NAVIGATING STREMES

Conceptualising, Activating, and Legitimising

Strategic Change within BBC International News

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submitted for the degree

of Doctor of Business Administration

Management School

University of Bradford

2014
ABSTRACT

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Conceptualising, Activating, and Legitimising Strategic Change within BBC International News

Keywords: Strategy, Change, Stremes, Network, Legitimacy, Alignment, Action Research, Practice, Complexity, Porosity

This thesis considers strategic change from the novel perspective of a manager practically ‘activating’ it within a complex organisation. It involved 18 months of action research and participant observation within BBC Global News, where joint processes were developed across two converging businesses. A journal was maintained of meetings and events, access was granted to internal documentation, and 12 interviews were conducted.

One contribution of this thesis is a new conceptualisation of the developing elements of organisational strategic posture and related environmental events as ‘stremes’: strategic memes representing relevant subsystems, ideas, and subcultures. The posture is depicted as a construction of multiple voices, often combining, sometimes clashing, as ideas compete for legitimacy. This allows the practitioner outlook to be presented through three linked perspectives. A ‘process’ approach maps the unfolding streme system; a ‘people’ approach considers the building of consensus to legitimise stremes; and a ‘practice’ approach considers the efficacy of action research in helping to craft change. It is found that not only do the actions of people
shape the streme network; the complex, interdependent network also partially shapes their actions.

This research builds on previous work on strategic change, but provides new narrative insight from a practitioner’s outlook. It also created ‘practical knowledge’, since many outputs of the process were implemented within the BBC, and may have relevance elsewhere.
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<tr>
<td>AIR</td>
<td>Audience Investment Return (latterly QIR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAU</td>
<td>Business as Usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC.com</td>
<td>BBC.com/news Website, and Business Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBA</td>
<td>Doctor of Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DQF</td>
<td>Delivering Quality First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GN</td>
<td>BBC Global News Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNL</td>
<td>BBC Global News Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSR</td>
<td>Global Strategy Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSR2</td>
<td>Global Strategy Review 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD</td>
<td>High-Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQIV</td>
<td>Reach Quality Investment Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBI</td>
<td>Key Brand Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEI</td>
<td>Key Editorial Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC&amp;A</td>
<td>BBC Marketing, Communication, and Audiences Dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Neil Parkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQF</td>
<td>Putting Quality First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QIR</td>
<td>Quality Investment Return (formerly AIR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIN</td>
<td>Transforming International News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WN</td>
<td>BBC World News TV Channel, and Business Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>BBC World Service</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the access, time, and financial support provided by BBC World News, BBC.com, and BBC Global News Limited (GNL). I hope that its professional outcomes continue to be of lasting benefit to the new company’s public service mission of bringing BBC journalism to global audiences. This project was only part of the story of GNL’s formation, but even so it involved many people at the BBC and at Bradford University School of Management, all of whom have my thanks. Any shortcomings and frustrations expressed in this thesis are mine, and not the responsibility of the people with whom I worked, who generously gave their time and expertise to both its professional and academic aspects. I would particularly like to thank:

- Prof. Irena Grugulis and Dr Anna Zueva-Owens for supervising this thesis, providing pragmatic, wise feedback on my half-baked drafts, and patiently waiting for my brain to muddle its way through the mess of strategic change.

- Dr Eva Niemann and Dr Craig Johnson, the heart and soul of the Bradford DBA programme, and who, with Prof. Nancy Harding, made it so welcoming; my thanks for all their workshops and support over the years. Dr Ian Fouweather, who rightly observed that I’d never be a philosopher, despite his efforts as our finest lecturer. Cohort 7, increasingly fragmented, but who had fun in the modular years. And all at Heaton Mount; friendly, familiar faces whenever I stayed there.

- At the BBC, Sian Kevill and Anne Barnard for enabling the research; Jim Egan, Peter Horrocks, and Grant Welland, my sponsors, for supporting me through the core project; and James Montgomery for support in the latter stages. Also Mark Burkhill, whose Visio talents are being gloriously wasted by a swimming pool in France.
Finally, I'd like to thank John Smith, for showing me as a child that questions could be explored, understood, and addressed through the wonders of science. He is a doctor who continues to enrich my life, so I wish him the very happiest of birthdays.

When BBC World News and BBC.com finally regenerated into BBC Global News Limited at the end of this story, it was indeed change, my dear reader, and it seemed not a moment too soon.

NP, November 2013.
This thesis is dedicated to Hannah

– my own streme’s

perfect, enduring, alignment.
1 Introduction

What we are concerned with here is the fundamental interconnectedness of all things.... I see the solution to each problem as being detectable in the pattern and web of the whole. The connections between causes and effects are often much more subtle and complex than we with our rough and ready understanding of the physical world might naturally suppose

- Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency (Adams 1988, p.115)

Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation

- BBC Motto, from its coat of arms. (BBC 2005)

1.1 The Research, and the Contribution to Academic Knowledge

“The fundamental interconnectedness of all things” (1988, p.115) may seem an extreme generalisation, but it reflects the feeling of a manager in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) whose own work is inextricably intertwined with multiple other concurrent developments. This thesis is written from this perspective, and contends that taking a wider view of a network of co-developing processes,
alongside the experience of the actors within that network whose actions formulate it, can shed new light on the way that organisational strategic posture unfolds. Here, “the connections between causes and effects” identified above are social as well as physical; and being a more “holistic detective” can create both practical and academic knowledge, as well as being a way for the fictional Dirk Gently to justify his improbable expenses.

Strategy is nothing without organisational change, and forests of academic literature address these amorphous subjects from numerous perspectives. Early depictions (Chandler 1962, Ansoff 1965) presented strategy as a planned, positivistic activity: omnipotent senior executives or specialists thinking deep thoughts before putting them into action. Later, greater emphasis was placed on process (Bower 1970, Mintzberg 1978); planned and emergent strategic development coexisting, as relevant activities were distributed across the members of an organisation. The increasingly complex picture led to alternative classifications of the field (Mintzberg et al 1998, Whittington 2001) including planned, incrementalist, societal, and interpretive approaches (Johnson 1987). More recently, the craft of strategy, depicting it as a practice, has been explored (Mintzberg 1987, Whittington 1996, 2004, 2006, 2007, Jarzabkowski 2005, Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008, Spee and Jarzabkowski 2009). As a practitioner I experience an unfolding, complex network of interdependent subsystems, people, and narratives; different concerns arise over time, some in competition, others becoming integrated into a greater whole. It is, therefore, descriptions of strategic change as a process underpinned by people that reflect my own experiences, and on which I have chosen to focus, drawing particularly on the logical incrementalist view of Quinn (1980), Pettigrew’s
work on continuity and change (1985), and Johnson’s (1987) more integrated, interpretative account.

This thesis provides new insight in three key respects. Firstly, it is written from the perspective of a practitioner: a middle manager in a large, complex, messy organisation, practically activating aspects of a conceptual high-level strategy, which called for two business units to converge without detailing specifics. Managers are often the people expected to ‘buy in’ to strategy, and many strategic initiatives involve their input; but creating strategic change from this perspective involves working with colleagues across the organisation, and facilitating consensus without line management authority over the numerous departments involved. Secondly, this is an interventionist, action research (AR) based view, which created practical knowledge through a change programme within the host organisation, as well as conceptualising it to provide academic insight. Finally, the conceptualisation, rather than being a detailed exploration of a narrow field of research, aims to take a broader view. The project is depicted as just one of a number of organisational activities, foreshadowing a discussion of how the wider network of people and processes impacted upon it. AR is used as a framework within which the issue is discussed using linked process-, people-, and practice-based perspectives. In short, the aim is to represent multiple facets of the practitioner experience, breaking down the distinction between the ‘strategising’ and the ‘strategised upon’.

From a systemic, process perspective, the strategic posture of an organisation is comprised of unfolding subsystems. A change agent seeks to configure these elements towards their desired future vision, pragmatically seeking alignments and considering which can be influenced in a way that will help progress their own work. Different actors can have disparate concepts of the current state and future vision,
leading to competing narratives and localised activities; and, for each, different subsystems will be modifiable. Some authors employ flow-based metaphors to depict the developing pattern of the key subsystems, talking of internal decisions and external events flowing together (Quinn 1980, p.43); “a giant river system” (Johnson 1987, p.58); “a stream of decisions” (Mintzberg 1978, p.935); or “streams of activities” (Pettigrew 1985, p.438), with today’s posture derived from yesterday’s, and evolving into tomorrow’s. The word “memes” (Dawkins 1976, p.206) was coined to represent ideas evolving within a sea of culture, and here the term ‘stremes’ – strategic memes – is similarly used to represent the flowing, interdependent elements that comprise organisational posture. Stremes include subsystems; processes, documents, planned strategic programmes, approval systems, and departments; but also local subcultures, stakeholder attitudes, and external events. The task of the change agent is thus to chart, successfully, a course through these factors to their destination, their vision for their part of the organisation, by ‘Navigating Stremes’.

The conceptualisation assumes a system open to its environment, but the stremes found relevant in this case formed a network that was internally focused, messy, and primarily emergent. The thesis describes how numerous stremes developed and interacted during the course of the core project, some coming into alignment (for example, harmonising existing performance measurement systems into a combined framework) and others into conflict (debating the desired level of reinvestment versus profitability, as envisaged from differing public and commercially focused subcultures). The overall process is mapped, with a practitioner-based taxonomy of the stremes involved, and a discussion of their various types of interaction.
The evolving alignments between the conceptual stremes are underpinned by consensus building for change amongst the actual people involved. Change can be a threat to the existing order, or at least a chore, and so the legitimisation of novel proposals is portrayed as crucial (Pettigrew 1985, Starr and MacMillan 1990, Zimmerman and Zeitz 2002), overcoming “the liability of newness” (Stinchcombe 1965, p.148), and being conferred by a utilitarian audience of stakeholders (Suchman 1995). Here, each streme has a degree of “legitimacy” – akin to human political capital – conferred upon it by relevant actors, through its alignment with other systems, with future vision(s), and through having practical utility. The thesis describes how I sought, practically, interlevel legitimacy for my proposals amongst peers and boards, by actively forming and demonstrating alignments with existing systems and subcultures as well as future vision. It also depicts the difficulties I faced in building consensus, where there were misaligned stremes, changing priorities elsewhere in the network, or an insufficient clarity of vision. An interesting feature of the system was, thus, that stremes might be in competition with each other, but had to build legitimacy through alignment. As part of his planned approach to change, Lewin gradually developed a mathematical field theory of social groups in which competing societal forces both drive and restrain change (Lewin 1997, Burnes and Cooke 2013); in this thesis, four more qualitative force fields are used to summarise the pressures on streme evolution. The vision force arises from people driving change towards a cohesive future goal, whilst the culture force restrains new activities that don’t reflect ‘the way we do things around here’. Another brake on change is a globalisation force that takes time to correct mismatches between different stremes, deriving from a desire to legitimise processes by taking into account other organisational activity, whilst, conversely, a localisation force is
provided by actors independently driving towards their own future vision, with less wide-scale support. In accordance with prior literature (Johnson 1987, Deuten and Rip 2000, Fenton and Langley 2011) it is found that symbols and narrative are important components of the societal alignment process, actors’ discourse often demonstrating a respectful fit with the past, and collaborative ways into the future. Moreover, a key finding of the research is that the very complexity of the streme network itself impacts upon the human activities discussed: whilst people’s actions shape the network, the network also shapes the actions. The term ‘cognitive porosity’ is coined to reflect the quantity of networked issues actors find themselves dealing with when addressing an issue; and the related ‘group porosity’, the number of people who get involved.

A modified AR methodology was utilised for several reasons. I was not a detached observer, but a practitioner seeking practical outcomes. I felt that AR could embrace the semi-detached subjectivity of a narrative approach, and the creation of practical knowing alongside academic knowledge (Gummesson 1991, Greenwood and Levin 1998, Reason and Bradbury 2008, Coghlan and Brannick 2010); this latter facet mirroring the requirement of the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree that the research should also provide a contribution to management practice. AR’s pragmatic, trans-disciplinary, holistic embracing of complexity enabled me to address a practical problem, conceptualise it through multiple perspectives, and place it into the interdependent organisational context, in a way that I felt a deeper but narrower theoretical exploration could not. Finally, many of the social ambitions within the methodology appeared to parallel the craft of a change agent building consensus for progress between actors. However, the approach had to be modified in practice, again partly because of the group porosity of the network. There was no
simple core team jointly tackling a single issue; rather, shifting hierarchical constituencies (emails in this project reached 137 people) of specialists became relevant, and, using AR principles, I acted as a facilitator between them.

The three perspectives, of the interacting *processes* in the streme network, the legitimising *people* within it, and observations on strategising *practice* using AR, form the research subtopics shown in Box 1.1. The core topic is ‘how strategy is activated, and the processes of strategic change are perceived, by a middle manager in a complex organisation’. The ‘process’ perspective considers the key properties of the network of stremes, and how it evolved. This wide-angle mapping of the complex river-system of issues in the organisation is followed by two other perspectives that zoom-in to the interacting flows that comprise it. The ‘people’ perspective considers the social legitimisation behind the interacting stremes then, zooming-in yet further, the ‘practice’ perspective considers my personal experience of performing the activation using AR, and its application to the craft of strategy.

**Box 1.1 Research Topic and Subtopics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Topic: How strategy is activated, and the processes of strategic change are perceived, by a middle manager in a complex organisation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtopic 1) Process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What streme network was involved, and what are its key characteristics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtopic 2) People</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did stremes interact and become legitimised through the actors involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtopic 3) Practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent did the Action Research methodology help to craft strategic change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary, this thesis is written from the viewpoint of an academic practitioner interested in the value that social-science perspectives can bring to the workplace, whilst also hoping that conceptualised practical insight can, in turn, contribute to academic thinking. It thus responds to calls for consensus-building, narrative-based social science, aiming to bridge the perceived gap (Susman and Evered 1978, Schön 1992, Gibbons et al 1994, Tranfield and Starkey 1998, Aram and Salipante 2003) between research characterised either by academic rigour or practitioner relevance. It also provides rare insight into board-level activity and mid-level management within a major international media organisation that, like many other entities tasked with creating public value, increasingly needs to raise commercial revenue in support of its core mission.

1.2 The Setting, and the Contribution to Practical Knowledge

2012 was a momentous year for news services at the BBC. Not only were there big stories, including the London Olympics, the Queen’s diamond jubilee, and the US elections; there were also major changes behind the scenes. The organisation began to consolidate its London production base into what became Europe’s biggest newsroom, New Broadcasting House. This new facility was designed to respond to the demands of digital media consumption: not only by producing high-definition (HD) television, but also by enabling closer working across all platforms: radio, TV, web, mobile and social media. The BBC’s international news services, run by the Global News Division (GN), moved into this new production environment, and there were also organisational changes aimed at creating a more coherent, multi-platform product. The BBC’s high-level Global Strategy Review (GSR) (BBC 2011a) had determined that the BBC broadcast news internationally for the public good (as in
the UK), its partly commercial funding being a means to this end. It recommended that two existing business units work more closely together: BBC World News television (WN, previously part of GN) and the BBC.com/news website (previously part of BBC Worldwide (WW)). These two units had different internal cultures; although commercially funded, WN was more publicly-orientated, being closely associated with domestic BBC News culture, whilst BBC.com’s team came from a more commercial mind-set, built on the sales perspective of WW. The subcultures engendered differing views on how the GSR should be implemented, and 18 months elapsed between its publication and an eventual merger of the units into Global News Limited (GNL) in mid-2012, a period during which the creation of some common systems was sought, although the end result was unclear. It is this period of quasi-emergent development, ‘activating’ aspects of the somewhat conceptual GSR findings, that provided the setting for this research, as this project (this streme), called ‘Shared Success’ at the BBC, developed some practical, common subsystems for managing the converging businesses.

My role in the organisation was that of the Head of Business and Technical Innovation within WN (and, latterly, within GNL). This was a flexible role, involving me in various developmental activities. At the time of the research I was working closely with the GN Strategy team, and was asked to look at how WN and BBC.com could develop common performance measurement frameworks. This was the seed of my broader research proposal, which was sponsored by the Director, GN (the Chair of the WN and BBC.com boards); the Controller of Strategy, GN; and the Finance Director of BBC.com, thereby representing both the TV and online businesses in process governance. The data-gathering phase of the research took
place across 2011 and into the first half of 2012, during which time I ran the Shared Success project, reporting into the boards of WN and BBC.com.

As depicted in the second column of Figure 1.1, the project had three top-level aims: seeking to develop congruent approaches to a common company vision, common performance indicators, and a common initiative evaluation, all in accord with the GSR. These three aims are then shown splitting into five activities, the core stremes, discussion of which forms the findings of this thesis. Within the findings, two key episodes of integrated activity are described, which are also shown in the figure. The first portrays the difficulty encountered in formulating a common vision across the two company subcultures, whilst the second explores how two competing proposals for brand-based audience research were successfully aligned.

To the right, the key practical outcomes are summarised; of the five core stremes, three broadly succeeded, whilst two partially succeeded. The most direct contribution to management, and the BBC, is that several of the frameworks developed were used at GNL, thus becoming practical knowledge at least transiently encoded into the organisation. The least successful aspect of this project was the creation of a common vision across the merging businesses, since much of this happened elsewhere. However, the research did contribute to building incremental commitment towards GNL formation, and developed some key rationales for commercially funded public service broadcasting which formed the first paper at the inaugural board meeting of the new company. More practical outcomes included a monthly summary of performance measures: a company ‘dashboard’, created to run the business at board level. This incorporated some new measures and targets created through this process: Quality Investment Return (QIR), a financial measure of the amount of commercial revenue reinvested into public value news output; and brand-
based Key Editorial Indicators (KEIs), audience survey metrics developed with the Marketing Communications and Audiences (MC&A) teams to measure quality. The final output shown is a framework for appraising initiatives that was partially instituted, and that demonstrably affected the budgeting process. This was used to greenlight investments, for example a new International Business Correspondent, announced in March 2012, and the launch of an HD feed of WN to Asia Pacific in August 2012.
Figure 1.1 Overview of the Shared Success Project

- Project Stremes:
  - Top-Level Aims / Stremes
  - Core Stremes (Mapped in Ch. 4)
  - Key Episodes (Discussed in Ch. 5)
  - Key Outcomes for GNL

"Shared Success"

1. Joint Vision Formulation
   - Vision
   - Vision paper at 1st Board Meeting
   - (Modified) Dashboard

2. Joint Metric Formulation
   - Dashboard
   - QIR
   - QIR KPI a key target
   - Brand Attributes & Metrics

3. Joint Initiative Evaluation
   - Joint Initiative Evaluation
   - Aligning Localised Stremes (Key Episode 2)
   - Key Editorial Indicators tracked
   - Framework partially used
   - Framework partially used
1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

The overall thesis structure is shown in Figure 1.2, depicting the integration of the dual academic and practitioner perspectives inherent in this research. To the left, academic literature on strategy, legitimacy, and AR is reviewed to consider the processes, people, and practices involved in activating strategic change. On the right, the workplace project is developed and implemented, producing data. These two aspects are unified in the central structure through the reporting of findings.

The chapters of the thesis are also shown. Following this introduction, the next chapter reviews some relevant academic writing. It considers classifications of strategy, and depictions of unfolding strategic subsystems, evolving sometimes in competition and sometimes in alignment, to form an overall strategic posture. It also depicts the people behind the subsystems, considering rational, incremental, and interpretative perspectives on their actions. The nature of legitimacy, and how it is conferred by actors onto activities, is described, especially in justifying change in the face of opposition. Finally, there is a short discussion of the ‘art and craft’ of strategy, and how change agents move strategic development forward. In discussing consensus-building and facilitation, this section finds many parallels with the use of an AR methodology, which comprises Chapter 3. There, AR’s philosophical basis and core concepts: structure, democracy, participation, reflection in action, and validity, are discussed. This sets the scene for the methods used in this research, its ethical approach, organisational setting, and structure. Data-gathering, and its analysis to form the emergent narrative presented here, are described.
Figure 1.2 Thesis Structure
Chapters 4-6 are the core of the thesis, reporting the research findings for each of the three subtopics. Firstly, Chapter 4 looks at the strategic activation through the prism of process. It takes a deliberately ‘wide-angle’ view, mapping the network of observed stremes, reflecting on the maps’ characteristics and the descriptive power of this approach. It also considers some of the broad attributes of this processual process of strategic configuration. In so doing, it recounts the story of the activation, introducing the somewhat specialised setting of the research. The complexity of the network depicted sets the scene for the following two chapters which zoom-in to see how it was created by, and influenced, the people and practices inside it.

Chapter 5 reports on how interactions between actors conferred legitimacy on the processes and the subsystems. The discussion opens with comments from directors and peers regarding their experiences within the emergent streme network, before moving on to my own perspective regarding which stremes I could and could not influence, thereby creating a classification based on practitioner concerns. This develops into a discussion of the means by which legitimacy was sought and conferred, including streme alignment, the interlevel dynamics of the process, the use of narrative/symbols, and network effects. Two further sections look at key episodes of activity during the process, integrating various aspects of the foregoing discourse into concrete examples, one of conflict and one of alignment. The final chapter of findings, Chapter 6, then reflects on how useful AR was in practicing the craft of strategy through consensus- and alignment-building, relating my own experience as a practitioner back to the expectations of its academic proponents. In particular, the chapter considers how the networked context of the AR project modified the methodology, and limited some of its basic ambitions for democracy, participation, and learning.
The potentially wider value of these findings, and further work that could be undertaken professionally and academically, are discussed in Chapter 7, which also considers the quality and limitations of this research, and concludes with some final reflections.

In summary, this thesis considers the practical activation of strategic change from a practitioner outlook that encompasses process-, people-, and practice-perspectives. It depicts how multiple streams, and the actors behind them, interacted to establish mutual legitimacy, each building on past contexts and understandings as they sought to establish influential alignments in the organisation now and into the future, in an evolving, networked, process without beginning or end. Thus, whilst the BBC’s motto, quoted at the start of this introduction, is “Nation shall speak peace unto nation” (BBC 2005), the aim here is more modest: simply that departmental vision shall speak peace unto departmental vision.
2 Academic Approaches to Activating Strategic Change

You're walking,
And you don't always realize it, but you're always falling.
With each step you fall forward slightly,
And then catch yourself from falling.
Over and over, you're falling,
And then catching yourself from falling,
And this is how you can be walking, and falling,
At the same time.

Strategy formation walks on two feet, one deliberate, the other emergent.
- Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p.271)

When you plant a fertile meme in my mind, you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme’s propagation.
- Dawkins (1976, p.207)
2.1 Introduction

Any discussion of academic writing on strategy and organisational change is necessarily selective, since there are large, interconnected bodies of work across many overlapping fields. The focus here is on the middle management experience of working with the processes that formulate strategic development and change within a complex organisation, since these are the issues I recognise professionally and wish to use to frame my exploration. Thus, whilst the review opens with a brief discussion of the more normative, planned approaches to strategy which characterised early thinking on the subject, the main consideration is of perspectives that explore dynamic, evolutionary change and the people who create it, an ongoing process with no beginning or end. Here, as beautifully reflected above in Laurie Anderson’s (1982) depiction of forward motion, and described by Mintzberg and Walters (1985, p.271), deliberate and emergent strategic developments coexist on the journey towards a future vision. The review begins by exploring some of the taxonomies of strategy that have been proposed, each highlighting differing contextual factors, all having something to contribute.

