limitations of *'doing it off the ground'* as on-the-job training was seen as encouraging a rather narrow view of housing practice, which contributed to knowledge closure and a lack of reflexivity. Hence, trainees were in danger of becoming focused on just their small *'patch'* of houses, rather than being open to ideas and knowledge from the wider world of housing and related sectors.

There was a definite sense that all of the housing managers in the research viewed knowledge as an on-going project of learning. *'You're learning all the time'* was a phrase that was used by a broad spectrum of interviewees. However, what pragmatists meant by *'learning all the time'* and what pro-activists meant by the same sentiment was different in two respects: the acquisition and nature of knowledge. The remainder of the chapter will analyse pragmatists' and pro-activists' differing approaches to knowledge.

6.4 – Routes to knowledge

6.4.1 – The pragmatists' approach to knowledge

Pragmatists mainly used know-how, *i.e.* experiential knowledge, acquired mainly from performing the housing management function over a long period of time. This provided a framework for how they interacted with tenants, their use of information sources and attitudes towards role specific knowledge.

For this group, know-how was valued more highly than academic sources of knowledge

because most of what they needed to know could be picked up in the course of doing their job, and therefore other sources of knowledge were largely superfluous. Hence, the working environment itself was considered to provide ample opportunities for acquiring the basic knowledge for most of the tasks on hand. They looked for *information* that would enhance their ability to do their work efficiently on a mundane, everyday level, rather than knowledge for its own sake. They were constantly responding to requests from their tenants, and being conscientious about following up information on behalf of their tenants was an integral part of their professionalism. As pragmatists' learning was directed towards what was necessary to carry out their role effectively on a day-to-day basis, they adopted a practical approach to acquiring useful knowledge, *i.e.* on a *'need to know'* basis. Consequently, they consulted information sources only as and when they were convinced of their usefulness in specific contexts. For example, Brian, a rent arrears officer, readily admits that he rarely looks at housing magazines or other written sources of housing information, but would do so if there was anything specifically relating to rents:

> *'I'm purely doing the rent side of things at the moment and I'm trying to concentrate on that, whereas, perhaps if I was doing other things, and the magazine that comes out was discussing topics that I'd be dealing with then, then I might be a bit more interested in looking at it and reading it. If there was something in it about rent arrears then, certainly. Or if someone said "oh there's an article here about rent arrears, or housing benefit or whatever", well yah, I'd have a look at that. I'd have a look to see if there was anything in there'* (Interview 11)*.

There was no sense from the majority of pragmatists that they would read the housing press or a procedures manual unless they knew there was something in it that was directly related to their specific area of housing management. These housing managers compared themselves with other professions where it was compulsory to have many years academic training and qualifications. By comparison housing knowledge was:

> *'Just common sense'* (Interview 25)*,
>
> *'Just knowledge you gain through working'* (Interview 20)*, and
>
> *I think it takes common sense to do the job* (Interview 40)*.

Hence, housing management was generally seen by pragmatists as *'what you do'*, rather

than a profession with a complex knowledge base.

The perception that formal knowledge (with the notable exception of housing law) is not so important gives increased status to know-how; *'the way we do things around here'*. This scenario is fertile ground for the team culture that was evident in the research. Amongst the pragmatists a lot of sharing and pooling of information goes on, and a collective way of doing things emerges. One housing manager explained how she learnt from a colleague how to carry out a 3-way house exchange:

> *'It was really complicated because there were three families involved. Now the procedures manual will take you so far with it but you couldn't pick up from that all the best way to do it, because it wasn't all written down. The trick with it was to get all the families in to sign the papers, but not to have them all in the room at once. Get them to do it one by one. That way you didn't get confused as to which tenants had to sign which tenancy agreements. Now I would have never thought of doing that if it hadn't been for her'* (Interview 44)*.

So rather than just going by the procedures manual which was limited because *'it wasn't all written down'* it was much more effective for the above manager to be guided by a colleague who could show her *'the trick'* with doing a 3-way house exchange. Hence, the know-how in housing management is evolved, not from formal education courses, as in other professions, but from *'on-the-ground'*. While expressing doubts about the complexity of knowledge in housing management pragmatists regarded their *breadth* of knowledge as a central part of their professionalism because it was what enabled them to carry out their work effectively. The importance of being able to direct tenants to the correct sources of information is reflected in the two following statements:

> *'Because we were the council, I was picking up things, not just about housing, but it was other issues like environmental issues, services, legal issues, so you were picking up snippets from housing benefits etc. So I am really quite well informed because I know I can retain information well. Which is just as well because tenants ask us the most bizarre things and not housing things at all and they think we'll know it...I don't need to be told twice and if there's relevant pieces of paper, yah I'll grab it, take a copy of it... Of course, I'm still learning. That to me is being professional. It's a learning process all the time because things change all the time'* (Interview 41)*.

'I don't like tenants coming to me and going away without the information they wanted. I say that to a lot of people: if someone comes to you and asks you a question, if you just say blank "no it's not me", or "it's not my job", then they're going to be walking around aimlessly trying to find the right person'. But if you can say "oh it might be this" or "it might be that", you're giving advice and hopefully tenants will be pointed in the right direction' (Interview 7)*.

It was also what distinguished them from those who were new to housing management because a key resource was the body of information built up from doing the housing management task over a number of years:

'I think it's built up from actually working in the environment. I think, even if you went... a lot of places that advertise for housing officers will ask for some professional qualification, from the CIH or whatever, but if you went straight from school and did that, and then came into this environment, I'd probably know more than someone who'd done that qualification because you've got to work here to get the knowledge and you only gain it by experience. In this job, you're learning all the time' (Interview 27)*.

There was doubt expressed that anyone straight from university would be able to carry out the work effectively, on the basis that what was needed was a combination of knowledge and know-how. This is *'sedimented'* knowledge, in the sense that it could only be acquired through the practice of doing housing management over time, and that expertise was continually being built upon and up-dated. Although pragmatists associated *'professional knowledge'* with specialised expertise (for example, the kind of expertise that lawyers, doctors and teachers possessed) they nonetheless regarded their experiential know-how as a valuable form of knowing and an equally legitimate part of their professionalism. Hence, while acknowledging that their knowledge may not be recognised by formal institutions they expressed their professionalism in their learning approach to their work, *i.e.* they were 'learning all the time' to enable them to respond to their tenants needs.

The status afforded to sedimented knowledge was linked to the prominent role given to *'on-the ground'* local knowledge. Local knowledge was gathered from a variety of sources, most often from tenants and other agencies working in the area, such as the police and social services. An *'audit'* of the area was built up over time simply by

having a constant presence and close engagement with the community. One housing manager described the process of how pragmatists gain knowledge in the following words:

> *'They [the housing officers] might not have it [local knowledge] at the start, but they do over time, yah. You become very aware of what's going on locally because if you're a housing officer for any patch, you get to know absolutely everything that's going on, or at least you would hope so. You get to know exactly what's going on.'*
>
> *'Is this knowledge used by other agencies?'*
>
> *'Yes, yes, most definitely. We know a lot more than people think. I mean, we're bound to because we're there all the time. For instance, here we might have site staff who can tell us things that are going on... our caretakers are the eyes and ears of the estate. And we go into people's homes and they tell the estate manager things'* (Interview 42).

Pragmatists were at pains to build up relationships of trust with the tenants over a long period of time, partly in order to be able to keep their eye on what was going on in their *'patch'* of properties. This kind of informal surveillance carried out by estate managers extended well beyond a straightforward *'brick and mortar'* approach to housing management. Observations made during fieldwork illustrates this point:

> I accompany Daisy [the housing officer] on a rent arrears visit to an elderly man (Alan) in a high rise block of flats, not far from the estate office. She knocks on the door (bell is not working), waits a minute and then shouts in the letter box:
>
> D: *'Hiya Alan, are you there? It's Daisy from the housing office'*
>
> Alan comes to the door and opens it slightly. He sees it's Daisy and opens it further.
>
> A: *'I've not been very good'.*
>
> D: *'Can I see your rent card Alan. There's a problem with the benefits'. It's to do with the fact you have someone else living here.'*
>
> A: *'Well, George is here and he's not here. He's sometimes away for a few days on end.'*

D: *'It'd be better if he stayed here all the time. There's a shortfall of £8 every week. Can you manage £11 a week to catch up with the arrears?'*

A: *'I'll try my best for you. Don't evict me. It's my pride and joy'.*

D: *'We won't'.*

When we are out of earshot, Daisy tells me that Alan is gay and his partner, George, is a paedophile. He had had a flat in another part of the borough, but people got wind of the fact that he was a sex offender and they got a campaign going and got rid of him. She says that at least while he is living with Alan they can keep an eye on him and that she is going to *'keep tabs on the situation'.* We follow this by calling on the caretaker, Rita, at another block of flats. Amongst other things Rita says she is concerned about *'the comings and goings'* at flat no.21. She thinks they are dealing in drugs. Afterwards, Daisy tells me that she will pass on these suspicions to the police, without saying where she got the information (Field Work Diary: July 2002).

Having the ability to acquire this kind of information was viewed by pragmatists as a key skill in becoming a good housing officer:

> *'One of the qualities to being a good housing officer is to be nosy. We've a couple [estate officers] here who can find out anything and people will come to them and say "such and such is going on at No.9". Residents will tell them things, about crime that's going on, they may not tell the police. They will tell us. So, maybe we're used as the go-between, "there's drugs being dealt there" and we say "we'll tell the police"'* (Interview 46)*

The possession of this local knowledge constitutes a key component in the professional identity of these pragmatists. They are consulted by other agencies for this kind of information, and it is experienced as a source of status and esteem. Hence, it is highly prized by individual housing officers:

> *'I've had Sunnyside St. for two and a half years. I could tell you where every druggie and every trouble maker is. If somebody else [another estate officer] came along, they wouldn't. And you get selfish. I mean I've worked hard to get that knowledge and if I got moved somewhere else, I wouldn't like it 'cos I'd be starting from scratch, when I've worked blinking hard and the tenants know that what they tell me, I'll help them all I can'* (Interview 26)*.

While the legislative frame work and regulatory procedures are there to guide the boundaries of housing management, they are not experienced by pragmatists as forming the central basis for day-to-day housing work. Most housing managers possess the practical competence to perform the basic legal procedures, such as signing up a new tenant to a tenancy agreement, without which they could not perform their estate management function. These managers relied on recipe knowledge to perform the basic tasks and hence, did not routinely question why procedures were set out as they were, or why the organisation did things in a certain way. Although it was unanimous that housing law was a vital part of the work, most estate managers had no formal training on the legal aspects of housing, and knew *'just the basics'* about housing law. The majority had learnt the bulk of what they knew about housing law from colleagues, in a reasonably ad-hoc manner. In most cases this was restricted to what was necessary to carry out their particular role, for example, the issuing of Notices of Seeking Possession (NOSPs) in the case of estate managers. Hence, the law was seen by pragmatists as being directly relevant to quite a narrow range of routine housing management duties, as well as problems such as anti-social behaviour and homelessness, which were encountered on a regular basis.

The discrete occupational world, referred to earlier, which is built up through an oral culture lends itself to *'winging it'* as regards knowledge. *'Winging it'* or *'blagging it'* were the phrases most used by pragmatists to describe situations where they were unsure of the legal basis of what they were saying to tenants. They nonetheless pursued a certain course of action on the basis that that was the way they did things in their office, without necessarily questioning the reasoning behind a particular procedure. Pragmatists were much more likely than pro-activists to take at face value what they were instructed to do by their peers and line managers. Indeed, some pragmatists expressed surprise at the suggestion that some of the organisational procedures they carried out may not actually be legal. Their lack of legal knowledge meant that they were not always able to make a judgement as to the right course of action to take, which contrasts with pro-activists greater awareness of housing law (as outlined in section 6.4.2).

Suzanne, an estate manager described an incident with squatters which encapsulated the pragmatists expedient approach to getting things done:

'Well, we had this problem with a flat in XX Square. All hell had broken out with this property because the tenant had been arrested during the night and the place was sitexed [boarded up]...two people broke in and the neighbours rang to let us know. Myself and my colleague went down there and the two 'squatters' said that the tenant had said they could stay. One of 'em started on about his rights and we really didn't have a clue, but we blagged it because all we wanted to do was get them out of there. We got them out eventually by saying they had no right to be there and we'd called the police... The main thing was get them out ...we could deal with the consequences later'. (Interview 31)*.

Taking a course of action which had a questionable legal basis, or one which was at least open to legal challenges, was common practice in some housing organisations and was justified on the basis of pragmatism and being necessary to *'getting the job done'*. This is not a personal characteristic of individual housing managers, but is a feature of being socialised into the organisational culture.

The lack of legal training resulted in occasions where pragmatists felt challenged by tenants who appeared to know more about the law and tenants' rights than they did. Pragmatists do not have formal academic or professional qualifications with the result that they feel exposed to, and disempowered by, knowledgeable tenants.

'I would say they know more than us because they don't work do they, so they've got the time. We're here doing our work all day and the phones never stop. A lot of our tenants are more intelligent than us. They listen to the news all day and they read, don't they? They know what they're entitled to' (Interview 20)*.

The fact that increasingly knowledgeable tenants knew what *'they're entitled to'* caused pragmatists to experience a disruption in their taken-for-granted level of knowledge on occasions. One housing manager, Daisy, described how she experienced her lack of legal knowledge and how it changed how she interacted with one particular tenant:

'I've just been dealing with an anti-social behaviour case, and I've dealt with it because I manage the multi-storey flats, so I do handle quite a lot of cases of anti-social behaviour. I'm knowledgeable, no problems dealing with them and it's only when you meet someone that's got a little more knowledge than you that its intimidating. And this tenant has managed to...not intimidate me himself, but I felt intimidated when I was talking to him and I thought if I had more...not background knowledge, because I know and understand people, but the legal side that I need to be more aware of, and that I need more training on, what we can and we can't do' (Interview 41)*.

Although pragmatists were a lot less inclined than their pro-activist colleagues to undertake training they were nonetheless motivated by knowledgeable tenants to have a basic knowledge of the law.

So although pragmatists counted common sense and know-how as being essential this did not mean that the necessity of having legal information was downgraded. Conversely some pragmatists were keenly aware of the necessity to at least acquire the basics of housing law, which was invariably procured as a result of having to deal with an irate tenant or a crisis situation as documented earlier. Pragmatists articulated a general lack of confidence about their level of legal information and this led some of them to an awareness that their reliance on colleagues to pass on the correct information was not an ideal situation to be in. In the words of the following estate manager:

'Would you think about doing a housing qualification?'

'Can't see myself doing it but I think it'd be a good idea... because the education that I've got in housing is basically what I've been taught by others and I'd like to make sure from a legal point of view, that I'm following procedures correctly as well. And it's always those little cases when you're wondering "how do we stand legally with this"' (Interview 15)*.

At the same time, the majority of pragmatists were not prepared to address their gaps in knowledge by pursuing training or education outside of the organisation. While expressing doubts as to the adequacy of the knowledge imparted by some colleagues they continued to look to their immediate environment to get the information they needed:

'Either in-house training or at least for (the) legal (department) to provide us with the correct information. We seem to find out about changes in the law too late if you like. There was a recent scenario of unlawful occupiers and squatters and their rights and it was such a grey area and we didn't get the correct information and it delayed our actions and therefore, it created a real problem for a lot of people. And had we got the right information earlier we could have dealt with it better. It went out of control, if you like' (Interview 35)*

What is clear is that they were looking for *information* about the law that would help them resolve particular problems as they arose, rather than a more in-depth knowledge of housing law. As they did not see themselves as having a career or progressing up the management ladder in housing management (as stated in Chapter 5) they were unwilling to make the extra commitment that further education entailed.

Pragmatists' information-gathering approach to knowledge was also reflected in how they inter-acted with tenants. They do not present themselves as *'experts'* in housing matters and do not therefore even attempt to *'stand guard'* over a discrete area of knowledge. Rather than viewing their position as less powerful because of a lack of an esoteric knowledge base they use their non-expert position as a positive factor in the manager-tenant relationship. By contrast to other (aspiring) professions housing managers make a conscious effort not to demarcate a boundary between themselves and the users of the housing service. Rather, they see their role as intermediaries in the interpretation of whatever information and knowledge is needed to help tenants:

'You have to have knowledge, not an in-depth, but a basic knowledge, to be able to guide them [the tenants] somewhere else' (Interview 7)*.

For example, in the case of rent arrears, housing managers typically gather all the information and facts to do with the case of rent arrears. They then present the facts to the tenant, acting as advocate and advisor interpreting the organisation's legal procedures and suggesting what is likely to happen in the event of non-payment of arrears. Once tenants have been given the facts it is left to them to determine what course of action they will take. Hence, they are *'co-experts'* in the resolution of their (housing) problems, as described below by Graham, a housing officer.

'I would first enlighten them as to how the arrears have come about and what they need to do to turn the corner. I would give then some direction, if it's a HB issue and the claim's not been paid for the best part of 12-15 weeks, I would provide them with a rent statement which illustrates that. By the same token, I would convey relevant contact numbers and I would try to assist them by making enquiries myself, where possible, to deal with that matter. Once I'm satisfied they have all the facts and I've done as much as I could it's up to them. I can't make them do it' (Interview 15)*.

Pro-activists also face the challenge of demands for *'knowledgeable competence'* (Allen, 1998) but respond differently to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

6.4.2 – The pro-activists' approach to knowledge

Pro-activists gained their initial on-the-job housing training via the same routes as the pragmatists and also used experiential knowledge in their approach to their work. In common with pragmatists they also cited being knowledgeable as a cornerstone of their professionalism. However, pro-activists distinguish themselves from their pragmatist colleagues by their more *'cosmopolitan'* (Kleingartner, 1967) learning orientation, their exposure to the wider environment and their use of networks. A *'cosmopolitan learning orientation'* is defined as having an open and acquisitive approach to knowledge as articulated in the following statement:

'Having knowledge, if you don't have that knowledge being able to find out, an ability to research it or get it. Contacts on other disciplines, knowing how to get the best for your customers through social services perhaps, through lawyers, through environmental health' (Interview 38)

In contrast to other professions such as law, which relies exclusively on formal knowledge and professional credentials acquired through university, there was recognition of the validity of both informal and formal routes to knowledge. Having a cosmopolitan learning orientation was considered as important as having formal qualifications and was a significant marker of professionalism for these housing managers. Knowledge could be acquired from reading, going on courses, from academics and from staff in other housing organisations. Hence, unlike pragmatists who were much more localised in their approach, pragmatists looked beyond the immediacy of their workplace in the pursuit of knowledge.

Pro-activists (who were not required to possess anything other than the basic competence to carry out their job specifications by their employers) individually took it upon themselves to become skilled in a broad range of housing and housing related areas. By contrast to the pragmatist approach, where learning was done mainly by in-house training and through colleagues, these managers also looked outside of their immediate housing environment to gain knowledge of new developments. They looked for best practice from a wide variety of sources including other housing organisations, as expressed by the following two regeneration managers:

> *'We get the regeneration press as well. We get those magazines delivered here and it's visiting other areas as well. It's visiting other areas to see what they're doing, looking at best practice, you know, how things are changing and how they're delivering things and it's continually being, not stuck in one mind and thinking this is the way we do it, it's continually being aware of changing developments'* (Interview 2).

> *'It's about taking on new tools and new ideas and new approaches and the way things are tried these days, they're tried in pilot, so it's being aware of those pilots, and if you think there's a need inviting somebody up or going to see them for yourselves and see whether there would be a use in trying it in your own area'* (Interview 33).

But they also looked for connections and information further afield, via for example, the Internet and abroad. Some of these pro-activists, looked for examples of best practice from other countries that would enhance their own practices and procedures. In the words of the following team manager:

> *'I think we can all learn from, for example, how they do things in America may not be relevant, but bits of it might be. There's lots of things that other countries do very well, so how they manage housing in other countries is very interesting. They seem to be very good at it, so what do they do and how can we learn from them?'* (Interview 5).

However, pro-activists not only accessed a broader knowledge base but this knowledge was sought from a variety of sources, ranging from housing magazines to formal education courses:

'Yah, I read the housing magazines. What I tend to do with 'Inside Housing' with the question and answer legal bit, I stick a little post-it note on the page and write 'anti-social behaviour' or whatever and then put that away. If I need it, it means I have a quick reference to it. It's something that I've picked up since going to college' (Interview 43).

'Well... it could be formal or informal you know. I mean I've been able to take the route of formal education, but I think you can get just as much even from reading... from going to conferences, from speaking to other people. Not just coming in blinkered and getting on with your job.' (Interview 8)

The latter housing manager is distinguishing herself from others who *'are blinkered'* in their approach to knowledge, a sentiment which is also expressed by the following pro-activist:

'I read 'Inside Housing' religiously and also 'Housing Today' and 'Roof'. I make opportunities to read housing journals as well as advice ones. I read anything that we get – it all goes in my reading tray. But, I'm practically the only one who can be bothered. I went into an office where people had been in housing since they were 16 – no GCSEs – no interest whatsoever in what went on outside. You know "We work these hours and then we leave" and don't give it another thought' (Interview 1).

This manager is explicitly differentiating herself from her colleagues who did not make the same effort as she does to keep their knowledge up-dated and who are not open to *'what went on outside'* of their organisation and their local area.

It is important to stress that not everyone in this category had formal housing or professional qualifications because what was important to pro-activists was the attitude adopted towards the acquisition of knowledge, which in their view could be gained from a wide variety of sources. Hence, what distinguished the pro-activists from the pragmatists were their attitudes towards gaining knowledge and their ability to think beyond the narrow scope of what they needed to know on a day-to day basis, rather than simply acquiring housing qualifications. This was described in the words of one pro-activist as the ability to think *'outside of the box'*. Their attitudes to the acquisition of knowledge set them apart from pragmatists in that they looked beyond the strict confines of their organisation to other housing organisations and other sectors in order

to be equipped to deliver a better service to their tenants.

