EMPOWERMENT, TRUST AND CONTROL:
A MANAGEMENT PARADOX.

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Abstract

Employee empowerment is espoused as an important method in achieving a lean, flexible and responsive organisation, where the two main tenets of empowerment, structural and psychological, act to bring benefits to organisations and their employees, including increased innovation, efficiency, performance, job satisfaction, and commitment, whilst also reducing turnover. Further justification has been the rejection of traditional command and control by the modern highly educated workforce in favour of greater autonomy (Potterfield 1999; Nykodym *et al.* 1994; Dew 1997). Empowerment research however has often been undertaken in hierarchical organisations (see Hanaysha 2016, 2016a; Spreitzer 1995, 1996; Sigler and Pearson 2000; Sparrowe 1994) neglecting the increasingly-common matrix structure (Shirreff 2011; Burns and Wholey 1993; Kolb and Putnam 1992; Laslo and Goldberg, 2008; Galbraith 2009) and the potential effect that this has on perceptions of empowerment.

This investigation employed a phenomenological basis for a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. An insider researcher perspective was adopted to utilise the researcher's existing professional position within an aerospace-oriented subject organisation engaged in a transformation programme. Focus groups and individual interviews with employees and senior managers were used to elicit rich lived experiences of empowerment in that organisation, building on foundational knowledge gathered through pilot surveys.

Data was gathered from five focus groups and six individual interviews of, in total, twenty-seven participants of high experience within the organisation. Due to the researcher's insider position, there was a natural immersion within the subject organisation (Coghlan 2003; Taylor 2011) which allowed for participants to share perspectives and experiences candidly (Unluer 2012; Bonner and Tolhurst 2002).

The fieldwork yielded rich experiential data from which several themes were derived. Positives reported by participants included, contrary to the researcher's preconceptions, that the matrix structure of the organisation rarely had an effect on participants' ability to fulfil their role. An emergent but significant theme was that of trust, specifically a lack of such between managers and employees manifesting through restrictions on the capacity of the latter to make and execute decisions. This issue influenced many subsequent sub-themes, such as a perceived lack of managerial support, a culture of a fear of wrong decisions, prescriptive organisational processes, and the effects of a severe downsizing programme. These contributed to perceived employee frustration and disenfranchisement through not feeling empowered and being unable to fulfil their roles with pace and efficiency.

These findings make contributions to both practice and theory. In respect of practice, a summary of workplace obstacles to trust provides a sobering, and transferable, view of how empowerment, and thus the espoused benefit it brings, is inhibited by a lack of trust. With respect to theory, the investigation offers an alternative to the notable trend in the literature of employing solely quantitative methods in empowerment research by adopting a phenomenological, qualitative approach to highlight lived experiences. A second contribution is the rare exploration of the perception of trust from manager to employee, as opposed to the employee-manager flow documented by much of the trust literature, offering new insight into the way that managerial trust enhances, or indeed impedes, employees' ability to fulfil their roles. This inquiry brings to the fore the critical importance of trust in the perceptions of empowerment; it is an indispensable foundation upon which any programme of empowerment must build.

There are limitations of this investigation and the most notable of these are primarily temporal and contextual. Specifically, the ongoing downsizing programme in the subject organisation could have serious impacts on participants, where perceptions of job security, time pressures of working with fewer resources, and increased task load may contribute to more negativity than in usual business conditions.

Recommendations for further research are varied. As the research has adopted a PAR framework, it is strongly recommended that interventions are determined with full involvement of participants. There is also a call for further exploration of the application to the findings of this work of both existing theory and philosophy: Argyris' (1976) theories-in-action held value in helping to explain managerial perspectives and this research would benefit from greater investigation of such, specifically in relation to how and why the espoused approaches to empowerment often differ to those in actuality. The basis of this work was considered using a Foucauldian lens to provide philosophical insight of power relations. A recommendation then is for the use of a different philosophical viewpoint, specifically Bourdieu's theory of Habitus and related cultural capital. It is hoped that this lens will enable a greater understanding of the intricacies of the perceptions of professionalism, motivation, and control that may add a nuanced thickness to this work. Finally, it is requested that further work is undertaken to extend this research beyond the study of self-determination and formal power to the remaining recognised tenets of psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, and impact) in order to ascertain the effect of the constructs together.

Dedication

This Professional Doctorate was an incredible draw on my attention, energy and brain power. Understandably then it was a venture that required a sizeable amount of support from several important people, without whom it would not have been completed.

Firstly, and foremostly, the greatest of thanks go to my wife, Kam. You have been the rock upon which my doctoral castle has been built. Your unwavering support, your management of our home life, and your care for our two children, all whilst maintaining a career have been nothing short of awe-inspiring. You have gone about your work without complaint, even when I required several days without distraction to ensure targets and deadlines were met. You have continued to manage it all when I have had to travel with work, where I would be out of the family home for days. I am so lucky to have you in my life and I cannot declare enough how much I love you. I dedicate this work to you.

To my beautiful little girls, Elena and Laila. When I started this journey, Elena, you were six months old, and Laila, you did not even arrive until two-and-a-half years ago! You have cheered me up without end when I am down; you have given me cuddles, given me kisses, and made me be a better person. You have also made me more tired when I am already shattered! Without you both I would be not even half the man I am now. Being your Daddy has given me even more purpose and I hope that in accomplishing this work, I have shown you what you can do if you put the hard work into it. You can be anything you want to be, and whatever you choose, I will be there to support you all of the way. I love you both so very much.

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that instilled in me the importance of education, the importance of continually trying to improve and, critically, the importance of family. I hope to provide as much for my children as you did for me. I am forever indebted to you and I love you both with all of my heart.

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Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki fateh.

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I am incredibly grateful, and lucky, to have had such wonderful supervisors that have metaphorically held my hand through not only this journey to the academy, but through some turbulent personal times. I cannot thank you enough, but hopefully these few words go some way to show you my sincere gratitude. I hope I have done you proud.

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Acronyms

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AR	-	Action Research
HR	-	Human Resources
LMX	-	Leader-Member Exchange
MCS	-	Management Control System
PAR	-	Participatory Action Research
PMS	-	Performance Management System
POS	-	Perceived Organisational Support

"The world is a drama, staged in a dream. In a moment, the play is played out."

Shri Guru Nanek Dev Ji (1469 – 1539)

Introduction

The following section gives an overview of the research undertaken to date. It summarises previous work performed by the researcher, commencing with the research context, the objectives of the research, a brief discussion on the methodologies and methods adopted, and then a comment on the subsequent intent of this document.

Background

Empowerment of employees has been evidenced to lead to many positive benefits for organisations, specifically increased employee commitment (Saleem *et al.* 2018; Fong and Snape 2015; Hanaysha 2016; Denham Lincoln *et al.* 2002; Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spreitzer 1995, 1996), reduced employee turnover (Kim and Fernandez 2017; Sparrowe 1994; Seibert *et al.* 2011; Macsinga *et al.* 2015), increased employee job satisfaction (Choi *et al.* 2016; Fong and Snape 2015; Liden *et al.* 2000; Kumar and Moorthy 2015; Hechanova *et al.* 2006; Bowen and Lawler 1992), and increased organisation/employee performance (Li *et al.* 2015; Denham Lincoln *et al.* 2002; Biron and Bamberger 2011; Howard and Foster 1999).

The aerospace industry has been subject to several dramatic, sudden and unpredictable market-changing events that have affected air travel e.g. 9/11, the 2008 global financial crash, and the Eyjafjallajökull volcanic eruption, to name but a few. Indeed, more recently, the novel coronavirus outbreak has reduced air travel through mandated restrictions (Reuters 2020), whilst the climate change movement has highlighted the effect of air travel upon global warming and initiated a narrative against use of such a method of movement (Irfan 2019; Le Page 2019), with even royalty subject to criticism (BBC 2019). The effect of these issues has been a reduction in the ability for aerospace-orientated businesses to gain financial support, with evidence suggesting this is predominantly due to a reassessment of the risk appetite of financial institutions (KPMG 2009; Wehinger 2013). The consequence of this market and social context has led to many organisations pivoting to cut costs and transforming to survive (Dolan *et al.* 2010; Phelan 2009; Gasparro and

Dulaney 2015; Hanaysha and Tahir 2016). Scholars argue that this circumstance means an organisation must react faster, decisions need to be made quicker, employee numbers and thus costs are to be reduced, whilst employee innovation, commitment and flexibility are required to increase to compete; empowerment of employees can satisfy these needs (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Kidron 2018; Maas *et al.* 2018).

Whilst empowerment is recognised, another method in which organisations have endeavoured to survive in challenging and uncertain times is by employing matrix structures of direct and indirect reporting lines (Burton *et al.* 2015; Burns and Wholey 1993; Shirreff 2011; Kolb and Putnam 1992), endeavouring to utilise synergies and shared resources (Laslo and Goldberg 2008; Galbraith 2009) in complex business environments. Matrix hierarchies regularly require employees to report into multiple managers (Global Integration 2017; Burns and Wholey 1993; Kolb and Putnam 1992). Such a matrix organisational structure can however negatively influence the empowerment of individuals by leading to undesired conflict and organisational stressors (Oore *et al.* 2015; Workman 2015; Laslo and Goldberg 2008; Rizzo *et al.* 1970).

Organisational and Researcher Context

The subject organisation is a multi-discipline power generation business, with its activities predominantly focussed in aerospace. It employs over 40,000 in a global footprint, with the majority of those employees based in the UK. It has itself been undertaking a significant and material transformation exercise to streamline its processes, governance, and line of sight, a somewhat common approach in difficult operational times (Denning 2019; Goffee and Scase 2015). A further consequence of this transformation has been a sizeable reduction in global employee numbers. In respect of this subject organisation, and indeed across the industry as a whole, these challenging market conditions have presented a desire for delegated decision-making and lower bureaucracy to enable organisational performance, again as offered by

employee empowerment (Laschinger *et al.* 2004; Bowen and Lawler 1992; Avolio *et al.* 2004; Srivastava *et al.* 2006).

An insider researcher position was adopted to utilise the access and prior business knowledge of the researcher's current employment status within the organisation. The researcher's role at the time of the inquiry was as a specialist in a sub-function of approximately eighty employees supporting the sales of new products and associated maintenance, where management of employees was enacted through a matrix organisation of direct and indirect reporting.

Research Aim

This research aimed to investigate the empowerment paradigm within an organisation based in the aerospace industry. Through the insider researcher perspective, the researcher had preconceptions that the empowerment of employees managed through a matrix organisation was restricted and impacted their ability to undertake tasks swiftly and effectively. These then formed the key objective for understanding in whether employees felt this to be an accurate representation of their organisational lives. Taking guidance from Lashley (1999) in focussing on specific constructs of empowerment in context of the subject organisation rather than the whole concept, the research questions was defined as:

What are the experiences of employees in the aerospace industry with direct and indirect reporting lines, in respect of the self-determination and formal power constructs of empowerment?

The intent of the research was therefore to understand the holistic empowerment experience within the subject organisation: how do employees experience that empowerment? What is the basis of any empowerment? What blockers, if any, do employees face in respect of empowerment? Does being managed through a matrix system affect the individual's ability to exercise self-determination? Through gathering data on these issues, the research would contribute to immediate practice in terms of highlighting such experiences to

organisational management, including the considerations that should be made if endeavouring to increase empowerment levels. The research would also aid theory in terms of understanding experiences of empowerment within a context of a direct and indirect reporting lines.

Research Methodology and Methods

The investigation adopted a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, applied through a PAR framework, to investigate the lived experiences of participants (Alessandrini 2012; Saunders *et al.* 2012; Flood 2010; Hair Jr *et al.* 2007).

In order to develop an initial insight into the experiences of empowerment within the subject organisation, and to understand if these aligned to those of the researcher, pilot data gathering was carried out utilising an electronic survey based upon a Likert scale, designed to seek the perspectives of employees to form a baseline for the subsequent focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The survey questions were informed by a preliminary literature review, where many different concepts, constructs, and understandings of empowerment gave rise to a lack of consensus in respect of the definition of the term, a factor that was suggested to have impeded empowerment's progression (Tuuli and Rowlinson 2007; Denham Lincoln *et al.* 2002). The intent of the survey was to therefore establish if respondents understood themselves to be empowered, with subsequent questions being designed to verify if the tenets of empowerment, i.e. Spreitzer's (1995) meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, corroborated that position. Three key indirect sub-functions of the subject organisation were surveyed, all that operate within, or support, the sales and maintenance of products.

The survey highlighted an emergent issue that correlated with a conclusion of a preliminary literature review in that respondents consistently defined being empowered as having the ability to make decisions, with a desire to be accountable and autonomous. Further issues such as having to manage

multiple 'stakeholders' who invariably did not have an input into the approval process were often highlighted by respondents across the hierarchy. Senior management believed in empowering their reports, but suggested however that in contrast to the employees' response, team members were reluctant to grasp this opportunity, often referring to their managers even though the decision-making had been delegated. It was here that *trust* also began to emerge as a concern for employee participants, predominantly linked to their ability to make decisions. This emergence gave scope and direction for further probing through the subsequent investigation.

These perspectives, as well as other responses, gave rise to four important questions to be posed to participants, aimed at advancing from the survey data to delve into richer lived experiences:

- What do participants understand 'Empowerment' to mean?
- Do participants feel they have the authority and autonomy to fulfil their roles, and how?
- Do managers have trust issues and if so, why?
- How do people feel that indirect and direct reporting lines affect their abilities to (i) make decisions, and (ii) exercise freedom in enacting those decisions?

The research sample was narrowed to focus on one of the three sub-functions highlighted earlier, for accessibility and potential change implementation opportunity. Following Brinkmann and Kvale's (2009) execution guidance, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted. Both methods, together with the insider position of the researcher and the phenomenological methodology of the approach, yielded much opinion, experience and candid commentary on the context of individuals in the subject organisation endeavouring to fulfil their professional roles. The researcher did however face several challenges throughout the second phase of research where participants would attempt to canvas the opinions of the researcher, primarily due to that insider positionality, through innocuous statements such as "You agree, right?". The researcher was transparent with participants in stating that

any input may result in directing the conversation and that could impact any conclusions. This position was then respected by all participants.

Identification of Themes

Using the approaches recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012) and Attride-Stirling (2001) a preliminary thematic analysis of the rich and substantial data was performed. The themes distilled from that data highlighted a variety of key areas of interest, with some of those being significant, and occasionally surprising. Several of these themes have been summarised in the 'Preliminary Thematic Analysis' section later in this work, together with a brief outline of the thematic analysis process adopted, however those that remain warrant greater and more detailed investigation. This thesis will now present those additional themes; many have notable significance to participants, with one of *trust* between managers and employees to be discussed subsequently in detail. It is however pertinent and valuable to briefly touch upon this now.

The self-determination construct of empowerment, and indeed what participants understood the definition of empowerment to be, was discussed in depth in every focus group of employees. The concept was investigated further and further in each subsequent session to elicit richer data. From the early stages of analysis then, it became evident that an issue of trust in the organisation was emerging from the data. It was clear that trust was a common issue across many of the experiences that participants discussed, with that initial analysis indicating that it was a much more important constituent of participants' lives than that which the pilot data gathering alluded to. Of specific interest were the remarks in each group of the existence of a perception that management, in the whole, failed to trust employees to make and then execute decisions. The analysis of that pilot data showed that this theme was inextricably linked with several others that were explicated from the data, with the majority of those primarily from a basis of decision making, e.g. employees have a desire to be able to exercise judgement, a manager's support is needed if a 'wrong' decision is made, and approval processes repeatedly establish obstacles to efficient task completion.

The Next Phase of This Research

This thesis will commence with a revisit of empowerment-related literature that has either been published or now holds more relevance to the research since the preliminary literature review. Forming a significant part of the literature mapping, and in light of the emergence of trust as an important, common theme across the data, it will then evaluate literature related to this concept, correlating such a construct to empowerment of organisational employees. The thesis will then continue with the discussion and explication of further themes, including trust, in reference to the data gathered from participants, proposing initial approaches to combat any negative issues, limitations of this research, and subsequent lines of further research. The work conducted in this thesis will then be synthesised to propose a model of the key themes established by the inquiry.

From the researcher's own experiences as an employee of the organisation, the concept of empowerment in a difficult trading time, as well as the flux imposed by transformation, provides a practice-based contextual challenge. As such, the primary aim of the research is to provide a contribution to practice. That contribution endeavours to improve the experiences of empowerment of employees within the organisation, whilst also benefitting the respective managers' perceptions too. The issue of trust between the employees, managers, and thus the organisation, is to be highlighted, bringing to the fore the various challenges that each experience, ones that are exacerbated within the context of transformation and a reducing workforce. In drawing attention to this issue of trust, its antecedents, and its effects, it is hoped that organisations may tackle the negative, and destructive aspects of a lack of trust to enhance both the working environment for the individual, and the output of the institution.

There are also notable contributions to theory to expand the body of knowledge. The first reflects the theoretical concept variation in consideration of empowerment (see Conger and Kanungo 1988; Lee and Koh 2001; Tuuli

and Rowlinson 2007; Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2013) which allows for an opportunity to seek clarity on what the notion of empowerment means to employees of organisations. Consolidating this are two further contributions. The first of these two contributions, again in respect of theory, is a result of the data gathered during fieldwork. This data has directed the inquiry towards an investigation into empowerment *and trust*, specifically how the two interact. The second contribution is the discussion of the flow of trust, specifically manager trust in employees. At the time of writing, this appears to be a nuanced area of empowerment literature that has not been explored in detail, where much scholarly work discusses trust in respect of employee trust in managers as opposed to the converse. A further contribution is that of the methodological approach to the research from an AR participatory perspective, being original in its nature.

Literature Review

The core espoused tenets of empowerment can be mapped with the early prominence of such through civil rights movements, including feminism, toward that form which piques the interest in the context of this work: organisational empowerment. Empowerment and its related concepts are therefore multidisciplinary by their very nature (Kim and Fernandez (2017) and this diversity will manifest in the subsequent literature review by drawing on work conducted in a variety of fields which complement that or organisational theory, such as marketing, leader-member exchange theory (LMX), hospitality, and the public sector. This literature review section develops the broad preliminary literature review undertaken by the researcher through the pilot data gathering and analysis, and focuses upon key academic theory. It will focus upon literature in respect of issues that emerged from preliminary thematic analysis of the data gathered, furnishing more appropriate discussion later in this thesis.

Employee Empowerment

The current organisational climate is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, a desire for innovation and competitive advantage, and a need to act with greater pace (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Ivanova and von Scheve 2019; Bester *et al.* 2015). Global competition, technological advancements, and the evolving nature of employee requirements from their work, have meant that organisations are being compelled to make positive changes to address these threats (Hanaysha 2016a; Hanaysha and Tahir 2016; Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Lee *et al*. 2018). From traditional, rigid, top-heavy, outdated command and control cultures (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Barker 1993) relating to agency theory, where senior and middle management made all decisions (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Ivanova and von Scheve 2019; Hanaysha 2016), management must now move from hierarchical structures to delegate decisions, enabling fast responses to market dynamics (Barker 1993; Arnold *et al.* 2000; Fong and Snape 2015; Adamovic *et al.* 2020), and thereby increasing organisation (and employee) performance through participation

(Hanaysha 2016a; Ivanova and von Scheve 2019). Such delegation and participation results in empowered businesses being "characterized by self-regulating teams and flat management structures" (Caniëls *et al.* 2017: 1101). This is also said to lead to reduced labour costs, where other traditional managerial responsibilities are also delegated to a larger group of employees (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019). The reduced labour expenditure, together with the structural change required to embed empowerment, will be discussed in more depth later in respect of organisational transformation.

Empowering employees can aid organisational adaptability (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019), where a suitably embedded approach can often increase employee flexibility and their reaction speed (Caniëls *et al.* 2017). Empowerment also leads to employee job satisfaction (Hanaysha and Tahir 2016; Idris *et al.* 2018; Liden *et al.* 2000; Kumar and Moorthy 2015; Hechanova *et al.* 2006; Bowen and Lawler 1992; Men and Stacks 2013), greater commitment (Macsinga *et al.* 2015; Denham Lincoln *et al.* 2002; Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spreitzer 1995, 1996; Quiñones *et al.* 2013; Perkins and Zimmerman 1995; Men and Stacks 2013), innovation (Li *et al.* 2015; Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Potnuru *et al.* 2019; Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2013; Forrester 2000; Potterfield 1999; Kanter 1989; Simons 1995), increased motivation and well-being (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Conger and Kanungo 1988; Biron and Bamberger 2010), greater performance (Denham Lincoln *et al.* 2002; Hammuda and Dulaimi 1997; Menon 2001; Randolph and Sashkin 2002), and a problem-solving mentality (Kim and Gupta 2014; Caniëls *et al.* 2017).

In endeavouring to solve issues and overcome obstacles to fulfilment of roles, empowered employees "are likely to have an open attitude towards errors, seeing them not as failures but as opportunities for learning and further improvements" (Caniëls *et al.* 2017: 1101). Such a mentality can aid the organisation in a challenging business climate as that being currently experienced. The effect of empowerment on employee commitment to the organisation should also not be overlooked; for instance, Zhang and Geng (2019), using a questionnaire to ascertain respondents' perspectives in their

investigation into frontline employees and service recovery, determined that employees who were empowered felt greater support and thus demonstrated greater commitment to the organisation (Zhang and Geng 2019). Other researchers have also found a strong positive correlation between employee empowerment and organisational commitment (see Hanaysha 2016a; Thurston and Glendon 2018). For further positive organisational benefits, Ivanova and von Scheve (2019) have summarised the common discourse of empowerment eloquently through a modest table of general features.

Such direct employee consequences, including other positive behaviours such as creativity, innovation, and productivity (Chenji and Sode 2019; Maas *et al.* 2018; Hanaysha 2016) are some contributing factors as to why practitioners and academics alike have recognised the importance of having an empowered workforce (Wikhamn and Selart 2019).

Definition and Constructs

Preliminary literature mapping highlighted the lack of an established, universally-accepted definition of 'empowerment'. Using Spreitzer's (1995) constructs of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, together with the preliminary thematic analysis, a definition of empowerment for this research context was developed as follows: *the ability to make and be accountable for decisions to effectively fulfil one's task and role within one's levels of experience and formal guidelines*.

The definition above is consistent with academic leaning that empowerment, by its very etymology, is associated with the redistribution of *power* (Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Idris *et al.* 2018; Potterfield 1999; Laschinger *et al.* 2004; Knol and van Linge 2009), where lower echelon staff can bring insight and knowledge to decision making (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000). The greater ability to make decisions provides higher intrinsic reward for employees (Thomas and Velthouse 1990). This position is supported by both Bowen and Lawler's (1992) structural empowerment model and the research conducted by García-Juan *et al.* (2019).

The role of power in empowerment is regarded as being part of its structural construct (Kanter 1977; Bowen and Lawler 1992; Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2013a; Lashley 1999). The impact of sharing power, and therefore increasing that particular construct can however also benefit employee perceptions of the second construct, psychological empowerment, by strengthening the feelings of self-determination and autonomy (García-Juan *et al.* 2019).

Seminal theory of psychological empowerment is established by Conger and Kanungo (1988), Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995). These important contributors to theory argue that structural empowerment is one of two constituents of overall empowerment, with the other considering the psychological positioning and subjective *feelings* of the individual.

Recent research has supported the positions of these eminent authors in respect of the benefits of psychological empowerment. For example, Wikhamn and Selart (2019) determined that psychological empowerment was important for increasing positive behaviour in organisations; Kang *et al.* (2017) established that psychological empowerment leads to increased motivation which then encourages productivity and citizenship behaviour, whilst Tao *et al.* (2018), in a corporate social responsibility context, determined that psychological empowerment helps employees recognise their own value and improve prosocial trust and commitment within the organisation (Tao *et al.* 2018).

Within their research, Wikhamn and Selart (2019) investigated Spreitzer's (1995) four constructs of psychological empowerment. These authors found that, whilst *meaning* acts as an *engine* of empowerment and thus contributes to employees acting with energy and drive, *felt obligation* had much potential in leading employees to hold a strong sense of empowerment. Felt obligation is related to psychological ownership, contracts, involvement and engagement (Wikhamn and Selart 2019), and essentially is that feeling of the employee which commands them to perform in the interests of the organisation. Wikhamn and Selart's (2019) work evidenced that felt obligation mediated the relationship between psychological empowerment and personal initiative but

this was limited to Spreitzer's (1995) meaningfulness and competence constructs.

In a rather specialist field of study, Roseman *et al.* (2017) investigated empowerment within the restaurant food safety environment. The authors noted that safety and quality performance was enhanced in relation to increases in the four Spreitzer (1995) constructs of psychological empowerment. They also recorded that that psychological empowerment can be increased by observing attitudes and behaviours of colleagues (Roseman *et al.* 2017) thereby evidencing a cultural norm effect.

Although empowerment can be very beneficial to both an organisation and its employees, it can also affect the individual negatively (Biron and Bamberger 2010; Chan and Lam 2011; Zhang and Geng 2019). From a social perspective, Wåhlin-Jacobsen (2019) discusses how some empowerment activities may lead to an ascription of identity e.g. *management gophers*, if some employees make suggestions of task that other employees believe should be management's job to do. Chan and Lam (2011) discuss how the actual responsibilities of empowerment can weigh heavy on some employees. They argue that the greater information and decision-making accountability, the more the adverse effect on performance: "such malleability may be demanding for employees" (Cham and Lam 2011: 612).

To counter such a position, Biron and Bamberger (2010) propose a model of *selective* empowerment, where leaders selectively grant authority dependant on competency and interest of the individual, and how this may assist managers maintaining an element of oversight and control, increasing the benefits of empowered individuals but reducing operational risks.

Whilst research conducted by Zhang and Geng (2019) found that empowerment led to trust between employees and managers, as well as a material positive effect on job engagement, it could again lead to employees often feeling emotionally exhausted at taking accountability and responsibility.

The authors advise that, because of the propensity of feelings of exhaustion, managers should consider and rationalise any intended programs of empowerment to account for such impacts; this position is supported by Matsuo (2019) who advocates for managerial training on job and task assignment to stimulate employee perceptions. The academically-suggested management approach will be considered in greater detail later.

As a closing comment in this section, a notable argument challenging empowerment should be acknowledged. Despite the existence of research as mentioned above, to name but a few, Ivanova and von Scheve (2019) incorrectly suggest in their work that there are "no counterarguments challenging its upbeat portrayal" (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019: 9). The authors are critical of empowerment rhetoric, specifically citing that empowerment of employees is simply "*a technique for commodifying knowledge and skills of all types of employees*" (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019: 11), with it acting potentially as nothing more than a further tool to achieve organisational objectives without any notable concern for the employee (Randolph and Kemery 2011). The extant literature on empowerment as a concept however, as discussed earlier, has evidenced the material benefits that empowerment of employees can, and indeed does, bring to an organisation.

Self-Determination: Managerial Push vs. Employee Pull of Empowerment
Creating a culture of empowerment is fundamental to achieving continuous improvement, overcoming challenges, and maintaining successful growth (Hanaysha 2016a; Hammer Jr 2016; Chhotray *et al.* 2018). Such a culture can stimulate and facilitate employees working to their best ability, to take responsibility, and to act flexibly within that ability (Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Hanaysha and Tahir 2016; Roseman *et al.* 2017). In embedding an empowerment-driven culture, management will increase their employees' feeling of psychological empowerment through Spreitzer's (1995) constructs (Randolph and Kemery 2011).

A managerial investment into an empowered climate with decision making responsibility is a key characteristic of a successful team (Hanaysha 2016). Decision making was discussed earlier as a key understanding of empowerment by participants in this research and therefore should be explored appropriately.

Decision delegation is "a complex, multi-faceted process" (Yukl and Fu 1999: 219) that invariably is the assignment of responsibility and accountability to subordinates of a particular course of action to achieve organisational goals without prior approval from management, where that responsibility and accountability would originally rest with the delegating manager (Erstad 1997; Potterfield 1999; Forrester 2000; Smith 2003; Rappaport 1981; Yukl and Fu 1999). In delegating, management can decrease reaction times of the organisation, reduce managerial workload, satisfy an employee's psychological need for autonomy, and increase intrinsic motivation of the employee (Yukl and Fu 1999; Roseman *et al.* 2017; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Tao *et al.* 2018; Maas *et al.* 2018). Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) found through their study that approximately half their sample of managers defined empowerment as delegation within a framework, whilst the remaining half deemed empowerment to mean trusting individuals and taking measured risks. It therefore is reasonable to suggest that delegation is a combination of the two positions. In respect of the latter however, i.e. taking risks, leaders have the ability to create a culture that can learn from mistakes, as opposed to punishing them (Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Özaralli 2003); this is an important principle and will be considered as part of the discussion on trust that follows.

By delegating decision making, managers are on the journey to creating an empowered organisational milieu. It is abundantly clear then that leaders play a fundamental role in embedding empowerment at the meso-level, with the manager-employee relationship therefore having a considerable effect on the employee's perception of empowerment (Gómez and Rosen 2001; Saleem *et al.* 2019; Miao *et al.* 2017).

Saleem *et al.* (2019) suggest that transformational leadership, i.e. leadership orientated towards motivation, morale and trust (Bass 1999; Ismail *et al.* 2011; Srithongrung 2011), specifically where leaders

> "broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group" (Bass, cited in Gilbert *et al.* 2016),

can positively influence employee performance and commitment through being mediated by behavioural integrity, i.e. executing tasks for the best interests of the organisation, together with employee empowerment. Although not in the scope of this study, it should be noted that this identifies a relationship between felt obligation, behavioural integrity and empowerment worthy of subsequent investigation.

In order to supplement delegated decision making and in an endeavour to embed empowerment in an organisation, management should also actively espouse the significance and autonomy of employees, emphasising how these employees and their outputs impact the organisation achieving its objectives (Kang *et al.* 2017; Appelbaum *et al.* 1999; Conger and Kanungo 1988).

It again should be acknowledged how the pursuit of an empowered workforce can however also bring difficulties. As discussed earlier, some individuals may find the additional accountability and responsibility a burden that can in fact hamper their performance. Gómez and Rosen (2001) raise a further interesting issue for organisations. In their work, the authors found that the perceived effect of empowerment undoubtedly was beneficial; however the grant of decision making ability was applicable to only an in-group of employees, i.e. employees that the management favoured. This was at the cost of those employees who were considered in the 'out-group'. In-group employees will often be supported, coached and given a distinct latitude in

which to operate because of a high-quality dyadic relationship with their managers versus out-group employees who have a low-grade exchange (Gómez and Rosen 2001). This clearly brings its own difficulties to the context.

As highlighted earlier in this review, the main fundamental tenet of empowerment is derived from its use with civil rights movements and social equality. As such then, any subdivision of one team into individuals that are empowered, i.e. the 'in-group', and those that are not, i.e. the 'out-group', is therefore incongruous with the basic principle of empowerment. It is not for further investigation within this work, but a useful note is that the authors, referencing previous research, suggest that in-group status is often lead by demographic characteristics, as opposed to LMX theory which suggests assignment of in-group membership is based skills, ambition, and trust (Liden and Graen 1980; Gómez and Rosen 2001); this is most likely a hinderance in today's diverse workforce. The authors advise that "managers need to be made aware of the potential drawbacks of initially assigning employees to an out-group status based on non-job-related factors" (Gómez and Rosen 2001: 65).

Many authors contribute to the debate on empowerment and organisational requirements (see examples of Erstad 1997, Biron and Bamberger 2011, Macsinga *et al.* 2015, and Choi *et al.* 2016). Chan and Lam (2011) suggest that organisations enhance the probability of empowerment success by assigning employees the right task for their skillsets, and by bolstering employees' task motivation through highlighting the meaning of the task and value of the employees. Others suggest that, in common with seminal writers such as Block (1991), Dew (1997), Kanter (1977), and Bowen and Lawler (1992), a common vision must be communicated to employees for alignment and direction (Hammer Jr 2016; Chhotray *et al.* 2018).

In embedding empowerment initiatives in an organisation, having a suitable long-term plan with notable management support and structure is imperative (Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Hammer Jr 2016); the additional psychological aspect should however not be neglected. Caniëls *et al.* (2017) highlight the

importance of fairness and constructive review of ideas and proposals the delegated employees generate by management in encouraging the psychological aspects of empowerment. This position is consolidated by Singh and Singh (2019) and also Li *et al.* (2015) who suggest that management in fact should actively strengthen and encourage employees' perception of their work, their decision making ability, and the meaning of their work; after all, meaning has fundamental importance to employees' satisfaction (Miao *et al.* 2017).

The effect of such management behaviour and the provision of, essentially, a managerial support network can lead to positive, reciprocal behaviour from employees to create high quality exchanges, demonstrating the importance of the manager-employee relationship (Randolph and Kemery 2011). The support will allow employees to assess a relationship with a manager as genuine and secure, especially when they are provided with the tools and support to execute their processes (Hammer Jr 2016; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Randolph and Kemery 2011).

Common themes within academic research have consistently advocated that managers *push* empowerment down the hierarchy to their subordinates, with employees being often labelled as 'docile' or 'passive' within this context (Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019). The heading of this subsection alludes to an oft-omitted influence on the operationalisation of empowerment: that employees must not rely only upon management to grant empowerment, but that they must *pull* on management to gain it. As succinctly captured by Wåhlin-Jacobsen (2019):

> "While empowerment practices have been the subject of considerable debate, little attention has been paid to how employees shape the outcomes of these practices through their active participation" (Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019: 1).

That organisations can enhance the perception of empowerment by increasing resources, whether cognitive or otherwise, is not contested (Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Kanter,1977; Greco *et al.* 2006), however employees themselves also have a material role in approaching their work and roles to raise their levels of empowerment which is not necessarily dependent upon management. Empowerment itself as a principle is said to fail without the active involvement of employees (Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019; Randolph and Kemery 2011; Wikhamn and Selart 2019); indeed, it is the employees that will suggest whether they are empowered, not the organisation (Randolph and Kemery 2011).

It is espoused that programmes of empowerment be designed with, and in the interests of, both employees *and* management for greater likelihood of success (Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019), where doing so may reduce the aforementioned perception of employee passiveness. Where employees take an active role in the design of empowerment initiatives, they can become partners in the organisation, addressing the meaningfulness and competence constructs of empowerment to achieve more success within their roles (Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Hammer Jr 2016; Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019). Should they elect to not exercise such ability or opportunity, empowerment benefits are unlikely to materialise (Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019).

A specific approach to employees being active in empowerment design is that suggested by Matsuo (2019). The author discusses how a personal growth desire, or *personal initiative* as described by Wikhamn and Selart (2019), combined with available developmental job experience can promote employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment. This personal growth desire is said to drive the employee forward to seek challenges, request more decision-making accountability, and give a long-term focus (Matsuo 2019; Wikhamn and Selart 2019), echoing with Spreitzer's (1995) constructs of meaning and competence.

García-Juan *et al.* (2019), in a similar vein, highlight how goal orientation of employees can help to motivate individuals towards success. They found that in their study of public sector workers, employees who had the potential to directly influence their roles and how they felt about their jobs were essentially in possession of the ability to affect their meaning, impact, and self-determination. Such an approach is akin to self-design of a role. Biron and Bamberger (2010) discuss this capability in their work, where they state that allowing employees the latitude to include learning and growth opportunities will develop perceptions of empowerment and well-being.

Leadership Effect on Employee Empowerment

Within the following section, the terms 'leadership' and 'management' are used interchangeably but are regarded, within this specific context, as one and the same in referring to those that have responsibility for others. 'Leader' and 'manager' are to thus be similarly construed, as opposed to the *process* of leadership and management. This use of the terms is not to incite debate on the robustness of each, nor an overarching position that one is of greater purpose and value than the other as it is recognised that leadership and management are *both* important to an organisation (Nienaber 2010; Kotterman 2006), but it is to reflect the current organisational operational context. The demands of the individual have relatively recently changed to reflect a difficult and extremely challenging business circumstance, where the traditional delineation of the two roles has become blurred. As such then, and in the same fashion as Yukl (1989) and Dirks and Ferrin (2002), the following use of 'leadership' and 'management' and related concepts intend to refer to individuals with the ability to influence objectives, commitment, controls, task behaviour, and culture within an organisation.

The study of organisational leadership has become increasingly popular as a discipline in recent years (Gilbert *et al.* 2016), and the effect of strong, robust yet considerate management on the organisation itself is obvious. Amongst other impacts, senior organisational leaders have been proven to have a positive effect on satisfaction and intentions to leave of employees, whilst local

level managers are stated to have a positive effect on distress and well-being of employees (Bish *et al.* 2015). The inherent link between leadership and empowerment then is rarely argued (Chhotray *et al.* 2018; Srivastava *et al.* 2006; Ismail *et al.* 2011; Conger *et al.* 2000; Appelbaum *et al.* 2015; Bester *et al.* 2015), with the followers of an empowering leader being heavily influenced by the dyad, and also by the wider empowered group (Fong and Snape 2015). Positive leaders can foster organisational commitment through encouraging employees to voice opinions and thus engage in decision making (Saleem *et al.* 2019), with the literature supporting the effectiveness of these behaviours in the working environment (Gilbert *et al.* 2016).

At this juncture it is important to distinguish that the subsequent discussion is primarily, and naturally, orientated towards *transformational* leadership as opposed to *transactional* leadership, with the latter being when managers utilise an economical reward driven, heavily controlled and transactional approach to managing employees (Men and Stacks 2013; Arnold *et al.* 2000).

The preliminary literature mapping revealed that transformational leadership is regarded as an antecedent to an empowered workforce, where relationships situated in a transformational leadership-led environment have produced characteristics of an empowered organisation. For example, Saleem *et al.* (2019) found that, in their study of bank employees, a positive correlation between managerial action and narrative assists in employees recognising that they are empowered; Choi *et al.* (2016) determined that transformational leadership led to increases in self-determination and competency of employees, often due to the use of intellectual challenges to empower employees.

Transformational leadership is therefore often characterised by leaders empowering followers (Gilbert *et al.* 2016; Den Hartog *et al.* 2002; Özaralli 2003), with leaders of such orientation more likely to delegate power and involve employees in decision making (Men and Stacks 2013; Avolio *et al.* 2004; Srivastava *et al.* 2006). In transformational leadership, "leaders inspire employees to achieve a certain vision for themselves, which often makes work

more meaningful" (Gilbert *et al.* 2016: 159), directly contributing to the meaning construct of empowerment. Men and Stacks (2013) are vocal in their assertion that

> "through sharing power with employees and engaging them in the decision-making process, transformational leaders make employees feel more accepted, trusted, and valued, thus also shaping employees' favourable evaluation of the organization" (Men and Stacks 2013: 183).

An argued subtle variation of transformational leadership is that of *empowering* leadership, where the approach is more focussed on empowering subordinates (Fong and Snape 2015; Lee *et al*. 2018) through the encouragement of independent acting (Lee *et al*. 2018). Empowering leadership can be defined as the application of leadership behaviours where the intrinsic motivation of employees is raised due to managerial power sharing (Srivastava *et al.* 2006). Research undertaken by Arnold *et al.* (2000) provides support for five factors of empowering leadership behaviour: leading by example, coaching, participative decision making, informing, and showing concern for individuals (Arnold *et al.* 2000). Although espoused to be specific to empowering leadership, these constituents hold commonality with transformational leadership, and have been evidenced by Lee *et al*. (2018, 2018a) to be more effective for certain desired outcomes (e.g. task performance) for those employees with less organisational experience, as opposed to those with more. Empowering leadership can also contribute to the generation of a trusting dyadic between a manager and employee (Lee *et al.* 2018, 2018a).

Previous discussion on empowerment briefly noted the tendency for *in-groups* and *out-groups* to form in respect of the relationship(s) managers have with subordinates. Employees will often be aware of the quality of the exchange/relationship they have with management and as such, those reporting high quality dyads will regularly receive more favourable treatment (Liden and Graen 1980). Leaders trust different people contrarily (Fong and Snape 2015); a greater quality relationship with the manager is often

characterised by a subordinate being considered by that manager as being more competent, aligned to the leader's objectives, having worked longer for that particular manager, holding a greater level of trust, and having an articulated desire for greater responsibility (Yukl and Fu 1999; Liden and Graen 1980).

Liden and Graen's (1980) notable research into the Vertical Dyad Linkage model of leadership determined that those employees who confirmed high quality exchanges often held greater responsibility and contributed more to the organisation than those with lesser quality exchanges; essentially, these employees are considered to be *in-group*. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), supported by Fong and Snape (2015), confirm the favoured treatment of in-group members by stating that such employees would often hold greater respect and trust from the leaders and therefore would be granted greater latitude and autonomy. These examples highlight the circular nature of in-groups, in that high quality exchanges result in greater responsibility, which then results in high quality exchanges.

A considerable effect on in-group and out-group status can be workplace ostracism, as investigated by Chenji and Sode (2019). Through their research on ostracism and psychological empowerment, the authors found that when employees are ostracised, akin to being in an out-group, they feel ignored to the point that their presence has little impact; this leads to a negative effect on creativity, efficacy and output, whilst increasing the self-protecting mechanism of defensive silence (Chenji and Sode 2019; Jahanzeb and Fatima 2018).

Undoubtedly then, the relationship between manager and employee has a commanding influence on the employee (Chenji and Sode 2019; Wikhamn and Selart 2019), and thus the tasks that the employee would be expected to perform together with their behaviours (Liden and Graen 1980). The way in which that leader affects the wider group of employees can however itself lead to a group-wide response (Fong and Snape 2015). Tsui *et al.* (1997) suggest that a leader's use of economic exchange and social theory to invoke a clan mentality can help an employer/employee relationship. Their work found

support for a mutual investment system between managers and employees, where employees are more likely to assist others, suggest improvements and ideas for implementations, and to drive toward the objectives of the organisation.

It must be remembered though that managers are human too. They, like employees, have objectives and organisational tasks that they are required to satisfy as part of their roles. A manager, by very definition, has accountability and responsibility for decision making (Mintzberg 1994) and to that effect then must also be subject to reward and sanction if those objectives are not met. Whilst some advocate for managers to consider their assumptions of individuals, and how they relate to others (Cunliffe 2008), in an attempt to open managers up to a holistic understanding of their workforce, it is understandable to a certain degree that from a typical, hierarchical managerial approach, in-groups and out-groups exist, as "some managers see the involvement of lower echelon employees as encompassing too great a risk, a fear of losing control" (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999: 176). The success of empowerment programmes is reliant upon a manager's willingness to reduce control (Gómez and Rosen 2001), thereby likely increasing their risk. As such, this issue of a perceived reduction in managerial control due to empowerment initiatives will now be discussed with a brief reference to types of organisational control.

Managerial Control: Effects on Employee Self-Determination and Power Delegation

Control and empowerment as constructs are inextricably linked in a complicated and dynamic fashion (Lewis *et al.* 2019), where empowerment can potentially be counterproductive in terms of a loss of managerial control (Choi *et al.* 2016; Biron and Bamberger 2010; Simons 1995). Attempts to empower often manifest in new forms of control (Barker 1993), where the persistent tension between a need for management control and an employee need for empowerment often results in managers showing reluctance to

involve subordinates (Lewis *et al.* 2019; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999), leading to reduced initiative-based action by those same employees (Lee *et al.* 2018).

Control, and the exercise of such, is a central notion of organisational theory and shapes the experiences of organisational members (Barker 1993), where traditionally, writers on empowerment and control assumed the constructs to be diametric (Lewis *et al.* 2019). Organisations are often encouraged to relax existing controls to afford employees more autonomy (Fournier 1999), though external regulations or similar stimuli are often utilised to encourage required behaviour (Kim and Fernandez 2017). Even in these instances, however, managerial domination and control still remains paramount (Courpasson 2000).

The work of Barker (1993) on control in self-managing teams is notable and relevant in this discussion. In his writing, he cites Edwards' three controls that are used to coordinate and restrain employees in organisations: simple (i.e. authoritarian), technological (e.g. assembly lines and computing), and bureaucratic (i.e. social controls of a hierarchical nature). He comments how the latter two forms evolved to address the dissatisfactions associated with the simple control method.

The concept of bureaucratic control is expanded on by Barker (1993) as he references Weber's notion of the iron cage, i.e. 'red tape', as modern control. He states that "we become so enmeshed in creating and following a legalistic, rule-based hierarchy that the bureaucracy becomes a subtle but powerful form of domination" (Barker 1993: 410). This is symptomatic of modern organisations, where, in counter to the predictions of Drucker (1988), bureaucracy has thrived (Hamel and Zanini 2018) and process upon process highlights that "organisations institutionalise control through complex and combined systems supplementing each other" (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019: 14). This bureaucracy can manifest even in some instances where the intentions of a reform were to remove the burden (Torsteinsen 2012). This 'management control' is concerned with ensuring the organisational goals are met by employees with little latitude and variation (Lewis *et al.* 2019), and can

be successful in instances where efficiency or quality are essential to the end product (Simons 1995).