The work of a middle manager in a complex organisation is only a small part of the whole, and so a host of interactions arise with the wider system. The core of the review, therefore, considers key writings on, firstly, the complex network of subprocess development taking place within the strategic evolution and, secondly, on the interactions between the actors involved. Dawkins (1976), above, describes these exchanges starkly, as parasitical brain infections, but they are more often pictured through softer cultural, political, and symbolic factors that mediate change processes, as different actors seek to confer legitimacy onto specific subprocesses to increase
their influence, and move the organisational state towards their own version of a desired future construct.

The review concentrates on the perspectives of three authors who formulated their views through studies of managerial activity within complex organisations, and moved away from the predominantly planned, rational approach to strategy. Firstly, there is the logical incrementalism model described by Quinn (1980) following studies across nine multibillion-dollar corporations, which focuses on managing locally rational subsystems, and maintains that actors overseeing the network act logically in delaying decisions, thereby moving forward step by step. Secondly, Pettigrew’s influential study (1985) at Imperial Chemical Industries, looking back over 20 years, builds on the incrementalist depiction but, in coming from a perspective of exploring change and continuity rather than strategy, uprates the importance of politics, culture, and context, leading to a more social and legitimacy-based view. Finally, Johnson’s work (1987) on strategic change at a UK clothing retailer combines three perspectives: the rational, the incrementalist, and the human, here framed as a more interpretive, sensemaking approach.

This review formulates a depiction of overall organisational strategic posture as being the aggregation of numerous subsystems and cultures, interacting both internally and with the environment, in an ongoing processual development (Section 2.3). This posture is the outcome of the actions of change agents, each pursuing quasi-localised subgoals, their rationality bounded by cognitive and process limits, and influenced by cultural and political forces. Section 2.4, therefore, considers how the agents interact to justify and legitimise enduring change, since competing environmental forces impede as well as drive progress. A crucial mechanism is the building of consensus between key actors at different hierarchical levels of the organisation, interacting
through mutually understood narratives and symbols. These interactions result in change programmes competing, evolving, and aligning, creating mutual legitimisation for successful new initiatives, and thus moving the entire organisation forward in response to its changing environmental and internal context. A complex network of people, departments and local issues is formed which cannot be omnipotently, centrally managed, and thus strategic practitioners dynamically configure the subsystems, navigating their ways towards their future goals.

Finally, Section 2.5 considers the art of a strategic practitioner within the system, this actor-based perspective being provided by Mintzberg’s (1987) craft outlook, and Whittington’s (1996, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2007, Jarzabkowski 2005, Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008, Spee and Jarzabkowski 2009) ‘Strategy as Practice’ perspective. This craft is depicted in literature as being one of reflection as well as action, of facilitating debate, of understanding local issues, and of becoming involved in messy detail to make progress. Parallels are drawn with AR, leading into the methodology chapter.

In summary, this review considers ongoing strategic development from a systemic perspective, from a more social perspective, and from a change agent’s practice perspective, thereby paralleling the three research subtopics. It also notes calls for greater insight into the practitioner’s experience of these issues, the gory details of enacting change, and the placing of the resulting microportrait within a wider context. This research does this, and goes further, by showing how the wider network of issues itself influences the local actions of those within. It uses the new concept of ‘stremes’ to outline the broader network of organisational subsystems before then discussing how they influenced this project, and participants’ actions. In this model, stremes are the unfolding subsystems, events, cultures, and other influences perceived by a change
agent within an organisation. The review introduces stremes in two stages. In Section 2.3.2 they are developed from the literature on processual strategic development, so allowing the overall developing system to be mapped from the practitioner’s perspective. Following the societal part of the review, Section 2.4.6 takes the streme concept further, adding the social dimension. The interactions between stremes become a representation of the interactions between the people behind process development. If group consensus about the utility of a particular streme increases, as a result of it becoming aligned with other stremes in support of a communicated future vision, it is depicted as gaining legitimacy, the underlying currency that sustains it into the future. Finally, paralleling Lewin’s field theory in which the environmental space of influences creates social forces driving and restraining change (Burnes and Cooke 2013), four environmental field forces that influence streme development (vision, culture, globalisation, and localisation) are postulated. These ideas, of streme interaction, legitimacy, and forces, will subsequently be used to analyse the activation described in this thesis.

2.2 Shapes of Strategy

2.2.1 Definitions

This review opens with some definitions of strategy, before outlining how the concept has become increasingly intricate in moving from simpler, positivistic depictions to more complex, dynamic, socially based concerns. In particular, this section builds to a discussion of Whittington’s (2001) classification of strategy, used later to consider the activation studied here. Strategy has been defined in numerous ways, and Johnson (1987, p.4) summarises some key thematic commonalities: the long-term direction and the scope of an organisation’s activities; their match to its environment; capability and
resource allocation; and the expectations and values of shareholders. Quinn (1980) defines it as:

the pattern or plan that integrates an organization’s major goals, policies, and action sequences into a cohesive whole. A well-formulated strategy helps to marshal and allocate an organization’s resources into a unique and viable posture based on its relative internal competencies and shortcomings, anticipated changes in the environment, and contingent moves by intelligent opponents.

This pattern does not derive solely from a chief executive; Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, p.433) depict strategic change as an attempt to alter “modes of cognition and action” involving sensemaking and sensegiving between participants, whilst Whittington (2001, p.23) sees strategies as “a way in which managers try to simplify and order a world which is far too complex and chaotic for them to comprehend”. Pettigrew focuses on the change management aspect of strategy, describing the literature as “sprawling and none too coherent” (1985, p.2), and seeing the term ‘strategy’ as simply highlighting the magnitude of that change, having multiple, or second order, effects (p.439). This question of scale is also addressed by Quinn (1980, p.9), who argues that, since strategies exist at all organisational levels, the difference between a strategy and a tactic is in the eye of the beholder. From a high level, a more detailed departmental activity may be perceived as a tactic, whereas to the head of department enacting the programme, the middle manager perspective considered in this thesis, it may be seen as more strategic, as visualised in Figure 2.1.
Quinn’s distinction is that tactics are short-duration, adaptive, action-interaction realignments that opposing forces use to accomplish limited goals, in contrast to wider, ongoing strategies that order these adaptions towards broadly conceived purposes. In this thesis I adopt some further definitions used by Quinn (1980, pp.7-8), summarised in Figure 2.2. ‘Goals’ describe what is to be achieved when, but not how. ‘Policies’ are rules or guidelines expressing the limits of action, sometimes as rules that resolve goal conflicts. ‘Programmes’ are how goals are achieved, and incorporate the commitment of resources. Each may be considered strategic, if of sufficient import and, overseeing all this, strategic decisions determine the overall direction of an enterprise and its viability in the light of external events.
2.2.2 Classical Strategy and its Limitations

The classical approach to strategy emphasised centralised scientific analysis for the planning of long-term economic objectives, strategies being formulated and decisions made by considering a corporation’s capabilities within its environment, then evaluating options for execution, famously through a matrix (Ansoff 1965, p.109). One assumption being made was that an individual or a small group of senior managers could perform the assessment, whilst others enacted it (Johnson 1987, p.17). Complexity, it seemed, could be defeated through analysis, and appropriate action taken. As the practical limits of this model became questioned, individuals’ motivations, conflicts, and cognitive limits began to be considered. Whilst some held to the positivist approach, but incorporated corporate structure (Chandler 1962), others reduced assumed omniscience to a more localised rationality (March and Simon 1958, Cyert and March 1963). Resource allocation became a process, with managers being
observed to make “a series of small acts [that] create incremental commitments”, thus accreting strategic positions over time (Bower 1970, p.69). Mintzberg, in considering strategic formulation processes, similarly downplayed the ‘plan and then implement’ model, strategy becoming “a pattern in a stream of decisions” (1978, p.935), and latterly identifying deliberate and emergent strategies (Mintzberg and Waters 1985). As strategy became reframed as a process, it was also increasingly perceived as having multi-level, political, and cultural aspects, becoming integrated into the everyday activity of a firm: Johnson later noting (1987, p.5) that managers do not generally separate “doing strategy” from other activities.

This is not to say that the planned approach to strategy was dead, or didn’t have a place – Porter’s (1980) book on competitive strategy analysis has probably outsold most of the other books in this review – but those studying process had their doubts about its efficacy. In outlining the rationale for his process study of complex multibillion-dollar companies, Quinn (1980, p.2) was concerned that formal planning was not only failing in theory but also in practice, being “highly questionable, if not actively destructive”. He thought that too much bureaucracy and control in large organisations was driving most decisions outside formal planning structures, and the complex models used didn’t reflect real life. In addition, formal approaches focused on the quantifiable, ignoring the more qualitative and organisational aspects that actually resulted in strategy evolving as “internal decisions and external events flow together to create a new, widely shared consensus for action among key members of the top management team” (p.15). Quinn’s study (p.43) observed formal planning processes (accommodating analysable, quantifiable factors) and more evolutionary strategic development (deriving from informational shortcomings and actors’ rationales for delaying decisions) taking place in parallel.
Around this time, Peters and Waterman’s “In Search of Excellence” (1982), an examination of long-term successful companies, became influential amongst many practitioners, even if it was not rigorous enough for some academics. Criticising scientific, planned management as not taking enough account of people, it helpfully went on to propose digestible lessons from successful companies that could replace it. One was the notion of balancing the need for centralised company values and aims with support for guided, local initiatives, maintaining “simultaneous loose-tight properties” in managing the system (p.318). Latterly, other studies supported the assessment of strategy as a process involving many stakeholders. Pettigrew (1985) analysed five change cases at ICI, placing them in a decades-long historical context, and found few signs of rational planned strategies being formed and implemented. Instead, he highlighted issues of change, politics, and culture. Johnson (1987, pp.190-194) also found only isolated examples of planned and analytic behaviour in his study of a clothing retailer, decreeing that the rational models of strategy formulation were insufficient to describe typical managerial behaviour and decision-making. He found little evidence of systematic and comprehensive scanning, a single example of an attempt to create a planning infrastructure, minimal examples of clear objectives or explicit choice between strategic options, and only a few localised cases of proactively attempting to reduce complexity through analysis, the processual model again dominating over the planned one.

More recently, turbulent and complex environments have been noted as engendering adaptive strategic formulation. Roos et al’s three newspaper case studies (1996) noted that a planned model could not capture the dynamic nature of evolving strategy responding to media convergence whilst, in the oil industry, Grant (2003, p.515) also
identified a trend from formal forecasting towards ongoing integration and adaption, concluding:

much of the debate between the ‘strategy-as-rational-design’ and ‘strategy-as-emergent-process’ schools has been based upon a misconception of how strategic planning works… The process of ‘planned emergence’… is consistent with management principles derived from complexity theory and observations of complex adaptive systems.

Others also assert that most strategic planning takes place within emergent development, sometimes periodically by communicating annual performance goals, in an attempt to align managers’ attention onto wider priorities, rather than those of their local department (Ketokivi and Castaner 2004). The numerous observed shortcomings of the classical approach, and its relegation to be but one component of strategy, had thus resulted in the development of process- and people-based models of strategic change. Before discussing these further, it is helpful to briefly consider some classifications of strategy in the post-classical world.

2.2.3 Classifying Dynamic Strategy

With the demotion of the rational, planned approach from being dominant to being just one facet of strategic change, conceptualising strategy became more complex, with multiple approaches and taxonomies. For the present discussion, a useful classification is provided by Whittington (2001, p.10), who considers the different strategic approaches previously observed by academics. He arranges them by the results sought (simple profit maximisation, or a plurality of outcomes), and by the internal processes (deliberate or emergent) primarily utilised by the organisation. The approaches are mapped on a matrix in Figure 2.3, and their characteristics summarised in Table 2.1.
Figure 2.3 Whittington’s Classification of Strategy

Source: Whittington 2001, p.10

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Whittington’s Strategic Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Classical</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
<th>Evolutionary</th>
<th>Processual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>Crafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td>Profit Maximisation</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Internal (Plans)</td>
<td>External (Societies)</td>
<td>External (Markets)</td>
<td>Internal (Politics/Cognition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes</strong></td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Darwinian</td>
<td>Bargaining / Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At the top-left of the matrix, Whittington sees the classical school’s continuing relevance within companies that conform to the previously-studied simple scenarios,
with internally focused profit-maximisation sought through deliberately analysed and planned formal strategies then directed into business process. To the lower-left, the systemic school sees firms, with multiple objectives derived from their environments, developing localised embedded rationales; there is no one best approach. To the right, organisations exhibit more emergent processes. In the evolutionary quadrant it is not organisations that determine success or failure but the Darwinian marketplace (p.16); a pessimistic view of the capacity of managers to influence their fate, and one which limits planned long-term investment, lest it be wasted. Finally, the processual approach not only eschews rational planning but also takes a less clear-cut approach to the environment. Here, everything is messy, neither companies or markets are perfect, and thus everyone muddles along, doing their best with limited information, and limited cognitive ability. The vaguer rationale for the company turns the focus inward, leading to internal politics and bargaining, so strategy becomes more crafted, deriving from an intimate involvement in operations (p.10).

In case four views of strategy prove insufficient, Mintzberg et al (1998) built on earlier work (Mintzberg and Waters 1985) by summarising ten strategic schools (Table 2.2).
Table 2.2 The Ten Strategic Schools of Mintzberg et al

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>The Design School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a process of conception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Planning School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a formal process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Positioning School</td>
<td>strategy formation as an analytical process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>The Entrepreneurial School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a visionary process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Cognitive School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a mental process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Learning School</td>
<td>strategy formation as an emergent process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Power School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a process of negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Cultural School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a collective process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Environmental School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a reactive process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Configurative</td>
<td>The Configuration School</td>
<td>strategy formation as a process of configuration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mintzberg et al (1998, p.3)

The prescriptive group at the top of the table harks back to the positivist approaches to strategy, describing how strategy ‘should’ be done, whilst it is the descriptive schools that reflect on how strategy operates in practice. The final school, configuration, describes actors who try to integrate various aspects of the other schools into time-sequenced life cycles of activity, akin to the process maps and the influences behind them that are central to this thesis.

This section of the review has briefly considered some definitions of strategy, beginning with classical, planned-strategy portrayals, and moving to more sophisticated depictions of strategic change as ongoing processes encompassing both deliberate and emergent aspects. Two examples of classifications of strategy,
emphasising different aspects of the developing academic field, have been noted, and their application to this case will be discussed in Section 4.3.2.

2.3 Dynamic Strategic Change: Systemic Perspectives

2.3.1 Mapping Process Development

Some depictions of the developing subprocesses that underpin dynamic change and strategy formulation are outlined in this section, leading to their conceptualisation in this thesis as interrelated ‘stremes’. A picture is formed of a network of subsystems within (and outside) an organisation, each addressing local concerns, but also interacting. In totality, these form the strategic posture of an organisation at a given time, and key elements can be summarised on a map. A strategic change agent, who experiences cognitive and process limits, cannot comprehend this complex network as a whole. Unable to control the whole system, they instead ‘navigate’ it towards their future vision, influencing parts of the network where they are able. The review notes that many writers use a flow metaphor for the unfolding strategic systems that they discuss, which together with the meme idea of Dawkins (1976), leads to the introduction of stremes in Section 2.3.2, a concept used to embody and map the elements of the system.

In the previous section, the depiction of strategy moved from the planned model to one of processual and social systems. Of the three core studies in this review (Quinn (1980), Pettigrew (1985), and Johnson (1987), it is Quinn’s study that puts the greatest focus on these systems and the mapping of process evolution, perhaps because, although he acknowledges the company’s internal social and political context, he regards the actors within it as acting rationally in response to their situation, and so other societal aspects are downplayed. In the companies he studied, he observed
specialised subsystems addressing key needs, for example diversification, divestiture, major reorganisations, external relations, and research and development. He summarised four findings (1980, p.16-17). Firstly, strategies tended to emerge from multiple strategic formulation subsystems with different actors, information, and timeframes, each looking at different issues. Secondly, each subsystem had its own strong internal logic, but the different timings involved meant that its work rarely aligned with the needs of others. Thirdly, each subsystem had “cognitive and process limits”, so its strategy, and thus that of the overall enterprise that comprised the interacting subsystems, was arrived at logically and incrementally. Finally, a “skilful manager” would not find this “muddling”, but use this incrementalism as a proactive, effective mechanism for “improving and integrating both the analytical and the behavioural aspects of strategy formulation”. It is this fourth finding, which considers a manager proactively utilising the multiple, time-dependent, evolving subsystems to drive strategy forward, that inspires the use of the word ‘navigating’ in the title of this thesis.

All the companies Quinn studied used formal planning within some subsystems, to formalise and implement prior strategic decisions, for funding long-term investments, to drive managers to consider a bigger picture, and to inform specific strategic decisions. Rather than subsystems being in competition, difficulties seem to arise from cognitive and process limits: an inability to holistically analyse, control, and implement responses to large-scale complex situations in a short timeframe before events move on (1980, p.51). This was also noted by Pettigrew (1985, p.22) at ICI. Planning, therefore, becomes just one element of a company’s overall strategic development and posture (Quinn 1980, p.37-38). Quinn argues that formal planning is itself part of the incremental process, deriving from the system’s prior state and
feeding guiding frameworks back into it that could respond to future developments so as to have long-term, rather than transient, value (p.41). An attempt to reconcile incrementalism with more formal planning has been made (Camillus 1982) but, in being prescriptive about the periodic nature of incremental exercises, it turns them into planned strategies, seemingly contradicting their somewhat emergent nature.

Given his observation of multiple developing subsystems, Quinn parallels Mintzberg (1978) in stating that one “must look at the actual emerging pattern of the enterprise’s operant goals, policies, and major programs” (1980, p.9) that together comprise the company’s “strategic posture” (p.10); this “widely held understanding resulting from a stream of decisions” (p.9) becomes the real strategy:

It is changes in this pattern – regardless of what any formal strategic documents may say – that either analysts or strategic decision makers must address if they wish to comprehend or alter the concern’s strategic posture. (p.10)

It is the complex relationships between the subsystems that, Quinn argues (p.51), not only constrain the overall organisational posture, but shape decisions over years, building on local successes, and allowing failing subsystems to wither. Therefore, it is proposed that mapping their interconnectedness, and trying to understand their evolution holistically, has value. Similarly Koch (2011, p.339) asserts that strategic processes cumulatively build on prior events and decisions, with organisations limited in their strategic choice by their own histories. Quinn (1980) maps the developing strategic posture of Pilkington Brothers over a 25-year period from 1949-1974, reproduced in Figure 2.4.
Figure 2.4 Simplified Strategy Flows at Pilkington Glass

“Diagram of Pilkington Brothers, Ltd. strategy development showing how separate subsystems develop independently, yet interrelate and flow together for final strategic posture as an innovative, decentralised, professionally managed, publically held, worldwide, glass products company. Cross-relations are vastly simplified for the diagram.”

Source: Quinn, Strategies for Change: Logical Incrementalism 1980, p.55
The figure depicts a number of separate subsystems, initially producing plate glass, and successfully diversifying geographically and into new product lines. The mid-1960s see changes in senior management, and new managerial approaches, once the complexity of the company could no longer be managed centrally. Later, decentralisation was partially reversed, the company went public, and strikes led to a change of management culture, leading to the strategic posture of the 1970s, at the bottom of the diagram, where far more interdependence between the subsystems is depicted than in the previously simpler, localised world. The detailed story is not important here; what is relevant is the finding and depiction of an ongoing narrative that links the, then current, 1970s posture with decisions made over 25 years, and, without hindsight, the impossibility during the process of predicting how these multiple complex subsystems and precipitating events would interact. Although internally focused, as depicted here, logical incrementalism appears, therefore, to be both a rational means by which to behave as an actor within the organisation, and to have explanatory power in describing its development. Also notable is the bottom of the figure which, in depicting a final “new strategic posture” of stable, unified integration, appears to contradict the processual view that this is part of a narrative continuing onward into the future.

Johnson (1987) also notes that mapping can be illuminating in discussing strategy formation, depicting strategies within his studied organisation evolving over time (Figure 2.5), and similarly observing that prior strategy “moulds or constrains” strategic development, even as it responds to environmental change.
This depiction recalls a liquid flowing from one systemic pool of activity into the next; Quinn had similarly headed his diagram “strategy flows”. Pettigrew (1985, p.438) also used a stream metaphor in discussing strategic change:

streams of activity involving at various times the differential attention of individuals and groups, which occur mainly but not solely as a consequence of environmental change, and which can lead to alterations… in the host organisation.

In addition, this quote depicts environmental change as a key driver; similarly for Hassard (1995), the system model should be open, with the organisation in a dynamic relationship with the overall environment and itself. “Interactions between
components affect the system as a whole. The open system adapts to its environment by adjusting the structures and processes of its internal components” (p.32).

2.3.2 Introducing Stremes (1): Subsystems and More

This model, of a river of flowing subsystems that interact and, in so doing evolve, inspires the streme analogy that is used in this thesis, through which a manager within the system attempts to navigate towards a future vision. The word ‘streme’ is coined, firstly to encompass the numerous processes, strategic endeavours, and other considerations whose holistic pattern and interactions comprise the overall system of organisational and environmental activities. Secondly, it recalls the meme concept introduced in The Selfish Gene (Dawkins 1976, p.206), of a unit carrying ideas, symbols or practices that can be transmitted from one person’s brain to another, the whole forming a pool of ideas that are interacting and evolving, some surviving and others not. In fact, many stremes are memes: ways of doing things, or organisational concepts. Like Dawkins’ memes, which exist in humanity’s cultural soup, the stremes exist within the cultural soup of the organisation and beyond, sometimes reinforcing each other, and sometimes conflicting. However, the foregoing discussion has seen the distinction between strategy and process break down, and so stremes are more than strategic ideas; they are also practical activities. They include events in the environment and cultural factors, as well as the organisational strategies, processes, programmes, and departmental structures that together form an organisation’s strategic posture, within which individual actors function. They build on previous processual perspectives and indeed, Pettigrew broadly summarises the idea behind them (1985, p.439):
Yesterday’s strategies will provide some of the pathways to and inputs for today’s strategies; and today’s strategies will have a concept of the future built into them. The consequences of the implementation of today’s strategies will provide part of the context to tomorrow’s strategies. But time is but a segment of the context. Context also includes the social, economic, political, and business environment of the firm and changes thereof, and various features of the internal context of the firm, the structures and systems, leadership arrangements and processes, the culture or cultures of the organisation, all the systems and dynamics of control and power in the organisation, all of which mediate what is seen and acted upon in the way of environmental change.

This is a wide collection of influences, so why place them all into one big basket called ‘stremes’? In deriving from the viewpoint of a practitioner within the system, stremes allow a mapping of those unfolding chunks of reality perceived as being relevant to a change process. Whilst authors depict influential factors, including processes, power, culture, environment, and events in compartmentalised theoretical frameworks, to a change practitioner they are, in the end, all factors to be navigated, aligned or nurtured in incrementally building towards a desired outcome. A potentially narrow focus on ‘my work’ shifts to a more holistic, contextualised view of change, enabling a discussion of the impact of wider subsystems. Inspired by Quinn and Johnson, the first research subtopic in this thesis (Chapter 4) maps the overall network and then reflects upon the evolving stremes as observed during the change process studied here, providing a wide-angle view of this project within the evolving whole.

It is, however, the people behind the subsystems, whose political, cultural, and, finally, personal interactions drive the evolution. There are, indeed, memes behind the stremes. The next sections, therefore, consider the literature from a societal angle, leading to the further development of the streme metaphor in terms of the change forces acting upon the stremes, their interactions, and their legitimacy.
2.4 Dynamic Strategic Change: Social Perspectives

2.4.1 Logical, Incremental, People?

Having identified that processual development of systems is widely observed, this section turns to the actions of the people behind it. Logical incrementalism is discussed first, in which rational actors feel their way by maintaining flexibility until the last possible moment. The discussion then moves to more political, interpretive, change-based depictions; there is no one all-encompassing approach. Actors are depicted having limited control over, and limited understanding of, their surroundings, and interact through a common language of narrative and symbols. This discourse constructs internal culture(s) within which change needs to be justified and legitimised. A change agent’s work thus becomes that of using discourse to formulate consensus around new proposals at the human level, and integrating activities at the subsystem level. These discussions lead to a further depiction of stremes in Section 2.4.6, in which their social aspects are described.