Pro-activists were also characterised by their enthusiastic attitude towards their own self-improvement. They went on housing and generic training courses, such as computer courses, and built up their cv's with the long-term view of staying in the housing sector. These were housing managers who saw themselves with promising careers, as stated in Chapter 5, and they were looking ahead to what they needed to do to progress in the housing sector. They took the initiative in identifying shortfalls in their knowledge and skills and proceeded to do the appropriate training and education, in order to address these gaps. This was often over and above what was identified in their annual appraisal and personal development plans by their organisation. As some of this training was over and beyond what was necessary to carry out their day-to-day duties, pro-activists often found themselves having to make a strenuous case for going to university, for example, to their line managers, in competition with other pro-activists who also wanted further education. In many instances their request for time off was refused in the first instance and they had to persist over time with their application to get permission to go to college. This was in stark contrast to the more passive approach of pragmatists who were content to access all their training in-house as and when they were offered the opportunity.

Gaining a formal qualification in housing was viewed as an obvious route towards advancement because this would signal to others that the housing manager in question was knowledgeable and also committed to her/his own career development.

> *'A lot of it is me. Doing the housing qualification was entirely down to myself. Doing the BSc was down to myself. So all the qualifications I've gained, the choices to do them were mine. Nobody said "you need to do this and you need to do that" because, as I said before, you don't really need qualifications to work in housing'.* (Interview 43)

It also gave them an opportunity to network with other housing professionals. Hence, the oral culture that was evident within the workplace was also extended to the external environment when pro-activists met other housing students on college courses. Hence, pro-activists were exposed to, not only the more in-depth knowledge imparted through the educational process, but to the *'perspectives'* of housing managers in other organisations, as described in the following account:

'I think going and doing the qualifications makes you want to read more…going into things in a bit more depth… Well it's part and parcel of doing it. You have to read more in order to complete the course work and do the exams. And also talking all the time to people who work in other organisations who've got other perspectives. Some people have undertaken stock transfers, some people are in local authorities that are contemplating transfer so you have a huge variety of people, all with different levels of experience, all discussing issues and that also gives you a much wider picture as to what's going on' (Interview 6).

In contrast to pragmatists who expressed a lack of confidence due to their dearth of knowledge, pro-activists felt an increasing sense of confidence in their own competence and knowledge base as a result of attending university. This was considered important when dealing not only with tenants, but in their interactions with other professionals. Jane, a recently qualified HNC graduate, housing employee, and tenant of a housing co-op, reflects on the difference that having a job in housing and possessing a qualification had made to how other professionals perceived her:

'One thing I forgot to mention earlier was other people's perceptions of me before and after my course in housing. As I said, I've been in a housing co-op for several years. On countless occasions I felt patronised or that my (or the co-op's) point of view was ignored or seen as not as important as other professionals, i.e. the Housing Corporation or our partner HA. At the time I put this down to being a tenant and their attitude towards tenants in control of their own housing. Since passing the HNC and also since taking up paid work in housing I have seen a big change in this attitude. Don't know why, but I presume it is because I am now perceived as a professional rather than an amateur' (Interview 4: note to the researcher left after interview).

A common theme amongst pro-activists was the benefits of learning housing law. This enabled them to make more informed judgements on the extent to which their organisation operated within (or outside of) the legal framework which governed the tenant-landlord relationship. As they were exposed to how other organisations carried out certain legal procedures, this caused them to reflect on their own organisation's procedures. They felt more knowledgeable about the law than their unqualified colleagues and were keen to differentiate themselves from those with no formal training. The following statement is how one pro-activist described the low level of

legal knowledge possessed by pragmatists, who were presented with anything other than the routine aspects of tenancy agreements:

> *'I mean the tenancy agreement is a legal document and every single day we're talking to people about that document or they'll come in and say "my partner is leaving. Where does that leave me with the tenancy?" Ehm...joint tenancies, etc. The housing officers just wing it. And I've seen decisions made and you sit there and go "What!. You know, that is just so not right"'* (Interview 8).

Although organisational procedures were identified by some as providing a guide for good practice, this was challenged when the procedures themselves were unlawful or out of date. Hence, routine legal matters were handled in a very straightforward way, but the *'recipe'* knowledge upon which they generally relied was disrupted when there was conflict between what the pro-activists understood to be legal and what was enshrined in organisational policies and procedures. Several of the interviewees gave examples of breaches of landlord-tenant law which were institutionalised in the procedures of their organisation. In these instances their professional knowledge, gained from external training and education was seen to be in direct conflict with organisational procedures that they were required to carry out in the course of their day-to-day duties.

This situation presented pro-activists with a dilemma as to how to proceed when faced with the choice of carrying out a questionable procedure or making a stance against these dubious practices. They coped with this dilemma in different ways, ranging from directly confronting their senior managers to using more convoluted tactics in a bid to get these procedures changed. The majority of pro-activists took the *'softly, softly'* approach towards trying to change the systems within their organisations, which did not always result in the desired outcome:

> *'The abandoned notices, yah. Totally illegal. We haven't got a leg to stand on. So when I came and found out about them, I went and spoke to the Director about it 'cos I was very concerned and he said he was quite happy with it and to continue. So, I felt my hands were tied really, which didn't make me feel very good'* (Interview 9)

Another housing manager in this situation described how she went to her manager and the legal section to gather the facts before she made a case for changing the way they

did a couple of procedures, which after a period of time did come about.

> *'A couple that spring to mind, I then spoke to Legal (Services) and just said, you know "if this scenario happened, what would we do? What should we do?" And if they say what the same answer at college was, then you know that's okay. When the answer's not the same I have on those couple of occasions just gone to the assistant area manager and said, who luckily has also been to college and possibly should have picked up on it first, but (laugh), having said that (laugh), said "look we do this and is and we need to change it a.s.a.p." I made a really strong case and he couldn't really say no because he knew as well as I did that it was a bit dodgy'* (Interview 8)

Two other pro-activists put in place a *'check and balance'* for another procedure of a questionable legal standing and were eventually successful in obtaining a change in policy.

The fragmented nature of housing knowledge also informed the way housing managers negotiated the boundaries with other professionals, in areas that were at the intersection of housing, such as planners, lawyers, surveyors, and accountants. They used other professionals when their own *'generalist'* knowledge was not sufficient to carry out a particular task and the experts needed to be called in. In this way they defined for themselves where the boundaries of housing lay. Several managers spoke of rejecting the *'silo mentality'*, which characterised inter-professional relations in the past and which had compartmentalised professional knowledge. Recognising *when* to call in other professionals was seen as a particular skill for these housing managers.

In the following quote one senior housing manager described how she made sense of her own stock of knowledge. For her, the notion of boundaries with other professions was to an extent sterile because of the fluid context in which housing management is carried out, but boundaries were re-enforced when her lack of expertise necessitated using other professionals, such as accountants:

'I think this whole idea of boundaries is to an extent sterile. But there is a point in which we are aren't an accountant because we might start to know bits about balance sheets, but we don't know enough to actually pull together a set of accounts, do we? So, I suppose in some ways it's the point at which the boundaries are, when you come against a boundary and people will say "well, you can't do this because you need to know this, this and this"' (Interview 13).

This also required them to go beyond being knowledgeable about how best to deliver their own service and therefore to be aware of what services other professions could offer in order to provide a better service to individual tenants or to the neighbourhood. Pro-activists saw themselves as co-ordinators of services into their area. One housing manager described her expertise in doing this as having *'the knowledge'*:

'The knowledge, which is your way around, you know. What do other services provide'? What are the obligations that other services have to the kind of people who are likely to be your clients? What should social services be doing in certain circumstances? When is it appropriate to bring in the education department to deal with kids that aren't attending school? What is the role of the Police? What are the limits of the role of the Police?' (Interview 21).

They accessed a broader spectrum of knowledge, which contributed to their contextual understanding of their role and the wider environment in which they worked. They subscribed to the general view that housing management was about *'more than bricks and mortar'* and they were acutely aware of the problems involved in managing an increasingly residualised housing stock. For this group it was important that social housing was seen in its political, historical and social context because it provided some rationale for the current position of social housing and social housing tenants.

'So a lot of the background of the actual, you know, may be a large part of the population that we're actually dealing with, I studied a lot of that anyway. So the actual tenant group, then you know, I sort of looked at that so it's just like going on from there and actually then focusing on the housing issues' (Interview 8).

'You're not a professional in that way, if you don't have that wider understanding of what housing's about. And indeed, as an officer within a local office it's a danger to have that sort of isolated experience' (Interview 3).

Hence, they were more likely than their pragmatist colleagues to draw upon ideas around *'social exclusion'* and *'community'* for example, when considering the problems that confronted them in their dealings with tenants. This led them to the view that the problems in social housing had a lot to do with the wider economic and social structure, rather than the shortcomings of individual tenants. Having a broader perspective enabled them to achieve a greater understanding of tenants, and hence to give them a better service as a result, a theme which is explicated fully in Chapter 6.

As already suggested, the diverse and changing nature of knowledge in housing and the breadth of areas it covers mitigates against housing managers becoming experts in any discrete knowledge bases. While achieving dominance over a discrete area is a guiding principle for many other aspiring professions, the opposite was true of the pro-activists in this study. Indeed, diversity and breadth of knowledge was seen as a positive advantage in the fluid environment in which they worked. Some of the managers referred to the extent the knowledge base for housing had changed over the years:

> *'Seventeen years ago when I started going to college nobody mentioned to me about marketing, the five p's: people, place, product, price, position. And yet, I spend more time talking about it. Is that the right property? Have we got the right client group? Is it at the right price?'* (Interview 10).

As they found themselves having to meet new challenges in the demanding housing environment these managers actively sought to equip themselves with the appropriate knowledge and skills.

6.5 – Conclusion

Knowledge in housing management is fragmented and diverse and requires a breadth of knowledge, which is changing all the time. A *'learning orientation'* is valued over and above housing qualifications and validity is given to both informal and formal pathways to knowledge. An oral culture is prevalent and most officers acquire the know-how to do basic housing procedures in an informal and *ad hoc* manner. This oral culture creates a space for the reproduction of working practices, based on *'the way we do things around here'*, which is diffused through the *'role models'* acquired by new recruits and through support given by colleagues in *'the team'* management structure. An oral culture is also evident outside of the organisation, on university housing courses where managers have the opportunity to inter-act with other housing managers and

exchange information and knowledge.

Pragmatists value common sense and know-how as the essential foundations of their knowledge. However, the extent to which this knowledge can be said to be *'common sense'* is challenged by the contingent nature of the knowledge that is acquired in day-to-day housing management. Pragmatists are very much reliant on on-the-job training and the *'way we do things around here'*, which is re-enforced by the fact that they do not engage with education or training outside of their organisation. They view their working environment as an ample training ground for the basic knowledge necessary to carry out most housing tasks. However, they adopt a learning approach *within* the framework of the organisation in order to respond to the complex needs and demands of their tenants. This manifests itself in an *'information-gathering'* approach to gaining knowledge.

Pro-activists adopt a more *'cosmopolitan'* approach towards the acquisition and nature of knowledge. They take it upon themselves to build up a portfolio of knowledge, above and beyond what was required of them by their organisation, in order to provide a comprehensive service to their tenants. Knowledge was gleaned from a wide range of sources and by a number of different routes, both formal and informal. **Appendix 4** (p. 241) provides a graphic representation of both the collective and individualised elements of professionalism in relation to knowledge, as set out thus far.

Clearly housing managers recognised the fluidity of *knowledge* boundaries when working with other professionals. However, knowledge was only one area where housing managers engaged in boundary un-making practices. Chapter 7 will expand from this to consider how *'working the boundaries'* and the way in which it is incorporated into every day working practices, is viewed as a component part of professionalism in housing management,.

Chapter 7 — Professionalism as the management of boundaries: service and emotions

7.1 – Introduction

Professionalism for these housing managers represents more than simply a claim to knowledge as outlined in the previous chapter. It also represents a claim to a set of commitments to certain service ideals (Laffin, 1990). This chapter focuses on how managers negotiate the competing demands of providing a housing service within a managerial culture. More specifically, it establishes that the management of service and emotional boundaries (Malin, 2000) are at the heart of professionalism for the housing managers in this research. It analyses how ideas about professionalism are propagated through on-going reflexive practice and are manifest through the management of boundaries in three areas: organisational, embodied, and emotional boundaries. This highlights how understandings of appropriate professional behaviour guide practice on an every-day level, in housing management, which is not traditionally categorised as a profession. It sets out the argument in four stages.

First, the chapter analyses the ethical discourse[11] that underpins housing managers' aspirations to deliver a professional customer service. In doing so, housing managers mediate the boundaries between a standardised service, (based on all customers) and an equitable service. Second, the use of initiative is identified as a significant marker of professionalism. Working practices that demonstrate this initiative, within and beyond organisational boundaries are clearly outlined. Third, the way in which a sense of professionalism is embodied in the aesthetics of image and presentation is explored. Fourth, the making (and un-making) of emotional boundaries (Malin, 2000), as an integral component of professionalism, is analysed.

7.2 – Service boundaries and the service ethos

The housing managers in this research all stressed the importance of service as an essential component of their professionalism. At one level, this was unproblematic and

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[11] Discourse is not defined in the Foucauldian sense, i.e. in relation to power. Discourse is used in this

(continued on next page)

was described in terms of the standards that were expected by the organisation. Hence, housing managers were aware of the need to apply organisationally defined service standards that focused on the broad aims of providing decent quality accommodation:

> *'Doing everything in what you would sort of class is a professional way, which is getting in place your policies and procedures in order to provide a service to the customer, client, tenant, whatever you care to call them. That enables you to give them a professional service, but also achieve the objectives you need to achieve... in giving them the best service that you can, providing them with the accommodation they need. Giving them good value, good standard accommodation, which is what we're here for'* (Interview 6).

The importance of service was also described on a mundane everyday level, such as taking care to answer the phone and replying to people's letters for example:

> *'By doing what you say you're going to do. If someone rings up and makes an inquiry, you have to ring them back. You say "I'll ring you back" within whatever period of time, you ring them back within that period of time'* (Interview 11)*.

This service orientation was described by one housing manager as:

> *'Looking after the small things, which are the big things in many tenants' eyes'* (Interview 15)*

However, housing managers couched the discourse of customer service in moral terms, both explicitly and more generally in terms of *'doing the right thing'*, over and above what was stipulated by their organisation's contractual obligations:

> *'I think that professionalism in some ways is quite... well for me it's a range of quite moral things, like about ehm ...treating tenants and ehm leaseholders the way you'd want to be treated. And I don't really care whether they're called customers or tenants or our contractual obligations as an organisation, or whatever. It's about treating the people who we provide a service for with the highest degree of respect'* (Interview 34).

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thesis to simply refer to a set of ideas and attitudes revealed through written and oral accounts.

'It depends what you mean by professional but I would take it in the broadest sense. You know are you efficient, are you reliable, do you do the right thing, do you treat people respectfully, you know do you do what you're supposed to do?. You know that is what I understand about being professional in the broadest sense' (Interview 4).

When managers construct a morally-infused discourse to describe what they mean by customer service: ordered around emotionally charged notions such as *'equity'* and *'respect'* it can be understood as a challenge to organisational activity based on rationality and instrumental or procedural criteria (Bauman, 1993). Housing managers do not simply go along with a standardised housing service and construct a discourse that privileges *'equity of service'*. This is a strategy intended to ameliorate the consequences of carrying out organisational procedures within a largely constrained procedural framework.

The attitudes of housing managers to customer service was encapsulated in the way they thought about tenants. There was a noticeable reluctance to characterise users of the housing service as simply *'customers'* (Wray-Bliss, 2001: 53). For these housing managers the customer is also a tenant to whom managers felt some moral and social obligation

'I'm not interested in housing for profit, how much money you can make out of it. I'm interested in the fact that there are those people that do need the help. I don't mean to sound like "oh we've got to help people", in a patronising kind of way. It's not like that. There are people out there who cannot sort things out for themselves and they need a bit of a guiding and that's what we're here for. There are people who can't afford to buy or don't want to buy or who don't want to put themselves in so much debt, risk or whatever and that's what we're here for. And then there are those people who just don't have any alternative and that's what I like about it' (Interview 42).

For these housing managers *'customers'* were constituted not as one-dimensional and unproblematic, but were tenants who were entitled to the same considerations as they themselves were due. This characterisation of tenants' rights has a much wider moral and social grounding that is noticeably absent from customer charters or tenancy agreements. Peter, a resources manager, describes the values of working in a public

service as being primarily about people, which was a major motivating factor in the kind of service he wanted to provide, in the following words:

> *'I think that if you're working in local government then primarily, you're dealing with people. You're dealing with situations. You're dealing with a different set of values. There is a business element of it but the business is in that you could be the most efficient, business-like person but, if you don't relate to the people themselves...then you might be able to tick some boxes off but you're not actually providing the services that people should expect, the service I would expect from people in local government. Therefore, I think I should do the same thing, provide the same service'* (Interview 3).

Housing managers had their own definite views on the quality of service that they wished to give to tenants that was over and above organisational requirements. They stressed time and again how they used *themselves* as a yardstick for the desired standard of service, rather than relying on organisational guidelines or procedures:

> *'My bottom line is always "how would I like to be treated if I was looking for housing?" For example, I've been trying to find accommodation for my parents because they're elderly and they could probably do with something like sheltered accommodation and I hear myself arguing over the phone with housing workers and saying to them "don't speak to me like that, or I will speak to your manager" Now I would like to think that I would never speak to anyone like that so I don't expect to have to take it from someone else either. It's that simple'* (Interview 30).

> *'I've always wanted to provide the kind of housing service where somebody would be treated as I would like to be treated if I had approached the organisation'* (Interview 19).

Echoing Gilligan's (1982) account (although with an important caveat, as contrary to her findings, gender was not analytically significant in my data) they were coming from the position in which the interests of others are perceived as being as valid as those of the self (Gilligan, 1982, cited in Tyler and Taylor, 2001: 64). This kind of moral stance (Bauman, 1993) can be interpreted as being in resistance to the rationality of housing organisations that rely on the efficiency of managers in carrying out their duties to the required time frames.

Housing managers did not automatically comply with organisational procedures that

they felt were inherently unfair or not justifiable. This manifested itself in the way *'quantity'* of service was sometimes seen to conflict with *'quality'* of service. For example, the need for a quick turn-around of properties meant that houses to be re-let were not always judged by the housing officers themselves to be of an acceptable standard, although they (the properties) complied with organisational guidelines. Daphne, an area team leader, used a moral discourse to speak about how the same *'acceptable'* standards they applied to perspective tenants should also be applied to the housing organisation:

> *'We say, if they're a transferring tenant the property has to be at an acceptable standard when they're leaving it before we will consider them for a move. Well, we should apply the same rule to ourselves and not take people to a property where the cupboards are still dirty, where the garden is overgrown, full of rubbish and the toilet is a disgrace. I feel that I should be able to put the key in that door and feel pride in what I'm showing somebody. And then they will have pride in living there and become a tenant whose standards we want'* (Interview 7*).

Respect for the diversity of tenants' needs was used as a countervailing factor where there was increasing pressure to provide uniformity of service. There was a feeling that housing organisations were better at coping with mainstream housing needs although the numbers of tenants with more complex needs had increased dramatically. Managers articulated the difficulties of using a standardised approach to policies and procedures, when clearly there were varying degrees to which they could slot people into categories of need, a theme explored in a later section of the chapter.

Housing managers were mediating between a *'non-discriminatory'* customer service (based on *'generalised others'*: *all* customers) that promoted (e)quality of service and customers rights and an *'equitable'* customer service that brought *individual* tenants into view and was based on actual service provision in concrete situations. This resulted in ambiguity encapsulated in the following statement by Gerard, a senior housing manager:

'My view of customer service is making sure that everyone gets treated equally, ...ehm... it's about ensuring the quality of the service is there, it's about ensuring that everyone gets treated, irrespective of their backgrounds, their creed, their colour. Why you're dealing with them first and foremost as a customer, you know. I have never, ever thought of Mr and Mrs X from No. 23 and the only reason I know them, they're a pain in the butt about rent arrears or repairs. You know, even though they might have reported 50 repairs, the 51st time they come in, they're still a customer to me and I'll deal with them the way I would deal with any other customer' (Interview 47).

Later in the same interview Gerard added:

' There always needs to be room for dealing with individuals as individuals, as opposed to dealing with people as numbers, just because its laid down that that's how we do it' (Interview 47).

Mr and Mrs X 'are still customers' defined by the service interaction, to be dealt with in the same way as any other customer, but they are also represented *'as individuals'*.

Morally objective principles such as equality and equity of service are problematised by housing managers as they are confronted, not with the anonymity of the *'generalised others'* of the tenant body, but with face-to-face encounters with real tenants. In doing so they are actively engaged in negotiating the contradictions of all service work which as Korczynski (2002: 83) points out juxtaposes rational rules with customer-orientation and efficiency with the customer relationship. These contradictions echo the dual pressures of a public service ethos that is pitched against a managerially-defined customer service. *'Equality'* of service was problematised because this did not necessarily achieve *'equity'* of service. This was articulated by one housing manager in the following words:

'For me there's 2 things. It's about equality and equity, which is not the same thing. So where you say "well, we'll treat everybody equally" yah but that's not the case in relation to customers. You should have basic premises, basically the foundations of your service, which are the same for everybody, in terms of how you deal with rent arrears and how you deal with these key policies and principles. But, then you have to be equitable. Which is like saying " we'll treat everybody equally because every office we've got has got 3 steps up to it so we're treating everybody equally". But the equitable bit of that is to say "But that alright for those people who are able-bodied, who aren't either disabled or have got a buggy with them". So, to be equitable means about equal access and thinking about level access and that's a bad example, but you know what I mean' (Interview 21).