Courpasson (2000) comments that organisations should be understood as *soft bureaucracies*, alluding to the re-emergence of bureaucracies where "existing legitimate authority perpetuates itself by incorporating soft practices and articulating these with hierarchical and formal bureaucratic processes" (Courpasson 2000: 142). Here, Courpasson (2000) essentially suggests that even in organisations that are delayering and decentralising, there remains a central locus of power that retains much political authority and decision making ability. The perception of the removal of bureaucracy is in fact almost deceptive, with traditional control enduring.

Barker (1993) discusses *concertive control* as a natural answer to bureaucratic control. He relates how the clamour for empowerment in organisations has led to a position where concertive control satisfies the desire of decentralised, participative and indeed more democratic methods of control. Concertive control acts as a method in which a culture of value-based norms, ideas and rules can become dominant; it creates social meanings that thus turn into a system of control of the organisation members (Barker 1993). This perspective is supported by Ivanova and von Scheve's (2019) commentary that empowerment discourse often encourages liberal self-determination which is "created and maintained through a complex set of means for the control of labour" (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019: 1).

As concertive control moves the locus of power away from the bureaucratic system to that of the socially-created system of norms and employee consensus, the *iron cage* is said to become stronger (Barker 1993), where peer pressure together with reasonable, logical and rational rules create new metaphorical bars. Group dynamics, as discussed by Fong and Snape (2015), therefore play a significant part here too, where individuals can be controlled with their actions induced by the expectations of peers (Barker 1993). Indeed, "strong socio-ideological control normalises a specific set of values and behaviours, and, in doing so, can preclude alternative perspectives and

possibilities" (Lewis *et al.* 2019: 492). This is described by Barker (1993) as being "under the eye of the norm and *in* the eye of the norm" (Barker 1993: 435), where concertive control is concealed and operates away from external pressures of management.

In concertive control, the ability of employees to decide their own actions in achieving organisational objectives echoes with the comments of Saleem *et al.* (2019): "Self-determination is useful to develop the perceptions of control over work" (Saleem *et al.* 2019: 305), where reduced managerial involvement allows employees to perceive greater autonomy and control. Barker (1993) argues that concertive control is therefore potentially a more powerful tool than bureaucratic control. Indeed, where control is derived from normative values, acting appropriately with organisational goals and intrinsic motivation in mind becomes the culture of the group (Six 2007). Despite this however, there is increasing evidence that empowerment initiatives often fail to meet the requirements of both managers and employees when employees consider it as an implied management control mechanism or system (Chan and Lam 2011).

Briefly, and in respect of this latter point, management control systems (MCS) offer a route to maintain a level of rule where empowerment of subordinates has been granted by the organisation (Lewis *et al.* 2019; Herbert 2009), when policies and procedures clearly lay out the specified processes for completing tasks. Managers often utilise MCS in organisations regularly as tools of agency theory (Whitener *et al.* 1998), where they are used for monitoring and behaviour measurement (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). MCS can however both support and impede empowerment efforts, with such systems either enhancing or undermining employee trust and confidence (Lewis *et al.* 2019; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000).

As posited by Spreitzer and Mishra 1999, a variation of an MCS that is considered less intrusive than the traditional form is a performance management system (PMS), where this system serves to highlight the task performance of employees and adherence to standard processes (Lewis *et al.*

2019; Moulang 2015). In their research on the effect of PMS on task performance and job satisfaction, de Souza and Beuren (2018) found that a PMS did not necessarily lead to better task performance. The authors did however evidence a positive relationship between a PMS and psychological empowerment, as also corroborated by Moulang (2015), with the latter identifying an improvement in perceptions of self-determination and competence. Continuing in their work, de Souza and Beuren (2018), supporting Spreitzer and Mishra (1999), suggest that providing subordinates with a transparent PMS helps to ensure that they have access to information and could use that information to feel empowered in their roles. Indeed, in presenting employees with a method in which they can track their own performance, the perceived risk of delegating greater responsibility and the quality of associated outcomes expected from them is reduced and increased, respectively (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999).

Where a PMS is used to evidence that employees are found to not be performing in line with expectations, or *rule systems* as described by Kramer (2010), then the organisation may elect to employ sanctions, and conversely incentives when rewarding outputs. Sanctioning systems that are understood by employees to be fair and consistent help to encourage required behaviour (Kramer 2010). Although counter-argued by Lewis *et al.* (2019)*,* McNeish and Mann (2010) and Kramer (2010) suggest that there is however a cost involved in monitoring of performance. Though a pervasive constituent of the requirements of modern business (Bernstrøm and Svare 2017), the organisation cannot monitor every decision made by every individual, even from simply a practical point, and as such management cannot reward nor reprimand all positive or negative behaviour (Kramer 2010). The cost of utilising an MCS, whether financial or practical, must then be one that the organisation has to become comfortable with.

A more nuanced managerial control is that as highlighted by Mintzberg (1994), who suggests that managers can control, overtly or surreptitiously, by the processing and distribution of organisational information. Holding back information prevents employees from acting in an 'undesirable' way and

managers often adopt this approach (Simons 1995). Mintzberg (1994) states that this processing of information is supplemented by the design and definition of responsibilities and hierarchical authority; they are utilised to disseminate information as and when necessary to control people's behaviour.

The way that the control of information and organisational cultural expectations intertwine to govern employee behaviour is similar to Foucault's concept of governmentality (see Townley 1993). Governmentality leads to a disciplinary framework of norms to which subordinates are expected to comply (Fournier 1999). Indeed, Fournier (1999) cites the work of Townley to highlight that the desire for increased autonomy creates *discretionary gaps* that require new 'softwares of control' i.e. new methods of asserting control in a context of autonomy and self-determination. These new controls place emphasis on cultural expectations e.g. behaviour, attitudes etc. (Fournier 1999) and interlink greatly with the idea of *professionalism*. Professionalism is employed discursively and allows for the control of employees from a distance, concentrating upon the control of individuals to a moral set of standards (Fournier 1999). It is inherently dualistic in nature, forming a significant part of organisational ideology, where it can be used to not only justify reward and stature, but also punishment and sanction (Knights and Clarke 2013; Gill 2015; Alvesson 2001). Though outside of the scope of this research, the notion of professionalism and the application to the context of this work offers an avenue for extending this inquiry at a later date.

Empowerment in Respect of Varying Levels of Managerial Control
As discussed previously, the tension between empowerment and control is a paradox (Lewis *et al.* 2019; Simons 1995). Empowerment is argued to be a necessary requirement in the current business climate, yet some level of control for managers is also crucial. How does this issue then manifest in an organisation? Lewis *et al.* (2019) write in depth on the matter and propose terms for the two variants of empowerment that are established: *obstructed* and *illusory* empowerment.

Obstructed empowerment is described by Lewis *et al.* (2019) as where elements of structural empowerment embedded in the organisation do not lead to a perception of psychological empowerment. It is often characterised by role ambiguity, where multiple MCSs may be operating together, resulting in confusion and essentially feelings of disempowerment. Lewis *et al.* (2019) propose that the overarching business climate pressure to decentralise decision making versus the difficulty that this causes in using MCSs to control employees contributes greatly to obstructed empowerment. They continue in their discussion to highlight that where organisations enforce informal cultural expectations of the organisation, individuals feel even more psychologically disempowered; this itself then often results in negative reinforcing cycles e.g. defensiveness and denial, where cognitive dissonance is experienced by employees (Lewis *et al.* 2019). In instances such as this, management may desire a certain level of psychological disempowerment as a pseudo-control mechanism (Lewis *et al.* 2019).

Illusory empowerment is defined as where individuals perceive psychological empowerment without having the formal, structural organisational ability; where decision making remains centralised (Lewis *et al.* 2019) i.e. the *imagery* of empowerment exists but where the managerial control remains firm. In this form of empowerment, the organisation exercises control over employees in a comprehensive and transparent method, however it remains invisible to those employees (Lewis *et al.* 2019): an obvious, yet furtive control. Group dynamics, as discussed earlier, also play a role with illusory empowerment as team members impose a team/individual accountability (Lewis *et al.* 2019); individuals therefore rely on each other to achieve objectives and thus maintain a powerful, yet discreet control, whilst enhancing the perception of autonomy and self-determination (Lewis *et al.* 2019).

Illusory empowerment can be fragile, due to the nature of it being reliant on employees' perceptions. Should employees become aware that decision making is indeed still centralised, tensions can develop and defensive behaviour can manifest; this can then lead to further management controls

being put in place to combat this purported dysfunctional behaviour (Lewis *et al.* 2019).

The ideal scenario is that represented by *authentic* empowerment. Here, structural and psychological empowerment levels are high (Lewis *et al.* 2019). MCSs, as one of the four levers recommended by Simons (1995), are utilised to identify formal accountability hierarchies within which delegation can occur, giving employees clear guidelines and indeed a level of self-determination. Authentic empowerment assists controls through enabling a culture of socio-ideological methods, where they encourage choice and autonomy (Lewis *et al.* 2019). For authentic empowerment, employees *must* be given the information and resources to be able to discharge their decision making accountabilities fully (Lewis *et al.* 2019).

The remaining three levers of control that Simons (1995) proposes are (i) belief systems, where the organisational vision, values and overarching culture are cultivated to powerfully and positively direct employees; (ii) diagnostic control systems, where control systems illustrate the key performance metrics and where they are located within the required tramlines; and (iii) boundary systems i.e. the core limitations on action in which the employee may operate. Simons (1995) suggests that these four levers in total can be operated collectively, but in whichever manner is fit for that particular organisation to empower its employees yet retain an important element of control.

In Summary

As discussed, empowerment has the potential to conflict with the idea of management control (de Souza and Beuren 2018). The very core of empowerment is the ideological nature of freedom (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019; Herbert 2009) i.e. "the *liberation* of employees from the control of middle managers" (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019: 12). That such liberation is however tempered with the problem faced by managers of how they can grant greater decision making authority to subordinates without a loss of control (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Gómez and Rosen 2001).

It is then sobering, considering the literature on empowerment and indeed the intent for *freedom*, that Ivanova and von Scheve (2019) suggest that where an empowerment initiative exists, it does not necessarily for altruistic reasons. It is embedded, they posit, as a "well-planned and well-organised [management] technique, whose implementation and functioning are relentlessly enforced" (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019: 16); where intensive monitoring together with pre-planning and analytics are utilised to ensure risk reduction in achieving objectives i.e. organisational control.

In respect of managerial control, the discussion traversed the complicated path of delegation of control by managers and the issues associated with such. To further this debate, an investigation into the specific cognitive reasons as to why managers are seemingly reluctant to relinquish control above and beyond those previously highlighted would be beneficial. This, however, is difficult: as Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) write, there is a dearth of empirical research that investigates what can make managers more willing to delegate decision making authority and, to date, it remains the case. It is notable nonetheless that much delegation and surrender of managerial control with respect to empowerment is underwritten by a greater reliance on trust (Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Six 2007; McNeish and Mann 2010). In order to gain a greater understanding of the impact of it on empowerment, trust, and its related phenomena, will be explored next.

Trust

Definition and Context

Trust is acknowledged as having an influence upon empowerment, but why does it hold importance for this work? Through the preliminary thematic analysis, the data gathered from participants offered green shoots of an emerging, and unexpected, theme of trust. The basis of this trust theme was orientated towards it impeding employees' ability to fulfil their roles efficiently and effectively. This helped to cause a variety of issues that seemingly, and prior to further investigation through later stages of this document, contributed

towards a frustrated working environment and feelings of low self-determination, and thus empowerment.

In light of this emerging theme it is necessary to study existing extant literature on trust in detail for contextual understanding and to allow for an informed discussion of the issue. The influence that trust has on empowerment, and the equivalent in reverse, is also of importance. To that point, academic consensus suggests that a strong relationship does indeed exist between trust and empowerment, where trust not only acts as an antecedent of empowerment, but also has material importance in achieving high levels of organisational effectiveness, whether that be employee satisfaction, commitment or performance (McNaughtan *et al.* 2019; Gómez and Rosen 2001; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Randolph and Kemery 2011; Zeffane and Al Zarooni 2012; Karunarathne 2019; Bligh 2017; Quinn and Spreitzer 1997; Men and Stacks 2013; Gill *et al.* 2019; Loes and Tobin 2020). Indeed, as Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) suggest, leaders are required to embrace uncertainty by demonstrating faith in employees by trusting them.

Trust as a paradigm has recently been gaining increased interest from organisational and social theorists (Alarcon *et al.* 2018a; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Deutsch Salamon and Robinson 2008; Kramer 2001), where it has been depicted as the opposite of control (Herbert 2009). Much like empowerment, this interest in trust has grown from a highly competitive climate, higher consumer expectations, and environmental factors forcing organisations to adopt principles to enable more fluid responsiveness to customer demands (Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Whitener *et al.* 1998); but what *is* trust?

Trust literature does not offer an overarching agreement on the definition of trust (McNeish and Mann 2010) and as such, the nature of the term continues to be debated (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006). There are wide-ranging positions on the definition, most likely because of its complexity as a dynamic concept (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Krot and Lewicka 2012; Kujala *et al.* 2016; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Gilbert 2005; Legood *et al.* 2016; Fawcett *et al.* 2017; Bligh

2017) and its multi-disciplinary/multi-dimensional nature (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006; Kramer 1999; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Krot and Lewicka 2012; Lau *et al.* 2007; Dirks and Ferrin 2002).

A large majority of the definitions consider trust as a positive belief or expectation (Lau *et al.* 2014; Six 2007; Mishra and Morrissey 1990; McEvily *et al.* 2003), with general agreement that trust inherently has dependency on another party (Whitener *et al.* 1998; Krot and Lewicka 2012; Hakanen *et al.* 2016). Expanding on such a position, Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) suggest that trust is constructed from three discrete constituents: (i) a belief, (ii) a decision, and (iii) an action. In seminal groundwork, Mayer *et al.* (1995) write comprehensively on trust. In an oft-quoted article, the authors propose that trust is defined as

> "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer *et al.* 1995: 712).

This thread of *vulnerability* is woven through the work of several subsequent academics on trust. Using both the work of Mayer *et al.* (1995) and the research of Rousseau *et al.*, Six (2007) describes trust as a psychological state, comprised of "the intention to accept vulnerability to the actions of another party, based upon the expectation that the other will perform a particular action that is important to you" (Six 2007: 290). Krot and Lewicka (2012) similarly identify the vulnerable position adopted by an individual when interacting with another party; indeed, it appears that vulnerability and risk are inherently linked, and especially so in organisational exchanges (Whitener *et al.* 1998; McEvily *et al.* 2003; Skiba and Wildman 2019).

Other academics espouse a position which argues that trust is conceptualised as having an expectation of an individual's reliability, integrity, and benevolence during exchanges (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Whitener *et al.* 1998; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000), based upon a complex assembly of

judgements (Heyns and Rothmann 2015). Kramer (1999) introduces the term *risk* to understanding trust, where he reviews the sizeable body of literature to state that "trust needs to conceptualized not only as a calculative orientation toward risk, but also a social orientation toward other people and toward society as a whole" (Kramer 1999: 573).

Trust is a fundamental antecedent and constituent of any positive social exchange process and thus relationship (Zhang *et al.* 2008; Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Kramer and Cook 2004; Evans *et al.* 2019). It acts as a "social lubricant" (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999: 179), recognising that these social exchanges occur not in a vacuum, but in a context where multiple additional variables, e.g. individual values, experiences, and integrity, help to shape social transactions (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Six 2007; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015). It varies according to the relationship involved (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006) and becomes more robust over time as a function of cumulative exchanges (Kramer 2010; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Kujala *et al.* 2016; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Whitener *et al.* 1998; Evans *et al.* 2019; Lau *et al.* 2007; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015; McAllister 1995; Bligh 2017), demonstrating its *relational*, feedback-driven quality (Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Six 2007). The more that individuals interact in positive, trusting ways, the more a tipping point is reached where the individuals are likely to engage in trusting behaviour (Kramer 2010). That trust, assuming mutual benevolence remains, eventually becomes self-sustaining and behaviour becomes more predictable (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000).

Scholars emphasise that developing trust is a lengthy process; it is fragile in nature, being difficult and slow to build and sustain, but easy to damage and remove completely (Krot and Lewicka 2012; Fawcett *et al.* 2017; Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Six 2007; Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Kramer 1999; Hakanen *et al.* 2016; Kramer 2001). It is built in an incremental fashion (Six 2007), acting as an "adhesive force" (Wang and Hsieh 2013: 621) that brings together people and their environment, based on the exchange being open, reliable and competent (Mishra and Spreitzer, cited in Gómez and Rosen

2001). It is also both cognitive and affective by character (Korsgaard *et al.* 2015; Mayer *et al.* 1995, McAllister 1995; Dirks and Ferrin 2002). An individual who trusts, a *trustor*, must learn as much as possible about the trustee, focusing primarily on actual achievements and also relational signals (Six 2007) but also on the environment external to the trustee (Mayer *et al.* 1995), in order to feel confident to take the risk. That trustor requires evidence that the *trustee* is not opportunistic and will not abuse the vulnerability of the trustor (Six 2007; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Whitener *et al.* 1998). Based on the literature, it can thus be said that trust is a hedge of future behaviour.

In respect then of trust in organisations, social processes operate in this context too, and as such, trust plays a vital part. Although some suggest that the study of organisational trust is problematic (Kramer and Cook 2004), where it is said that the body of literature regarding such a concept is lacking in coherence and integration (McEvily *et al.* 2003), many authors have written comprehensively on this specific discipline. Kramer (2010) posits that trust is affected by the behavioural contract of rules guiding and constraining the behaviour of others. It is clear then that this echoes similarities with organisations, where trust is fundamental for positive cooperation, interpersonal relations and organisational growth (Den Hartog *et al.* 2002; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Whitener *et al.* 1998; Bligh 2017).

Trust is essential for open and honest communication in organisations, where it acts as a substitute for full monitoring and where thorough information concerning any problems will be more likely be disclosed (McNeish and Mann 2010; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000). Trust also enables conflict resolution as individuals accept the policies and processes of dispute resolution (Kramer 1999). A part of the literature that illustrates the point made by McEvily *et al.* (2003) in respect of coherence is the discussion on forms and bases of trust. As an example, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) list the following as specific forms of organisational trust:

- Calculative trust appetite i.e. the assessment of risk vs. reward;

- Knowledge-based trust i.e. confidence in the knowledge of the trustee;
- Institution-based trust i.e. role trust e.g. 'they must know what they're doing to get that position'; and
- Unconditional trust.

Three bases of trust within organisations are posited by Fine and Holyfield (1996). Through their novel ethnographic study of mushroom collectors, they suggest that *awarding trust*, *managing risk*, and finally *transforming trust* are the key dynamics of trust in organisational life. Trust is seemingly awarded fairly quickly and easily when an individual becomes part of a social group, with the individual trusting in the benevolence of existing members. Managing risk is the next phase where those new members are encouraged to socialise and learn from existing members. Finally, transforming trust, the authors suggest, is where "the organization is transformed from an object of trust to an arena of trusting [mutual] interactions" (Fine and Holyfield 1996: 28); shared experience and member legitimisation helps to consolidate trusting behaviour from each member of the exchange. Time allows the individual to become more experienced and develop their own standards to which the granting of trust is measured against.

Kramer (1999) approaches organisational trust in even greater depth, presenting the following different bases that build upon the work of Fine and Holyfield (1996):

- Dispositional trust: where beliefs of individuals from early trust experiences form the predisposition to trust;
- Historic experience-based trust: where perceptions of the trustworthiness of, and willingness to trust in, certain individuals is based upon previous cumulative interactions between the individuals;
- Third party: the influence of third parties on the trusting nature of others, e.g. through opinions or gossip, and both positively and negatively;
- Category basis: where memberships of social or professional groups influence the allocation of trust;

- Role-based trust: a 'presumptive' trust due to role nature and professional identity; and finally,

- Rule basis: explicit and tacit understandings in respect of transaction norms, interactional processes and exchange routines that form a basis of shared understanding of the rules.

The historical experience base that Kramer (1999) cites is noteworthy. According to Kramer's (2010) interpretation of a variety of existing trust models, historic incidents form the basis for the initial and then subsequent trust expectations, showing that individuals approach social exchanges temporally, without a neutral manner but with many biases (Mintzberg 1994; McEvily *et al.* 2003). Common values help individuals to predict future behaviour thereby reducing surprises, potentially offsetting that initial judgement, and encouraging trust (Gillespie and Mann 2004). Trust however must be managed well, for instance to reduce opportunistic behaviour and maintain the course of expected conduct (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Six 2007; McNeish and Mann 2010).

Korsgaard *et al.* (2015) investigate three constituents of dyadic trust: reciprocal trust, mutual trust, and asymmetrical trust. Reciprocal trust is described by the authors as where the trust held by one member of the dyad affects the other, whilst also being affected by time. They continue to describe mutual trust as when two parties involved in an exchange have complementary levels of trust, and it emerges when each party understands the trustworthiness of the other party, although it is not a certain outcome (Korsgaard *et al.* 2015). Shared social context acts as a determinant of mutual trust (Korsgaard *et al.* 2015). Finally, Korsgaard *et al.* (2015) present trust asymmetry as a continuum, where the trust held by one party is not the equivalent to that bestowed on the other dyadic party. Asymmetrical trust often associates with a lesser quality relationship and may be affected by role and power differences (Korsgaard *et al.* 2015). Each of these trust constituents are argued by the authors to be present in organisational life in one form or another.

As discussed earlier, the basis of trust in a relationship is offering up a vulnerability or taking a risk upon the exchange being mutually beneficial. It is therefore reasonable to note then that the converse of trust is *distrust*. Distrust is self-perpetuating where even benign actions can be treated with suspicion (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000). Kramer (1999) cites many reasons given in the body of literature as to why distrust may exist, such as surveillance, but none accurately fit the context of this work. Kramer (1999) does however posit how individuals are inclined to make logical, rational, and efficient decisions to gain expected positions or to reduce the potential losses related to exchanges. Although tendency to trust may in fact be a predisposition (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006), it is often difficult for a trustor to gather enough information about a potential trustee to facilitate an understanding (Kramer 1999). By their very nature, people are unpredictable, with no means of guaranteed behaviour. Such an affective position can understandably then lead to insecurity and distrust (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006; Gilbert 2005), giving rise to negative behaviours and defensive actions, e.g. withheld information, poor communication, fear, and anger, thus resulting in fractious relationships (Kujala *et al.* 2016; Costa *et al.* 2018; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Gilbert 2005).

Trust and distrust can indeed co-exist in organisations (Kujala *et al.* 2016), with distrust proving beneficial in some instances, such as when it is employed to force change, or with issues of control or quality (Gilbert 2005; Kujala *et al.* 2016), although it often results in ineffectiveness (Mishra and Morrissey 1990). In relation to in-field studies, Kramer (2010) found that investigating issues of trust and distrust in real-life contexts was fraught with challenges, not least because organisations were loath to share issues with trust; however, organisations where trust is a pertinent concern are often characterised by their robust control mechanisms, high bureaucracy, and hierarchical top down organisational structures (McNeish and Mann 2010; Six 2007; Mayer *et al.* 1995).

Trust is pervasive in organisations (McAllister 1995). It can help to materially reduce operating costs and risk in organisations (Krot and Lewicka 2012) and maintain team effectiveness (Gillespie and Mann 2004), whilst also increasing participation (Kujala *et al.* 2016). Returning to empowerment, manager-employee dyad trust is incredibly important to employees' perceptions of empowerment (Gómez and Rosen 2001). Similar to the espoused benefits of empowerment, a high level of trust also reduces employee turnover, enhances well-being and engagement, and increases willingness to be positively criticised without defensiveness through effective communication and teamwork (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Wang and Hsieh 2013; Krot and Lewicka 2012). Trust is vital to organisations where working together requires employees to have an interdependent relationship in order to achieve objectives (Mayer *et al.* 1995; Lau *et al.* 2014), driven by clear policies and an embedded culture of norms (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000).

Decision making involvement is a material and significant part of organisational trust (Gillespie and Mann 2004; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Kramer 1999; Zhang *et al.* 2008; McEvily *et al.* 2003). Trust aids decision making by facilitating confidence in the sharing and interpretation of information for all parties (McEvily *et al.* 2003; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Lee *et al.* 2010), leading to an environment of openness, transparency, and disclosure. A common issue with building trust is a fear of losing managerial authority and risk of undesired outcomes (Mishra and Morrissey 1990), with Whitener *et al.* (1998) remarking that the higher the costs associated with a decision, the lower the likely trusting behaviour from managers. Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) however argue that trust actually increases managers' willingness to "become vulnerable in their relationship with lower echelon employees by involving them in decision making" (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999: 157). When employees participate in decision making, managers demonstrate their trust; the views of their team members are valued, their interests are noted, echoing the desire of the individual for formal and social stimuli to cultivate employee trust in the organisation (Zhang *et al.* 2008). This inspires confidence in the leader and can lead to empowerment perceptions materialising as the leader is trusted to fulfil promises (Saleem *et*

al. 2019; Gillespie and Mann 2004). It satisfies Dietz and Den Hartog's (2006) mandate that a party needs to act on trust as there is no benefit to trusting yet not acting upon it.

Benefits of Organisational Trust

It is pertinent before the subsequent discussion to briefly summarise and indeed raise again what trust is purported to enable in the notable body of literature (Kramer and Cook 2004). Trust is essential for social and political relational exchanges (Stein and Harper 2003; Morgan and Hunt 1994) and contributes materially to organisational success and performance (McNeish and Mann 2010; Morgan and Zeffane 2003). It can help to reduce employee turnover by enhancing cooperation and reducing conflict (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Stein and Harper 2003; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012; Morgan and Hunt 1994), simplify decision making (McEvily *et al.* 2003), aid teamwork (Fawcett *et al.* 2017; Costa *et al.* 2018), allow organisations to both manage change and react flexibly (Morgan and Zeffane 2003), create value (Fawcett *et al.* 2017), reduce transaction costs (McEvily *et al.* 2003; Kramer 1999), and decrease uncertainty (Lee *et al.* 2018). Indeed, trust is fundamental to organisations, as McEvily *et al.* (2003) state:

> "without trust, the uncertainty that pervades the organization and coordination of economic activity would be debilitating" (McEvily *et al.* 2003: 99).

Trust is a determinant of relationship commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). It is reciprocal, with those employees who feel supported often registering not only greater trust within their local manager, but also higher perceived levels of empowerment (Gill *et al.* 2019; Saleem *et al.* 2019). As such, trust supports empowerment through the operation of autonomous teams with decision making capability (Mayer *et al.* 1995; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). The management trust associated with delegated decision making can also lead to increased productivity and morale (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). It is worth noting however that managers tend to demonstrate less trust for employees who have not worked for them for a material amount of time (Yukl and Fu

1999), or if performance information is not available (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999).

On a related note, information and knowledge sharing is fundamentally important for companies to realise the benefits of trust. It can positively influence business performance, competitive advantage and thus financial performance of organisations (McNeish and Mann 2010; Rutten *et al.* 2016; Khvatova and Block 2017). It is important for the individual as they measure the value they provide to the organisation through the ability to seek, hold and manage information (McNeish and Mann 2010; Rutten *et al.* 2016). It is also important for leaders who, by acting in a knowledge builder role, can increase knowledge sharing and degrees of trust as team members learn to rely on each other (Lee *et al.* 2010). In respect of organisations, academic consensus is that trust is fundamental to knowledge sharing (McNeish and Mann 2010; Den Hartog *et al*. 2002; Rutten *et al.* 2016; Nerstad *et al.* 2018), although some argue that its positive influence is limited (Khvatova and Block 2017). It allows leaders to foster information (Lee *et al.* 2010), and supports an individual to accept information, and thus a risk, without the ability prove the accuracy of it (McNeish and Mann 2010; Rutten *et al.* 2016; Nerstad *et al.* 2018), especially where a task is highly ambiguous (Khvatova and Block 2017). As such, the higher the trust, the greater the knowledge sharing, and the greater the potential success of the organisation (Rutten *et al.* 2016).

Willingness to Trust and Trustworthiness

Each individual involved in a social exchange will be aware of needing to demonstrate a willingness to trust, an offer of solidifying a relationship; it is after all a core constituent of the conceptualisation of trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Although, as discussed, trust is a risk-based course of action, a willingness to trust is not, as there is no specific risk associated with holding such a position (Mayer *et al.* 1995).

A willingness to be vulnerable (Mayer *et al.* 1995) is dependent on upon social contexts and particular circumstances (Stein and Harper 2003). Mayer *et al.* (1995) posit that the willingness of individuals to trust varies due to different

life developmental circumstances, e.g. experiences, personality types, education etc. Building on this work, Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) and Kramer (1999) discuss the influence of past experiences on the ability to trust within their respective works. The former state that previous experiences may support or damage the willingness to make oneself vulnerable (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006). This echoes with the commentary of Call (2005), who proposes that any action an individual undertakes is based upon the previous experiential learning. Kramer (1999) posits that two elements contribute to the willingness to trust based upon historical experience: the first is the *a priori* expectation of how an individual will behave; the second is the degree to which that behaviour supports or opposes such expectations.

A further factor that deserves attention is how a *propensity* to trust affects the willingness to trust. Propensity is an antecedent of trust and utilises the rational choice model of trust, where individuals make reasonable decisions to gain maximum potential benefit for themselves, often when there is little information in respect of the potential exchange (Alarcon *et al.* 2018a; Kramer 1999). It can be considered as a willingness to trust (Mayer *et al.* 1995), or, as Alarcon *et al.* (2018) interpret the description of propensity to trust by Mayer *et al.* (1995) as a "generalized positive expectancy about behaviors people will perform" (Alarcon *et al.* 2018: 70).

Propensity to trust holds a strong relationship with trust, manifesting early in the trust process (Alarcon *et al.* 2018; Alarcon *et al.* 2018a). It influences how much trust an individual has for another prior to receiving information on that other individual where tacit and explicit context points direct trustors to a high willingness level (Mayer *et al.* 1995; Gill *et al.* 2005; Kramer 2010). Individuals who have a higher propensity to engage in trust believe that they are less likely to be victims of exploitation in the exchange (Alarcon *et al.* 2018), with the propensity to trust then being a "target-agnostic trait-based perception of others" (Alarcon *et al.* 2018a: 1907), although Gill *et al.* (2005) argue that it can also act to consolidate pre-held cognitive beliefs about an individual e.g. if an individual is considered to have integrity, a propensity to trust will be high. Should information of another's negative behaviour come to light however,

then the potential trustor may experience negative affect and be reluctant to engage in a willingness to trust (Six 2007).

Despite the previous discussion, the literature supporting propensity to trust as an influencer in the trust process is mixed. For example, though cited above in contextualising propensity, Gill *et al.* (2005) determined that propensity to trust correlated with an intention to trust only where there was little information available to the trustor about the trustee's trustworthiness. Similarly, Alarcon *et al.* (2018a) found that although propensity to trust may be a predictor of trust intentions, it was not related to trust behaviour. Such empirical evidence opposes the position of Mayer *et al.* (1995) who posit that trust is a function of not only a perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity of the trustee, but then also notably the trustor's individual propensity to trust.

A final point on willingness: as briefly acknowledged earlier, it is clear that a willingness to trust serves no purpose unless it is acted upon and the trustor takes a risk (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Alarcon *et al.* 2018a). Indeed, if it is not supported with an action, willingness, as a constituent of trust, becomes almost redundant (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Trust inclinations do not necessarily compare with actions; individuals with high trust intentions may not necessarily engage in trusting behaviours (Alarcon *et al.* 2018a), and this may be due to the unpredictability of humans in terms of acting benevolently (Whitener *et al.* 1998). However, should a trustor demonstrate and act upon a willingness to trust, and this act leads to a beneficial positive outcome, the trustor's opinion of the trustee will positively increase: essentially then, it is reasonable to suggest that trust leads to greater trust in positive circumstances.

Trustworthiness affects the efficacy of trust throughout the organisation (McEvily *et al.* 2003). It is the cognitive measure of one party by another in respect of trusting attributes (Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Lau *et al.* 2007), a judgement of whether the other party is worthy of trust and thus the likelihood of a favourable exchange (De Cremer *et al.* 2018; Mayer *et al.* 1995; McEvily *et al.* 2003; Fawcett *et al.* 2017). It is associated strongly with cognitive trust,

as opposed to affective trust, where the trustor's belief system plays a significant part in judging levels of trustworthiness (Gillespie and Mann 2004).

The results of the research undertaken by Heyns and Rothmann (2015) highlights the importance of trustworthiness, together with propensity to trust, on the level of trust conferred on an individual. Mayer *et al.* (1995) suggest within their model of trust that there are three key constituents of perceived trustworthiness: ability, benevolence, and integrity. Ability concerns the competence of the trustee; benevolence refers to extent to which it is believed that the trustee will act in a positive manner for the benefit of the trustor; and finally, integrity applies to the perception that the trustee will adhere to values that echo with those of the trustor (Mayer *et al.* 1995).

Trustworthiness is a social phenomenon, being affected by the delivery of social cues (Kramer 2010; McEvily *et al.* 2003) and as such, individuals who make themselves vulnerable will seek out those trustees that offer the greatest perceived level of security from the social exchange (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Mayer *et al.* 1995). Perceptions of trustworthiness held by the trustor then encourage or constrain the level of risk that the trustor is prepared to accept (Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Whitener *et al.* 1998).

Perceptions extend deep into the trustworthiness concept, and as stated earlier, materially affect the levels of trust that an individual may elect to bestow upon another (Mayer *et al.* 1995). Heyns and Rothman (2015) posit that each person has a base level of perceived trust which influences the trustor's willingness to depend upon the words and behaviours of the trustee; should this trust not manifest fully and actively in respect of trustworthy individuals, then there is an opportunity cost of unutilised trustworthiness (McEvily *et al.* 2003).

Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) draw on extant literature to suggest that trust is a continuum, where trust and distrust are not necessarily opposites. Similarly, Mayer *et al.* (1995) contend that trustworthiness should also be approached as a continuum, where the level of trustworthiness that a trustor perceives can

be at any level along that measure, as opposed to a binary decision of a trustee being deemed trustworthy or not. It is therefore understandable then that each part of a dyad generates a belief of how trustworthy their opposite number is on that continuum (Lester and Brower 2003) based on perceptions of benevolence, ability and integrity; propensity to trust however helps to form variances within the perceived trustworthiness (Mayer *et al.* 1995). As Heyns and Rothmann (2015) comment, propensity to trust "acts like a filter that colours the interpretations of others' actions and perceived trustworthiness" (Heyns and Rothmann 2015: 3).

At any point prior or during the potential exchange, a positive relational signal can help to vary trustworthiness perceptions, especially where such relational signal benefits the other party at the sacrifice to the originator (Six 2007; Fawcett *et al.* 2017). Such a positive relational signal can however be superseded by influences outside of the relationship that can impede or encourage trustworthiness perceptions (Mayer *et al.* 1995). An example of such is the social network within which the relationship is situated; this network can impose effects through formal and informal controls to encourage individuals to demonstrate specific behaviours (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000). Those behaviours, as Alarcon *et al.* (2018a) determined, can then fully mediate the relationship of trustworthiness perceptions over a period.

McEvily *et al.* (2003) state that trust is not sustainable without a foundation of trustworthiness. Trust perception then is, as discussed earlier, imperative to building trust in organisations, and thus helping workplace positive attitudes (Lester and Brower 2003). The organisation can elect to encourage a trusting environment by implementing rules that require individuals to trust in other organisational members, where reciprocity is considered a *norm*. The practices can

> "exert subtle but powerfully self-reinforcing influences on expectations, shaping not only individuals' perceptions of their own honesty and trustworthiness, but also their expectations and beliefs regarding other

> organizational members' general honesty and trustworthiness as well"
> (Kramer 2010: 89),

supporting individuals in regularly assessing the fragility of trust, the appropriateness of it, how to interpret what seemingly appear as contradictory behaviours, and whether to increase their trust in an individual (McEvily *et al.* 2003). It is clear however, that the overarching perception and understanding of the context of the potential exchange, including inconsistencies in information, will drive the trustor's decision in the evaluation of trustworthiness, and whether to make a leap of faith to invest trust in that relationship (Mayer *et al.* 1995; McEvily *et al.* 2003); trustors however do not always act upon the positive perception of trustworthiness (Heyns and Rothmann 2015).

Taking the discussion on organisational trustworthiness further, De Cremer *et al.* (2018), in a similar fashion to Legood *et al.* (2016), found evidence supporting the assertion that trustworthiness must initiate at the top of the organisational hierarchy. The authors determined that if senior leaders act in a way to positively influence middle management's trustworthiness perceptions in them, subordinates will then perceive that middle management are also trustworthy because of trickle-down effects. De Cremer *et al.* (2018) witnessed that a learning experience for the subordinate was created when the managers acted in a positive manner, leading to a trust relationship developing (De Cremer *et al.* 2018).

Whitener *et al.* (1998) posit five categories of behaviour that further influence employees' perceptions of managerial trustworthiness and complement those of Mayer *et al.* (1995): (i) behavioural consistency; (ii) behavioural integrity; (iii) sharing and delegation of control; (iv) communication; and (v) demonstration of concern. Legood *et al.* (2016) synthesise these together with the model of Mayer *et al.* (1995) to demonstrate the impact of Whitener *et al.*'s (1998) antecedents of behavioural consistency and integrity, concern, delegation of control and communication on integrity, benevolence and ability on trustworthiness. Whilst evidence has demonstrated that Mayer *et al.*'s (1995) competence and integrity constituents of trustworthiness materially mediate

the link between strong relationships and knowledge sharing (Evans *et al.* 2019), the authors confirmed that leader trustworthy behaviour predicted organisational trust, as mediated by trustworthiness and perceptions of trust in the leader. These results demonstrate the pervasive and integral nature of trustworthiness in organisations but are orientated towards trustworthiness travelling up a hierarchy; what of it travelling down from managers to subordinates?

The notion of *felt trustworthiness* is defined as being "the extent to which a subordinate perceives that his leader evaluates him to be a trustworthy individual" (Lester and Brower 2003: 18). It is vital to organisations and dyads operating in them (Bernstrøm and Svare 2017; Brower *et al.* 2009), representing, along with trusting, the two elements of a trust-based work relationship. It is important to note that it is suggested that the trust bestowed on employees has no effect until those same employees *feel* that they are trusted (Deng and Wang 2009).

Lester and Brower (2003) write in depth on felt trustworthiness, citing how a positive dyadic relationship between managers and employees can help employees to demonstrate greater commitment, greater job satisfaction, higher organisation commitment and citizenship behaviour, and greater happiness in respect of their work when they perceive that their management trust them (Lester and Brower 2003; Skiba and Wildman 2019; Deutsch Salamon and Robinson 2008; Brower *et al.* 2009).

Although in respect of interorganisational trustworthiness, the work of Fawcett *et al.* (2017) remains applicable to intra-organisational trustworthiness and felt trust. In order to feel trusted, the other individual must perceive that the trustor is willing to take risks (Lau *et al.* 2007), however Fawcett *et al.* (2017) found that of their managerial sample, many managers struggled to know how to invest in trust signals to aid trustworthiness; they also did not view trust as a valuable concept to invest in. They discovered that this latter point was driven by managers being fearful of being left vulnerable. The authors summarised that such a managerial position contributes significantly to a paradox where

managers often feel benefits of a trust-based organisational environment, but self-preservation means they are unwilling to relinquish control to subordinates (Fawcett *et al.* 2017). In their research into antecedents of felt trust, Lau *et al.* (2007), supporting the work of Brower *et al.* (2000), Gillespie and Mann (2004), and McAllister (1995), gathered evidence to suggest that common, shared values are antecedents of trustworthiness perceptions, and managers investing time in imparting their values can assist levels of trustworthiness and felt trust.

Felt trustworthiness, also described as felt trust in a proportion of the literature (e.g. Skiba and Wildman 2019) will be discussed in further detail shortly in the next chapter, however it is worth noting at this juncture that because trust may not always be felt by subordinates (Lau *et al.* 2014), it is fundamental for managers to demonstrate and communicate that their subordinates are considered trustworthy in order to crystallise the espoused benefits of trust (Lester and Brower 2003; Deutsch Salamon and Robinson 2008).

How Organisations Can Increase Trust

The notable benefits of trust within organisations have been articulated earlier (see examples of Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Stein and Harper 2003; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012; Morgan and Hunt 1994). As Mason and Lefrere (2003) state, "trust cannot be decreed, or designed, only *designed* for" (Mason and Lefrere 2003: 265). How then can an organisation increase levels of trust not only intra-employees but also between employees and the organisation itself, especially when "we know relatively little about what types of trust an organization should focus its efforts on building" (Kramer and Cook 2004: 5).

It is stated that trusting acts, assuming the results are positive, are essentially reciprocal: trust breeds further trust (Kramer 2010; Six 2007; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015). A clear, simple and unambiguous move in enhancing a culture of trust of all kinds within organisations is to increase direct interaction between members (Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Kramer and Cook 2004; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000). Such face-to-face contact can not only demonstrate

benevolence and support from a party, but also solidifies the cultural norm of the institution (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000).

Implementing norms and values for the operation of individuals within an organisation can encourage trust between those individuals and are a vital part of embedding trust-enhancing principles (De Cremer *et al.* 2018; Schein 1992; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Whitener *et al.* 1998). Mishra and Morrissey (1990) found evidence that organisations believe trust should start at the top and filter downwards: it must have "a strong and visible commitment from top management" (Mishra and Morrissey 1990: 453). If trust can be institutionalised at the macro-organisational, collective strata, it becomes embedded at the micro-organisational, employee level (Kramer 1999), and the trust-enhancing model proposed by Whitener *et al.* (1998) highlights this with focus upon culture, structure and people. Trust-increasing policies can therefore be launched that guide behaviour (Kramer 2010) and promote the normative frame (Six 2007; Kramer 2010). Six (2007) adds to this thinking by recommending three policies for organisations to engender interpersonal trust: (i) highlight the culture in which relationships are valued and important, including concern for shared and individual values; (ii) reduce bureaucratic control to the benefit of normative control; and (iii) explicitly socialise the values and principles of the organisation, i.e. the culture, for newcomers.

The embedding of such a culture echoes parallels with Foucault's musings of *governmentality*. As Pease (2002) comments, Foucault proposes that organisations employ self-policing principles to ensure compliance to norms, with O'Brien (2013) then interpreting Foucault's writings to contend that this self-policing encourages them to *modify* their behaviour in order to align. Organisations further this governmentality by introducing rewards and reprimand for obedience or nonconformity respectively, i.e. Foucault's (1977a) disciplinary power. Whitener *et al.* (1998), together with Spreitzer and Mishra (1999), suggest that organisations embed a variety of policies that act initially as substitutes for trust, such as shared reward structures between managers and employees, rewarding trusting managers and employees that reciprocate, and providing safety nets, and training, to help managers initiate trust.

Although unintended, Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) highlight a further method of increasing compliance; they propose hiring individuals whose personal objectives fit with those of the organisation, thereby decreasing the likelihood of disobedience. These policies all contribute to the self-regulation of employees.

Although Gillespie and Mann (2004) argue that research on trust and leadership behaviours shows inconsistent findings, literature has recommended that open communication, greater decision making, sharing of critical information, and a sharing of feelings and perceptions contribute to the building of a trusting employee-manager relationship (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Gillespie and Mann 2004). Many of these positions help to demonstrate trust as the manager puts themselves in a position of vulnerability when that manager relinquishes a certain level of control (Lee *et al.* 2018). There are however further actions that managers and leaders can take to enhance trust within the organisation.

Management-Specific Actions to Increase Organisational Trust
Trust is of central importance to the organisational relationships of managers and employees (Gillespie and Mann 2004; McAllister 1995; Brower *et al.* 2000; Den Hartog *et al.* 2002; Bligh 2017; Engelbrecht *et al.* 2017). Leadership must have the goal to build trust in its organisations (Zhang *et al.* 2008), as doing so can materially contribute to positive outcomes (Skiba and Wildman 2019). However, two basic issues can affect this desire to trust: (i) as discussed, trust in a dyad operates both ways, and if either party of the dyad lacks any trust, then the relationship will not operate at its potential (Brower *et al.* 2009; Bligh 2017); and (ii) sizes and strata in organisations hinder the ability for decision makers to gain dense social interactions to develop a personalised, social understanding of an individual to engender trust (Kramer 1999). Those leaders, however, that wish for higher performance from employees must show their trust in their employees (Deutsch Salamon and Robinson 2008; Brower *et al.* 2009; Dirks and Ferrin 2002), with many of those leaders recognising that they have the greater responsibility in developing trust (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Gillespie and Mann 2004).