From a logical incrementalist perspective, each streme is at a different stage of development, and moves at different speed. Therefore, “it is impossible to set forth the total enterprise strategy in a way that instantaneously covers all areas” (Quinn 1980, p.56), and overall strategy can thus never be completely comprehended or formulated. Managing logical incrementalism becomes a job of understanding the internal logic of each streme and cohesively integrating them as best as possible. Given cognitive limits, it also means involving the appropriate specialists who understand local issues, and engaging with them in a way that stimulates creativity and problem-solving by keeping options open (p.52). Thus, the executives observed had rational reasons for responding to events incrementally, partly to get the best from team members, but also because decisions could have long term, irreversible implications. Commitments were
tentative, and there was a desire to maintain flexibility: “all parties wanted to test assumptions and… learn from and adapt to others’ responses” (1980, p.20). Delaying decisions, or keeping them vague, could encourage team participation and build common commitment to solutions, respecting and improving organisational and power relationships between key constituents. Thus:

> to improve both the information content and the process aspects of decisions surrounding precipitating events, logic dictates and practice affirms that they are normally best handled carefully and consciously incrementally, to make decisions as late as possible consistent with the information available and needed (p.22).

Quinn saw executives aiming to keep individual subsystem thrusts from getting out of control, preserving a balance across them, and encouraging people to move in broadly the right direction congruent with broad future vision. Furthermore, alternative proposals could be generated, tested, and filtered locally, before being exposed to higher-level organisational politics once support had been rallied (p.52).

Towards the end of the 1980s, Johnson (1987, p.58) built upon the prior work of Quinn (1980) and Pettigrew (1985) when he depicted different descriptions of strategic management in a continuum, as shown in Figure 2.6:
Different approaches are shown, from the rationalist planning model at the left, through to the logical and political actions of managers that power Quinn’s incrementalist model (1980) of process evolution, to ever more actor and culture-based interpretive views, underpinned by sensemaking through cognitive and symbolic interactions, on the right. Thus, rational planning still takes place within organisations, alongside the politics and bargaining of incrementalism, and within a people-based internal culture made up of symbols and narratives. Johnson (1987, p.204-7) observed managers explicitly justifying the taking of incremental steps, using them as the bridge between the environment and process. But, (Figure 2.6), he asserts that this wider range of perspectives and explanations are relevant, from the rational, to the incremental, to the interpretive, regarding them as useful alternative descriptive approaches. Whittington (2001, p.22) also mirrors Quinn’s findings, asserting that strategic “hands get dirty, steps are small, and there are few bold lunges” as managers adapt, muddle through, and maintain consensus. Pettigrew (1985, p.22) notes that, in contrast to previous models of rational decision-making, Quinn actually concerns himself with a lack of decision-making, but still attributes this to managers acting rationally within a political environment. This underlying, if bounded, rationality contrasts with the “garbage can model of organizational choice” (Cohen et al 1972) in
which actors only give partial attention to decisions whilst lost in a fog of partial understanding. Here, decisions are depicted as outcomes of “relatively independent streams” (p.3) – note that metaphor again – of problems, solutions, and participant energies, occurring only when these elements serendipitously coincide at a time and place where a choice is expected to be made. Action and process are utterly emergent and almost coincidental, a view which has a definite ring of truth to a practitioner having a bad day, but for Pettigrew (1985, p.22) it underplays other issues: the cultures, structures, and overall values that at least partially unify an organisation’s overall strategic direction. He seeks a middle ground, accommodating social issues, whilst also attributing some control to the actors involved.

2.4.2 Continuity and Change

Of the three authors at the core of this review, it is Pettigrew who is most concerned with continuity and change as being the most appropriate perspective from which to depict strategic processes. He opens his discussion by noting the messiness of change and as with strategy itself, suggests there is no one all-encompassing approach:

Beware the myth of the singular theory of… change, look for continuity and change, patterns and idiosyncrasies, the actions of individuals and groups, the role of contexts and structures, and processes of structuring. Give history and social processes the chance to reveal their untidiness (1985, p.1).

In 20 years of development at ICI, Pettigrew notes that “continuity is a good deal easier to see than change” (1985, p.439), mirroring Mintzberg’s previous depiction (Mintzberg 1978, p.943) of short “spurts” of change within much longer periods of continuity. Indeed, he criticises Quinn, noting that ongoing incrementalism contradicts Mintzberg’s depiction. Managing strategy, in this view, is mostly about managing stability (Mintzberg 1987, p.73) reconciling “quantum” change and continuity by
identifying when strategic change is appropriate (p.75). Even when change does take place, the prior state of the system, comprising both the shared values that were held within it, and any knowledge from formal planning for previous similar situations, contribute to the organisation’s ability to react (Quinn 1980, p.19). For processualists, the answer is a learning organisation that can continuously adapt to the environment, but, here paralleling Quinn, Whittington (2001) cites studies that show that fundamental change in organisations, which could have long-term implications, is often delayed as long as possible. He identifies the difficulty of engendering structural change in an organisation, or indeed of even establishing a need for it.

Influential early thinking on planned change was provided by Lewin, the father of AR (Section 3.3). His field theory saw the environmental field of the system creating societal forces that drove and restrained planned change, and which, when balanced, maintained equilibrium. Hence he proposed that the impeding forces needed to be overcome in an unfreeze/change/refreeze process, if change were to occur, and he argued that understanding these competing forces could be of value (Lissack 2012). Field theory and this three-step change model came under criticism in the 1990s, but recently there have been calls for its rehabilitation (Burnes and Cooke 2013).

2.4.3 Interpretative Issues: Vision, Narrative, Culture – and Brains

Underpinning continuity and change are the motives, visions and discourse of all the participants in an organisation. Centralised corporate vision, espoused by leaders, seems to have most congruence with classical strategy, where it assumingly can be driven through in a planned manner. As the system depiction becomes more decentralised and emergent, so the unity of objectives is fragmented; a complex organisation contains numerous actors and groups, who will not all share a common vision. Instead, local concerns may dominate and compete, thereby driving streme
isolation rather than alignment. Johnson (1987, pp.35-36) observed multiple objectives, some of which may be unclear, or unannounced, some specific and others more general. Thus there is scope for different actors to have different objective prioritisation, especially in organisations with multiple objectives where profit-maximisation is not the clear goal. Competition between viewpoints arises, with functional/systemic depictions of change criticised for emphasising normative harmony and integration over the conflict that arises (Hassard 1995). Pettigrew (1985, p.439) notes that a tendency to go back and fix current misaligned concerns is one brake on change:

Differential perception by various parties inside the organisation of a changing context which is only being partially understood and acted upon can provide not only the tensions and enabling conditions for new strategies to evolve, but also… sustain in place the existing definitions of what the organisations core issues are and how they are to be continued to be tackled.

In the absence of a fully centralised vision, change initiatives that disrupt the existing order require justification and legitimisation with stakeholders, to overcome “controversy and confusion” (Cornelissen et al. 2011, p.1702). Change becomes an issue of “confronting and embracing emergence” (Lissack 2012, p.168), with narrative and dialogue used to reduce uncertainty, promote real-time problem solving, and formulate coherence. Creating a shared language that can accommodate differing perceptions whilst enabling ideas formulation about a company’s future becomes important (Roos et al. 1996, p.34). Johnson notes that managers may “need a pattern of beliefs [rooted in past experience] through which to interpret occurrences and within which to manage” (1987, p.44). New ways of doing things may, therefore, be seen to be disruptive or threatening, and current norms may be protected. Pettigrew similarly states (1985, p.443) that:
Structures, cultures, and strategies can protect the interests of dominant groups. This recognition that intervening in an organisation to create strategic change is likely to be a challenge to the dominating ideology, culture and systems of meaning and interpretation, as well as the structures, priorities, and power relationships of the organisation, makes it clearer why and how the process of sensing, justifying, creating, and stabilising strategic change can be so tortuous and long.

Moving to the “interpretive” right of Johnson’s continuum (Figure 2.6), analogy, metaphor, and symbols are seen as important in contextualising change in way that is culturally familiar to stakeholders and connects with their existing motivations; a process of bridging understandings termed ‘framing’ by Cornelissen et al (2001). This discourse, it is suggested, is a collection of communicative actions, verbal and textual, that is a means for change agents to influence the organisation (Heracleous 2003). It entails developing shared understanding (Hoon 2007) although the generation and exploration of different ideas and alternatives, with senior managers giving out signals in reaction to middle managers proposals. Hoon identifies that these interactions take place through informal contacts, punctuated by more formal meetings, with closure involving the letting go of rejected options and cementing the use of what works. The ‘strategy as practice’ perspective has further considered the importance of communication and narrative in strategic development. Strategic tools used in organisations (Spee and Jarzabkowski 2009) are seen as boundary objects that can enable or constrain communication across groups, and, therefore, communication and explanation is needed to give them meaning across different stakeholders. The ‘doing of strategy’ takes place through various forms of communication; narrative is seen as providing an overall sense of direction and as a way of giving meaning to practice emerging from sensemaking activities, with symbols providing anchor points for shared understanding. It can even give import to some activities by labelling them as strategic, whilst marginalising others (Fenton and Langley 2011, p.1189). In areas of
innovation it is through the reciprocal accounts of actors, which build and reflect upon each other, that “complexity and uncertainty” are reduced, according to Deuten and Rip (2000, p.89), suggesting that the building of congruence is required if the narrative is to take hold. However, Fenton and Langley (2011) note that this coherence is hard to achieve, and may be superficial, imposed, or subject to parallel, competing versions that undermine it. Johnson (1987, p.55) usefully sums up the way in which the “meaning systems” of managers underpin strategy, again taking the discussion back to maps, and thus their value in understanding strategic change:

Managers possess cognitive maps through which they make sense of a complex and uncertain organisational world; they impose such maps on the world, and in this sense, strategy is the organizational enactment of managerial meaning.

Strategy, here, is driven by managers’ conception of their organisational reality, with stories that “sustain a set of values and form part of a network through which meaning travels” (Gabriel 2000, p.88) a component of it, alongside symbols and rituals. Whilst for Turner (1990, p.96), this symbolic construction of culture is a “slippery notion” given that others place more emphasis on process, in these terms the management of strategy becomes the management of culture, or sometimes conflicting subcultures. Whether culture can be managed has been questioned (Gabriel 2000) but it, summarised as “the sorts of benefits and assumptions held… fairly commonly” (Johnson 1987, p.47), creates much of the need for change justification discussed here.

The idea of managers having their own conception of reality leads to the final topic in this section, a brief discussion of the brains that process and, hopefully, learn from this interpretive complexity which, Johnson (p.38) notes, has to be “coped with at a cognitive and ideological level”. I am not a neuroscientist (and this thesis is not brain surgery), but he identifies two relevant notions that connect actors to their
environment and enable them to cope with complexity by building on the past. Firstly, instead of just responding to stimuli, individuals “impose a construction of his or her reality on the outside world” (p.39), thus becoming reflexively integrated with their environment, rather than separated from it. In addition he notes that complex information is patterned or “chunked” into larger units so it can be managed. This concept was developed by Miller (1956), who suggested that concepts get chunked into pre-existing familiar units, rather than ones of standard size – as with strategy, it seems we ourselves build on past experiences to cope with new ones. Argyris and Schön (1974, p.15) concur that we build new decisions on past understanding. A set of theories in use is often used to tackle new problems and maintain constancy of approach, which may relate to the inertia of organisational beliefs and subcultures. The approach of having a toolkit that informs us how to manage once issues have become so complex, dynamic, and uncertain that formal models cannot provide answers, was further developed by Schön (1983), in considering how professionals think in the moment of action, thus making a link to the reflective AR methodology approach used in this study. This active, reflective navigation and shaping of the subsystem network, building legitimacy around particular stremes, is an essential craft of change managers, and will be developed in the following sections.

2.4.4 Strategic Change Agents as Subsystem Integrators

The discussion now turns to the building of consensus and legitimacy by change agents around specific stremes, sustaining them and increasing their impact. A picture forms of agents having limited spheres of influence in the network, but building legitimacy for their work over time. Within logical incrementalism, effective executives are seen to continually be scanning for future patterns that could be created between the developing subsystems, feeding ideas back into individual systems’
development so as to create alignments. Whilst a number of methods are used, overall integration takes place within the minds of high-level managers, each differently perceiving the utility of aspects of the overall pattern, leading to unresolved issues, which might be resolved openly or covertly. Therefore to be effective, a strategy (or subsystem thrust) needs to “achieve a level of consensus sufficient to focus action” (Quinn 1980, p.57). However, the overarching facet of excellence identified in Peters and Waterman’s study (1982) was the notion of “simultaneous loose-tight properties” – the “coexistence of firm central direction and maximum individual autonomy” (p.318), with staff bound together through culture and values. Thus, as emergent change within a system becomes more prominent, it is argued that managers become facilitators instead of doers (Burnes 2012), encouraging information-gathering, communication, and learning within the workforce, whilst providing direction through the maintenance of a common vision. Decentralisation beyond senior management is not necessarily a failure of control, but a positive attribute that allows everyone to give their best, provided that it is shaped into an overall framework. Coordinated yet individual effort by people across the firm, including middle managers, then becomes the focus of strategy, as does their expertise (Mantere 2008). Jarzabkowski (2005, p.43) sees middle managers’ role as mediating between top managers, the wider organisation, and strategy. Hoon (2007) also views them as central, given their practical expertise about how the organisation actually works and their ability to mediate formal and informal strategic conversations. A small quantitative study also found that involving middle managers in strategy formation improved organisational performance, calling for a “mix of top management purpose and middle management initiative” (Wooldridge and Floyd 1990, p.240). Imbuing these change agents with strategic “agency”, the ability to champion alternatives, and to influence the
organisation beyond their operational responsibilities, is seen by Mantere (2008) as critical, as is the need to permit them to “go out on a limb” (p.311), promote creativity, and, possibly, fail. We have now left the classical strategy model of chief executive omnipotence far behind; in contrast a middle manager with imbued strategic agency will have a limited, localised sphere of influence, so some stremes will be impervious to their activity. What stremes can and cannot be influenced, therefore, becomes a central practical concern within a process of change enactment.

The time taken for creating the conditions for change, by building support around a new streme, can be long, and is related to the time taken for decision-making. Johnson (1987, p.23) outlines four stages of discussion: problem-awareness, diagnosis, solution-development, and referral to senior management; he notes that key decisions can take from a month to several years to go through this process. The evaluation of alternatives often consists of qualitative discussion, and is a process of bargaining and negotiation between interdependent coalitions and individuals, with preferred solutions being ones acceptable to those with power who control resources (p.29). He also perceives what appears to be a positive feedback loop, noting that “the greatest power will devolve upon those who can be seen to secure perceived collective purposes despite an uncertain environment” (p.31). Finally, Mantere (2008) carried out hundreds of interviews for an examination of strategic agency amongst middle managers, and found that assignment of legitimacy to them (for instance by inviting them to take part in the planning process) was important. Allowing them to create and select between ideas imbued legitimacy in turn upon the processes developed. This action, of managers with legitimacy bestowing it upon subsystems, driving outcomes, and configuring strategic posture, leads to the final discussion in this section, regarding the attribution of legitimacy to stremes.
2.4.5 Engendering Legitimacy

Legitimacy, as a measure of acceptance, utility, or relevance of ideas, will now be used as a ‘currency’ to unify many of the social and cultural concepts that have been discussed. Building it, both across hierarchical levels, and for the long-term, will be seen to be crucial if change is to be justified, enacted, and enduring. For Pettigrew (1985, p.443):

The… political and cultural view of process gives a central place to the processes through which strategies and changes are legitimised and delegitimised. The content of strategic change is thus ultimately a product of a legitimisation process shaped by political/cultural considerations, though often expressed in rational/analytic terms.

From this perspective, achieving change within the network is a process of anchoring new concepts, priorities, and ideas, incrementally mobilising support to “ensure these early illegitimate thoughts gain powerful support and result in… action” (p.439).

Others consider legitimacy in a slightly different context of whole companies, although there are parallels, and broad agreement on its import. Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) consider the importance of establishing legitimacy for new ventures, seeing it as a resource at least as important as capital, technology, and personnel. They connect it to Stinchcombe’s (1965, p.148) lovely description of having to overcome the “liability of newness”, and to Starr and MacMillan’s portrayal of it as "a critical ingredient" in acquiring resources (1990, p.83). Suchman, meanwhile, focuses on an organisation’s status within its environment, but his definition of its legitimacy as (1995, p.575):

a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions
could equally apply to individuals, or change initiatives. Of value to the depiction of
legitimacy as the currency that underpins streme formation and dissolution, being
collectively imbued by a group of actors within an organisation, he states (p.575):

Legitimacy is socially constructed in that it reflects a congruence between the behaviors of the
legitimated entity and the shared (or assumedly shared) beliefs of some social group; thus,
legitimacy is dependent on a collective audience, yet independent of particular observers.

This audience, like a rational logical incrementalist, bases pragmatic assessment of
legitimacy on “self-regarding utility calculations” (p.586). They may only accept
rather than actively support an initiative, but the notion of utility suggests that it
should actually add value rather than simply make sense, somewhat paralleling the
realist/pragmatist philosophy of AR (to be discussed in Chapter 3) which measures
value by practical application. The building of legitimacy “is generally a proactive
enterprise, because managers have advance knowledge of their plans and of the need
for legitimation” (p.587), and has three components: a) confirming to the dictates of
the pre-existing audience under current conditions, b) finding environments that
support current practices, and, crucially, c) manipulating environments by creating
new audiences and new legitimating beliefs. This parallels the previous discussion,
legitimacy being obtained through aligning/framing one’s behaviour and propositions
with existing cultural value systems, whilst also inserting one’s story into the web of
existing accepted organisational narratives/myths, influencing the whole so as to
navigate towards the future. Another view sees legitimacy as more passive, needing to
be combined with political power or perceived urgency to create authority (Mitchell et
al. 1997). This idea, that more senior managers have the capacity to imbue greater
legitimacy, means legitimacy is formed at different organisational levels, paralleling
the “interlevel dynamics” that Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.80) discuss within the
AR process (Section 3.3.2). Finally, there is the question of when legitimisation can be said to have occurred. Cornelissen et al (2011) note that strategic change ideally comes to be a natural part of the framework, being taken-for-granted when fully legitimised with stakeholders.

2.4.6 Introducing Stremes (2): Perspective; Legitimacy; Interactions; Forces

The foregoing, interpretive depiction of a socially constructed organisation has been one of actors mutually interacting, negotiating through symbols and narratives over the incremental development of internal change initiatives. At this human level, they are building political capital and consensus to work towards their individual interpretation of the future vision, whilst, in parallel at the systemic level, they are seeking to align and thus legitimise subsystems – the stremes – or to introduce new ones into the network, in what to them is a favourable manner. However, this all takes time and, for some, local concerns may dominate, leading to ‘subsystem thrusts’ that trade overall alignment for faster progress in one part of the map. People’s activities and evaluation confer transient legitimacy upon stremes through utility, alignment, and socialisation, some rising in relevance and others dying out, all evolving in the unending river of activity stretching from the past into the future. In this picture, it is the holistic summation of this multi-level activity that shapes composite strategy, making it more important for academic accounts to consider strategies from standpoints other than that of the General in his tent or the Great Man at the Top, since all are actively involved in shaping strategy both as it is developed, and as it is put into place.

This section returns to the streme concept. Firstly, it depicts the likely perspective of a change agent inside this complex, processual organisational model, using the language of stremes. Only some are visible; and many are chunked by an actor’s overloaded
brain as s(he) tries to make sense of their situation. The stremes interact; and activities in the environmental field are considered to create ‘forces’ on a given streme that influence its development. Here, there are not just progressive and regressive change forces, but also a globalisation force that reflects the pressure to conform and align, and another localisation force that reflects the temptation for actors to cut loose from the network and make progress themselves. It is postulated that this may come at the expense of wider legitimacy, whilst acting globally increases legitimacy but slows streme development. These issues will be introduced briefly in this section before being used to examine real-life scenarios in the findings throughout Chapter 6.

**Figure 2.7 An Actor within an Evolving Processual Organisation**

The viewpoint of an actor within an organisation comprised of interacting causal stremes is depicted in Figure 2.7. This is part of an open system within which there are interactions with the wider environment. The central block depicts a timeframe which is influenced by a number of input stremes 1,2…n that were in play in the recent past, and which, at the end of the timeframe, have developed into, or led to the creation of,
output stremes 1,2…m that continue into the future. Within the model, numerous stremes interact and evolve. For an actor in the organisation seeking to develop the influence of the stremes that (s)he is responsible for, or has affinity with across the network, the task, in this model, is the title of this thesis, ‘Navigating Stremes’ – creating alignments between stremes and building their legitimacy, thus incrementally moving their area of the model towards their conception of the desired state. In a large-scale, complex organisation, not all the internal stremes are visible, or directly relevant to the actor; some are ‘offstage’, although they may have influence through network effects. For the actors within the system:

The kinds of strategic consensus one could observe appeared much more like a giant river system, constantly in flux and flow with many more discrete river tributaries contributing to its strength. The system’s central thrusts might be quite clear, but its specific boundaries and currents would rarely be conceivable in their totality (Johnson 1980, p.58).

At the blurred boundaries of relevance or of the actor’s cognitive ability, chunking (Miller, 1956) occurs so as to keep the problem manageable. Some stremes are perceived in great detail (for instance, the formatting of a document in a given process), whilst others are chunked into more basic form (a perceived streme may be a whole department, or an environmental event; for instance, a new government). Some may change quickly, whilst others are relatively static. Some may be influenced by stremes under the actor’s control (the document), whilst others may be largely impervious to them (another department, or the government). Thus the network of stremes is observer-dependent, in terms of which are visible, which are important, which are controllable, and which are considered or understood. The practitioner perspective suggests a move from an academic outlook to a more pragmatic one, concerned with practically moving towards a perceived future vision. A key issue is
simply what can be usefully shaped. In short, the viewpoint is: ‘I have a limited sphere of influence amongst all this complexity – what elements do I perceive as important, what can I understand, what can I usefully influence (and how), and what do I simply have to make the best of?’ More succinctly, the question moves from, for instance, ‘what is emergent or planned, logical or social?’ to a more direct ‘which issues are locked, and which are unlocked, to my influence?’