Managers cited examples of policies that were intended to promote equality of access had an unintended consequence of making things less equitable for more vulnerable tenants. Some housing managers [12]spoke of the unintended consequences of policies such as *'choice-based lettings'* whose aim is to promote greater choice and accessibility to social housing. They did not accept the organisational rationale of the new lettings system, *i.e.* that it was necessarily a fairer system because it was more transparent, open to everyone and all applicants were treated the same. They engaged in their own evaluation of it based on their own independent moral standards. A key factor was that they did not have as much flexibility as they had heretofore to affect allocations and which had contributed to their sense of their work as socially meaningful:

'Although some people may say "let properties and everybody does it the same, that makes it fair for everybody", it may do in one sense, but in another sense, you feel there are certain sections of society missing out, like very vulnerable people, where you could maybe use a bit of flexibility in how you let a property. Under this new (choice-based) letting system, there's less flexibility. It just doesn't seem right to me'. (Interview 39).

They rejected the idea that the new system was necessarily a good thing for everyone or that it constituted an improved service because they envisaged how more vulnerable

[12] A choice-based letting system had been introduced shortly before the fieldwork was carried out.

applicants and tenants could lose out to an allocations policy that seemed to respond more to demand than to need. Hence, they articulated an alternative view that problematised the new open market orientation of choice-based property allocations.

The next section will explicate how working practices that are *within* the boundaries of organisational rules and regulations (albeit at the margins) *i.e. 'working the system'* and *beyond* the boundaries, are constructed as providing an equitable quality of customer service. This relies on the endorsement of senior managers of the rationality of the decisions made and some deviation from the rhetoric of having a procedure for everything. Hence, some actions and decisions which spring from a pre-social moral impulse are reconstituted as rational, and as such satisfy both a managerially defined consistency of service and a front-line view which is more concerned with an equitable quality of service. These working practices are highly individualised and rely on having a certain amount of autonomy, and yet there was also some evidence that housing managers exercised control over themselves as to the extent to which they exceeded policies and procedures, hence demonstrating the economy of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977).

7.3 – The use of initiative: within and beyond the boundaries

7.3.1 Pragmatists

Pragmatists were more likely to express the view that being consistent about the application of procedures and *'sticking to the rules'* was a necessary feature of their professionalism. There was also a more practical reason why they held this view, as also found by Clapham *et al.* (2000). Policies and procedures were used as a safeguard against tenants' *'unreasonable'* demands and a fall-back if there were complaints about the service given. This defensive attitude was described by one estate manager as *'covering your back, when you felt you needed to'* (Interview 26)*.

Defensive attitudes notwithstanding, pragmatists were concerned to deliver a decent quality housing service that took into account the individual needs of tenants. This manifested itself in the desire to *'go the extra mile'* for tenants that they felt deserved special treatment by virtue of their age, vulnerability or other extraneous circumstances. An estate manager described how she went out of her way to make sure that elderly or vulnerable tenants' repairs were carried out faster than the proscribed target time

because they needed that kind of service more than others:

> *'With people with no hot water, the official approach to that is, 5 working days but, who would want to be without hot water for 5 working days? So we unofficially, would ask the contractors to go out as soon as possible. Likewise with elderly people, people with special needs you try to get them new toilet seats for free or whatever, even though they're supposed to pay because very often they're not up to doing it themselves'* (Interview 45*)

Not always sticking strictly to the rules was regarded as legitimate given the heavily bureaucratised system within which they were working. However, they were constrained both by their lack of knowledge and their low position on the management hierarchy to deviate too far from organisational procedures.

Although pragmatists were sometimes frustrated at their inability to give tenants the sort of service they wanted they went out of their way to give reasonable explanations when this scenario arose. This can be represented as an attempt by these housing managers to compensate for the inflexibility of bureaucracy by focusing on the quality of the service interaction especially in cases where the tenants' needs could not be met. Pragmatists positioned themselves as intermediaries to act on behalf of the tenants, even when solutions to the tenants' problems could not be found.

> *'People come into you for a wide range of reasons and you can't always give the person what they want. They could come in to me about rent arrears. They could come on to see me about neighbour nuisance. They could come in to see me about a move. And very often there's very little I can do...I think that they should feel that they've got something, even if it's only me as a contact for future reference, they should go out of that interview knowing that there is someone here that they can contact again'* (Interview 7). *

Hence, when pragmatists spoke of having *'respect'* for the tenants by being *'honest'* about what they could expect from the organisation, this allowed them to continue to view their work as (morally) meaningful. The service interaction was based on an understanding of perceived entitlement; tenants were entitled to a reasonable explanation as to why their requests could not be met, which has echoes with Hochschild's emotional labour as: *'Measured by a prior sense of what is reasonably owed, given the kind of social bond involved'* (1979: 568), which is explored in more

detail in section 7.5.

7.3.2 Pro-activists

By contrast, pro-activists described a sense of autonomy and flexibility in their day-to day work that was at odds with the rhetoric of a highly constrained procedural framework. They expressed the view that being professional was about choosing to be creative about the interpretation of procedures. The use of initiative was represented as an individualised choice to work at the margins of the system, rather than as an inevitable consequence of working in a heavily bureaucratised housing service. A sense of responsibility towards tenants informed the use of their initiative in two sets of circumstances: where basic procedures that were legally due to tenants were *not* carried out (hence procedures were not sufficiently adhered to) and where policies and procedures *were* carried out, but in an overly bureaucratic way.

Retaining a sense of what others (the tenants) were due in terms of their rights motivated managers to challenge situations where basic procedures (which were based on legal requirements) were not being followed for financial reasons. In two instances, where repairs services were being curtailed in direct contravention of normal procedures, managers set out to challenge such practices on the basis that tenants' entitlements as customers should not be dictated to by financial constraints. When asked to refrain from ordering repairs by his line manager, one estate manager responded by pointing to their contractual and legal obligations to the tenants and sticking to the repairs procedure as set out:

> *'My manager was indicating that the budget was a bit tight that year and therefore, we shouldn't be doing certain kinds of repairs because the budget might not stand it. And my response to that was we have a contractual and legal obligation under the 1985 Housing Act as it was. If he was instructing me not to do those repairs I wanted that in writing so that I could pin it up in the reception area of our office and say that the decision had been made that we would be breaking our contractual obligations to do these particular repairs. The response I didn't get, so I carried on doing the repairs'* (Interview 23)

In terms of the housing manager's dual loyalties to his employer organisation and tenants, here we have a clear identification with the tenant.

Being prepared to go beyond the procedural boundaries was described as *'an attitude of mind'* that marked the pro-activists out from those who were 'just doing their job', (Interview 12) or 'doing the bare minimum and getting away with it' (Interview 5).

Jeanette, a housing manager, spoke about how she did not feel the need to be particularly *'dogmatic'* about procedures, for example around the re-housing of former tenants who owed them money because she choose to look beyond the rules to the individual concerned. This was in contrast to some of her colleagues who were *'strict followers of rules and regulations'*:

> *'Despite the fact that your policy says you won't re-house people with former arrears, there is a certain leeway that allows you to do it, given a certain set of circumstances. And that's how we work and I think that's how most people would like to work. Perhaps not everybody chooses to use that discretion. You know some people are... very strict followers of rules and regulations, therefore if it says "we don't house people who owe us money" they won't even contemplate talking to those people about where this debt arose from'* (Interview 6).

Hence, Jeanette is making clear that she is different from other housing managers because she is willing to go to some considerable lengths to make the procedures work for the tenants, and this distinction forms a central part of her identity and professionalism. Pro-activists were more likely to have confidence in their own skills to be able to *'work the system'* and achieve desired outcomes for their tenants. By contrast to pragmatists, who frequently experienced uncertainty due to their lack of a solid knowledge base, pro-activists had a greater sense of confidence in their abilities to *'work the system'* when policies and procedures did not address the needs of the tenants, or the desired outcome for themselves, as managers. In the following extract, William, a pro-activist, describes how he goes through quite a convoluted process to *'get around a problem'* while still following organisational guidelines:

> *'If I want to get around a problem I sort of try and look for a convoluted solution, just banging away around it so that you get what you want and still work within the guidelines. Very often things are written down, but if you test them, you very often find that you can get things to run your way and still do it properly'* (Interview 19).

Another housing manager spoke about her *'professional philosophy'* within the

constraints of the organisation in these words:

'Well, you follow rules and procedures but you should try to expand from policies and procedures. If they don't fit their philosophy professionals will recognise that and try to change the procedures to fit and make them more in line with what they should be. Because anybody can follow policies and procedures' (Interview 5).

Similarly,

'Well, once you start putting your foot in the water these are the sort of things that come up. Normally what people do is apply the rules because they don't want to venture round the edges within the rules. And so you start using your initiative in trying to adapt the rules because there are things you can do in some cases and you just need to put some effort in and not just go down the same path all the time' (Interview 34)

The above two managers are therefore distinguishing themselves from those who simply apply the rules by their willingness to expand from and adapt procedures. One pro-activist, Maxwell, described how he stretched *'the limits of a procedure to try and make it fit'* to one individual's circumstances. He did so by appealing to rationality and using his knowledge of how they were able to justify doing the same course of action in another organisation.

'That bit about assigning a tenancy might not be in black and white, but let's look at it and will it fit, can we make it fit for this particular person 'cause you've got to look at people's quality of life as well. You've got to say "that particular thing might not fit in section 5.6" but, because every housing organisations procedures are slightly different ... I can look at something and think "well I've dealt with that before, that reminds me of when I was in Midtown HA, and what we did then was X, Y and Z" and I'll go to my boss and say "this is the situation, the same thing as I came across in Midtown and we were able to get around it this way." It usually works to take the logical approach like that' (Interview 43)

Thus, he was *'playing the game'* (Clegg, 1989) by interpreting the regulations in such a way that enabled his manager to give him the go-ahead to do what he thought was right for the tenant.

Choosing to *'work the system'* in order to achieve outcomes that pro-activists felt were (morally) right for the tenants concerned was a feature of *'exceptional circumstances'*

points in housing allocations. The following two accounts of a pragmatist and a pro-activist, respectively, as regards *'exceptional circumstances'* points[13], encapsulates the greater reliance of pragmatists on organisational procedures to deliver a good service, and the initiative of pro-activists in using the same procedures to change outcomes for tenants. Daphne, a pragmatist, outlined her attitude towards the *'exceptional circumstances'* provision in pessimistic terms:

> *'Not that I don't want to get more points for people, but I never seemed to get anywhere with them...kind of put me off. I mean it shouldn't have to be like that... People should just get the points they're entitled to in the first place without all the messing about' (Interview 7)**

This was in contrast with the view of Celia, who made frequent attempts to get these points on the basis that it was a legitimate thing to do given the inflexibility of the system:

> *'Now some officers never even try to get extra points for people, but I do because that's what they're there for. I mean you look at where people are on the waiting list and it seems pretty hopeless and their circumstances could be really bad, so I try and do what I can...make a case for them...talk up where I think they could get some more. I've been amazed at times when I have got them points when even I thought it didn't sound that convincing. Even a few extra points could make a difference, you don't know...'* (Interview 16).

However, the same manager said:

> *'I wouldn't push it though'* (Interview 16)

because she thought that if there were too many applications her manager (who made the decision as to the extra points) would not be as inclined to look upon them favourably and it would be counter-productive to keep applying for them. This can be interpreted as a self-imposed disciplinary measure whereby the anticipated responses of the senior manager constrained the field of action (*i.e.* the amount of *'exceptional*

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[13] *'Exceptional circumstances'* points were a feature of the allocation system, whereby applicants who had reasonable grounds could apply for extra points on their housing application, over and above what was initially granted. The application for extra points was completed by the housing manager and then went to the appropriate senior manager for their consideration.

circumstances' points applied for) and functioned to keep *'exceptional circumstances'* cases just that.

When pro-activists described their approach to customer service a general theme was the time they invested in problem-solving. Tenants were not straightforward, *'they haven't read the procedures manual'* as one manager aptly put it (Interview 14). It was not always the case that regulations could be followed, given the diversity of tenants and applicants, which opened a space for imagination and creativity in the interpretation of the rules. Pro-activists saw out of the ordinary cases as a challenge that required them to go beyond the boundaries of applying or bending the rules.

Two housing managers gave instances of assignments of tenancies which had no basis in law, but which was felt to be morally right as an example of what motivated them to go well beyond the rules and regulations. In one example, the sole tenant of a three-bedroomed house died leaving her elderly lodger (who had also been her carer) without any legal claim to the tenancy of what had been his home too for twenty-five years. The estate manager concerned took it upon herself to make a case for a new tenancy to be created in his name, even though as a single person he would not normally be entitled to a 3-bed house.

> *'It was obvious that something had to be done... Here was a man who had always lived in the house and looked after Mrs XX, who was the tenant. I mean you couldn't just ask him to move to another place because he was getting on a bit and already had his life turned upside-down. I don't think many people would have stood by and let that happen. It took a bit of sorting...quite a bit actually, but we got there in the end. Maybe some people don't do that bit extra because it's too much hassle, it's so much easier to do it by the book, isn't it?'* (Interview 34)

She made her case to the senior manager and a new tenancy for the same property was granted to the elderly lodger.

In the other case, a 16-year old female, with the responsibility for 3 younger siblings, with no guarantor, presented a procedural conundrum (the legal age at which a tenancy can be granted is 18 years old). One pro-activist took the initiative to pursue her case, liaising with Housing Benefits, Social Services and other agencies to reach an agreed outcome, where she was eventually granted a tenancy.

To summarise thus far, housing managers negotiate the boundaries of customer service

as defined by organisational constraints and customer service as defined by pre-social moral ideas such as *'fairness'* and what is *'right'*. In this ambiguous space, there is a certain amount of flexibility as procedures cannot by their very nature fully encompass the *'how'* of policy implementation (May and Buck, 2000). Housing managers operate at varying levels of flexibility and autonomy both within and beyond the boundaries of organisational guidelines.

It was clear from the evidence thus far that professionalism was thought of as an individualised project of the self, whether working mainly within knowledge and organisational boundaries (pragmatists), or at the margins and beyond organisational boundaries (pro-activists). The next section explores this theme further by explicating how the body is used as an important indicator of professionalism by all the housing managers in this research.

7.4 – Embodied boundaries – all housing managers

Chapter Three noted that *'traditional'* professions have a number of means at their disposal by which to construct and maintain boundaries. They have access to a discrete and esoteric body of knowledge (the basis of a collective professional identity) that engenders distance between themselves and their clients. Housing management, on the other hand, lacks a collective identity (as noted in Chapter 5) and a discrete body of knowledge (as noted in Chapter 6), and places more emphasis on professionalism as an individual endeavour. However, given the perceived need to respond efficiently to customers' needs and demands, the *'professional project of the self'* in housing management also involved the presentation of an image of professional competence, as is the case with the medical and legal professions, for example (Hughes, 1958; Becker, 1970).

All the housing managers in this research (*i.e.* both pragmatists and pro-activists) agreed that what was most important was the approach they took to delivering a professional service. They were keenly aware that as housing managers they were the *'face'* of their housing organisation. Emphasis was put on the way they *'put themselves across'* to tenants, as well as to other professionals, from the purely aesthetic (appearance and image) to the way they spoke and acted when carrying out their work. Clearly, the self was seen as a positive resource in communicating a professional role. The following section will explicate how the body is conceived as a text to be read (Trethaway, 1999)

in both maintaining and collapsing professional boundaries.

Although their organisations did not stipulate a dress code all the housing managers in the research had definite ideas about what to wear which were based on the necessity to convey an image of a competent, but nonetheless caring professional. In the absence of a prescribed dress code their approach to how they dressed was influenced by whether they wanted to collapse or maintain boundaries between themselves and tenants. This in turn depended on the nature of the interaction between housing managers and tenants on any given occasion. It was obvious from their comments that housing managers put a lot of thought into what they wore, in a bid to produce satisfied customers. Hence, a lot of emphasis was placed on wearing the appropriate clothes, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

> *'No we don't have a dress code, not written down anyway, as far as I know anyway. Ehm...but I would expect people to come in looking smart because they need to portray an image for the organisation which is, a...a professional organisation and although...ehm... maybe some people wouldn't see wearing jeans as being unprofessional I think...I think really, personally, my personal view is that you've got to be smart'* (Interview 9).

This involved dressing appropriately for the situation at hand:

> *'I think it's a catch 22, because I think sometimes when...in my position, when residents are expecting somebody from the Authority, they expect that somebody from the Authority to appear in a certain way, so you know, I think there is a certain unwritten dress code, that somebody at my level should wear at a meeting of the community. But that doesn't mean that other officers can't meet them in different ways, use different tools and perhaps go to fun days and stuff like that. But I think if you're going to a meeting, and it's a community meeting, I think they're expecting that Council official to appear in a certain way'* (Interview 2).

There was a general opinion that housing managers should not wear expensive clothes or jewellery, for example, because this would alienate their tenants and hence have the effect of creating a barrier between them, which in turn would inhibit their ability to produce satisfied customers. At the other end of the spectrum they did not want to appear as too scruffy or casual because this was disrespectful to their tenants and conveyed an image of incompetence. Presenting an efficient image was important when

representing the organisation at court cases, for example, and special care was taken to conform to court etiquette by the wearing of smart suits. However, when working on housing estates it was acceptable to be a bit more casually dressed.

Thus, in the absence of a dress code housing managers made decisions (based on a shared etiquette) about how they needed to portray themselves, which involved 'being smart' yet at the same time being a *'bit more casual'* than *'a shirt and tie thing'*. The following manager's comments put this aspiration into words:

> *'In the early days in housing, I went working at another office. I cycle to work and one day my clothes got wet, so I had a t-shirt and jeans on, and I spent the day on the counter with those on. Somebody actually said, "it's great not to talk to a stuffed shirt", and since then, I've been more casual in my dress, so it's not a shirt and tie thing. ...I don't see it as "I am local government, I will do this, that and the other". I am here to help. I don't like this barrier thing'* (Interview 29)*.

Another housing officer explained how she used the way she dressed as a tool for breaking down barriers and producing good manager-tenant relations.

> *'I normally wear jeans and trainers, my hair pulled back, just like one of the lads, basically and that's the way I like them to see me'* (Interview 41)*.

If she did not dress in a reasonably casual manner, it would inhibit tenants from giving her the information she needed to manage her estate, which, in turn, would impact on the community she served.

Housing managers also talked about how they had developed and used bodily performances and nonverbal behaviours (*c.f.* Goffman, [1959] 1971) that collapsed the barriers – and thus highlighted the similarities - between them and their consumers.

> *'If somebody was distressed then you know, I might put out my arm ... my hand on their elbow, to give them a bit of comfort. It depends really on the circumstances'* (Interview 16).

Jacqueline, a housing advisor, outlined how she used body language to get across the message to clients that she was really listening to what they were saying, which she described as *'active listening'*:

'It's one that I've worked on over the years. It's one I always emphasise when I'm applying for a new job because I think it's absolutely fundamental to the job that we do generally in housing, to be able to listen and understand and interpret what the client is saying and clarifying it. It's about really focusing on the client and giving the right signals that you're listening, like tilting your head slightly and nodding, whatever' (Interview 34)*.

What is clear from the above accounts is that the housing managers in the research saw themselves as embodying their professionalism through their outward appearance and manner. However, their concept of professionalism transcended the aesthetic and encompassed a complex negotiation of emotions as regards the boundaries between themselves and tenants. The remainder of the chapter will analyse the processes involved in the management of these emotional boundaries.

7.5 – Professionalism and emotional boundaries

Professionalism was seen to be important in the increasingly competitive social housing sector, which demands a competent, business-like image. However, the nature of the work itself was also thought to require an image of the *caring professional* that went beyond outward appearances and encompassed qualities such as empathy and understanding, essential to providing a service to customers who were drawn increasingly from low-income, disadvantaged sections of society. Housing managers felt they were able to counter-act a negative collective image by being professional, but in a manner that also allowed them to be caring in their dealings with tenants. This aspect of being professional brings to the fore the housing manager-tenant relationship and the importance of managing boundaries within that context.

As the majority of housing managers did not belong to a professional body and therefore, did not experience the socialisation attached to other professions (as noted in chapter five), they made up for themselves a definition of being professional, which was refined and reflected upon over years of being in the front-line of housing management. They commonly applied to themselves the standards that they would expect from other professionals and used this as a benchmark with which to judge their own performance. To this end, housing managers highlighted the importance of engendering trust and respect in their dealings with their tenants and this was seen as an on-going process, as they built up relationships with them over time.

Hochschild's (1983) seminal work on emotional labour was useful in the analysis of the data on professionalism in relation to emotional boundaries. Although largely ignored by academics and managers, emotional labour has been performed in front-line service jobs for many years (Korczynski, 2002: 140). Hochschild's (1983) study of flight attendants and debt collectors, *'The Managed Heart'*, first drew attention to emotional labour in the service industry. In the increasingly competitive world of air travel airlines sought to differentiate themselves from their competitors with the quality of the service offered. This translated into specific demands on workers not only to present a subservient *'front'* to customers, but to engage in *'deep acting'*[14], rather than *'surface acting'*; to internalise the feelings they are meant to display, hence the *'Managed Heart'* of the title. Intimate elements of the self are used in the work process *'to produce an emotional state in another person'* (Hochschild, 1983: 7).