As the behaviours that leaders display have a material impact on trust formation (Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Whitener *et al.* 1998; Dirks and Ferrin 2002), the trust that a manager has and displays in an employee will affect the way that employee behaves (Brower *et al.* 2009). If employers invest greater than simply an economic agency theory approach, they are more likely to be perceived by employees as demonstrating more positive relational signals (Six 2007). Tsui *et al.* (1997) found that when employers are willing to commit to longer-term trusting relationships with employees, those employees will likely respond favourably in respect of performance and attitude.

Interpreting Bauer and Green's work, Gómez and Rosen (2001) suggest that managers' delegation of tasks is often an assessment of the competence, trustworthiness and ability of employees. Employees that are more trusted have essentially given the manager confidence of competence, that a task will be completed accurately and swiftly, thereby increasing the likelihood of further delegation and thus trust (Brower *et al.* 2009; McAllister 1995; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Gómez and Rosen 2001). This trust, as discussed earlier, is context specific i.e. dependent on the level of perceived risk (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Mayer *et al.* 1995), and remains a mechanism that exposes vulnerability (Nerstad *et al.* 2018). When leaders are seen to take greater risks with subordinates through conferring trust, those subordinates are likely to demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction, performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (Brower *et al.* 2000).

When behaviours of leaders are positive, unambiguous, and predictable by employees, and those leaders communicate shared visions and important values, employees' positive perceptions of integrity and competence of their leaders increase, leading to greater confidence in their management and thus trustworthiness (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Gillespie and Mann 2004; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Six 2007). Heyns and Rothmann (2015) therefore posit that leaders should actively explain the values and beliefs behind their actions to encourage the building of relationships. Gillespie and Mann (2004) also propose actions that leaders should take to enhance trust: (i) consult

employees in decision making; (ii) share a collective vision; and (iii) hold and advocate common values.

An additional action raised by Legood *et al.* (2016) is the importance of managers following through on what they say they will i.e. "word-deed alignment and promise fulfilment" (Legood *et al.* 2016: 682). Research shows that when there is consistency between the actions and the rhetoric of managers, employee engagement and employee trust will both increase (Wang and Hsieh 2013). In any case, and as Gill *et al.* (2019) state, supervisors must overtly communicate that they trust their employees.

At this juncture, prior to continuing with a management-centric discussion and highlighting that much literature focuses on employee trust in leaders (Brower *et al.* 2000), it is reasonable to reiterate that employees also have a part to play in increasing trust in relationships. Trust is unidirectional, working both ways in the manager-employee dyad, and each member has a responsibility (Six 2007; Lester and Brower 2003; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Krot and Lewicka 2012; Gómez and Rosen 2001; Brower *et al.* 2000; Bligh 2017). It is evidenced in some cases that even with a manager demonstrating trust in an employee, that same employee may not trust the manager (Brower *et al.* 2000), and such a circumstance can place the manager in a trust dilemma; despite effort, the manager may not receive a reciprocal return (Whitener *et al.* 1998). Both individuals in the dyad therefore can take constructive actions to make the trust more resilient (Six 2007), where, as social exchange theory suggests, manager/employee obligations of reciprocation are aimed for to enhance success levels of relationships (Brower *et al.* 2009).

Returning to empowerment, when trust between a manager and subordinate exists in the dyad, that manager may delegate and grant more responsibility to the subordinate, as well as increasing the subordinate's latitude; that same subordinate may then respond positively with greater commitment (Yukl and Fu 1999; Lau *et al.* 2007). A trusting climate thus includes participation, and employees require an ability to take responsibility to make decisions within the workplace to develop and to have an input in the performance of that

organisation (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Skiba and Wildman 2019; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). Those managers that are seen to share control and empower employees in respect of decision making are perceived as trustworthy (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000).

As briefly discussed in the previous section, felt trust i.e. a judgement of how much an individual feels that they are trusted by another (Gill *et al.* 2019; Skiba and Wildman 2019), is vital to a trusting organisational dyadic, and managers should actively endeavour to increase employee feelings of trust (Skiba and Wildman 2019; Gill *et al.* 2019). Perceptions of felt trust can be increased with enhanced employee control over decision making (Bernstrøm and Svare 2017) although a subordinate's historic performance will shape the manager's perception of whether to accept such vulnerability or not (Brower *et al.* 2000). After all, it is important to remember that "trusting and feeling trusted are attitudes and perceptions of two different parties" (Lau *et al.* 2007: 323).

Felt trust contributes to reduced employee perceptions of uncertainty (Skiba and Wildman 2019) and can help to make individuals feel empowered through the self-determination and impact constructs (Gill *et al.* 2019). It can also support empowerment not only by increasing employees' intrinsic motivation, but by being a form of feedback i.e. the better an individual performs, the greater the felt trust (Bernstrøm and Svare 2017; Kanter 1977; Miller *et al.* 2001; Kanter 1989; Greco *et al.* 2006; Howard and Foster 1999). Deng and Wang (2009) studied felt trust in a Chinese industry context. They infer from existing literature that felt trust is predicated on four dimensions, specifically empowerment perception, justice perception, supervisor support, and information sharing. The authors found that feeling trusted positively affects subordinate satisfaction and increases loyalty. Similarly, Skiba and Wildman (2019) suggest that felt trust allows employees who have been given formal decision responsibility to exercise their own judgement, and thus gain satisfaction, in taking a course of action that they believe to be most suitable.

Exploring decision making further, the ability to take responsibility and accountability for decisions has a notable impact upon an employee's felt trust,

according to the literature. Employees that feel trusted, such as with decision making consultation and ownership, will often feel compelled to increase performance to meet what they feel is an increased responsibility (Skiba and Wildman 2019) and reciprocate that trust in management (Morgan and Zeffane 2003). It is important to appreciate that whilst Wang and Hsieh (2013), amongst others, recommend that leaders share and delegate control in order to increase authentic leadership and therefore trust, it is imperative that leaders demonstrate their support for employees in *utilising* such an ability, as

> "too often leaders delegate tasks, but then fail to support their employees or provide them with the autonomy necessary to accomplish their task, which leads to a decrease in trust and hinders employees' sense of empowerment" (McNaughtan *et al.* 2019: 95).

When employees feel that their leaders are demonstrating risk-taking behaviour, i.e. making themselves vulnerable (Brower *et al.* 2000), and depending upon them, felt trust and the associated sense of reliance has a positive effect on their self-perceptions and their outputs, including organisational citizenship behaviour (Lau *et al.* 2014), whilst also reducing organisational uncertainty (Skiba and Wildman 2019). However, if there is little or no felt trust, employees will perceive that the relationship cannot progress and evolve (Skiba and Wildman 2019). Managers must then project an image of trust by taking actions with both substance and high visibility to embed the trusting culture (Lau *et al.* 2014).

A method of establishing a trusting relationship between managers and employees, and to support decision making delegation, is to conduct decision making as a shared experience, where information disclosure and experiences of managerial failures and successes can create positive, trusting environments (De Cremer *et al.* 2018; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Lee *et al.* 2010). Together with these shared experiences, De Cremer *et al.* (2018) suggest that to aid trusting social exchanges, managers must also highlight the positive expectations associated with the trustworthiness demonstrated, but with the inherent internal acknowledgment that trusting does not always return a

positive outcome (Heyns and Rothmann 2015). A reliance then on empowered teams means that fewer controls will be in place; essentially trust and empowered ability to make decisions are then cyclical: empowerment requires trust (Mayer *et al.* 1995). As trust is then principally embedded by the norms of the organisation and a voicing of expectation, trust can thus be regarded as a potential 'soft', pseudo-governance mechanism (Fawcett *et al.* 2017).

This discussion of the literature supports that leaders have a critical position in respect of fostering and embedding a trusting exchange with employees. An interesting piece of scholarly work by Pittman (2020) is situated within a neuroleadership context. Although such a context is outside of the scope of this research, it is useful to note that the author proposes eight *building blocks* of leadership to develop trust. Several of these are common with those espoused by organisational trust literature, specifically openness, caring (or concern), investment (or coaching), and naturalness (or authenticity). In a similar vein, Legood *et al.* (2016) suggest that leaders should actively seek to foster benevolence within their employees to enhance trust.

Building trust however is a fragile concept with respect to leadership. Liden and Graen (1980) suggest that managers are reticent to trust as bestowing trust and then receiving poor performance from employees would reflect badly upon them. Managers must, however, act pre-emptively, taking risk for the greater good, and providing a foundation for organisational trust (Whitener *et al.* 1998). All of this is reasonable and achievable, but what else can managers do to encourage a trusting working environment?

Mayer *et al.* (1995) posit that managers should show benevolence to employees often. To do so in a simple fashion, managers can protect the employee from the consequences of mistakes, and this will lead to greater trust in the relationship (Mayer *et al.* 1995). This approach would help to form part of Whitener *et al.*'s (1998) behavioural integrity, a constituent of five behavioural traits that the authors suggest influence perceptions of managerial trustworthiness. The remaining four are: (i) behavioural consistency; (ii)

delegation of control; (iii) communication (e.g. accuracy and openness); and (iv) expression of concern (Whitener *et al.* 1998).

Further to those aspects above, Lee *et al.* (2010) suggest that leaders who show a desire to support the development of individuals and teams increase confidence within those employees, which itself then drives greater trust. When that supervisory support is not present, however, trust is impacted and issues can develop in the relationship (Zhang *et al.* 2008).

In order to enhance the understanding of leader interaction with subordinates, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory is useful; indeed, there is a material overlap of the argued antecedents of trust and those of LMX (Brower *et al.* 2000). LMX theory suggests that the quality of the exchange between a leader and subordinate mediates the relationship between managerial trust and empowerment of employees (Gómez and Rosen 2001). Gómez and Rosen (2001) found through their work that those employees that reported a high level of felt trust also reported a greater quality of exchange, and also an increased perception of psychological empowerment. This impact of leadership however may be limited by organisational context (Gillespie and Mann 2004).

A specific discipline of leadership theory that is often referred to by literature, not only in respect of empowerment but also when discussing trust, is that of transformational leadership (Lee *et al.* 2010). Although both transactional *and* transformational leadership behaviours can help to enhance trust (Bass 1995; Den Hartog *et al.* 2002; Avolio *et al.* 2004; Ahearne *et al.* 2005), transformational leadership is regarded as the greater influencer (Gillespie and Mann 2004; Den Hartog *et al.* 2002; Dirks and Ferrin 2002). Through transformational leadership, when a leader acts positively, effectively, and in line with organisational objectives, trust in the exchange will increase (Den Hartog *et al.* 2002; Gillespie and Mann 2004), leading to shared commitment and shared values, fulfilling the trust cycle as discussed earlier. Transformational leadership is also characterised by the use of contingent reward, where the grant of such reward for performance can increase

perceptions of trust (Appelbaum *et al.* 2015; Gillespie and Mann 2004; Bass 1995). Transformational leaders are however advised by the literature that rewards only serve to increase trust in the relationship where they have been committed and that commitment is then subsequently fulfilled by leaders (Den Hartog *et al.* 2002); any over-reliance on rewards can also act in the opposite of intention, with employee perceptions of trust decreasing (Men and Stacks 2013).

Organisational Structure

Transformation

The business context of this research within the subject organisation, specifically the business' commenced journey of 'transformation', was highlighted earlier. In order to achieve a greater understanding of the impact of this element of transformation on empowerment, trust, and its associated issues, the following section will undertake a comprehensive map of literature on the subject. It will feature seminal work of Pascale (1990), Mintzberg *et al. (*2003) and Cascio (1993) to provide an early basis of understanding prior to moving on to more recent scholarly work.

What Approach is Common?

The global market for business has become more challenging, whether due to competition or external crises, or a combination of other factors (Gandolfi and Hansson 2011) and as such, this has induced many organisations to have undertaken large-scale, material, structural change (Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Pascale 1990; Arnold *et al.* 2000).

The term 'organisational transformation' can refer to a variety of approaches, whether that be organisational learning, structural reorganisation, or organisational renewal (Mason and Lefrere 2003; Pascale 1990; Mintzberg *et al.* 2003) and, as to be expected, there are many ways and recommendations in the literature on how to positively undertake this radical organisational change e.g. those found by Hill and Collins (2000). It is not however in the scope of this work to analyse those recommendations and make further

comment, but to understand what transformation has, so far, meant in respect of this subject organisation, and thus what the arguments are that surround it.

Organisational change through transformation is part of everyday operation for modern, dynamic businesses (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Kiitam *et al.* 2016). Converging change, where small, incremental modifications are employed to maintain competitive position in contrast to sweeping changes, are often employed in reaction to minor environmental triggers (Mintzberg *et al.* 2003). Such an approach, argue Mintzberg *et al.* (2003), is simple to implement, and allows the organisation to be consistent with strategy, structure and people by taking a small factor, in relative terms, and amending it i.e. *piecemeal* change (Mintzberg *et al.* 2003). Should this change be positive, it can be employed and rolled out in a greater number of applicable areas; should it not live up to expectations, then it can be consigned to history and learning. This incremental approach to change however, is argued by Pascale (1990) to only be useful and effective when the desire in general is a continuation of the current operation i.e. "more of what you've already got" (Pascale 1990: 12).

There is, however, no agreed consensus on best practice for organisational change, and thus nor for transformation (Pascale 1990). Successes have made organisations historically feel content with the status quo in which no improvements were deemed to be required (Pascale 1990). In more recent times however, change and its consequences have become the dominating organisational position (Baruch and Hind 2000), forced by competition and challenges that have seemingly increased exponentially. Here, temporary, *en vogue* fads are ubiquitous and drive much ill-conceived change (Mintzberg *et al.* 2003). More often than not, organisations elect to employ drastic, one-off, *discontinuous* changes (Pascale 1990), arguing that external crises have forced their hands (Mintzberg *et al.* 2003; Pascale 1990); however "crisis does not guarantee redemption. In fact, more often than not, organizations mismanage it" (Pascale 1990: 122). These large-scale changes are commonly badged as *transformation* (Pascale 1990; Mason and Lefrere 2003; Cascio 1993), and literature is candid in remarking how its perceived benefits are much desired, yet rarely realised (Mason and Lefrere 2003).

Transformation is often used as a pseudonym for downsizing (Cascio 1993), where the latter term can be constituted of a variety of activities. These activities draw upon a wide array of management theories and organisational literature (Gandolfi 2008) to reduce costs (Gandolfi and Hansson 2011) e.g. eliminating functions, developing cost reduction strategies, streamlining processes, improving authorisation, reducing task (Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011), or, increasingly, through outsourcing those tasks that were once completed internally (Griggs and Hyland 2003). Although it has been an active part of management strategy since the 1980s (Brockner 1992), and much like transformation itself, there is no one clear definition of downsizing and as such the variety in approaches has led to confusion (Gandolfi 2008). It is however commonly associated with a reduction in workforce (Cascio 1993; Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Arnold *et al.* 2000), and shall be considered as such in the context of this work from hereon in. This planned reduction in jobs (Cascio 1993) has become a common, and popular, way of life in contemporary organisations (Harney *et al.* 2018; Mishra and Spreitzer 1998; Gandolfi 2008; Griggs and Hyland 2003; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Arnold *et al.* 2000; Cascio 1993; Brockner *et al.* 2004; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011).

Although, as mentioned earlier, there are numerous reasons why organisations undertake transformation, there is no one, overarching driver as to why they engage in downsizing specifically (Gandolfi 2008; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011). The most commonly espoused rationales, and thus objectives, are indeed similar to those of transformation holistically, all aimed at reducing costs, removing inefficiencies and waste build-up, and increasing productivity together with profitability (Brockner *et al.* 2004; Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Griggs and Hyland 2003; Mishra and Mishra 1994; Arnold *et al.* 2000), and not simply just a workforce reduction (Mishra and Mishra 1994), though Gandolfi and Hansson (2011) contest this latter point. Appelbaum *et al.* (1997) cite several objectives of downsizing beyond simply reducing costs, including less bureaucracy, faster decision making, and increased productivity; it remains, however, a complex, dynamic, and multifaceted

concept (Harney *et al.* 2018; Gandolfi 2008; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011). Interestingly, Cascio (1993) highlights how the financial plight of many organisations in respect to burdensome debt can force those businesses to undertake far-reaching structural changes, such as downsizing, in order to ensure that there is a cashflow availability.

Drastic change, in this case downsizing, is not always necessary for business (Mintzberg *et al.* 2003). Although organisational change is often employed during times of market-perceived failure (Morgan and Zeffane 2003), workforce reductions, if implemented, should be part of a consistent, clearly-defined organisational strategy; if that strategy is not appropriately outlined before the implementation of employee restructures and rationalisation, then it will not serve to support the direction of travel (Brockner 1992). In these instances, where downsizing is utilised to address situations caused by external market issues or other short-term requirements, employees often suffer from negative consequences (Harney *et al.* 2018), and the literature addressing these shall now be explored.

Benefits and Issues of Downsizing
Despite the popularity of downsizing, especially so in more recent times, there has been a distinct dearth of empirical financial and organisational evidence of successes where it has realised the espoused objectives, and the pervasive phenomenon has paradoxically continued to be employed in contemporary businesses despite this (Gandolfi 2008; Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011), becoming engrained in the institution's culture (Cascio 1993). As such, with this lack of a positive relationship between downsizing and increased financial performance, the image of downsizing is considered to be miserable by employees (Gandolfi 2008).

Appelbaum *et al.* (1997) set their stalls out early in respect of restructuring being considered as "corporate anorexia" (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997: 278), and much literature agrees with the sentiment. Downsizing is "rarely successful" (Gandolfi 2008: 5) as a cost-saving exercise, with many firms having failed to realise any material financial benefits from enacting it, leading to an ever-

increasing number of dissenting voices (Gandolfi 2008; Farrell and Mavondo 2004). Companies that downsize are regularly outperformed by those that do not in short-, medium-, and long-term timescales (Gandolfi 2008).

If at all, organisations often gain only in the short-term; downsizing commonly results in a fleeting increase in productivity and then a drop to lower levels (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). In respect of the financial reception of organisations that outwardly declare their intention to downsize, markets generally respond positively, and value increases, but such an increase is often short-lived and followed by a slow elongated fall to lower value (Cascio 1993): "Firms take a one-time charge to earnings, their operating margins improve, and the financial markets cheer" (Cascio 1993: 99). Short-term financial benefit however is often a mask for long-term negative consequences (Gandolfi 2008). In their study of market perceptions of downsizing, Brauer and Zimmerman (2017) found that where industry is in a negative phase of its cycle, market perceptions are pessimistic; in other words, where downsizings are argued by the company to be required to cost-cut in a context of market shock, this is viewed undesirably. The authors suggest that in these such circumstances, a downsizing in a bleak business macroenvironment implies that the organisation is *having* to act, and this leads to the perception of pessimism in respect of the company's future profitability (Brauer and Zimmermann 2017). This perception is compounded if the organisation was already operating with a negative performance trend (Brauer and Zimmermann 2017).

Mintzberg *et al.* (2000) comment sternly on downsizing. They suggest that this *dramatic*, and dangerous, approach to managing is 'junk' and is destined to fail, but only after initially deceiving the markets, prior to a loss of faith and a collapse. In relation to this position then, the negative long-term market position may be justified when it is understood that downsizing generates notable direct and indirect costs, and rarely the benefits (Gandolfi 2008; Mishra and Mishra 1994). Indeed, organisations often do not see cost benefits from downsizing because they then experience reduced productivity from those employees that remain, and also have to replace employees lost with

consultants, or indeed re-hire those they let go as contractors for inflated rates to bring back the required skillsets (Cascio 1993; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997).

Why is downsizing then perceived by many to not be an effective strategy yet continually utilised by organisational leadership? Farrell and Mavondo (2004) ask the same question and call for research into the perception, with academic and industry interest now starting to focus on the realisation of downsizing benefits (Griggs and Hyland 2003). Cascio (1993) suggests that failure is commonly due to the inability of organisations to break away from the hierarchical command and control approaches to structural design and management, though the desire to implement a successful downsizing is there. This sentiment is echoed by Appelbaum *et al.* (1997) who themselves propose that organisational management fails to understand what its employees need and what works well. Downsizing, unfortunately, is considered a 'quick-fix' that is easily implemented in response to issues; where these issues are not resolved, the common response is to downsize again (Farrell and Mavondo 2004). It becomes a trend that exists even when there is no threat to financial performance (Cascio 1993).

The literature is clearly, and overwhelmingly, critical of the realisation of the benefits of downsizing, or rather the lack of (Gandolfi 2008). There are however real, concerning issues that affect employees of organisations which elect to downsize. Baruch and Hind (2000) found that many participants of their research demonstrated a sense of realism in understanding that costs had to be reduced and that restructuring was the right course of action for the company. This shows that employees are aware that they usually form one of the largest cost levers of a business. Despite this awareness, they can be affected negatively, and substantially, by organisational downsizing.

Organisations repeatedly underestimate the adverse effects of downsizing on their workforce, leading often to the manifestation of not only lower performance, productivity, profitability, and well-being, but also increased conflict (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Mishra and Mishra 1994; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Harney *et al.* 2018; Lehman and Linsky 2008), job insecurity

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(Brockner 1992), and constrained organisational learning (Griggs and Hyland 2003). Employees may also feel low morale, distrust, guilt, anger, and reduced loyalty (Gandolfi and Hansson 2011), all contributing to an increase in stress experienced (Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Brockner *et al.* 2004; Baruch and Hind 2000). This emergent feeling often leads to perceptions of less control and thus a reduction in organisational commitment and, again, in employee performance (Brockner *et al.* 2004; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Farrell and Mavondo 2004). Although some individuals prosper in new, challenging and evolving scenarios, the majority prefer stable and predictable environments, where the requirement for adaptation and change is forecasted and thus expected (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997: 278).

Downsizing as organisational change contributes then to uncertainty and thus anxiety (Hammond *et al.* 2019; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997), and the emergent behaviour associated with the workforce of downsizing entities is seemingly surprising to organisational leaders (Mason and Lefrere 2003). There is a long recovery for those who experience downsizing (Brockner 1992), especially employees that remain in the organisation where they have had to witness friends and colleagues forced to leave their companies (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Baruch and Hind 2000). Some individuals may even become withdrawn, unwilling to work to their full potential because of an expectation that doing so will be futile where more job losses are anticipated to occur (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). As such, the major challenge of a downsizing organisation is to reduce the undesirable effects of the action upon employees (Brockner *et al.* 2004) and to understand what Appelbaum *et al.* (1997) term the 'people factor'.

Many organisations do not undertake downsizing well, with a large proportion of employees feeling alienated especially where those institutions have commenced downsizing without policies or programmes of training for those that remain (Cascio 1993). Organisations assume that employees who retain their jobs will be grateful, however they are often cynical, angry, and fearful (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). These individuals that remain have been termed by Brockner (1992) as 'survivors', overtly creating the relationship with the etymological understanding of the word as people who have shared reactions

having experienced some level of hardship (Baruch and Hind 2000). Describing survivors further, Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) suggest that they can fall in two camps: the first, *obliging*, is where the employee feels that downsizing is benign and is unlikely to lead to harm; the other camp, the more common *fearful*, consider downsizing as likely to be harmful because they commonly hold the perception that they do not have the required level of resources to cope with the change (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998).

Barker (1993) highlights that the more common transformation of an organisation is to drive towards a post-bureaucratic structure, a flatter organisation consisting of self-managed teams; in other words, an empowered workforce. Empowerment has previously been discussed as being able to help businesses reduce costs; it is therefore understandably argued by Ivanova and von Scheve (2019) that empowerment can contribute to downsizing by reducing labour costs, but conversely help survivors by reducing work intensity and managerial layers. Despite Brockner (1992) suggesting that employee autonomy increases post downsizing, some scholars argue that downsizing, if not undertaken strategically and comprehensively for the correct reasons, in actuality regularly contributes to a consolidation of decision making at upper managerial tiers of the organisation, leading to reduced autonomy for employees (Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Mishra and Spreitzer 1998). This decline in autonomy can lead to those employees feeling that they have less control and less discretion to cope with the downsizing (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998); more discussion on this point will follow shortly.

Employees that remain in the organisation will often find that they have to now operate within new, ruthless environments, where high output is still expected (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). They are demoralised (Baruch and Hind 2000; Cascio 1993), stretched with accountability for management of more subordinates, more task, and more responsibility, having to work additional hours to absorb workloads of those that have left (Cascio 1993; Gandolfi 2008; Hammond *et al.* 2019; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Griggs and Hyland 2003; Brockner 1992). Often, all of this is without any additional support or training (Gandolfi 2008; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997) and

without changes to job descriptions (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). Invariably, specialist skillsets have also departed with those employees that have left, meaning that survivors have to slowly undertake those tasks that were originally completed quickly (Griggs and Hyland 2003; Cascio 1993), and internal controls are sacrificed because of time pressures (Simons 1995). Consolidating this traumatic position, Ivanova and von Scheve (2019) state that through their notable literature review, they could not find any evidence of a reduction of previous task with downsizing; the authors comment that conversely, organisations are seldom focussed on reducing task and instead look to increase profits with fewer employees (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019).

Collectively, these factors in downsizing can contribute to destructive survivor perceptions, exhaustion, and other stressors (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998; Harney *et al.* 2018), and further consolidation of negative behaviours, or as Gandolfi (2008) terms it, the "aftereffects of downsizing" (Gandolfi 2008: 11). As previously discussed, many organisations have seemingly ignored the undesired employee impacts of downsizing because they believe that survivors will be relieved at retaining a job and thus act accordingly (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997).

The effects of downsizing as described earlier are posited by Cascio (1993) and Baruch and Hind (2000), and echoed by Hammond *et al.* (2019), to stem from breaches of the psychological contract, or a sense of injustice, in respect of the positive forces that unite employee to organisation. As such, organisational management must raise its approach to morale issues in downsizing (Spreitzer and Quinn 1996; Cascio 1993; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011) and the associated insecurity. Employees "have become insecure, and they feel unbelievably hurt. They feel like slaves on the auction block" (Drucker 1988, in Spreitzer and Quinn 1996: 256). Perceptions of fairness, where decisions made by the organisation on who is required to leave the business are undertaken transparently and consistently, can help survivors overcome a proportion of the negative feeling, potentially even boosting positivity (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Brockner 1992). A vital part of reducing ill-effects however is communication between management and subordinate levels

throughout the downsizing (Baruch and Hind 2000; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Brockner 1992; Morgan and Zeffane 2003). Further scholarly recommendations on how to reduce these undesirable consequences of job losses will be explored later.

Though the discussion to this point has focussed on the negativity that surrounds downsizing, it is reasonable to put forth the reported, yet rare, positives that may manifest from the activity (Harney *et al.* 2018; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011). As an example, and despite many cases to the contrary, Brockner *et al.* (2004) determined that employees' perceived influence in relation to the organisation increases through downsizing. Interestingly, the research conducted by Baruch and Hind (2000) materially bucks the expectations as laid out by the literature, where positive perceptions were reported of the organisation during and post downsizing. The authors found that integrity and morale was in fact ranked high by employees through and beyond downsizing, predominantly driven by management sharing and explaining the motives behind decisions (Baruch and Hind 2000). Reasoning offered by the authors for these results was centred upon the belief that the organisation had endeavoured to act to demonstrate that survivors were highly valued; a slightly more pessimistic explanation was that base scores on morale, commitment, and trust were low before the downsizing activity and therefore only a small improvement by the organisation would have raised them, especially since those who left the business were more likely to have originally awarded low scores (Baruch and Hind 2000).

Trust, Empowerment, and Downsizing: Relating the Concepts
The following section will briefly return to trust, explicating the relationship between empowerment, trust, and downsizing, to give the interconnected, holistic context of the research.

In circumstances where organisational trust is important for fluid operation and change (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Mason and Lefrere 2003), downsizing leaves employees not knowing who they can trust (Simons 1995; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011;

Baruch and Hind 2000; Cascio 1993; Farrell and Mavondo 2004). Any organisational change can reduce trust (Morgan and Zeffane 2003) but the effect of operating in a circumstance where job security is perceived to be low, or there is an expectation of further downsizing, drives the breakage of values and assumptions employees held about the organisation (Simons 1995; Baruch and Hind 2000; Cascio 1993), corroding that understanding (Morgan and Zeffane 2003) and often leading not to simply a lack of trust, but also conscious *distrust* (Cascio 1993; Mishra and Mishra 1994). It is then ironic, as Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) suggest, that downsizing contributes to eroding trust which is necessary for the organisation to remain competitive, the very objective of downsizing.

Mishra and Mishra (1994) undertook a two-part research process comprising of interviews with senior managers followed by a large sample mail survey using a Likert scale of ninety-one organisations, all situated in the automotive sector. The authors found that managers were thoroughly aware of the need for trust throughout any change process, but those same managers felt that downsizing conflicted with their desire to build that trust (Mishra and Mishra 1994). Conversely, the authors also found that where mutual trust existed, employees and managers would often work together to identify innovative solutions to stave off job losses, such as temporary unpaid leave, where operations were critical to maintain output (Mishra and Mishra 1994).

In respect of downsizing, employees often feel a lack of control over their roles within the organisation (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Brockner *et al.* 2004). This is predominantly driven by the perception that "how well you do your job does not matter much; you may lose it anyway" (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997: 278). Such an assessment leads to employees feeling *disempowered* (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997), the very opposite of what organisations are holistically attempting to implement. Brockner *et al.* (2004) also add to this notion by suggesting that a perceived lack of control is worsened by the negative effect that downsizing has on well-being. The authors posit that an unstable environment contributes to employees feeling

that they do not have a level of control over their future, amplifying the effect upon work behaviours.

It is clear then that trust and empowerment play a vital part in survivors' coping ability and effectiveness during and after downsizing (Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Mishra and Spreitzer 1998; Morgan and Zeffane 2003), helping to reduce costs associated with labour yet promoting cooperation (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that empowerment has developed concurrently as a concept with downsizing (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019). In a fluid and unstable environment, empowerment of employees becomes crucial (Wikhamn and Selart 2019), where actively supporting and increasing employees' perceived levels of it can help survivors to take a more active role in downsizing (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998), and also aid the retention of survivors that may be assessing their futures within the organisation (Idris *et al.* 2018). As such, empowerment is argued to support employees through, as Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) contend, Spreitzer's (1995) four constructs of empowerment. If supported by the organisation, these constructs can help those survivors gain control to cope with downsizing and thus respond in a greater positive fashion to subsequent challenges (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998).

The nature of empowerment in downsizing organisations is, however, somewhat of a paradox as organisations can feel that they have been pressured into decentralising (Lewis *et al.* 2019) whilst reducing workforces. This sentiment is echoed by Ivanova and von Scheve (2019), who suggest that employee empowerment is a response to maintain output where the organisation is downsizing, but works to reinforce this process of workforce reduction. Similarly, as Spreitzer and Quinn (1996) posit, empowerment is encouraged for middle management and subordinates by the top of the organisation, however these layers are often the ones targeted for redundancies.

Mishra and Spreitzer's (1998) theoretical framework pulls together the concepts of trust and justice to form a primary appraisal of the degree of threat

from downsizing, followed by empowerment and work redesign which constitute a secondary appraisal of the downsizing in respect of coping resources. The authors state that, despite this discussed paradox, empowerment of survivors will increase the likelihood of engagement and activity of survivors, with them not being "passive recipients of a top management mandate" (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998: 578). From here then, what are the recommendations from the literature in respect of transformation?

Recommendations for Downsizing

Helping survivors deal with the impacts of downsizing is vital for an organisation (Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). It is the institution's responsibility to support employees (Potnuru *et al.* 2019) and downsizing, despite the majority of the previous discussion, does not have to culminate in employees that remain having to deal with undesirable conditions and feelings (Baruch and Hind 2000). Downsizing requires a change in managerial processes and culture, amongst others, to drive success (Baruch and Hind 2000; Mintzberg *et al.* 2003).

Change and continuity, posit Mintzberg *et al.* (2003), need to be balanced for success. However, in respect of downsizing, there is no systematic framework, a best practice, for implementing such a change and because of this, few companies have undertaken downsizing well (Harney *et al.* 2018; Gandolfi 2008). There are however many recommendations in the literature for companies looking to implement a downsizing initiative.

Through their research, Baruch and Hind (2000), as then subsequently supported by the suggestions of Morgan and Zeffane (2003), determined that communication was vital. The authors found that together with positive industrial relations, actively concentrating on transparent communication meant a prevention of fear and anxiety, which both played a material part in successful downsizing (Baruch and Hind 2000). These factors were consolidated with the key message that it was cost reduction that was the target, not the number of job losses. Similarly, Cascio (1993) also recommends, amongst other points, that for a successful downsizing,

organisations should use a partner, communicative approach that highlights the specific cost reductions that are required. The author, together with Brockner *et al.* (2004) and Mishra and Spreitzer (1998), also suggests the importance of the sense of fairness and justice in respect of the severance terms for those that leave, and workload for the survivors.

The generation and/or preservation of organisational trust has previously been discussed. It must however be reiterated that trust is incredibly important for any organisational change, and especially so for downsizing, where a culture of trust, including trust in leadership, can get employees prepared for downsizing (Bligh 2017; Mishra and Mishra 1994). This trust can serve to enhance commitment of survivors (Bligh 2017), and consolidate a perspective of continuous improvement that can be utilised to support the downsizing intent (Mishra and Mishra 1994). In respect of such, academics recommend that senior leadership become much more visible and involved, helping to maintain and enhance trust, highlight the intended vision of the organisation, counter the natural withdrawal of survivors, and thus enhance employees' positive outlooks (Brockner 1992; Bish *et al.* 2015; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Mishra and Spreitzer 1998).

The investment in the work-orientated well-being of survivors should also be of high concern for organisations. To reduce negative impacts, it is key for firms to prepare, to offer specific training and emotional support to survivors, and to invest in the those that remain proactively (Gandolfi 2008), factors that People functions in those same organisations have much experience in (Harney *et al.* 2018). The People team, with senior management support, is also at the forefront of driving consultation, listening to the concerns of employees (Harney *et al.* 2018). There is no real cost associated with this, yet it can help to reduce negative perceptions and generate a sense of control for employees through the ability to give input (Harney *et al.* 2018; Morgan and Zeffane 2003).

Further to these points, other recommendations address the human need for control, realisable by: allocating tasks to individuals with achievable targets

which they are likely to succeed (Brockner *et al.* 2004; Cascio 1993); encouraging innovative work behaviours, as championed by Hammond *et al.* (2019); and, promoting rewards and career paths in the 'new' organisation (Cascia 1993). An approach that is not within the scope of this work, but warrants further academic investigation, is the use of other mechanisms to achieve the cost reductions that organisations believe they can realise through downsizing. These mechanisms, forming *proactive* rather than *reactive* organisational behaviours (Farrell and Mavondo 2004), include wage freezes, incentivised retirements, reorientations or the redesign of jobs, removal of inefficient/unnecessary task, and working week reductions, amongst others, to help preserve jobs (Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Brockner 1992; Mishra and Mishra 1994; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011). These other options may help to alleviate the issues experienced by both the organisation and employees through downsizing.

An area of concern touched upon earlier was that of knowledge and experience leaving the organisation through downsizing. There are, however, ways of implementing a successful downsizing and retaining this knowledge. As Griggs and Hyland (2003) determined, changing overarching strategy and culture to become a learning organisation, i.e. one that values knowledge and information relationships (McNeish and Mann 2010), can aid in supporting survivors and helping to protect the organisation in a context where a loss of such can entail a high-risk consequence (Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Griggs and Hyland 2003).

Research Design

Methodological Considerations

This research adopted a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, applied through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework to investigate the lived experiences of participants (Alessandrini 2012; Saunders *et al.* 2012; Flood 2010; Hair Jr *et al.* 2007). In adopting an AR-based framework in terms of methodology, the level of participation requested from those taking part in the research is stated as being suitable to be limited to

member-checking of core themes and also in determining appropriate interventions, if any, proposed by the work. This level of participation is warranted due to several reasons.

Wang *et al.* (1998), Elden and Chisholm (1993), and also Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), advocate that participative approaches to research should not be seen as a doctrine (Elden and Chisholm 1993; Barreteau *et al.* 2010), and are in reality flexible (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), without an espoused single, recommended process (Cassell and Johnson 2006). Actual levels of participation as suggested by some literature can commonly not be practical, or indeed even feasible (Wang *et al.* 1998; Elden and Chisholm 1993). It is then the important facet of participatory research posited by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) that holds relevance here: that the crucial element of participatory research is not the way in which it is conducted, but more about the intention and attitude of the researcher and for whom the research is undertaken for.

It is argued here that this research does not require collegiate, true participation (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Sense 2006). The basis of this argument is predominantly the rejection of the connotations between collegiate participation and outsider research as posited by Elden and Chisholm (1993), where it is suggested that collegiate participation is often required by outsider research to support understanding of an organisation for that research to be useful to organisational members. This research is conducted from an insider perspective, therefore the researcher holds pre-existing intimate knowledge of the organisation. Supplementary reasons for the rejection of full participation are: (i) a question of whether participants who have not been trained as social science researchers could establish direct and trustworthy knowledge using social science methods (Elden and Chisholm 1993); (ii) that participants often do not want control and authorship over research (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Ledford Jr and Mohrman 1993); and (iii) that employee participation can wane during the research due to preconceived ideas or agendas (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Sense 2006) and as such, a

reduced level of participation from that of collegiate can assist in driving the research forward.

It is the intention of this research to make recommendations of the course(s) of action that the subject organisation can take to address any issues identified by the discussion. It is paramount that any interventions that are subsequently undertaken by the organisation are designed with the full collaboration of participants to aid the likelihood of success.

Pilot Research Methods

It was acknowledged earlier that the principal form of data gathering for this research was to be qualitative. In order to give that qualitative work an informed direction, a survey was composed and distributed across the organisation that sought to elicit initial and holistic data from participants about empowerment and their related experiences. Surveys "have their place as one method, of most value when used in tandem with other methods" (Gillham 2000: 1), and as such, questionnaires can be supported by qualitative methods to develop key themes (Bourque and Fielder 2003; Gillham 2000).

The preliminary literature mapping, together with the conceptual framework (see 'Appendix 1 – Conceptual Framework') allowed for the derivation of survey questions that were posed to participants; these are detailed in 'Appendix 2 – Pilot Data Gathering: Survey Questions'. The answers to these questions were recorded by participants on a Likert scale to offer reliability and a rough ordering of attitudes (Oppenheim 2005).

The organisation granted access to eighty individuals across three key indirect sub-functions of the subject organisation, all that operate within, or support, the sales and maintenance of products. Of these respondents, fifty-two were employees and twenty-eight were management.

The results of the survey fulfilled the requirement in providing foundational knowledge of the experiences of empowerment within the organisation. From

here, the principal research could then commence, with the survey acting as a compass to give the principal research direction.

Principal Research Methods

The research is orientated towards understanding and illuminating the experiences of participants. Much existing research into empowerment has been undertaken from a positivist, quantitative perspective (e.g. Hanaysha 2016; Zhang and Geng 2019; Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Men and Stacks 2013), including seminal work by Spreitzer (1995, 1996); notable exceptions are those of Foster-Fishman *et al.* (1998) and Arnold *et al.* (2000). As discussed earlier however, empowerment is argued by scholars to be composed of structural and psychological constituents, therefore any positivist, quantitative method alone is deemed by the researcher to not be suitable to fully investigate and articulate the perceptions, experiences, and more importantly, the reasons of why participants perceive empowerment in the way that they do.

The premise of hermeneutic phenomenological research is focussed on establishing meaning and truth (Flood 2010) by understanding, and thus describing (i) lived experiences (Laverty 2003), and (ii) the essences of those socially-situated experiences (Wilkinson 1998; Gibson 2004). Enablers of this understanding are focus groups and interviews, both of which were utilised in data collection. Focus groups have become more popular recently, and especially in social studies (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Wilkinson 1998; Bryman 2004). Their use forms a key role in qualitative data collection, permitting a researcher to understand individuals within their contexts (Wilkinson 1998) to "elicit opinions, attitudes and beliefs held by members of a group" (Myers 2009: 125). That focus groups encourage a variety of viewpoints to surface (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) allows the researcher to determine themes and discourses that are present within the group (Palmer *et al.* 2010; Wang *et al.* 1998), potentially leading to more personal disclosure than that from an individual interview (Wilkinson, cited in Smith 2004).

Interviewing is an oft-employed method associated with hermeneutic research (Walker 2011), and they are commonly regarded as one of the most important data gathering methods in business-orientated research (Myers 2009). Interviewing is a dynamic process that, through social interaction and co-construction, allows the researcher and participant to generate knowledge (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015), comparable to the interviewer-traveller metaphor utilised by Kvale (2007). Their use allows for the gathering of rich, primary data that adds credibility to qualitative work (Myers 2009), whilst seeking 'to understand the meaning of central themes of the subjects' lived world" (Kvale 2007: 11).

The relationship between interviews and focus groups is complimentary, as stated by Fusch and Ness (2015), with the authors suggesting that the two methods can work well together to explore phenomenon in a short space of time. This latter point is especially pertinent to the context of this research. As has been discussed, the subject organisation is undergoing a transformation, of which downsizing is a notable constituent. Access to participants was then clearly required to be as time-efficient as possible. As such, focus groups and interviews were undertaken as follows: senior management were offered interviews, whilst employee participants were asked to attend focus groups. Interviews as the method of choice for senior management data gathering brought time efficiencies that potentially swayed further senior managers in participating. Where focus groups required a timeslot that is convenient for all participants, finding the same for senior management was a material challenge, especially for research that was viewed as a luxury as opposed to business critical. Thirty-minute individual interviews allowed for focussed and effective conversation, with management's attention held due to the comparatively short drain on their time resource and direct questioning. Employees were conversely not as restricted by calendar availability, but rather by task. As such, to ensure time efficiency, employees were offered focus group settings; where employees did have constraints on time and could not attend planned focus group sessions, yet stated they wished to participate in the research, they were offered individual interviews, as the greater the number of participants, the richer the data gathered.

Sample Size

For the principal research, the original sample size from the three sub-functions that were engaged in the pilot data gathering was reduced to specifically one. The reason for this reduction was primarily due to the nature of the PAR framework. There are few processes and approaches that the three sub-functions share, and as such, there is limited scope to identify a change that could be implemented and that can immediately translate across each of those sub-functions. As the researcher has a role currently positioned within one sub-function, there is more opportunity to utilise existing networks and influence to identify and then pursue the implementation of an intervention, if necessary. Such intervention will also be quicker to effect, with a smaller number of stakeholder approvals required than if all three sub-functions were also included. Table 1 details the sample from that sub-function and the method adopted,

Instance	Format	Organisational Position	Number of Participants
1	Interview	Employee	1
2	Focus Group	Employee	7
3	Focus Group	Employee	2
4	Interview	Senior Manager	1
5	Focus Group	Employee	7
6	Focus Group	Manager	2
7	Interview	Senior Manager	1
8	Interview	Senior Manager	1
9	Focus Group	Employee	3
10	Interview	Manager	1
11	Interview	Senior Manager	1
		Total	27

Table 1 - Method and Number of Participants

As highlighted earlier, the premise of the pilot data gathering work was to build a foundation of knowledge prior to progressing onto the substantive qualitative research that forms this thesis. The results of the pilot data gathering gave much information in respect of early perceptions of empowerment of participants. Following the thoughts of Lincoln (1990), who recommends that research questions "must emerge as salient issues emerge from research respondents and participants" (Lincoln 1990: 78), this early data, together with the conceptual framework, helped to generate the following questions that were posed by the researcher, acting as the facilitator, to initiate, and indeed move on where necessary, conversation in qualitative focus groups and semi-structed interviews:

- What do participants understand 'Empowerment' to mean?
- Do participants feel they have the authority and autonomy to fulfil their roles, and how?
- Do managers have trust issues and if so, why?
- How do people feel that indirect and direct reporting lines affect their abilities to (i) make decisions, and (ii) exercise freedom in enacting those decisions?