Lewin described social forces that act on change, a result of the environmental field of activity. In this model, these act on stremes, a result of actors navigating towards their future visions, being constrained by existing subcultures, and interacting with others’ stremes to create alignments. These forces might be summarised as depicted in Figure 2.8.
Figure 2.8 The Forces Acting on Streme Development (1)

The developmental progress of a changing streme is driven here by a vision force – the behaviours of actors who influence it trying to reach a coordinated future vision, whilst, conversely, the culture force, in short ‘the way we do things around here’, holds it back, tending to resist change. There may be multiple visions and subcultures, from individuals, departments, or groups, pulling the streme in different directions, and diluting the impetus that comes from a unified vision. The globalisation force is that which brings stremes together, changing them so as to create closer alignment
with other stremes, as a result of the need to build legitimacy amongst influential actors seeking a more coordinated approach to current issues. It is, therefore, high when there are misalignments to be corrected, and subsides as these are resolved and legitimacy increases. The opposing localisation force arises when local departmental or personal concerns dominate, making progress at the possible expense of legitimacy – through actor choice, the perceived irrelevance of more remote stremes (local rationality), or because of the limited zone of streme visibility, derived from cognitive limits. Where localisation occurs through choice, it may be through an urge to get things done, since the process of establishing the need for change, building political consensus, and thus creating streme alignment takes time, and managerial decision-making may rationally be delayed for as long as possible. The globalisation force, in reflecting organisation-wide concerns, may well be in alignment with a broad future vision but is, therefore, likely to impede development of a given streme, whilst, conversely, the localisation force could enable far faster progress, at the expense of overall organisational congruence. The figure can thus be redrawn as follows to reflect the nature of these two forces:
Figure 2.9 also shows two other results of these considerations. Firstly, the globalisation force, alongside the culture force, may create a tendency to ‘go back and fix things’ to increase alignment between existing core issues rather than look to the future. Secondly, there is likely to be a somewhat disordered drive forwards, as parts of the organisation make semi-coordinated progress, some in response to centralised vision, and others through more expedient local narratives, creating conflict between stremes. The job of a change agent is likely to include encouraging broadly aligned progress, whilst containing or reshaping any strategic thrusts that are overly misaligned. It can be surmised that, with these competing forces, tensions could arise
in even a simple system. In more complex structures, with multiple streme interactions mediated by interactions between people, each of whom have their own versions of reality, visions of the future, and political capital, the issues could become magnified. Stremes will be in competition for legitimacy but, conversely, need to align in order to accrue it. The types of interactions that take place, and the way they relate to the streme forces, are discussed within the people-based findings in Chapter 5, where this model is used to aid analysis of some of the situations depicted.

What skills do people need to navigate successfully in this environment? The next section briefly considers the craft of strategy, and starts to relate it to the tenets of AR. This sets the scene for the third and final research subtopic, which examines practices, and the usefulness of AR methodology for a change agent.

2.5 Strategy as Practice and as Craft; Parallels with Action Research

The key consideration for this final area of this review, and of Whittington’s (1996, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2007) field of strategy as practice, in which “creative… reflexive” actors take a central role because “their practical skill makes a difference” (Whittington 2006, p.616), is “what does it take to be an effective strategy practitioner?” (Whittington 1996, p.731). In this, it finds parallels with a craftsman, making progress on a wider scale through a masterly attention to detail, their actions and thoughts intertwined as they proceed. Calls for research into this detailed process and its contextualisation within the wider picture are noted and, finally, the connection between this craftsmanship and AR methodology lead into the following chapter on methodology.

For Whittington, practice implies a wider sociological view than process (2007), and is not just about the inspiring parts of strategy, but the nitty-gritty; the perspiration, the
routine, the talking, the form-filling by which things get done, and which comprise the doing of strategy in its widest sense. From the perspective of this thesis, this is streme alignment formulation and configuration in action. “Here, craft skill is as important as technical facility; essential knowledge is as much tacit as formal, local as general, and persistence and detail may win over brilliance and inspiration” (Whittington 1996, p.732). Elsewhere he states “The skills required to succeed in these kinds of activities are of a high order. They are creative, artful and adaptive” (Whittington et al. 2006, p.625). In a call to get back to the roots of strategy-making, Mintzberg (1987, p.68) had also used the term craft: “The most basic [concept] is the intimate connection between thought and action. That is the key to craft, and also to the crafting of strategy.” “No craftsman thinks some days and works others. The craftsman’s mind is going constantly, in tandem with her hands” (p.69), with success deriving from a mastery of detail, and intimate knowledge of the task, based on long commitment:

They are involved, responsive… learning about their organisations and industries through personal touch. They are also sensitive to experience, recognizing that while individual vision may be important, other factors much help determine strategy as well (p.66).

He was also paralleling the ‘reflection in action’ practitioner viewpoint of Schön (1983) discussed earlier as a way of artfully coping with, and managing, complexity. Another depiction of successful change agents (Nordqvist and Melin 2008) asserts that they must fulfil three roles: the social craftsperson, combining and navigating between the different concerns of others to seek alignment; the artful interpreter, building on formal strategic planning methods and adapting them as necessary; and the known stranger, gaining the trust and respect of others to enable sensitive discussion, whilst maintaining distance and objectivity. These images of a craftsman, reflectively facilitating and enacting strategic change by engendering consensus and alignment
within the streme system, parallels many of the tenets of the AR consensual group approach to research that will be described in Chapter 3. Indeed, there are further parallels. Pettigrew (1985, p.439) notes that the genesis of change is often when a small group of people see a performance gap between the perceived environmental and internal configuration of the firm, whilst the AR process begins with the identification of a relevant, real world issue. Whittington’s view, above, that effective practitioners make a practical difference, parallels the imperative in AR to create practical knowledge. I perceive a natural congruence between research into the practical making of strategic change, the practitioner-centric requirements of the DBA programme, and AR as a methodology.

In addition there are numerous calls in the literature, both from the 1980s, and from the more recent strategy as practice community, for qualitative research to illuminate the strategy process. Quinn (1980) called for descriptive research that could highlight issues, and contribute insights, providing value through rich, candid information. Mintzberg (1987, p.66) considered that by depicting strategy making from an individual perspective, free of the “strategy industry,” we could learn about its crafted formulation. Almost by definition, Whittington’s strategy as practice field calls for more research into the practicalities by which strategising is actually carried out (Whittington et al. 2006, p.617), stating that “in typically academic fashion, business schools have become too detached from practice… disdaining practical skills in their classrooms” (Whittington et al. 2006, p.625). Pettigrew (1985, pp.23-24) notes that a limitation of the literature is that in regarding the change event of the unit of analysis, it becomes separated from the local and more distant contexts that shape it and provide meaning. Instead he calls for research that seeks to place events in a more generalised context, without a beginning or ending. Similarly, Whittington (2007) also calls for the
microportrait to be located in a wider societal context. Fenton and Langley (2011, p.1172) argue, “a perspective that focuses on narrative can contribute in important ways to understanding the practices of strategy”.

These calls for more practical, hands-on research suggest an AR approach, but so does the proposal to take a more holistic view. AR, unlike many academic methodologies that study a localised, controlled, isolated phenomenon in great detail, embraces complexity. And, for Johnson (1987, p.38), it is the study of management in dealing with complexity that is interesting. My work, like that of the three core case studies discussed here, aims to usefully describe and understand how the management processes that underpin strategic change work inside a complex organisation, rather than to be prescriptive about a methodology for making strategic decisions. Although Johnson is an external researcher, and I am an insider action researcher, I identify strongly with his intent for his research (1987, p.61), comparing my middle manager experience with existing theory, as opposed to proving a specific hypothesis. In addition, in enunciating the experience to the reader and myself, I aim to explore the usefulness of this new descriptive metaphor, stremes, which has built both upon prior academic work, and my own practitioner’s viewpoint. Also like Johnson, I struggle with the width and complexity of the systems studied and the issues involved, but want to depict these aspects, in contrast to the ‘deep and narrow’ approach that characterises much academic research. This holistic width is needed to portray the complexity that influences activity; to narrow the focus on to a specific area of the process would lose the essence of what it is that I, as a practitioner involved in crafting change, am trying to capture, and present to the academic community. AR, therefore, appears to be a valid intellectual approach for this exploration, but to what extent it
worked in practice, and supported the art and craft of the change agent in making real change, is the third subtopic of this research.

2.6 Summary: Building the Research Subtopics

This review began with a consideration of classical strategy, before focussing on classifications and depictions of more distributed, dynamic change processes. In turn, these issues were considered firstly through the systemic perspective of interacting processes within an organisation, secondly through the social processes that legitimise and underpin those systems and, finally, from the perspective of an agent practising the craft of change. These three perspectives parallel the three research subtopics, which deliberately zoom-in from the wide angle depiction of the wide network of streme activity that impacts a change programme, to the more detailed considerations of how that impacts the behaviours of people and, further, to the practice that I used during the project.

The review began with a systemic perspective presenting an organisation’s overall strategic posture as the cumulative integration of numerous co-evolving subsystems. Two examples of the mapping of particular subsystems were reproduced (Quinn 1980, Johnson 1987), and it was noted that several authors had invoked a flow-based metaphor to describe this model. This, together with an evolutionary meme metaphor, led to the introduction of the streme concept used here; a streme representing the considerations – subsystems, processes, events, cultures – that influence a strategic change programme, and that, within an organisation, together comprise strategic posture. Strategies might be seen as memes that then result in process change, but with both planned and emergent ongoing activity taking place, the distinction blurs and becomes observer-dependent (discussed later in Figure 5.5) – both are considered to
be stremes. The streme model has thus built upon previous academic writing, but is novel in presenting the multi-level issues involved from the perspective of a middle manager navigating this flowing river of processual activity towards a notional destination, whilst trying to avoid the rocks. The research subtopics, therefore, explore how the model functioned in exploring one particular change programme. The first subtopic, ‘process’, creates streme maps of the project, showing the key subsystem relationships, and presenting the zoomed-out contextual view. The overall topography of the maps, and their key characteristics, are discussed in Chapter 4, which also relates the process findings back to the strategic classifications in the literature.

The review then considered the people and social systems in the organisation, the flesh and blood actors whose actions comprise the stremes, define their interactions and confer them with legitimacy. Different perspectives on their activities were discussed, Quinn’s logical perspective contrasting with more social, political, and interpretive viewpoints, without any one seemingly providing a complete description. It was noted that in a complex organisation, different actors have different specialisations, localised concerns, and different conceptions of the desired future state, especially if the firm itself has multiple high-level objectives. These different perceptions of the current system state could be a brake on change, which becomes something that requires justification to participants and the building of political consensus, the environmental field creating forces that act on the stremes. Ongoing discourse, shared narratives, and the use of symbols have been observed to build congruence within the organisation, with consensus formulation amongst the actors paralleling alignment formulation between the stremes. The discussion then moved to the perspective of a change agent within the system, looking for future patterns to align, and building consensus to facilitate coordinated action and to integrate subsystems. A picture formed of
legitimacy being bestowed upon managers who, collectively, then bestowed it upon subsystems or stremes, so that the concept of legitimacy, derived from self-centred utility calculations amongst the actors, could be used as a currency that measured the health or relevance of a streme. It is this ‘people’ perspective that is discussed in the second subtopic, which zooms-in to the detailed interactions that underpin the maps previously presented. This discussion, in Chapter 5, portrays the experience of those within the system, categorising stremes and their interaction types from the perspective of a change agent. It then looks at how discourse, narrative and symbols were used to build legitimacy for stremes, and how change forces impacted upon them.

The final section of the review linked the art and craft of the strategy practitioner to some basic tenets of AR. Here, the craft is the building of consensus, alignment and legitimacy with colleagues and groups to influence the evolution of stremes. This was particularly of concern to a middle manager tasked with enacting change, who could not simply rely on centralised top-down power to achieve it. The final subtopic, ‘practice’, is reported on in Chapter 6, where a modified AR approach was found to be useful in crafting change.

It is clear that there is a very rich literature on strategic change, but it is hoped that this thesis can still contribute new insights. The views of a practising manager are sometimes reported, but not using the pragmatic ‘what can I influence’ perspective of a change agent within a sea of complexity. It is this standpoint, and the belief that the overall shape of the system needs to be represented in order to understand the behaviours that underpin it, that leads to the novel notion of stremes. It is also notable that the three studies central to this review, which were found to resonate with my practitioner’s perspective, are all from the 1980s, and so may be considered old-
fashioned in academic circles. However, that does not make their analysis incorrect – what is important is whether the contextual conditions still exist. I believe they do: not only does the central feature of human agents acting within complex, political, processual organisations endure but, in the digital age, more information and issues flood the in-boxes of managers at all levels. Although this theoretically increases our ability to act rationally on information from across organisations, information overload and our cognitive inability to understand the detail of all the relevant processes taking place across different, but interrelated, time horizons may mean that the characteristics of enacting change within a complex system that were identified in the 1980s have greater relevance now, not less.
3 Philosophy, Methodology, and Research Design

*If you want truly to understand something, try to change it.*

- Credited to Kurt Lewin (Tolman 1996, p.31)

*It would be nice if all of the data which sociologists require could be enumerated because then we could run them through IBM machines and draw charts as the economists do. However, not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.*

- William Bruce Cameron (1963, p.13)

3.1 Introduction and Research Topic

The quotes above succinctly present a case for learning through deep, practical involvement with a topic and the people concerned, as was my aim; I am a subjective academic practitioner, rather than a detached, positivistic observer. AR, which can be performed by practitioners in their own organisations to solve current problems, whilst creating both practical and academic knowledge, thus seems a natural approach. In
addition, it will be seen in this chapter to parallel, somewhat, the craft of change agents presented in the literature review.

Whilst the central theme of this thesis, ‘how strategy is activated, and the processes of strategic change are perceived, by a middle manager in a complex organisation’, was likely from the outset, the practical nature of the research meant that more detailed subtopics were emergent. Academic and professional aims co-developed during the unfolding story, as I sought to make a useful and integrated contribution to both fields. An AR approach was used during the core project, but the research subtopics came into focus only after data collection and a detailed literature review, when it became apparent that the wide, complex network of activities had been a key influence. The idea of stremes, as described in Chapter 2, was then developed, and AR became a framework for exploring the activation through three related perspectives. Firstly, the process perspective considers what stremes were involved, how the network evolved, and the characteristics of the strategy observed. Secondly, the people perspective is concerned with the perception, legitimisation, and interaction of the stremes through the discourse of those involved, and, finally, the process perspective considers my experience of actually performing the activation, whilst reflecting on the appropriateness of the methodology. Box 3.1 summarises these subtopics:
# Box 3.1 Research Topic and Subtopics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Topic: How strategy is activated, and the processes of strategic change are perceived, by a middle manager in a complex organisation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subtopic 1) Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stream network was involved, and what are its key characteristics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtopic 2) People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did streams interact and become legitimised through the actors involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtopic 3) Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent did the Action Research methodology help to craft strategic change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter opens by discussing the philosophy of this research, noting that the applied field of business research utilises a range of approaches, none of which have a monopoly on truth. Here, practical and academic knowledge is created through a socially constructed process, its internal validity largely based on pragmatic utility, and its external validity contextually dependent (Section 7.2). Some core literature and concepts relevant to the AR methodology are then discussed, including its cyclical structure of action/reflection, together with requirements of participation, democracy and facilitation. How the AR approach worked in practice, and contributed to the strategic activation, is the subject of subtopic 3, and so is considered in the findings (Chapter 6). There, it is found that the wider network and the constraints of corporate life altered the idealised ideals of AR in this project. The large numbers of people transiently involved through the course of their normal work, in contrast to a core AR group, meant that my facilitation and representation between hierarchical organisational levels replaced bottom-up people power. However, many of the
principles and structures of the methodology were maintained, and enabled a successful core project.

This chapter continues by considering the ethics of this research before its design is discussed. The research setting, of merging television and online business units into GNL, and my role in the process, is also presented.

3.2 Philosophical Perspectives

3.2.1 Rigour, Relevance, and Knowledge in Business Research

Management research has become a soft, divergent, applied field of study that uses multiple ontological and epistemological paradigms, and sociological methods from elsewhere (Tranfield and Starkey 1998). It needs to have relevance for practitioners alongside academic rigour (Heracleous 2003), but there can be a tension between these aims:

The researcher-practitioner gap, thus, consists of the apparent tension between rigour and relevance, between the particular and the general. The challenge of narrowing the gap consists of generating knowledge that mitigates the apparent tension between these criteria. (Aram and Salipante 2003, p.190)

Others also perceive this gap (Schön 1992, Gibbons et al. 1994), and it is argued that a trans-disciplinary approach is needed that takes a dynamic, reactive approach to problem solving in a given context, and engages with both theory and practice (Tranfield and Starkey 1998). AR, with its dual aims of creating academic and practical knowledge, is seen as a mediating discourse (Gustavsen 2001) that can help to create a “potential intellectual bridge” (Aram and Salipante 2003, p.192). Different types of knowledge are produced dependent on the ontological and epistemological frameworks in use. Gibbons et al (1994, pp.1-16) draw a distinction
between traditional, academic “Mode 1” knowledge, and “Mode 2” knowledge that is trans-disciplinary, socially accountable, reflexive, transient, distributed, and problem-focused. They argue that it is this latter form that is relevant to contemporary society. Similarly, Stringer (2007, p.193) sees a fundamental difference between the physical and social worlds, the latter being an evolving cultural creation which science cannot usefully address. Many social science findings have been criticised as “of little or no use to… practitioners” (Reason 2006, p.188), whereas, for this epistemological position, “creating knowledge is a practical affair… in the pursuit of worthwhile purposes” (p.188). From an action-orientated perspective, “while words often have a slippery relationship to reality… practices are reality” (Gustavsen et al. 2008, p.63), and the focus moves to “world making” (Gergen and Gergen 2008, p.166). In contrast to the objective reality of positivism, this distributed perspective implies the social construction of knowledge, actors together forming subjective meanings or, from the perspective of this thesis, new streme states and connections, fashioned through experience, discussion, and interaction (Creswell 2012, p.24). Verbal and textual discourse becomes both the mechanism by which social and organisational reality is constructed, and a rich lens through which the activity can be examined (Heracleous 2003). Thus the research process itself constructs a new reality through participation: “making the road while walking” according to Reason and Bradbury (2008, p.24), or, here, making the map of strategic posture while navigating. In addition to the practical knowledge site-specifically encoded into the organisation, my meta-learning aims to create knowledge of interest to the academic community.

3.2.2 Critical Realism and Pragmatism

Philosophically, Pedler and Burgoyne (2008, p.325) also sought an intellectual bridge, between the ontological extremes of a positivist approach and ‘anything goes’
constructionism. They identified critical realism as an appropriate way for action learning to create this middle path. This philosophy pragmatically rejects both extremes, arguing that neither work as a descriptive or a practical approach; thus this discussion somewhat mirrors the integration of planned and emergent strategic formulation. I, too, see myself as a pragmatic critical realist, sympathising with Sayer’s (1992) ontological approach, in which co-constructed symbols and narratives emerge within a tangible universe of many fallible epistemologies.

Contributors to Reason and Bradbury’s (2008) *Handbook of Action Research* reported that their own life experiences, their network of relationships, a participatory worldview and, in some cases, their religious and spiritual influences, were central to their research outlook (Wicks et al. 2008, pp.16-26). For someone schooled in scientific positivism, it is initially hard to see how a methodology based on such diverse, interpretive, ephemeral foundations can claim any form of validity. But, if there is no single, infallible answer, then perhaps the value of ideas and reflections can, pragmatically, best be judged on their usefulness. Creswell (2012, p.28) links pragmatism to a focus on the outcomes of enquiry, and summarises some of its other attributes: a lack of commitment to any one philosophy, and thus freedom of methodology and method on the part of the researcher; truth as being “what works at the time”; a focus on the intended consequences of research; and the placing of research into social, historical, and political contexts. Martin (1990) similarly argues for methodological chameleons, there being no “one true faith” (p.42) of methodologies, no monopoly on truth, and none free of flaws; it is argued that results can be drawn from any well-executed method. Creswell sees this pragmatic approach as underpinning experiential learning, with Pedler and Burgoyne (2008, p.325) seeing philosophical pragmatism and action learning as closely related. Greenwood and
Levin similarly argue that the true test of any social theory is its capacity to solve important problems in real-life situations, and thus that AR “specifically engages in systems-informed, pragmatic social science” (Greenwood and Levin 1998, p.75). Nevertheless, for some, pragmatism is too closely identified with utility: “simple pragmatism… is too crude and does not have proper goodness of fit [with moral values]” (McKernan 2006, p.205), as opposed to a broader realist philosophy. Nevertheless, pragmatism’s utility orientation implies that we should not waste time on issues and debates that make no practical difference (Pedler and Burgoyne 2008, p.325). Philosophical debate aside, the simple approach of ‘does this make a practical difference’ is, to me, useful in the context of engendering change. My aim in this research has been to create both academic and practical knowledge, through deep involvement with my topic, and the AR-based approach.

3.3 Action Research

3.3.1 Aims, Definitions, Characteristics – and Event-Mapping

AR takes place in organisations or communities, where groups of people jointly seek positive change. Kurt Lewin is generally credited with first using the term ‘action research’ around the time of World War II, foreseeing “a social experiment with the aim of achieving a certain goal” (Greenwood and Levin 1998, p.17), and changing a system whilst learning about it (Susman and Evered 1978, p.586). For Bargal (2012), his work led the integration of theory, research, and action, paving the way for the development of a methodology that would respect the democratic creation of practical, alongside formal, knowledge. This section outlines the methodology’s key concepts, particularly focussing on my key practical text during the core project, Coghlan and Brannick’s Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation (2010), and the claims
made for the benefits of this approach. Its core components of participation, democracy, and learning are discussed in more depth in the following section, which additionally records the set of facilitation skills needed by an insider action researcher, and their close connection to the craft of the change agent discussed in Chapter 3. There, it is also noted that support for the project is needed at different levels of the organisation, paralleling the group legitimacy building previously discussed in Section 2.4.5. Section 3.3.4 looks at the cyclical structure of AR, and the importance of journal-keeping in meta-learning, before the final section considers quality and validity: the importance of having practical and academic outcomes from the AR project, and the difficulty of taking such site-specific knowledge into new contexts.

Some big claims are made for AR’s potential: “Action research can help us build a better, freer society”, according to Greenwood and Levin (1998, p.3), driven by its “social change agenda”. It is said to have “changed the world in far more positive ways than has conventional social science”, going beyond simply creating practical knowledge to produce “a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet” (Reason and Bradbury 2008, pp.3-4). Reason has also stated (2006, p.199) that “there is no difference between good action research and living a good life”, raising the question of where the boundaries around the process actually lie. Somewhat more modestly, Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.35) simply argue that AR meets the needs of modern research. It appears to encompass a variety of activities, “a family of approaches” that are more an “orientation to enquiry” (Reason and Bradbury 2008, p.xxxiii) than a methodology; implying that there are multiple valid ways to enact it. Nevertheless commonalities, rather than differences, of approach are noticeable in literature. Core attributes of problem-solving, participative democracy, social change, and evidence-based action derive from Lewin’s worldview.
(Burnes 2012), whilst Greenwood and Levin (1998, p.4) list similar elements, defining AR as “social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organization or community seeking to improve their situation.” Stringer (2007, p.11) sees it as encompassing democracy, equality, liberation, and the enhancement of life. Another definition encompasses similar elements but is more practice-based:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes… It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

Four basic characteristics of AR are identified by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.4-5). Firstly (and unsurprisingly!) research takes place in action, specifically through a cycle of planning, action, and evaluation. Secondly, they echo others’ concerns about the importance of a collaborative democratic partnership, in contrast to participants being seen as subjects. Thirdly, academic research occurs concurrently with action, producing dual scientific and practical outcomes and, finally, AR consists of a sequence of events that comprises a practical, problem-solving approach. It is identified with “practical knowing” (p.36) – i.e. actually doing something – and being content with simply knowing what is needed for the moment. Although practical knowing may be furthered by later reflection outside of the core AR project, this immediate-need approach in a workplace context parallels a pragmatist philosophy.

A discussion of action science adds a few more considerations: the need to develop a holistic understanding, recognising the dynamic complexity of the system; the close relationship with organisational change; a need for pre-understanding of the
organisation; the importance of ethics; and of using mixed data-gathering during the process Gummesson (1991, p.102-106). In Section 2.5 of the literature review I noted my own desire to take a broader view of a problem than is traditional in much academic research, where in-depth analysis of a narrow topic is often the norm, linking this to Johnson’s view (1987, p.38) that it is the study of management in dealing with complexity that makes it interesting.