Although housing management cannot be considered to be strictly a welfare profession it is involved with welfare issues as housing managers engage in face-to-face interactions with tenants, who are increasingly disadvantaged or socially excluded (Clapham *et al.* 2000). It also has similarities with the service sector as it provides a housing service within an increasingly performance-led public service. Analysis of the data revealed that a considerable amount of *'emotion management'* and *'emotional labour'*, as well as *'surface acting'* was carried out by these housing managers. The housing managers interviewed for this research did not use the term *'emotion management'* to describe the processes they went through to manage their feelings in work. Neither were there formal feeling rules[15] as regards what was expected of housing managers in interactions with tenants. In what sense then can the term *'emotional labour'* be applied to housing management?

Although there was no formal recognition of emotions in the workplace, tacit recognition was given to the emotional expertise required for certain aspects of the work

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[14] 'In *"surface acting"* we consciously change our outer expression in order to make our inner feelings correspond to how we appear' (Smith, 1992: 7).
"Deep acting" requires us to change our feelings from the inside using a variety of methods such as verbal and physical prompting so that feelings we want to feel show on our face' (Smith, 1992: 7).

[15] Hochschild (1979) defines *'feeling rules'* as norms and standards that shape inner experiences in a variety of social and organisational settings. Feeling rules, she writes. *'are what guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges*' (p.56).

and strategies were devised to accommodate this through specific working practices. Individual housing managers in generic area teams are routinely assigned a *'patch'* of houses and/or flats to manage. There are *'good patches'* and *'bad patches'*, constructed in terms of the type of tenants housed, the general environment and the demands made on individual housing managers. In the occupational world of housing management the most difficult to manage areas are characterised as those with high rise flats or small houses, with large numbers of young, single people with varying support needs, a high turn-over of tenants and demanding levels of anti-social behaviour. The emotional work involved in managing these areas is acknowledged in several ways. *'Patch rotation'* is a common management practice, whereby a housing officer will be allocated a *'good patch'* after a period of managing a *'bad patch'*. This was put forward as a way of counter-acting the *'burn-out'* and stress likely to be experienced by officers who manage the very demanding areas over a period of time. One estate officer spoke of how she had managed a *'bad patch'* for a number of years, and had recently requested (and been granted) a transfer away from the area. She felt she had *'given it everything she had'* and needed a break from the stresses and strains of dealing with constant complaints about anti-social behaviour.

Emotional expertise with particular groups of people was particularly valued and roles were allocated informally on that basis. For example on one team, Nadia, was especially good with older people and hence, she was given the task of serving the *'Notices of Seeking Possession'*[16] (N.S.P.s) on everyone over the age of sixty within her area. Although her line manager had been concerned initially that she was not as up-to-date with policies and procedures as her other colleagues *'she was worth her weight in gold, regardless'* (Interview 9) because she was able to put across the seriousness of the N.S.P.s without upsetting anyone unduly. Her approach was contrasted with another estate officer in the same team who:

> *'just doesn't know how to talk to people. She'd get into a set-to with anyone [tenants]...really knows how to wind things up. I spend a lot of my time repairing the damage she's done...complaints from tenants, etc'* (Interview 9).

[16] A court can only make an order for possession (of a property) on specified grounds and only provided that the landlord in question has followed the correct procedure. This procedure is commonly known as a 'notice of seeking possession' or N.S.P (Arden and Hunter, 1997: 80).

This type of informal role allocation was also evident in a housing advice team in one of the other organisations. Although it was not written into their job descriptions, housing advisors took it upon themselves to specialise with different client groups. So for example, one advisor 'specialised' in teenage mothers, while another dealt with most of the domestic violence cases. They saw their natural empathy as counter-acting the general level of stress attached to their work and had spent years building up experience of working with these groups. In other words, their emotional expertise was used as a buffer because they were able to derive satisfaction from helping specific groups of clients.

It was recognised that housing managers were often in emotionally charged situations and hence, *'being good with people'* was seen as a primary skill. Both pro-activists and pragmatists spoke about how they had to get on with tenants and listen to their problems in order to *'get the job done'*. Surface acting was an integral part of interactions between managers and tenants and did not present any real problems for experienced housing managers. They went through the motions of displaying nominal empathy, courtesy, a caring expression and whatever else was thought appropriate to carry out their work successfully. Senior managers expected them to put up with a certain amount of *'flak'* in the course of their day-to-day work, even if that sometimes entailed being at the receiving end of heated verbal exchanges between themselves and tenants. Managers were expected to be able to handle tricky situations and to *'toughen up'* or *'back down'*; whatever was appropriate to keeping communication flowing with tenants and getting the correct information from them. Informal feeling rules about *'not getting people's backs up'* or allowing people to *'let off steam'* formed part of what was required of a 'good' housing manager. It was accepted that in order to achieve organisational objectives such as meeting rent arrears targets, this required the compliance of the tenants, which at times required the active, and sometimes *emotional* engagement of the housing manager.

However, while there was evidence of some harmful side effects as a result of trying to manage these emotions, housing managers also expressed satisfaction arising from becoming emotionally engaged with their tenants. This finding highlights a key critique of Hoschild's work: *i.e.* emotional management is a good deal more complex than is portrayed in her seminal work (1983) and is not necessarily harmful to those who experience it in the course of their work, as suggested by Callaghan *et al.* (2002) and

Bolton and Boyd (2003). These housing managers managed their emotions in the work place both to benefit themselves and to benefit their tenants.

What emerged from the interview data was that housing managers genuinely empathised with their tenants, and their reasons to go beyond the boundaries were sometimes guided by what also motivated them in their social lives. Hence, they were concerned to be seen as caring, honest people who would go out of their way to help someone who was in difficulties. Working within the constraints of a big organisation, they were trying to present the idea that housing managers were not *'just bureaucrats pushing bits of paper around the office all day'*, as described by one housing manager (Interview 8). Another manager articulates the same sentiment in the following words:

> *'I want our service to have a human face. I don't want to be part of a sort of a mindless bureaucracy, which is how some government officials were seen, mainly in the 1950s, or earlier. Local government people were seen as faceless and uncaring. I think it's important to have a caring face. You've got to be able to step back a bit as well, but I think it's important to be caring, people have got to be able to see that you care, otherwise local government does come across as these people who provide houses, but they don't really care about you, they're just doing their jobs'* (Interview 39).

Housing managers not only *genuinely* felt a commonality between themselves and their tenants, but also used this common ground as an opportunity to engage in emotional labour, which enabled them to communicate effectively with tenants and achieve desired outcomes. They wanted to make an *authentic* connection with tenants, rather than merely go through the motions of conveying *'surface'* (Giddens, 1990) sympathy, albeit that this was sometimes for instrumental reasons (*e.g.* getting details that will speed up a housing benefit application). Although all of the managers in this research, without exception, subscribed to the idea of being caring professionals, there were subtle differences as regards emotional boundaries between pro-activists and pragmatists. The remainder of the chapter will address the key questions: Who does the managing of emotions, how, and with what consequences?

7.5.1 – Pro-activists and emotional boundaries

Pro-activists are situated in a wide range of positions within the organisation and at various levels of management. While some have a strategic and managerial role they all

have some contact with tenants and characterised the successful management of relationships with tenants as an integral part of their professionalism. These housing managers, like pragmatists, saw their similarities with tenants as a positive resource, and used what they had in common with them to their advantage when the situation arose. In contrast to the traditional professions who strive for distance and detachment in their dealings with clients, pro-activists were not averse to trying to get along with tenants by making very general references to their own lives when discussing particular problems with tenants. What distinguished pro-activists from pragmatists in this regard, was the nature and extent to which they did this type of sharing. They did reveal certain biographical details for example, in order to strike a rapport with tenants. The most common disclosure (not surprisingly) was that they too had grown up on a council housing estate, or had had friends who were tenants on council estates. However, they were guarded about what they revealed and did not disclose much more to tenants beyond that. Thus, they made a point of never discussing any of their own problems with tenants, a boundary that is not always enforced by pragmatists, (as is outlined in the next section).

Pro-activists were significantly less inclined than pragmatists to collapse boundaries and emphasised the desirability of having some distance between themselves and their tenants. Considerable thought went into the management of these relationships and the skill involved in negotiating the fine line between being approachable and becoming too involved, as outlined by Rachel, an area housing manager:

> *'It's a fine line between being professional and being unapproachable, I think. You need to know where, you need to be able to pitch yourself at the right level for the person that you're talking to. And you don't always do it. You're not always successful. Sometimes you get, you know, you might get slightly too involved. Sometimes you might be a little too remote and they might not feel they can connect with you, therefore, they might not tell you what they need to tell you and you can't help them'* (Interview 17).

They were more aware than pragmatists of the potential conflict involved in being familiar with tenants while at the same time getting them to comply with certain organisational requirements. For this reason pro-activists took care not to become too friendly or *'matey'* with tenants. One manager made the point that however friendly he was with tenants he was always aware of the *'bottom line'*, which was that he was the

landlord and they were the tenant:

> *'You're dealing with people in a business arrangement, whether you like it or not, it's a business arrangement. You're the landlord and they're the tenants. Be polite and cordial with people but, always remember what you're saying to them and don't mislead them and don't joke with them, particularly about people on the estate and things like that. Don't tell them things that they're not supposed to hear, even if you wanted to say something in confidence. Never make any idle promises, unless you know everything is guaranteed. Just to remember it's a business relationship'* (Interview 19).

They suggested that getting too close to tenants would interfere with their ability to do their job properly and were inclined to focus on *'the problem'* rather than *'the person'*, in a bid to stop themselves becoming caught up in emotional situations.

However, it was also recognised that it was neither possible nor desirable to be completely detached. This was especially the case when managers came across families or old people whom they considered to be vulnerable and which sparked off feelings of similarity with their own personal circumstances. For example, one housing manager, who was a mother of young children, spoke of how she found it *'difficult to not say something'* when dealing with a tenant who was in the same situation as herself because she was affected by what she saw as the tenant's lack of care for her children:

> *'It's hard to stand back sometimes and not say anything. Especially if there's a similar situation to yourself. You know, if someone comes in or I've been to properties where you know, they're in dreadful circumstances, really dirty houses and there's small children. You can't help but feel...affected by what you see. You may want to turn round and say "My God, how can you have your children living like this?" And quite often you want to, but it's not about that. It's about, these people have problems, how can we address them, how can we resolve this'?* (Interview 8).

Hence, while most pro-activists aspired to the ideal of maintaining a professional distance from tenants, in practice they did not always achieve this goal. Some situations touched them personally and they struggled to keep the professional distance to which they aspired. Therefore, in common with pragmatists, they were not immune to becoming emotionally caught up with tenants' problems. However, they distinguished

themselves in the way they sought to manage that situation, as described by this housing manager:

> *'It's hard when you're providing a personal service, which often requires, you know, a level of empathy, not to become very drawn on a personal basis and to the sort of problems that people have. You know, a classic example, working in homelessness, people fleeing violence who quite clearly have been very badly abused and personally you often feel very angry about that, very frustrated about what you can do. But you have a role in relation to that individual which involves being as empathetic as you can, to provide the best service that your organisation can provide to that individual. But it has limits. And I think recognising those limits is a legitimate part of professionalism... It's also more honest than raising people's expectations.'* (Interview 5).

Mary's account is a graphic description of the emotional labour involved in genuinely feeling one thing and presenting a different (un) emotional self in the public arena of the housing office. The above manager expresses a feature of emotional management common to all pro-activists, *i.e.* a recognition of the limitations of the organisation in delivering a service to tenants. While being empathetic to tenants' problems they strive to keep things in perspective by reminding themselves of what it is possible to achieve within the constraints of the organisation. They distinguished themselves in this regard from other, *'less professional'* housing managers, who became too emotionally involved and consequently made unrealistic commitments to tenants, which they later could not deliver.

Although there are not formal *'feeling rules'* (Hochschild, 1983) a key finding from the data was that pro-activists were instrumental in implicitly setting the boundaries for emotional management in the work place. This monitoring of emotions came about most often in the form of advise to colleagues, who were in danger of stepping over the boundaries and getting too personally involved in tenants' problems. One team leader spoke of how, at times, she had to get someone *'to pull back'* from a problem by suggesting they stick to policies and procedures rather than getting too involved in a case. In one area office, a particular housing officer had the reputation of being *'too soft with the tenants and their problems'* and consequently was not seen as particularly effective or efficient by her colleagues. Although it was acknowledged that she had a particularly difficult *'patch'* to manage, her problems with bringing some of the anti-

social behaviour cases to a satisfactory conclusion were more often than not put down to the fact that she got too closely involved and was therefore not being as effective as she could be. Hence, the problem, i.e. an inability to get through the work-load because of spending too much time trying to sort out tenants' problems, was seen as an individual one, i.e. down to the personal characteristics of the officer, rather than anything inherent to the job. The onus was put on her to *'toughen up'* in order to get the work done.

Several pro-activists had given less experienced colleagues advice about getting too close to the tenants and the pitfalls of *'doing too much for them'*:

> *'I've said it to other housing officers because other people [housing officers] have said it to me, you know, to a colleague I've said "you're getting too close to this problem here" or "just look at what's going on and deal with that. I know such and such a person is probably getting a hard time, but deal with it as a problem and not as a people thing"'* (Interview 19).

What is of note in the above comment is how this manager depersonalised the situation, thus enabling distance, by focusing on the *'problem'* rather than *'a people thing'*. Another housing manager described getting too upset about the tenants as being unprofessional in the following account:

> *'I've seen other housing officers come out of interviews and they've been really upset and then they've had to sit down for 10 minutes and ask someone else to take over for them for that time, and to me that's not being professional because you know what you've got to deal with, you know the types of people you're dealing with. We're dealing with nice people, we're dealing with criminals, drug dealers, we're dealing with really hardened criminals who you think, I'm just glad that I don't have to mix with these on a daily basis'* (Interview 43).

This manager advised a new recruit to *'deal with the problems'* by reminding himself that he was not Joe Bloggs, who goes in the pub (*i.e.* his social self), but Joe Bloggs, housing officer (*i.e.* his work self). Hence, new managers were given pointers as to how not to *'get in too deep'* by more experienced colleagues.

Detachment is a criterion for many traditional professions and it is clear that these pro-activists have taken on board what they perceive as a professional trait, *i.e.* the ability to maintain a boundary between themselves and the tenants. They drew a line between

their personal and private life by not discussing their problems with tenants, which would only serve to detract attention away from the tenants and *'cloud the issue'*. They felt this enabled them to do their work in a fair and consistent manner. Pragmatists were distinguished from pro-activists by the nature and extent of their emotional engagement with tenants, a theme which is explored in the next section.

7.5.2 – Pragmatists and emotional boundaries

Pragmatists are situated in the *'front line'*[17] of housing management, are the main point of contact for the tenants and are seen as the public face of the organisation. They typically work in satellite offices situated on the estates themselves although a number of them worked from the town centre near to the estates. In either case, a significant part of their time is spent visiting tenants in their own homes or interviewing them in the estate office. They feel the pressure of trying to be kind and caring to tenants while also carrying out their work in a reasonably efficient manner to meet organisational deadlines. As such they find it hard to position themselves between the competing demands of both parties. They are empowered by the close contact that they have with tenants and have built up good relationships with some of them over time. Many have worked the same *'patches'* for a number of years and are well known in their respective areas. They invest a significant amount of their identity in being down-to-earth and open-minded because this is how they want to come across to tenants, as noted in Chapter 5.

Pragmatists had a negative view of the concept of having boundaries between themselves and tenants. Unlike pro-activists, they problematised the construct of professionalism as boundary maintenance on the grounds that this put an unhelpful barrier between them and service users. They constructed an image of *'a professional'* that was remote and unable to communicate with tenants. One pragmatist articulated her idea of a professional in the following words

> *'You want it (the housing service) on their (the tenants') level, don't you? I think once it gets too professional, I think it's like "them and us" and I don't think it should like that. It should be equal, shouldn't it? We've got the choice.'*

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[17] Front line housing management is defined as housing management that involves face-to-face contact
(continued on next page)

'Is that what "professionalism" conjures up in your mind, them and us?'

'Yah, "professional" as in professional people right. I think they need the qualifications right, but speaking to tenants is completely different. I think they want somebody who's down to earth, who can understand where they're coming from and I think that if it gets too professional there'll be a gap and I don't think that is right' (Interview 26)*.

Professionals were defined by the above manager in the formal sense, as those who had qualifications, but not necessarily the inter-personal skills to engage in a productive way with tenants. This was contrasted with their own interactions with tenants which were characterised by close engagement and encompassed the notion of friendship. Pragmatists were adamant that it was not only possible but also desirable to be professional without having unnecessary barriers between themselves and tenants.

Pragmatists, in common with pro-activists viewed their ability to establish good working relationships with the tenants as pivotal to their work and in common with pro-activists, they put a considerable amount of thought into how these relationships could be established and maintained. The negotiation of boundaries between housing managers and tenants was regarded by pragmatists as a skill to be fine-tuned by the experience of doing the job over many years. Boundaries were flexible, and most significantly, could include being friends with tenants, a scenario that would not be contemplated by pro-activists. In the words of the following pragmatist:

'I think sometimes, you know with certain people how to mark a professional boundary and not to cross it. You know with some people, but you also know with other people you can perhaps get away with a bit more, maybe be a bit more forceful than what you would normally be, and in that way, get what you want. Or sometimes it can go the other way, where you tend to make more of a friend of them' (Interview 27)*.

Interviewees had a range of different approaches towards communicating with tenants, which they adapted, depending on whom they were speaking to:

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with tenants, for example, estate management or tenant participation.

'I am aware that you have to talk to people differently. I learnt this from being a salesman really. There are certain people on the estate whom I get to know reasonably well. During the course of my work I get to see them on a regular basis. Now, if I've got an 18 year old in a flat who isn't paying his rent, I can go up to him and say, "look, Darren, shape up or you're shipping out". Whereas, Mrs Wilberforce, who's a 75 year old granny, in a lovely little bungalow, I wouldn't address her in the same way I would speak to Darren' (Interview 28)*.

Another pragmatist described how at times she was professional (when following policies and procedures), but her way of communicating with tenants was a different matter:

'I'm professional in that I follow policies and procedures, but in some cases I'm not professional because I call a spade a spade and I think that sometimes, with the people we work with, they appreciate that. All this jargon and going through this and that, it's like they think, "oh it's the same old council". You know, bureaucratic, whereas, if you speak to them at their level kind of thing. And sometimes, I agree with them because, if you want something doing, it does take months and months and I feel just as frustrated as them and I'll tell them that, but I don't think that's professional. But I'll say things like that to them. Do you know what I mean?' (Interview 26)*.

She preferred to be more straight-forward and honest than what might be expected from a detached professional because then she was *'being herself'* and this helped her retain credibility with tenants and hence a good relationship with them. Pragmatists, while considering themselves to be professional on one level, *i.e.* providing a good service, they nonetheless wanted to distance themselves from other housing professionals who aspired to keeping boundaries between themselves and their tenants. The above account illustrates the difficulties pragmatists had with negotiating the boundary between their personal feelings and perceived professional boundaries.

Pragmatists regularly made judgements about how far they could be assertive and when it was most appropriate to *'push matters'* with the tenants, so as to get the information they needed. One housing manager, Lottie, tailored her interactions on a case by case basis depending on whom she was dealing with, and how much she thought they (the tenants) knew about their own situation:

'I think you've got to make a judgement on how you're going to take this scenario or how you're going to listen, how is it going to be, because I find every case is different. Sometimes I might be a little bit more assertive in some cases and sometimes even a little bit more authoritarian, let's say, and other times I think to myself "well, here I can't have the same approach as I would in maybe the house down the road"' (Interview 35)*.

What is clear from the above three accounts is that the way these housing managers communicate with tenants is based on *'what works for them'*, and their experiences gleaned from interactions both in and outside of work. This points to the importance of their individual biographies (as noted in Chapter five), as their social knowledge structures the way they approach social interactions and the way that they approach work matters generally.

In the following account, Veronica, an estate manager, describes the effect of serving a NOSP on a woman with whom she had considerable sympathy:

'She's [the tenant] got 2 sons who are complete dick-heads. And they've caused loads of problems on the estate, so we've had to do an NSP and went for eviction. She was a perfect tenant. She'd done absolutely nothing wrong, but because of her sons she lost her house. I know there's got to be some commitment. I know that. You've got to lay the law down, but it seems very, very unfair. She wants to come back on the estate. She can't because of all this made her £400 in debt so there's no way she's going to get that £400. I understand that there's procedures we've got to follow. But I find it very, very difficult because I really felt for her. It prayed on my mind a bit afterwards...I probably got too involved. I'll hold my hand up to that' (Interview 26)*.

At times like this being able to relate personally to a tenant's predicament led them to spontaneously and freely engage in *'opening up'* to tenants. This emotional element of labour was evident in the accounts of pragmatists, who in contrast to pro-activists, described how they felt that their ability to be professional sometimes *required* them to share intimate details about their own personal experiences with their tenants.

Pragmatists brought to bear their own experiences, such as being a single parent, or suffering from depression, during interactions with tenants. Knowledge was gleaned from their own life experiences and learning from how to cope with certain situations:

'You're also using knowledge that you didn't know you'd got'.

'Such as'?

'Well, like personal development things, life experience. For instance, when you're dealing with homeless clients, you can relate to lots of the problems because you've already been there or you've got some background knowledge about what you did in similar circumstances, not being a drug addict, or anything like that, but, you know' (Interview 25)*.