Preliminary Thematic Analysis

In contrast to traditional approaches in respect of transcription of qualitative data (Kvale 2007; Davidson 2009; Hammersley 2010; Byrne 2001; Halcomb and Davidson 2006; Flood 2010; Laverty 2003; McAuley 2004), audio recordings of interviews and focus groups were used to facilitate a predominantly memoing approach, as opposed to transcription and coding, to maintain context and clarity (Birks *et al.* 2008). The memoing technique adopted directed the researcher to listen repeatedly to the audio recordings and to take notes and quotes from each and every listen. This allowed the researcher to be immersed in the data, and to maintain the context of those notes and quotes, e.g. intonations, as opposed to the exclusive transcription which was argued to potentially remove the researcher from that immersion.

These memos were then thematically analysed using the recommended approach from Braun and Clarke (2012). This process was complemented by the Thematic Networks method suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001), where memos were cut and randomly organised to remove data hierarchy, and then clustered in common threads. The search for themes was then, as Attride-Stirling (2001) recommends, made more comprehensive by determining local themes, which evolved into organising and then finally global themes.

The question of what was understood by the term 'Empowerment' consolidated the views captured within the pilot data gathering in that individuals often referred quickly to the ability to make decisions and feeling able to complete tasks within the best interests of the organisation. As such, a definition of empowerment in the context of the subject organisation was derived as: "*the ability to make and be accountable for decisions to effectively fulfil one's task and role within one's levels of experience and formal guidelines*". This definition aligned to a variety of descriptions of empowerment that had been identified by the initial literature review, drawing on work from Spreitzer (1995), Erstad (1997), Potterfield (1999), Forrester (2000), Smith (2003), and Rappaport (1981).

A valuable part of this research was the investigation into the effect that a matrix structure had on employees. It was a preconception of the researcher, being an insider of the organisation and acknowledged due to the Heideggerian phenomenological methodology adopted, that a matrix hierarchy had a negative effect on employees' ability to exercise self-determination, a core tenet of empowerment (Spreitzer 1995, 1996). It was believed to in fact cause undesirable conflict to occur.

From the experiences collected, and in respect of the effect on self-determination, a large proportion of participants stated that the direct and indirect nature of their reporting lines worked well and had little negative effect; this was contrary to the researcher's initial positionality. In undertaking tasks within the organisation, the researcher had first-hand experience of the effect of matrices limiting their ability to act with pace. The data proffered by

participants suggested that this experience was in the minority and was not of a regular occurrence.

An emergent theme that arose however, was that of conflict. Participants (of both managerial and employee status) concurred that conflict often manifested, with some highlighting the confrontational language commonly used by leaders as having a detrimental effect upon their ability to fulfil their roles. This is in line with Teasley and Ready (1981) who suggest that matrix organisations almost urge managers to contest for power.

The following 'Findings' and 'Discussion' sections will focus this research upon the emergent and material themes that were established during the preliminary thematic analysis but not explored at that point. These themes, at initial understanding, offer rich potential to understand key elements of participant experiences that will give clear insight to any factors that affect their empowerment.

In response to critique of qualitative research, and in a desire to ensure trustworthiness in accordance with Guba and Lincoln's (1982) criteria, a variation of member-checking was employed throughout the data gathering stages of this work, to seek clarification within the context of the provision of that data by participants. Points of understanding related to comments, opinions and experiences were verified and confirmed with participants throughout the data gathering, with the researcher, and indeed other participants, engaging in probing questions (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) to seek that depth of understanding, as recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015).

Koch (1993) posits that dependability of research can be enhanced by engagement in member checking, hermeneutic circle satisfaction, and also reflexivity. Guba and Lincoln (1982) also suggest not only reflexivity but additionally triangulation of data. Although this latter point is seemingly contradictive of the constructionist paradigm, it can be adopted to highlight multiple constructions of reality (Seale 2003). Scholars (see Kaplan and

Maxwell 2005; Lather 1986; Flick 2002; Suter 2012; Fusch and Ness 2015) advocate the use of triangulation where data from multiple sources, methods, and individuals adds to the quality of the research. In this work, findings from the surveys undertaken in the pilot work have been brought into the discussion of data gathered from diverse focus groups and interviews within this research to assist in triangulation of data. To assist in transparency, a sample of interview transcription is provided in 'Appendix 3 – Example of Interview Transcription (Focus Group Instance 2)', whilst 'Appendix 4 – Thematic Analysis' documents the process of thematic analysis through photographs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues have been considered throughout this work, including through the preliminary thematic analysis; the nature of the research has also helped to reduce manifestation of many. A notable issue however did arise during the pilot data gathering which is worthy of mention.

Immediately after the release of the survey to respondents, an ethical issue arose that reflected the concerns of what was originally only one senior manager respondent. That manager suggested that the survey questions in the preliminary data gathering phase had the unintentional effect of acting as a pseudo-assessment of that individual's managerial ability. Addressing this well-founded criticism, survey questions were rewritten and a greater sample of senior managers were recruited as participants in order to add to the anonymity that had been committed to through the associated Participant Information and Consent Form.

A further issue that arose prior to the commencement of the principal data gathering was related to the third question that was to be asked by the researcher in those sessions. This question was originally as follows:

- Do managers have trust issues and if so, why?

In asking this potential question, it was deemed by the researcher that it could unnecessarily influence participants, and as such it was against Chan *et al.*'s (2013) guidance that "the researcher must ask focussing but not leading questions about their situation and listen carefully to the participants" (Chan *et al.* 2013: 5). The inference of such language may have directed discussion immediately onto the assumption that managers do indeed have trust issues. As such, the question was modified before the interviews and focus groups commenced to the following, which was deemed more neutral but still investigative:

- What are your experiences of trust between managers and employees?

Such a question aimed to remove the subjectivity, and enable participants to answer from their own experiences, whether that be as managers or employees, without leading conversation.

At the time of writing, no further ethical issues have materialised. It is however important to note that the guiding ethos of any interpretive research is, as recommended by Benner (1994), to remain true to the voices of participants. As such, there may be instances where the previously-recognised preconceptions of the researcher may be challenged, and thus more that are emergent may need to acknowledged. In order to maintain ethical robustness in this respect, questions as proposed by Benner (1994) will be asked by the researcher *of* the researcher throughout the remainder of this work: (i) what is now known or seen that was not expected or understood before analysis began; and (ii) have any held preconceptions been challenged, extended, of reversed?

These simple, yet important questions will aid the researcher to maintain as strong an ethical position as possible during subsequent discussion and analysis, and act as a virtual check to ensure that if these questions are not answered positively, then further immersion in the data is required; it is not reasonable nor logical to expect that there is nothing of value to be learnt from conducting this research.

Findings

A Brief Summary of the Previous Themes

The preliminary thematic analysis found that participants were united in their view that empowerment was understood as having the ability to make and execute decisions in the best interests of the organisation. This resulted in the establishment of a definition of empowerment specific to this research of "*the ability to make and be accountable for decisions to effectively fulfil one's task and role within one's levels of experience and formal guidelines*".

One of the original elements of this research is the context of the inquiry, not only in an aerospace organisation currently in the midst of a large-scale transformation exercise, but also the hierarchical, *matrix* structure of this organisation. As such, how participants found direct and indirect reporting lines affected their ability to make and implement decisions in their roles was investigated through the pilot data gathering. The results of the question showed that the majority of participants felt that operating in a matrix structure did not negatively impact their ability to make and execute decisions. The participants did however offer data that identified conflict, manifesting because of those matrix reporting lines, as an issue that often made their fulfilment of their roles more difficult.

The following findings and associated discussion utilise the data gathered by the principal research methods to determine *key*, material themes, and also supplementary further themes that have emerged through thematic analysis, evidenced by relevant excerpts from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews. They are not discrete; the themes that follow overlap with one or more others and as such, the discussion moves from one to another swiftly to paint an absorbing picture of the organisation. Following the identification of the themes is a return to prominent literature reviewed earlier in this work to aid the discussion.

In order to maintain clarity on the positionality of the researcher in respect of this phenomenological investigation, the researcher declares that no specific biases or further preconceptions were held in relation to any of the themes that shall be discussed. These themes emerged only through the thematic analysis that was conducted post-fieldwork and as such, the researcher did not hold any other opinions than those previously highlighted that could have biased (i) the data being gathered, or (ii) the positionality of the researcher, whilst undertaking the thematic analysis.

Key Themes

Key Theme 1 – A Lack of Trust Is Preventing Employees from Fulfilling Their Roles

Though the original position of this research was an investigation into empowerment and its specific constructs of self-determination and formal power, an issue has emerged through the data that holds significance for the remainder of this work. That issue, *trust*, materialised almost immediately in each discussion with participants, where the original investigative question of what each participant understood empowerment to be was answered in the main as the ability to make decisions; this then triggered conversation between participants on whether those participants were *able* to make decisions. Trust, it appears, had much involvement with this aspect, and other themes that were subsequently raised seemingly return to this concept with links and overlaps.

There is a Lack of Trust

Participants from all instances of the focus groups and interviews stated that trust within the organisation had deteriorated during the period of transformation to date. The nature of this worsening of trust seemed originally limited to the perceived lack of clarity given to participants by the organisation for day-to-day operation, where one participant stated that

> "trust has got worse through transformation because the guidelines aren't clear so we're having to get more and more checked all the time" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 5).

This rather specific position was not necessarily corroborated by other participants overtly in the opening minutes of trust discussion, but it did receive much support later in the sessions. That "trust is bad in the business" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 9) was echoed by senior management, and it is initially where this in-depth discussion on trust within the organisation shall commence.

Whilst senior management recognised that trust was a difficult concept to consider and to talk about, it did state that the organisation is on a "trust journey where that trust has not been there historically" (Interview Instance 11). Senior management participants were united in articulating a desire for a trusting working environment, acknowledging that leaders play a fundamental part in helping to create that environment. One senior manager discussed the issue of trust in detail, and referenced both a required organisational culture shift, as well as leadership behaviour changes to drive to a more trusting business. In respect of the former, this senior manager cited the belief that trust and culture are inherently linked, and that

> "it [trust] takes a long time to build, which is why it's challenging, takes some time for culture to change, but then it can be broken and eradicated extremely quickly, in a very damaging way, over a very small interaction" (Interview Instance 4).

There was much emphasis on time as an overarching influential variable from senior management, where in all instances, participants highlighted how trust takes a substantial amount of time to build. In Interview Instance 4, the senior manager suggested that leaders must

> "build trust, empower people, to make the right judgements, when they're sat in a set of circumstances that face them" (Interview Instance 4).

That same leader, however, then also stated that though the desire is there from the board of the organisation through to senior management, the time to undertake such actions and to build relationships was not readily available in the organisation, especially with transformation target commitments having been made to the markets:

> "you often need some time together, to get to know one another…to get alignment, because I think for trust to really be absolute you need to understand each other, and that requires time" (Interview Instance 4).

The position of employees was clear and unambiguous in terms of not feeling trusted; clarity however was required to determine what the source of that perceived lack of trust was. Probing further, it was initially established that the perception of a lack of trust was primarily driven by the overarching sub-function, as opposed to direct managers. Employee participants suggested that "I don't feel trusted functionally, but I do through the task" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2), with one senior manager recognising that the "general perception is that the [sub-] function does not trust its members" (Interview Instance 8); this is specifically investigated in more detail shortly in the next subsection. The most common thread that developed through the sessions however was related to direct management. Although a very small number of participants (two) suggested that they were currently trusted by their immediate managers (Interview Instances 1 and 8), the remainder were clear and robust in conveying that they did *not* feel trusted by their managers, in existing or previous roles, and thus the organisation at large:

> "my current manager definitely makes me feel trusted, and empowered; other roles I've had? Not so much" (Interview Instance 1).

The perceived relationship between empowerment and trust began to reappear here, coming into focus through continued conversation. Senior management (Interview Instance 8) and employees (Interview Instance 1; all Participants, Focus Group Instance 2) stated that trust was inherently linked with feeling empowered. Interestingly, middle managers argued against this

perspective, positing that trust was not actually related to empowerment, and it was not necessarily the issue at hand during the organisational transformation:

> "trusted is the wrong word, empowerment is not about trust. Empowerment is about being able to deliver the task, what their [employees'] objective says " (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 6)

It shows a distinct disconnect then between at least the middle managers in this research and their team members/ direct employees. Whilst the importance of empowerment was recognised by employees, some participants suggested that they perceived trust as more important than empowerment within a working context where, for those employees, rules are accepted, but a lack of trust would not be (Focus Group Instance 2):

> "feeling unempowered, probably, I think is not as bad to me as feeling that someone doesn't trust me, although I know they go hand in hand a bit" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2).

Experiences of low managerial trust, low empowerment and low managerial support were suggested to be common and increasing (Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 5), leading to, as suggested in the above excerpt, negative emotional impacts on employees (Focus Group Instance 2). Continuing the discussion on trust, employees stated that as direct managers are inherently trusted by the organisation to lead teams, they must ensure that such trust flows down into their team and thus empower, as understood in the context of this work, individuals (Focus Group Instance 5; Interview Instance 1):

> "if they trust you to go out and do what they say, and you've agreed up front, and they'll sort of have your back, then that's what it means to me, I'll feel truly empowered" (Interview Instance 1).

Employees perceived that they were often trusted more by those outside of their sub-function than colleagues within the function. Trust was deemed to be earned by employees from intra-organisational customers external to the sub-function by those employees acting as, and being seen as, 'gatekeepers' (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 3; Interview Instance 1), upholding the relevant sub-function rules. In these circumstances, those customers would often demonstrate respect and trust in the guidance that employees would provide from their specialism, raising a sense of empowerment in those employees (Interview Instance 1):

> "they genuinely come to you because they are the experts in their field, but we are in ours, and knowing that she [the manager] trusts me, it gives me the confidence to give that guidance" (Interview Instance 1).

The ability to issue guidance and counsel external from their team, i.e. essentially being able to make decisions, was raised in depth across all participant sessions and led to a more intense investigation *between* many participants themselves, intra-focus groups. The desire for trust in the working environment was highlighted by one participant:

> "there needs to be that trust to enable you to make decisions in your level" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2).

Employees noticed that management would often pore over their output, commencing a cyclical approach of checking, amending, checking and amending again and again prior to approving (Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 9):

> "I don't think…that there's any trust without a check what's going out is right for management" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 2).

Should managerial trust be experienced by employees, then morale and confidence would increase, where that "trust just gives you that bit more confidence to go out and smash it" (Interview Instance 1). The lack of trust

from management commonly perceived by employees however was suggested to disenfranchise employees (Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 5), having a notable negative impact on those employees endeavouring to progress in their approach and thus their careers. Little to no trust was cited as reducing the opportunity to learn and be more productive (Focus Group Instance 2):

> "no trust means a lack of opportunity to be better. Not being trusted takes away my opportunity to do something better, to be better, to learn more and create something that could be quite good" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

This sentiment was echoed often by employees in the focus groups, where some suggested that the lack of trust coupled with the perceived-as-unnecessary amendments and countless corrections made by management to employee outputs, meant that employees often questioned their ability to add value to tasks or whether they were just 'handle-turners' (Focus Group Instance 9, Focus Group Instance 2, Focus Group Instance 3):

> "it self-perpetuates as well, because if you don't feel trusted, then you feel demotivated, and you feel like you don't have any empowerment, then to your point [another participant] you just don't want to do anything" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2).

The dispiritedness served to repeatedly reduce semblances of empowerment that employees felt they may have initially had. Instead of acting with appropriate authority and self-determination, employees suggested that they would have to amend their usual approach to undertaking their roles to ensure that they catered for their respective managers and their associated lack of trust in them. One employee stated that "I was always feeling like I had to give updates, and minutes, to make sure that relationship was ok" (Interview Instance 1). The situation often affected the ability of the employee to act with pace, adding additional burden to each task. In some cases, the overt lack of trust resulted in employees not being able to fulfil their role to the best of their

ability due to uncertainty on what particular action they should follow through on:

> "you just get paralysed because you don't know what to do if you don't feel trusted" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2);

> "you can't be empowered because you're too frightened to do anything when you're not trusted" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 3).

Though many participants commented that the creation of an enduring trusting environment is the responsibility of employees, middle management and senior management (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 5), discussion often returned to the perceived lack of trust from all levels of management in employees. Participants proposed a key attribute of an ideal manager was the ability, and desire, to involve employees in their team in discussions, solution-seeking for problems, and general participation *as a team* (Focus Group Instance 2; Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 5; Interview Instance 4), though this was rarely seen:

> "there's an element of people being sort of in their own cocoon, no team ethic from managers that everyone is there to support each other" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 9).

This desired involvement sparked much further conversation between participants on why some managers did not create such an environment. Trust was argued to be subjective (Focus Group Instance 2), with examples of individual managerial protectionism being evidenced. The inclusive behaviour of a manager was deemed to dependant on personality and historical experiences (Participants 1 and 4, Focus Group Instance 2), where the variations in managerial trust and thus style caused participants to recall experiences of extremes:

> "one [manager] was probably more sort of, have no issue with me going off and seeing a customer, negotiating and come back. Others wanted

a tighter control over you and be involved in every discussion, jump in, take the lead…" (Interview Instance 1).

As discussed earlier, participants often felt a lack of ability to fulfil their roles in such a low trust-led working environment. The manner in which participants were ultimately affected by this environment was the perceived manifestation of limitations on their ability to make judgements and execute related decisions. Participants commonly stated that a managerial trust in employees' capability to make suitable and reasonable judgements was needed for them to be able to feel that they can contribute to the success of the organisation (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 2; Interview Instance 1; Interview Instance 4; Focus Group Instance 5):

"there's no trust in people to use their judgement to make decisions" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 2).

Employees Have Applicable Information and Should be Able to Use Their Judgement
Employee participants were keen during discussions to highlight their abilities and experience, and how they could add value to tasks in the organisation. This ability however was deemed to be hindered by an overly cumbersome and prescriptive set of processes, ones that were perceived to articulate the overt lack of trust in employees from management:

"It's so prescriptive. The issue is you don't get to use your judgement and if you don't use your judgement, you don't feel empowered. And that's where it [the organisation] falls down, everything is so prescriptive" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 2).

All participants in all sessions agreed that rules were definitively needed in the organisation, and that they served a strong purpose. All participants, whether employees, middle management, or senior management, echoed opinions that boundaries were very much necessary and helped to form the envelope of employee empowerment by indicating the limits of authorisations (Interview

Instance 11; Interview Instance 4; Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 6; Focus Group Instance 3; Interview Instance 7). Despite the opinion that they are often incorrectly blamed for the perceived lack of empowerment (Interview Instance 7), processes that convey those rules into working practices were however isolated as being cumbersome, inefficient, and obstructive to employees endeavouring to fulfil their roles, with participants arguing that they were inflexible, negative, and risk averse (Focus Group Instance 2).

Whilst it was suggested that governance through processes should serve the purpose to sufficiently guide without constraining individuals, detailing flexibility to operate within specific tramlines (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 6; Participant 2, Focus Group 3; Focus Group 2; Interview Instance 4; Interview Instance 11), robust feelings were held by participants, including senior management:

> "I think generally the perception is that we will put everything we possibly can into a process; we'll write a 50-page process because we don't trust that people can use their discretion or make their own decisions on it, so we have to be very, very prescriptive, and then when suddenly something happens that doesn't quite fit into that, everybody's scratching their heads and not knowing what to do about it" (Interview Instance 8).

The result of these processes, and the inherent lack of trust, was argued by employees to be an organisation that is typically inflexible, and slow to respond to different stimuli (Focus Group Instance 2). The feelings of some participants led to exasperation, where "you just feel like you're squished all the time" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2), as well as claims, some from first-hand experience, that other organisations were more driven to empower employees. The ability to make judgement calls, i.e. what decision making was colloquially referred to by participants, was deemed to be more available to employees in other businesses of similar scales in which those employees had previously worked, when compared to the subject organisation (Focus Group

2), where the individual was able to determine how much review was required for a particular task.

The behaviour of direct managers was suggested by employees to exacerbate perceived inabilities to exercise judgement. During negotiations that employees had led, often for several months if not years, management would undertake discussions with customers or suppliers that removed commercial leverage the employee had deliberately held on to; this would be perceived by employees as disempowering, with feelings of frustration and worthlessness (Focus Group 2; Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 5). Scenarios such as this would directly contribute to employees feeling a material imbalance in that they could not exercise their own judgement, whilst management, with an often cavalier attitude, could:

> "if you're managing commercial issues, and you're using your judgement and you're trying to do the best you can in terms of trading, holding out, keep some leverage, and you're doing that because you haven't got the empowerment to do anything else really. But then you send it up a level [i.e. to direct management], and they just give it all away because they have the ability to do that, but then that just completely undermines you and your position, and it undermines that ruling really and that level of decision making, because it says 'well, whatever you do, it's not really worth anything, because I'm going to give it away because I can'" (Participant 1, Focus Group 2).

In the majority of cases, participants commented, management would *close* the negotiations and thereby, whether consciously or not, take the plaudits for completing the transaction (Focus Group 7; Focus Group 2; Interview Instance 1). This would be despite the work undertaken by the employee, and the employee holding the in-depth knowledge of the deal:

> "he can do that [close negotiations], he's allowed to that, I'm not, even though all the information that he got to in order to make that decision came from me" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

The same frustrations arose from other participants, who consolidated this perspective of the employee holding more information due to being the individual that has owned the task, yet being neglected in decision making:

> "even though you're sometimes the least senior person in a decision, if you're the person that's actually done the work and got into the details, you can technically know more than them" (Participant 1, Focus Group 3).

Employees argued that management needed to show respect and confidence in individuals and their ability (Focus Group 3; Focus Group 5), where "your input and judgement needs to be valued by the organisation" (Participant 1, Focus Group 5); where "people trust your judgement when you say 'that's an accurate assessment of what's going on'" (Participant 2, Focus Group 3). One conversation between participants in Focus Group Instance 2 in respect of management closing negotiations was rich with strong feeling, where participants questioning each other helped perspectives and positions to come to the surface:

> "[in respect of why an employee did not make the decision] because he's allowed to make a judgment but we're not" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2)

> "So he could make a judgement based on exactly the same information, I would've got to the same point, now he didn't give it all away, and clearly there's a couple of things we got back, but I could've done that – I had all the information to do that!" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2)

> "So why didn't you do that? Was it because you didn't think that was the right thing to do, or was it because you didn't feel like you had the ability?" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2)

"Or were you told not to?" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2)

"I was told not to! So every time I went to him, same person, to ask for some give there if we get this, I was told 'no, hold the line'" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2)

"Which you wouldn't mind if you were told to hold the line because the tactic is going to be 'this, this and this and then we'll resolve it at the end'" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2).

That employees often had intimate knowledge to make reasonable judgement calls (Focus Group 9) was recognised by some senior management. One senior manager posited that they had much responsibility and accountability to ensure that employees understood the flexibility that they had to enable them to fulfil their roles, essentially the *empowerment* that those employees held:

"it's up to people like myself [senior and direct managers] to kind of convey that, yes the processes are there, but there is also limits that you can go outside of the processes and you won't be sacked, shot, hung for doing so, because you're making a sensible, rational decision outside of the process" (Interview Instance 8).

There is Self-Awareness and Pride
The belief in employees' ability to make reasonable judgement calls was stated to be very much dependent upon personalities of senior management (Focus Group Instance 5). Employees, however, suggested that their experience and their knowledge should count in senior management allowing them to utilise their ability because of a sense of self-awareness, and self-pride. Employees highlighted that mistakes and incorrect judgement calls are not deliberate (Interview Instance 10; Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 5), and as such trust between employees

and management requires recognition of self-discipline and self-awareness on *both* sides (Interview Instance 4):

> "you should be trusted enough to know, to recognise yourself when it's something that you're not comfortable with…and I think you do, you have that feeling of nagging doubt, or uncomfortableness, and it's just…it's the empowerment that rules how often that feeling occurs" (Participant 4, Focus Group Instance 2).

The self-awareness aspect was argued by some employees to be proven by their adoption of peer reviews for legal documents or specific actions (Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 5). Peer reviews act as a safety net of sorts for employees, where employees seek the review of a colleague to ensure that their output is logical and in accordance with organisational objectives. Self-awareness and professionalism meant, to employees, that there should be managerial trust in their abilities to 'do the right thing' and thus those employees should be empowered (Focus Group Instance 9):

> "We're all sensible people; if we're not sure about something, we will go and check, or if we're happy in our own minds that something is correct then we should be empowered to go ahead and do it" (Participant 5, Focus Group Instance 2).

The importance of being able to exercise judgement and thus empowerment was highlighted by employees as being material in helping to increase knowledge, and thus bettering judgement going forward. A lack of being able to apply reasonable judgement would prevent lessons being learned, meaning that individuals become more reliant on management:

> "If you don't give people empowerment, you don't teach them" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2);

> "If they just keep the rules just like this, then you won't learn, because you won't learn what good or bad judgement is, so any young officers

coming through will just get told 'write this, have it checked, go for approvals'" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2).

In respect of having the ability to make judgements, one employee interestingly commented that it was part of an overarching cycle, where making what are deemed by management as 'correct' judgements would serve to increase an employee's perception of being granted further empowerment and trust, and also act to provide feedback to the employee themselves on their ability:

> "It's very hard to know when you're getting it right. Empowerment is one of the only tangible things that can show you that you're getting it right, because you'll get more and more empowerment and trust" (Participant 2, Focus Group 3).

The exercise of judgement though can however mean there is a likelihood that sub-optimal decisions are made and executed. This brings further pressure challenges to the management/employee relationship, creating new obstacles to overcome.

Wrong Decisions are Not Necessarily Wrong, and Manager Support is Important

Senior management stated that decision making is imperative to a responsive organisation, and as such the ability has to be delegated to employees: "speed and action required means you have to devolve it to the people that are closest to the interactions and task" (Interview Instance 4). Any kind of decision making invariably brings forth the potential for those decisions to be incorrect, in this case against organisational objectives, however some employees suggested that the management's perceived reluctance to empower was driven by not only a fear of those sub-optimal decisions being made for the organisation, but more specifically, it being different, and not necessarily sub-optimal, from what the manager themselves would do i.e. simply a different interpretation (Interview Instance 8):

"What's 'wrong'? Is 'wrong' different? Or is 'wrong' *wrong*?" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2);

"Sometimes there isn't just one right answer, but just my own personal experience. Sometimes if you don't draw the same conclusion as somebody else has drawn then you're wrong and actually you're not" (Participant 4, Focus Group Instance 2).

Employees were united in discussing how judgements and decisions are point-in-time specific, based on evidence then available and forecasts. If those circumstances change, then "it's that context of assuming that if it doesn't go exactly as planned, it's wrong, which isn't necessarily true" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2). It was highlighted by a participant that when a 'wrong' decision is discovered, or there is a form of quality escape, "it becomes a witch hunt" (Interview Instance 10). The result is a quality investigation which seeks to determine the reason for the escape, but one that upon completion, raises barriers that reduce the ability of employees to fulfil their roles efficiently (Focus Group Instance 9). Investigations commonly lead to individuals fearing recriminations and thus becoming defensive (Interview Instance 10; Interview Instance 8), and this was suggested by senior management to stem from the original organisational culture of fear "where the wrong answer was unacceptable" (Interview Instance 11):

"Wrong decisions doesn't mean anyone will die! The result of a wrong decision here is not going to cause anything like that. Not to be flippant, but it is only money and we still are trying to do the right thing" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 9).

As discussed earlier, participants posited that being able to make decisions allows for experiential learning, where "if you make the wrong decision, you need to be supported, and let's learn from it" (Participant 1, Focus Group 9). Similarly, a senior manager stated "you learn more from failure, and actually it's ok to get things wrong, and it is all about judgements" (Interview Instance 11). To enable confidence in employees about decision making and to create

a trusting environment, participants suggested that managerial support and feedback is significant (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 5; Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 9; Interview Instance 4).

The availability of that managerial support allowed employees to feel confident in making decisions, where managers "protect the team" (Interview Instance 1), presumably against disproportionate criticisms stemming from quality investigations discussed earlier. Direct managers were urged by senior management to show a "leap of faith" (Interview Instance 4), and to have confidence that employees behave in the 'right' way for the benefit of the company, being "aligned to what the company wants to do" (Interview Instance 4):

> "I want the business to be in a position where they [management] trust people to do the right thing, because generally, there's no one here that really tries to do the wrong thing and I'd like to think that if there was then the company would deal with them very quickly and get rid of them" (Participant 2, Focus Group instance 9).

Whilst employees decried the low demonstrations of managerial support, some experiences of managers providing that support and encouragement were put forth, with one participant again referring to the potential recriminations in the organisation for 'wrong' decision making:

> "I didn't feel like I'd be hung out to dry, and that's really important for me to feel like I could do a good job, to trust the manager not to throw me under the bus" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

Some participants recognised that a number of managers show what employees termed 'pragmatism', i.e. where decisions may be delegated that are within the employee's competence, which is appreciated (Focus Group Instance 2), and others ensure that they do work *with* employees to aid understanding and development (Focus Group Instance 9), acting as "coaches and developers, not demanders" (Interview Instance 4):

"He'd coach and protect me, he wouldn't let me drown…he'd let me get close in order to learn, and he would never blame me" (Participant 2, Focus Group 3).

Relating trust to the ability to make decisions and thus fulfil their role, in respect of the positive support that their immediate and current manager provides, an employee stated that:

"once you gain her trust and she knows you're capable, she'll just let you go and she'll let you act in the capacity" (Interview Instance 1).

These manager experiences echoed with the comments of senior management. The consensus of that sample in respect of being a 'good' manager was that support is crucial, where autonomy has to be developed by sharing the ability to exercise judgement (Interview Instance 8; Interview Instance 11), giving employees "the freedom to act, to be at their best, and being at their best means supporting them to make decisions" (Interview Instance 11).

Why is There Trust in Some But Not Others?
Discussion from employee participants raised the perceived imbalance of the trust conferred by management on some sections of the employee population and not others. Whilst senior managers stated that they trusted their team irrespective of where they had come from (Interview Instance 8; Interview Instance 7; Interview Instance 11; Interview Instance 4), other employees suggested that trust, and thus empowerment, was bestowed upon job title as opposed to actual experience (Focus Group Instance 9; Focus Group Instance 3), where there was also the perception of greater trust in those who had come from external organisations into roles rather than those that had risen through the ranks internally (Focus Group Instance 9):

"what's the difference between a what a [sub-function] manager and a [sub-function] officer can do? Trust is simply based on job title" (Participant 1, Focus Group 3).

Other employees shared similar perspectives, and referred to the availability of managerial roles as an obstacle to gaining organisational trust, where the trust was, as stated above, predicated on job title. The frustration in that respect was clear in the comments of employees, where those employees felt they were already performing in a managerial capacity:

"we're there in everything but title, because those roles aren't available yet we're doing the work!" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 9).

It was also suggested by employee participants that trust is not only inherently driven by personalities (Focus Group Instance 2; Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 5), but also by first impressions that managers get of employees (Focus Group Instance 3). The participant perceptions of this aspect of managerial behaviour will be explored in more detail later.

Key Theme 2 – Senior Management Believes it Empowers, but Employees Need to Do More

Senior Management is Empowering

A smaller, yet still important theme emerging from the data was that in respect of senior management perceptions of empowerment in relation to their teams, specifically whether they felt they did empower their teams or not. The resounding response from those senior managers was that they did (Interview Instance 4; Interview Instance 7; Interview Instance 8; Interview Instance 11). It was interesting to note however that responses from one senior manager suggested that the ability to empower employees was constrained not only by budget and financial viability, but also by corporate governance requirements (Interview Instance 7). In a period of transformation such as this however, that manager continued, the business cannot afford to do anything else but ensure that organisational members are enabled and empowered as there are fewer people to do the work (Interview Instance 11).

Another senior manager went into their perspective in much detail, and acknowledged where the organisational culture was originally situated. That manager commented that the organisation was moving from an "old world, a command and control, bureaucracy-driven" (Interview Instance 11) culture, where many barriers existed that prevented employees from fulfilling their role as best as they could:

> "it's been too much at [the organisation], of command and control, 'I'm going to manage you!'" (Interview Instance 11).

Empowerment was described as a form of new-age leadership, a "modern way of running an organisation" (Interview Instance 11), and this senior manager emphasised that they actively sought to empower their team to increase the autonomy that those individuals had:

> "I have been quite deliberate in trying to empower my direct team, and give them accountability" (Interview Instance 11).

Though, as evidenced above, the senior manager stated they had engaged in delegation of formal power, i.e. the grant of decision making to their team, they had the perception through interactions with lower echelon staff that such delegation seemed not to be cascading through the middle management layer to employees:

> "I do see an issue with flow-down of desired behaviours from the top to the bottom of the organisation, but there's something that's blocking it" (Interview Instance 11).

The term 'muddle' was used by the manager to describe a layer of middle management that was driven by process ownership and pseudo-authority generated through it. That muddle was suggested to be very much positioned in the command and control culture, where such an outlook constrains employees from performing to their best ability due to fear of reprisal (Interview

Instance 11). Citing experiences where discussions with employees had demonstrated their desire to have greater self-determination, the senior manager suggested that:

> "top down and bottom up need to meet, and focus is needed on middle management" (Interview Instance 11).

Employee opinions seemed to offer support for the senior manager's statements. Autonomy was considered as being much better in some other organisational areas (Focus Group Instance 9), and when employees were asked the question of whether they feel they have the authority and autonomy to fulfil their roles, all save two employee participants replied in the negative:

> "we're really good at having the autonomy to come up with ideas with the customer, but for me, the hardest bit is always the internal struggle" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 9).

One of the two participants that suggested they did indeed have autonomy had previously commented that their manager in their current role trusted them to pursue the completion of tasks with their own judgement (Interview Instance 1); the second of those participants stated that they acted to seek autonomy themselves, by "pushing and challenging, with respect, what the boundaries were" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 3). This issue of employees actively seeking empowerment and delegation was not discussed by any other employee in the sample; it was, however, cited by many senior managers.

Empowerment Needs to also be Pulled, Not Just Pushed
Whilst senior managers see "a real desire at all levels for ownership and empowerment" (Interview Instance 11), employees need to do more, in the opinions of senior management, to *pull* empowerment from management, challenging the status quo (Interview Instance 8; Interview Instance 7; Interview Instance 4) and not simply waiting for it to be 'granted':

"they're the people [employees] that are using them [the processes] day to day, so they're the ones with the experience of where it's not working or they see a particular area where it could be less prescriptive, because that's how it needs to be for us to do our jobs properly" (Interview Instance 8).

In order to pull that empowerment from managers, employees need to engage in a change of mindset and style (Interview Instance 4), showing greater confidence (Interview Instance 11) and proposing new ideas (Interview Instance 4; Interview Instance 8). It was however interesting to note a powerful question that one senior manager posed in respect of employees and empowerment:

"Do people actually want it?" (Interview Instance 7).

This position was explained further by the senior manager, where, in their opinion, the opportunities for employees to seize empowerment and make it their own were available but often overlooked. The manager suggested that employees lacked the mindset to take advantage of the availability, to own an issue and be accountable for it, and instead sought the comfort of *not* having to make complex decisions, deferring repeatedly to direct management (Interview Instance 11); this senior manager talked, they said, from first-hand experience. Other managers commented in a similar fashion. It was suggested that these such approaches from employees are personality-driven, where some may grab any opportunity, whilst other individuals may not want any level of empowerment (Focus Group Instance 6). Another senior manager suggested that employees may indeed be reluctant to positively exploit openings but more because those employees may have a perceived fear of reprimand as opposed to a lack of desire (Interview Instance 10). The overarching feeling of management however was that all employees are in fact already empowered to a certain extent already, and this is not always realised:

"we are more empowered than we realise, or trust in ourselves" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 6).

Employee participants gave some corroborating perspectives to those of senior management. Over-empowerment, where empowerment levels were above and beyond the self-perceived skillset of the employee, was considered as contributing to a feeling of vulnerability, where nerves would inhibit clear thinking (Focus Group Instance 3), leading to being like a "deer in the headlights" (Participant 5, Focus Group 2). The support network for empowerment, argued one senior manager, is however there for employees but, and critically, only where those employees make it known that they require that support (Interview Instance 7).

Key Theme 3 – Approvals are Barriers to Fulfilling Roles
There Are Too Many Approvals
Approvals in the context of this research refers to the necessary approval from subject matter experts or hierarchical managers that are mandated by policies and processes in the subject organisation. Linking in then to the previous sub-themes related to trust and judgements, where all participants had acknowledged that rules, frameworks, processes and governance were always required, approvals as a topic was discussed by many participants, and consistently from a negative standpoint.

Despite this acknowledgement, it was interesting to note that participants, specifically employees and middle managers rather than senior management, suggested collective frustration at approvals required for them to undertake a particular action (Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 9; Interview Instance 10; Interview Instance 1), where it was felt that those approvals acted as 'blockers' to empowerment (Focus Group Instance 6). It was perceived by some employees as especially galling when they would have to seek approvals even though they as owners of the task knew most about it, and would appreciate the ability to exercise reasonable, independent judgement (Focus Group Instance 2; Interview Instance 10).

Employees felt that existing processes required them to seek an ever-increasing number of approvals, and that governance necessities meant that

there were too many obstacles to overcome to make a real change; they thus held a perspective that "approvals have gone backwards" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 9). Seeking those mandated approvals would invariably lead to the need to 'negotiate internally', where a specific course of action may have been discussed and agreed in a preliminary fashion with a customer or supplier in a fairly straightforward manner, but acquiring internal approvals before the formal agreement would be challenging (Focus Group Instance 5). In many circumstances similar to this, even though the employee perception was that managers are empowered to make decisions (Focus Group Instance 5), employees would find that they would be instructed to seek additional approvers to whom those original managers would defer their decisions, ones that in all likelihood were not actually required as part of the process requirements (Focus Group Instance 5). Many time-consuming amendments enforced by approvers would also end up appearing stylistic to employees as opposed to changes that really added some level of value to the task (Focus Group Instance 9):

> "because of how we're organised, as a company…I'm governed by so many approval loops, and many of those approvals are stylistic" (Interview Instance 10).

When seeking approvals, participants would often be asked to explain the context of the intended action. Often, employees suggested, this was acceptable however in what was perceived to be an equal proportion of instances, this explanation would be to an approver who had little knowledge of the general approach to the task and thus the participant would have to commence explanation at the very beginning of the issue:

> "a half hour meeting for me to justify what I've done is right, when they think I've missed something or made a mistake. It's a waste of time when I know I've done it right, it slows it down." (Interview Instance 10).

A notable further bone of contention with approvals raised by employees was the number of *pseudo-approvals* that they were required to gain. It was

suggested by employees that too many individuals within the function, and indeed the organisation, seemingly have a say in the decision making processes: it was perceived that the majority of these individuals have loud voices but are not mandated as an 'approver' by the processes (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 9; Focus Group Instance 2). In these circumstances, decisions would be made by committee (Focus Group Instance 9), with many individuals perceived to be challenging simply to have a say (Focus Group Instance 3). Those challenges slow the pace of the task down at a time where responsiveness is critical, giving a podium to those individuals who could halt progress but that are not aware of the intricacies of the situation (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 9).

Seeking approvals from some managers was said to be a good, learning process whereas for other managers it was painful "verging on pointless" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2). Where managers work with employees, it helps to improve the individual (Focus Group Instance 9), though this was said by employees to be a rarity. Often, negative responses are expected when approaching management for approval for a particular task, though because it appears seemingly subjective it can change day-to-day (Focus Group Instance 2). The reason proffered by employees for this naturally-negative position perceived to be taken by managers was in essence the same as that given by management when discussing the reluctance of some employees from seizing empowerment and thus accountability:

> "people don't want things to come back and bite them" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 9).

Senior management briefly considered the approvals requirement across the various processes that are employed by the sub-function. It was put forward by one senior manager that leaders, like them, should be actively identifying and removing barriers to employees fulfilling their roles to the best of their ability (Interview Instance 4). Transformation, suggested another senior

manager, is intending on moving the culture from that of 'stakeholders' i.e. those with voices, to a clear and concise approval framework.

In summary, the perceived result of these issues relating to approvals was succinctly encapsulated by one employee, who was audibly and visibly frustrated when stating:

> "I find myself using the phrase a lot more often that I'm just going to ask for forgiveness rather than permission, firstly because I don't know what permissions I'm asking for, and secondly because the answer's probably going to be 'no' but I don't think rules that have formed that 'no' are clear enough to say it's a 'no', it's all too subjective" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

Further Themes

The themes cited below emerged through the preliminary thematic analysis, and interconnected with the key themes discussed earlier. They are considered smaller themes as participants did not collectively dwell on each, unlike the key themes. As such, the following discussion is brief, however they remain pertinent to this research to provide a more contextual, richer, and holistic picture of the experiences of participants.

Theme 1 - Clarity is Fundamental

A lack of clarity was suggested by participants to be an antecedent of a poor trusting working relationship (Focus Group Instance 2) and this had been exacerbated by the transformation activities currently taking place. Transformation had confused many employee participants, where changes of role together with downsizing had meant that many of the original processes and policies were outdated, and accountabilities were blurred (Interview Instance 1; Focus Group Instance 2; Focus Group Instance 9). The result of this circumstance was the feeling of employees that they needed to repeatedly check their output and approach management for guidance, as there was a perceived fear of making a mistake:

"you struggle a bit without having that information and clarity around you to make those good decisions" (Participant 4, Focus Group Instance 2).

This felt need of having to seek management approval was deemed by employee participants to be disempowering, preventing those same employees from exercising any empowerment that they actually did hold, and often leading to instances where they would actively seek alternatives to circumvent the obstacles (Focus Group Instance 2).

The issue of clarity was recognised by one senior manager. That manager suggested that when clarity on roles and accountabilities is not available, employees will have no other choice but to be risk averse and seek management out to approve (Interview Instance 11):

"historically people didn't have clarity on accountability, so the natural thing is, when you haven't got clarity or a culture of empowerment, people always look up, and that's why you have instances of twenty signatures and not two" (Interview Instance 11).

Senior management said it is actively endeavouring to provide clear guidance to employees, but it understood the frustration that employees would be feeling when attempting to fulfil their roles but arriving at obstacles:

"frustration manifests because people on ground are hearing message of simplification and empowerment but not seeing it happen" (Interview Instance 11).

Theme 2 – Information is Not Shared Purposely to Maintain Control

A smaller theme that emerged from employee participant discussions was that of information being shared between colleagues, predominantly between management and employee levels. Employee participants collectively agreed that information and learning needs to be shared not only in order for the

organisation, and thus individuals, to keep improving (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 6; Focus Group Instance 9; Focus Group Instance 2; Interview Instance 1; Interview Instance 10), but also for the most informed decisions to be made:

> "because we have so many complex relationships and so many people involved, you struggle to not know the whole information to make those decisions" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2).

Previous experiences were suggested to affect an individual's ability and/or desire to trust (Focus Group Instance 2), with again the idea of 'fear' providing a constraint to that sharing, in this case that fear being where the information receiver may use that information 'incorrectly' or 'wrongly' (Focus Group Instance 2):

> "they've trusted people in the past and they've disseminated information, but then those people have gone and made the wrong decisions " (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

In this circumstance, the employee participant continued, such an experience has led to those original trustors retreating from an open, sharing relationship. Other reasons given by employees for a reluctance to share were personalities, and also the desire to maintain a level of control. It was suggested that a sense of control over others appeals to some individuals, where it acts as a 'power play':

> "control is power, power to them, and it's their importance" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2);

> "It's their empire" (Participant 4, Focus Group Instance 2).

Trust was however said to function both ways and as such, management and other employees should trust each other to utilise information appropriately:

"trusting both ways isn't it? It's you trusting the person you're going to and them trusting you to be responsible with the information they're giving you because if they keep you on a leash by not giving you that information you're going to have to keep coming back" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

Theme 3 - Pace is a Problem

Pace was a topic discussed by all participants, especially when referenced with downsizing activities. That "every process is too onerous to fulfil your role and nothing can be done at pace" (Participant 3, Focus Group 2) was previously discussed, however the issue returned during discussions of other themes. Frustration was conveyed by employees that a variety of obstacles and ever-increasing additional requirements has led to a circumstance where tasks that were originally a day long now took weeks (Focus Group Instance 9) with little ability to use judgement (Focus Group Instance 2), and in the current transformation, working at pace was vital (Focus Group Instance 6; Individual Interview Instance 11; Individual Instance 4; Focus Group Instance 2). When questioned whether employee participants had the ability to fulfil their roles, one participant articulated the perceived issue, with others in that specific group enthusiastically agreeing:

"we can fulfil our roles, because we do, we do it, we get to an end point, but it is painful, and it is slow, and it is driven by a million roadblocks, and a million restrictions, that's how it feels. So we can obviously do our jobs because we do them, we get contracts signed, we do it, but to fulfil our roles to the best of our ability and to be able to act at pace, then I would say 'no'" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2).