AR developed from its Lewinian roots in workplace systems design to one of social networks, where the capacity to put ideas into effect is about “the complexity and quality of… relationships, and the ability to develop and make real a broad range of ideas in parallel” (Gustavsen 2001, p.24). In a project, a large number of events take place, and it may be of limited interest to examine any one in detail, since they are so specifically context-constructed than only limited learning can be carried over. Instead, all events have the same status, and long-term relationship building takes place across a “wave” (p.24) (an interesting choice of metaphor, given its relation to a flow) of continuous development. This is the principle behind streme-mapping, which aims to present the broad developmental story of this research, and which will be presented in Chapter 4, before specific interactions are discussed in Chapter 5.

3.3.2 Facilitation, Participation, Democracy, and Interlevel Dynamics

In Chapter 2, some aspects of the craft of a change agent were discussed. This section calls for similar skills, but from the AR perspective. Hierarchical dynamics within the organisation impact idealised notions of participation and democracy, and facilitation becomes a key skill for the AR researcher. This constructivist portrayal of the task is apposite:
to develop a context in which individuals and groups with different perceptions and interpretations can formulate a construction of their situation that makes sense to them all (Stringer 2007, p.41).

The work is thus that of facilitating debate and discussion between numerous participants, seeking a mutually acceptable outcome. This is a complex role according to Mackewn, who demonstrates this by listing 30 (2008, p.617) desired qualities in a facilitator, some contradictory, since the skillset varies reflexively with the needs of the moment. It includes interpersonal skills, as well as combining practical purpose, conceptualisation, science, and art. Facilitating change can be difficult and exposing, implying that the role requires self-reflection, controlled expectations, and tolerance (Coghlan and Brannick 2010); they cite Argyris et al (1985) as proposing that an interventionist action scientist should “combine advocacy with inquiry” (p.89) in producing shared, practical knowledge. This facilitation of organisational development has been described as the “dynamics of helping” (Schein 2011, p.xi), whilst Stringer (2007, p.24) uses the term “catalyst”: useful phrases encapsulating the role.

Action researchers are said to need local knowledge, not to exert power but to act as a friendly outsider within the system. They must be able to open up lines of discussion, facing potential pessimism about change, surfacing tacit knowledge, and saying the unsayable when appropriate (Greenwood and Levin 1998, p.93-108). Grant et al (2008, p.591) “consider relationships to be the foundation on which the success of participative AR depends”, and see “trust as the central challenge”, being built on transparency and clarity on the part of the researcher.

Three key challenges are presented for insider action researchers (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, pp.114-122, 126-132): pre-understanding, managing role duality, and managing organisational politics. Firstly, pre-understanding comprises theoretical understanding, lived experience, and tacit knowledge. It is countenanced that
“familiarity… inhibits inquiry” (p.153), by creating a tension in exploring issues normally taken for granted, and by access to data being affected by pre-existing relationships. Secondly, the practitioner/researcher role duality can become awkward and confusing, and conflict can arise from being both an involved professional and a more detached observer. This can lead to a sensation of being an outsider in both positions (p.119). Thirdly and finally, politics are seen as unavoidable, organisations being social systems. Coghlan and Brannick (p.127) are direct: “doing action research in your own organization is political. It might even be considered subversive”, and thus it requires the researcher to be astute in maintaining relationships. They note that the relationship of a middle manager with their sponsor is critical in seeking counsel and maintaining support.

Democracy and participation are core values of the AR approach, permeating the process: “action research democratizes the relationship between the professional researcher and the local interested parties” (Greenwood and Levin 1998, pp.7-11). AR aims to move a group into a “more self-managing, liberated state,” but Greenwood and Levin (1998) do question some commonly held notions of democracy, in terms of a homogeneous community, majority rule, distributed justice, and the consensus model. They instead set what appears to be a lower, although perhaps more useful, standard of creating arenas for debate and decision-making that respect diversity. Others go further, seeing AR as a counterpoint to the power relationships that prevail in the dominant positivist outlook, characterising it as “popular action” with “liberating potential” (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008, p.181). Participation is seen as a way to decentralise control, and it is argued that all those affected by a project should be included (Stringer 2007, p.33-36), thereby alleviating not just an immediate problem but also interconnected ones. There is a call for ongoing reflexivity in power
relationships, with an agreement at the outset about how decisions will be made, and “meaning making” transferred incrementally to the group as the process proceeds (Grant et al 2008, p.593). It is, however, important not to make assumptions about the degree of participation desired by a community (p.595), time constraints being one barrier, and levels of commitment likely to change during a project.

It was noted in Section 2.4.5 that legitimacy was collectively imbued on stremes, and that those with more power would likely have more influence. Rather than being a popular democracy, “interlevel dynamics” (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, p.80-89) becomes relevant in two respects. Firstly, we expect to see effects on the unfolding process, and the application of democracy, from the hierarchical dynamics between the organisational layers within the businesses, and indeed with the wider corporation. Secondly, the change agent is expected to operate reflexively at different relationship levels, from self, to individuals, teams, and interdepartmental groups. This took place in this project, where AR had to be modified for use in the ongoing daily life of a complex organisation, with over 100 people contributing through their normal work, rather than as a specific AR group. Nevertheless, through facilitation and representation, it was felt that the spirit and structure of AR was broadly maintained. The modifications are discussed throughout the findings in Chapter 6.

3.3.3 Core Action Research Cycles and Iteration

Lewin’s three-step model of planned change as a simple one-shot unfreeze/move/refreeze process, in which the change forces in his field theory (Section 2.4.2) are temporarily moved out of equilibrium, has been criticised as too simplistic in the context of ongoing, organisational change (Greenwood and Levin 1998, p.18), but has recently found more favour, at least focusing on the need to sustain change through group learning (Burnes and Cooke 2013). It is the forebear of the iterative learning
cycles which are now prolific and underpin AR. These cycles of action and reflection are commonly seen as central to the core research project and there are many designs; Stringer (2007) keeps things admirably simple with Look-Think-Act (p.9). Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.11) counsel not to get too occupied by structure at the expense of participation, seeing a continuum between rigid cycles and a more tacit, integrated approach. Their cycle (p.8) follows a Lewin-like structure, proposing a ‘pre-step’ to establish context and purpose, before the main loop of constructing, planning, taking, and evaluating action (Figure 3.1).

The pre-step is used to explore why the project is necessary, and to clarify the ‘desired future state’. This may be more or less tangible, depending on the context and amount of leadership direction, resulting in “directed”, “planned”, or “guided” change (p.65); it is the looser, guided mode that has most affinity with the constructivist approach, and which is relevant here. At the top of the figure, constructing is a collaborative, social activity where issues are discussed, forming the foundation for action. This leads onto more detailed planning. Action, the implementation of the plan, occurs at the bottom of the loop, before intended and unintended outcomes are evaluated, leading into the next cycle. It is notable that the cycle includes both planned and emergent development, and an implicitly iterative trial and error approach in sequential loops. Additionally, concurrent, nested cycles of activity take place; shorter time cycles feeding into longer ones (p.8).
Figure 3.1 Coghlan and Brannick’s Action Research Cycle

Source: Coghlan and Brannick 2010, p.8
3.3.4 The Learning Cycle, Meta-Learning, and Journal-Keeping

The core AR project aims to make a practical difference for participants, but the methodology also envisages a higher level of learning, as the core project is reflected upon and conceptualised. As their names suggest, the fields of action learning and AR are closely related, with similar outlooks on values and validity, but whereas action learning looking inward towards individual development, AR looks outward. Both are associated with the cyclical, iterative approach using a group resource, with commonalities outweighing differences (Pedler and Burgoyne 2008, p.322). In this AR scenario, the focus is on organisational development, learning from changes that took place in the core project. There is a meta-learning cycle taking place, reflecting and responding to the activity of the core research cycle, with the researcher developing both in parallel, to create practical and academic outcomes. Journal-keeping is portrayed as a key reflective mechanism (Moon 2006, Coghlan and Brannick 2010) providing a systematic record, a self-evaluative account of experiences, and an analytical tool where data can later be analysed. A number of formats are proposed, both for the entire journal and for individual entries but, pragmatically, I believe the focus should be on convenience to encourage regular use, and searchability to enable later analysis. Through the journal, the insider action researcher’s own “beliefs, values, assumptions, ways of thinking, strategies, and behaviour… are afforded a central place of inquiry”, making them a key data-generation instrument (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, p.18), although in moving the focus here, it might be argued that the commitment to group learning is downplayed.
3.3.5 Quality and Validity

The final section of this discussion considers how the twin notions of quality and validity in AR can be judged. Unsurprisingly, given its pliable, often qualitative, social nature, there is no simple answer, but proponents of AR appear to be used to defending themselves against charges that it is unscientific. Greenwood and Levin (1998, pp.54-55) argue against the “standard criticism” that AR is based on anecdotes and storytelling, arguing that conventional social scientists’ disengagement from their subjects is too easily equated with objectivity, and that it is a mistake to try to sever thought from action. Instead, they see AR’s constant interaction between these two states as more closely paralleling the physical sciences, which both they and Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.5) argue takes place in iterative cycles of reflective thought and action / data-gathering. Similarly, AR is portrayed (Susman and Evered 1978) as part of a move from describing mechanistic rules, to “an enabling science” which enumerates “interpersonal and problem-defining” skills for coping with the issues faced within organisations. The wider lesson, it is argued, is the commitment to cooperation itself (Gustavsen et al. 2008, p.74). This parallels the position of Schön (1983, 1987, 1992), who argues that a reflective approach by practitioners is needed to respond to the complex, dynamic problems that have led to the crisis in professional knowledge discussed in Section 3.2, where the potential trade-off between academic rigour, and practitioner relevance in knowledge, was noted.

AR validity, and especially external validity, is a key concern on which there are different views. At one extreme, Reason (2006) specifically rejects the word ‘validity’, with its connotations of a positivistic, one correct answer approach, and argues that choices (and their consequences) and transparency are central to quality in AR, being in alignment with a constructionist viewpoint within a pluralistic open society.
Worthwhile purposes, democracy and participation, many perspectives on knowing, and an emergent, developmental form, are highlighted as quality criteria. In the centre of the debate, Greenwood and Levin (1998, pp.80-84) argue that the internal credibility-validity of AR knowledge is measured according to whether actions arising from it solve problems (workability), increase participants’ control over their work situation, and generate new knowledge, so they have two tests: did the actions result in a solution to the problem? And: how can the outcome be integrated into a meaning construction process that generates new knowledge? The external trans-contextual credibility is assessed thorough a project’s historical and contextual analysis. For Payne and Williams (2005, p.296), “qualitative research methods can produce an intermediate type of limited generalization, ‘moderatum generalizations’. These resemble the modest, pragmatic generalizations drawn from personal experience.” However the limits of this inductive reasoning, in going from the specific to the general as the underlying context changes, remain blurred. Similar issues of inductive generalisability occur in case studies; in that context, it is suggested that it is “the intimate connection with empirical reality that permits the development of a testable, relevant, and valid theory” (Eisenhardt 1989, p.533), together with a tight integration with prior literature, and a clear presentation of findings, without losing meaning through intensive coding. A challenge is to convey both “deep involvement and reflective distance” (Levin 2008, p.679) and, sometimes, the aim is not theory building, but finding ways to describe events (Eisenhardt 1989, p.536). At the other pole of the validity debate, there is a call to define it explicitly using detailed criteria, since otherwise any management project might be considered AR (Eden and Huxham 1996). Depressingly, for an aspiring action researcher, they acknowledge that “given the complexity and pressure of the real world AR setting…. it is probably an
unachievable challenge” (p.84) to satisfy them. Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) present more concise, practical criteria that include the critical analysis of a significant problem; justification for use of the methodology; the generation of new knowledge through reflection; and the acknowledgement of limitations alongside suggested avenues for further research. Even more concisely, Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.15) usefully boil the requirement down to three simple elements: “a good story, rigorous reflection on that story, and an extrapolation of usable knowledge of theory from the reflection” or, even more directly, “What happened? How do you make sense of what happened? So what?” Interestingly, given other claims that AR knowledge may be context specific, they do, therefore, call for generalisable knowledge, as well as noting that it is important to learn from outcomes, both intended and unintended.

In summary, AR in literature has noble aims and ideals, of consensually improving people’s lives whilst creating academic knowledge on a wide, real-life, complex canvas. There is a set of core principles and structures, but the methodology seems flexible in its detailed implementation. This, and its social, site-specific nature have called its validity into question; but, in turn, its proponents attack the relevance and supposed objectivity of more scientific approaches. Pragmatically, perhaps this methodology can best be judged on results, and how this modified form of AR worked in practice will be explored in Chapter 6. This chapter now moves to the specifics of this research project: its setting, ethics, and design.

3.4 The Research Setting

The BBC has a long tradition of international news broadcasting via BBC World Service (WS) and subsequently WN, and of raising commercial revenues through the international activities of WW. This research concerns the merging of two
international, commercially funded, business units, one tasked with running the WN television channel, and the second its digital counterpart, which provided the BBC.com website, together with content delivery to a host of devices. At the time, WN was part of GN, which also included WS radio and TV, and which became part of BBC News during the research. It was, therefore, a unit that, although it had to raise commercial revenues from advertising and distribution, had a strong element of public service culture in its stakeholders and employees. BBC.com was managed by WW, the BBC’s sales arm, and thus had a more overtly profitmaking culture. Both units were essentially commissioners: selling, marketing and distributing their products around the world, but sourcing content from elsewhere in the BBC, predominantly BBC News, through aggregated internal contracts.

In an era of technological convergence, with news being consumed on multiple devices, it was decreed by a strategy programme, the GSR, that these units should work more closely together to create a more cohesive cross-platform editorial proposition, and should do so to create public value, commercial funding being a means for providing news to the world. The GSR did not detail the closer working it envisaged; it set out strategic goals, but the policies and programmes to attain them were presumably seen, from this level, as tactics. Given the different cultures of the two business units, this left plenty of scope for debate and emergent development regarding its implementation, since its public service orientated findings were more in sympathy with the culture of WN than the more commercial outlook of WW. These findings eventually led to the business units being merged into a new company, GNL, under BBC News and the BBC Commercial Holdings board, but this outcome was not clear at the time, and arriving at it took 18 months. It is the ‘activation’ of the GSR, during this period of emergent uncertainty, which is analysed in this thesis. This
research project focused on some practical aspects of closer working that could be applied, no matter how, or whether, the two units eventually merged. It was jointly sponsored by a board representative from both business units, and by the Chair of both boards; Figure 3.2 presents it as a specific example of Figure 2.7, which showed an actor within an organisation surrounded by a river of streams flowing through time.

**Figure 3.2 High-Level View of this Research**

The research period was just a brief episode within an overall timeline of processual development without beginning or end. Figure 3.2 centres on a three-year period from mid-2009, when a key strategic review, Putting Quality First (PQF), was initiated, through to mid-2012, when GNL was formed. It is the developments within this period that were found directly relevant to the discourse around the core research project that began in January 2011. There were numerous inputs and outputs at the start and end of the process; the ones shown are highly ‘chunked’ together to keep the model manageable, as they were in my mind. On the left, at their most basic, these were the
merging companies and the recommendations of the GSR, together with many associated streams: primarily existing subsystems. On the right, outputs were the merged company, and the main systems within it that resulted from this work.

My initial practitioner proposal (Appendix 1), written for the boards of WN and BBC.com, discussed creating alignment vertically from high-level strategy, notably the GSR, and horizontally across both businesses. It outlined three project development aims for joint working: company vision, performance indicators, and evaluation of new initiative proposals. These were perceived to flow causally from one another, as summarised in Figure 3.3:

**Figure 3.3 Top-Level Aims from the Core Project**

The second aim, of creating a framework of metrics, was closely allied to the first aim of developing a joint vision. Whilst commercial companies use mostly financial KPIs, particularly turnover and profitability, to assess their performance, the situation here was more complex. Profitability was important, since the companies had to be at least self-sustaining but, from a public value perspective, so was reinvestment in
international news editorial output and the quality/reach of that output across both TV and online. Measuring quality is always difficult but, nevertheless, metrics were needed that measured, for instance, not only how much BBC news people consumed on different devices, but also the extent to which they trusted and engaged with it. There was, therefore, a need to create a company ‘dashboard’ that summarised the most important financial and non-financial measures in a few pages for board meetings, to create a new financial metric of editorial reinvestment from the business (QIR), and to formulate a set of editorial quality metrics (KEIs), based on the audiences’ perceptions of WN/BBC.com’s brand attributes. Figure 3.4 shows the structure of the core project including, at the centre, the way the second of top-level aim split into these three pieces of work. To the right, two key episodes of activity are shown that will be discussed in Chapter 5, as well as the practical project outputs subsequently utilised by the merged company. The extent to which these outputs endured beyond the end of the project is discussed in Section 5.3.6. All this work took place against the background of the ongoing, partially emergent merging of these two culturally different business units.
Figure 3.4 Overview of the Shared Success Project

- **Shared Success**
  - 1. Joint Vision Formulation
  - 2. Joint Metric Formulation
  - 3. Joint Initiative Evaluation

- **Top-Level Aims/Streemes**
  - Vision
  - Dashboard
  - QIR
  - Brand Attributes & Metrics

- **Core Streemes (Mapped in Ch. 4)**
  - Streeme Failure (Key Episode 1)
  - Aligning Localised Streemes (Key Episode 2)

- **Key Episodes (Discussed in Ch. 5)**
  - Vision paper at 1st Board Meeting
  - (Modified) Dashboard
  - QIR KPI a key target
  - Key Editorial Indicators tracked
  - Framework partially used

- **Key Outcomes for GNL**
3.5 Ethics and Confidentiality

The AR process can become closely integrated with day-to-day activity, and the ethics of the methodology are argued to be the same as those of a good life, being based on “principles of democracy, justice, freedom, and participation” (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, p.132). Ethical issues were integral throughout my research, and I aimed, reflexively, to respect the needs of those involved, the organisation and, by extension, wider society, given my belief that GN’s work makes a positive societal contribution. In particular, as a dual-role practitioner researcher, I was aware of my special status and the need to maintain the integrity of the overall project, even though it will be seen in Chapter 6 that there were times when I felt I was no longer ‘playing by the rules’ of AR. Corporations may not be due the same level of protection as individuals, but I sought to apply a more fundamental no-harm principle at both levels. I consciously sought positive outcomes both from the core project and the wider research, and where this thesis is critical it is intended to be constructive. I also hoped participants would benefit, as they reflected upon issues and improved the processes they used.

I took ethics into account as I developed the academic aspect of the work, adopting an approach that I felt would allow me to tell an enlightening story based on evolving alignments, without compromising the organisation or individuals. I obtained initial consent from sponsors for this research through an email proposal. Formal approval for the research was then provided via a board paper (Appendix 1), which was prepared for the BBC.com and WN boards, noted the consultative nature of the project, and paralleled my academic proposal. A further email about the process was then circulated to likely participants. This explained that a journal would be kept, and offered the opportunity to opt out of the academic component, although no one did. Subsequently a reflexive approach was taken, as different, transient, participants had
different levels of contact with the project. Consent was obtained at the opening of recorded conversations and the discussion group. The project was also explained to new participants joining the substantive discussion, although more peripheral contributors would not have been aware of the academic component and are only represented through their contribution to the size of the email network; I have not represented their views. For the boards at the centre of the process, the monthly papers provided ongoing written reminders of the academic work, and my presence was obvious. My exact topic was emergent, and during the write-up I considered the vulnerability of those whose work is depicted in my thesis, even though they are anonymised. I have limited the use of quotes from others’ emails; I had not originally sought consent for this, so individually contacted those whose emails I quoted that were contentious.

Whilst the BBC is identified, and examples of internal performance indicators and report formats developed during this work are provided, I agreed that I would not provide performance data, or list proposed investments, which were commercially confidential. Some reproduced documents are, therefore, redacted. In reporting, individual anonymity has been provided to participants by anonymising quotations and viewpoints, unless consent for identification was obtained. Whilst it is common in social science to provide context by referring to contributors’ gender and age, these qualities are felt to be irrelevant to the professional concerns being reported here, and would endanger anonymity. It also seems over-simplistic to refer to people as having come from primarily commercial or public service perspectives, or from WN or BBC.com, when they have more nuanced outlooks, and the organisational structure was such that many worked for multiple business units. However, lists of anonymised core participants and their departments are provided in Section 3.7.1.
Relevant professional data was held on BBC networks through the normal course of business, but electronic data that identifies individuals for the academic project, including digital conversation recordings, have been held externally to the BBC under encryption. Although a DBA thesis is unlikely to attract wide attention, the BBC research setting may create interest, and in writing up it has been important to continue to respect the commercial and personal assurances established. Late drafts of the thesis were, therefore, provided to my sponsors and a few resulting minor redactions made which did not alter my findings. I propose to destroy all confidential academic data five years after project completion, but to retain publicly available and regular business information.

3.6 Research Design: The Core Action Research Project

This section describes the overall project structure, and how the AR loops intertwined with business activity, before data collection and analysis are discussed. How the AR methodology was adapted and worked in practice within this situational context is the subject of the third research subtopic, and so is reported in Chapter 6. My initial research design (Figure 3.5) was a form of one proposed by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002, p.177), simplified to encompass unexpected developments. The structure is basic, with iterative cycles comprising the core research project at its centre, and a more linear visualisation of both the pre-step at the top, and subsequent academic analysis and writing up below. The adaption of this core structure, and its conclusion after an unexpectedly long duration, is discussed in Section 6.2. A flexible approach was taken, with core activity, data-gathering, and initial data analysis happening concurrently.
Figure 3.5 Initial Research Structure

Adapted from Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002, p.177)
The other main structural change was the addition of a ‘post-step’ after the core project during which practitioner activity continued, in parallel to thesis writing. In retrospect, this is unsurprising: this is an episode of activity within an unending timeline, and so some key developments occurred after the end of the core project, which I wanted to reflect here. The thesis project also became less linear than envisaged, combining data analysis and writing up (Section 3.7.2).