The above accounts show that many housing managers find that, in their everyday work with tenants, personal life experience is as important as formalised knowledge (as noted in Chapter 5). In common with pro-activists, pragmatists saw a similarity with tenants quite explicitly as a positive resource. Where they differed from pro-activists (who did not venture to share personal details) was the extent to which they engaged in sharing those personal experiences with tenants. Conversations with tenants touched upon pragmatists' personal experiences of depression and debt, to give just two examples. Consequently, they often drew on life experience that by its very nature could not be conveyed through professional training because it was relating to intimate parts of a housing manager's individual biography. For example, Daphne, a housing manager, used her experience of coping with dyslexia in her family as a means of making a connection with clients she was working with, in the following words:

'There will be clients who will be upset, angry or embarrassed because they can't read and write, and because they can't read and write they can't get jobs, and they get into bad company and bad ways. I know what dyslexia does to you because my children are dyslexic. So if someone tells me they can't read or write I will talk to them about it' (Interview 7)*.

Anabelle, another estate manager, finds satisfaction in her emotional input in tenants' lives because she is interested *'in the whole package, people's social lives'* because:

'They don't just come to you for housing. They come to you for marriage guidance and debt counselling and everything' (Interview 40)*.

She cites one particular case where she felt she had *'made a real difference'* and had helped move along a very difficult family problem for one of her tenants:

'We've had a case...where the resident was having a NOSP served on her, but it was her daughter was causing the problem. And I could see it was really devastating her. So we brought her in with her daughter, and I just explained to the daughter "I know how your mum is feeling. I've been there. I've been to hell and back with one of mine" and basically just explained how her mum feels. You know "your mum wakes up in the morning thinking of the problem she's got with you. She goes to bed at night thinking of the problem and believe me, I do know and it's one of the worst things". I just explained how her mum was feeling. And they've just sobbed and sobbed and we've all felt like crying. And the girl and the mum are hugging each other and saying "I didn't realise that's how you felt, mum" and sometimes it takes somebody from outside to say something because usually you don't listen to your own family. So with the younger ones, it does help. I've said to some of the younger ones, "you think I don't know what you're going through. I've been there. I've been there with one of mine. And we've come out of it at the other end. It might have taken 5 years but we've come out of it. It might not be the same problems as you're having, but it's still been a problem that's effected your family and other people on the estate"' (Interview 40)*.

This case was a source of real satisfaction to Anabelle because she was able to use her own life experience as a mother to help a tenant, as well as effecting an improvement in the anti-social behaviour of this particular family.

Pragmatists often spoke about the satisfaction they got from making genuine connections with tenants. Grant, a housing manager, *'got a personal buzz'* out of helping people because:

'Some people come to you who have absolutely nothing, and then to actually get them signed up for a property in an area they want, and get established and get the kids settled in the local school, and then visit them 2 or 3 weeks after they've moved in, and I think that's great... I don't expect thanks, but I get a bit of a personal buzz from thinking I've got people set up and they're established and doing well (Interview 28)*.

Daisy, an estate manager, was managing a particularly *'challenging'* block of high-rise flats, where a lot of the tenants were young, single and with a variety of support needs. She went out of her way to build up relationships with them and with the other tenants

for both philanthropic and instrumental ends. A lot of the tenants know her by first name and she is instantly recognisable. Over the three years she has been on that *'patch'* she has become quite friendly with some of the tenants, sharing stories about her family and getting to the stage where the tenants no longer see her as *'just a housing officer; they think I'm their best mate'* (Interview 41). She interprets her brief as housing officer widely and prides herself on *'really getting to know'* her more vulnerable tenants, particularly young ex-homeless people. She considers listening to their problems and *'just popping in to see them to make sure they're alright'* to be an integral part of the job, although these impromptu visits are above and beyond what is expected from her by her organisation. Tenants recognise that she is *'there for them'* and reciprocate by giving her information that helps in curbing anti-social behaviour and the general management of the high rise flats. However, there is a price to pay in getting too close to some of the tenants when Daisy has to investigate complaints against them. She spoke of how she had to *'put on her housing officer hat'* and adopt the persona of a council representative with the same tenants that she had become friendly with. She was aware that she had *'crossed over the line'* and found it difficult to then *'draw back'* when the need arose. At the same time, she continued to engage emotionally with tenants because she could not envisage being a housing manager without doing so.

The findings demonstrate the range of and frequency of emotionally charged situations experienced by pragmatists. These situations went well beyond the *'bricks and mortar'* definition of estate management and illustrates how interviewees were defining for themselves where the boundaries of housing management lay.

The above accounts support the proposition that feelings are managed for a wide variety of reasons, not just for organisational or instrumental gains. For many managers their personal biographies, personalities and social lives were primary factors in guiding their emotional management with tenants. It also brought into focus the fact that the divide between the public and the private is far from clear-cut (Malin *et al.* 2000: 219) and boundaries between these two areas are frequently blurred in a workplace setting.

In conclusion, housing managers used boundary-setting practices as a way of communicating their professional role. Housing managers took it upon themselves to define the boundaries of service and the extent to which they worked within and beyond policies and procedures was a defining aspect of their sense of professionalism. The self was seen as an important resource and image and body-language were used to both

collapse and maintain boundaries. The *'social openness'* of the self, based on a sense of shared experiences and genuine connections with tenants (rather than surface acting), facilitated the emotional management and emotional labour revealed in the accounts of housing managers. Findings revealed that they managed their emotions in the work place to benefit themselves, the tenants and their organisation. Further, in contradistinction to what has been demonstrated in other occupations (Smith, 1992), emotional labour in housing is not necessarily harmful and there is ample evidence that there is pleasure (as well as pain) to be gained from genuine emotional engagements with tenants, where there is reciprocity and an *'equal emotional exchange'* (Hochschild, 1983). Colleagues, rather than senior managers, were active in monitoring the emotional element of work, but emotions were not discounted entirely. Implicit recognition was given to emotional expertise and its inherent value, by working practices, such as role allocations. We can conclude thus far, that professionalism is more than rhetoric and has real currency for housing managers, who *'live out'* what it is to be professional through their knowledge and boundary making practices.

This *'working of the boundaries'* is clearly a manifestation of agency, and yet there was also evidence that structure was not written out of the equation. On the contrary, those interviewed were keenly aware of the way in which the external environment, in the form of a performance ethos, affected their decision-making abilities and how *'being called to account'* shaped their ideas of professionalism. Hence, the next chapter (8) will elucidate the final component of professionalism in housing management, *i.e.* accountability.

Chapter 8 — Professionalism as accountability

> *'He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power, he makes them play spontaneously upon himself. He inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles'* (Foucault, 1979: 202-3).

8.1 – Introduction

The last chapter contended that housing managers were engaged in boundary making and unmaking (Malin, 2000) as regards service, image and emotions that formed an integral part of their understanding of professionalism. By contrast to other studies which focus on the harmful effects of emotional labour (Trethewey, 1999; Smith, 1992) it demonstrated that housing managers made authentic connections with tenants that were a source of pleasure as well as pain. The self was used as a resource to communicate a professional role and professionalism was seen to be not merely rhetoric, but to have real meaning for them, in their day-to-day working lives. Finally, it suggested that boundary setting and emotional management could be viewed as a manifestation of agency, but housing managers do not operate in a social vacuum, and they were keenly aware of the external environment. How this awareness of the external environment, in the shape of the performance ethos, may impinge on their views of professionalism is explored in this chapter.

The chapter focuses on how, and in what form, managerial demands impinge on the professionalism of housing managers. It take four steps to do this. First, accountability as a key theme is identified and defined. A distinction is drawn between two types: *'formal'* and *'informal'* accountability[18]. Second, the relationship between accountability, the self and identity is outlined in order to consider how accountability may act upon the professional identity of housing managers. Third, the context and processes of formal accountability are outlined in order to ascertain how housing managers are exposed to the power of performance management. Fourth, the

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[18] *'Formal'* accountability, for the purposes of this thesis, is defined as performance measurement systems and techniques, such as performance indicators. *'Informal'* accountability refers to the *'giving of an account'* in face-to-face interactions between housing managers and tenants.

accountability of pragmatists and pro-activists is analysed. It is argued that accountability is a key component of professionalism for both pragmatists and pro-activists because being accountable re-affirms their sense of themselves as competent professionals. In many ways, this was a counter-intuitive finding because the literature (as outlined in Chapter 3) stresses the attempts by professions to achieve autonomy and control over their work, and hence views accountability (usually in the form of performance management), as a deprofessionalisation process (Braverman, 1974).

However, in the case of these housing managers, it will be demonstrated that being accountable was seen as a means of enhancing their claims to a professional ethos for three reasons. First, the concept of being formally accountable for their work promoted transparency and hence the visibility of a competent (or otherwise) performance, and was used as a means of asserting control in an otherwise uncertain environment. Second, performance was a *negotiated process* that promoted a positive sense of professional identity which did not undermine the inter-subjective relationship between senior managers and housing managers. Third, for these housing managers, the conception of accountability, *i.e.* being responsible and answerable to tenants, took on a much wider form than the managerial one of formalised performance indicators and targets and was in keeping with, and an enhancement of, the boundary-unmaking professionalism outlined in Chapter 7.

This is not to suggest that there was no resistance to, or modification of, the hegemony of managerial techniques and their coupling with the concept of professionalism. A key finding was the degree to which *'performance'* was a contested concept, open to negotiation and re-interpretation. Where individual housing managers did not sign up to the idea of efficiency (*i.e.* the meeting of targets) as a trait of professionalism it did not in the main lead to a *'spoilt identity'* (Goffman, 1969). Both pragmatists and pro-activists called upon an alternative understanding of accountability which became manifest in different ways. Pragmatists became more disengaged from the processes of formal accountability and aligned themselves with what they imagined the tenants wanted, rather than with the business orientation of targets and performance indicators. A discourse of distinction was constructed around what the tenants thought was relevant and desirable and what the organisations chose to highlight in the performance tables. Pro-activists, on the other hand, continued to engage with the idea of performance as a measure of accountability, which they chose to view as a driver for organisational

change and a more responsive housing service.

8.2 – Accountability, self and productive power

Accountability refers to the capacity to give an account, explanation or reason. For the purposes of this research, accountability also encompasses the need to justify one's performance to others...and to concerns about the evaluation of one's performance by others. Giddens (1984: 30) has suggested that:

> *'The idea of "accountability" in everyday English gives cogent expression to the intersection of interpretive schemes and norms. To be "accountable" for one's activities is both to explicate the reasons for them and to supply the normative grounds whereby they may be justified'.*

As already outlined in Chapter 6, a feeling of knowledgeable competence is crucial to the professional identity of housing managers. The data revealed a strong desire on the part of all of the managers in the research to do a professional and therefore, competent job, and moreover, to be seen to do a professional job. It is for this reason that the processes of accountability have a positive role to play in housing managers' construction of what it means to be professional. Contrary to other studies which focus on the negative aspects of techniques such as performance indicators (Jacobs and Manzi, 2000), the productive power of being accountable emerged as a strong feature of professionalism for these housing managers. The individualising effects of formal (and hence, remote) methods of accountability (such as PI's and *'quality checks'*) were mitigated by the more face-to-face forms of *'giving an account'* in a way that largely sustained and supported these housing managers' sense of themselves as competent professionals.

The following section 8.3 will outline the reasons why motivated compliance to the performance regimes in housing management exists. To address these issues, it is first useful to understand the significance of accountability and the constitution of self.

Roberts (1996) explores the role of accountability in making the self visible both to self and others. Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty he suggests that to be held accountable holds a mirror up to an action and its consequences in a way that creates focus within the stream of the lived experience; the focus of being an individual. *'Self is reflected and confirmed by being called to account by others'* (Roberts, 1996: 42).

For symbolic interactionists Mead and Cooley, the self arises out of social interaction (Jenkins, 1996). Encapsulated in the image of the *'looking-glass self'*, the individual is aware of how she is perceived by others and tries to imagine what others think or feel about her actions. Each individual learns to perceive the world as others do in order to get on in the world. Hence:

> *'the individual thus acquires from the "generalised other" a source of internal regulation that guides his behaviour in the absence of external pressures'* (Casey, 1995: 57).

Housing managers have a weak collective professional identity, (as noted in Chapter 6) which makes their sense of themselves as professional practitioners fragile and in need of constant reassurance. They want to convey an image of themselves as competent professionals and this image needs to be accepted by others in their immediate work environment, particularly their managers. Hence, they take on the performance agenda in a bid to present themselves in a positive light. If individual managers fail to perform in the terms set out for them by their managers, then accountability techniques have the potential to threaten this fragile sense of professionalism. Power is also an issue because, although managers display varying levels of identification with the managerial agenda, there are obvious (negative) implications of failing to *'play the rules of the game'* (Clegg, 1989). I would argue that this makes housing managers vulnerable, and more open to the performance regimes that have been a growing feature of housing organisations.

Housing managers who want to get on in the profession (by definition, pro-activists) are likely to engage in playing the *'rules of the game'*, a premise borne out by the findings of this thesis and which are outlined in the latter half of the chapter. However, the performance regime acts upon *all* managers, not only as a hierarchical power that merely constrains their *'fields of action'* and intervenes at particular points in time. It also has a positive dimension where housing managers act upon themselves and respond in a productive way to the framework within which they have to work. The power of targets and performance indicators (PI's) to pass a judgement on housing managers' performance is taken on board and internalised to the extent that PI's are no longer seen as remote, but as something to be worked with and made their own.

> *'Our own reflexive gaze takes over the disciplining role as we take on the accounts and vocabularies of meaning and motive which are available to us, while certain other forms of account are marginalised or simply eased out of currency'* (Clegg 1989: 156).

Hence, the economy of disciplinary power as performance management acts to shape the attitudes and behaviours of all managers, not just at the *'moment of judgement'* (encapsulated in concrete terms in league tables and incorporated into personal targets), but as a defining influence on the kind of housing managers they are.

8.3 – Processes of accountability

Housing managers are increasingly exposed to the measurement and monitoring of their performance (Jacobs and Manzi, 2000; Walker, 2000) in the form of targets, key performance indicators (KPI's) and *'quality checks'* and *'job chats',* as is borne out by the evidence presented in this chapter. The performance targets and indicators in housing management to date have focused mainly on the measurable elements of housing management, *i.e.* rents, voids and allocations.

The data found that line managers play a key role in interpreting and presenting performance management information so as to make it user-friendly and relevant for the housing managers out on the housing estates. They are the *'conduits'* (May and Buck, 2000) of performance management as all information comes through them, and from there is relayed to the housing teams in the regions. One manager explained how the information *'cascaded down from head office'* (Interview 47) and it was up to him to convey the information to his officers at *'ground level'.* There were various methods and forums used to get the message across about the importance of these PI's and how the targets for the region were related to each individual housing officer.

KPI's covering rents and voids were prominently displayed in graph form in the main offices. The information was organised in such a way that made it easy to read (in linear fashion), rendering the performance of each team, across the organisation and for each area, highly visible. What was significant was the fact that figures were collated and produced on an *area,* not on an *individual* basis. Graphs gave a clear indication of which areas were doing well (or otherwise), but it was not possible to identify the performance of individual housing officers from this information. Hence, the most visible manifestation of performance, the KPI's represented on the graphs, was

presented as a team effort. This mitigated the alienating effect of hierarchical and remote performance management techniques because it was not immediately apparent which managers were performing well or otherwise. That is not to suggest that housing managers were left to draw their own conclusions as to their contribution to the team performance. Housing managers were left in no doubt as to their individual performance, which was monitored and discussed in *'job chats'* and annual appraisals.

Additionally, rent officers were given individual read-outs of the figures for their particular *'patch'* on a weekly basis. These figures were regularly brought up at team meetings and on staff *'away days'*. The main aim was to get housing managers to take the performance information on board and act upon it for their own particular *'patch'*. Discussions about KPI's and targets were a significant component of *'job chats'* and individual appraisals. A senior manager described the process in the following words:

> *'When we're having "job chats" with the lettings officer or doing an appraisal, we'll be concentrating on those areas of performance, because the lettings officer's targets will be built around that particular aspects of the work. Arrears, when the arrears housing officers are being appraised, estate management indicators for the estate management housing officers. So yah, as it works its way through with people, then we focus it around what area they're directly working in, what they've got control over'* (Interview 23).

Hence, their goal was to get performance information to *'work its way through with people'* (Interview 23) and get individuals to take ownership of their targets.

The same senior manager described how the information was colour coded, for maximum visual impact:

> *...'that information is available on the system as well and there's snapshots of certain periods of time. And we're using a bit of a traffic light indicator at the moment, so if you're looking at PI's and within the XXX region, is anything red, is it amber or is it green. Green means all is going okay. The amber means it could go either way. I'd want to take a close look at it and the red stuff definitely needs your attention 'cos you're not performing as well as you might be on certain aspects of that part of the service'* (Interview 23).

Another housing manager experienced the performance graphs as a constant reminder of the state of her rent arrears that could not be ignored because:

'I think you have to be motivated by them 'cos they're there all the time. They're not a target that they might put up at the beginning of the year and you might never refer to, it's there constantly. Everybody is very aware of targets. They have to motivate you. You have to think constantly now "how are we going to get better, to get nearer that target"' (Interview 42).

The majority of housing managers (both pragmatist and pro-activist) in this study viewed PI's as an inevitable feature of the financial constraints of social housing:

'I think you've got to have targets. I think if there was no targets and we had nothing to aim for, and we didn't know what was expected of us, and we didn't compare ourselves to other housing associations and what the Housing Corporation expect us to have, then we'd probably just do a set level at a set pace' (Interview 44).

Although they were viewed as inevitable, housing managers had some concerns as to how realistic the targets were and what the KPI's were measuring. A common refrain was that the PI's only measured what could be measured, such as rent arrears and void (empty property) figures, while being incapable of recording less tangible, but equally important aspects of the job, such as time spent helping tenants. Several managers shared a certain scepticism about the reliability of the figures on the basis that they could be skewed to make things look better than they really were. These reservations not withstanding the managers submitted to the process of having the quality of their work judged against those of distant others.

Line managers, as intermediaries, had an influential role to play in the giving and reading of accounts because they act as *'buffers'* from above (the board of management, funding bodies *etc.*) and below (front-line staff). Housing managers give reasons and explanations for the performance figures in an attempt to deflect criticism or blame and to pre-empt any suggestion that their own personal performance was not *'up to scratch'*. Their reading of the figures has to be accepted in order for them to sustain a sense of themselves as competent and therefore, professional. Hence, their accounts have to be aligned in a way that justifies the figures (by taking the context into account), leaving their professional identity intact. However, this is threatened when line managers refuse to consider rationalisations of failure because this calls into question their competence as housing managers.

Performance is also monitored in a more discreet way through computerised checking systems called *'quality checks'*, administered on a random basis by senior managers. This enables the managers to access all rent accounts and to check on the progress of action taken in rent arrears cases. Housing managers were keenly aware that random checks were done on a regular basis and this was brought home to them when they received e-mails from their senior manager as to particular rent accounts. Individual housing managers are called to account for any rent cases that are not at the right severity levels, which sometimes resulted in a flurry of e-mails to the individual rent officers, following a quality check on their particular *'patch'*. There is no way to be outside of this accountability process because everyone is implicated in the calling for or giving of accounts.

However, the most negative *'individualising'* effects whereby discipline realises its power (Foucault, 1979) were mitigated by line managers in a conscious effort to keep all housing managers *'on board'* with the accountability process. They achieved this by negotiation with their housing officers. The following section will outline how and in what form housing managers negotiated performance targets.

Senior managers were given targets for their areas and they then devolved these targets to their estate managers in a process of consultation and negotiation described by one senior manager in the following words:

> *'We set them as managers, historically, knowledge about the estate. So we set them at the beginning of the year and they're all different for each office obviously. Then I will ask the housing officers to set targets and do it with me for their own patch, but it will reflect my targets. So, if my target for voids is 35, which it is, that's going to be reflected with my housing officers. They'll still be different so one might have 5 and one might have 7, depending on the patch'* (Interview 21).

There was an absence of the hierachical consequences of accountability for two main reasons: senior managers negotiated and down-played the disciplinary power of such techniques by *'enrolling'* front-line officers in their own performance management, with which they had a certain amount of success. There was a recognition of not just the achievement of PI's and targets, but also the constraints within which housing managers operated, and the inherent ability and skills of the housing managers. Performance was

viewed by senior managers as an on-going process, a movement towards a goal, which induced in both pragmatists and pro-activists a willingness to participate, as opposed to feelings of alienation and atomisation. Hence, officers were encouraged to participate in setting their own targets and provide performance information for their team.

Line managers also attempted to alleviate the perceived negative effects of performance management by consciously engendering a feeling of collegiality amongst housing officers. Individual targets were discussed, but only on a one-to-one basis:

> *'That is the graph (pointing to a large graph displayed in a prominent position on the office wall) that the housing officers get every month, as I do, but it's not individuals. I will not do individuals. I will expect them to do that themselves. I do it for the estate, but what they do is they pull out their figures every Monday morning for their own patch'* (Interview 47).

Performance charts did not identify individual housing managers and information was collated on a team basis. Targets results were openly discussed and ideas as to how to effect the figures were pooled:

> *'They sit together. So, XX tends to pull off the figures every week and they might have a discussion about them then. They talk about why such and such a patch has gone up in arrears, that sort of thing'* (Interview 21).

The main focus was on the *'patches'*, *i.e.* the areas on which the indicators were based, and not on the individual housing officers themselves. As a result there was a noticeable absence of the competitiveness between colleagues that is a feature of many hierarchical accountability systems. While there was little evidence of defensive *'atomised'* individuals in a constant state of pre-occupation with how they were being judged by others, there was a much more positive sense in which the accountability process was embraced.