A summary of the key themes and further themes is shown in Figure 1 as follows.

STRUCTURAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL	STRUCTURAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL	STRUCTURAL
Senior management is empowering	*Empowerment needs to also be pulled, not just pushed*	*There are too many approvals*

EMPOWERMENT CONSTRUCT

SUB THEMES

Senior management believes it empowers, but employees need to do more

Approvals are barriers to fulfilling roles

KEY THEMES

A lack of trust is preventing employees from fulfilling their roles

SUB THEMES

There is a lack of trust	*Employees have applicable information and should be able to use their judgement*	*There is self-awareness and pride*	*Wrong decisions are not necessarily wrong, and manager support is important*	*Why is there trust in some but not others?*
PSYCHOLOGICAL	STRUCTURAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL

EMPOWERMENT CONSTRUCT

Figure 1 - Summary of Key and Sub Themes, with Reference to the Relevant Empowerment Construct

Discussion

Employee Empowerment Through Self-Determination

The Constraining Effect of Organisational Trust and Control

The emergence of trust as an issue during the findings was not a surprising development, especially after the preliminary literature mapping briefly suggested that trust played at least some part within the experience of empowerment. The interesting and notable element of it was however the sheer magnitude of feeling conveyed by participants, especially employees, where trust, although considered an important factor in organisational life

(Chiu and Chiang 2019; Seppälä *et al*. 2011), was not expected to be so evident through the data as such a central theme. Trust discussion manifested not only in its own capacity, but also as a fundamental underlying factor in each of the subsequently identified themes.

An emergence of a theme to such extent formed an immediate key finding, reorientating the research from having a predominantly-empowerment driven focus, to that of its influential constituent, trust. As such, the literature review conducted earlier was vital to the contextualisation of the concept.

The preliminary literature mapping suggested trust was considered an antecedent of empowerment, where it would act as "a social lubricant in the relationship between managers and lower echelon employees" (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999: 179). The presence of trust between the manager-subordinate dyadic would then naturally lead to the delegation by the manager of decision making, thus increasing the perceived autonomy of the subordinate (Mayer *et al.* 1995; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Gillespie and Mann 2004; Kramer 1999; Zhang *et al.* 2008; McEvily *et al.* 2003; Adamovic *et al.* 2020). This process would evolve in a cyclical fashion, where positive experiences e.g. the completion of tasks, would aid the fostering of trust within the organisation, which would then itself lead to greater delegation i.e. trust engenders trust, as posited by Kramer (2010) amongst others (Six 2007; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015; Brower *et al*. 2017; Svensson 2006).

The data provided by participants crossed several different subcategories in relation to trust. The questions of the understanding of empowerment and then whether participants had the autonomy to fulfil their roles were supplemented by the question of what the experiences of trust between managers and employees were. It was predominantly this latter question that instigated much debate on trust, though several aspects did arise in earlier exchanges. Conversation across participants was varied, with core themes as detailed earlier. Due to this interwoven nature of the subject, the following discussion will move from one argument to another to explicate the experiential data

gathered from participants, and the theory behind them, to form a representation of those participant experiences.

Participants, whether employees or senior management were united in acknowledging that trust was a notable concern within the organisation: "trust is bad in the business" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 9). Whilst employees and senior managers were forthcoming with robust negative views on trust, other senior managers often inferred such, by citing the 'journey' towards a trusting operational environment that the organisation was on. This latter point was of note, demonstrating the transient, and temporal nature, of trust in the context of the organisation, where the intended target of a trusting organisational environment was stressed by senior management. The desire for trust was unanimous throughout all participants, voiced in different manners, but indicating that participants had an understanding of the benefits that trust could bring to the organisations and its members.

Senior management was aware that having high levels of trust could help to reduce employee frustration and thus turnover (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Stein and Harper 2003; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012; Morgan and Hunt 1994) through simplified decision making with clear accountabilities for those subordinates (McEvily *et al.* 2003). It was also acknowledged by senior management that increasing trust would benefit the organisation's reaction speed, ability, and thus resilience, as suggested by both Morgan and Zeffane (2003) and Gillespie *et al.* (2020), helping to create value (Fawcett *et al.* 2017), and reduce transaction costs (McEvily *et al.* 2003; Kramer 1999). The candid statements by some senior managers of how time was an issue in developing that desired trust was noted with interest, with the sentiment of one particular senior manager indicating the importance of time:

> "you often need some time together, to get to know one another…to get alignment, because I think for trust to really be absolute you need to understand each other, and that requires time" (Interview Instance 4).

It is suggested by a large proportion of literature that trust is time-driven, specifically that as trust is a relational construct (Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Six 2007), it increases over time based on greater positive interactions between parties (Korsgaard *et al.* 2015; Kramer 2010; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Kujala *et al.* 2016; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Whitener *et al.* 1998; Evans *et al.* 2019; Lau *et al.* 2007; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015 McAllister 1995; Bligh 2017). Senior management suggested that it did indeed understand the impact of time, in that it was required to aid the relationship between employees and management to develop that trust. The seemingly compelling desire of senior management to increase trust was however contradicted with the suggestion that time currently was a rare and precious commodity, exacerbated by the current, ongoing organisational transformation. This contextual factor, along with one senior manager stating that "it [trust] takes a long time to build, which is why it's challenging" (Interview Instance 4), encourages the greater exploration of the temporal facets of trust.

This issue of time availability was a notable one. Literature addresses that building trust is indeed a lengthy, gradual, and incremental process (Chiu and Chiang 2019; Six 2007; Guinot Reinders and Barghouti 2019) which is easily derailed, with the fragile nature of trust being the critical aspect (Krot and Lewicka 2012; Fawcett *et al.* 2017; Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Six 2007; Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Kramer 1999; Hakanen *et al.* 2016; Kramer 2001; Guinot Reinders and Barghouti 2019). An acknowledgement by senior management of the issue of trust followed by the presentation of an outwardly negative obstacle is a clear indication that trust may not be able to improve in the organisation in the short term. Taken directly, the manifestation of time as a hurdle caused by transformation illustrates an external force acting upon the dynamic, which tests the traditional understanding of trust. Trust is often addressed by a number of scholars as being situated in, and due to, the 'social exchange' paradigm, as posited by several authors referenced in this work e.g. Spreitzer and Mishra (1999), De Cremer *et al.* (2018), Brower *et al.* (2009), and Kramer (1999). Such a perspective is focussed upon the establishment of trust based upon interactions and constructions between, and of, actors, however the finding here highlights the impact of external, macro factors on

the process. The availability of time, constricted by the transformation exercise of the organisation, has forced participants to not give due temporal consideration necessary to develop relationships, and thus places pressure upon subsequent interactions.

Related literature is clear in that the advocation of trust within an organisation must start with top management (Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Kramer 1999; Whitener *et al*. 1998; Six 2007), with a culture of trust being embedded throughout the organisation, supported by normative trust-enhancing practices. As Zhang *et al.* (2008) suggest, senior management must be orientated to building trust within its organisation to realise positive outcomes (Skiba and Wildman 2019). Where senior management acknowledges the issue, being aware of the benefits a resolution could bring, but fails to instil action within the organisation to resolve that issue, the associated problems may continue to the detriment of that organisation. Those problems, as currently being experienced by employees, will now be discussed.

The views of employee participants were conclusive to the extent that they too believed that trust was an issue within the organisation, and cited this as more critical to their roles than perceptions of empowerment. The initial concern in respect of trust for individuals was that of their position within the sub-function; they felt that they were not trusted by that sub-function, of which they were mandated members through job titles: "I don't feel trusted functionally, but I do through the task" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2). That lack of functional trust impeded their ability to fulfil their roles: "you just get paralysed because you don't know what to do if you don't feel trusted" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2). This functional perspective was then exacerbated by the more notable matter of employees perceiving that their direct managers did not trust them. This latter aspect will be discussed initially.

The relationship between trust and management is covered by a vast collection of organisational literature, with it being agreed that trust is imperative to a successful relationship between managers and employees (Gillespie and Mann 2004; McAllister 1995; Brower *et al.* 2000; Den Hartog *et*

al. 2002; Bligh 2017; Engelbrecht *et al.* 2017; Holland *et al.* 2017; Zhang *et al.* 2008). It should then be concerning for the organisation that many employees commented on experiences of low managerial trust, with those experiences perceived to have increased in volume recently. These experiences were explained by participants to be primarily cognitive, linked to the ability to make and execute judgement calls and decisions in respect of their tasks. However, the affective element of trust also had a notable influence, derived from relationships where a lack of trust compelled employees to work hard to "make sure that relationship was ok" (Interview Instance 1).

The behaviours that leaders demonstrate are suggested by Whitener *et al.* (1998), together with Heyns and Rothmann (2015) amongst others, to have a significant effect on employees. In respect of this, employees were candid with robust feelings on how management impacted their ability to fulfil their roles through a lack of trust in their respective decision making ability. Management obstacles to that fulfilment were often centred upon a cyclical check-then-amend process, where a vast majority of the employees' outputs were repeatedly assessed before they could be submitted. Management often also undermined employees, especially in long-term negotiations where they would act in a *closing* capacity.

Research has determined that there are material, positive correlations between trust and organisational support (see DeConinck 2010; Alder *et al.* 2006), where the concept of reciprocity holds notable importance in that relationship (Ferres *et al.* 2005; DeConinck 2010). It has been evidenced that employees reciprocate the treatment they receive from their respective manager, i.e. if trust is shown to them then they demonstrate trust in their direct manager (Seppälä *et al.* 2011; Martínez-Tur *et al.* 2020; Holland *et al.* 2017; Mayer *et al.* 2009; Neves and Eisenberger 2014) and respond to simple, single behavioural cues as opposed to complex signs (Bijlsma and van de Bunt 2003). This *reciprocal trust* is thus defined as "the trust that results when a party observes the actions of another and reconsiders one's attitudes and subsequent behaviors based on those observations" (Serva *et al.* 2005: 627).

As Chiu and Chiang (2019) posit, a manager often acts as a model of behaviour for a subordinate, and if that managerial behaviour is positive, it will breed further positive behaviour in the dyadic. The employee would be motivated to reciprocate the constructive behaviour as they will believe that doing so will be appreciated by the manager and thus it will reward the relationship (Mayer *et al.* 2009).

According to the literature, and as an extrapolation of this principle, the entire organisational chain of managerial command can have notable and material impact on the relationships between a senior manager, middle manager and employee through a process termed a '*trickle-down effect*'. This effect denotes where the behaviours of higher level managers will be replicated by middle managers and then subordinates (Mayer *et al.* 2009; Chiu and Chiang 2019), with those subordinates then reciprocating such behaviours. It is possible then that the lack of trust exhibited by senior management is related to that strata's own particular experiences of being a trustee: it is reasonable to suggest that the perceived lack of trust that is demonstrated with respect to employees by senior management is driven by that layer not feeling appropriately trusted by the organisation, although data from interviews would cast doubt on this specific perspective.

Neves and Eisenberger (2014) posit that senior management does however require not only support from the organisational hierarchy, but also, as employees do, clear demonstrations of trust in them to enhance their perceptions of perceived organisational support (POS). POS gives all employees confidence in their beliefs with respect to "the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger *et al.* 1986: 501), being associated with the predilection of organisational members for responsibility (Nica 2016) and the reduction of conflict in relationships (Caesens *et al.* 2019). It can help to fulfil the socio-emotional needs of organisational employees (Caesens *et al.* 2019), with evidence indicating that it also has a strong relationship in facilitating organisational trust and citizenship behaviour (Duffy and Lilly 2013).

As Mayer *et al.* (2009) determined, supported by Adamovic *et al.* (2020) behaviours at the very top of the organisation have an important effect on the behaviours seen in lower employees indirectly through senior management. The same effect was evidenced by Chiu and Chiang (2019), with Legood *et al.* (2016) also highlighting the material influence that the hierarchical positioning of leaders/managers can have on building perceptions of trust and support i.e. the higher the leader, the more impact they can have. Where such POS is *not* available for senior management, it can lead to inflated levels of cynicism across all strata of organisational members, harming the level and quality of performance (Neves 2012) and thus the trust in the organisation.

Employees argued that they were often prevented from utilising their respective experience and skills by management through a lack of appropriate autonomy and thus self-determination in two overlapping ways: (i) through inflexible processes, and (ii) through the overt restriction on their ability to use judgement. They were robust in stating that they found processes as overly prescriptive, risk averse and unnecessarily complex, a view shared by some senior management, where the very aims of those processes were seemingly to prevent flexibility and the exercising of judgement simply to maintain a command-and-control hierarchy, similar to that as described by Ivanova and von Scheve (2019), Spreitzer and Mishra (1999), and Hanaysha (2016): "that's where it falls down, everything is so prescriptive" (Participant 3, Focus Group Instance 2).

The lack of flexibility through those processes has a strong correlation with the suggestions of scholars in respect of *managerial controls*, especially when considering that there is a duality of trust and control where they "each assume the existence of the other, refer to each other, and create each other" (Seppälä *et al.* 2011: 759). All organisations have, and are expected to maintain, processes that are utilised to reduce risk, enhance efficiency, and comply with external governance (Weibel *et al.* 2016). Control systems such as these can act to reduce risk and exposure for employees (Weibel *et al.* 2016), however where those processes are created with an overly risk-averse mindset and prescriptive rules, or applied inconsistently, the organisation is demonstrating

that employees are not trusted (Brower *et al*. 2017; Weibel *et al.* 2016; Mayer *et al.* 1995).

The use of processes to control employee output links significantly with the structural tenet of empowerment, where business rules act to limit divergence from what is deemed to be required by the organisation. In doing so, organisations are actively, and without ambiguity, stating to employees that there is little room for flexibility, and that employees are expected to comply. Although structural in design, this forms a psychological barrier around the extent of the employees' influence, clearly marking the limits of their accepted ability.

With this perspective, the processes can be interpreted to act as a form of Weber's *iron cage*, as described by Barker (1993), where they form a rule-based hierarchy of normative control i.e. employees are expected to follow them and are measured against compliance, using an MCS to ensure conformance to the bureaucratic requirements with little challenge. To this latter point, there was no employee within the fieldwork that came forward to suggest that they had fed back to management about how the processes were perceived to restrict their ability to fulfil their roles. This aspect will be explored in more detail later.

The discussion of the prescriptive processes showed little evidence to support the application of Barker's (1993) concept of *concertive control*, where cultural value-based norms are dominant. Indeed, the absence of any real indication of concertive control may be used to argue that empowerment, and thus decision making latitude, is not particularly high within the organisation as concertive control is often used as a system of control where decentralisation and self-determination is seemingly advocated (Ivanova and von Scheve 2019; Barker 1993). The organisation appears to encourage the perception of empowerment, becoming, as suggested by Courpasson (2000), an example of a *soft bureaucracy*, yet is undeniably set in a context of Barker's (1993) overt bureaucratic control. It seems then that the organisation does not necessarily *walk the walk*, despite *talking the talk,* of increasing empowerment:

"Often, managers will talk about empowering their employees, but employees feel that they are not assisted or supported in this change. At the heart of the matter is the feeling by some people that power is a zero-sum game" (Randolph and Kemery 2011: 96).

The second method in which employees felt their ability was restricted was the limitation on the application of judgement through their roles i.e. decision making. Whilst one senior manager echoed the sentiments of Weibel *et al.* (2016) in that the granting of the ability to make and execute judgements can be constrained by governance requirements, employees were at pains to highlight different examples where they had experienced such limitations without any specific relationship with external governance.

Throughout commercial negotiations, employees considered themselves as the one individual that would hold intimate knowledge of the transaction, e.g. key issues, leverage points etc., but it would invariably be the manager that would be authorised by the organisation to make the decision on the right course of action. Often, such action would be the same as that advocated by the employee, and the very same action that the manager would have originally instructed the employee to *not* implement. In such circumstances, the employees would be left despondent, with managers taking the plaudits for completing the negotiations. Literature suggests that this may be a common occurrence: Herbert's (2009) experience of his case studies found that though management often makes decisions (even in empowered organisations), it was unaware of the holistic circumstance and employees may be better placed to do so. To address such an issue, Brower *et al.* (2017) propose that "managers need to adequately scope assignments, grant resource authority, and not undermine it later" (Brower *et al.* 2017: 4), however the manifestation of such an event in a relationship could have severe consequences for trust.

Where a manager has undertaken a course of action that was specifically prohibited for the employee to carry out, it has a significant effect of

undermining the trust in the relationship. As discussed, trust is fragile in nature, and such a transparent show of disregard for the employee, whether intentional or not, can serve to act as a betrayal of trust. The trust that an employee has within the manager is not only role-related and structural, but also affective, driven by the psychological contract between the two. Any betrayal may be perceived to be less, or even negated, if the manager is proactive with an explanation of how circumstances changed to allow that act i.e. sharing information with the employee (as to be discussed later in this section), appealing to not only the emotional aspect of trust, but also the cognitive, and thus a facet of structural empowerment through sharing information. Should that not be the case, then the relationship may be materially damaged. A secondary effect of the betrayal is that it may also potentially create a circumstance where that employee may self-doubt their ability and their judgement. Self-pride and a confidence in their own ability was a strong message from employees, and together with the effect on it of trust betrayal, will be explored shortly.

The very nature of delegated decision making is argued to be a manager relinquishing control (Choi *et al*. 2016; Biron and Bamberger 2010; Simons 1995), and as such it is understandable then to a certain degree that managers may be reticent to do so, retaining decisions as their own to make, as those managers continue to hold organisational responsibilities and objectives that are required to be achieved. Indeed, as posited by Seppälä *et al*. (2011) and Martínez-Tur *et al.* (2020), the manager is considered as a representative of the organisation, having to maintain its requirements, achieve its objectives, and defend its interests. In holding responsibility for such, pressure is significant on that strata and their actions may unintentionally demonstrate a lack of trust in subordinates, giving rise to increasing control whilst restricting latitude (Brower *et al*. 2017).

This is essentially then a paradox: how can empowerment and employee involvement be increased yet control maintained (de Souza and Beuren 2018; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Gómez and Rosen 2001)? Delegation is undoubtedly supported by trust within the relationship (Heyns and Rothmann

2015; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Mayer *et al.* 1995; Six 2007; McNeish and Mann 2010), and as discussed earlier, this is a concerning issue within the subject organisation. The commentary of Lewis *et al.* (2019) however provides a valuable insight here, where trust takes a backseat for *illusory empowerment*, a concept that appears to be utilised by the subject organisation. Illusory empowerment concerns the imagery of empowerment, where employees perceive a certain level of empowerment but where the overarching control, i.e. decision making, in reality remains centralised (Lewis *et al.* 2019).

In some circumstances, and to some extent, employees felt able to self-determine to a certain degree e.g. when assessing what to present to managers for checking and/or approval, or generating potential solutions for customer issues. This self-determination constitutes the immediate, basic level of empowerment in the subject organisation, where employees feel they are trusted to a level, possibly due to their understanding that they must be perceived as capable in order to hold that specific role (Kramer 2010). As discussion evidences, however, control remains in the majority with senior management.

One senior manager stated that it was their responsibility as a high-ranking organisational member to relate to employees that there is flexibility within the mandated processes. Weibel *et al.* (2016) contend that managers do indeed often have some element of freedom in how they enforce process compliance, where a mutually-trusting dyadic means that in the majority of instances the employee is granted notable latitude by the manager (Seppälä *et al.* 2011; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). This latitude however is predicated upon the interpretation of different characteristics of the employee (Han *et al.* 2019), granted with the knowledge that it could rescinded immediately, and additional controls imposed, should the employee break the trust (Seppälä *et al.* 2011). It could then be argued that, without notable evidence from employee participants to the contrary, the claims of flexibility in processes for individuals within the organisation serves to simply maintain the perception of illusory empowerment.

Lewis *et al*. (2019) are clear in suggesting that illusory empowerment is an extremely fragile concept, with it being reliant on employee perceptions. In this instance then, it appears that employees may have recognised the perception of illusory empowerment, and their candid and robust comments throughout the data gathered indicate that they do not hold particularly strong feelings of experiential empowerment within the subject organisation. As Lewis *et al*. (2019) continue, in these circumstances, where the image of illusory empowerment is shattered, the organisation often implements additional, restrictive management controls, linking again to the existence of what employees describe as 'overly-prescriptive processes'.

Kahneman (2011) suggests that "whatever else it produces, an organization is a factory that manufactures judgements and decisions" (Kahneman 2011: 418). True empowerment of employees should grant those same employees the ability to undertake a task in what they decide to be the most relevant manner, without fear of excessive recourse (Herbert 2009). Not being able to exercise judgement, validated through years of previous experience and learning, resulted in employees believing they were disempowered, as though they were merely acting as administrative staff, not adding value to the task nor the organisation itself; thus they would often feel disenfranchised, as evidenced by one employee participant:

> "it self-perpetuates as well, because if you don't feel trusted, then you feel demotivated, and you feel like you don't have any empowerment, then to your point [another participant] you just don't want to do anything" (Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2).

This obstacle preventing the utilisation of judgement would often then result in a lack of ability to learn from both mistakes and failures, with the former being crucial to the evolution of an organisation (von Krogh *et al*. 2001). In this circumstance, employees would often lose sight of *meaning* in their work, a fundamental tenet of psychological empowerment as suggested by Spreitzer (1995, 1996).

Application of Employee Judgement Justified Through Professionalism and Self-Pride

Meaning is considered as the ability of the employee to influence the direction and outcome of a task (Spreitzer 1995), and should either of these be unperceived by the individual, then the overarching experience of empowerment can be materially reduced (Spreitzer 1995; Liden *et al*. 2000).

The lack of meaning, and thus impact, was cited by employees as resulting in them feeling the need to actively change their approach to each manager, having learnt from previous interactions, to accommodate for the shortage of trust, as evidenced by one employee participant who stated "I was always feeling like I had to give updates, and minutes, to make sure that relationship was ok" (Interview Instance 1). Such modification of interaction with each manager would translate directly into delays, where the employee would not be able to act with pace, agility and responsiveness to the task in hand. This is of notable importance to the organisation currently, one that is in a business context of high uncertainty, high global competition, and changing employee requirements, where, as Hanaysha and Tahir (2016) and Wikhamn and Selart (2019) suggest, organisations are having to change materially to overcome.

The lack of organisational approval to utilise experience and thus judgement was perceived by employees as demonstration of an absence of trust in their abilities. Though this lack of trust, manifesting through reduced ability to make and execute decisions, had a reducing effect on meaning as discussed, it had significantly more of an impact on the perceived relationship between management and employees. It is clear in the literature that should an employee feel trusted by their manager, they will often be more engaged with cooperative attitudes, show greater effort to go beyond their roles, and thus achieve higher performance levels (Chiu and Chiang 2019; Brower *et al*. 2017; Turnipseed and VandeWaa 2020; Martínez-Tur *et al.* 2020; Rezvani *et al*. 2019): this is felt trust (Chiu and Chiang 2019; Lau *et al.* 2007; Skiba and Wildman 2019). Conversely, when employees feel uncertainty in respect of their relationship, trust is not easily forthcoming nor sustained (Kramer 2001).

Employees in the organisation suggested that management invariably *has* to be trusted due to role-related trust (see Gilbert 2005; Evetts 2003; 2013), which means they are entitled to make decisions. Employees however, in line with the thoughts of Kramer (2001), experienced a notable amount of uncertainty because they did not know how much their managers actually supported them.

Employees were keen to state that their decision making was based not only on experience and internal governance systems, but also a sense of professionalism and ethics through self-pride, potentially a feature explained by the concept of Bentham's principle of the Panopticon as described by Sia *et al.* (2002), Lynch (2016), and specifically Fournier (1999):

> "being a professional is not merely about absorbing a body of scientific knowledge but is also about conducting and constituting oneself in an appropriate manner" (Fournier 1999: 287).

In respect of that self-pride, it can be reasoned to essentially be a form of self-trust, where employees believe in their ability and judgement to take the logical, most optimal course of action for the organisation. Participant 4 in Focus Group Instance 2 evidences this self-trust by suggesting "you should be trusted enough to know, to recognise yourself when it's something that you're not comfortable with…and I think you do, you have that feeling of nagging doubt, or uncomfortableness…". Such an example illustrates that trust does not only act externally between multiple entities; it has a notable internal quality, one that is distinct from the inner dialogical consideration of trust in other parties; one that is reflective and gives the individual a certain potential level of agency. With this self-trust derived agency, albeit limited to an extent by compliance with organisational restrictions, employees can choose to act and exercise a level of discretion in their task, to self-determine. Indeed, it is recognised by a number of participants that this agency exists: "we are more empowered than we realise, or trust in ourselves" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 6), and others have utilised that ability, as evidenced by Participant 6 in Focus Group Instance 2, who stated that "I find myself using

the phrase a lot more often that I'm just going to ask for forgiveness rather than permission…" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2). From the majority of the data gathered, however, this seems an exception as opposed to a rule. Employees appear unaware of their ability to utilise some semblance of self-determination.

Returning to judgement, for employees there was never a desire to deliberately make an error and it was argued by those employees that this should provide management with comfort, with the basic tenet of trust being that managers believe employees are competent in their roles and are therefore able to make wise decisions in respect of their actions (Spreitzer and Mishra 1999). This position in the literature is echoed by Roozen *et al.* (2001) and also Quinn and Spreitzer (1997), with the latter positing that management should "trust that employees will do the right thing if given the chance" (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997: 44). Indeed, employees demonstrated that they were thoroughly behind reprimand for those who had deliberately and knowingly engaged in improper decisions, as evidenced by Participant 2 in Focus Group instance who stated "there's no one here that really tries to do the wrong thing and I'd like to think that if there was then the company would deal with them very quickly and get rid of them". Such a perspective corroborates the professionality of employees, as identified by Fournier (1999), whilst also being an overt observation in support of Evett's (2013) suggestion that professionalism requires demonstration of the worthiness of trust. With this comment, the strength of employee feeling that they actively work in the best interests of the organisation is shown, a declaration of their trustworthiness as described by De Cremer *et al.* (2018) and Mayer *et al.* (1995). This statement by employees then shows the strength of underlying emotional feeling, the innate desire that they deserve to be trusted, but put forth in a manner so as to differentiate those who are not to be trusted from themselves.

Employees were aware that where 'right' decisions have been made in tasks i.e. ones that management agreed with, more trust was conferred on those employees, consistent with the discussion of Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) and Mayer *et al.* (1995). There appeared to be a path that would enable them to

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have more latitude, if management was more receptive to that decision making delegation. In interviews, senior management had acknowledged that it could not realistically make *all* decisions, in line with Han *et al.* (2019), Martínez-Tur *et al.* (2020), and Burton *et al.* (2015), and that delegation was imperative for having a responsive organisation. This acceptance however failed to materialise substantively, as discussed so far. It was understood by employees to be the perceived management fear of 'incorrect' decisions being made that appeared to be restricting the ability to fashion strong and mutually beneficial relationships based upon trust between employees and management.

Employee participants deemed this management fear unreasonable and stressed the negative, disproportionate effect that it had on relationships. Again, employees stated, intended decisions they made were logical, formulated in a specific business context at that time, with no intention of causing a material negative impact: "it's that context of assuming that if it doesn't go exactly as planned, it's wrong, which isn't necessarily true" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 2). If an answer generated by an employee, which was again logical and reasonable, was not the same as that generated by their manager, it was regularly rejected. Where a decision was made that did not require manager approval, and that decision then developed into an issue that bore sub-optimal outputs for the organisation, the resulting quality investigation very much held up a blaming game. The results of any investigation would then invariably add obstacles to the employees fulfilling their tasks in an efficient manner.

Manager support in the event of a challenge, or quality investigation, was considered vital by employees, as it would "protect the team" (Interview Instance 1) from criticism. It has previously been noted that literature evidences the greater effort, productivity, motivation, and commitment demonstrated by employees when trust in them is demonstrated by their managers (Chiu and Chiang 2019; Brower *et al.* 2017; Duffy and Lilly 2013), and in this circumstance, that trust is displayed through POS.

A high level of POS has also been found to have a notable correlation with empowerment, where empowerment not only acts as a mediator between POS and job satisfaction, but also facilitates increased organisational commitment and reduced job-related stress (Maan *et al.* 2020; Butts *et al.* 2009; Eisenberger *et al.* 1997). More directly, Butts *et al.* (2009) determined that high involvement work practices, e.g. where employees are involved in strategizing and decision making, can lead to greater rewards for organisations by focusing on Spreitzer's (1995, 1996) four tenets of empowerment: self-determination, impact, meaning, and competence.

The perceptions of employees were focussed on how readily available manager support was to them, specifically in relation to any particular course of action that they had elected to take in a task, and the associated trust that this showed in the relationship. Seemingly in reference to the limited self-determination that they held, employee participants again highlighted that 'wrong' decisions were not made deliberately, with Six (2007) positing that not every individual can perform to their fullest intent continuously. In the event that a decision was made which turned out to be sub-optimal for the organisation, it was a learning opportunity for all involved and a chance for assessment of the logic process that informed the decision, offering vital avenues of knowledge for the organisation, according to McNeish and Mann (2010). This sentiment was echoed by senior management, however experiences relayed by employees seemed to suggest that this perspective was not shared by *all* management. In the circumstance of a business decision that did not work out as intended, as stated earlier, manager support was vital for the employees to feel 'protected' from criticism and for them to explain the logic behind the decision taken without fear of an adverse career impact.

POS is influenced by whether the employee considers that the organisation has benevolent or malevolent intentions, essentially its culture, and amongst other factors, how the organisation would respond to employee mistakes (Eisenberger *et al.* 1986). Where employees perceive a high level of POS, they believe that the organisation will support their optimal levels of risk taking and positive intention, and address issues in a moderate, good-faith fashion

(Nica 2016; Neves and Eisenberger 2014; Caniëls *et al.* 2017). Such a perception is based upon high levels of trust between the employee and management, termed *failure-related trust* (Neves and Eisenberger 2014). A relationship based upon high levels of POS and failure-related trust such as this will then facilitate open and honest communication, where mistakes are self-disclosed without fear of punitive reprimand (Neves and Eisenberger 2014; Nica 2016).

In discussing some positive managerial support instances, employees acknowledged how vital those experiences had been to them, with Participant 6 in Focus Group Instance 2 stating that "I didn't feel like I'd be hung out to dry, and that's really important for me to feel like I could do a good job". Notwithstanding the clear employee belief that support allows them to carry out their roles well, this statement can be interpreted as a perception of invested trust in the employee *from* the manager involved, or what is described by literature as felt trustworthiness (Lester and Brower 2003). Here, the trust translates to a courage of their convictions, a confidence that the manager would be present to provide a defence if required. Such an example demonstrates the emotional aspect of trust, specifically with use of the phrase 'hung out to dry'. This phrase can be construed to show the negative, anxiety-inducing feeling that arises in employees from their interpretation of the organisation's perceived culture: employees believe they will be castigated should it be determined that their decision resulted in a sub-optimal outcome for the organisation, and this reprimand drives their *need* for managerial defence i.e. somebody to fight in their corner. The availability of such support, i.e. POS, would inevitably then lead to greater depth and robustness of the relationship through a display and reciprocation of trust (Kramer 2010; Six 2007; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015).

Neves and Eisenberger (2014) found that managers are key in communicating to employees that they are trusted to do the 'right thing' for the organisation. In respect to the subject organisation, employees felt this did not occur, and that managers, despite some small exceptions, were not forthcoming in relating such a position to them. This is again likely due to managers feeling

pressure of delivery, and thus wishing to maintain a control, but it could also be due to managers not feeling particularly empowered themselves. The outcome of this circumstance could potentially be a reason as to why some managers questioned the desire of employees to be empowered, as will now be discussed.

Employee Proactivity in Seeking Autonomy

Emerging as a key theme heavily related to the discussion of processes earlier, employees suggested that although policies, processes and associated governance was understood to be a necessity, the vast number of approvals mandated by those same policies was often time-consuming and harmed their ability to act with pace. That some of those such approvers would then suggest that the employees sought the authorisation of other organisational members, who were critically *not* mandated as a required approval by the policies, sought to give voices to those who did not actually hold any accountability yet could derail the task, exacerbating the frustration. In these situations, it was perceived by the employees that some management was reluctant to accept a level of responsibility for making decisions and thus deferred to others. This is similar to the findings of Serva *et al.* (2005) and Lee *et al*. (2016), who contend that in frequent cases, managerial delegation of approval/decision making can be regarded by employees as an abdication of responsibility. In circumstances where employees were directed to gain further approvals, employees would occasionally make the decision themselves, documenting the logic, and addressing related issues if/as they arose. The matter of 'excessive' approvals therefore comes full circle to the ability of employees to make decisions yet again.

As discussed, relevant literature is clear in that autonomy is fundamental to employees asserting themselves on their tasks (Seppälä *et al*. 2011), and as such the move to employees taking accountability themselves is understandable, even though such accountability is not bestowed upon them. Too much autonomy however can be an issue in negatively affecting employees where they may feel as though they have been abandoned (Bijlsma and van de Bunt 2003; Adamovic *et al*. 2020), especially where a lack

of role clarity exists (Adamovic *et al.* 2020). Determining the most appropriate level of autonomy whilst maintaining an element of control and governance is again, as covered earlier, a difficult task for management; it is a managerial risk-taking action (Seppälä *et al*. 2011) with no obvious answer. It is interesting that although Bijlsma and van de Bunt (2003) found in their investigation that autonomy and decision making did not appear an antecedent of trust, Seppälä *et al*. (2011) argue that "supervisors and leaders may encourage subordinates' reciprocal trust by giving a subordinate as much autonomy as the subordinate is willing to accept" (Seppälä *et al*. 2011: 772). This latter point, alluded to earlier in this Discussion, raises the question of what level of autonomy and decision making ability then is perceived as appropriate by employees?

Senior management stated that it fundamentally believed that it did empower employees, and in some cases this perspective is indeed supported by a number of employees where, as the discussion so far evidences, there are instances where they held the ability to exercise a level of decision making. However, when continuing the discussion of employee empowerment, robust opinions did surface, specifically in respect of employees proactively requesting empowerment ability from senior management.

Multiple senior managers questioned whether employees did actually *want* to be empowered to seize responsibility and accountability for a course of action, or whether they raised empowerment as an issue to cover their lack of desire to make decisions. The way in which one senior manager asked this rhetorical question could easily be interpreted as passive-aggressive: "Do people actually want it?" (Interview Instance 7). This perspective seems to resonate with the sentiments of Brower *et al*. (2017) who posit that employees will often apportion blame on management when it is organisational policy that is causing frustration rather than their managers. In doing so, dyadic trust is eroded (Brower *et al*. 2017) and a feeling of helplessness manifests on all sides. Although two employees commented that they do indeed demand greater decision making scope by "pushing and challenging" (Participant 2, Focus Group Instance 3), they remained the exception in terms of employee approach, seemingly supporting the manager's view. The discussion of

employee reticence led to senior management positing that employees needed to engage in more activity to *pull* empowerment and not simply wait for it to appear: they needed to articulate what empowerment they wanted, what specific decision making latitude, as they were the individuals that utilised the existing processes every day. Opportunities were there for employees to grab that empowerment, as the transformation exercise, i.e. downsizing, had meant there were fewer managers to realistically make all of the decisions.

This position of managers contrasted with that of employees. Although only few examples existed in the data gathered from employees of them proactively seeking greater latitude, the desire and commitment from those employees to fulfil their roles was robustly articulated, with the previously-cited excerpt from Participant 1 in Focus Group Instance 2 stating "we can fulfil our roles, because we do, we do it, we get to an end point" illustrating such an intent. That employees had seemingly, to senior management's belief, not challenged for greater autonomy was evidence to those senior management participants that they did not desire greater decision making ability. This perception could however be ill-informed: where employees are so vocal about issues that they face, as in this research, demonstrates their desire for the context of their roles to improve. They may believe that this investigation will act as a conduit to highlight the problems they face to management to enable discussion and progress. However, the lack of direct challenge to management is a notable factor, in that when issues of empowerment and decision making latitude reach managerial ears, it can be construed as a criticism of managerial approach and thus could trigger defensive attitudes, as those evidenced above. These attitudes could be exacerbated by the ongoing transformation, where performance and feedback on managerial abilities may have a potential effect on job retention and security.

In addressing reasons why management may not wish to empower, theory suggests senior management may perceive that handing control over to an employee could be considered as a burden to that employee (Seppälä *et al.* 2011; Lee *et al.* 2018). In support of this, the research of Han *et al.* (2019) offer an insight, specifically in relation to *passive* employees who may hold a view

that their particular role should be conformist, where decision making should be solely the remit of the manager. In this circumstance, employees will not actively engage in seeking delegation. Interestingly then, no employee participant put forward in any data gathering session that they had actively given feedback to either their direct line management or any senior management within the organisation about their issues, and the desire for more delegation and self-determination.

From the data gathered then, and though "there is something counter intuitive about a bottom-up philosophy being directed downwards by management" (Herbert 2009: 225), senior management is seemingly challenging employees to become *proactive*, where they should consider themselves as partners and voluntarily readily available to request and, critically, accept responsibility (Han *et al.* 2019; Nykodym *et al*. 1994). Han *et al.* (2019) evidence that proactive personalities influence a leader's perceptions of, and thus behaviour towards, an employee, helping to establish a trusting relationship (Han *et al.* 2019; Chiu and Chiang 2019). Indeed, by demonstrating Han *et al.'s* (2019) proactive behaviour, employees can work with management to improve the organisation (Guinot Reinders and Barghouti 2019), influencing the relationship positively where engaging in such actions can engender that trust and thus an increased level of personal control (Gómez and Rosen 2001). As such, employees take more ownership of their roles, however this perspective seems incredibly reductionist when considering the mass of variables that each employee must overcome to gain traction especially, as discussed, the tight grip of managerial control on decision making in a time of downsizing.

The work of Argyris (1976) offers further interesting insight here. As previously highlighted, senior management, whilst suggesting that it is fully supportive of the empowerment of employees, also gave a defensive position as that above. Argyris (1976) suggests that this behaviour is typical of *Model 1 theories-in-use*, as compared to *espoused theory*. These concepts are defined by Argyris *et al.* (1985), where "espoused theories are those that an individual claims to follow. Theories-in-use are those that can be inferred from action" (Argyris *et al.* 1985: 81-82). The fundamental concept of Model 1 theories-in-use is its

basis upon a single-loop learning process. Here, argues Argyris (1976), humans adopt a linear approach to issues where individuals essentially do not feedback experience from a particular course of action into the loop, i.e. there is limited, if any, reflective activity; where there is a loop back into the process, i.e. double-loop learning, this is termed Model 2 (Argyris 1976). A Model 1 embedded position, often in contrast to what that individual outwardly espouses as their perspective, means that an individual habitually becomes defensive, frustrated, and angry when their espoused theories are questioned against their actions, and this links with low levels of trust (Edmondson and Moingeon 1999). Model 1 theories-in-use then are regularly associated with the avoidance of root problem correction because of these behaviours, leading to discontent amongst organisational members (Edmondson and Moingeon 1999).

Individuals are usually unaware of their Model 1 theories-in-use tendencies and that they are incongruous with their espoused theories. Indeed, as Argyris (1976) states, Model 1 theories-in-use inhibit self-questioning, remove opposition, and discourage change by limiting the challenge of the status quo. Individuals with such a Model 1 theory-in-use also act to suppress feelings and unilaterally control information (Argyris 1976). It is typical of those engaged in a Model 1 theory-in-use that they will make assumptions and inferences of others without any check in respect of their accuracy, validity or explanation (Edmondson and Moingeon 1999; Argyris 1976). Such a position has the effect of

> "communicating that one is not interested in understanding others' points of view, giving rise to self-sealing interpersonal dynamics in which no one mentions their silent attributions and thus no one learns" (Edmondson and Moingeon 1999: 160-161).

It can then be that whilst an individual promotes a particular programme, they may work against it, being defensive about change, but yet be unaware that they are behaving in such a manner. In respect of organisational relationships, Argyris (1976) goes so far as to state that leaders enveloped in such a Model

1 theories-in-use position work actively, but unknowingly, to maintain control over subordinates, holding the perspective that such control is required to ensure subordinates work to achieve organisational objectives and that those same subordinates 'fear' challenging those with power.

This theory can be applied to the senior management of the subject organisation. That all senior management participants espoused empowerment of employees, yet in the main failed to offer specific examples of doing so in actuality, all whilst employees put forth many instances of managerial obstacles preventing them from perceiving their empowerment, echoes with the tenets of a Model 1 theory-in-use. It appears that senior management through (i) the cumbersome processes as discussed earlier, (ii) a perceived lack of managerial support for employees, and (iii) increased control, is displaying typical tendencies of a Model 1 theory-in-action, where it essentially acts to limit employees' empowerment. This is also evidenced by the middle management "muddle" (Interview Instance 11) discussed earlier, where that particular strata of the organisation was deemed, by senior management interestingly, to prevent the flow of empowerment from the top of the organisation to the lower levels. The passive-aggressive "Do people actually want it?" (Interview Instance 7) excerpt from the interview of one senior manager serves to illustrate the defensiveness, and thus low trust level, that is typical of a Model 1 theory-in-use.

It appears then that a recognition of such a position of senior management *by* senior management may aid the organisation's espoused drive for further employee empowerment. It is noted, however, that Argyris (1976) suggests the recognition of Model 1 theories-in-use is difficult, and the change toward Model 2 theories-in-action, i.e. double-loop learning, is fraught with challenges. This re-education and realignment is outside the scope of this research, however it forms a recommendation for further work.

Formal Power: Exercised Through Control of Information and Knowledge

In its basic terms, empowerment is about increasing the ability of an employee to act in the organisation, to exercise decision making ability, with power transferring across the organisation from the senior hierarchy to subordinates (van Baarle *et al.* 2019; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2019). Idris *et al.* (2018), citing the work of both Spreitzer *et al.* (1997) and Conger and Kanungo (1988), suggest that empowerment can be understood as "enabling relations of power through a process that fosters employees' sense of control and competence" (Idris *et al.* 2018: 699), with Randolph and Kemery (2011) similarly agreeing that empowerment itself is perceived by individuals as a sense of power. This notion of power transference can be interpreted to refer back to trust, identifying the transient nature of the relationship between the two constructs that are central to social exchanges (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012; Stein and Harper 2003; Brion *et al.* 2019).

Literature is clear in positing that management *must* trust all levels of employees to share power and authority with them (Hammer Jr 2016; Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Randolph and Kemery 2011), and to enhance the willingness of those employees to use power (Choi 2006; Randolph and Kemery 2011). Both Choi *et al.* (2016) and Randolph and Kemery (2011) suggest that delegation of power from manager to employee is perceived by employees as a demonstration of their value to the organisation, with that power utilised in the form of decision making ability central to perceptions of autonomy (Seppälä *et al*. 2011). Though organisations have recently changed perspectives in terms of adopting a more participatory approach with employees, together with a move toward a reduction of traditional bases of authoritative and positional power (Heyns and Rothmann 2015), there is still the belief, as discussed earlier with reference to control, that the subject organisation operates in a predominantly command and control style. Where power is not shared, such as in this circumstance, and a material differential is maintained due to hierarchical positions, creating and preserving trust becomes incredibly complex (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000).

In respect of the data gathered from participants, there was surprisingly no specific overt discussion on power within the organisation, especially considering the research question, save two threads of conversation: (i) control of decision making ability, which has been addressed earlier; and (ii) control of information. The latter item offers interest for exploration. Whilst employees understood that senior management in certain circumstances had to use expert, and almost symbolic, power (Randolph and Kemery 2011; Morgan 1998), e.g. making highly sensitive, multi-million dollar decisions where information was not necessarily appropriate for subordinates to receive, employees were keen to highlight examples where they had actively sought information to aid them in their task but not been provided such. In these instances, employees considered management to be withholding that information for two reasons. One such reason was a fear that the information may be used 'incorrectly' by the employee: "they've trusted people in the past and they've disseminated information, but then those people have gone and made the wrong decisions" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2). This particular excerpt highlights a level of understanding from employees in that a trust, which is fragile by its very nature (Krot and Lewicka 2012; Fawcett *et al.* 2017; Heyns and Rothmann 2015; Six 2007; Hakanen *et al.* 2016; Kramer 2001; Guinot Reinders and Barghouti 2019), has been perceived as being broken in a previous experience. Exploring further, it appears that in this example, the trustor has shared information willingly, assuming a level of vulnerability (Mayer *et al.* 1995; Six 2007; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2000; Whitener *et al.* 1998) where the related trust has been shattered. This betrayal of trust stems from the 'incorrect' use of the information, potentially linking back to previous discussion of a fear of reprimand from what is deemed to be a 'wrong' decision.