An important step was relating the core cyclical AR structure to company board meetings, thus marrying the ongoing legitimisation and emergent direction of my work with existing approval processes. The meetings provided formal evaluation of previous work and approval for the next cycle, acting as punctuation marks between AR loops. The overall 18-month core process is presented in Table 3.1, which shows the board meetings at the end of each loop, and the paper that was presented by the project at each stage.
### Table 3.1 Board Meetings and Papers Delineating Action Research Cycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>WN Meeting</th>
<th>BBC.com Meeting</th>
<th>Paper Presenting Results of Previous AR Loop</th>
<th>Agreed Next AR Loop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 2011</td>
<td>(No Board)</td>
<td>17/3/2011</td>
<td>Project Proposal</td>
<td>Start Loop 1: Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>25/7/11</td>
<td>21/7/11</td>
<td>Dashboard Draft Discussion</td>
<td>Start Loop 5: Investment Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
<td>23/11/2011 Joint Awayday (Centrepoint)</td>
<td>(Departments present Awayday Papers)</td>
<td>Start Loop 8: Budget Revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2011</td>
<td>20/12/11</td>
<td>15/12/11</td>
<td>Proposal to Transfer to Business as Usual</td>
<td>End Core Project (Post-step)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 2012</td>
<td>31/7/12 1st GNL Board</td>
<td>GNL Vision and Kick-off Proposal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some initial discussions and proposals were underway in late 2010, but this project gelled at the all-day joint meeting of the WN and BBC.com boards in January 2011, shown at the top of the table. Following this, the pre-step took place tacitly, since the use of an AR methodology had not then been chosen. Five semi-structured conversations with board members of WN, and the BBC’s Chief Economist, were used to focus the topic further; these are discussed in the following section on data collection. A more refined project proposal was then written for the boards in mid-March, and feedback incorporated to maximise value to the organisation before wider consent was sought and the core project began. This consisted of eight research cycles, each punctuated by an approximately monthly WN/BBC.com board meeting, some held separately, others jointly. Board papers were presented at the end of each loop to report on progress, to generate discussion, and to propose and get approval for next actions. The first cycle consisted largely of seven semi-structured conversations with board members, and a discussion group of middle managers from WN and BBC.com. In subsequent cycles, specialist peers and directors from relevant departments, predominantly MC&A; strategy; finance; airtime and distribution sales, were involved in collaborative discussions between board meetings. This was where most work took place, forming many side iteration cycles on particular topics. The end of the core project was initially deemed to occur in December 2011, when both the WN and BBC.com boards agreed to adopt the proposals that had been developed. Although the strict cyclical structure was brought to an end at this point, detailed implementation continued until summer 2012, in what I termed the ‘post-step’. In July 2012, GNL brought together WN and BBC.com, and some of the key outputs from this process were presented as the first paper at its inaugural board meeting. At this point, I moved onto other work, and the project was essentially complete in BBC terms.
3.7 Research Design: The Thesis Action Research Project

3.7.1 Data Collection

Data was collected from a variety of sources, aiming to enable key events and perspectives to be recalled and analysed so as to enable a rich research story, and satisfying the need (Coghlan and Brannick 2010, p.74) to capture information not just generated in a formal setting but from day-to-day interactions. The dataset comprises personal journal entries, internal documents, emails, and calendar entries, collated throughout the core project, together with semi-structured interviews and a discussion group held at the start of the process. The volume of this core data, from the first research interview on 7th December 2010 to the first GNL Board Meeting on 31st July 2012, is summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Summary of Core Data

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal Entries</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook Calendar Entries</td>
<td>997, of which 588 work meetings, of which 138 directly project related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook Email Threads</td>
<td>738, of which 428 from NP from: 54 people to: a network of 137 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews / Conversations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Groups</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 237 entries in my own journal, maintained using Journler software (Figure 3.6), are the key data for telling this story. They are referenced here by date (Journal dd/mm/yy), and are presented as created, including any errors. Entries include the
basic recording of key events, meeting notes, and simple, one-line comments, alongside emotions and meta-learning reflections.

Figure 3.6 Screenshot of Journal

During the process, I was often preparing for a meeting, chairing it, and following up on it, reflecting on these stages in my journal. I considered it too intrusive (even if consent could have been obtained) and impractical to record all meetings, so I took notes on relevant issues as best I could, also fulfilling my professional role. It was particularly difficult to chair a discussion whilst simultaneously capturing comments as accurately as possible, but I aimed to record the elements that seemed important to the change project, reflecting on them later in the day as I typed up my notes. The journal included information on formal meetings and other passing interactions, so that the emotional narrative of the project could be reconstructed alongside the more
dispassionate perspective provided by official documents. The development of data
coding will be discussed in the following section.

The BBC uses Microsoft Outlook software for internal emails and diary management,
and my calendar was, therefore, available for later review. Table 3.2 notes 997
calendar entries during the process, of which 588 were formal meetings. Of those, 138
were directly about this project, but it was an integrated part of business activity, so
some other meetings would have been partially relevant. Many casual, non-diarised,
interactions also took place, and would have only been recorded in the journal if they
were notable. Thus, these numbers are simply a guide to the scale of project activity.
The meetings developed particular topics within side iteration cycles, involving a
range of specialists and departments in the project through regular business processes,
which are summarised in Table 3.3 and Table 3.4. These summarise the complex web
of overlapping departments and specialisms involved as the project developed. (In this
thesis, quotations from core participants that are sourced from journal entries or emails
are referenced as such; others are from the conversations in Table 3.5.) In particular, I
was aware that more peripheral departmental members knew less of the project than
the core participants, and so I do not refer to individuals so much as departments in
these cases (and, as one zooms out from one’s own locality, it is increasingly
alignment-formation with departments that it is useful to report on). During the
process, 738 relevant emails (428 came from me) were captured into a specific
Outlook folder for later review, and a brief quantitative review of these outlines the
size of the human network involved. The emails were sent by 54 people to a network
of 137 recipients, not including group addresses.
Table 3.3 Anonymised List of Core Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Participant Identifiers and Affiliations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director1(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager1(BBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director2(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager2(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director3(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager3(WW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director4(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager4(WW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director5(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager5(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director6(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager6(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director7(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager7(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director8(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager8(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director9(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager9(WW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director10(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager10(GN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director11(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager11(GN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director12(News)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager12(GN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director13(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager13(GN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director14(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager14(GN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director15(News)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager15(GN)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Joint* means participant was part of both WN and BBC.com

Table 3.4 List of Key Departments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WN</th>
<th>BBC.com</th>
<th>WW</th>
<th>GN</th>
<th>BBC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Development</td>
<td>Business Development</td>
<td>Global Offices</td>
<td>Digital and Technology</td>
<td>Central Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital and Technology</td>
<td>Digital and Technology</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Global News Strategy</td>
<td>Corporate Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>MC&amp;A</td>
<td>News/Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Global Offices</td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>MC&amp;A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Product Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Offices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC&amp;A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is thus notable that this is not a classic AR closed group of participants; instead there was a more open system. A small core of people from the two businesses was concerned throughout, but a far greater number of people, mostly specialist peers from other departments, were transiently involved. Even more widely, the email network reached some individuals who I do not know, and I felt the effects of the views of people I have never met. The consequences for AR participation and democracy are discussed in Section 6.3.

Other available BBC documentation included the frameworks developed within the project that are presented later; several of these were sequentially captured as they were iterated from cycle to cycle, thus helping to portray how the process was presented to, and evolved within, the organisation. Publicly available strategy documents, as well as the monthly board papers that discussed project progress were also available. As noted previously, 12 conversations were a key source of data early in the process; to some extent the number was limited by people’s availability. They took place within BBC offices, or the company canteen, in West London, and lasted up to an hour. They were audio-recorded, aside from a mysterious glitch that only retained the first seven minutes of one conversation, and were used for initial capture of the views of key stakeholders, to develop ideas, and to explain the project. I also tried to use them to begin to develop the trust and collaborative relationships needed as part of the AR project. As an insider researcher, I wanted the interactions to be a symbiotic process in which we explored and developed each other’s ideas; so I preferred to term them conversations rather than interviews. They were thus semi-structured; I had a number of topics I wished to cover, but I also wanted the participant to be able to open up related areas that they felt important. Five conversations were carried out at the start of the research, as I narrowed down my research topic and
confirmed its value. I carried out a further seven in a second phase that formed the first cycle of the core project within WN and BBC.com/news, primarily discussing aspects of converging the company vision. The conversation schedules for both rounds are in Appendix 2. Conversations are listed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 List of Conversations and Discussion Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Participant(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-Dec-10</td>
<td>Conversation (Pre-Step)</td>
<td>Director1(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-Dec-10</td>
<td>Conversation (Pre-Step)</td>
<td>Manager1(BBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-Dec-10</td>
<td>Conversation (Pre-Step)</td>
<td>Director2(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-Dec-10</td>
<td>Conversation (Pre-Step)</td>
<td>Director3(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-Feb-11</td>
<td>Conversation (Pre-Step)</td>
<td>Manager2(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director2(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director4(Joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director8(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director3(WN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director7(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director9(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-Mar-11</td>
<td>Conversation (GNL/BBC.com convergence)</td>
<td>Director10(BBC.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-Mar-11</td>
<td>Discussion Group (Convergence, decision processes in the two companies)</td>
<td>Manager2(WN), Manager3(WW), Manager6(Joint), Manager7(BBC.com), Manager8(Joint)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The conversations were a personal learning experience, as I tried to steer them reflexively, aiming to keep on track, whilst wanting to allow free expression. I was appreciative of the detail of people’s answers, although we did sometimes wander off track, and was taken aback by the honesty of critique that I sometimes heard, which I suspect stemmed from my being a known colleague to some. As shown in the table above, I also held a discussion group deliberating similar topics with some middle managers who proposed new initiatives, part of which is discussed in Section 5.2.1. It was not practical to keep up these formal conversations throughout; I became busier with the actual project and already felt I was making demands on others’ time, without taking more for academic conversations. As my research focus developed, I found that much of the data became less academically relevant, despite its use in initially developing the topic and my proposals for shared vision. I felt the conversations were artificial, being driven by the research, as opposed to being part of natural business practice, which was what I was studying. For the remainder of the project, data on regular meetings and interactions were, therefore, captured through the other mechanisms discussed. My reflections on resultant project democracy are in Section 6.3.

Conversation and discussion group transcription was carried out by an experienced transcriber at the BBC, who gave a confidentiality undertaking. I was, however, mindful of the potential conflict here, and did not pass on any particularly contentious material. Instead, I listened to recordings and removed any material that I thought was irrelevant and/or inappropriate, possibly disclosed because my insider/observer status meant that I was known and trusted by many colleagues. I also transcribed a short section of particularly contentious material myself. With the conclusion of the
transcription process, all source documentation was available in searchable digital form for subsequent analysis.

3.7.2 Data Analysis: Constructing Emergent Structure and Narrative

As discussed previously, the broad theme of enacting practical strategic change was apparent early on in this research, but the exact approach was not identified until late in the core project. It became apparent that a key theme, which consumed a lot of time and resource, had been that of establishing legitimacy for each change initiative, and creating alignment between this work and other internal strategy programmes, processes and attitudes. There were then three key, emergent, stages in developing the final approach. Firstly, an initial pass of my journal was carried out, rereading key entries to get a sense of the overall narrative, and listing what, initially, appeared to be the key events and influences on the process. A simple outline timeline was then constructed using my Outlook calendar entries, the journal, and BBC documents, before the AR loops were incorporated. This led to the idea of reviewing the connectivity between events, and the legitimisation of particular aspects of the change process in implementing the overall strategy. Further reading was then undertaken, when the relevance of the work of Quinn (1980), Pettigrew (1985) and Johnson (1987) to my experience became apparent, leading to the determination of an academic context for the process which had evolved within the workplace.

In the second stage, I developed the timeline and basic narrative in more detail. I used the Journler software to code entries relevant to the top-level aims/strems shown in Figure 3.4, simply classifying them into ‘Pre-Step’, ‘Topic 1’, ‘Topic 2’, ‘Topic 3’, (corresponding to the three key aims in Figure 3.3) and ‘Post-Step’. These were then available to me in ‘smart folders’ to develop the narratives. Similarly, I reviewed each conversation transcription, using the software’s comment functionality to highlight
apposite passages of text to code and group them, using the same basic structure. In starting to write the narrative, and thus explore the data in more depth, I began chronologically with the pre-step. This provided a small subset of the dataset with which to experiment and understand how different perspectives and documents could be knitted together in a representative way. The streme maps presented in Chapter 4 were then constructed by reviewing journal entries, calendar appointments, emails, and internal documents, to determine the timeline of each of the stremes. The input/output relationships that were identified between the stremes were reconstructed from journal and email entries, and from my memory of events. I next completed an initial chronological draft of the entire narrative, adding content from conversations and relevant BBC documents, attempting to bring a wider number of perspectives to it. However, although this draft was a necessary step in my comprehension, it was a dead end. It became clear just how complex the overall story was, and how easy it was to get lost in practitioner detail, rather than coherently connecting the core activities observed to the academic themes emerging from further reading of literature. The decision was taken, therefore, to fundamentally revise the simple chronological structure first drafted.

Reflecting on how to make the findings more thematic, my key realisation was that the core themes arising were the interlinked perspectives of process, people, and practice. So, thirdly, and crucially, I was then able to progressively restructure and deepen my literature review and my findings using these perspectives. I returned to my journal, and started to recode entries using the thematic structure, additionally delving deeper into each one, guided by the literature review topics, until I regarded the number of entries in each classification as being manageable. The resultant coding is shown in Figure 3.7. It is noticeable that many of the entries were reflections on the process
itself; the Practice/AR category having then highest number of entries (110), followed by people, alignment and legitimisation issues (87).

**Figure 3.7 Journal Entry Count, by Code Structure**
Similarly, the 738 email threads from the process were categorised as shown in Figure 3.8. Here, the large amount of work in developing KPIs and a joint performance dashboard is reflected by the 391 threads relevant to the topic: over half the total traffic. It is notable that although there is a high volume of email, much of it is mundane in terms of richly presenting actors’ perspectives. Alongside this coding, I only noted 47 emails that I specifically wanted to return to later for review, and only a few were eventually quoted. The key role of this dataset was to assist in reconstructing the timeline and recalling streme linkages.
With the ‘process, people, practice’ structure established, I was then able to rewrite this thesis thematically, building upon some of my previously unstructured material. As I iteratively spiralled inward from a state of great narrative uncertainty towards a more cohesive whole, I found that additional conceptualisation was stimulated through both further reading, and writing up.
3.8 My Professional Role and Perspective

This is a qualitative thesis utilising an AR approach to a single issue, and whilst my aim is to provide appropriate academic objectivity in my data collection and analysis, by definition I am at the centre of my story, and my own biases and preconceptions affect my view of events. So readers should be aware that I have worked for the BBC for over 20 years, and fundamentally believe that quality-based public service broadcasting is A Good Thing (especially if it involves hesitation, repetition, deviation, MJN Air, or a TARDIS), which can provide that which purely commercial broadcast frameworks cannot, although that does not make me uncritical of the organisation. At the time of the core project, I primarily worked for WN, as Head of Business and Technical Innovation, before latterly taking up the same post in the merged GNL. As this research began, my project-based role was fluid, enabling me to work flexibly across a number of issues of concern to the WN board and the GN strategy team, including providing input into the GSR process, evaluating responses to the global economic downturn, and formulating proposed investments to deliver editorial quality and commercial improvements.

I wanted my research to make a practical as well as a theoretical contribution at the BBC, as I was concerned that many well thought-out proposals did not result in actual change. My initial interest was to examine the process by which disparate initiatives (for example, HD implementation, Asian newsgathering arrangements, or connected TV application development) were approved at WN, seeking a set of public and commercial criteria that could improve the quality of internal debate. However, as a result of the GSR my sponsors (Director, GN; Head of Strategy and Business, GN; Finance Director, BBC.com) asked me to consider this in a cross-platform, cross-business manner, leading to the wider considerations discussed here.
To me it has always been apparent that BBC international news is primarily a public service, whereas for some others it has been a far more commercial enterprise. GSR affirmed the public underpinning, although it was not clear during this process that GNL would eventually be formed within GN; it could have been under the ownership of WW, or not created at all. I should also emphasise that GNL formation was a much wider process than my own work, involving many colleagues in strategy and elsewhere, often taking place offstage from my perspective. However, I was pleased to play some part in ensuring that public value measures became influential alongside more traditional, and enabling, commercial drivers. The trick – and the difficult bit that occupied this project as well as much management time – is to successfully marry these two needs together to their mutual benefit, whilst keeping sight of the underlying purpose.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter began by reviewing the claims made for AR as a methodology, linking many of its precepts to aspects of the work of change agents presented in the previous chapter, as well as to the desire in this research to encompass the complexity of practically enacting change in a large corporation. Although others’ writing has provided context and insight into wider perspectives on the field, as a practitioner embarking on insider AR, Coghlan and Brannick’s book (2010) has been my core text in this review, as it was during the core project. The ambition of AR to generate practical as well as academic knowledge seems laudable to this practitioner, who can appreciate the rigour of much academic research into business, whilst sometimes being unsure of its relevance to his day-to-day professional life. A number of the structural and participatory AR issues that have been enunciated in this chapter will
resurface as the core narrative develops, thereby providing insight in Chapter 6 into the merits and limitations of a change agent using and modifying this methodology in practice to propel strategic development within a complex, hierarchical, processual business environment.

Before that, the next two chapters present findings from the process and people perspectives. Chapter 4 takes a wide-angle view; it contextualises this project within maps of the wider stremes involved, describes overall activity in relation to strategy literature, and critiques the explanatory power of the streme concept. Chapter 5 then goes behind the maps, zooming in to look at the behaviours creating the streme interactions and building legitimacy for change. It finds this activity is influenced by the complexity of the streme network; human actions may shape the network, but the network also shapes the actions. Throughout, Coghlan and Brannick’s (2010, p.15) succinct description of good AR as encompassing “a good story, rigorous reflection on that story, and an extrapolation of usable knowledge of theory from the reflection” is the basic tenet that I have aimed to fulfil.
4 Mapping the Stremes

(Process Findings)

He built the Total Perspective Vortex... [modelling] the whole of reality as extrapolated from a piece of fairy cake... she saw in one instant the whole infinity of creation, and herself in relation to it. To Trin Tragula's horror, the shock completely annihilated her brain; but to his satisfaction he realised that he had proved conclusively that if life is going to exist in a Universe of this size, then the one thing it cannot afford to have is a sense of proportion.

- The Restaurant at the End of the Universe (Adams 1980, p.64)

4.1 Introduction: Mapping the Network

A key theme of this research is the complexity of the overall system and its interdependency with the actions behind it. The next two chapters act in concert; this one presents a ‘wide-angle’ view of the observed streme network, extending the conceptual maps of evolving strategic posture (Figure 2.4, Figure 2.5) previously created by Quinn (1980) and Johnson (1987) to depict the system from a practitioner, middle manager perspective. The maps are necessarily more modest than Trin Tragula’s Total Perspective Vortex described above (it would be difficult to map the whole infinity of the BBC, never mind creation); instead they chart the stremes
observed in this corner of the Corporation. However, Trin’s fictional finding is apposite; we normally focus on our own work out of proportion to others’, so this chapter broadens the context, mapping the observed, wider system. This activation was but one initiative within a very complex streme structure, and its porosity as it interacted with many, many other stremes, at both systemic and social levels, fundamentally influenced its evolution. Chapter 5 then zooms in to look at the experience and actions of people within the system, to explore not only how they underpin it by building legitimacy for new ideas through discourse, but also how the emergent complexity of the network affects them. Across these two sets of findings, a picture forms of a constructivist interdependency; the actors shape the network, but the network context correspondingly partially shapes their actions (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1 Actor / Network Constructivist Interdependency**

This chapter’s findings are divided into two sections. Section 4.2 maps the project stremes and provides a practical overview of the research, reproducing several internal BBC materials that resulted from the stremes, though the complexity of my journey through the activation makes it difficult to convey the detail of all the specialist
developments that took place. Section 4.3 then considers the key characteristics of the maps, the observed strategic development of the business units, and some benefits and drawbacks of the streme approach. The maps are found to be messy, complex, and primarily emergent, with some planned aspects. Interrelated subsystems evolve in concert, and sometimes in parallel, responding to each other; to subcultures, to planned strategic programmes, and to stakeholder attitudes. Some stremes thrive, whilst others go dormant or are outshone by other developments. Deriving from a single person’s cognitive perspective, they are bounded and chunked: local activity is depicted in detail, some more remote activity is perceived in outline, and offstage activity is not depicted at all. Their complexity, and the number of systems depicted, hints at the number of issues and people with which a change agent has to interact, alongside the potential problem of transmitting information across the system (Section 5.2.1). Section 4.3.2 relates the characteristics of the mapped strategic change to the classifications of Whittington (2001) and Mintzberg (1998), building upon these models from this middle management, practitioner’s perspective, rather than considering the activity of the organisation as a whole. It finds that the maps depict an internally focused, mainly emergent system, with multiple objectives. It is therefore primarily processual in nature, and in merging the two business units, the organisation also merged their slightly different strategic approaches. It is postulated that Mintzberg’s configuration school is relevant to the actors integrating activities inside the system: ‘navigating stremes’ by crafting strategic change. Finally, Section 4.3.3 reviews the usefulness of the streme maps. They enable a change programme to be presented from a practitioner’s perspective, and to be contextualised within surrounding activity. The issues that ebb and flow in relevance, over time, can be portrayed. On the downside, this is, of course, a subjective view. There are stremes
within stremes within stremes – this whole project is a streme. In addition, the chunking is very personal, and which stremes were important or could be influenced would vary for different actors and departments (Section 5.2.2).

As shown in the second column of Figure 4.2, the core project to engender closer working across WN and BBC.com had three aims, initially perceived to flow causally from one another, of creating a common vision across the WN and BBC.com business units, a joint set of KPIs, and a joint initiative evaluation framework. The second (KPI) aim then split into three interrelated activities, causing five core stremes to be initiated, as shown in the third column. In addition, two other relevant stremes were observed and will be presented here as two timelines that sit alongside the five maps of the core stremes, shown in bold at the centre of Figure 4.2. The first consisted of high-level stremes – environmental issues and strategic programmes – and the second was an internal ‘clock’ of approval mechanisms, principally board meetings. This was all one great interlocking system; it is presented in the manner in which it was chunked for processing by this practitioner’s brain.
Figure 4.2 Overview of the Shared Success Project

- Project Streme
- Top-Level Aims/Stremes
- Core Stremes (Mapped in Ch. 4)
- Key Episodes (Discussed in Ch. 5)
- Key Outcomes for GNL

1. Joint Vision Formulation
   - Vision
   - Vision paper at 1st Board Meeting
2. Joint Metric Formulation
   - Dashboard
   - (Modified) Dashboard
3. Joint Initiative Evaluation
   - QIR
   - QIR KPI a key target
   - Brand Attributes & Metrics
   - Key Editorial Indicators tracked
   - Aligning Localised Stremes (Key Episode 2)
   - Framework partially used
4. “Clock” Stremes

"Shared Success"
4.2 Streme Timelines and Maps

4.2.1 Timeline of the High-Level Stremes

This section presents maps and timelines of the stremes at the centre of Figure 4.2. These form the basis of subsequent findings; their characteristics are discussed later in this chapter, and many of the activities discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 refer back to them. First is the timeline of high-level stremes: the strategic programmes and external events that were observed to influence my five core project stremes (Figure 4.3). UK developments are above the timeline; international ones, including this project, are below. As introduced in Section 3.4, the international GSR programme was the key driver for the closer working between WN and BBC.com that was the subject of this research. But it did not spring from nowhere; instead it flowed from prior domestic activities, top-left in the figure. These stremes were two linked strategic programmes, PQF and Delivering Quality First (DQF). In June 2009, the BBC Trust – which governs the BBC on behalf of the public – and the Executive – which manages the organisation – started a strategic review to shape the BBC’s direction until 2016, a timing determined by the regular long-term environmental heartbeat of BBC Charter review and licence-fee settlement. The resulting PQF proposal (BBC 2010) set out a high-level policy shaping resource allocation, concentrating diminishing licence-fee resources into five areas of quality-based, public value output, leading with journalism. The timeline then shows PQF being reviewed (BBC Trust 2010), before the DQF programme further considered it, developing detailed findings (BBC Trust 2012) for subsequent implementation. Few external events feature in these timelines or maps, but the election of a coalition government in May 2010 is shown at the centre of the figure. The resulting licence-fee settlement froze the BBC’s public income, and placed new requirements upon it, requiring the DQF work to seek savings.
Figure 4.3 Timeline of the High-Level Stremes

High-Level Strategic Programmes:-
PQF: Putting Quality First
DQF: Delivering Quality First
GSR: Global Strategy Review
GSR2: Global Strategy Review 2
TIN: Transforming International News

UK Focused Activity

Strategy Review (PQF)

May 10
PQF
Announced

May 11
New Trust
Chair

DQF

GSR

GSR2

TIN

Internationally Focused Activity

Apr 11
GN into
BBC News

Jul 12
1st GNL
Board Meeting

Pre-Step

Shared Success Core Project

Post-Step

Jun 09
Strategy Review
Initiated

Mar 10
PQF
Announced

Oct 10
Licence Fee
Settlement

Apr 11
Trust Reviews PQF

May 10
Government
Elected

Jun 10
Trust Reviews PQF

Jun 10
DQF

Jul 10
GSR

Aug 10
GSR2

Sep 10
TIN

Oct 10

Nov 10
Dec 10
Jan 11
Feb 11
Mar 11
Apr 11
May 11
Jun 11
Jul 11
Aug 11
Sep 11
Oct 11
Nov 11
Dec 11
Jan 12
Feb 12
Mar 12
Apr 12
May 12
Jun 12
Jul 12

One notion was that a funding gap in News might be closed by somehow increasing income from the commercial international news services, WN and BBC.com/news. Below the timeline, the GSR (BBC 2011a) stream, another high-level strategy programme, went back to basics, asking fundamental questions about the funding, organisation, and purpose of BBC international activity. This international counterpart to the domestic PQF process built upon its findings. Journalism was again the lead genre, at the heart of the fifth public purpose in the BBC Charter: “bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK” (BBC 2011a, p.2). International news was, therefore, provided primarily for public value reasons, whilst the main purpose of WW global activity in other genres, for example selling Sherlock or Doctor Who to overseas broadcasters, was to create financial value (Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4 The BBC's International Purposes**

Source: The BBC’s Global Strategy: An Overview from the BBC Executive (2011a, p.3)
BBC international news was, therefore, to “put quality first” (p.5) internationally, adopt a cross-platform approach across WN/BBC.com/WS, and utilise a “mixed funding model” (p.5) that required commercial effectiveness to support the public mission. The full list of GSR principles underpinning this research is in Appendix 4. In conclusion, the review stated, “For news, a new strategy and structure for all international news services will be developed, based on the pursuit of the BBC’s public purposes and quality” (p.9). As a result, the public service orientated News Division became GN’s primary stakeholder.