The remainder of the chapter discusses the ways in which pragmatists and pro-activists engage in both formal and informal accountability processes.

8.3.1 – Pragmatists and accountability

The majority of pragmatists' conception of accountability is mainly characterised by compliance with the disciplinary power of performance management. *'Compliance'* refers to meeting the expectations of the organisation (in the form of targets, PI's, and

quality checks) and maintaining a sense of professionalism based on knowledgeable and practical competence. What was striking about the data was that although there were varying degrees of enthusiasm for PI's and targets, there was a general consensus amongst pragmatists that they were an inevitable part of contemporary housing management.

Pragmatists had mixed and contradictory views towards formal accountability processes. On the one hand they expressed their willingness to comply with performance techniques because they sometimes used performance targets to their own advantage, *i.e.* as a justification of their efforts and performance. At the same time they problematised the validity of some of these measures, on the grounds that they simply did not reflect the realities of the job or the priorities of tenants. These reservations notwithstanding, the disciplinary effects of performance management were evident in that they were concerned with being able to justify their results (*vis-à-vis* the KPI's) in such a way that did not reflect badly on them and their performance. One aspect of accountability that they positively endorsed was the transparency of KPI's. The visibility of performance indicators was a significant feature of formal accountability for these managers because they provided a benchmark by which they, and their line managers could judge the competence of their own performance. More specifically, they valued the visibility of their inputs into meeting hard-to-reach targets, regardless of the outcomes achieved because it was viewed as a validation of their efforts to be competent housing managers.

One manager regarded having something concrete to measure himself against as a good thing that prevented him from getting complacent or lazy about his work:

> *'I think you need to know what your targets are, what your objectives are and I think by way of having performance monitoring you've got something to work from or something to strive to, in that respect...stops you getting lazy...that's the desired effect anyway'... Ehm...I mean...trying to hit these targets all the time, isn't always feasible, but I do agree with them, to stop people sitting on their arses and taking it easy'* (Interview 29)*.

For the above pragmatist, the disciplinary power of performance was directed not only towards himself, but also towards colleagues who were perceived to be *'taking it easy'*. Hence, the concept of being formally accountable for one's performance was enrolled as

a useful tool towards normalising the amount of effort and hard work that was required to do a good job in that particular office. Another manager described KPI's in a benign way because he was from a performance-oriented sales background and viewed them as a useful technique and a good indicator of his competence in doing his job:

'Personally, as far as the work is concerned, I've no problem with somebody standing behind me watching me work every day. It's never bothered me, 'cause with having been in retail and being a sales rep anyway, it was very like that. You'd have the big graph on the wall with everybody's sales figures. I'd rather somebody tapped me on the shoulder and said "look, I think you're going to have to sharpen up if you're going to make any dent in those void figures", or "I think this is going a bit pear-shaped". No problem with that at all' (Interview 28)*.

The PI's gave them an opportunity to record and therefore to provide evidence of their efforts to reach various targets especially in situations where the desired end results were not forthcoming. Hence inputs were regarded as being as important as outputs by these managers, and this was accommodated for in the performance management framework. So for example, they could record the frequency of rent visits, rent interviews, letters sent, and if they had carried out the required minimum actions against a tenant then they were reasonably satisfied that they were doing a good job. The importance of having the evidence to back-up a competent performance is stressed by two rent arrears officers in the following words:

'I suppose what I'm saying is that I can evidence that I'm making contact with people. I'm attending court appearances, I'm making relevant applications for evictions, in line with our policy and procedures and relevant logs are being registered on the system and can be seen by purely physically looking at the relevant accounts' (Interview 15)*

'I like to see results as well. I like to make sure, with the rent arrears, I want to make sure that I'm on top of the situation. I try my hardest on there and I seem to be doing okay cos they (the managers) say to me the rent arrears are fine. Ehm...they say I'm doing alright, but, I like to physically see evidence that I'm doing okay, not just somebody saying it' (Interview 11)*.

This second quote highlights the officer's need for an objective validation of a competent performance, so that he did not have to merely rely on what *'they'* (the

managers) say, but could *'physically see'* the figures for himself. Hence, contrary to other studies which focus on the negative aspects of performance management, for these interviewees the *visibility* of KPI's was experienced as a good thing.

KPI's were also used by pragmatists to provide evidence that decisions made were consistent with policies and procedures. This feature of PI's was particularly valued by pragmatists because it was confirmation that they were making the right decisions:

> *'The PI's and all the rest of it, it actually shows on the computer, that we are working consistently. You might have a run on people who are fleeing domestic violence, or you might have a run on people who are being evicted from private rented, but overall, during a 3 month period, very consistent. We'll have dealt with them in the same way and you can see that by looking at the figures'* (Interview 25)*.

For the above manager, this was important because she was aware that although she made decisions differently to a colleague:

> *'...which was natural because I'm a different person, we have to comply with legislation in the same way, so our decisions have to be spot on'* (Interview 25)*

the KPI's represented an independent evaluation of her ability to make the right decisions. Another housing manager remarked that it made her feel more confident in team meetings that they were being consistent because:

> *'Sometimes you think are you right in what you're doing with any one case...and then when it comes to the team meetings, with all the stats. it's there in black and white...we've all got roughly the same figures'* (Interview 24)*.

These examples illustrate how managers felt that formal accountability processes can be enabling as well as constraining in so far as:

> *'these reduce uncertainty about how the agent is to be held to account, and whether the agent will continue to enjoy the patronage (and perhaps also maintain the respect) of the principal* (Munro and Mouritsen, 1996: 32).

The ubiquitous nature of the performance regime, *i.e.* its *'ever present'* quality, serves as a constant (if sometimes largely in the background) reminder that housing managers are monitored on a regular basis, sometimes without their knowledge, and this impinges on their daily working lives, to a greater or lesser extent. Paradoxically, this allows

pragmatists to take a more sanguine attitude to the performance regime than would be possible under a more sovereign regime. Pragmatists interpret silence on the performance issue by senior managers as an indication of a satisfactory performance. The fact that they felt under constant surveillance (through computerised random *'quality checks'* on rent accounts, which can be carried out without their knowledge, for example) enabled them to draw positive conclusions about their own performance:

> *'Well they can go into the computers any time they want. You don't know whose watching you. They can have a look at any time. It does come up when Graham's put it on [checked the rent accounts], but he can go in at any time he wanted to without putting anything on...the one thing about this job, they don't get on your back particularly... but then like Graham says to me "I know you do a good job when you're here and you come to work to work"...I know they can check up on us, but I do a good job and don't often get pulled up'* (Interview 20)*.

When probed for their perceptions of how others regarded their competence, and the cues they received about their performance, a common refrain was that

> *'If I wasn't doing alright my manager would say something'* (Interview 32)*.

The inference is that in the absence of any interjection from line managers, on a day-to-day basis, these managers perceived themselves as receiving validation for their performances. By and large, performance techniques were not experienced as unduly oppressive, or in the words of one manager:

> *'They're not used as a stick to beat you with'* (Interview 28)*.

Although they were compared to and ranked with other areas as regards rent arrears and voids, for example, this did not appear to threaten their self-identity as competent professionals because as referred to earlier, they were called to account as members of a team in the PI's graphs displayed in the office for all to see. Team results were experienced as being less onerous than individual target read-outs because responsibility for them was experienced as a shared phenomenon. They were also called to account on an individual basis through personal read-outs of the figures and computerised quality checks which was where the greatest resistance occurred.

In contrast to pro-activists, who were more inclined to challenge their senior managers reading of the figures, and hence were still actively engaged with the process, some pragmatists resorted to a discourse in which they disassociated themselves from the

pressures of performance when they felt their efforts to meet targets were not being recognised. Clegg, (1989: 208) has characterised that resistance which imposes limits on power as *'frictional'* – an absence of interest in the realisation of the goals of power. They expressed their frustration with a system of accountability that appeared to bear down on them and did not take into account the circumstances in which they had to work. They had only limited control over the outcomes of the KPI's and this lack of control did not incline them towards tackling the inherent injustices of the accountability system. A recurring theme was the inequity in having similar KPI's for different areas. One estate manager expressed how she felt under pressure over her inability to meet her targets, which were unrealistic ones for the *'patch'* that she was managing, by comparison to other areas:

> *'Some people might be covering areas where it's a worse hit area and it's on a social decline, or that sort of thing in comparison with other areas, and if there's more anti-social behaviour in an area, there's more crime going on. I might have said something to my boss, but I've done that before and it didn't get me anywhere'* (Interview 45)*.

The above manager was not alone in articulating a powerlessness in relation to performance measurement and having a dialogue with line managers about the subject. 'Bad managers' were described as those who just looked at the figures and did not take into account any other factors:

> *'Were you listened to when you mentioned things like that, in relation to PI's?'*
>
> *'No, because our current manager is a "figures woman". The bottom line is the figures. To have a figure, say, of 15 voids, "I've got 4 people to sign up", she'd say, "oh great, our voids are coming down by 4 this week, very good". And I might say "I've just been told that 3 people have died", and it's like "oh bloody hell. We're back up again" It's just a straight "numbers are up", "numbers are down"'* (Interview 29)*.

Winifred, a rent arrears officer describes how she lets things *'go over her head'* when she is *'being pulled down'* about the PI's in the following words:

'They (PI's) could be brought up then, but I know that I'm doing...I'm doing my job to the best of my ability and I do what I can, and I can't control what tenants pay, and we don't have a lot of control in getting the money back. So, if the arrears go up, it upsets me sometimes because I know I've worked bloody hard and I'm still getting "pulled down" because they go up, but it tends to go over my head now a lot more than what it did. I just don't care that much anymore' (Interview 27)*.

When these housing managers did problematise performance management as a component of professionalism, this did not in the main lead to a rejection of the concept of accountability because pragmatists drew upon a subjective, alternative definition of accountability that aligned them with tenants, rather than with the organisation's formal performance management agenda. Targets and outputs, for example, were characterised as being irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of tenants, and thus provided reasonable grounds for resistance to the demands of formal accountability made on these housing managers. This is expressed by an estate manager in the following words:

'The tenants want a service, they want a decent service. Telling them that "I've got to stay in and do my figures for the month" or whatever. That's irrelevant to the tenants, isn't it? It's like "I want a service and I want it now". They do care about things like central heating and things like that, but not what's behind it' (Interview 40)*

They articulated an aspect of accountability that went beyond efficiency and performance. It comes closer to what may be regarded as accountability in the more traditional sense (McKevitt and Lawton, 1994: 80), *i.e.* being answerable for one's own actions. This individualised conception of accountability was predicated on the interdependence of tenants and housing managers where managers felt personally responsible for and to their tenants, their *'patch'* and their community. This view is summed up in the words of a young pragmatist:

'Your role as a housing officer is...it's very split. I mean, you want to get to know your community, you are responsible. You are answerable to these people. They pay their rent. They pay your wages. You have a patch. That's my patch. I'm answerable for that patch. You want to improve it. You want to give them better... that's what I mean by being professional' (Interview 18)*.

Pragmatists expressed their answerability as a willingness to provide explanations for their own actions to the residents:

> *'Yah, and it's about being accountable.'*
>
> *'To whom?'*
>
> *'To anybody, any tenant, to my manager and to the residents... I'm willing to stick my head above the parapet. I'm not one of them that passes the buck, I don't think. I try not to anyway. I won't take the blame for everything, by any means, but yah, being accountable for what I'm doing.'* (Interview 28).

The way they conceptualised being answerable to the tenants was by being there for them on a day-to-day basis and striving to meet their demands, which provides the rationale for the kind of service aspirations outlined in Chapters 6 and 7. The close engagement with tenants, combined with their own personal visibility out on the estates, led them to a more immediate and community-oriented view of being responsible to tenants than some of their colleagues, who were not in direct contact with tenants.

8.3.2 – Pro-activists and accountability

By contrast, pro-activists were more engaged with the formal accountability process, which they saw as an inevitable feature of contemporary housing management and as a means of distinguishing themselves as high-achieving managers. Attainment of targets and meeting PI's was seen as one aspect of professional competence such that performance and professionalism are linked in the minds of these housing managers. Further, the act of positioning themselves in relation to PI's constituted an on-going process of self-examination that influenced their behaviour in productive ways. Crucially, the negotiated nature of monitoring allowed for the self-evaluation (and self-knowledge) of pro-activists, which did not undermine trust between them and senior managers, and therefore enabled their view of themselves as competent professionals. Within this negotiated framework processes of accountability are used to sustain a positive sense of self that is itself largely in keeping with (and constitutive of) a professional identity. Pro-activists not only complied with performance targets but actively engaged in taking ownership of them, thereby demonstrating the productive power of formal accountability. It became a source of pride and satisfaction that they were successful in the terms set out for them by their line managers.

There was ample evidence in the data that the desire to obtain the *'kudos'*, as well as the material rewards (performance-related pay) associated with good target results was meaningful in terms of a sense of identity (*i.e.* as a highly competent housing manager), even for those at junior levels of management.

By contrast to pragmatists who expressed very little interest in comparing themselves to anyone else, and were more comfortable with the concept of a team effort, ambitious pro-activists extended their efforts to perform across time and space. The importance of having some kind of a measure that enabled officers to make a judgement about their performance compared to distant colleagues in other area offices was a theme that frequently emerged during research interviews. They were acutely aware that if they were going to be successful they would have to be seen to perform at a level that was comparable to the best housing managers in other area offices. This normalisation across time and space as to what was an acceptable performance was taken on board to the extent that individual housing managers were concerned about how they compared with distant others, whom they had never met.

The sense of personal satisfaction derived from meeting and exceeding targets is articulated by Maxwell, an estate manager:

> *'Well, I set myself targets anyway. Yah, when I was doing rent arrears they'd turn around and say "our net debit has to be this amount" and I wanted to beat that, for me.'*
>
> *'Why was that?'*
>
> *'Yah, basically I thought, that's what you want. I can do better than that. For me, if someone sets me a goal, and this is not just my professional side, it's my personal side as well, if someone sets me a goal, I'll try and beat that'* (Interview 37).

Mary, a housing manager, took the initiative in devising her own performance indicators and views them as a tool to improve service provision:

'I'm looking at possibly reintroducing PI's here, since last year they seem to have fallen by the wayside, because from my point of view, if I establish why customers are coming in, what kind of information they're asking of us, and if there's a void space there that I can fill by having someone in and doing open surgeries I'm giving out information to tenants and publicising it, we'll be filling in a gap, as it were. That's the kind of thing I enjoy doing...improving things' (Interview 5).

Significantly, both of the above pro-activists emphasise the personal in their approaches to the performance agenda: *'I wanted to beat that – for me'* and *'that's the kind of thing I enjoy doing'*. This links in to the point made earlier about the self arising from social interaction. These managers do not operate in a social vacuum and when they talk about themselves they demonstrate the degree to which they have been moulded and affected by the performance culture. This suggests that it is not just a personal character trait (although it may be that too) that motivates them to try to exceed targets, but a willingness to participate as a response to the managerial demands made upon them. They internalise the performance culture as part of themselves and act upon themselves to meet its demands, thereby demonstrating the economy of disciplinary power.

However, this does not mean that there is whole-hearted capitulation and, in common with pragmatists, pro-activists articulated some resistance to the performance agenda. There was resistance to the performance culture when techniques such as *'quality checks'* and targets were not reached and hence, pro-activists felt themselves to be open to possible criticism. They deflected criticism by articulating a discourse that drew a distinction between their efforts to do a good job and their lack of control over the external environment. Dieter, an estate manager reflects on the process he goes through when separating his own performance from the context in which he works, in the following words:

'So I think it's looking at the context of the patch that you're working in and then explaining why you've not reached it and possibly have that target re-negotiated with your boss or higher up. And that's what I say is the professional way of working instead of, spitting your dummy out and saying you can't cope. It's a case of "why hasn't it worked for me?", I want to know if I've not reached something, why haven't I? Is it me or is it the external environment, which I can't control as much as I would like, but then quantifying why I've not done it' (Interview 48).

The process of self-examination evident in the above quote enabled the officer to continue to draw positive conclusions about his competence and performance. This reflection on performance was portrayed as the *'professional way'* of working and was contrasted with the ways of other managers:

'Simply don't see the relevance of targets...tried to pretend that they don't exist' (Interview 6).

However, this positive self-evaluation had to be underpinned by an explicit recognition of the ability of these managers to perform, even in the difficult *'patches'* where targets were harder to achieve. This was achieved by an on-going negotiation and re-negotiation of targets and the tacit recognition of line managers as to the difficulties inherent in meeting all the PI's:

> *'...well that's where I had the conflict with one of the managers 'cos it was purely a case of, they used the PI's as a way of bashing people, which is why I used the term "slapped with" because that's the way I actually felt because again, some of the rent arrears cases didn't quite fit into the slot. You had to do further investigation into it. A good manager would say "if you can quantify why you've not got something up to a certain speed" and you can say "well this is the issue" and you can talk and discuss it with your manager, well that takes the pressure off. If your manager is sitting there saying "don't care. This is what I want, I'm not bothered about staff, not bothered about anything else. All I'm interested in is this PI", then you start to feel pressurised'* (Interview 16).

This manager graphically describes the process of negotiation on performance that was said to characterise a *'good manager'*. Clearly, having a discussion with her manager that acknowledged both the inherent difficulties in meeting those particular targets, and her efforts to meet those targets enabled this manager to retain a sense of herself as a competent practitioner.

For some of these pro-activists a qualified resistance is expressed by questioning, not the need for PI's *per se*, but the form that they take. Tenants are characterised as prioritising PI's around *'bricks and mortar'*, such as central heating, double-glazed windows and being interested in very little else to do with performance management. By contrast to pragmatists who characterise KPI's as having no relevance to tenants, pro-activists envisage how KPI's can be used to benefit both the housing service and the

tenants that are at the receiving end of that service.

Accountability techniques such as consultation were viewed more positively because these mechanisms were in keeping with their view of the kind of organisation they wanted to work for, and the sort of relationship they wanted to have with tenants. Pro-activists embrace the need for consultation with tenants because it counteracts the paternalistic (and increasingly out-dated) tendencies of housing organisations:

> *'In some respects, I think it is good because there's a history of paternalism and "we know what's best for our tenants and we'll just get on with it and we'll impose things on them", so I think some mechanisms like consultation and things like that are good, looking at consulting with our tenants and comparing ourselves to other organisations and implementing good practice, that's certainly a move in the right direction'* (Interview 34).

Hence, accountability was viewed as a positive thing because it was the driver behind consultation with tenants, and was perceived as a hallmark of professionalism by one manager in the following words:

> *'You know, you do things to people, you do things for people, you do things with people, then...people do things by themselves. I'm a great believer in continually moving along that spectrum and that is part of my definition of being professional. You make as many opportunities as you can, for people who are your customers, to control their own destiny and you do that by being open and accountable... And how serious you are about that, is a reference point, a marker as to how professional you are'* (Interview 12).

Face-to-face accountability functions as a framework for consulting and working with tenants. Frequent face-to-face communication and the relative absence of formal power differentials between managers and tenants was particularly a feature of tenant participation and housing-related regeneration work. Consequently, these pro-activists have much in common with pragmatists as regards feeling personally responsible for their actions towards groups of tenants. However, pro-activists extend this sense of responsibility in ways that also envisage an accountable role for their organisation. In what Roberts (2001) has termed *'socialising'* processes of accountability, being able to provide a context and explanation to the tenants both for their own actions *and* the policies of their organisation was important to these managers. Gordon, a pro-activist

resident liaison manager, describes this socialised view in the following words:

> *'I certainly go out of my way to explain my actions to people and try and give a context to those actions, my actions, as to why I think the way I do about a certain subject when I'm working with residents and residents groups. So there's a lot of advocacy and trying to explain why XX have this view about their houses or their rent or...you know...trying to make things simpler. I mean, tenant participation (TP) is my job and for me TP is just about making things work better for residents, to make the core services work smoother and less alien and more what they want'* (Interview 22).

What was evident in the absence of hierarchy was that the dialogue with residents constituted a process of accountability that recognised the reciprocal nature of relationships between tenants and managers.

Pro-activists viewed the formal accountability requirements demanded of their organisation as a positive thing because it enabled them to adopt an *'advocacy'* and *'intermediary'* role on the tenants' behalf within the organisation. One housing manager, Derek, described this aspect of accountability in the following words:

> *'As a housing manager working in that particular borough, I have never been so accountable to tenants as I was under that framework. They voted us in and they could vote us out, which meant that if a tenants group wanted to meet us 5 evenings a week for us to give them a daily update on what we'd done about the problems that we were dealing with, that was what we did. And in some ways we became their advocates within the landlord organisation and some of the stuff that they had been struggling with for years and literally years. I was sorting out problems in that borough that the tenants had had for 10 or 15 years'* (Interview 49).

On-going consultation with residents also provided the basis for a more *'realistic'* form of accountability because it was seen to directly address the concerns and expectations of the communities in which they worked, and was both more demanding and more satisfying to individual managers than anything imposed by their organisation through targets and PI's. Working with tenants was viewed in both instrumental and moral terms. Tenant participation was both necessary because it was imposed by government targets, but it also had a strong normative element; it was simply the right thing to do.