The withholding of information also was interpreted by employees as a manifestation of the intent to exert a power *over* them (van Baarle *et al.* 2019) through the generation of a dependency, forming the second reason. This was evidenced by Participant 2 in Focus Group Instance 2 suggesting that, when discussing sharing of information, "control is power, power to them, and it's their importance". In their study of empowerment and control, Corduneanu and

Lebec (2020) found that management often deliberately failed to share information with subordinates, citing reasons such as the time taken to enable employees to use the information being too great. Yukl and Falbe's (1991) research however directly echoes with the position of employees, specifically where the authors highlight that the possession and dissemination of information that enables others to fulfil their task is considered a source of power. Outside the scope of this work, but warranting further investigation, is the reasonable likelihood that whilst some organisational members may indeed restrict information sharing for the sense of power, others may be doing so for job security.

In a time of downsizing, the perceived level of job security for employees is materially low (Brockner 1992; Spreitzer and Quinn 1996; Cascio 1993; Gandolfi and Hansson 2011), with no real indication of whether immediate survivors will be subject to redundancy themselves. In this context, McNeish and Mann (2010) posit that knowledge is incredibly important to employees, where it acts as "source of employees' power and only guarantee of employment" (McNeish and Mann 2010: 25). In such circumstances, it is reasonable to suggest that organisational members may desire to protect their value to the business in return for favourable treatment when it comes to redundancies. It is possible then to conclude that these organisational members are not necessarily maliciously withholding information, nor being reluctant to share it to gain/retain power, but more from a personal perspective of self-protection from losing their jobs.

Information is essentially a form of knowledge, imperative to the sustainability and competitive advantage of an organisation (von Krogh *et al.* 2001). Organisations can be considered as streams of knowledge (von Krogh *et al.* 1994), moving from person to person, place to place, and when those streams reach a blockage, the organisation struggles to move forward. The flow of information is fundamental to building high trust in relationships (Mason and Lefrere 2003) and the experiences of employees, such as that of Participant 2 in Focus Group Instance 2 earlier, suggests that the relationship suffers when relevant information is not shared. Employees encouraged the idea that those

with information need to display trust in others, to have confidence that the information they share will not only be used suitably, but importantly will help to help develop the members of the organisation by increasing knowledge and experience (Focus Group Instance 3; Focus Group Instance 6; Focus Group Instance 9; Focus Group Instance 2; Interview Instance 1; Interview Instance 10): "…and them trusting you to be responsible with the information they're giving you" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2).

As a final point in respect of knowledge in the context of power, the Foucauldian musing that resistance is a form of power (Foucault 1977; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998) has interest. Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan (1998) argue that power can be utilised by dominant organisational members to aid their agenda and enforce their positions because of a lack of resistance. In the subject organisation, as discussed, the ability for employees to make and execute decisions is limited through such application of organisational power via policies and internal governance. Though Foucault (1977) suggests that resistance acts as a form of power, what can employees do to demonstrate *their* collective power? They cannot, realistically, simply elect to not complete a task, pointing to the fact that they disagree with policy as this will draw severe reprimand, ironically a traditional source of power.

It is rational then to propose that the only real opportunity to demonstrate some level of resistance to the status quo is by voicing grievances in respect of the working environment, yet completing the task, as Participant 1, Focus Group Instance 2 suggests: "we can fulfil our roles, because we do, we do it, we get to an end point, but it is painful, and it is slow, and it is driven by a million roadblocks, and a million restrictions, that's how it feels". In doing so, employees highlight a dedication to get the job done, offering to the organisation examples of their value in a time of downsizing and reduced job security, whilst demonstrating their own power through those comments, as a form of resistance. There is value to this assumed employee position: collective voices can often demonstrate a power for change, for example as discussed in respect of civil rights movements. Warranting further investigation post this research is the issue then of whether those grievances raised by

employees are legitimate in that they are in fact negative experiences, or whether they are simply acting as a prop, a form of resistance to the organisation, the system.

The Effects of Downsizing (Transformation) on Employee Empowerment
Participants raised that the issue of trust had deteriorated during the organisation's transformation activity i.e. *downsizing*, with employees outwardly stating so: "trust has got worse through transformation" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 5). This perception is forecasted and indeed evidenced by much existing literature which investigates the effects of downsizing (see Gandolfi and Hansson 2011; Simons 1995; Morgan and Zeffane 2003; Baruch and Hind 2000; Cascio 1993; Farrell and Mavondo 2004). Though organisations are often caught in a challenging circumstance where external crises mandate difficult decisions such as the reduction of a workforce (Gillespie *et al.* 2020), downsizing can affect employees trust in two profound ways: they can be left (i) insecure about their job prospects (Hammond *et al.* 2019; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997), and (ii) with a lack of clarity on the way in which they should operate within the organisation because of the fracture of organisational norms, processes and values (Mishra and Spreitzer 1998; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997; Brockner *et al.* 2004), both directly leading to reduction in perceived empowerment (Adamovic *et al.* 2020). It is in these circumstances that trust is most likely to be lost during crises and disruption, when ironically it is in the greatest need (Gillespie *et al.* 2020).

In respect of transformation, employees suggested that the process of the organisational change had left those managers that remained much more insecure, to the extent that they were unwilling to delegate decisions because of their delicate positions, harming the trust in the employee-manager relationship in the process. As Gillespie *et al.* (2020) suggest, in a context of downsizing, employees look toward their immediate management to provide security and reassurance that trust is present. However, "managing trust in contexts of disruption is a process fraught with challenges, as evidenced by the fact that employee trust is often lost during such periods" (Gustafsson *et*

al. 2020: 21) through management maintaining a tight grip on control and thus not providing that desired reassurance.

Senior management commented that the aim was indeed to empower and trust middle management and employees. Related to this point, one senior manager brought together the desire of employees to be empowered and the intent of the senior management to empower employees to highlight that there appeared to be a disconnect in the organisation, manifesting in middle management, or the "muddle" (Interview Instance 11). It was suggested that this muddle of middle management was in fact restricting the trickle-down of empowerment from the top of the organisation through to lower levels, where middle management persists with a command and control style typical of such a strata of the organisation (Winzenried 2010; Zaleznik 2004). Interestingly, however, is that middle management is often the section of the organisational demographic that is targeted for reduction (Spreitzer and Quinn 1996), therefore a reticence to expose oneself to career-ending mistakes by delegating decision making is understandable.

It is then this typically command and control middle management culture, in a context of the 'quick fix' of downsizing, that has a notable impact on the way knowledge is held within the organisation. It has previously been discussed that many of those who had practical organisational knowledge were middle management, often themselves targeted by redundancies (Spreitzer and Quinn 1996). Those that remain however are reticent to then relinquish the elements of decision making ability to others, meaning the reduction of learning potential (Farrell and Mavondo 2004; Brower *et al*. 2017). This principle can be extrapolated from the application of Pascale's (1990) comment to this downsizing: "when a social system reaches a critical mass, participants sense that the old rules may no longer apply" (Pascale 1990: 140), i.e. old rules of endeavouring to share and develop organisational members is lost to a protectionist mindset. A consequential, adverse, and self-sustaining process then comes into existence: control is required by management because of downsizing, however control limits trust; a lack of trust impacts decision making ability, and thus a dearth of delegated decision making

reduces learning and knowledge. This position echoes again the effect on empowerment and potential reduction of *meaning* (Spreitzer 1995, 1996).

Transformation made a further, secondary contribution to the issues that employees faced. Participants stated that through downsizing, with many individuals leaving the organisation, countless policies, processes and accountabilities had either become outdated or unclear. This context made it notably more difficult for employees to navigate the requirements of their tasks, contributing to anxiety and frustration, which invariably then led to reduced pace and productivity (Cascio 1993; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). Cascio (1993), together with Mishra and Spreitzer (1998), highlighted that often, organisations do not provide the appropriate resources, invoke new clarifying policies, nor engage in relevant training to support employees that remain in the business, and this appears to be the case in the subject organisation. The lack of clarity in respect of how an individual is expected to fulfil their role meant that employees were caught in a pincer-like movement restricting their empowerment: on one side, as discussed, managers maintained an iron-like grip upon decision making; on the other, with the lack of clarity and even where employees felt that potentially the decision was in their hands, they had no real choice but to seek management approval for a particular course of action because of the lack of clarity of policies and processes. Little by little, empowerment that the employees had seems to be subject to erosion, leading to the perception of low self-determination.

In Summary

Throughout this discussion, the emergence of trust as an issue in respect of the perception of empowerment in the subject organisation gained greater and greater importance. The explication of the themes derived from the data gave insight into the important ways that the experiences of trust are woven into the everyday life of organisational members, and how it as a concept materially and significantly impacts the way that employees consider empowerment. To summarise, Figure 2 details a model of trust in respect of the subject

organisation, highlighting contextual and temporal factors, and how the various elements of trust in this circumstance manifest, according to the data.

The 'Input - Temporal and Contextual Factors' in Figure 2 capture the findings relating to the 'Employee Empowerment Through Self-Determination' section, detailing how the effect of transformation, through increased demands on employees and through limiting the availability of time for investment in relationships, acts as a foundation of trust-related concern for participants. As suggested through the 'Application of Employee Judgement Justified Through Professionalism and Self-Pride' discussion, the 'Primary Forms' component of Figure 2 highlights the key elements of trust that employee participants personally hold, specifically the trust manifesting from their sense of professionalism, and their internal belief in their ability and competence. The trust derived from professionalism is shown in Figure 2 through the 'Constituents' column, where it is described as being driven by a role-related trust, i.e. a perception of competence in their own ability from holding a specific organisational role, a feeling of themselves being trustworthy individuals, and a self-pride that spurs employees on to get the task done well. These elements are complemented by an emotional factor in respect of the positive relationships that they have with those managers who provide support, as detailed in the discussion earlier.

Professionalism, role-related trust, trustworthiness, and self-pride are all then shown in the 'Expressed As' section of Figure 2 through employee participants wanting to do the right thing by acting in the best interests of the organisation, with the acknowledgement of the effect of positive managerial interactions (relating to the 'The Constraining Effect of Organisational Trust and Control' and 'Application of Employee Judgement Justified Through Professionalism and Self-Pride' sections). Figure 2's 'Obstacles' part then summarises from each area of the previous Discussion the various obstacles that impede the development of empowerment-enabling trust, drawing those factors back to the related empowerment constructs.

INPUT - TEMPORAL FACTORS

Availability of time for investment

Organisational transformation

TRUST

Organisational transformation

INPUT - CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

PRIMARY FORMS

Derived from Professionalism

Internal belief

CONSTITUENTS

Role-related

Trustworthiness

Emotional (affective)

Self-pride

EXPRESSED AS

'Doing the right thing'

Relational

OBSTACLES
(AGAINST EMPOWERMENT CONSTRUCTS)

Availability of managerial support
(PSYCHOLOGICAL)

Transformation/downsizing
(PSYCHOLOGICAL/STRUCTURAL)

Organisational processes
(STRUCTURAL)

Fragility
(STRUCTURAL)

Relationship weaknesses
(PSYCHOLOGICAL/STRUCTURAL)

Availability of time
(PSYCHOLOGICAL/STRUCTURAL)

Fear of making the 'wrong' decision
(PSYCHOLOGICAL/STRUCTURAL)

Figure 2 - A Model of Trust in the Subject Organisation as a Material Antecedent of Empowerment

Conclusions

This research undertook an investigation into empowerment in a subject organisation that not only operated with a matrix management structure, but was also situated in an ongoing transformation exercise. The aim of the investigation was to understand the experiences of participants with respect to their empowerment, and specifically their ability to self-determine within their roles in relation to holding formal power.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was adopted as the governing epistemology, with a PAR approach providing the framework for the insider research. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, which built on the pilot data gathering conducted earlier. These interviews and focus groups yielded rich and thick experiential data, where a preliminary and then principal thematic analysis was then conducted utilising a memoing technique to allow for emergent global and secondary themes to come into the foreground. In the context of the research, this analysis led to several significant themes being established.

Though the literature suggested that empowerment was a multi-faceted, complicated concept, it was understood by participants in its primary form i.e. to have the ability to make decisions. This then contributed to the definition of empowerment applicable to this research being formed from the data as *the ability to make and be accountable for decisions to effectively fulfil one's task and role within one's levels of experience and formal guidelines*.

The overarching opinion of participants was that a matrix hierarchy did not particularly prevent them fulfilling their roles, in contrast to the expectations of this insider researcher. The matrix structure was considered by participants to occasionally increase conflict, though this did not overly impact their working life. As such it was determined that understanding of the matrix structure did not demonstrate notable influence on the participant perceptions of empowerment within the subject organisation.

The continuing thematic analysis led to a reorientation of this research. Originally situated principally within the study of empowerment, data gathered from participants showed a new related avenue of discussion, one that was of material importance to the actual experiences that participants had of empowerment itself: trust. Trust emerged as an issue that impacted the working experiences of all participants, whether employees or senior managers.

Trust was not originally considered to be a fundamental aspect of the perceptions of empowerment, especially where it was found through the preliminary literature mapping that discussion on trust acting as an antecedent of empowerment was brief. A key finding of this research however established that it was in fact critical and there was a clear and important relationship between trust and empowerment. In respect of empowerment, and relating back to the definition of such through this work, employee perceptions of trust in the ability to make and execute decisions was significant. It became clear that there was a substantial issue with trust in the subject organisation that hampered the ability for employees to complete their tasks both efficiently and with pace, factors that were established to be critical in the current business context.

Trust was determined to be scarce between managers and employees, exacerbated by the transformation activity of the subject organisation. Senior managers demonstrated an understanding of the positives that high levels of trust could bring to relationships and agreed that trust had to improve in the organisation. Employees relayed the same message, but gave details on negative experiences that had impacted them in the workplace, providing rich data on perceptions of low managerial trust in their abilities. This low trust manifested primarily in the lack of decision making ability, where managers would hinder such by a variety of measures, whether knowingly or unknowingly, e.g. increasing control, deferring to other managers, restricting the sharing of information, and/or supporting prescriptive processes. In respect of control, it was suggested that the current transformation activity, i.e. downsizing, may have led to managers feeling insecure about their futures

and thus not wanting to expose themselves to any 'wrong' decision making. This fear was a notable obstacle to trust in manager/subordinate relationships, even though senior managers espoused their collective desire to increase trust across the organisation.

Employees felt strongly that they should be trusted in using their experience and judgement to make decisions on behalf of the organisation. They referred to their professionalism and their desire to 'do the right thing' for the business, whilst giving evidence of an internal, self-pride related trust. They also cited that in sporadic cases where they were afforded some decision making latitude, managerial support was an important demonstration of trust if those decisions were established to be sub-optimal for the organisation. In this instance, where employees could justify the logic behind such a decision, having a manager support them through the resultant criticism was fundamental, and helped to create stronger, more mutually-beneficial relationships.

In respect of this latter comment, it was noted by all participants that robust relationships between organisational members were important to a functioning work environment, and that improving those relationships would undoubtedly lead to greater mutual trust. In a context of transformation however, time was an issue: it was addressed by senior management as not being readily available to invest in those relationships, categorically highlighting one of the main obstacles to developing trust that the organisation was experiencing.

Senior management, returning to empowerment, did also pose a question of desire: did employees actually want to be empowered? One senior manager suggested that employees may espouse the requirement and need for empowerment, but not truly wish to be empowered as there was a fear of accountability. This was argued by the data to not necessarily be applicable, where employees had robustly stated their need to feel productive and valuable through the completion of tasks to a good standard.

In summary, the research demonstrated the *vital* importance of trust in relation to empowerment. It focused the lens of empowerment upon trust, to show that the latter was a material and principal antecedent of the former, where trust acted primarily through decision making delegation to increase the positive perceptions of such in employees. The investigation also brought to the fore the many obstructive issues that the subject organisation was experiencing in the development of trust, emphasising the gravity of the effect that downsizing, through the guise of transformation, can have on the working lives of employees. Whilst the organisation delivers messaging of the desire to empower its workforce, it must now fundamentally consider the evidence of participants' experiences if acting to develop such across its members, not only for the satisfaction of its employees through empowerment, but also for the competitiveness, longevity, and security of the organisation. Increasing trust across the organisation then is imperative for the empowerment of employees.

Greater discussion of the contributions of this work follow, however it is of importance to highlight the primary contribution here – a transferable model of trust-inhibiting obstacles. The aim of this insider research was to improve the working lives of participants, and therefore make a contribution to practice. The research has shown that the development of trusting relationships could counter the frustrations and issues that all of the employee participants experienced in one form or another, whilst also delivering benefits to the organisation of increased output and greater morale, amongst others. These factors then contribute to the transferability of this work. The findings, whilst specific to the subject organisation, can be viewed from a higher level to remove the effect of the subject organisation, thus generating a model that can be applied to other organisations undertaking a downsizing whilst attempting to realise the espoused benefits of empowerment. Figure 2 documents the various factors that impede trust, acting as a succinct, visual summary of the key issues determined. The model can be used to highlight to other organisations the issues that likely require consideration, together with their influencing factors. In understanding and thus heeding these findings,

members of the subject organisations and others could pre-emptively address many of the concerns, with the benefits possibly being significant.

Recommendations for the Organisation

Although determining the relevant interventions for the subject organisation is outside the scope of this thesis, it is prudent to offer brief initial guidance for that subsequent work. Organisations that empower believe in the value that their employees can add (Simons 1995), and the delegation of decision making makes a clear demonstration of their trust (Saleem *et al.* 2019). Managers are required to become dynamic and transparent (Kumaran 2012), especially in a time of significant change as that currently being experienced through downsizing. It is in this circumstance that mutual trust should have been created prior to the downsizing (Mishra and Mishra 1994) as employee trust in the organisation is critical during this period (Gillespie *et al.* 2020). The situation can still however be helped, with the words of Pascale (1990) resonating with importance and indeed relevance: "we keep trying to apply the *tools* of transformation without a corresponding shift in our managerial *mindset*" (Pascale 1990: 13). It is thus imperative that the experiences of employees within the subject organisation are heeded:

> "Trust must be enhanced if empowerment is to occur" (Randolph and Kemery 2011: 99).

The organisation must acknowledge that the onus is upon the managerial strata to grow trusting relationships (Brower *et al.* 2017). In order to improve the working life of organisational members, organisational support through the training of senior management to engage in trusting behaviours is imperative (Adamovic *et al.* 2020). This training will help to overcome the cynicism and related ambivalence towards empowerment (van Baarle *et al.* 2019) that the lack of trust induces, as where managers are willing to trust their employees, the organisation will benefit from a synergic influence (Chiu and Chiang 2019). Employees evaluate the actions of their managers to ascertain whether they are trusted to perform with autonomy and make decisions (Skiba and Wildman

2019; Seppälä *et al*. 2011; Adamovic *et al.* 2020) and positive behaviour will pay dividends. Bearing in mind the warnings given by Mintzberg (1994) in respect of vague impositions of empowerment forced down the hierarchy from the top, the organisation as a collective entity has to support senior and middle management clearly and with intent, in being comfortable in taking reasonable risk through delegation to help demonstrate these positively perceived behaviours (Brower *et al*. 2017; Adamovic *et al.* 2020). The organisation must also deliver the message that in such an operating climate as that being experienced by the subject organisation, management cannot realistically carry out all roles themselves; as such there is a *need* to release a level of control (Heldal 2015), to delegate, and thus take on a level of risk (Martínez-Tur *et al.* 2020; Simons 1995; Gómez and Rosen 2001) throughout the hierarchy.

Managers themselves should actively engage in developing trusting interactions by building relationships, being "willing to expose themselves to the prospect of misplaced trust if they are to reap the benefits of trust" (Kramer 2001: 24). Doing so will help to create an organisational culture that has trust at its very core (Guinot Reinders and Barghouti 2019; Han *et al.* 2019). That culture must be developed to focus on reciprocal trusting practices (Bligh 2017); it is required to have as its aim not only transparent, robust communication practices, but also active listening of the words of all organisational members (Tucker 2017; Chiu and Chiang 2019), and, critically, the delegation practices discussed earlier (Chiu and Chiang 2019; Maan *et al.* 2020). The organisation itself then should also be prepared to expose a vulnerability in committing to a learning approach, where logical decisions that return sub-optimal results are not punitively punished, but assessed, understood, and consumed as learning material. Delivering this message and creating it as a norm across the organisation would help to resolve the fear aspect of trust discussed earlier, potentially allowing managers some psychological security and thus leading to a relaxation of control.

As Seppälä *et al*. (2011) suggest, the promotion of trusting practices can help to support positive experiential emotional responses in employees, leading to

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the belief of more future opportunities in the working context as opposed to issues and threats. In creating progressive systems of delegation and participative decision making, all supported by a learning culture, encouraging relational signals are displayed that help to build trust (Six 2007), allowing employees meaningful input into the direction of their work (Holland *et al.* 2017); this is critical when viewed in accordance with Spreitzer's (1995, 1996) *meaning* tenet of empowerment. In respect of communications, Gillespie *et al.* (2020) found evidence of support for Brower *et al.* (2017) in that transparency is vitally important for trust to develop in working relationships, and sharing both positive and negative information related to the organisation and tasks can develop a belief in employees that the manager trusts them. With specific reference to the subject organisation, in the current downsizing programme, this is of notable importance as information could positively affect perceptions of job security and thus realise the benefits of that security as discussed earlier.

The data strongly support the literature in asserting that the development of relationships between organisational members is critical to the production and maintenance of trust. Though the availability of time for investment in these relationships is clearly an issue in respect of the subject organisation, the importance of such cannot be underemphasised. It is imperative for trust, and thus for empowerment, that the organisation considers a method in which to enhance and support those working relationships. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) state that creating cultural norms of interaction, preferably face to face, are beneficial, and McNaughtan *et al.* (2019) agree, suggesting that these such interactions can demonstrate managerial care and investment in their employees to induce feelings of trust. Seemingly identifying a cyclical nature to the effect of trust in a relationship, Skiba and Wildman posit that "feeling trusted is necessary to grow and expand the social exchange relationship" (Skiba and Wildman 2019: 230) i.e. feeling trusted will help the relationship, which will then lead to further trust, etc.

There is also value in not only assisting the working, professional side of relationships but also the social, leisure-orientated aspects too. Dixon (2007)

interprets Foucault's musings to offer guidance on better working relationships through that specific social aspect. The author posits that interpersonal relationships which are perceived as mutually satisfying and enjoyable could offer greater feelings of well-being. These then lead to the increase in positive interactions in the working context more so than traditional, professional manager-employee exchanges. Engaging in such social activity reduces the gravitas of fear in the workplace and replaces it with pleasure and respect, altering the 'flow' of power. Such a theory should be further deliberated in a subsequent extension of this work.

Whilst these methods predominantly apply to the generation of trust, there should also be a consideration of trust preservation, aimed at conserving any trust that exists in the organisation during times of change, or a 'jolt' as termed by Gustafsson *et al.* (2020). These authors refer to a 'jolt' as being a disruptive external force that acts upon either the organisation, or on its members relationships, to enforce uncertainty and a level of vulnerability; in the context of the subject organisation this jolt can be understood as the downsizing activity. Inevitably though, Gustafsson *et al.* (2020) argue, the jolt has a negative effect on organisational members by removing familiarity in work processes, thus acting to reduce trust, whilst increasing self-protectionism.

It is in these situations that a form of organisational member agency manifests, where those members can act to withdraw their trust after judging their organisational contexts, assessing whether exposing themselves to vulnerability truly is in their long-term benefit (Gustafsson *et al.* 2020). Preservation of trust is laden with challenges, however there are practices that can be undertaken to reduce the erosion of existing trust, including acting transparently, demonstrating behaviours in accordance with organisational values, showing care for other organisational members, and actively seeking to reduce relationship uncertainty (Gillespie *et al.* 2020; Gustafsson *et al.* 2020; Adamovic *et al.* 2020). Managerial direction here is critical: as Gustafsson *et al.* (2020) evidenced, managers see themselves as protectors of the business during the jolt, and as such have perceived agency to preserve

or sacrifice trust. Leading by example then is important in ensuring that trust can be supported by

> "involving employees in decisions and changes that affect them, giving them a sense of control, and emphasizing the values and purpose of the organization and other familiar foundations of trust that already exist in the organization" (Gillespie *et al.* 2020: 2).

Developing these relationships will undoubtedly lead to a stronger, more robust level of working life through a critically-important increase in trust. Unquestionably, however, these methods require an investment of time. As Bligh (2017) comments, the reality of the working environment means that managers often do not have much direct and consistent interaction with employees, limiting the progression of relationships. However, with many of the obstacles of trust evidenced by this research being exacerbated and fuelled by the main temporal issue of a dearth of time, as well as the important contextual issue of a downsizing across the board, the organisation has a choice to make as to whether it continues with the status quo, or it reprioritises to protect time for these purposes.

Contributions

The contributions of this investigation cover both practice and theory, though the contribution to practice was and remains the original, primary aim. The major contribution to practice was highlighted earlier; summary of further contributions now follows.

Practice

An Organisational Definition of Empowerment

The practical contributions of this research lie with the understanding of empowerment and trust within the subject organisation that leads to actionable knowledge. Through the establishment of key themes, this research has focused the lens of what the literature describes as the multi-faceted concept of empowerment to determine a specific and contextual definition of

empowerment applicable in the subject organisation, i.e. the employee ability to make decisions. In doing so, the organisation becomes aware of the specific element of empowerment that its employees require, allowing the operationalisation of empowerment programmes (Spreitzer 1995, 1996; Gómez and Rosen 2001) with a higher associated level of success.

Downsizing and Trust as an Antecedent of Empowerment

The effect of a matrix hierarchy structure on employees' ability to fulfil their roles was determined to be minimal, however the research showed that empowerment itself held much potential for both the organisation and its members. Although employees conveyed their desire for greater decision making latitude, and senior management espoused its intent *to* empower employees with this decision making delegation, it was evidenced by this research that the scarcity of trust was a material and significant factor in impeding the employee perceptions of empowerment. This lack of trust was explained as manifesting through a variety of key obstacles that prevented its development, obstacles that were shown to be temporally and contextually driven.

In highlighting the importance of trust as a fundamental antecedent to the empowerment, this research contributes to practice by informing top management that employee perceptions of managerial trust are vital for those employees to be able to fulfil their roles and complete their tasks at pace, efficiently, and effectively. The research also brings to the fore the relationship between downsizing and that managerial trust: in respect of the subject organisation, the findings show the form of hurdles derived from that downsizing which are currently acting to inhibit the development of trusting relationships, hurdles that must be prioritised for the greatest levels of return should the organisation choose to act. In respect of other organisations endeavouring to engage with programmes of both empowerment and downsizing, the research delivers warning of those obstacles and advises pre-emptive consideration of such to mitigate their impacts.

Dissemination: Driving the Change Agenda in the Subject Organisation

The findings of this research are to be disseminated across the organisation, with both strata of senior management and of employees. Doing so will highlight to those organisational members the issues that came to the fore during the research and the obstructions to trust that need to be overcome, primarily by senior management, but with the assistance of the employee fraternity. Dissemination across the senior management will be approached with care and respect: the findings of the research, though not notably controversial, do still hold an impact and may possibly be perceived by senior management as critical of its approach. Though this is not necessarily the intention of the work, the areas that need addressing have been highlighted and thus the findings are clear that senior management must act if improvements to the working lives of participants are to be realised. As such, dissemination will be through individualised briefing sessions, much like the individual interviews held to gather the data, in order for each senior management participant to be fully appraised of the findings, and to answer any questions that may arise, reducing the potential for negative or dismissive group think (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Dimitroff *et al.* 2005; Smithson 2000).

It is recognised that change in the subject organisation is often a slow process, primarily driven by its size; as such, any intervention that is established will undoubtedly not happen overnight. It is also noted that in the current, COVID-19 stricken context, the aim of the subject organisation, and many others undoubtedly, is to ensure survival through the pandemic. To this point then, the organisation may not be able to devote time nor resource to what may be perceived as a lower priority issue. That being acknowledged, it is argued that the findings of this research have significant potential to make the working lives of participants much better, with less organisational stressors. The researcher remains an employee of the organisation, with continuing professional and social relationships with participants, and is passionate about enacting change to realise benefits for them. Recognising the importance of keeping the requirement for the interventions at the forefront of senior management minds, the researcher will then continue to work from inside the organisation to drive an agenda of change, consistently raising the benefits

that it will bring, at what could likely be a low financial cost. This work has brought to attention the issues that employees face in fulfilling their roles, and in implementing corrective action, the organisation will undoubtedly benefit in the long term. To date, two sessions of dissemination have taken place with senior management; further briefing activity is in the process of being scheduled.

Dissemination: Sharing the Model of Trust Obstacles

Continuing in respect of dissemination, there is value in the findings being shared further as part of post-doctoral work, beyond the subject organisation as highlighted above. To that point then, Figure 2 and the related narrative will be disseminated via journals orientated toward organisational studies, specifically organisational behaviour. Due to the effect on employees of organisations, together with much of the literature being from that discipline (e.g. Tucker 2017 and Bish *et al.* 2015), the findings will also be shared through HR-orientated journals. These latter journals will allow recognition of employee perceptions at a level where one of the most notable obstacles could possibly be addressed by that area i.e. transformation concerns. The feedback from this discipline may also assist in the following use of the findings: the generation of training material.

Facilitating the Creation of Training to Enhance Trust

The review of literature conducted earlier in this work highlighted how the lack of training for survivors during downsizing had negative impacts on their ability to fulfil their roles (Cascio 1993; Gandolfi 2008; Appelbaum *et al.* 1997). In these situations, survivors were expected to continue to provide the organisation with their efforts, despite that same organisation having materially impacted the norms of operation. Commentary from employee participants through the data gathering sessions echoed the same core sentiment, in that the loss of individuals who occupied approval roles in processes led to gaps and thus their inability to perform both efficiently and without frustration was affected (see 'Theme 1 - Clarity is Fundamental'). As called for by Lee *et al.* (2018), the findings here give an avenue for the development of training aimed at increasing trusting exchanges not only within the subject organisation, but

potentially externally too. Training will be developed initially with the organisation, subject to internal approvals of resource and time, to ensure that all parties recognise the concerns of the other, to educate about managerial coaching, and appropriate decision making. In doing so, and receiving such training, it is envisaged that senior management will become more confident in the abilities of employees to make decisions that are aligned to the organisational requirements, and employees will be able to lean on techniques to assess the most optimal course of action. The training will also endeavour to change the mindset of senior management toward that of a learning culture, thereby enabling experiential learning across the members as opposed to the fear of incorrect decision making that has been discussed to hamper empowerment perceptions.

Change to the Researcher's Professional Practice
The findings have also contributed to the researcher's own practice. Most significantly, it has ensured that the researcher demonstrates more patience and understanding in circumstances where decision making ability is not conferred by management: it may not necessarily be that management has a lack of faith in the researcher's ability, but more that there are circumstances that may be hindering their desire to do so, such as the fear of errors. The researcher has therefore accepted that this may be the case on occasions, but continues to proactively request that autonomy where relevant. It is hoped that the dissemination of this inquiry, from an insider researcher, will help other participants to also exhibit that patience and understanding, in both directions of a dyadic, for the benefit of all.

A final comment but in terms of a recommendation for practice is that the organisation should fundamentally look towards allocation of time to aid in the building of robust relationships. Many of the issues explicated through this inquiry could seemingly be improved quickly and efficiently by the development of the senior management/employee relationship, as indeed suggested by participants (see 'Employee Empowerment Through Self-Determination' section). It is acknowledged that time is of limited availability, however the findings indicate that should the organisation be able to allocate

such a resource for relationship building activities, the benefits could be significant.

Theory

The three key contributions made to theory by this investigation are varied in nature, but equally important. The first contribution to be discussed is that of methodology, and specifically the qualitative, phenomenological approach of this investigation.

Qualitative Inquiry of Empowerment Through Phenomenology

Of the extant empowerment literature reviewed to provide a theoretical grounding for this work, all save three were conducted after the authors had situated themselves firmly in a positivist position. Influential scholars such as Spreitzer (1995) and Gómez and Rosen (2001) utilise quantitative questionnaires, or in some cases surveys, to prove/disprove hypotheses related to empowerment and/or trust, with many others following suit (see examples of Li *et al.* 2015; Caniëls *et al.* 2017; Wikhamn and Selart 2019; Mishra and Morrissey 1990; Gill *et al.* 2019; Men and Stacks 2013; Chenji and Sode 2019; Potnuru *et al.* 2019; McNaughtan *et al.* 2019; Hanaysha 2016, 2016a; Kim and Fernandez 2017; Adamovic *et al.* 2020; Zhang and Geng 2019; Miao *et al.* 2017; Fong and Snape 2015; Spreitzer and Mishra 1999; Choi *et al.* 2016; Hanaysha and Tahir 2016; Özaralli 2003). The outliers in respect of epistemology and methodology are Foster-Fishman *et al.* (1998) and Foster-Fishman and Keys (1997), who notably employ interviews to gather data. Foster-Fishman *et al.* (1998) are explicit about adopting a phenomenological approach; interestingly Yukl and Fu (1999) utilise interviews as only a secondary data method.

This research the offers originality in respect of the approach to data gathering, and the guidance of a PAR framework. With regards to the method of only using questionnaires or surveys exclusively in much of the existing research, this researcher contends that such a method excludes a significant proportion of the true perception of empowerment. Though a survey was used in the pilot data gathering for the investigation of empowerment, it was undertaken

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deliberately with the aim of deriving foundational knowledge that lent itself to more specific, inquiring questioning through the interviews and focus groups. The use of surveys to draw full conclusions often reduces the experiences of individuals to a limited response through a Likert scale, without any basic information as to why the individual perceives their situation in that way; it offers only a participant's view and not their actual behaviour (Kim and Fernandez 2017; Nuhu *et al.* 2019). This approach is somewhat perplexing, especially where literature is direct in espousing the psychological and experiential nature of not only empowerment, but also trust. Similarly, Wilson and Sapsford (2006) remark on the apparent contradiction of using questionnaires to assess social exchanges, where the questionnaires themselves form an artificial social situation, whilst other scholars, in support of this researcher, criticise the method by highlighting that questionnaires do not allow for the development of *why* certain positions are adopted (Gillham 2000; Creswell 2014). As such, it is argued that the research conducted here presents a more holistic understanding of both empowerment and trust.

The Investigation of Manager-to-Subordinate Trust

A second contribution is that of the investigation of the flow of trust, specifically for this research the manager-to-subordinate downwards trust. As Bligh (2017), Han *et al.* (2019), and Lester and Brower (2003) suggest, much research into trust, including the majority of that referenced in this work (with the exception of felt trust related investigations) study employee trust in a manager, and not a manager's trust in an employee. Indeed, "empirical research examining predicators of managers' trust in their teams has been relatively neglected" (Martínez-Tur *et al.* 2020: 662). The issues raised by employees in this research then required a more nuanced, investigative understanding, as new meaning and knowledge was being uncovered.

Establishing Trust as a Vital Antecedent of Empowerment

The third key contribution to theory is that of the importance of trust as an antecedent of empowerment. As alluded to earlier, the preliminary literature mapping reviewed empowerment literature, and its relationship with trust was not discussed as a material factor. This research has shown that managerial

trust in employees is critical to the perception of empowerment. Evidence has been presented that highlights issues that can arise temporally and contextually that prevent the development of, and indeed in some cases erode, trust within the organisation. The specific bond that empowerment, predicated on trust, has with decision making has also been brought to the fore, identifying the common desire of organisational employees to be able to self-determine with the support of the organisation. The clarity given to obstacles to trust, together with the direct relationship to empowerment through decision making, are notable contributions to empowerment, and indeed trust, theory.

In Summary

The contributions made by this research are wide-ranging and valuable. In producing a definition of empowerment, the ambiguity of the term is eradicated for the subject organisation so that it can work to improve empowerment levels in the knowledge of what that means for its members. The unearthing of issues relating to trust, together with the influence generated by downsizing on it, and thus employees, has allowed the importance of trust to be focussed on. Trust has then been established as an critical antecedent of empowerment, demonstrating to organisations the importance of ensuring that this aspect of working life is improved prior to the implementation of any empowerment programme. Through dissemination of the transferable trust model, the subject organisation as well as others can proactively understand key issues that may manifest in their drive to enhance empowerment, offering a greater chance of success. In respect of the subject organisation, the bringing into the foreground of these issues permits the researcher to continue to drive forward the aim of this research in invoking change that will benefit the participants, including the production of training material that will help to improve trust between employees and management.

The theoretical contribution of inquiry through the use of a phenomenological basis, supported by a PAR framework, offers an original alternative to the vast quantitative work on empowerment previously undertaken by scholars. The light shone on the manager-to-subordinate trust relationship also offers a

further insight into the oft-neglected relationship direction, where much previous work has focussed upon subordinate trust in management. The final theoretical contribution of establishing trust as a vital antecedent of empowerment consolidates the same practical contribution, as discussed above, in facilitating the holistic understanding of the empowerment, and thus the potential steps that can be taken to enhance future success of initiatives and realise the benefits of an empowered workforce.

Limitations

Though this research sheds new light upon empowerment, and especially its relationship with trust in an organisation, there are limitations to the work. The discussion earlier posited that purely quantitative research into empowerment may not offer deep understanding into the concept and how it is perceived by organisational actors. That being said, it must be recognised that further quantitative study of empowerment and trust may however offer *new* insight that may not be comprehended through an investigation such as this limited predominantly to the qualitative paradigm.

The inquiry was limited to a sample of a sub-function within the subject organisation. Whilst that sample was argued to be demographically and hierarchically diverse to permit robust conclusions, such a sample may limit the applicability of any subsequent intervention based upon this research. A further related limitation, and one of note, is the temporal and contextual aspect of this research. The phenomenological methodology adopted in this inquiry restricts to an extent the generalisability and repeatability of the work by its very nature, in that it is a specific exploration of a circumstance within the subject organisation at a specific point in time. The effects of this point in time in which the data was gathered, together with the situation of the organisation and its members also acts to make these findings specific. In undergoing a downsizing programme, the organisation has initiated a sequence of events that, as discussed, could have serious impact upon the perceptions of organisational members. Not only does job security affect those individuals, but also time pressures of working in reduced numbers and

seemingly without any reduction in task. As such, a deeply stressed working context such as this could have negatively influenced the views of participants at the time of data gathering, leading to data that has more negativity than it would do in an alternative circumstance, e.g. when the downsizing activity was completed. A secondary associated limitation is that the data gathering itself was conducted a year before the findings. As such, whilst arguably representative of the participants' experiences, they may now be less applicable to those participants; the findings of this research should then be revisited with participants at the point of intervention design.

Recommendations for Further Research

The issues uncovered by this research would benefit from subsequent investigation. Specifically, and as discussed earlier, the PAR framework adopted through this work requires that interventions aimed at addressing those obstacles to trust and thus empowerment are established and then executed, with a reflection on the success of those interventions. It is paramount that any such interventions are determined with the input of participants to ensure a high likelihood of success.

Trust and empowerment theory, as well as organisational practice, would also benefit from further research into Argyris' (1976) theories-in-use versus espoused theory. It is interesting to note Argyris' (1976) findings that the approaches which individuals espouse are not often aligned to the behaviours they present. This may hold much value for the theory and practice in that addressing this prior to the commencement of any programme of empowerment could contribute to greater success in embedding those initiatives; as such, further investigation would be beneficial.

During the principal literature review, this research has acknowledged that trust is espoused to be consisted of a cognitive, as well as an affective, aspect (McAllister 1995; Legood *et al*. 2020; Korsgaard *et al.* 2015; Mayer *et al.* 1995), where the former relates typically to reliability and competence, and the latter to emotional and interpersonal links (Legood *et al.* 2020). The discussion has

deliberately collapsed these constituents in referring to a holistic *trust* concept, as opposed to each of the aforementioned parts, to ensure that this specific investigation remains focused upon the emerging important interaction between empowerment and trust itself. Any specific inquiry into the delineated affective trust and cognitive trust falls outside of the scope of this research, however such an investigation would be beneficial, as echoed by Legood *et al.* (2020), to understand which aspect can help to realise most benefits. As such, a recommendation for further work is for an exploration of the effect of each aspect of trust, specifically flowing from manager to employee, upon the empowerment of organisational employees.

From a theoretical perspective, whilst this research has adopted a Foucauldian-inspired lens to understand the power in empowerment, it would be a useful as well as an enlightening addition to this work to apply other philosophical lenses to the issue. Of specific interest and indeed applicability to this research subject, would be Bourdieu's theory of Habitus. The use of such a lens would draw light on avenues of investigation that may offer value, especially in consideration of cultural capital and, as Aldridge and Evetts (2003) discuss, the related discourse of occupational self-identity which helps the perceptions of professionalism. This potentially could add a line of inquiry into how senior management and employees view their professionalism, whilst also translating into associated motivation and control, adding greater knowledge to that explicated through this research.

It was discussed earlier that the findings of this inquiry could be transferred to other organisations. It is firmly argued by the researcher that the constituents of trust and the associated obstacles to their enhancement are of such a holistic level so as to be applicable to other entities and not only to the subject organisation. To enhance understanding and to thus test this position, it would be beneficial for these findings, summarised through Figure 2, to be applied proactively and pre-emptively to other organisational settings, where the applicability and indeed their usefulness would be established.

A final call for advancement of this research is that related to Spreitzer's (1995) constructs of psychological empowerment. As previously discussed, literature posits four tenets of empowerment, specifically meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer 1995). The aim of this inquiry was deliberate in investigating only one of these constructs, i.e. self-determination, as the insider researcher had first-hand experience of this being a difficulty in the subject organisation. Spreitzer *et al.* (1997), supported by Kim and Fernandez (2017), however guide that it is only with the combination of all four constructs of empowerment when the benefits can be realised, going as far as to suggest that

> "From a more applied perspective, practitioners that focus exclusively on a single dimension in their efforts to empower employees, are likely to have, at best, limited success" (Spreitzer *et al.* 1997: 701).

As such, a study of the effect of the other three constructs of psychological empowerment, together with the impact of trust acting as an antecedent would provide much colour to the debate of how to enable the most valuable perceptions of empowerment for employees, thus benefitting senior management, and the organisation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework has been distilled from the preliminary literature mapping activity and the principal literature mapping conducted as part of this thesis. This conceptual framework provided the research with structural guidance and aided the composition of the questions to pose to participants in the focus groups and interviews.

MATRIX HIERARCHY			
indirect reporting lines		direct reporting lines	
PRIMARY FACETS			
formal power	trust	authority	autonomy
decentralisation			
shared control		self-determination	
EMPOWERMENT			
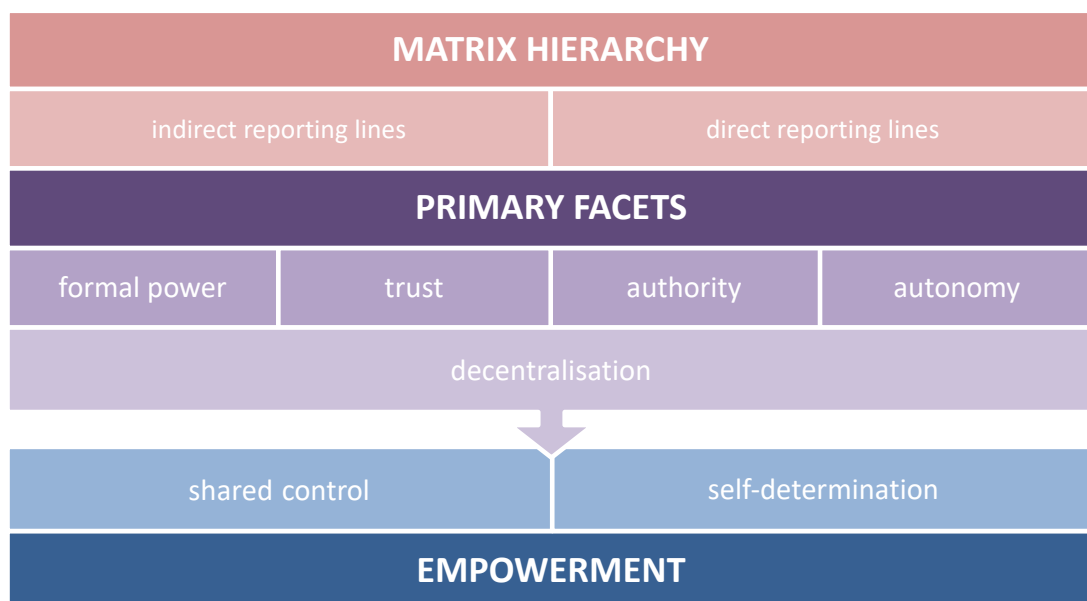
Appendix 2 – Pilot Data Gathering: Survey Questions

Question for employee	Question for Manager	Constituent of framework being addressed
"I am empowered at work."	"I believe in empowering my team."	Overarching empowerment.
"I have access to appropriate job-related information."	"My team has access to job-related information."	Structural Facets (*Resources, Support*).
"I have access to the tools I need for my job."	"My team has access to tools that they require to do their job."	Structural Facets (*Resources, Support*).
"I understand the vision applicable to my team (i.e. what the team should strive to be)."	"My team understands the vision applicable to it (i.e. what the team should strive to be)."	Antecedent (*Vision*).
"I am accountable for my work."	"My team is accountable for their work."	Key Aspects (*Accountability*).
"My role is visible across the organisation."	"My team is aware of how to increase its visibility across the organisation."	Antecedent (*Formal Power*); Structural Facets (*Opportunities*).
"I have autonomy in determining the ways in which I complete job tasks."	"The autonomy of my team is encouraged."	Key Aspects (*Autonomy*).