A month later, Lord Patten was appointed Chairman of the BBC Trust (BBC News 2011); his international experience influenced internal streme development by seeking further quality improvements in international news. Thus policy uncertainty increased, with the new Chairman seeking additional quality-based investment into international news, whilst the DQF process contemplated further commercial dividends from international news for use elsewhere. This uncertainty from higher order stremes directly impinged upon this work, since formulating a common vision and then creating relevant metrics were key project aims that needed to reflect both the public and commercial aspirations.

It might be assumed that the GSR resolved this issue, but although it provided a strategic and policy framework, it did not specify desired outcomes for the WN and BBC.com business units in detail, or how the dual desires for quality-based, publicly-valued output, alongside commercial success, were to be achieved. From the Trust’s perspective these were detailed policies and tactics but, from my position, they appeared far more strategic, being fundamental to the desired behaviours of the business units. The two units had very different subcultures and conceptions of the current state (Section 3.4), WW broadly being staffed by people with a more
commercial mind-set whose reward depended on a greater degree on revenue performance, whilst WN/GN had a more mixed public/commercial rationale and perspective. They, therefore, saw the GSR differently:

probably the reason there’s a slight difference in how we see our purpose… is because WW runs a business whose purpose is to make a profit, and GN does not run a business whose purpose is to make a profit and that informs an awful lot of what we do and how we think. It informs who WW choose to run the business. It informs the decisions about short-term versus long-term thinking. Lots of things. (Director2(WN))

even though we [WW and GN] sort of signed up, we’ve theoretically signed up to a Global Strategy which has a common purpose for us, actually I still think we approach it rather differently. (Director2(WN))

The latitude from the GSR, DQF, and the Chairman meant, therefore, that my work was one of guided change, emergent debate and development. Furthermore, other stremes to the lower-right of the timeline flowed from the GSR, run by the strategy teams. ‘Global Strategy Review 2’ (GSR2) and ‘Transforming International News’ (TIN) also explored GSR implementation in several key areas, including ownership and organisational structures across GN and WW, and KPIs. These stremes led to the eventual creation of GNL at the far-right of the figure, putting all commercial international news activity primarily under the control of News, some 18 months after GSR publication. The interlinked, high-level strategic stremes in Figure 4.3 formed the background to this project, interacting with my core research stremes, and are shown on the maps that follow.
4.2.2 Mapping the Vision Streme

The maps of the five core stremes of this project are now presented before their characteristics are discussed in Section 4.3. Box 4.1 provides a key to the maps.

Box 4.1 Key to Streme Maps

- Shaded streme blocks denote the core research streme under discussion; related stremes are white.
- Period when a given streme was particularly relevant / active – streme evolving
- Period when a given streme was particularly relevant / active – streme fixed
- Interaction between stremes or periods of streme activity. May be one- or two-way.
- Dotted lines denote predominantly dormant periods, or activity less visible to the researcher.
- Pins dropping vertically from the timeline denote key events.

- The top of the figure: overall timeline and high-level stremes
- The bottom of the figure: relevant long-term locked stremes, for example subcultures

The first of the three main ambitions for the core project was to formulate a common vision across the TV and online businesses. Figure 4.5 maps this vision streme (shaded). It depicts its two key periods of development; the first to the left of the figure, when a conceptual common vision across the boards of WN and BBC.com was being sought, and the second towards the centre, ten months later, when a number of more practical proposals for joint working were discussed. The map ends at the right-hand side, with the first board meeting of the newly formed GNL, formally unifying the two companies.

A feature of this map is the breakdown of the vision streme in May 2011. This was a key episode in the process, detailed in Section 5.4. It can be seen that there were a number of inputs into discussions on common vision formulation, and my aim was to seek alignment between them and with the higher-order GSR/DQF strategies ongoing
Figure 4.5 Map of the Vision Stream

- GSR
- GSR2
- TIN

Development mostly in GSR2 then TIN

Future Visions / Strategies
Brand Position
Aud. Segmentations / Metrics
Profitability / ROI

Vision Consultation (Concept)
Mostly Dormant
Joint Finance / Sales
Joint Marketing / Brand
Joint Editorial

Reinvestment Cycle
Conceptual QIR Measure
Audience Quality Measure
Initiative Evaluation Criteria

Draft ideas feed into stream developments detailed in Figures 4.6, 4.9, 4.13, 4.14

Global News / World News Culture
BBC UK Public Value Measures
at the top of the figure. These included the two merging business units’ existing future visions/strategies, brand positions, audience segmentations, and performance metrics; in all these areas, we sought to find areas of commonality that could be used across TV and online. However these issues and, more particularly, attitudes towards profitability and the use of UK public value measures were proxy expressions for the business units’ cultural values (WN/GN, public; and BBC.com/WW, commercial) depicted at the bottom of Figure 4.5, which both sought to influence the debate around vision, and thus subsequent arrangements for closer working. These differing perspectives meant that agreement on key issues of vision, profitability, and metrics was not achieved through this work, and the vision streme became largely dormant as a result. This was not due to lack of interest, but an inability to resolve the issue between the participants in this forum. The diagram then depicts the work of formulating joint vision taking place offstage, in the strategy teams’ GSR2 and TIN stremes, whilst the central dotted line depicts my dormant vision streme. A feature of the structure is thus that parallel stremes were evolving in different parts of the organisation, occasionally interacting, and each contributing to the emergent conclusion: GNL formulation. My early vision activity did have influence, however, and the lower-centre of the figure depicts four outputs of the aborted process: a draft model linking the twin desires for commercial and public value creation; a new, related KPI to measure reinvestment (AIR/QIR); an agreement to develop a brand-based audience measure of product quality; and draft criteria for measuring investment return. These ideas all flowed into the subsequent core research stremes. In addition, the centre of Figure 4.5 depicts them flowing into the evolving GSR2 streme within Central Strategy, and latterly into TIN, which had become the dominant vehicle for progress.
To the right, the second burst of vision streme activity represents a later, more practical approach to formulating common vision by creating common processes. This represents work around a day-long meeting of the two boards (Section 6.4.2), where departmental presentations from finance, sales, editorial, and MC&A, were given, summarised in the figure as input stremes. These reflected great strides in formulating vision alignment in their style and language (Section 5.3.4), often outside my vision streme. The figure depicts the output of the meeting feeding into the development of budgets for the following financial year, as well as into localised departmental activities with which I was not involved. Here, as in subsequent maps, streme activity consists of conceptual formulation in one part of the timeline, later moving onto practicalities.

The far right of Figure 4.5 shows the first board meeting of GNL in July 2012. My vision work had basically culminated at the departmental meeting, the BBC’s higher-level GNL vision development instead taking place in TIN. However, the first board paper to be presented at the merged company, setting out its mission, KPIs, and success criteria, was largely based on this work.

In summary, the joint vision streme was the least successful of the core stremes, mainly being notable for providing outputs to my subsequent work. It contributed to the joint vision formulation taking place across the organisation, one component of building “incremental commitment” (Bower 1970, p.69) towards GNL unification. However, it demonstrated the limits of a single manager’s ability to formulate consensual change in the political atmosphere that characterises processual strategic development, and which can involve conflict (Section 5.4). More influential parallel stremes, the GSR2 and TIN strategy processes, were the key influencers that drove vision convergence, part of the offstage corporate activity that resulted in the decision
to create GNL with a public service rationale. It was that event that embodied, or imposed, a common vision, something that my vision streme, from my position in the hierarchy, did not have sufficient legitimacy to achieve on its own.

4.2.3 Mapping the Dashboard Streme

The next three stremes are closely related, all being concerned with creating an integrated performance measurement system incorporating public and commercial measures for international TV and online news. The first represents a process of creating a joint dashboard to concisely summarise the measures, whilst the following two stremes formulated metrics that fed into it. Given the complexity of the global businesses, with their use of both financial and non-financial metrics and targets, dashboards that summarised key data for boards were already in use. The aim here was to unify some existing measures from the two businesses into a joint monthly dashboard with a unified format, tracking financial/sales performance against budgets, and tracing changes in audience consumption or perceived editorial quality. There was a lot of detailed, practical work with individual departments to establish which measures were feasible and useful. As reflected earlier in the high email count it generated (391 from 738 in total), this, therefore, became the most iterated and time-consuming of the core stremes, and is mapped in Figure 4.6.
Figure 4.6 Map of the Dashboard Streme

GSR → DQF → GSR2 → TIN

Compliance Report
WN Sales Dashboard Format
WN Finance Format
.com Finance Format

KPI Interaction

WN
BBC.com
UK News

Build First Template

Conceptual QIR Dev.

Initiative Appraisal Streme

“News > GN > GNL Hierarchy”

(To Figure 4.14)

Directors’ Business and Editorial Commentaries
Financial Reports
Sales Reports
Audience Metrics, inc. Brand Tracker Attributes (information from Figure 4.13 activity)

WN/BBC.com BAU

BBC News Board Approval

Summary pages needed

BAU (To Figure 4.14)

1G GNL Board Adoption

WN/BBC.com

UK News

Financial Dashboards
Sales Dashboards
Audience Dashboards

Data Availability Limitations
To the centre-left of the figure, initial inputs to this streme are summarised. These were existing financial, sales, and audience metrics/dashboards from the stakeholders (WN/BBC.com/UK News). This streme began with me hosting discussions across the business units that collated options for which metrics could be used. The process initially proposed a shortlist that sought alignment with the UK measures, with the more commercial needs of BBC.com, and the public measures valued by GN. As a practical example of what this entailed, Figure 4.7 shows how a summary of the draft inputs from the business units was annotated during one discussion, and the resulting intermediate output subsequently presented to the boards. The first draft dashboard template was presented to the boards in July 2011, and is shown in redacted form in Figure 4.8, where the core components can be seen. The first row shows a slide of joint directors’ commentary, and subsequent rows depict financial, sales, and audience metrics from WN/BBC.com, also aggregating them where possible. These were deliberately presented in a common format, visually emphasising commonalities between the two businesses.

This conceptual process having taken place, the right-hand side of Figure 4.6 depicts the ongoing evolution of the streme, the dashboard being developed across the four core components: commentaries, financial, sales, and audience reports. The practical development of each component became a substreme in itself, working with specialist departments (the finance departments determined their detailed KPI sets (Journal 23/6/11), as did the airtime sales team), slowly aligning processes and formats, adapting existing monthly data, and steadily populating the dashboard. The streme became operationalised over time, and continued to be aligned with existing reporting systems and formats, as they, along with the QIR and brand metrics I was working on, were sequentially incorporated.
Figure 4.7 Draft Joint Performance Measures

(Redacted)

1) As annotated from input state

2) Intermediate output state as presented at boards
First page provides short business and financial commentaries on the previous month.

These pages summarise the financial position of each business unit, and a combined picture – all in a common format.
These pages summarise the advertising revenue position of each business unit, and then cross media activity.

The final pages present non-financial indicators; audience based metrics that reflect reach and the perceived quality of the product.
To the lower-right of Figure 4.6 this streme starts to gain influence, as the dashboard became populated and thus useful. In December 2011, the two boards agreed that it would become business as usual (BAU); it was subsequently approved for use by the BBC News Group board and, latterly, GNL. Some changes to the format were agreed, making it easier to present a headline performance summary to stakeholders – my streme continuing to evolve, seeking alignment with prevailing needs. Whilst this streme map shows a lot of interaction with departments and processes within the business units, in comparison to the vision streme it has far less direct engagement with the higher-level strategies and events streme, including GSR and DQF. This reflects my experience; this was detailed, tactical work about process, although indirect influence and alignment did take place via the network. Most overtly, GSR had derived from PQF, so specified that the purpose of providing international news was aligned with that of UK News (Section 4.2.1). This alignment of purpose also implied some alignment of metrics, resulting in the connectivity at the centre of Figure 4.6 with the BBC News and GN Stakeholder Perspectives. I recorded: “People want it [the dashboard] to align with News; [Director6(Joint)] suggested hierarchy of WN/BBC.com>GN>News” (Journal 25/7/11). As a result of GSR, this quote depicted BBC News’s UK metrics as a foundation; that GN metrics should align with them; and that in turn, WN/BBC.com metrics should align with GN’s, forming a hierarchical alignment, perhaps more conceptually than practically, since international data-gathering limitations would mean that detailed metrics could differ. Conversely, the metrics selected for this dashboard fed back into the thinking of the central strategy GSR2 process, and the initial work of my initiative appraisal streme (Section 4.2.6).

This was a successful streme that created a summary dashboard of financial and non-financial indicators for consideration at board meetings, incrementally building
legitimacy for the developing document with peers, directors, and stakeholders. Firstly, it built conceptual alignment across key stakeholders, by shortlisting existing measures and seeking correspondences between them. Secondly, it became a practical proposition, being operationalised by getting actual data with the help of specialist departmental peers, and presenting the information in a common layout. Finally, it cemented its position through ongoing board feedback and approval of the iterating document. This ‘interlevel dynamic’ of legitimacy formulation across both peers and boards will be discussed in Section 5.3.2, and its sequential nature in Section 5.3.3.

4.2.4 Mapping the QIR Streme

The QIR streme created an influential new measure that not only became used in the dashboard, but as a primary financial metric and target at GNL. Quality Investment Return (originally called Audience Investment Return (AIR), and subsequently renamed Editorial Dividend) is a financial measure of the amount of commercial revenue generated by the international news businesses that is reinvested back into editorial content, to support the public service mission, not of creating profits, but of creating news programming. This reinvestment supports, for example, foreign news bureaux, international journalists, TV features, and web content, but, because of the aggregated nature of internal contracts, would be costly to break down into specifics. Creating the measure comprised two tasks, discussed within this section. Firstly, the reinvestment of commercial profits back into programming was depicted as a virtuous cycle that intellectually justified the new measure, and secondly the actual figure was calculated, demonstrating its practical utility. Figure 4.9 maps the linked development of these two components of this streme (again shaded). The left side depicts the prior work of the vision streme, itself deriving partially from the GSR. Although the vision streme stalled, it produced a draft cycle of reinvestment that flowed into this streme. A
simpler map than the preceding examples, a process is then shown in which the cycle
further developed as a theoretical concept, before the measure was operationalised by
demonstrating that it could be practically calculated, at the same time being presented
to and latterly adopted by key stakeholders.
Figure 4.9 Map of the QIR Streme
The conceptual development of the reinvestment cycle is at the centre of the map, and Figure 4.10 shows some developmental drafts as the tacitly international cycle provided from the vision stream was increasingly modified to align more clearly with editorial reinvestment concerns within UK News. These cycles depict measures that were used by the BBC in the UK to measure public value, Reach/Quality/Impact/Value (RQIV). Wanting to align any international framework I proposed with UK Metrics, at the outset of this process I had spoken with the BBC’s Chief Economist (Journal 9/12/10) to explore whether they could be used here, in accordance with the GSR findings, and be depicted as a linked cycle:

NP: Do you think that people use a causal framework in the UK or do you think it’s essentially four separate measures?

I think there is a clear understanding that they are not independent of each other. There’s no point in having high quality programmes that don’t reach anybody and if they don’t reach anybody, how could you say they’ve had an impact? (Manager1 (BBC))

Version 1 began simply, with quality programming driving audience reach, and thus value (revenue) that could be used to improve quality. Version 2 introduced AIR into the cycle, as a specific reinvestment. Version 3.0 is notable for its explicit mention of PQF, and of News Group vision (together with a somewhat broad ambition for profits: of greater than zero, but less than infinity), and Version 3.1 formalises these sketched ideas by incorporating publicly funded news into the cycle; demonstrating that the reinvestment benefits UK as well as international audiences.
Figure 4.10 Reinvestment Cycle and QIR Development

Version 1: Representation of early cycle arising in vision stream

Version 2: Cycle as presented to BBC.com and output from vision stream
Version 3.0 Sketch created in this streme, by NP and Director6(Joint)

Version 3.1: Further development
Figure 4.11 Reinvestment Cycle, as Presented to Stakeholders
The final form, Figure 4.11, is the one that subsequently fed into other stremes: GSR2, the GNL board, and News Group, with an explanatory commentary (Appendix 3). This iterative development was an example of seeking alignment between stremes: the model was modified not only to bring it closer to core BBC public value measurement systems, but to explicitly incorporate UK News interests by incorporating reinvestment into them. Furthermore, at the top centre of the streme map (Figure 4.9), the ‘Public Value Paper’ streme, sitting between this activity and the GSR2 planned strategy process, represents work with an external consultant, commissioned by the strategy team to write a paper contextualising the QIR cycle alongside the measurement of public value elsewhere in the UK (Simon 2011). Demonstrating this external alignment provided symbolic legitimacy for the cycle and the QIR metric (Section 5.3.4).

The measure would only be of practical use, however, if it could be operationalised so that its financial value could be calculated and tracked. This process, to the right of the map, was undertaken with the finance teams, first deriving parallel, aligned definitions of what would be included in the measure for TV and Online; and then charting it using historical data (Figure 4.12).
Figure 4.12 TV and Online QIR Definitions and Historical Chart
(Redacted)

### TV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QIR: Editorial Output</th>
<th>Editorial Enablers: Infrastructure and Distribution</th>
<th>Other (Support)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Programme funding</td>
<td>• Transmission</td>
<td>• Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Translation funding</td>
<td>• Distribution</td>
<td>• Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Overheads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QIR: Editorial Output</th>
<th>Editorial Enablers: Infrastructure and Distribution</th>
<th>Other (Support)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• News content funding</td>
<td>• Product and technical development</td>
<td>• Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Video services</td>
<td>• Website hosting</td>
<td>• Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Overheads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Historical Chart](chart.png)
Finally, the right of Figure 4.9 notes the socialisation of this unfamiliar concept with numerous stakeholders within GNL and with BBC News. This is discussed in Section 5.3.2, but involved explaining the measure to a strategist in News, and getting sequential formal approval and feedback from multiple boards. In late 2011, QIR was adopted as a pan-GN target and as a key measure by the WN and BBC.com boards. In early 2012, it began to be reported in the dashboard, was adopted as a key 2012/13 target by BBC News Group, and, later, as the primary financial target for GNL at the company’s inaugural board meeting. Here it was rechristened Editorial Dividend, to achieve greater alignment with the editorial culture of the key BBC News stakeholder. The symbolic and narrative nature of QIR is discussed in Section 5.3.4.

I regard the cycle and measure as key outputs from this research, visually linking public and commercial, international and domestic activity, in accordance with the GSR. The question was originally summarised like this:

Revenue just doesn’t feel right for an organisation pursuing public purposes, but the obvious question arising is - well, what is the right metric then? (Email 1/8/11 Director6(Joint) to NP)

QIR answered this, creating an intellectually justified financial metric that sees commercial activity as an enabler of public value creation (reinvestment into BBC News production to the benefit of both international and UK audiences). As such, so long as the company is financially sustainable, it becomes more important than simple revenue or PBIT. Other public organisations are increasingly driven to seek commercial funding to support their mission, so I hope that the reinvestment cycle concept (Figure 4.11) and the associated metric may be of value elsewhere.
4.2.5  Mapping the Brand Attributes and Metrics Streme

Figure 4.13 maps the last of the three related KPI stremes; this one formulating a set of ‘brand attributes’ for BBC international news (for instance dynamic, impartial, relevant), that could be surveyed amongst audiences alongside measures of reach, engagement, to reflect editorial quality, and to populate the last two pages of the dashboard (Figure 4.8). This streme itself became a process of aligning two more local stremes, shown at the right-hand side of the diagram. This latter activity was seen as a key episode and is discussed in Section 5.5. A large number of inputs were relevant to electing the exact attributes to be used. The vision streme (top-left of Figure 4.13) had identified some possible attributes from WN’s and BBC.com’s existing brand positions, with those from the BBC, UK News, and GN subsequently considered through a workshop with MC&A. This was a reflection of alignments being sought across platforms, in the UK, and internationally, again deriving from the GSR. This created difficulty for this streme in creating alignment, and, therefore, legitimacy, across so many stakeholders (Sections 5.3.2, 6.2.3). Of interest at the process level is not just the number of inputs, but also the fact that they were changing in priority. As shown at the centre of the figure, the KPI work had so far been derived from the vision streme, and thus had primarily sought alignment across WN and BBC.com.
Figure 4.13 Map of the Brand Attributes and Metrics Streme

- GSR
- DQF
- GSR2
- TIN

 WN
 BBC.com
 Future Visions / Strategies
 Brand Positions
 Aud. Segments/Metrics
 Profitability / ROI

 Vision Consultation (Concept)
 Brand Attribute Development
 Priority Change

 BBC Brand Positioning
 UK News Brand Positioning
 GN Brand Positioning

 Editorial Objective: A Quality Measure
 MC&A Meeting

 Brand Tracker: Key Brand Indicators
 Alignment Process
 Quality Sphere: Key Editorial Indicators

 On-going MC&A updates to Dashboard (Figure 4.6)

 Aligned KEIs used in GN 12/13 Objectives
 Data Gathering

 BBC News Stakeholder Perspective
 Global News Strategy Perspective
 MC&A Perspective
At this point, the new GSR2 streme became more influential: Central Strategy were holding regular meetings with GN strategy and corporate finance examining how to implement GSR and, given their UK background, alignment between domestic and international measures was seen as key. (“THE QUESTION HAS CHANGED: GSR2 NewsCo/News alignment taking over” I called my Journal entry for 8/8/11.) Four stremes were interacting and aligning over time: my brand attributes streme, the GSR2 streme developing GSR implementation proposals, together with the two influential stakeholder perspectives of the GN Strategy department and BBC News. In the event, what felt like a major storm subsided, and the brand attribute and metric development continued locally in MC&A for the rest of 2011. Measures flowed into my monthly dashboards, and plans were formulated for practical international data collection; another example of operationalisation following theoretical development (Section 5.3.3).