Christopher, a regeneration manager, articulates this view:

> *'I'm not under pressure from PI's but I think I'm under a more realistic pressure and that is the expectations from the community.'*
>
> *'Do you feel that's where you're mainly accountable?'*
>
> *'Yah, I do. It's the community seeing what's happening, the community thinking that what we're doing is worthwhile and that we are engaging them, because it's only right that they're consulted about their own homes and the area they live in. So it's working with the communities to identify funding, taking forward appraisals for that funding, securing it and then getting an effective spend on that. That's accountability. It's involving them, the residents, in a decision and delivering the solution at the end of it'* (Interview 2).

8.4 – Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter set out the reasons why accountability is a component of professionalism for housing managers. It argued that accountability is incorporated into housing managers' concept of professionalism because they engage with the performance agenda in a number of ways that are in keeping with, and constitutive of, a professional identity. Pragmatists' sense of professionalism is bound up with knowledgeable and practical competence and some accountability processes were seen to enhance feelings of worth and competence. The high visibility of technologies of accountability such as PI's and targets provided an independent evaluation of a competent performance, promoted transparency of inputs (*i.e.* effort) as well as outputs (*i.e.* results) and confirmed consistency of decision-making in an otherwise uncertain environment.

When performance is viewed as a negotiated concept that gives recognition not only to the achievement of targets, but also the constraints within which housing managers operate, then accountability has the capacity for sustaining housing managers' sense of professionalism. Pro-activists interiorized the performance imperative by a process of self-examination and explanation. This required a process of negotiation between line managers and housing managers that allowed for both explanation (for the figures) and interpretation (the normative grounds whereby the figures may be justified).

Pragmatists and pro-activists also articulated a more fundamental and wider sense of

accountability. The former felt personally responsible to and for their tenants and the communities in which they lived. This sense of accountability was more immediate and individualised, than anything required of housing managers by their organisation. For pro-activists, accountability was conceived both as a tool for organisational change and as a justification for consultation, and as such represented a more tenant-focused form of accountability than could be accommodated for solely by KPI's. Responsibility towards tenants was discussed in both instrumental and moral terms, as managers attempted to respond to both the managerial (in the form of formal accountability tools such as PI's) demands of the organisation and the demands of tenants.

Chapter 9 — Conclusions

9.1 – Introduction

The thesis has reported the findings and theoretical conclusions drawn from a research study undertaken over a 4-year period. This chapter concludes the thesis in four sections. First, it outlines the overall contribution made by the thesis to the sociology of the professions concerning the meaning of professionalism in housing management. Second, it responds to the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and draws conclusions as to the implications of housing managers' conceptions of professionalism. Third, it critically reviews the research process, and comments on how alternative research strategies may have added to the richness of the data. Fourth, it considers some of the implications for housing practice, for the employment, education and training of housing managers. Finally, and in the light of the findings, it considers directions for future research.

9.2 – The contribution to the sociology of the professions

This thesis makes a significant contribution to on-going debates about the nature of professionalism in contemporary society (Elcock and Rose, 1993; MacDonald, 1995; Freidson 2001). These contributions are briefly summarised in the introduction and then explored in detail below. First, the findings suggest that the meanings attached to professionalism are a response to, and a mediation of, managerial demands. Housing managers' use of the term professional was based on how individuals conducted themselves and met the needs of their tenants within the structural constraints that framed their day-to day working lives. For housing managers, this is influenced by their backgrounds and work experiences as well as their own beliefs and values about what it means to be a housing manager and the kind of housing manager they aspire to be. Thus, the professionalism set out in this thesis is characterised by both inter-personal skills and reflective, enterprising practice. The housing managers in this thesis tend to judge other professionals by the same professional norms that they use to judge themselves and one another, and that they believe other professionals use to judge them. Therefore, their use of the terms professional and professionalism are not grounded in their understanding of the professions *per se* or in the processes of professionalisation.

Regardless of management position, the housing managers in this thesis applied the same norms of professionalism to themselves and those around them. Hence, the housing managers interviewed here do not necessarily equate the formal aspects of being a professional (membership of a professional association, professional qualifications *etc.*) with professionalism. For these housing managers, professionalism has a subjective, personal meaning and is a much more individualised project. The contention is that the nature of professionalism in housing management is more complex than simply an adherence to policies and procedures and the limiting of individual discretion (Clapham, Franklin and Saugeres, 2000).

Second, this thesis bridges the gap between sociologists' understandings of the professions and professionalism, and workers' understandings by explicating how housing managers use these concepts to describe themselves and others in their daily social interactions and working lives. Instead of giving up on the ideal of profession or trying to gain professional status through association, or as a group, housing managers in this study have created a set of norms for both professional and unprofessional behaviour that they have applied to their own behaviour as well as to the behaviour of others, independent of occupational status.

Third, this study opens up the debate on the professions by challenging the notion that professionalism is necessarily undermined by the managerial agenda. Lacking a substantive knowledge base and the necessary collective identity to coalesce into a distinct profession, it is clear from this study that there is a strong element of individualisation of practice in housing management. This individualisation is undergoing change, which reflects the changing context within which the housing management task is being performed.

Lacking a strong collective ethos and subject to managerial and consumer demands, new forms of reflexive practice emerge, which are outlined in Chapters 5-8. While many have argued that increased regulation and accountability has undermined the status and autonomy of the traditional professions, this thesis develops an alternative viewpoint by demonstrating how it has presented housing managers with new opportunities to behave in a professional manner.

Professionalism can therefore be seen as a potent ideology at the level of the individual housing manager, in terms of identification with the work, learning orientations,

relations with tenants and processes of accountability. I use this analysis to argue that an individualised (as opposed to collective) *'professional project of the self'* (Casey and Allen, 2004) is being constructed in housing management. I suggest that this analysis is significant because the current sociological literature says very little about professionalism as an individualised *'project of the self'* and thus little about the implications that this might have for our understanding of professionalism (Casey and Allen, 2004).

This thesis also speaks to the on-going debate on the impact of professional-managerial relations on the way that public services are delivered by analysing the agency of individual housing managers. Although housing managers work under common structural constraints they react to them individually and in a way that is shaped by their personal biographies, motivations, beliefs and aspirations. The construction of identity in Chapter 5 revealed a multiplicity of orientations towards being a *'housing professional'*. There were differences between individuals at all levels of management, although the tendency was towards more identification with the managerial agenda at the more senior levels of management. For some, being a housing professional was first and foremost a commitment to the tenants of social housing and to the housing service itself. This was expressed as a personal commitment to gaining knowledge in order to deliver an *'equitable'* customer service. Pragmatists, on the other hand, did not see themselves as *'housing professionals'* at all, but nonetheless found themselves having to respond to the same structural constraints. Some people were enthused by the challenges with which they were presented, and were actively engaged in acquiring the appropriate skills to progress in the increasingly competitive social housing sector. Others had a more cautious view of the changes in management practices and articulated modification and resistance through working practices both within and beyond service boundaries.

It is clear from the data that professionalism as a concept is enlisted in the attempts by housing managers to *mediate* between their own beliefs and values, managerial demands and the needs and demands of customers. In the discussion on ethics (chapter 7) there is clear evidence that housing managers are not *'capitulated selves'* for whom the new culture is a *'totalising culture'* that influences all aspects of their identity and practice (Casey, 1995). There are remaining areas of discretion in day-to-day practice and, in these areas of ambiguity, housing managers negotiate acceptable compromises

between organisational procedures and customers needs.

The *'new sociology of occupations and professions'* addresses the every day realities and processes of work (Coffey and Atkinson, 1994: 2). Although there has been some research into occupational roles and every day practice within housing management (Franklin, 2000, Clapham; Franklin and Saugeres, 2000; Saugeres, 1999; Franklin and Clapham, 1997; Jacobs and Manzi, 2000), these are the exceptions and the sociology of housing management, in general, is characterised by a relatively low level of empirical and theoretical analysis. This thesis explores how housing managers are actively engaged in the practical activities of occupation and career. It breaks new ground in analysing the processes involved in *becoming* a housing manager and the precarious status of housing managers working in a marginalised profession. As such, it has much in common with other occupations such as prison officers and further education teachers (Coffey and Atkinson, 1994: 3) that also work with marginalised or *'problem'* clients. The flexible approach of the housing managers in this thesis towards both the acquisition of a knowledge portfolio and a career trajectory point to a degree of mobility that has yet to be articulated in the literature on careers in the public services. The flexibility evident in the thesis suggests that housing managers acquire knowledge by a variety of different means, and in an eclectic range of knowledge domains, in order to advance their careers.

Although the literature on housing management is replete with references to *'customers'* and *'customer service',* there have been no previous attempts made to theorise how the concept is constructed and utilised in the day-to-day world of housing management. Hence, although the housing-related management literature reifies the *'customer'*, it has remained remarkably well insulated from wider debates on the ramifications of the service provider-customer relationship. Studies of housing management have not engaged in debates about how customer-oriented behaviour is engendered and the conflicts inherent in providing a *'human'* service which may clash with over-arching managerial objectives, that are the mainstay of critical perspectives on the service economy (Sturdy, Grugulis and Willmott 2001; Korczynski, 2002). The thesis represents a first attempt to begin to articulate how the *'customer'*, in the guise of the *'tenant'*, *'applicant'* or *'user of the housing service'*, is constructed in housing management.

In summary, these contributions are doubly significant. They contribute at the *subject*

level of the sociology of the professions, in terms of theoretical and empirical evidence, which builds on and challenges previous research. Although the thesis is firmly located within the sociology of the professions, its contributions are more wide-ranging as the thesis also *'reads across'* to the sociology of work and occupations and the burgeoning management literature on customer service. It also contributes empirical insights at the *disciplinary level* of sociology in terms of identity, knowledge, service and emotional boundaries, and accountability, which are outlined in the next section.

9.3 – Summary and implications of housing managers' conceptions of professionalism

The construction of professionalism articulated in this thesis demonstrates that the historical discussions about the nature and purpose of housing management outlined in Chapter Two are as relevant as ever. The legacy of Octavia Hill's social welfare approach to housing management, it is argued, has renewed currency for the housing managers in this study, demonstrated by their broad interpretation of the boundaries of housing management. In common with their predecessors from earlier in the twentieth century, these housing managers see themselves as a distinct occupational grouping with discrete knowledge and skills. However, they have moved away from a commitment to housing credentialism (towards more generic management qualifications) and from a strong allegiance to their professional organisation, the CIH. Unlike the pioneers of housing management who saw the professional body as the main manifestation of their professionalism, these housing managers view professionalism as a more individualised project. Further, in contrast to the historical contrasting approaches to professionalism of men and women outlined in Chapter Two, professionalism in this thesis is not conceptualised along gendered lines.

This thesis concludes that the changing context of social housing management, specifically managerialism and customer demands, offers housing managers increased opportunities to *'act professionally'*. There is a growing emphasis on inter-personal skills and communication and reflective practice. The *'new professionalism'* (Pearl, 1997: 215) is less about membership of a professional association and professional qualifications and more a *'professional project of the self'*. This is developed reflexively over time by each individual, rather than through a national organisation or professional body. The thesis explicates what constitutes the *'professional project of the self'* and the

implications it has for the profession of housing management.

Four substantive research questions were derived out of the original research question: *How is the concept of professionalism constructed in housing management?*

Each of these will be briefly considered in turn and the contribution that the thesis has made to answering these explained.

9.3.1 – What is the nature of identity in housing management?

Chapter 5 analysed the nature of identity in housing management. Housing managers shared an understanding of housing management as an invisible or marginal profession. Identity is shaped by the tension between this negative public image and housing managers' own conceptions of what housing management is. The thesis found that individuals responded in a variety of ways to the positions in which they found themselves. These differences were rooted in biographical backgrounds, work experiences and aspirations and commitment to housing as a career. A significant minority, *i.e.* the pragmatists, had a low level of commitment to housing as a profession and saw it as a means to an end. By contrast, pro-activists displayed varying levels of commitment to careers both within and beyond housing management. In general there was little support for the professional community in the form of a strong identification with the CIH, and professional membership was viewed in instrumental terms as a necessary pre-requisite for career advancement. There was clearly little evidence of a conventional *'domain'* professionalism based on the accreditation afforded by a unifying professional institution (Furbey *et al.* 2001). The housing managers in this study did not look to the CIH for professional guidance but defined for themselves appropriate qualities, skills and ethos, in an individualised way.

9.3.2 – What constitutes professional knowledge in housing management?

Chapter 6 explores the central role of knowledge in housing managers' professionalism. Although lacking the status and image afforded to members of the *'true professions'* (Becker, 1970) the housing managers in this study see themselves as professionals and as conducting themselves professionally during the daily performance of their jobs. In common with professions and other aspiring professions, they identified knowledge as the foundation for the professional performance of their work. Knowledge was viewed

as a key resource and essential as a building block for competence in carrying out the housing task. They identified housing law as a key area of technical knowledge and one of the main reasons why they considered acquiring housing management qualifications. One of the key drivers for housing qualifications was the perceived challenge from increasingly knowledgeable customers. However, their conception of the knowledge necessary for housing management distinguished them from other professions in several key respects.

While acknowledging their lack of technical expertise, they regarded the kind of knowing they did possess as being crucial, *i.e.* common sense, know-how, tacit and contextual knowledge. They presented the importance of *'being knowledgeable'* as an important element of their professionalism, but in a way that represented a highly-individualised response to managerial demands. This manifested itself in a personal choice to work on the professional self by adopting a learning orientation and acquiring new knowledge and qualifications, over and above the minimum requirements for the job. This can be seen partly as a response to the consumerist challenge where customers have increased expectations and are no longer likely to defer to the opinions of the *'experts'*. Braverman (1974) has suggested that increased lay knowledge and a more discerning customer mitigate against professional authority and should be understood in terms of a de-professionalisation process. This thesis challenges that view by presenting data on the increased opportunities for housing managers to become *more* professional in their quest to meet the demands of their customers by acquiring new skills and expertise. The prediction that housing management is being reduced to a series of competencies and skills rather than being knowledge-based (Walker, 2000: 282) is refuted by the data on the increased levels of knowledge, skills and understandings required of the housing managers in response to managerial and consumer demands.

In making claims to possessing a varied body of knowledge the housing managers in this study are laying themselves open to the suspicion that they are merely talking up the positive in order to advance the professional project. However, these housing managers were not talking about standing guard over a specific domain of expertise (Furbey *et al.* 2001). Conversely, they articulated a need to adopt a *'learning orientation'* (Bordieu, 1984) which required them to continually acquire new knowledge and skills, in response to the changing needs of their customers.

9.3.3 – How do housing managers construct their professional boundaries in relation to users of housing services?

Chapter 7 explores the issue of boundaries between housing managers and customers of the housing service. Housing managers use boundary-setting practices to communicate a professional role. There is a growing recognition of the importance of the *'self'* or personal qualities of the housing professional, most particularly their inter-personal skills of communication and being approachable. They articulated that how they *'delivered themselves'* to tenants encapsulated both personal skills and understanding *and* organisational and performance requirements. Hence, while inter-personal skills were given prominence, this was overlaid at times by a concern for performance. In other words, good relations with tenants were equated with good management because it was thought that the more information and co-operation they got from tenants (which required them to be approachable) the better the estates could be managed. This area of expertise was not something that was formalised or could be *'taught'* but relied on their life experiences and a feel for the job that was built up over years of reflective practice.

Housing managers negotiated the boundaries between equality and equity of service: between a non-discriminatory customer service that was based on generalised others and a service that brought the needs of individual tenants into view. Housing managers viewed taking the initiative as an essential component of professionalism because it enabled them to work within and beyond procedural boundaries to achieve satisfactory outcomes for tenants.

Professionalism was also conveyed through the body (in terms of image, appearance and gestures) and through non-verbal communication. Given the nature of estate management (involving visits to customers' homes) and the increasingly complex demands of tenants, housing managers suggested that different definitions of what it meant to be professional needed to be adopted. For example, it was possible to be professional while being casually dressed and adopting the role of *'friend'* rather than detached professional. This manifested itself in boundary-unmaking practices such as sharing personal experiences with tenants. While this focus on their ability to demonstrate professional generic skills and qualities such as empathy and understanding is reminiscent of the emphasis on *'manner'* and *'altruistic service'* of the age of *'status professionalism'* (Furbey *et al.* 2001), what is different, it is argued here, is the depth of feeling that accompanies interactions with tenants. There are genuine feelings of

empathy that go beyond *'face-work'* (Goffman) which arise from shared experiences and feelings of commonality.

Yet professionalism implies the capacity to control fairly well-defined boundaries between professional and client (Cant and Sharma, 1998). Emotional management was evident in the way that housing managers monitored the boundaries of their own involvement with tenants by discussions with colleagues that enabled some distance to be gained from the problem in hand, and other more practical means like *'patch'* rotation.

The issue of professional boundary-keeping and the management of emotions has not been widely debated in the housing literature, at least not in the official housing press and journals. This is in stark contrast to the caring professions such as homeopathy (Cant and Sharma,1998), psychotherapy, nursing (Smith, 1993). Yet, the housing managers in this thesis placed boundary and emotion issues as being important components of their work and their professionalism. This would suggest that a more in-depth study of emotion management in housing management is over-due.

9.3.4 – How and in what form do managerial demands impinge on the professionalism of housing managers?

This thesis explicates how *individual* housing managers in the study were responding to the managerial culture in productive ways to achieve their own individual ends (*i.e.* to work on their professional selves and thus their room for manoeuvre) as well as for systemic ends (*i.e.* to produce efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery). It demonstrates how the discourse of professionalism as a set of values is mobilised by employees as a form of *self*-discipline. Far from viewing performance management as a repressive power that undermined their ability to work as professionals, some housing managers take on the demands of the regulatory regime and interiorize management goals and objectives in a bid to become more professional. They act upon themselves to meet and exceed managerial expectations, which can be characterised as the *'professional project of the self'*. The *'presentation of self'* (*c.f.* Goffman, 1959) and use of individual initiative, in order to effectively respond to the demands of consumers, were thus integral to the meaning that housing managers gave to professionalism in their everyday work.

Hence, Chapter 8 explored how the demands of performance management were

incorporated into housing managers' sense of professionalism through the key concept of accountability. It was clear that a managerial and performance ethos has impinged upon the way that housing managers carry out their work. Contrary to other studies, performance management, by and large, was not viewed as a negative aspect of housing management. Rather, performance management was seen as a means of advancing professionalism on an individualised basis. The visibility of performance and the negotiated process of formal performance management were identified as factors that enabled a sense of professionalism. A distinction was drawn between formal accountability and informal accountability to customers.

The starting point of this thesis was to explore what it means to refer to oneself as being professional in housing management. The research reported here leads to the conclusion that professionalism in housing management is best thought of as a project of the self which encompasses both competencies and attributes that distinguish such individuals from others in the same occupation. However, it is also evident that the external environment also impacts on their professionalism, given expression in the key finding of professionalism as a *mediation* between the housing managers themselves, the organisation and the customers of the housing service. The project of the self is expressed as a willingness to *'go beyond the boundaries'* in order to provide a service in four key areas: knowledge, emotional labour, customer service and accountability. Claims to professionalism are made, not merely on the basis of technical and esoteric knowledge and commitment, but on the basis of a project of the self, developed over time by each individual.

On this analysis the housing management profession remains an oxymoron (Furbey *et al.* 2001), but the *'housing professional'* is emerging. The *'new'* housing professionals, on the basis of the evidence presented in this thesis are characterised by fluidity in their attitudes towards housing management a profession. Hence, they will continue to subscribe to housing courses only as far as they perceive them to be useful for the acquisition of relevant knowledge and advancement of their individual careers, rather than on the basis of a belief in their intrinsic worth. A similar instrumental approach to membership of the CIH, or any other professional association is also evident. Housing professionals seem set to acquire an array of credentials and qualifications in generic management as well as housing related areas, in their quest to advance their status and employability. They are also less likely to remain committed to one particular

organisation or area of housing management and are willing to move across to other related areas of expertise, such as regeneration.

In conclusion, I shall suggest that the changing meaning of professionalism in the wider society, its multiple meanings in housing management's occupational ideology and responses to the changing context in which housing services are delivered point to an increased desire on the part of housing managers to professionalise. However, their assumptions about the meaning of professionalism undermine the likelihood that they will make collective demands for the professional treatment that they seek. Hence, while the managerial ethos presents housing managers with increased opportunities to be professional in the ways set out in this thesis, and to construct careers in the varied occupational niches that can be said to make up the field of housing management, the profession of housing management as a collective entity is increasingly under threat.

9.4 – A critical review of the research process

A crucial part of the training constituted by registration for and completion of, a higher degree by research is the researcher's development of a critical perspective on the research process itself. This thesis was submitted after three years of full-time and then one year of part-time registration. This period of time has provided the author with plenty of opportunities for reflection and critique. This section outlines the results. The critique is comprised three sections.

9.4.1 – Reflections on methodology and methods

Reflecting back on the study methodology, and the *'insider'* status of the researcher, it is important to acknowledge the necessity of reflexivity in managing qualitative data. The constant critical self-scrutiny implicit in the research process and the role of the researcher in that process necessarily features prominently in qualitative studies. The notion of epistemological privilege stemming from insider knowledge has been confronted, requiring the researcher to demonstrate a careful retracing and reconstruction of the research methods and interpretation (Mason, 1996). The key challenges to the credibility of the data in this thesis arose from the biases which characterise the qualitative method of interview sources, such as veracity and the representativeness of the accounts. The formulation of a *'professional self'* is a situated and contingent one, drawing on data from a small group of housing managers. I neither

claim that the sample is representative of the entire housing management profession, nor that differing accounts based on the data are possible. I do, however, claim to have constructed a plausible and thought-provoking re-telling of their *'professionalism'*. I anticipate that such an interpretation of professionalism may apply elsewhere, in other occupations that lie on the boundaries of housing management, but this is an expectation not a claim.