-	"My team is encouraged to take the lead in relation to tasks."	Antecedent (*Trust*); Structural (*Support*); Key Aspects (*Decentralisation, Accountability, Autonomy*); Psychological (*Competence, Self-determination*).
"I am aware of the rewards I have access to in my role."	-	Structural Facets (*Resources*, *Opportunities*); Psychological Facets (*Meaning and Impact*).
"The rewards I have access to are commensurate with my responsibility."	-	Structural Facets (*Resources*, *Opportunities*); Psychological Facets (*Meaning, Impact*).
"I have the decision and choice about how I will approach a task."	"My team is encouraged to own and deliver their tasks with minimal input."	Antecedent (*Trust*); Psychological Facets (*Self-determination*).
"I am able to exercise freedom and control in how I execute my job."	"My team is able to exercise freedom and control in how they execute their jobs."	Antecedent (*Trust*); Psychological Facets (*Self-determination*).
"I have the authority to fulfil my job tasks."	"I am permitted to share general authority with my team."	Antecedent (*Formal Power, Trust*); Key Aspects (*Decentralisation, Accountability, Autonomy)*; Psychological (*Self-determination*).

-	"My team is trusted to make decisions in the best interests of the organisation."	Antecedent (*Trust*);
"My development is supported by the provision of coaching."	"My team has access to coaching for their development."	Structural Facets (*Support, Development*); Psychological Facets (*Competence*).
"Having more than one reporting line causes conflict in my everyday role."	"I often experience conflict due to the matrix reporting structure of the organisation."	Conflict.
"Having more than one reporting line means I am not able to determine how I execute my job."	"I am clear in what my role requires in respect of managing employees."	Conflict; Key Aspects (*Decentralisation, Autonomy*); Psychological (*Self-determination*).
-	"I am supportive of the empowerment of my team."	Overarching Empowerment.

Appendix 3 – Example of Interview Transcription (Focus Group Instance 2)

Note: 'PR' is the researcher, whilst the participants have been randomly assigned a P number to ensure confidentially in accordance with ethical approval, and to trace back direct participant quotes as required. Identifiers within the transcript have been redacted as required to maintain organisational confidentiality.

PR: The first one, is quite a core one: what do you understand empowerment to mean? So, I'll just throw it out, feel free, anyone who wants to take the lead…

P1: So, for me it means the ability to make my own decisions, I suppose to a certain extent, and to control what I do within a set of boundaries and guidelines that I understand.

P6: Yep…

P1: So, I am empowered to make decisions based upon those set of guidelines, which may mean that sometimes I can make decisions by myself, and sometimes I need an input from others depending on what that decision is.

P2: I largely agree, but I'd also say that I only feel empowered if those guidelines are not, are…not too small because…

P1: Not too restrictive…

P2: I wouldn't feel empowered if someone said exactly the same thing but the only thing you're allowed to do is to write…

P1: The date!

P2:…yeah, I guess, something in guidelines that they have to check I wouldn't be empowered by that.

P1: I think it's about having the right level of empowerment to do things by yourself based on experience, your judgement, the hierarchy I suppose.

P4: I think for me it's also about being clear what those boundaries and guidelines are because if it's not clear then I don't think you feel empowered because you're uncertain, and that holds you back from using that empowerment that you've got because you're uncertain about it, it, it stops you.

P2: It might be a bit of… I know in [REDACTED] everyone's used to having guidelines that everyone's used to, but if you start saying people are empowered and then talk about empowered within certain lines, I'd say I don't feel empowered.

P1: It depends what those lines are though, so it goes back to what you said before, if that, if those lines aren't particularly restrictive, then…so for example I know that [REDACTED], their processes are a lot more flexible than ours, and I know [sub-function] managers that work in there feel more empowered than I do for the same grade. But that's because they have, they don't have these very strict processes. But what they do have is a guideline on value, so they get to make decisions up to a certain level of million dollar worth of value in terms of a decision or a pricing point, or whatever, so I think that…they probably feel more empowered…they've still got that restriction, but it's a sensible restriction it's not a restrictive one…

P2: Is it quite a singular restriction?

P1: Yeah…

P2: 'cause I've seen more time I've spent in [sub-function], and I've probably moved around because I don't like the lack of empowerment. The places I've

moved to I've sort of gone "oh yeah, I feel empowered" and then about six months later the rules change, and I think I don't think you feel empowered if there are lots of different angles to that box that you can get put in, whereas one rule, you do feel empowered…

P1: …and its more clear to your point.

P6: I think it's the clarity…

P4: Yeah, it's the clarity that makes…I have got…being absolutely blunt, I have got absolutely no idea what I am and not allowed to do so I end up having any empowerment that I may have being taken away from me because I feel like I need to check everything.

P2: I wouldn't feel empowered knowing very clearly that I have seven restrictions.

P4: No, but depending on what they were and what level they were and how they fitted together…

P2: I would still feel not empowered because I would say that's lots of different ways of trying to control what I do.

P4: Yeah maybe, context is…

P2: But I'd say having a…you can do a, and this is a ceiling, not here's a ceiling, and a side, almost not even just in a [REDACTED] context, of feeling empowered…I do not feel empowered with lots of little rules.

P4: Yeah, no, I get what you mean, if its oh I can do this under here but actually if it falls under this category and I can't and this one here, you end up actually no being able to do anything…

P2: …and then you move to the next step and you can't do this, but this or this…

P4: …yeah, I do know what you mean.

P1: Yeah, by the time you've applied all of those rules, the ability that you have to make a decision is so slim…

P2: it's 'cause you've done little steps of the decision, I've done this bit, and this bit, start a [REDACTED], end a [REDACTED], and you gradually step through lots of different steps you just feel like you're squished all the time.

P3: I don't feel…sorry, you go P5…

P5: You sure? I think there could also be an issue of…if you don't have the boundaries at an appropriate level…almost if you've got too much leeway, that you don't feel experienced enough to make the decisions.

P4: Yes.

P5: That can have a negative as well…

P1: Almost too empowered.

P5: Yeah.

P1: What I was going to say is there are probably good reasons as to why there are those some of those ceilings, walls, whatever, probably not all of them but ones where the cumulative effect of all them leads to 'unempowerment', whereas it would be more appropriate…you have the ones in place that are appropriate then that would be a probably be a good thing because it would provide clarity.

P2: Do you…I know we talk about a work context of it, but do you feel more empowered in your own life outside of work than you do in work?

P1: Yeah, because no one is telling me how much money I can spend on a car or a holiday, it's all down to my…

P5: How to bring up your kids!

P1: Yeah! You got social rules…

P2: But that's the thing, you still have legal rules, and social rules, rules to some extent…

P3: But they're not prescriptive. The issue is you don't get to use your judgement and if you don't use your judgement you can't feel empowered. And I think that's where [REDACTED] falls down, everything is prescriptive, and there's no trust in people to use their judgement to make decisions.

P6: Yeah, 'cause I guess if you think about spending your own money, you might say I might spend this much on a holiday, but that means I won't buy those new shoes…

P2: Yeah.

P4: Yeah, you're using that balance.

P6: But then if you try to apply that same rule to [REDACTED] it'd be a 'no' there's the rule there, there's no judgement backing it up.

P1: But isn't that because we don't own that budget? So, in the work world, we don't own that pot of money.

P2: But then didn't you say that subs get set a financial element and that's a one rule based on them. So, if you take it to your real life, it's like 'Don't spend

more than *x* amount in a year' how you spend it…don't give an [REDACTED] $50M dollars in a year, or if you do you give it once, you don't give it twice.

PR: I know you wanted to say something Sarah so we'll come back to you in a minute unless you've said it already, but one of the things I just wanted to get clarity on…clarity is a buzz word…was one of the things you said P5 was if you have too much empowerment…

P5: If there's no rules, you've gone new into a business, and you don't know the processes and you don't know what you're supposed to do and people kind of just go…

P6: Off you get!

P5: Get on with your job, I think that would feel quite stressful and you wouldn't feel empowered.

P4: Like a deer in the headlights!

P6: Ha, I guess that's really quite reflective of your character being quite responsible, some people might be like "Just go for it"!

P5: Yeah…

P2: Do you think there's an element of you've worked in [REDACTED] for however many years, and you're used to having the rules…what do you think Grads think when they join? Or if you join from other companies, or you go to other companies, you are trusted, or you go and do something…

PR: P3's a great example of that. We've had several conversations over the past year, year and a half, about that. This is probably a good segway into what you wanted to say earlier…

P3: I don't feel very empowered at all, and it's based on what I've just said that its all prescriptive and you're not allowed to make judgement calls based on how risk or how much value you think is based on that contract.

P1: How does that compare to what you had before then. Did you feel more empowered in your old job?

P3: Yeah, you could make your own judgement calls…I mean you still had to get SME approvals for relevant changes but you didn't have to then go for senior approvals as well, or have people review your drafting on everything. You could make a call about how much review you wanted.

P4: Isn't there something about the consequences? As well as getting it wrong. That influences how empowered you feel. And when I say consequences, that's quite broad…I mean that in quite a broad sense.

P5: Do you mean business consequences or personal consequences?

P4: Both! But kind of…if you feel like if I make a mistake on this then I'll be supported by my team, or my manager, or whatever, I think you're more…you feel more empowered to make decisions etc. than if you think people are going to come down on you like a tonne of bricks or whatever, right?

P2: There's something you've started there. The consequences of if I get it wrong. So, we make business deals on what we think is going to happen, but we can't tell the future…

P4: No, I know…

P2: But the thing is it's that context of assuming if it doesn't go exactly as planned it's wrong, which isn't necessarily…

P4: No, I agree…

P2: Yeah.

P4: But it's the perception of people interpreting that as wrong, and actually in fact there's not always just the one right answer. It could be done in a number of different ways, but I think the two are linked together. My own personal experience is if you don't make the same decision, or draw the same conclusion as somebody else has drawn, then you're wrong and actually it's not necessarily…

P1: I think some of the difficulty we have is because it's such a complex business. I share the frustration about the lack of empowerment about changing stuff like contract drafting that I know is ok, you know, I know its ok, and yet I still have to get it checked by someone else. But then there's the other stuff where it's such a complex business, and whilst I may think that going and doing something with [REDACTED] is valid, and fine, and within the level of something that I should be able to decide, I don't really know what's happening over here with the network and all of the other [REDACTED], and how that's going to impact as an entire business, and I think there's that lack of clarity on, I don't know if its strategy, or policy, or its just lack of knowledge, but because we are so complex, and we have so many complex relationships, there's so many people dealing with those external parties, you've kind of…you struggle a little bit with not knowing the bigger picture and without having that information and clarity around you to make those good decisions whether they're right or wrong.

P4: Yeah, sometimes it adds nuances to the decision you would've made had you known about this. Because you don't you do what you think is best.

P6: I guess that's down to not having all the information though isn't it?

P4: Yeah…

P6: Even if you've got all the policies, and the rules and your boundaries, there's probably still something beyond that…

P1: That you don't know about…

P6: That you don't know about. And if you haven't got that, if you don't feel like you've got that level of understanding…

P4: Of the big picture…

P6: …then you still might follow all of the rules, and you still might feel like you can't make the decision, because you might sort of follow them but then you might come out with an outcome that's like "oh, I might just check in with so-and-so".

P1: Yeah.

P6: But there isn't something that's going on with another interested party, because you might talk to them and they may say "oh yeah, don't do that because we're trying to do a deal with them over here and we could put them together and use it that way". So, I suppose I don't know what the answer is because our business is very complicated…

P1: But there's probably a sweet spot of empowerment though isn't there? Where everybody would be comfortable up to a certain level, to make certain decisions, you know, and there should be that level of trust amongst the people that work for you to make that decision and then above that have bands of, you know, you might need to think a bit broader here and get a bit of advice and support.

PR: So, your comment on trust moves us on to the next questions then. What's the perceptions, the feelings, of trust, of managerial trust? So, trust of your manager, and what you believe is your manager's trust of you? Because that's quite a good idea that empowerment is linked to an element of trust.

P3: I don't think, given that everything, well most things, at the minute have to be checked because of a lack of clarity, that there's any trust without a check what's going out is right for management.

P6: I've felt, since the team that P2 and I now are in, there's a lot of trust in us as a team. And [REDACTED] reinforces that message all the time like "I trust you to go and do your deals", but I don't feel trusted functionally, if that's the right way to explain it, so obviously [REDACTED] isn't a [sub-function] exec or anything, but like he trusts us, I also feels like sometimes he couldn't really care less what the [REDACTED] rules are, he's just happy to trust you to go and do a good deal. So, on that side of things I feel I trusted, and that decision is reinforced, but as a member of the [sub-] function I don't feel trusted. And that's probably got worse in the transformation because the guiding lines are not clear and therefore, we're having to get stuff checked over and over again. And probably, there's probably some element of…there's an opportunity to standardise how the whole interactions of people when you need to go and get buy-off of things. Because I know full well that if I go to one individual for something, it will be a very different conversation than if I go to another individual for something. I know for certain individuals it will be positive and helpful and a good experience, and I know for other individuals, it'll will be…

P4: Painful!

P6: Ha ha ha ha, it will actually be quite pointless, and painful, and I will leave even more confused! So, I guess there's some element there of how you interact with others when you need to go and get the things you need.

P2: There's a trust element to that. It's interesting about that person you get less of a positive response from because, if they trust you, its trusting to share your information not being controlling, not being…it's almost like they don't trust you to give you all the information because then you might go and do something…

P6: Yes, because you'll go and do it yourself…

P4: Yes!

P1: Ha, because you might come up with some good ideas.

P6: There's definitely an element of that. It's trusting both ways isn't it? Because it's you trusting the person you're going to, and them trusting you to be responsible with the information they're giving you, because if they keep you on a leash by not giving you that information you're gonna have to keep coming back.

PR: For that point specifically, why do you think there isn't that release of information in its entirety, so you've given a few examples. Some people are very much "uhh, have it all and make something of it" whereas others, and the example that you've given, are very much hold it back.

P1: I think its power…

P4: I think some of it is personality as well.

P6: Well I have talked to people before who like to keep it all to themselves, and kind of, in a very gentle, probing way, asked why this is the case? They've explained things like they've trusted people in the past and disseminated information but then those people have gone and made the wrong decisions…wrong to your point, what's wrong, is wrong different, or is wrong wrong, and therefore they are now completely closed off to sharing information and want people to come back every time. So that kind of loses the empowerment.

P2: Thing is though it's the element of control that people like.

P4: Mmm.

P2: Control is power, power to them, and it's their importance.

P6: It's their standing…

P4: …it's their empire sometimes…

P1: The problem is it's all very subjective, trust I think is a very subjective thing, so you can't objectify it and say "I trust you because x, y, z" if a particular person has had bad experiences in the past where they have, just like our everyday relationships, friends, partners etc if you've had problems in the past then your future is going to be coloured by that, so if you've trusted somebody, and you know you've given a higher level of trust to someone, and that's been abused in some way, then you're probably less likely to do it going forward even though those people are completely different because it's very subjective.

P2: It's quite a weird position to get to though, that I won't share business information because I don't trust you, because at some point someone took some information and came to a different decision to what you've done. It's a big skew on it…

P4: It's an extreme example…

P2: It's an extreme example, and it is very contrary to [REDACTED]'s current culture which is trying desperately to step over that and actually I think really well is going away from that, we should have managers that talk to you, and involve you and act as a team.

P1: Some do but that is, like is, a bit personality-driven.

P4: I think it is to some extent. You can't change people's fundamental personality…erm…I suppose you can show them the problems that their approach is taking and how it makes people unempowered and so on, but beyond that you can't enforce change.

P1: That's another point, so feeling unempowered probably is not as bad to me as feeling like someone doesn't trust me. I know the two kind of go hand-in-hand a little bit…

P6: I know what you mean, I'm quite happy if someone says to me "you can only spend £10" and they go "that's your limit, you can only spend £10" I'd be like "Ok", clear rule, I'll do my best…

P1: Because that's the rule.

P4: Yeah, yeah.

P2: It's not a personal…

P4: It's not a judgement is it?

P6: It's not subjective, it's a rule, and I'll feel very creative with my £10 and I'd do whatever I could…

P1: Not that someone has said "I don't trust you, I'm not going to give you £10, I'm only going to give you £5"…

P6: It takes away your opportunity, me personally, not being trusted takes away the opportunity do something better, and be better, and learn more, and create something that could be quite good.

P5: Instead of "You've got £10 but you have to come to me every time you want to spend a bit of it and check if it's alright".

P6: Then it'll be "well actually, I don't want to spend any of it!".

P2: Yeah. And that's the issue when you suddenly get more and more rules. The interesting thing is an example from [REDACTED]'s team is when we had our away day, he puts himself in the controlling box, and he's aware himself

that he has that tendency but he's aware of it and he tries very hard because he knows that is not a good thing for the team. But he's aware of it, and in an [REDACTED] concept, he tries to move away from it and checks himself. But he is very self-aware, so you don't really notice that, if you come across him, you'd never think that, but he's obviously had feedback and altered. But if you're not aware of the impact that you have on other people.

P1: I think it kind self-perpetuates as well, because if you don't feel trusted, then you feel demotivated, and you feel like you have no empowerment, and then to your point you're not going to feel like you want to spend any of the £10 because you can't be bothered to ask. So…

P6: You just get paralysed because you don't know what to do…

P5: Yeah.

P6: Or I find myself using the phrase a lot more that I'm just going to ask for forgiveness rather than seek permission. Firstly, because I don't know what permissions to ask, and secondly if I go and ask permission, the answer's probably going to be 'no' but I don't think the rules that have informed that no are clear enough. I think it's all very subjective. If somebody said "the decision is no because of these five things; there you go, all written down, rules, very clear" but I think it'd be a "mmh, no, I don't like that"…

P4: …and actually, if I came and asked you on a different day, you might say maybe…

P6: Yeah…

P4: …or even yes if it was a really good day…

P1: Whereas in fact you could go to that person and say I've had a conversation with the third party, we've had a discussion between us, and

actually we think this is a neat solution, so…its more difficult to say no? Isn't it? Almost, when you've been there, had that discussion.

P6: But I do find myself more and more, finding ways around things and I shouldn't' be able to do that because the rules should be clear to stop me from doing that, but I know if I go down one route for approval, it'll probably be very painful and it'll be a 'no', but I think if I kind of take this side-step here, I might actually get what…

P1: Shoehorn into another process…

P6: Yeah, exactly, and I shouldn't…

P4: You're empowering yourself there, aren't you?

P6: Yeah, but I shouldn't be able to do that though should I?

PR: So…this is a very good group! We're coming onto the next question, which is perfect now. So, we talked about subjectivity, and we talked about sharing decision-making, control etc erm…like I said we've touched upon it already, but do you believe that you've got essentially the authority and, associated with that, the autonomy, to be able to currently fulfil your role as best you can?

Collectively: No!

PR: So that's it?

P1: Just no!

P3: Every process is too onerous to fulfil your role and do things in the timescales required.

P4: To even understand what the process is sometimes. If you…

P2: [REDACTED] is how many pages long?

P4: Yeah.

P3: You can't do anything at pace.

P1: I think that's the point. We can fulfil our roles because we do, we do it, we get to an end point. But it is painful, and it is slow, and it is driven by a million roadblocks, and a million restrictions, that's how it feels. So, we can obviously do a job because we do them; we get [REDACTED] signed, you know, we do it. But to fulfil our roles to the best of our ability and to act with pace, I would say no.

P4: And you know the best example, but don't tell anybody, but before Christmas when there was nobody in during those last few days, I managed to get a couple of extension agreements signed within a few days, from drafting to signed, but it was basically because there was nobody here so I empowered myself to make all the decisions. It's a three-month extension, it's a six-month extension to an existing [REDACTED], the alternative is that we have no supplier. Who are the parties, how well do we know them, blah blah blah, right ok, let's just do it, but through, don't quote me on any of this! But kind of through, not caution to the wind, but just took the view just get it done.

P1: Have you had anything that's come back from that, about not following process?

P4: Not yet, touch wood!

P6: But then you were using your judgement.

P4: Exactly.

P6: So, you wouldn't have done it if it was a 10-year deal, for a multi-million pound contract…

P4: No, exactly.

P6: There you go.

P4: Exactly, I'd had prior discussion, and legal approval, and the rest of it. It was a few tweaks here and there, and I thought "there's nobody here to ask". I think I spoke to you on one of them, does this look ok, and a bit of peer review, and it was like let's just…I took the [REDACTED] view of be bold…

P2: Ha, got to be bold.

P4: I'm going to be bold and say yes, do it.

P2: I'm going to be bold!

P4: I'm going to be bold, and just say yes, do it, otherwise you're stuck aren't' you?

P1: But that's where the trust thing comes back because you should be trusted enough to know, to recognise yourself when it's something that you're not comfortable with.

P4: And I think you do, you have that nagging doubt, or that feeling of uncomfortableness, and it's just…it's the empowerment I think that makes how often that feeling occurs.

P5: The thing is we're all sensible people and if we're not sure about something we will go and check.

P4: Yep and you know.

P5: And if you're happy in your own mind that something is correct, you should be empowered.

P2: There is something about having… you guys have been in [REDACTED] and [sub-function] longer than I have, but you have, you had…I had a couple of years in [sub-function] before all these rules and you have had beginnings of careers and learning before these rules, and you have outside, but if they keep the rules just like this, then you won't learn, because you won't learn what good or bad judgement is. So, all of the officers coming through will not learn good or bad judgement…

P1: They'll just get told…

P2: They'll just get told. "Write this, have it checked, right, go to [REDACTED], they say yes or no, go and do it". You end up…if you don't give people empowerment, you don't teach them.

P6: You're not pushing it down, are you, by not letting them learn, you're not pushing it down, and its staying up, and it'll always be up.

P2: And it's that thing about what's wrong. Doing something illegal is wrong, but making a business decision based on good judgement, and then life changes because business changes isn't wrong. Some [REDACTED] haven't turned out as expected, we probably haven't made as much money as we expected but it's not wrong; the original decision wasn't wrong, it was based on sound judgement at the time, but there's this feeling of if you doing something it's wrong.

P3: If it's right for one supplier it's not necessarily right for the next.

P4: And we spend a lot of time trying to negotiate [REDACTED] that cover every eventuality, and then whatever happens in the future, isn't one of those eventualities, and we have to find our way through it anyway because life happens.

P2: The worst case of absolute lack of empowerment I ever had was working in [REDACTED] where you've got draft [REDACTED] and you know you are told, and it is with good reason to some extent, to hold on to your [REDACTED], there are certain things that we just won't accept, [REDACTED], we have the right to terminate for these reasons that,…not clear rules but we know exactly what risk and we force the risk onto them. For the exact same [REDACTED] I negotiated I went and managed it in [REDACTED] space, at which point you have [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] everything. They haven't taken their [REDACTED], they're not paying. "Right, I negotiated this very hardly, we're allowed to do this, this and this". You know, teach the customers how to treat us, you can't take the piss. [REDACTED]. And that's why I hated that [REDACTED] job, because for half the [REDACTED] I negotiated and had been told I must hold on to this.

P4: We don't utilise it.

P2: You don't utilise it, the exact same boss! No wonder I don't like it, no wonder I'm miserable!

P1: But then that happens in an [REDACTED] space as well. So, coming back to empowerment thing in an [REDACTED] space. If you're managing commercial issues for example with an [REDACTED], and you're using your judgement, doing the best you can in terms of trading, and trying to hold out and keeping leverage, and then sometimes what you find is…and you're doing that because you haven't got the empowerment to kind of do anything else really. But then you send it up a level, and then they just give it all away because they have the ability to do that, but then that just completely undermines you in your position…

P4: Yes, absolutely…

P1: And it undermines that, that ruling, and that level of decision-making because it's saying that "actually whatever you do, it's not really worth anything because when it gets to this stage, I'm just gonna give it away because I can".

P6: And then they learn if they hold…

P4: If they hang out…

P6: They'll get it. It happened to me on [REDACTED]. Principles for the [REDACTED] agreement. I held out, and held out, and held out, from 2017, and we had the last few issues remaining, and they got escalated, because neither side was gonna give in. We had a one-day meeting, here, with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], his equivalent, and [REDACTED] just gave it all. And I sat there and thought "Well, I could've done that!". I could've done that six months ago!

PR: Is that a trust thing? Is it a control thing? Is it a power thing? What?

P6: [REDACTED] can do that, he's allowed to do that, I'm not. Even though all the information that he got to make that decision came from me.

PR: So, it's a judgement thing?

P2: He's allowed to make a judgement, but we're not.

P6: Yeah. So, he can to make a judgement based on exactly the same information I would've got to the same point. Ok, he didn't give it all away, there were a couple of things we got back, but I could've done that. I had all the information available to me to do that?

P1: But why didn't you do that? Is it because you didn't think that was the right thing to do, or was it because you didn't feel like you had the ability to?

P2: Or were you told not to?

P6: I was told not to. So, every time I went to [REDACTED], same person, to ask for some, you know, give there if we could have this, it was a no, hold the line, hold it.

P2: Which you wouldn't mind if you were told we're going to hold the line because the tactic is going to be this and this, they're going to want it at the end, and you know what, I'll come in, same as the [REDACTED], come in and say yes and we'll get the whole deal. If you're told the information about the tactic…

P4: Absolutely.

P2: I had the same thing with [REDACTED]. We even went to the moral "We're leaving", me, the [REDACTED]guy, even the [REDACTED], because they wanted the [REDACTED] changed, and we actually went all the way down there, had a 30 minute meeting, "we can't agree on this", we left. By the time we were half way up the train, up to here, they had phoned [REDACTED]. And I remember being like "oh", and apparently even [REDACTED]. Like "what?!". It was just like a year worth of that, saying "no, no, no" and it's not like it's just a few dollars.

P4: And the massive, fundamental principle.

P1: Yeah.

P2: Yeah, and I agree. But all of these, things I changed jobs because of all of those things I didn't like the way the business treated us, how I felt.

P6: If I think back to when I first started in this team in 2015, the first thing I came to do was [REDACTED], obviously quite big, first [sub-function] job so I was like "eugh", ok, so we had [REDACTED], but that was it. It was easier because it was clear: if you're spending money, go to [REDACTED]; if you're not, go and have a chat with [REDACTED]. When I was doing stuff on [REDACTED], I'd go to negotiation, would do it, but then I'd come back, look

through everything we had and kind of go through what *I* thought we should do and say "well I think we should give that, but hold that, and I think we should ask for a bit more here, but give some there". Then I used to go and sit down with [REDACTED], and go this is what I want to do and run through it, and he'd go "yep that's fine, stick it on an email and I'll say yes" and that was it.

P1: And that was the policy decision.

P6: And that was the policy decision.

PR: And that was…he was granting you the judgement?

P6: Yep he was ok…

PR: He was approving your judgement?

P6: Yes, he was approving my judgement in a way.

PR: So why were you…

P2: So why was he approving? Was it a check? It a peer review in a way? Does this make sense to someone else?

P6: Yeah, yeah.

P2: It wasn't a yes/know, it was a "yeah, you're more senior, you've done this a few times before, does it seem good?" You get advice on how to play that tactic, that sort of thing. Not a "I want you to set out how you're doing to do this and that exactly, what each one is worth and I'm then going to approve it from a financial and [REDACTED] view.".

P6: I guess it was a peer review, and then as I got more confident, I…I became ok with not checking everything with him, not in a prescriptive way, or this decision falls into that category so I don't have to, but more a case that "I've

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been here before, and we talked about it and I feel like understand it fully, and it was fine, this is all the reasons why, so I won't bother him with that question this time 'cause I know enough to make that decision. I'll just ask about these few, and if I look back over my emails over time they get less and less, I guess I'm growing in confidence and feel empowered to make those decisions. And also, I felt like I'd be supported if I made a valid decision based on the information I'd got…

P4: Consequences…

P6: I didn't feel like I'd be hung out to dry.

P1: But also, there's a lot of pragmatism from his side because he trusted you to have good judgement and therefore it was just a quick check. Whereas if I go back to the point about right and wrong, there were probably other ways of doing what you were trying to accomplish, but he didn't feel the need to say, to put his stamp on it and say "no, I think we should do it this way", unless there was a valid reason to why not.

P4: So, if you were in that same situation again, so imagine you had to do [REDACTED] again…

P6: You're completely hog-tied, I wouldn't know where to start. Look how quickly…

P4: Yeah, I know, that's why I'm asking the question.

P6: We didn't have to do APCs when we draft. So, I started [REDACTED] February 2015 and it was signed in November and it was massive, it's like one of the biggest things we've ever done. To do it in that short period of time you would not have a chance now, to remove all the [REDACTED]…

P4: Who would you even begin to sit down with to go through that?!

P2: Even before you start, you'd need to go "I need to put it on the pipeline, then there's the sentencing email, in…"

P6: Put it in a word document and then by email…

P2: …do all of that, and then they'll have a conversation without you being there, and then tell you that yes, legal are going to draft something…for all the communications you put into them, they don't give you much of a communication back. Go and speak to legal about it, then you'd have to go to [REDACTED].

P1: You even have to fill in your colour on the pipeline! Open the document and do it live! Why is it so difficult!

PR: I'm just conscious of time…

P4: We're taking you off topic!

PR: No, no! So, there's just one final question. So, it's related to the overarching principle of why I'm doing this, the direct and indirect reporting lines, so, similar to a question before, how do you believe that having direct and indirect reporting lines affects your ability to make decisions and exercise freedom in enacting those decisions as well. There's probably…I recognise that there's a fair bit of cross-over with what we're talking about before, but I'm just trying to get a bit more of an understanding on…

P5: I try and use it to my advantage. So, effectively what I'm doing at the moment is for [REDACTED], but I don't work for [REDACTED], but I go, because of all of the things you've talked about how he is empowering and lets people make judgements, I will go to him to kind of nod at things when I think I need a nod. I don't necessarily go to my direct line manager. But I ignored as much as possible the direct line and used the indirect.

PR: So, you try to pull on the most appropriate one at that time to empower you, to give you that ability to do your job.

P2: I'd say my direct of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], I use my direct lines and try and avoid the indirect ones as much as possible.

P6: I would say the same.

P2: Largely because I don't work in that team. And [REDACTED]'s not here so as far as I'm concerned, I don't have an indirect, I'm not going to start to try and push myself through a [REDACTED] process when I accept I might need some interaction with them, but if I've got my legal from [REDACTED], then that's the advice I'm getting and I'll try with the rest of it because we're not in that team.

PR: Anybody else?

P1: I think it's quite tricky, because the motives of the direct and indirect…just as a general point…but the motives can be completely different. The task boss might just be you know, "get the deal done, I need the deal, I need the capacity, I'm not going to mess around thinking about liability language. You know I want you to do your job, but the operational stuff is what we need" and what we're seeing at the moment is that trumping everything really. Erm…so it can be quite difficult having those two and trying to satisfy one over the other. It's a bit of a fine line sometimes.

P2: How do you think the new [REDACTED] structure will help or hinder?

P3: I think it will help. I can see myself as really kind of working in that structure now, I work very closely with [REDACTED] guys, and if you can get their weight behind you that something's urgent then it helps you push it through your indirect line, because then the operational requirement is putting some weight behind what you need to do commercially.

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P2: Because I'd hope that the [REDACTED] structures turn into …you have a direct reporting line through the [REDACTED] and they tell you what to do, you're a [sub-function] manager, and you do your job, you don't have to go to anyone else, why should you?

P3: You challenge them where needed, but they give you direction.

P2: Yeah, because…and you have a [REDACTED] process because you're a [sub-function] manager or a [REDACTED] and you should do, you have officers if they report into you, and you give advice but you should empower the officers more and more so that feeling of more…almost that feeling of going to [REDACTED]…

P6: It's spreading the learning isn't? Its spreading what you know…

P2: Yeah, yeah. And if you put the [REDACTED] like that then…it's the same as…the [REDACTED] don't work in the same way, they don't go out all the time…they don't always go to their [REDACTED], or the [REDACTED], they're empowered to buy.

P6: They're much clearer actually on their guidelines when you talk to them, they're very clear on what they can and can't do.

P2: They can do an awful lot, far more than [sub-function] can.

P6: [REDACTED] described it quite well actually he said to me the other day, he said "the process is we hand-cuff you and hog-tie you, and tell you to run".

P4: You could summarise this whole discussion like that couldn't you!

P6: Yeah…he's got no time for it at all.

P1: But it is hard sometimes because they are at odds with each other so, sometimes the operational stuff can help push the commercial issues through,

but sometimes if the operational stuff is to just give everything free, and you're trying to…trying to be a bit more commercial about it, then not give everything free…

P4: …or at least get some value for it…

P1: Get some kind value for it, but then this has got to be like really quick, and then you lose all your leverage and just give everything away…

P3: With the [REDACTED] you should get earlier sight, and they know you're there, 'cause you're part of that team where I think at the minute [sub-function] are a bit of an afterthought.

P2: And you'll become more important because they'll come to you, you should know what's happening; "we're doing this, this and this" and you'll be the one that says "actually we should link this, this and this" and "they want this quickly, but this is what we need quickly". So, [REDACTED] are really useful.

PR: As a final closing point then, going back to what you said P1, the motives can be really different. How do you generally overcome an issue?

P1: Compromise I suppose, or...

P5: Or somebody just needs to go and make the decision.

P1: Yeah, somebody…yeah…who has more of a say I suppose. Which issue is more important? And sometimes it's not you that can make that call; you can probably think what you think is more important from a commercial perspective, but if operationally we're gonna have [REDACTED] if we don't get these [REDACTED] in, and we need to get this…then that ultimately is more important. So, I think it's a bit of a judgement call on which is the most important and who has more of a decision.

P5: It's not always clear though is it? Who has that decision? Who's going to make that decision?

P4: Yeah, and I think we've asked that before haven't we, about ultimately who has the right of veto or is the final decision maker in all of this? Is it…when we talked about [REDACTED], are they an approver? Or is it well, this was the advice, but actually the business decides we want to go ahead and do this anyway, where is it written down that that is the case?

PR: Ok, marvellous. Thank you so much guys…

P1: Are you gonna fix it all?

P6: P7, have we sent you to sleep?

P7: No, I actually feel much better because of this sort of issues I've had over the last few months, with this lack of confidence, and not knowing who to turn to and who does what, erm…it seems I'm not the only one so it makes me feel a bit better!

P4: Definitely not the only one P7!

P6: Ah, this is good group therapy, we should do this on a more regular basis!

Appendix 4 – Thematic Analysis

The following images evidence the treatment in respect of data memoing, demonstrating the clustering thematic approach taken by the researcher. The images detail the progression from cutting and sorting to a removal of the data hierarchy. The clustering is then shown, with global themes finally being established:

SL: managers who say that people aren't approaching them with empowerment challenges maybe "can't see the woods for the trees"

MM: blockers mak...

SL: people should challenge opportunities to change

SL: being a leader = allow...
with them

SL: "account... issues

management in respect of resourcing issues

...knowing who to turn to and who does w...
the only one so it makes me feel...

MM: ...is too onerous and nothing...

...autonomy or authority in current rol...

SL: I give my tea...

MC: multiple rules (i.e. processes or guidelines) for one task can be
very neg...

...trust is personality-driven

MC: clear guidelines are imperative

MC: exercising judgement is imperative

...means less people to do th...

MC: empowerment means having independence

EX: Comm...
and th...
MC: individuals will adopt a balanced approach
MC: ...arise to p...
MC: deals are done on the evidence at the time and that's the same
for judgements ...hin...

...cess

CA: governance framework important for empowerment

CA: cu...
CA: empowerment is constrained by budge...

MC: 'wrong...

EX: direct and indirect –...

EX: 'up-front empowerment' is very useful for team when entering a
negotiation

EX: need to be a supportive manager

PL: empowerment = "able and allowed to make d...
appropriate for your level of experience of the area...
dealing with"

KK: need the tools...
KK: need manag...
KK: managers need to...(may...
KK: ...can operate more freely?)

KK: r...
KK: ...once you gain her trust and she
...y... ...e, she'll just let you go and she'll let you act in

ST: individuals want...
ability/compet...

ST: empowerment = make decisions without permissions from too
many people

EX: direct and indirect – direct lines (relating to...
too much in perception of empowerment

ST: people in the detail/task know more
...on problem solving

SL: I see a desire at all levels for ownership
bottom of the org...

EX: direct and indirect – functionally there's trepidation about having
self confidence

EX: direct and indirect – task-wise, there is often...
senior leader that "this is your role" therefore you kn...
talking about

EX: direct and indirect – empowerment = relat...
increases as relationships grow stronger
...between empowerment and trust

MC...
going...

PL: organisational a...
gain ag...

LM: empowerment nee...
focus, more relations...
EX: ...wrong decision – it's simply often just...
...e autonomy to come w...

LM: world is changing and therefore or...
LM: devolution of decision-making...
LM: I empower by listening, and u...

KK: direct and indirect make...
different styles which c...

KK: empowerment = ability to do my job well and effectively

MM: ...o onerous and nothing ...

...o autonomy or authority in current rol...

SL: I give my tea... ...processes or guidelines) for one task can...

...rsonalities

...and and control = too much bureaucracy, too...

...g the job as best you can

many barriers to...

...job and re...

MC: multiple rules (i.e. processes or guidelines) for one task can...

very negati...

MC: rules are accepted, but a lack of trust by management isn't...

...: trust is personality-driven

...don't use your judgement...

MC: clear guidelines are...

MC: exercising judgement is imperative

...means less people to do th...

...to not ba...

MC: empowerment means having independence

...ms sort of issues...

...o have more empo...

EX:
sen...
talki...

EX: direct and indirect – emp...
increases as relationships g...

EX: Comm...
and th...
...s to p...
...arise wh...

MC: individuals will adopt a balanced approach

...ment feels g...

MC: deals are done on the evidence at the time and that's the same

MC: deals are done on the evidence – it can change
for judgements...
...ning...

MC:
going...

...cess

...time

CA: governance framework important for empowerment

CA: cul...

CA: empowerment is constrained by budget a...

CA: ...

EX: direct and indirect – ...

MC: 'wrong' is...

EX: 'up-front empowerment' is very useful for team when entering a
negotiation

...le sam...
...ise judgement...

EX: need to be a supportive manager

LM:
fo...

LM: world is changing and ...

LM: devolution of decision-m...

LM: I empower by listenin...

PL: empowerment = "able and allowed to make de...
appropriate for your level of experience of the area...
dealing with"

LM: I empower...
...you can...

KK: need the tools...

KK: need manag...

KK: managers need to c...
...s (ma...

KK: managers need to ...they can operate more freely?)

KK: re...

by the or...

...once you gain her trust and she

KK:

...acity...

...e, she'll just let you go and she'll let you act in

EMPOWERMENT NEEDS TO BE REQUESTED!

MANAGER SUPPORT IS A NECESSITY

TRUST IS AN ISSUE

THERE IS
SELF-AWARENESS

WHY DO WE
TRUST
OTHERS?

INFO IS NOT SHARED TO CONTROL

SL: people should challenge

ST: individuals need to show confidence if they want empowerment

LM: empowerment should be demanded by employees

EX: employees need to 'pull' empowerment and challenge

LM: a change in mindset and style of employees is required

SL: "muddle" – a layer of management where empowerment and accountability come through fixed and dotted lines

SL: required behaviour flow down issues may be caused by (i) organisational framework, or (ii) people (i.e. mid-level management)

SL: accountability should be discharged by leaders (thro empower their team)

SL: leaders need to pull on those with SME knowledge and bestow decision-making accountability on them: "sum of the parts should always be greater"

MC: "if you don't give people empowerment, you don't teach them"

MC: knowledge should be shared   LM: leaders should develop employee learning

LM: leaders should be teachers, not demanders

ST: managers need to reflect, and share learning

EC: managers working with employee ideas helps to improve individual

MC: some managers show pragmatism and that's appreciated

LM: leaders need to show a "leap of faith"

EX: need to be a supportive manager

EX: being a leader – allowing people to make judgements and run with them

ST: manager support is vital

LM: confidence that employees behave in the 'right' way for the benefit of the company

MC: transformation has worsened trust

SL: We are on a trust journey where that trust has not been there historically

LM: trust requires time to build relationships and this organisation does not have that currently

LM: leaders must build trust

EX: managers are inherently trusted by the organisation to lead teams, so they need to trust their team

MC: trust works both ways

ST: need to create a trusting environment to do my job better

LM: environment for trust is desired

LM: trust requires self-discipline and awareness on all sides

MC: individuals have a sense of pride in the roles they do

MC: self-awareness makes an individual realise that they need to check items

MC: "you should be trusted enough to know, to recognise yourself when it's something that you're not comfortable with"

MC: we are sensible!

EX: inherent link between empowerment and trust   MM: empowerment is not about trust

MC: trust is more important than empowerment

KK: experiences are common of low trust, low empowerment and low support

MC: "I don't give...that there's any trust without a check what's going out is right for management"

MC: no trust means a lack of opportunity to be better

EC: trust is bad in the business

SA: trust – others need to show respect and confidence in your ability

MC: a lack of trust, empowerment can have an emotional impact

MC: "What is the basis on which we trust an individual to do their job and do it well?"

ST: what's the difference between a commercial manager and a commercial officer in some cases? Trust keeps based on job title

MC: lack of trust can disenfranchise

EC: perception of greater trust in those coming in to the organisation via different schemes

MC: different experiences of individuals trusting to share information – some retain it whereas others share freely

MC: some don't share because of a power play – it is a show of control

MC: people like control

MC: "control is power, power to them, and it's their importance"

PL: "I fundamentally believe we should be empowering our people more, but we've got to support them when maybe they make the wrong call, or they do make a mistake, because no one does that deliberately"

MC: "what's wrong? Is wrong different? Or is wrong wrong?"

EC: wrong decisions doesn't mean anyone will die!

SL: organisation is coming from a culture of fear where wrong answer was unacceptable

MC: need manager support

EC: manager support needed if 'wrong' decision made (still judgements)

KK: need managers to give support and backing

KK: managers need to protect team if anything is 'wrong'

MC: management support means "I didn't feel like I'd be hung out to dry"

ST: some managers look out for you – you're too frightened to do it dry"

ST: "you can't be empowered because you're too frightened to do anything" – where managers don't trust or support

KK: relationships are important – "once you gain her trust and she knows you're capable, she'll just let you go and she'll let you act in the capacity"

IS EMPOWERMENT SCARY?

(INTERNAL) APPROVALS ARE BARRIERS

SPACE IS A PROBLEM

PROCESSES ARE INEFFICIENT

MANAGER SUPPORT IS A NECESSITY

KK: manager style affects level of empowerment

MC: "if you don't give people empowerment, you don't teach them"

LM: leaders should develop employee learning

MC: learning needs to be shared

SL: being a leader = allowing people to make judgements and run with them

MC: need to be a supportive manager

MC: negative responses are always expected when approaching management

KK: 360s? where is the manager feedback process?