The methods used to collect data were conventional tools of the competent social scientist. Alternative methods could also have been used which might have shed further light on the professional dilemmas of housing managers. In particular, the use of non-verbal techniques of data collection could have been used. One type of research method, diaries, with which I have familiarised myself since completing the fieldwork seems appropriate as another technique in retrospect. Diaries have been mainly used in research into health issues (Johnson and Bytheway, 2001; Coxon, 1999), but there is a growing interest in their usage in other social science areas, including housing (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2000). The diary-interview method adopted by Zimmerman and Wieder (1975) was highlighted in Johnson and Bytheway (2001) and was a major influence on their research. Given the limited resources available to them in their study of the counter culture of young people, Zimmerman and Wieder developed the *'informant diary'* (1975). In doing so, they recognised that any observer recruited to a research project could be both a *'naive performer'* and a *'reflective informant'*.

> *'By requesting that subjects keep a chronologically organised diary or log of daily activities, we in effect asked for a record of their own performances as well as reporting the performances of others with whom they interacted. Completed diaries functioned for us in a way similar to the field notes turned in by our regular research assistants. Diarists thus served as adjunct ethnographers of their own circumstances'* (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1975: 484).

They then argued that the interview that followed, based upon the diary, was crucial. The diary, combined with the information resulting from the interview:

'affords at least the possibility of gaining some degree of access to naturally occurring sequences of activity, as well as raising pertinent questions about their meaning and significance' (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1975: 485).

To Johnson *et al.* their study suggested that:

'the interview in which the subject amplifies upon a diary that they themselves had kept has the potential to generate particularly revealing insights into everyday life' (2001: 185).

To this researcher its potential for application to the study of professionalism in housing management seems appropriate and offers the potential to explore illuminating questions about the every day working lives of housing managers such as *'what do housing managers do?' 'with whom do they interact?'* and *'how does professionalism manifest itself in the every day world of housing managers?'*. The aim would be to place housing managers' views of professionalism in their broader social context. Diaries could therefore explore inter-personal skills and reflexive practice in interactions with tenants, senior managers and other users of the housing service.

9.4.2 – Purposive sampling

The purposive sampling employed in this thesis is both a strength and a weakness. By focusing on housing managers, all of whom worked in the North West of England, an exploration of how professionalism is constructed in social housing was possible. The sampling procedure controlled for those in social housing and hence can make no contributions to debates about the public/private housing sector interface and possible divergences and convergences between the two sectors as to the meaning of professionalism in housing management. Moreover, because the sample contained low numbers of ethnic minority employees, the sample was ethno-centric. With the exception of one housing manager, all interviewees were white Britons. Hence, questions about the possibility of culturally specific notions of professionalism remain neglected. The fact that the research was based in the North West is another factor that limits the wider application of the data. A study which was located in the high demand housing areas in the South East and London may have yielded different meanings of professionalism. The theoretical and empirical connections between professionalism in housing and its different contextual influences (for example, high and low demand areas) merits further research.

9.4.3 – The transcription process: temporal scale and pace

I had under-estimated the time taken to transcribe the interviews. The purchase of a voice recognition package did not prove to be as helpful as was hoped for. The plan

was to speak all the interviews on to the computer and let *'Dragon 100'* do all the work. However, I soon discovered that even after training it to recognise my voice, it continually made mistakes and I reverted back to doing the transcribing manually. The transcription process was laborious – it took on average of seven hours to transcribe one hour's interview. The estimate of 420 hours spent doing the transcribing amounts to twelve weeks work, if one assumes a working week of 35 hours. This is just over 10% of the time for which funding was available. The amount of time spent on transcribing data was time not available for data analysis.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the daunting task of analysis began. Each transcript was approximately 13 pages, amounting to 720 pages of data in total. If one assumes an average word count of 300 per page, then the researcher is left with the task of producing an 80,000 word thesis based on the results of a research exercise which generated 216,000 words of data. This researcher found the task of making sense of such a volume of data challenging.

9.5 – Directions for further research

This section briefly sketches out potential new directions for research which arise from the arguments of this thesis. At this stage many of these ideas remain necessarily underdeveloped since they form part of a medium term personal research strategy. The issues raised here, however, should hold salience for researchers working in the area of professions and professionalism in housing management and in other occupations further afield.

Since the arguments presented in this thesis have been derived from an analysis of empirical work undertaken with housing managers, and the focus is on internal coherence rather than universal applicability of the data, caution is exercised as to their wider applicability to other areas of professional activity. Nevertheless, despite this caution, it is suggested that this theory of the *'professional project of the self'* potentially has wider implications for the sociology of the professions literature, which currently views professionalism as a collective project. To establish whether a *'professional project of the self'* is evident in other areas of professional activity, and to identify whether the nature of this project of the self differs between professions, the researcher argues for the following two developments.

The first concerns the need for research to examine the extent to which new public

management has initiated a *'professional project of the self'* in other public service professions and occupations and, if so, to identify the implications that this has for the way in which theories of professionalism could be developed in new directions, *e.g.* as an increasingly individualized project, rather than a collective project.

The second future development (that logically follows-on from the first development) concerns the questions that this raises about whether changes are occurring in the relative balance of power between professions that are seen to be undermined by new public management (*e.g.* medicine), and occupations that are benefiting from the chance to present themselves as increasingly professional (*e.g.* housing management). This latter question could most usefully be usefully explored in studies of joined-up working between professionals (such as medical consultants) and occupations (such as housing managers and social workers) in policy fields such as community care.

By raising the issue of individualised professionalism, in the form of a *'professional project of the self'*, a new empirical question comes to the fore: what is the relationship between occupational, organisational and individual levels of professionalism? Although the thesis was not focused on this question, it deserves attention from occupational sociologists. In fact, it goes right to the heart of sociology. It is concerned with the relationship between social structure (in this case the occupation of housing management) and individual attitudes and behaviour.

In a similar vein, research on the relationship between organisational culture and individual levels of professionalism seems pertinent. Although interviewees were selected from different types of housing organisation it is important to note that the purpose of this thesis is to make sense of the general meanings that interviewees gave to their professionalism rather than the more complex question of how and why these meanings may have differed according to organisational culture. This would constitute a more specific form of (organisational culture) theorisation which would provide a valuable area for further research.

Future research could address the perspectives on professionalism in housing management offered by service users, particularly in the light of recent interest in customers as active consumers. There is a dearth of research on tenants' views of what they consider to be a professional housing service and the qualities that they consider to characterise professional housing managers.

9.6 – Implications for policy and practice in housing management

The contention that professionalism in housing management is an individualised project is significant in the context of broad policy development. Policies such as anti-racism, equality of opportunity and community care all impact on housing management at a strategic as well as a practice level. These are introduced by government as broad objectives that can only be achieved on the ground through agencies whose duty is to meet those responsibilities, or deliver those objectives. The agencies can only do that if the individuals in those organisations deliver as required. The individualised professionalism of housing management could be interpreted as giving housing managers responsible for delivering against a particular set of objectives a lot of scope to go out and do something else. This is particularly in view of the fact that one of the findings presented in this thesis was the emphasis placed on the use of initiative regarding policies and procedures as a feature of professionalism. However, the mediated nature of the *'professional project of the self'*, as a response to managerial demands demonstrates that housing managers' professionalism can also be interpreted as a response to the context within which they work, hence structure is not written out of the equation. On the contrary, their response to managerialism is a mediation of structure and agency, which is given expression through the meanings they give to the concept of professionalism. Hence, housing managers' professionalism is also about being accountable, being able to render an account of performance, as argued in Chapter 8.

However, in situations where organisational policies and procedures themselves are at odds with the law, then this can put housing professionals in a very difficult position, as was suggested in Chapter 6. Presumably, this can arise because there is no effective code of practice at the organisational level. The CIH Code of Professional Conduct does not contain a code of practice and says very little about the rights of the customer. In fact, the relationship between housing professional and customer is noticeably unarticulated. Further, there is no recognition of *'knowledge'* in the profession as an *'upholder'* of rights. The emphasis is on the duty to the CIH and the employer.

This highlights the importance of professional ethics, translated into codes of practice for the housing sector, that transcends the behaviour of individual professionals.

Following Friedson (2001: 12) I take the view that this is not because individual ethics are not important for the performance of all kinds of work, but because economic, political and social institutions which may actively encourage ethical behaviour are ultimately more important. The thesis has demonstrated how individual housing managers grapple with complex issues where they are obliged to make ethical choices in the course of their day-to-day work. There are many examples given where housing managers were not immune to the constraints surrounding those choices which were keenly felt. Friedson (2001: 12) draws our attention to the *'institutional ethics of professionalism that establishes the criteria by which to evaluate those constraints'*. This seems particularly pertinent to housing management in view of the fact that the CIH Code of Conduct (1990) does not give clear guidelines as to what to do in the case of conflicts of interest between professional personal ethics and the employer organisation. The thesis presents clear evidence where the employer organisation failed to uphold customers' legal rights and housing managers struggled to depart from organisational policies and procedures in order to make a stance. In these kinds of circumstances it would be wishful thinking to expect the vast majority of housing managers to distinguish themselves by doing so, unless there was recourse to either a robust code of professional practice or a sector-wide code of ethics at the institutional level.

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Appendix 1 — Sample page to illustrate the coding of individual transcripts.

The box below contains an example of the coding of an interview. Coding consists of the identification of key points relating to specific topics which occur on each page and brief notes on what was said. This provides a brief summary of the interview, isolating its key features.

Transcript No.1

Page 1

1. **Biography:** various administrative jobs, had children, returned to education

2. **Motivation for going in to housing**: to fight people's battles, political fulfilment, needed a career.

3. **Age/generational issues:** cannot get the jargon right

Page 2

4. **Inter-agency working:** contacted EH and the rent deposit scheme.

5. **Housing knowledge/skills:** listening, interpreting, analytical, mediating, logic

Page 3

6. **Skills:** persuasion
Technical knowledge on repairs and maintenance

7. **Discretion:** to use legal measures
Responsibility for decision-making devolves to manager
Go to manager if decisions have political implications

8. **Boundaries:** with Social Services
Social services generally let you down

Appendix 2 — Section of coding frame

A coding frame is constructed from the coding of the interview transcripts. The key points across the interviews are brought together and grouped under key themes. This gives the range of attitudes to each key topic. The topic illustrated below (motivation for going into housing) has been further split into sub-themes to reflect the views of interviewees.

Motivation for going in to housing

Career:

'I had a degree in pharmacology and got fed up of vivisection and working in labs for hours on end. I decided to do something radically different. Hadn't got a clue what it would be, something about people. Interesting job advertised in Dundee, my home town, for housing advisors, an utterly new concept in 1973, following the Cullingworth Report. I applied and got the job' **(Interview 12:p9).**

Wanted *career* change: *'It wasn't something I'd particularly wanted to go into, but it was a vacancy that was similar to what I'd been doing really, the housing system part, making up rent arrears, arrears control, which I'd been dealing with in housing benefit, so there was a direct link there really'* **(Interview 36:p3).**

'I thought I'd try to get a job in housing rather than go back to my old job and I found it dead easy so that's how I ended up working here. I'd done the HNC initially just to help with the work I was doing in the co-op. And then realised I was easily as good as the people I was on the course, who were being paid and thought I would chance it and see how I go' **(Interview 5:p4).**

'I applied for the job as a means of getting back into the workforce after been at home for 15 years. And I ended up being employed by a housing association in Sheffield and what I found was, unlike just an office job, there was the contact with the public and the tenants and that was the part I enjoyed most' **(Interview 7:p3).**

Security:

'Back in the early 1980's it was a job for life (the council)' **(Interview 20:p5).**

'An in-road into local government, secure employer, steady money. I've been brought up on a council estate as well so... it was just an interesting job' **(Interview 9:p4).**

'Wanted to get into local government or civil service, for the security. The fact that it was housing was irrelevant' **(Interview 46:p12).**

Financial:

'Moved from housing benefits for better money, better career chances, wider scope' **(Interview 14:p7).**

Interested in housing: *'I'd done a little bit about it in my first degree... ehm... but at the end of the day, it came down to finance really'* **(Interview 34:p3).**

'I've seen people who've got no connections to housing, no interest in housing, no qualifications in housing thinking "I'll try my arm as a housing officer' it's just a customer service job" the same as it might be telebanking or something similar' **(Interview 4:p4).**

Appendix 3 — Coding table

The table sets out the key features of professionalism as expressed by pragmatists and pro-activists.

Chapter	General[19]	Pragmatists	Pro-activists
Chapter 5 - Identity	• Lack of a clearly delimited role for HM[20] • Invisibility (to general others) • Marginality (to significant others/professionals) • Negative image (with general/significant others) • Adventitious routes into HM	• View HM as 'just a job'/'a means to an end' (*i.e.* a salary, security) • Wish to stay in 'front-line' HM • Do not see HM as a career/profession • Commitment to the organisation rather than HM itself • Do not identify with other HMRs[21] in other organisations • Have no intention to develop career in HM • Do not engage in identity work to same extent as pro-activists	• High expectations for job satisfaction/an end in itself • View HM as an expression of political/social beliefs • A diversity of motives for embarking upon/ staying in HM • View HM as a worthwhile career/profession • Concerned to present a positive image of HM
Chapter 6 - Knowledge	**Nature of Knowledge** • Lack of a discrete 'stock of knowledge' • Common sense • 'Know-how'	• View life experience as more relevant than formal qualifications • Value information above knowledge • Value local knowledge • Direct tenants to other professional services	• Broader view of relevant knowledge • Value local *and* contextual knowledge • Active engagement in other professional worlds
	Routes to knowledge • Colleagues • On-the-job training	• Immediate work environment/organisation • Reactive rather than pro-active approach to gaining information • Informal learning • Reliance on colleagues to impart 'second-hand' knowledge (NB. oral culture)	• Look to external sources of knowledge (higher education, CIH) • Self-motivated learning portfolio • Use of professional networks • Informal *and* formal learning • Conflict between knowledge and organisational procedures

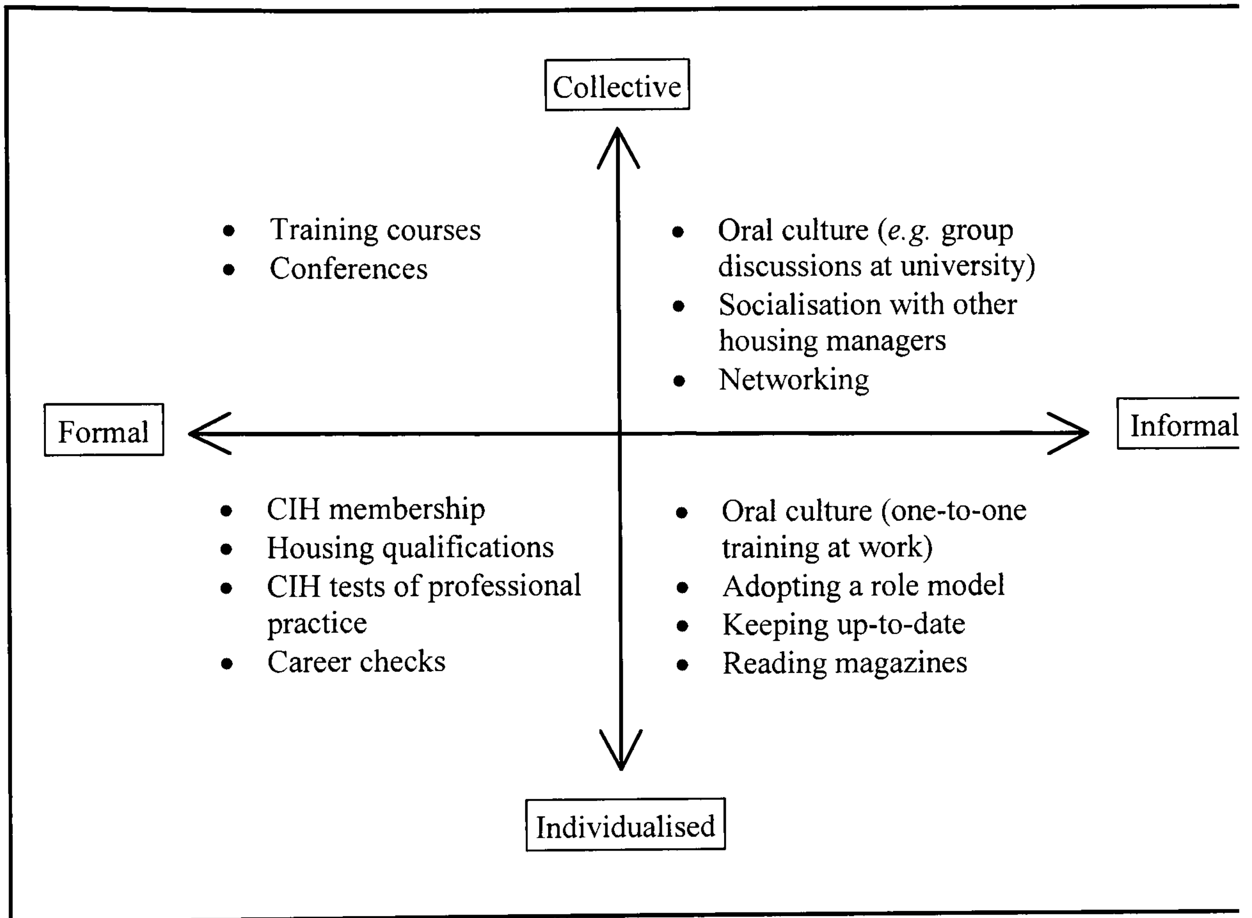
[19] The 'General' column refers to what pragmatists and pro-activists have in common
[20] HM = Housing management
[21] HMR = Housing manager

Chapter 7 – Boundaries of service and emotions	• Use of the self as desired benchmark for service • Use of the self as compensation for lack of service • Negotiation of boundaries • 'Surface acting' (Goffman, 1969) • 'Adopting the line of the other' (Goffman, 1969)	• Difficulty recognising the limitations of the housing service • Adherence to P+P's[22] • Use of P+P's as 'defence mechanism' • Rejection of boundaries • Sharing of experiences with tenants • At receiving end of emotional monitoring	• Stress on limitations of the housing service • Use of initiative re. P+P's • 'Working the system' within the boundaries • Going beyond *procedural* boundaries • Attempt to maintain *emotional* boundaries • Engagement in emotional monitoring
Chapter 8 - Accountability	• Largely positive attitudes towards PI's[23] • PI's not experienced as oppressive • Resistance expressed as alternative view of accountability	• Passive compliance towards PI's • Use of PI's to demonstrate competency • Use of PI's to demonstrate consistency of decision-making	• Active ownership of PI's. • More emphasis placed on negotiation of PI's • Desire to exceed targets

[22] P + P = Policies and procedures
[23] PI = Performance indicator

Appendix 4 — Process of becoming professional

The diagram below illustrates the collective and individualised aspects of professionalism as described by the interviewees.



Appendix 5 — Names of interviewees

The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect them their anonymity. The categories refer to each interviewee's role in housing management:

Core: Those directly involved in day-to-day housing management.

Strategic: Those whose work involves housing management at the strategic level

Peripheral: Those whose work is housing related, but is not estate management

Interview No.	Category	Pseudonym	Job Title
1	Peripheral	Susan	Housing Adviser
2	Peripheral	Christopher	Regeneration Manager
3	Strategic	Peter	Resource Procurement Manager
4	Strategic	Jane	Research Officer
5	Strategic	Mary	Senior Housing Manager
6	Strategic	Jeanette	Assistant Area Housing Manager
7*[24]	Core	Daphne	Estate Officer (Team Leader)
8	Core	Deborah	Estate Manager
9	Strategic	Lucille	Senior Manager
10	Strategic	Daniel	Director of Operations
11*	Core	Brian	Rent Officer
12	Strategic	Gareth	Director of Housing
13	Strategic	Cheryl	Director of Housing Management Services
14	Strategic	Belinda	Research Officer
15*	Core	Graham	Housing Officer
16	Core	Celia	Housing Officer
17	Core	Rachel	Senior Housing Officer
18*	Core	Amy	Housing Officer
19	Core	William	Housing Officer
20*	Core	Kelly	Housing Officer

[24] An asterix (*) denotes that the interviewee is a pragmatist

21	Strategic	Sharon	Community Housing Manager
22	Core	Gordon	Resident Liaison Officer
23	Strategic	Terrence	Regional Housing Manager
24*	Peripheral	Jacqueline	Homeless Welfare Officer
25*	Peripheral	Karen	Homeless Welfare Officer
26*	Core	Veronica	Housing Officer
27*	Core	Winifred	Housing Officer
28*	Core	Grant	Housing Officer
29*	Core	David	Housing Officer
30	Strategic	Derek	Policy and Performance Manager
31*	Core	Suzanne	Housing Officer
32*	Core	Sandra	Housing Assistant
33	Peripheral	Jocelyn	Development and Regeneration Manager
34	Peripheral	Alice	Supported Services Area Manager
35*	Core	Lottie	Housing Officer
36	Core	Patrick	Rent Officer
37	Core	Patricia	Housing Officer
38	Peripheral	Beth	Care and Protection Manager
39	Core	Louise	Housing Officer
40*	Core	Annabelle	Housing Officer
41*	Core	Daisy	Housing Officer
42	Strategic	Pauline	Assistant Regional Manager
43	Core	Maxwell	Housing Officer
44	Core	Chloe	Housing Officer
45*	Core	Yasmin	Housing Officer
46*	Core	Thomas	Housing Officer
47	Strategic	Gerard	Senior Housing Officer
48	Core	Dieter	Estate Officer
49	Core	Donald	Housing Officer