ST: manager support and feedback is important and creates trust

ST: manager support is vital – "he wouldn't let me down...he'd let me get close in order to learn, and he would never blame me"

KK: managers need to show trust in team

LM: confidence that employees behave in the 'right' way for the benefit of the company

KK: more experienced managers tend to trust more

MC: "you just feel like you're squished all the time"

MC: transformation has worsened trust

RULES ARE NEEDED

CA: governance framework important for empowerment

MM: governance is required for appropriate empowerment

MC: we're used to having rules

MC: clear guidelines are required

SL: people have to operate in a framework

SA: clear frameworks required

LM: boundaries need to still be in place

MM: guidance, governance, tools and policies is important for empowerment

ST: operation should be in flexible guidelines/ within role

KK: acknowledge that a level of rules is required

MM: need boundaries of operation

SL: there should be freedom to operate within framework/guidelines

MC: guidelines shouldn't be restrictive

MM: governance should make it so you are "sufficiently constrained without being constrained"

SA: there is understanding that all decisions can't be made by an individual

ST: expectation is correct to get SME/manager input

TRUST IS AN ISSUE

CA: lots of trust between managers and team

EX: I trust my team

KK: managers are inherently trusted by the organisation to lead teams, so they need to trust their team

CA: lack of trust comes in to play when there are too many stakeholders (less stakeholders would definitely benefit)

KK: trust works both ways

MC: trust is subjective

ST: trust is inherently based on first impressions

MC: trust is personality-driven

KK: trust is based on personalities

MC: previous experiences affect an individual's ability/desire to trust

KK: internal customers respect me makes me feel trusted and that will be appreciated

ST: commercial acts as a gate-keeper and earns trust from internal customers

MC: rules are accepted, but a lack of trust by management isn't

PL: trust takes time but can be damaged quickly

MC: "you just get paralysed because you don't know what to do" if you don't feel trusted

EC: trust-wise there is a perception of protectionism and cocoons

MC: "there's no trust in people to use their judgement to make decisions"

ST: there needs to be a trust in judgement

LM: leaders must build trust

LM: environment for trust is desired

EMPLOYEE HAS APPLICABLE INFO

MC: getting approvals even though the individual knows most about the task is frustrating

ST: people in the detail...

EC: person doing task has more intimate knowledge to make judgement calls

ST: respect needed for role...

SA: advocation of judgement calls is dependent on personalities

MM: written rules aren't available so judgement calls are...

SA: ability to use judgement within that clear framework

EX: I have the ability to execute judgement to an extent

NEED ABILITY TO USE JUDGEMENT

MC: other companies are better at permitting judgement

MC: "the issue is you don't get to use your judgement and if you don't use your judgement, you can't feel empowered"

MC: peer reviews should be utilised

MC: exercising judgement is imperative

MC: "you're not allowed to make judgement calls based on how risky or how much value you think is based on that contract"

SA: experience needs to count

PL: self-pride means mistakes and incorrect judgement calls aren't deliberate

MC: deals are done on the evidence at the time and the for judgements – it can change

MC: seniors often close negotiations – they're allowed to make a judgement but the individuals aren't

ST: hard to know if judgements are ok, but easy to see if they're 'wrong'

MC: if individuals aren't permitted to use judgement and potentially fail then "you won't learn, because you won't learn what good or bad judgement is"

WRONG DECISIONS & FEAR

MC: 'wrong' is just other interpretations, it isn't actually wrong

EX: 'wrong' decision – it's simply often just a different interpretation

MC: there's a fear of getting it 'wrong' and that influences the level of empowerment

EC: "people don't want things to come back and bite them"

PL: "that the minute something goes wrong, or there's an escape, it becomes a witch hunt"

...fear of recrimination leads people to look at their own ...ocess and defend it

PL: 'wrong' decisions lead to witch hunt

PL: in escapes, people self-protecting – "it's not my bit!" that went wrong

EC: quality investigations result in barriers in place

EC: learning is still good from 'wrong' decisions

SL: "you learn more from failure, and actually it's ok to get things wrong, and it is all about judgements"

CLARITY IS FUNDAMENTAL

MC: more information and guidance makes the individual want to overcheck

KK: need clarity on rules and accountabilities

MC: lack of clarity leads to a lack of trust

SL: need to be clear on accountabilities and roles

MC: 'you struggle a bit without having that information and clarity around you to make good decisions'

MC: because of a lack of clarity, individuals are having to find ways around things

MC: if there is no clarity, then you feel unempowered because you're uncertain and this prevents you utilising empowerment that you may actually have

MC: lack of clarity on guidelines

Has current misinformation but left uncertainty and reduced clarity

SL: clarity on all aspects is needed (in progress)

EC: ability to do job is there – length of time though is an issue

MC: when exercising judgement individuals can work at pace

PACE IS A PROBLEM

MC: every process is too onerous and nothing can be done at pace

SA: pace is important and this is helped by [...]

EC: "could do things in a day, but now it's a matter of weeks"

MM: working at pace is the high priority

(GETTING) APPROVALS ARE BARRIERS

EC: approvals have gone backwards (more required)

CA: transformation is intending to move the culture of 'stak [...] to a clear approval framework

SL: leader task is to identify barriers that prevent people doing the job and remove them

EC: requiring too many approvers sets a precedent and individuals then feel required to get more approvers

SA: being instructed to seek additional approvers (when not in process) hinders empowerment

EC: "too many approvals in place to make a change"

EC: too many difficult approvals

ST: with questions only if there's logic to them - too many people challenge just because they want a say

EC: internal struggle – convincing people ahead of the action that it's the right thing to do is extremely challenging

EC: decisions by committee in processes

EC: too many people with voices but not approval

EC: too much time spent on managing internal reports

ST: too many people have a say

PROCESSES ARE INEFFICIENT

pM: blockers make people feel unempowered

SA: multiple approvals impacts empowerment by having to "negotiate internally"

EX: managers should be able to convey flexibility in respect of processes

MC: collective frustration at barriers currently being felt

PL: organisational approvals slow work down – meetings, time to gain approvals when individual knows the action is correct

MC: multiple rules (i.e. processes or guidelines) for one task can be very negative

PL: feel empowered but restricted by approval levels

CA: processes are often blamed for lack of empowerment, but incorrectly

MC: commercial has slowly [...] icated empowerment for [...] prescriptive [...]

[...] are approached for approvals feel empowered to [...]

MC: senior management often undertake actions that remove commercial leverage that has been held out – feels unempowering

EX: Commercial tries to put everything into a prescriptive process and then issues arise when not everything fits

EC: when seeking senior approvals, employee is undermined when rejected by senior, but manager gains them

MC: "it's all prescriptive"

[...] S A NECESSITY

EC: senior levels (above SVP) are not visible nor approachable (e.g. managers sending emails written by officers)

MC: other areas have flexible processes and it works

MC: Organisation is typically inflexible

MC: a 'no' from management is subjective and often feeling-based

MC: too many rules lead to confusion and restrictive

[...] from some managers can be a good, learning [...] other managers it is painful

[...] always expected when approaching

RULES ARE NEEDED

[...] manager feedback process?

CA: governance framework important for empowerment

[...] and creates trust

MM: governance is required for appropriate empowerment

MC: we're used to having rules

MC: clear guidelines are required

SL: people have to operate in a framework

[...] to show trust in team

MM: guidance, governance, tools and policies is important for empowerment

SA: clear frameworks required

LM: boundaries need to still be in place

[...] more

ST: operation should be in flexible guidelines/ within role

KK: acknowledge that a level of rules is required

EC: instead of approval sheets, fill in justification sheets (e.g. police statement analogy)

MC: guidelines shouldn't be restrictive

MM: need boundaries of operation

MC: appreciate there needs to be boundaries

SL: there should be freedom to operate within framework/guidelines

MM: governance should make it so you are "suffi [...]

SA: there is understanding that all decisions can't be made by an individual

TRUST IS AN ISSUE

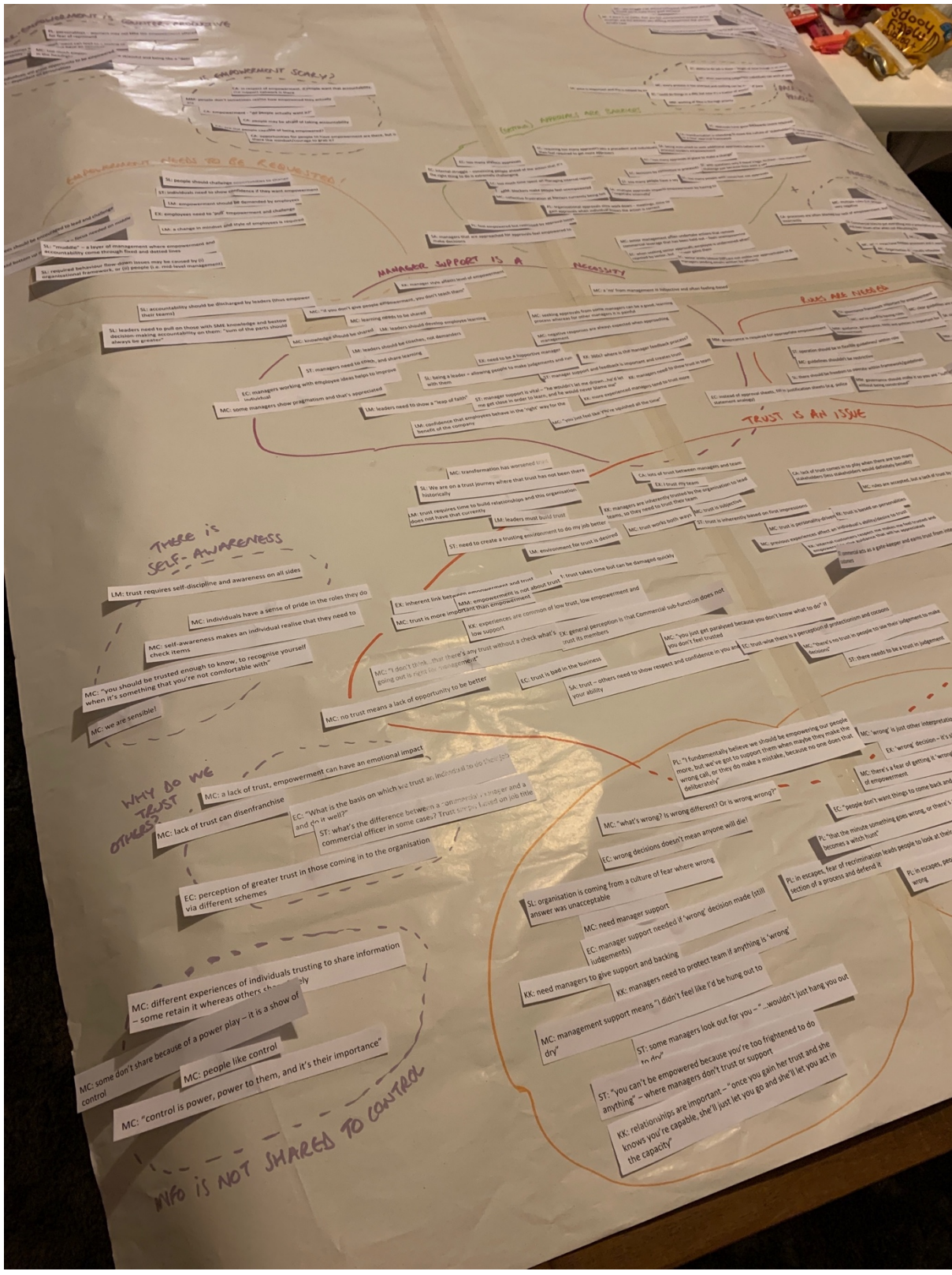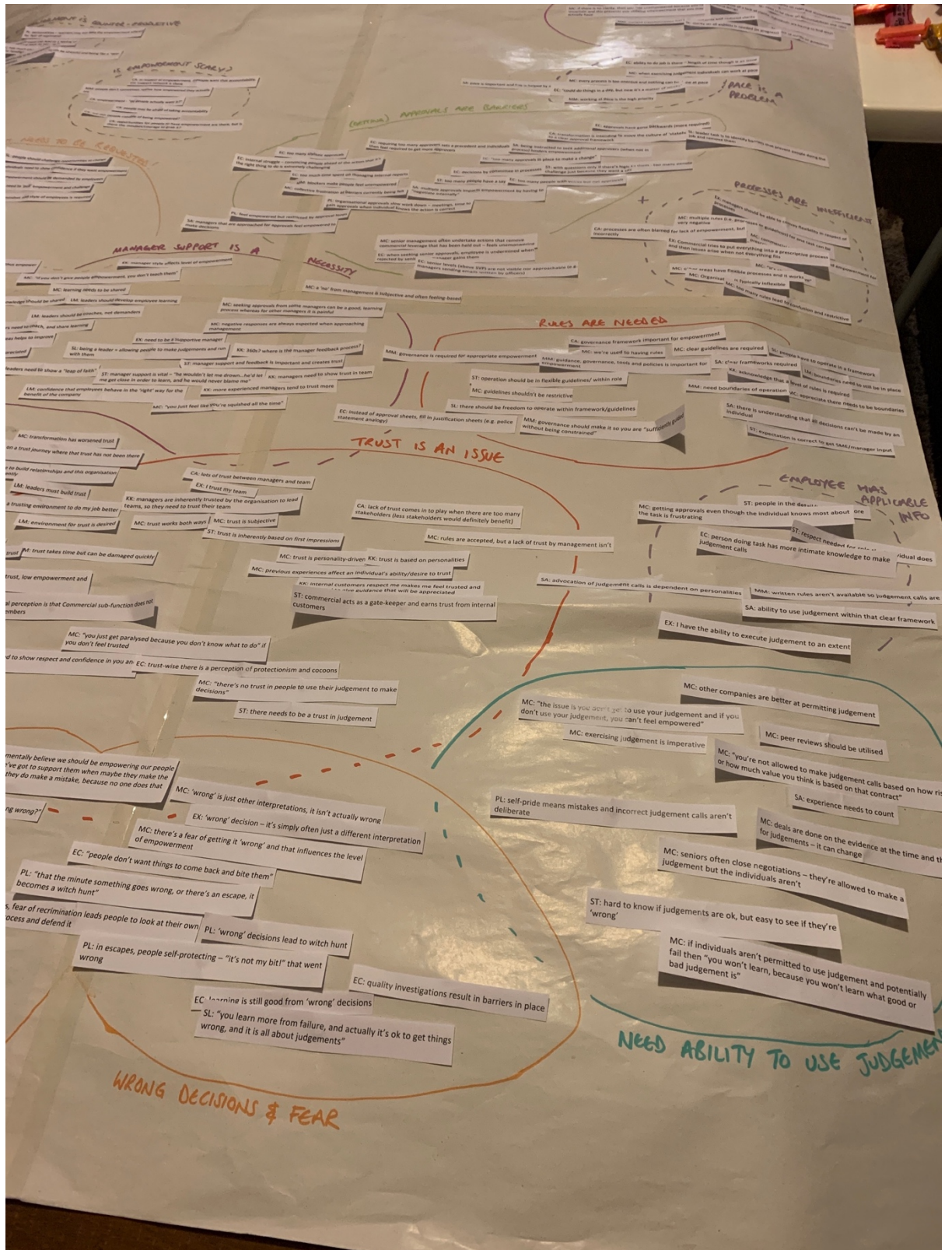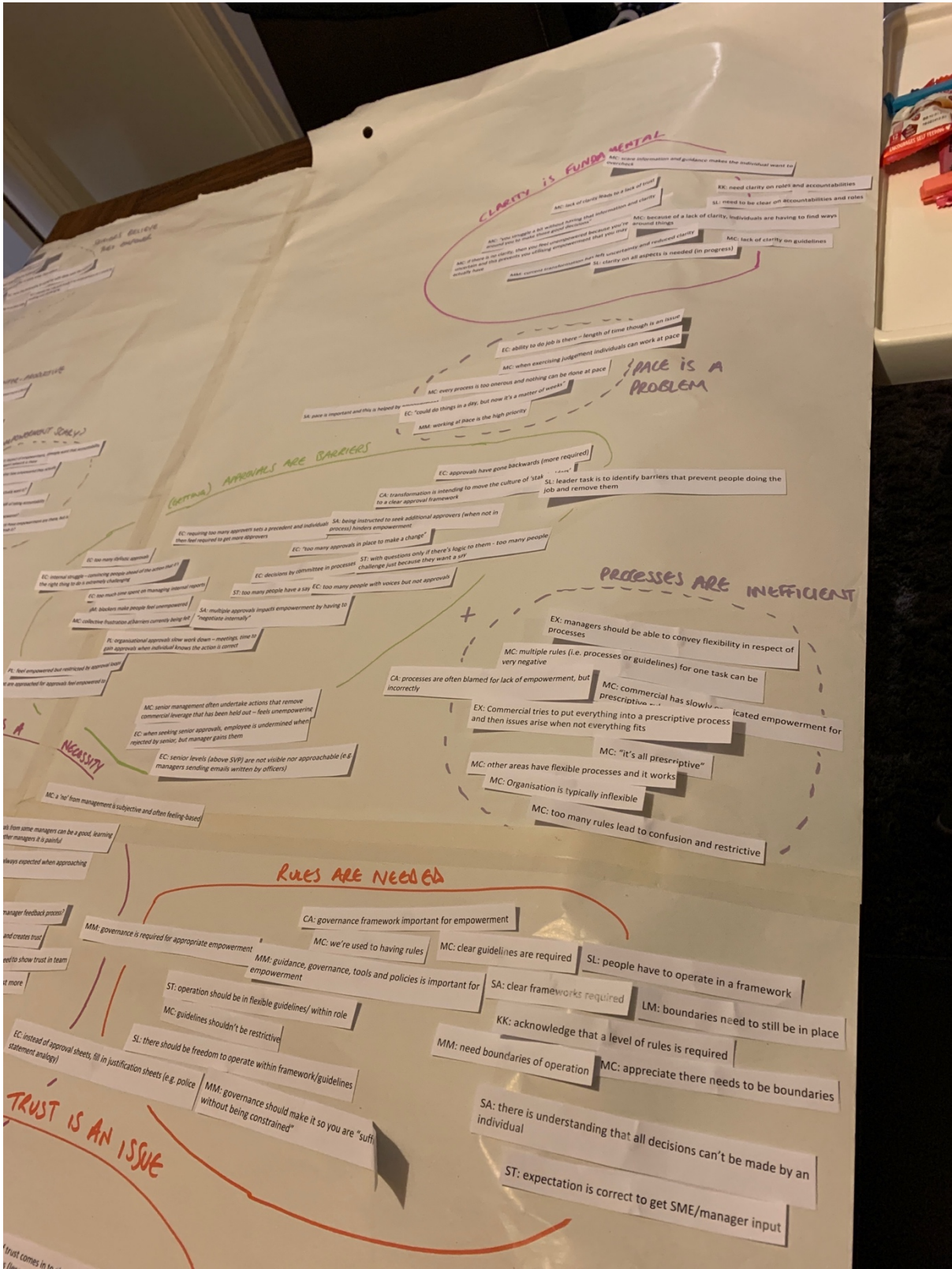ST: expectation is correct to get SME/manager input

[...] trust comes in to [...]

Appendix 5 – Reflections

An explicit provision of any form of interpretive AR is the researcher undertaking reflection on the investigation (Huang 2010; Coughlan and Coghlan 2002; Tuffour 2018), an element of qualitative research that not only serves to support experiential learning of inquiry (Coughlan and Coghlan 2002), but also benefits trustworthiness of the research itself by making explicit the researcher's role, preconceptions and values (Rolfe 2006; Koch 1993; Guba and Lincoln 1982; Lowes and Prowse 2001).

Reflection then is "embedded in praxis, not separate from it" (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008: 182), where the researcher steps back from the investigation to understand what the experience means, to highlight further action (Coghlan 2007); it is then, as Coghlan (2007) posits, the crucial link between the experience, the interpretation, and the intended action of inquiry.

The following section is supplemental to the reflections of the researcher that have been documented throughout this work, and it adopts Gibb's (1988) model of reflection, i.e. describing, feeling, evaluating, analysing, concluding and action planning, as the framework for discussion. Whilst it is a material part of AR, it is considered as complementary to the discussion and conclusions documented in this thesis and is therefore included here, as an appendix, to provide full context of the research methodology for the reader.

Method Reflections

At this juncture it is useful to note some reflections on the use of interviews and focus groups as the methods of data gathering in this research. Interviews are commonly utilised as a method of data gathering within hermeneutic research (Walker 2011) and that which is undertaken in a business context (Myers 2009). They allow for the researcher to understand the experiences of the subject through their individual perspective (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015), "to understand the meaning of central themes of the subjects' lived world" (Kvale 2007: 11) by enabling the generation of knowledge through co-construction between the researcher and participant (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Lincoln 2005). In undertaking interviews, very

specific, personal experiences of participants are able to emerge within the boundaries of contextual and temporal factors (Foster-Fishman *et al.* 1998). They also offer participants themselves a benefit: as Lincoln (2005) highlights, the ability to discuss issues through this method allows participants to engage in sensemaking, and thus reach a level of comfort with feelings and perceptions driven by the exchange.

Conducting data gathering using interviews brought notable benefits to this research. The use of interviews was predominantly driven by the availability of senior management participants, where the ability to arrange focus groups of that organisational strata was proven to be challenging. Interviews permitted spare time slots of senior management to be seized, allowing more senior management participants to be engaged in the research.

The interviews permitted the direct questioning of senior management participants away from the gaze of employees, allowing the crux of issues to be explored, perceptions to emerge, and answers to be clarified in accordance with the espoused approach in the literature (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Myers 2009; Fontana and Frey 1994; Brinkman and Kvale 2015; Coughlan and Coghlan 2002). This latter aspect, which was also carried out within focus groups conducted, allowed a form of member validation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) to be conducted thus contributing to the validity and trustworthiness of this research (Lincoln and Guba 1985) through the increase in quality of data gathered (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015).

The majority of interviews conducted were fruitful and collectively gave thick, rich data, whilst being allowed to run their own course, within reason (Cohen *et al*. 2007). As Myers (2009) states, the more comfortable the interviewee, the better the disclosure (Myers 2009) and the senior management participants on the whole were forthcoming with interesting insights. One senior manager was, however, seemingly reticent to discuss anything that could be interpreted as them being critical of the organisation. In this instance, the importance of trust in interviews, as highlighted by Jacob and Furgerson (2012) and Doody and Noonan (2013), may help to explain that reticence. It is

possible that this senior manager did not have confidence in the anonymisation process, and this could be evidenced by their request to not have the interview recorded, leading to potentially limited sharing of experiences. Whilst the lack of ability to record the interview caused a level of difficulty in subsequently allowing true immersion by the researcher in the data from that interview, it can be reasonable to suggest that it allowed slightly more comfort for the interviewee to share the experiences and perspectives that they indeed did do. Within a phenomenological inquiry, it is the opinion of this researcher that any first-hand data should be considered 'good' data and an insight of some sort.

As Fusch and Ness (2015) posit, focus groups work well in a joint approach to data gathering with interviews. Focus groups enable data to be collected of participant socially, contextually, and temporally situated experiences (Flood 2010; Laverty 2003; Wilkinson 1998; Gibson 2004) and shared meaning (Myers 2009). The data gathered from such a method is often rich in experiences (Palmer *et al.* 2010) but also, importantly, from a spontaneous and emotive perspective (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015).

Within this research, focus groups were beneficial for two significant reasons: (i) the time savings they allowed in sampling a larger number of participants as suggested by Wilkinson (1998), Myers (2009) and Bryman (2004); and (ii) the diverse responses with intra-group challenges and investigations they encouraged (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Cohen *et al.* 2007; Bryman 2004; Adler and Adler 2012; Palmer *et al.* 2010), again adding to the validity and trustworthiness of this investigation.

The focus groups conducted as part of this research were vital to the subsequent thematic analysis and findings. They offered rich, experiential data with participants often engaging in discussion between themselves, investigating viewpoints and eliciting further responses and clarifications without any input required from the researcher. To this extent, they were natural and organic, giving greater confidence in the feelings behind those abundant experiences.

The focus groups did however provide challenges that were different to any of those presented by the interviews. Often, the position of the researcher as an insider and also a facilitator would be drawn upon to give their opinion on the subject being discussed by the group, typically in a 'you agree, don't you?' fashion, as experienced by Walker (2011). Literature (Bryman 2004; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) advises that there should be minimal facilitator intervention in a focus group, save for ensuring discussion in semi-structured methods is drawn back to the item in question when necessary. In respect of those focus groups conducted as part of this research, the researcher clarified at the start of the sessions that they would not offer their opinions on any matter in the discussion, and this position was referred to if there was any instance of participants seeking the researcher's perspective later in the sessions, of which there were many.

A further challenge was that of one group which appeared to be unforthcoming in offering many perceptions or insights into experiences. Participants were quiet, and seemed otherwise preoccupied, resulting in the session often being filled with silences and a lack of engagement until the latter stages. An explanation for this can be extracted from the working context of the participants: this particular focus group was constructed from a team that were well-known across the function to be resource-starved in terms of team members, yet highly-loaded with task. To that extent, many participants from that team may have been distracted by thoughts of their current workload, and as such may not have fully committed to the data gathering session. In a focus group, where a small number of individuals is reluctant to engage in discussion, it may induce the same approach by others within that group as they deem it to be the socially desired response, or 'group think' (Cohen *et al*. 2007; Dimitroff *et al.* 2005; Smithson 2000). In this instance then, the quietness of the leaders in the group may have induced pressure on other participants to hold back from expressing their perspectives, thus silently compelling them to refrain from voicing their experiences (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Dimitroff *et al.* 2005; Smithson 2000). Whilst this one group was difficult to draw out, all other

groups were lively and engaged, with no similar reluctance in coming forward to offer rich data, data that was vital for the direction of this research.

Phenomenological Reflections

Reflection is a not only a critical aspect of AR, but also of hermeneutic phenomenology and thus qualitative research (Greatrex-White 2008). The uncovering of positions of the researcher i.e. "bringing something to light, or to show that which was previously taken for granted" (Greatrex-White 2008: 1843) assist the understanding of "the black box of human cognitive processing and individual…sense-making" (Lincoln 2005: 225).

Much like Greatrex-White (2008), the researcher found that Heidegger's concept of *being*, specifically of *being in the subject organisation* helped to explicate the data in recognising the experiences of participants were constituents of greater, and recognisable, social and cultural norms and exchanges. This allows the researcher to apply existing knowledge with the data to foreground salient issues.

The result of this *being* encouraged the researcher to highlight those forestructures of understanding (Greatrex-White 2008; Lowes and Prowse 2001), to bring those preconceptions and biases to the surface and thus to enable the full contextual understanding of the inquiry. As Tuffour (2018) experienced, the researcher was conscious of consistently revisiting the preconceptions in order to ensure transparency and awareness. The illumination of these positions was however predicated on the researcher knowing *all* of them, resulting from what Heidegger calls the individual's *thrown-ness* (Greatrex-White 2008). The researcher holds confidence that there was minimal influence of any subconscious preconceptions: the position of the researcher was not fixed throughout this investigation, and there was no associated disingenuous agenda. Throughout the thematic analyses, the researcher used Benner's (1994) questions to ask "What do I now know or see that I did not expect or understand before?" (Benner 1994: 101) in order to challenge their own views. The data showed the new, emerging theme of trust and as such, the researcher pivoted from the original empowerment-centric

focus to that new issue trust. This reorientation of the research toward this emergent theme, which notably was not considered material from not only the preliminary literature mapping but also from the researcher's own organisational experiences, demonstrates that the data led the research, and not the researcher.

Again similar to the experiences of Greatrex-White (2008), the researcher found difficulty with the notion of objectivism and subjectivism throughout the work and the effects of being an insider researcher, a participant, an employee of the subject organisation, and a colleague or subordinate of participants. This agency, which each of these positions holds, could often, as Lincoln (2005) suggests, manifest in the desire for impact, to show others that the investigation is of value, potentially leading researchers to push for causality which is not always apparent. The researcher found that the hermeneutic circle was of immense value here.

The literature on the hermeneutic circle (e.g. Laverty 2003), helped the researcher to understanding the iterative, cyclical nature of hermeneutic analysis. The researcher however failed to retain that knowledge and assumed that the process was completed with a single episode of the cutting and sorting technique of thematic analysis (see Attride-Stirling 2001). Through the explication of the data, the researcher realised that a simple, one-stop approach was not enough. This was especially pertinent for the researcher's re-immersion in the data where the original interviews and focus groups had been conducted almost a year earlier. When building the argument of initial themes, or the 'first pass' of the hermeneutic circle, the researcher became aware that many of the themes were actually interlinked in a much greater fashion: the sorting process, as advocated by Attride-Stirling (2001) commenced again for ongoing levels of interpretation.

Similar to the experiences of Benner (1994), the researcher consciously employed much more patience in poring over the data with no agenda of action or intervention in mind, setting aside as far as possible their preconceived experiences to better understand the experiences of participants. From here,

more relationships began to emerge as the researcher viewed the data from different angles, and heard differing arguments. The researcher became more attuned to these issues, allowing them to be pulled from the data; more topics came into the foreground, and more dependencies were illuminated that led to the researcher to establish the importance of trust as a foundation issue. The hermeneutic circle aided the sense making activity of the researcher, offering a symmetry between the researcher as an individual and the organisation itself which, as Lincoln (2005) posits, is constructed of enactments and activities that also support sense making.

The researcher then truly understood the literature: the hermeneutic circle is iterative (Gibson 2004) and does not ever really stop. It is simply paused at a time that the researcher believes is reasonable to draw robust conclusions, driven by an ethical position to be true to the voices of participants (Benner 1994). To this point then, there can never be simply one interpretation of the data, the truth above all truths. Interpretation is individual to each researcher, to each reader, and to each actor. The researcher takes a snapshot in time, driven by not only contextual and temporal factors, but also by the understanding of that researcher too. It is here then that the researcher realised the importance throughout the investigation for its epistemological positioning of social constructionism.

Participatory Action Research Framework Reflections
In respect of the PAR framework, a position of flexibility was adopted by the researcher through specific participation of individuals, where the intention of AR, i.e. "creating change that will benefit those who are studied" (Small 1995: 949), was supported by, as Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) suggest, establishing potential effective avenues of action and adding to the body of theoretical knowledge.

Though this level of position was defended in this work, a concern was that, as Heller (2004) argues, "validation is through the learning-action process itself and, whenever possible, through co-interpretation of outcomes with participants" (Heller 2004: 350), often through the hermeneutic circle (Laverty

2003) discussed earlier. Similarly, Small (1995) posits that "collaboration promotes local ownership of the research process and findings, and makes it more likely that the results will be believed and acted upon by collaborators" (Small 1995: 949). To this point then, the researcher held concerns that the conclusions of the research may not be received by participants with the level of gravitas that they deserve due to the level of collaboration, threatening the development and associated success of any subsequent interventions. The dissemination strategy discussed earlier in respect of ensuring that participants continue to be informed and brought along the journey of action will however address this concern, though this may be researcher-driven.

In respect of these concerns, it was comforting for the researcher to discover that Moore (2007) held a similar view, in that any form of AR should not be formulaic, arguing against the scholarly opinion that "provided certain rules and recipes are followed and organizational ingredients are introduced the actions that result will automatically be meaningful" (Moore 2007: 37). It was further reassuring that Coughlan and Coghlan (2002), two eminent scholars in AR, and as supported by Small (1995), recognised that AR is by its very nature "an imprecise, uncertain and sometimes unstable activity, as life is" (Coughlan and Coghlan 2002: 238). As such, the researcher became confident that the nuanced approach to the associated level of participation as a framework for this inquiry, i.e. participation focused upon the data gathering and subsequent intervention design, was suitable and acceptable to the academy, with an outcome of theoretical contribution laying a path toward related action (Coughlan and Coghlan 2002).

Through adopting a PAR framework for the research and mapping the related literature, the researcher was aware of the arguments that may arise in respect of positivist requirements of validity. The comments of Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) were especially of importance to the researcher, where the authors stated that

"the underlying assumption is that action researchers are themselves instruments in the generation of data. When they inquire into what is

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going on, when they show people their train of thought and put forward hypotheses to be tested, they are generating data" (Coughlan and Coghlan 2002: 234).

The researcher interpreted these remarks as caution in respect of the effect that the researcher, especially as an interview facilitator, could have on the data. It was acknowledged that some scholars recognise the use of external facilitators for focus groups (e.g. Noffke and Somekh 2005; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015), however the researcher believed that doing so would remove the phenomenologically vital concept of immersion in the data. Though the researcher was not overly experienced in the facilitation of focus groups, a research dissertation completed for a Master of Science post-graduate qualification had provided several constructive criticisms that the researcher looked to address. These factors led to the researcher facilitating the data gathering sessions and, as Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) advise, encouraging participants to share experiences via gentle questioning, as opposed to offering up the researcher's own opinions, thereby aiding validity in enabling participants to speak fully and in depth (Coghlan 2003; Roose and de Bie 2003).

The researcher acknowledged that relevant literature espoused the positive impacts that both PAR and qualitative methods could have for participants opening up and sharing experiences. It was then extremely pleasing for the researcher to find that some participants showed elements of what Lather (1986) terms *catalytic validity*. Catalytic validity aids the overarching validity of research (Lather 1986) and is essentially the sparking of introspective understanding within participants. The investigation process allows "an opportunity for respondents to grow through thoughtful assessment of their experiences" (Lather 1986: 70), i.e. where participants are awoken to self-understanding and "self-determination through research participation" (Lather 1986: 67).

Towards the end of Focus Group Instance 2, one of the more enthusiastic sessions, participants relayed the positive experience that they had in being able to share their thoughts:

> "Ah, this is good group therapy, we should do this on a more regular basis!" (Participant 6, Focus Group Instance 2);

> "I actually feel much better because of this sort of issues I've had over the last few months, with this lack of confidence, and not knowing who to turn to and who does what, erm…it seems I'm not the only one so it makes me feel a bit better!" (Participant 7, Focus Group Instance 2).

The excerpts evidence the benefit of focus groups and how sharing experiences has allowed participants to understand that others hold the same concerns, the same feelings, and the same desire to improve. Hearing these comments allowed the researcher some delight that the overarching intent of the PAR framework to improve the lives of participants was being met in a positive form.

Insider Researcher Reflections

AR and insider research hold a notable relationship (Coghlan 2003), where insider researchers often adopt a form of AR (Coghlan 2007; Brannick and Coghlan 2007). As a position, it holds great value in research (Brannick and Coghlan 2007) and, like AR (Coughlan and Coghlan 2002), is held in real-time (Coghlan 2003). It can be undertaken adopting a hermeneutic approach, where its nature highlights the researcher as a critical part of the research process, not individual from it (Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

As Moore (2007) posits, the insider researcher position offered a great avenue to go beyond the typical positivist methods to focus upon the experiences of colleagues (Bonner and Tolhurst 2002). Being an insider then, as Evered and Louis (1981) reflect upon, is being "experientially and existentially rooted in the organizational system" (Evered and Louis 1981: 387), drawing on not only the experiences of participants, but also of the researcher themselves

(Coghlan 2003; Brannick and Coghlan 2007). An insider researcher approach mitigated the risks of the inquiry not generating applicable findings, removing the risk of researcher detachment from the inquiry process (Evered and Louis 1981). This position contributes to the aforementioned issue of objectivity where it is considered one of the main reasons as to why insider research is sometimes regarded as challenging. Objectivity arguments specifically relate to the effect of the emotional relationships that the insider researcher holds with participants (form the majority of the concerns (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2013; van Heugten 2004; Moore 2007).

Brannick and Coghlan (2007) posit that because the insider researcher is close to and thus personally experiences organisational life, they feel a desire to investigate it, and that is indeed true of this researcher. It was this researcher that determined the phenomenon to investigate based on their experiences of the organisation (Roose and de Bie 2003) or, as Evered and Louis (1981) reflect upon, the researcher's Heideggerian *being* in the organisation. The researcher then became an actor in those situations (Evered and Louis 1981), not only as a colleague but in this case specifically through engaging with and interviewing participants as a researcher, all from a position of holding a personal stake in the findings of the inquiry and thus their effect on the organisation itself (Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

The researcher had seen first-hand how empowerment was being restricted due to the matrix hierarchy and this had stimulated a desire to investigate if colleagues shared the same experiences. This intent was in line with van Heugten's (2004) comments that the selection of a research issue clearly identifies the insider researcher's personal interest and the potential for bias, though these factors were attempted to be put to the side. In this circumstance however the data gathered from participants evidenced that others did not feel that the matrix structure caused them much issue.

The researcher found that being an insider brought many positives to the research process, not least that also experienced by Bonner and Tolhurst (2002), where the researcher's familiarity resulted in notable time saving in not

having to understand the organisation from the point of an outsider. As a native actor using the existing processes of the organisation (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Bonner and Tolhurst 2002), the researcher was able to immediately utilise not only theoretical understanding of the dynamics of organisations (Coghlan 2003), but lived experience to understand the everyday jargon, legitimate issues, and taboo phenomena (Coghlan 2003). An example of this is the ethical issue covered earlier in the 'Methodological Considerations' section. This helped the researcher to use the existing organisational immersion (Brannick and Coghlan 2007), i.e. the knowledge of culture, people, resources and the researcher's own experiences, to form temporal and contextual understanding (Evered and Louis 1981), which will also subsequently benefit the effecting of change.

The base knowledge of the researcher thus echoed some symmetry with Coghlan (2003) in being able to ask further, informed but probing questions to gather richer data from participants. Literature cautions that in these circumstances, the researcher could assume too much and thus not probe sufficiently (Coghlan 2003; Coghlan 2007; Workman 2007; van Heugten 2004). To ensure that the risk of these 'blind spots' were reduced as much as reasonably possible, the researcher used a form of member checking throughout data gathering sessions, adopting van Heugten's (2004) guidance to ensure clarity, and reduce uncertainty.

The familiarity of being a colleague of participants provided a sort of camouflaging cloak to the insider researcher position during data gathering, allowing the researcher to continue being 'one of them'. This meant that, as Tuffour (2018) experienced, the researcher was told "you know what I mean" and asked "what do you think?", with the opinion of the researcher being canvassed often by participants. Though difficult, the researcher addressed this by rejecting the overt and communicated switching of roles between colleague and researcher, as performed by Morgan (2006), and adopted the approach of van Heugten (2004) in avoiding giving opinions or feeding back personal issues, but critically ensuring that participants were aware of *why* this position was held by the researcher. This prevented the building of

metaphorical barriers to participants sharing experiences, maintaining an ethical approach. It is acknowledged however that other factors may have contributed to some participants not feeling able to share experiences fully, e.g. the ongoing transformation programme and the effect it has on job security, or the fear that other participants, or indeed the researcher despite confirmation of anonymity, may share the personal stories heard outside of the forum.

This concern was found however to be insignificant: as Tuffour (2018) and Morgan (2006) document, the similarities meant that the researcher could relate in more depth than an outsider would have been able to. The researcher initially felt the same concern as that which Tuffour (2018) cites, where "participants might take our sameness for granted" (Tuffour 2018: 15) and then not share experiences in depth. This did not transpire however, as participants provided rich and deep narrations of their view of organisational dynamics. In doing so, the researcher felt a confidence in them as facilitator of the data gathering sessions, essentially what Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) term *trust,* as a researcher and notably a colleague. This trust enabled employee participants to share information and opinions of management without a fear of recriminations or judgement.

Of interest to the researcher was Tuffour's (2018) reflection of organisational politics, being metaphorically pulled from one side to another, from personal to professional, with inquiry initially constrained. For the researcher, conducting interviews with senior management away from employees allowed those employees more freedom to discuss their concerns, avoiding the pitfalls experienced by Tuffour (2018) in some participants feeling they could not share perceptions of others. Though the initial reason for having senior management sessions separate to those of employees was availability-driven, it clearly led to a benefit for the data gathered.

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) advise from experience that the insider researcher should be prepared for change, and this did indeed materialise for the researcher. As discussed earlier, the reorientation of the investigation from

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experiences of empowerment to experiences of trust (in an empowerment context) were surprising, but incredibly exciting. This pivot of main inquiry was only permitted by the flexible core nature of insider research, where "there are no intentionally prescribed categories to constrain the researcher" (Evered and Louis 1981: 390). With this flexibility, the researcher was allowed to approach the inquiry open to the data (Coghlan 2003), and thus, echoing the experiences of Evered and Louis (1981), highlight "hidden organizational realities" (Evered and Louis 1982: 387). This delving into hidden features does however bring to the fore a final concern that may prove challenging for not only the insider researcher, but also the organisation itself.

This closing issue is whether the findings of the investigation will be considered subversive, the same feelings held by Moore (2007) and Roose and de Bie (2003) for their respective research, or whether they are taken in the manner intended i.e. as a work that could help to map the course for improvement for not only the participants, but also the organisation in respect of normal, working life. The very nature of insider research can be deemed subversive (Coghlan 2003, 2007; Moore 2007; Roose and de Bie 2003) because it examines all aspects of the organisation (Coghlan 2007) from an informed perspective. To this extent, the researcher shares the same specific apprehensions that were held by Moore (2007). In his exploration of his organisation, Moore (2007) found that the unspoken professional and cultural norms defined the level of inquisitiveness that he felt comfortable in demonstrating. These norms, together with social bonds of colleagues, caused a desire to fit in and thus the reduced the level of critical evaluation that Moore (2007) was initially willing to apply: "I did not want to do anything to scandalize, denigrate or offend the organisation I worked for" (Moore 2007: 31).

This perspective resonates greatly with the researcher. As an employee of the organisation, the researcher would often comment and criticise certain processes or methods of the organisation within the safety of their immediate team. These would remain as low-level comments, often not going much further than idle chat amongst colleagues who were equally as frustrated, but

too loaded with task to initiate any change. The academic requirement of this research together with the frustrations experienced by the researcher were factors that served to support and propel each other to instil a desire for action, though it was evidenced that the main issue as voiced by the researcher, i.e. the matrix structure restricting perceptions of empowerment, was not shared amongst other participants. Would the findings of this research, critical in nature, be deemed by management as subversive? As Moore (2007) posited, does disseminating work in the organisation gained from insider research appear mutinous? These concerns remain, but can be positively addressed by the dissemination strategy as discussed earlier, and the intended delay to the publishing of this thesis for commercial sensitivity reasons. To that extent then, the researcher is confident that this anxiety caused by the desire to not offend the subject organisation did not limit the findings; they stand alone in identifying critical areas of improvement that would not have otherwise emerged.

In an extension of this potential subversive quality of insider research, a question arose within the researcher after contemplating Tuffour's (2018) interaction with his female participants. Tuffour (2018) is open in how he assumed his insider researcher would be accepted by female participants; in actuality he was thought of as an outsider. Though the researcher was indeed an insider, did senior management consider the researcher as such? The researcher now realises that they held a taken-for-granted assumption that they would indeed be considered an insider by all participants, leaning on the professional and social bonds held within the organisation, when there was potential for the converse. The majority of senior management answered positively when discussing empowerment and trust, that it was 'on their radar' as a vital part of organisational life that needed improvement and their desire was to improve; only one manager questioned the need currently. It therefore could possibly be that the researcher was regarded as being an organisational insider, but not necessarily a *management insider*, leading to senior management delivering a statement of positive intent: one that may be assumed to be what employees wish to hear for comfort. It may not necessarily be senior management's true position on the issues presented. Though there

was no overt evidence to support this concern, it offers another avenue of subsequent inquiry.

The investigation has contributed much for the practice of this researcher. The understanding of the way in which the hermeneutic circle is employed in reality versus the simple reading of it in literature was illuminating for the researcher, and drove the reorientation of the research to the emerging issue of trust. It was comforting for the researcher to learn of other insider researchers that experienced similar issues in feeling the push and pull of being not only a researcher, but also an employee. The experiences of these scholars helped the researcher to consider the challenges that they had overcome to better the researcher's own practice. The reflections discussed have also aided the researcher in understanding some of the more nuanced aspects of the research, some that would arguably benefit from further work. Whether management in organisations consider insider researchers as *actual* insiders or not would open a vital avenue of discourse on the insider researcher approach, whilst the effect of the desire to not denigrate the organisation, and the 'best practice' ways in which these feelings can be addressed by the researcher to not impact the research, would again benefit the insider researcher paradigm. In summary then, the investigation has been extremely educational and enlightening for this researcher, with the latter in all honesty not being expected. Whilst undoubtedly benefitting the researcher, It is hoped that this research can meet its overarching objective and improve the working lives of the participants as not only members of the research, but as colleagues.