Possibly the most interesting topology of this map is that to the right of Figure 4.13, where this streme itself becomes a vehicle for aligning two other stremes in order to retain its own legitimacy and utility. This key episode is discussed in Section 5.5, but the figure shows how two competing measures had developed in MC&A, both aspiring to reflect editorial quality. The upper box represents a streme based on the brand attributes formulated from this streme’s work, described above. Tracing the flowchart back, it can be seen how this derived from the vision and, earlier, the GSR/DQF stremes and their exhortation to focus on quality. The lower box represents parallel work on measuring quality, designed to influence the style of news output, which again derived from the GSR/DQF programmes, but here the intermediary step was a 2011/12 GN objective to create a measure of editorial quality (Journal 9/1/12). Thus a lack of coordination across the network had started two hares running, two
stremes with common PQF/DQF roots, developing independently and in parallel, and creating new two audience surveys that would become a GN measure of output quality, in place of previously more ad-hoc or localised research. Although both locally valid, they were misaligned with each other and with other parts of the network: in practice, the business could end up reporting one set of metrics, but then making product changes in order to influence a different set. I could not develop a credible audience metric for the dashboard without this being resolved, so this metrics streme took on the task of aligning these localised stremes. This eventually succeeded, enabling a set of brand attributes to be tracked, the resultant KEI metrics used at GNL. They were surveyed in the field, reported in the dashboard, and used as a framework within GN’s 2012/13 objectives, bringing this streme to a successful conclusion.

4.2.6 Mapping the Initiative Evaluation Streme

The final core streme created a common mechanism for evaluating new initiative proposals across WN and BBC.com, and is mapped in Figure 4.14. This again flowed from the vision streme, where a number of existing shortcomings and elements of the desired state for investment appraisal were identified (Section 5.2.1). This streme started in summer 2011, and had two parallel components: the creation of a template form encompassing criteria used to evaluate individual investments, and the formulation of a 2x2 portfolio analysis matrix representing public and commercial return, on which many investments could be compared. Example projects seeking funding included a new foreign studio, or bureau; new website content; translated content; HD feeds; and developing new capabilities for web advertising. A number of investments were approved through this process (summarised as outputs to the right of Figure 4.14).
Figure 4.14 Map of the Initiative Evaluation Streme
They primarily related to the move of WN to the new W1 newsroom facility (from January 2013), and to HD broadcasting to Asia (from late 2012). Also approved was funding an international Chief Business Correspondent to front cross-media coverage of the global economic crisis. This post’s creation was subsequently announced, and reported in the trade press (BBC 2012, Broadcast 2012). Thus, this streme had particular practical, external effects, going beyond internal discourse.

The streme was initially concerned with identifying the appropriate criteria for evaluating proposals, and drafting the template form from them. The map depicts the developing dashboard metrics flowing into this; they were the initial criteria I discussed with stakeholders. It also shows the influence of higher-level stremes, as the strategy programmes, and the reported views of the BBC Chair, implied that quality criteria should be incorporated. The template created is shown in Figure 4.15, where the criteria group around likely financial/commercial benefits; public value benefits; effects on audience reach and engagement; and cross-platform benefits. These criteria track right back through the streme network to the GSR, reflecting the cross-platform mission.
### Implemented Version of Initiative Appraisal Form

#### Financial / Commercial Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact this Financial Year</th>
<th>Revenue Impact</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash Impact</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit Impact</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<th>Costs</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenues</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year NPV</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Financial Commentary

#### Other Commercial Benefits

#### Non-Financial / Public Value Benefits (Score each from 1 low - 7 high)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editorial Strategic Fit</th>
<th>(1-7)</th>
<th>Fit with Brand Attributes</th>
<th>(1-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Quality First?</td>
<td>(1-7)</td>
<td>Cross-Platform synergy?</td>
<td>(1-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added Differentiation / Competitive Advantage</td>
<td>(1-7)</td>
<td>Overall Average (Average Score)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Audience: Reach & Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will this improve reach/frequency/length of contact?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How will this increase WIS/WM audience awareness?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Cross Business Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How has cross business opportunity been increased?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How has cross business risk been mitigated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Measuring Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will success look like? (To be reflected at PMS)</th>
<th>The main criteria for success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The October/November 2011 streme development on the map represents a piloting process during which this template was applied to 16 possible initiatives, the results enabling a rough portfolio analysis in a way that had not previously been possible. This initial 2x2 matrix, and more sophisticated iterations, are shown in Figure 4.16. Each datapoint represented a possible investment. The vertical axis represented financial return, and the horizontal axis non-financial, public value return. In later versions, green/red coding showed whether each investment was currently budgeted for, and sphere size showed cash commitment. Clearly, the most attractive options were top-right, claiming to produce both commercial and public return. The final iterations of this matrix informed directors’ discussions of 2012/13 budgets, so although this streme did not determine investments in itself, it facilitated a structured cross-media, cross-business conversation regarding investment prioritisation with the directors (Journal 8/12/11).
Figure 4.16 Initiative Appraisal Matrix Development

(Redacted)
The map depicts the development of the template and portfolio analysis as fast processes taking only a few months. There were two reasons: difficult groundwork for the criteria had already been performed in the vision and dashboard streams, and the imminent deadline for annual budget decisions sped piloting. Progress again broadly followed the previously observed sequence of theoretical discussion, operationalisation (here including piloting), and socialisation/approval (Section 5.3.3). To the right, Figure 4.14 also depicts the fate of the template and portfolio matrix during BAU realisation. Implementing the template across the business involved international offices with their own local subcultures (Journal 7/2/12), integration with existing finance approval formats to meet the requirements of the BBC’s Commercial Holdings Board processes (Journal 7/2/12), and incorporation into WW Sales online systems (Journal 14/2/12). It was practically implemented for use for all investment proposals at WN from February 2012, and subsequently used at GNL, thereby enabling standardised cross-platform financial return measures to be discussed alongside quality/public value considerations for the first time. At the first GNL board meeting, it was used to approve a new HD service in Japan. Meanwhile, as the map shows, the portfolio matrix for comparing investments fell into disuse. I suspect it did not demonstrate enough practical utility for the work needed to maintain it, once I moved on from this research and new people joined the GNL finance team. This is, therefore, an example of a streme that burnt brightly and had temporary impact, but did not achieve enough legitimacy or utility to survive longer-term. The template streme, though, evolves ever onwards into the future.
4.2.7 Timeline of the Approval Clock Streme

Before discussing the characteristics of the maps, I briefly note another set of processes observed to impact the development of the five core stremes. These were periodic organisational approval activities, termed here the approval clock streme, which created an underlying developmental rhythm within the two business units, timelined in Figure 4.17.

Most directly, monthly board meetings were the ongoing approval mechanism for my core stremes. They provided them with legitimacy (Section 5.3.2), were the backbone of the cyclical AR structure (Section 6.2.2), and cemented BAU approval. Additionally, annual budget rounds and objective setting processes occurred near the beginning and end of the process. At the start of the project, in Spring 2011, annual objective setting for 2011/12 was underway, creating a managerial desire for alignment between the emerging vision being created here, and the objectives; a year later, as my project was concluding, it influenced the 2012/13 objectives, which incorporated QIR as a target. Similarly, the initiative appraisal streme interacted with the 2012/13 budget process; business performance influencing investments, and portfolio prioritisation flowing back into the budget, as discussed in the previous section. Thus, although other clocks could be identified – the cycle of BBC charter renewal, the pace of strategic programmes, or of external technological change changing audience behaviour and demanding a response – it was this approval clock that had most direct interaction with my work.
Figure 4.17 Timeline of the Approval Clock Streme

- Boards: Separate WN and BBC.com Boards, sometimes with a joint session
- Joint Boards / Awaydays: Joint meetings of WN and BBC.com Boards
- GNL Board: Merged Company Board

(Budget and Objective Planning FY 2011/12)

- Jan 11
- Feb 11
- Mar 11
- Apr 11
- May 11
- Jun 11
- Jul 11
- Aug 11
- Sep 11
- Oct 11
- Nov 11
- Dec 11
- Joint Awayday
- Boards
- WN Board
- BBC.com Board
- Boards, Joint Session
- Boards
- Boards
- Boards
- Boards
- Boards
- Joint Awayday
- Boards
- Boards
- Boards
- Joint Awayday
- Boards
- Joint Awayday
- "GNL Board"

(Budget and Objective Planning FY 2012/13)

- Jan 12
- Feb 12
- Mar 12
- Apr 12
- May 12
- Jun 12
- Jul 12

(Boards in this period not relevant)
4.3 Reflecting on the Streme Maps and the Strategic Development

4.3.1 Characteristics of the Maps

Having presented the maps for the core stremes of this project, this section discusses their main characteristics. Subsequent sections use the maps to identify that the progression is in Whittington’s (2001) terms a processual one, and to note the benefits and weaknesses of the maps in being able to portray key elements of the development, but, necessarily, being a personal, incomplete, view.

Like the maps of Quinn (1980) and Johnson (1987), these are necessarily simplified versions of the systemic flows that took place, attempting to portray linkages between key processes within the mess of complexity. Whilst they take a wide view of the influences on this change programme, in comparison to those examples they are zoomed in, showing only a part of the organisation, in greater detail, over a shorter time. In depicting my practitioner’s perspective, bounded cognition is apparent; I could only see so far within the organisation. So, as predicted by Miller (1956), is the chunking of the changing stremes by my brain; those further from me are portrayed in lesser detail. My intention was to portray an open system incorporating relevant external factors but the maps are, notably, overwhelmingly internally focused in terms of the influences depicted. Environmental issues, of governments, economic conditions, or technological change, tended either to play into the high-level strategic programmes or be tacit in their influence: a secondary network effect. Formal planning was itself observed to be part of the incremental network (Quinn 1980, p.41); there was interaction between the (apparently) planned high-level strategies and annual objective-setting with my more emergent work, although this distinction may be one of actor perspective (Section 5.2.1). There are no isolated stremes; instead, they evolve step-by-step, in response to or in conjunction with others, causally flowing from the
past system state into the present, and onward to the future, as described by Pettigrew (1985, p.439).

Whilst specific points of decision-making are not visible, there does seem to be a networked incremental commitment to proposed developments, as foreseen by Bower (1970, p.69); for example the KPI dashboard, the QIR measure, and the evaluation framework went through similar sequences as ideas were conceptually developed, piloted/operationalised, and socialised, eventually being approved by boards and becoming BAU (Section 5.3.3). This largely parallels Johnson’s (1987, p.23) decision-making process of problem awareness, diagnosis, solution development, and referral. Indeed, the entire maps appear to represent my work, a streme in itself, contributing to incremental commitment towards GNL formation.

The overall development appears to be broadly continuous; it is not possible to identify Pettigrew (1985) and Mintzberg’s (1978) spurts of change within longer periods of continuity, although this is likely a factor of the ‘zoom level’ of the maps and the research period of months rather than decades. It is not obvious that there are ‘bold lunges’ by individual stremes, more the small steps expected by Whittington (2001, p.22); but we do see multiple developing stremes interacting, and can envisage, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, change agents attempting to proactively encourage alignments and resolve any misalignments. More visible than lunges are parallel stremes doing similar work to similar ends; for example my core stremes and the GSR2 programme, both working on vision and metrics. Another example is that of the two marketing stremes to the right of Figure 4.13, both seeking to formulate quality metrics for tracking.

Perhaps the most important features of the maps are also the most obvious. Firstly, they are each very complex, certainly in relation to the naïve, linear three-step
procedure I had envisaged at the start of the project (Figure 3.3); in addition, they were all unfolding in parallel, alongside other work. There are not just pairs of stremes evolving and interacting; instead we observe the core stremes seeking to form alignments with multiple, often changing, input stremes, forming a complex sea of weaving input and output currents. I term this situation ‘porosity’ as it is a reflection of how the core stremes became interconnected with the rest of the network, rather than being impervious to it. This porosity – harking back to “the fundamental interconnectedness of all things” (Adams 1988, p.115) – is why this thesis argues that a more holistic approach, and these maps, are of value. It resulted in ‘group porosity’ with many specialist actors becoming transiently, partially, involved with the project, and to ‘cognitive porosity’, as they attempted to cope with the many simultaneous issues involved in the streme alignments (Section 5.2), and thus the characteristics of the network influenced the people within it.

Secondly, the entire process, from the first domestic strategic review (PQF), to GNL creation, took three years, and the core project maps cover a period of 18 months; far longer than again, naively, I envisaged in my initial four-month project proposal (Appendix 1). Given the time taken to align and legitimise stremes, discussed in the next chapter, and previous writings on the long process of justifying change (Cornelissen et al 2011, Roos 1996, Whittington 2001, Pettigrew 1985), it may be surmised that it is the very complexity of the maps, with all these alignments competing, evolving, and being debated, sometimes in parallel, that leads to developing a shared understanding taking quite so long. Another factor was the sequence of high-level strategic programmes, reproduced in Figure 4.3. These did not form a linear developmental path; UK and international projects overlapped, external events had an impact, and parallel stremes ran with overlapping goals. Their outputs
often did not specify how sometimes conflicting goals were to be prioritised, how
detailed organisational structures were to be formed, or how more tactical resourcing,
commercial, and brand activities were to be run, to enact strategic vision. Thus they
spawned further stremes, and their influence extended beyond their active period.
They formed a slower organisational clock, alongside that of the more obvious
approval clock streme, which created space for emergent activity.

Another noteworthy aspect of the maps is the depiction of relevant subculture stremes.
Several core stremes were greatly influenced by subcultures, local variants within
wider BBC culture. The two merging business units had different ownership structures
(WN being part of GN, and BBC.com being part of the WW), the first being more
focused on public value return, and the latter more culturally commercial, thereby
leading to different conceptualisations of the current state and future vision
(Section 5.4). In addition, interaction with other departments, whether strategy teams,
BBC News, or WW Sales, incorporated further subcultures and local perspectives on
the importance of particular metrics, or the relevance of the domestic BBC.

To a more distant observer of the BBC, or indeed to someone elsewhere in the
organisation, these stremes would be invisible and inconsequential; they would likely
notice no change at all, or perhaps simply the creation of GNL. Like Quinn’s (1980)
map, that concluded with a system-wide integrated strategic posture, these maps end
with GNL’s first board meeting; it is important to note that this was not the end of the
story, for the stremes continued to evolve and interact afterwards (Section 5.3.6).

4.3.2 Summarising the Maps: A Processual, Configurational Strategy

A key feature of the literature review was a process-based view of strategy, wherein
strategic posture unfolds over time through the interactions of numerous subsystems
and actors, rather than mechanically enacting the plans of an omnipotent chief
executive. Although the relevance of this description has only been asserted until now, the observed characteristics of the development shown in the streme maps seem to conform to it. Numerous networked stremes evolved in concert, without substantive sudden changes in strategic posture. This section considers the maps as a whole, relating their attributes to the relevant processual aspects of Whittington’s classification of strategic types (previously Table 2.1/Figure 2.3), and building upon his work in making the assessment from a middle manager, practitioner’s perspective. The characteristics are summarised in Box 4.2.

**Box 4.2 Summary of Streme Map Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex: a porous system</th>
<th>Internally focused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More emergent than planned</td>
<td>A plurality of outcomes sought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain cultural aspects</td>
<td>Sequential commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent, co-evolving stremes</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel developments</td>
<td>Incomplete, part of a wider system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stremes merging and aligning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The maps, drawn from a middle management perspective, depict the porosity and complexity of the network, with multiple, shifting, internal alignments in play. Their focus is overwhelmingly internal. Emergent development is more prominent than that apparently planned; even then, the high-level stremes interact with the overall flow. A plurality of outcomes, with both public and commercial return, is sought from this activity, and not necessarily easily reconciled; this leads to a vaguer rationale than simple profit maximisation. Relating these attributes to Table 4.1 suggests that the activity is indeed ‘processual’, the network characteristics likely leading actors into political bargaining to move the process forwards, with gradual, crafted strategic development, as described in the following chapters.
Table 4.1 Map Characteristics within Whittington's Strategic Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Classical</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
<th>Evolutionary</th>
<th>Processual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>Crafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td>Profit Maximisation</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Internal (Plans)</td>
<td>External (Societies)</td>
<td>External (Markets)</td>
<td>Internal (Politics/Cognition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes</strong></td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Darwinian</td>
<td>Bargaining / Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table Source: Whittington 2001, p.39*

The literature review also briefly noted Mintzberg el al’s (1998) strategic classification (Table 2.2). The Configuration School, which integrates the other schools, seems to be most relevant, as the maps depict the integration and alignment of various time-dependent activities. Behind them, we can envisage a collective, emergent negotiation, change agents continuously reconfiguring the streams. Briefly, it is worth noting that this discussion applies to the overall map, but it could be argued that there were subtle differences between the WN and BBC.com business units. WN had always reconciled multiple public and commercial objectives, and appeared to exhibit primarily processual, emergent traits as described. BBC.com, part of the more overtly commercial WW, was more single-minded in terms of profit maximisation, with greater outward focus, and a higher degree of long-term planning. The two business units are separately placed on the matrix in Figure 4.18. By definition, forming GNL unified them into a single point, which is shown taking on the more public values of WN, with some of the longer-term, market-focused planning of BBC.com. It must be stressed, however, that this trajectory is developed through pre-existing knowledge, not the maps.
4.3.3 Critique of the Maps

The streme maps are a new tool and so it seems appropriate to discuss their explanatory power. They have, I hope, conveyed the surprising complexity of the activation, and the numerous interrelated stremes involved. They are, of course, a personal view. Many people involved would agree on the key factors, and the overall timeline, but the exact stremes I have depicted, and their exact interrelationships, are my own. The maps are also necessarily simplified; this is not complete picture of all the work I personally was involved in, or of the entire project, there being aspects I could not observe. For clarity, some other stremes are shown only when most relevant, whereas they are always present; and mostly first order stremes are depicted, rather than every derived effect, networked effects becoming increasingly ‘hearsay’. Further,
cognitive chunking means that what constitutes a streme is subjective; there are stremes within stremes within stremes, and the boundaries are unclear. The conceptual forces on the stremes (Figure 5.4) are not apparent, and neither is the looped, iterative nature of the AR methodology. Merging alignments are depicted, but perhaps hard to understand without further explanation; many will be explored in the following chapter. However, it is hoped that the maps have conveyed the network of issues within a large-scale corporation that a middle manager navigates in practically activating strategic change.

4.4 Summary of Process Findings

This chapter has presented the research findings from a wide-angle process perspective, setting the scene for the more detailed actor-based discussions that follow. There is seen to be correspondence with prior processual strategy literature, with a messy network of interdependent stremes co-evolving from the past into the future, and a non-linear mixture of (primarily) emergent and planned strategic development. No bold lunges are seen; instead there is incremental, and sometimes parallel, progress on a number of fronts, in such a complex manner that the evolution could not be predicted in advance.

Overwhelmingly, the maps show processes of alignment rather than conflict, perhaps due to the nature of the practical convergence that was taking place. However, we do see failing alignments/stremes – in the collapse of the vision streme, where competing WN and BBC.com stremes could not be unified through this project (Section 5.4) in the incompatible audience metric stremes (Section 5.5), or in the initiative portfolio matrix falling into disuse. The maps also encompass multiple organisational clocks, with the approval clock most relevant. The high-level strategy stremes partially
determined the timing for the other stremes, including GNL formation, and created space for emergent development. Finally, external events, although often tacit (for instance charter review and technological convergence), set the scene for the developments within. Seen from this perspective, the overall configuration of the system, with its internal focus and multiple desired outcomes, appears to correspond to the processual school of strategy identified by Whittington, potentially leading to internal, crafted, political bargaining by those within.

In conclusion, I return to the findings of Quinn regarding subsystems (1980, p.16-17). As he did, I observed multiple stremes with different concerns, timeframes, and issues. Quinn saw alignment as limited by timing concerns whereas I saw developing alignment, although it could, indeed, take time. Most importantly, as this thesis moves towards the ‘people’ perspective is Quinn’s assertion that “A ‘skilful manager’ would not necessarily find this ‘muddling’, but be able to use this incrementalism as a proactive, effective mechanism” (p.17). The number of developing issues I observed, and their level of interdependence, dynamically shaped the task of the actors within the system, which became one of navigation: configuring and aligning the developing stremes in a beneficial manner. It is they who experienced life inside the network, who built organisational narratives, who conferred legitimacy upon the stremes – and who thus determined how the network evolved, as will be explored in the next chapter.
5 Aligning and Legitimising Stremes

(People Findings)

Organizations do not create, implement or renew strategies. People do. It can be argued that competent and active individuals are a strategic resource for organizations.

- Mantere (2008, p.312)

She said: ‘What is history?’

And he said: ‘History is an angel

being blown backwards into the future.’

He said: ‘History is a pile of debris

And the angel wants to go back and fix things,

To repair the things that have been broken.

But there is a storm blowing from Paradise,

And the storm keeps blowing the angel

backwards into the future.

And this storm, this storm is called

Progress’


It is in the nature of a large organization to oppose upsetting change and innovation, yet change and innovation there must be.

- Schön (1963, p.77)
5.1 Introduction: Experiencing the Network

Having explored some wider characteristics of the streme network, this chapter zooms into the experiences and activities of people in the organisation who, as Mantere (2008, p.312) notes above, actually determine its evolution, from a social constructivist perspective making the map (of strategic posture) while navigating from their personal conception of the present state towards their desired future. Moreover, it will be found that there is a two-way interdependency: whilst the actions of people undoubtedly form the network, in many respects the attributes of the network also shapes the actions of people.

The findings are in three parts. The next section discusses living in the streme network, finding that many directors and managers experienced the complexity portrayed in the maps. The broad topographical features of the network – at least in this neck of the BBC – were perhaps common, creating similar experiences for the actors within it. Interconnectivity or even misalignments between issues was increasing: decisions on a range of subjects had to take more stakeholders’ views into account, potentially causing emergent development, frustration, uncertainty and, perversely, localisation when the overall problem could not be resolved. I term these states high cognitive porosity – many interconnected issues had to be addressed; and group porosity – many interconnected people were involved in addressing them. The section then considers the mapped stremes from an actor’s perspective. Here the issue is a pragmatic one: if middle managers are striving for a future vision, how can they do this? What factors can they alter? Stremes are categorised into those that could be influenced (unlocked), and those that could not (locked), into those that varied, and those that were constant. This allows simplified forms of their interactions to be depicted; how my stremes could influence others; and how other stremes could impact
mine. Sometimes I had no option but to fit into other organisational expectations; elsewhere, I could change my surroundings, constructing the future alongside colleagues.

Section 5.3 then investigates how human interaction conferred legitimacy onto stremes. Although some stremes were in competition, the ongoing processes observed were largely ones of integration and alignment, with effects sometimes transmitted across the network from stakeholders I had no access to. This creation of legitimacy by aligning my new ideas with existing processes and attitudes took time; forming alignments with global issues being a brake on change and progress towards the grander future vision. The legitimacy of a new idea was often seen to build through a sequence of conceptualisation, operationalisation, and formal approval, and to have an interlevel dimension, it being utilitarian social acclamation from both specialist peers and formal boards. Also in this section, the importance of narrative and symbolism in building legitimacy for change is identified. I was surprised by how prevalent this was; in the way narrative was used to show respect for the past whilst proposing the future; and in the symbolism of the naming of aspects of the change programme, or of particular meetings. The section closes by reflecting on enduring legitimacy, since many of the practical outputs of this process are still in use, sometimes in evolving, modified form. This structured approach is at odds, however, with the messiness experienced, but it is not possible within this thesis to describe all incidents from 18 months of core activity in detail; indeed, that would entail repetition. The third part of the chapter therefore relates two key episodes, one of consensus breakdown when the vision streme collapsed, and another of consensus formulation between two competing ideas for audience surveys regarding product quality, utilising the concepts discussed above. The episodes are shown to the right of Figure 5.1.
Figure 5.1 Overview of the Shared Success Project

- **Project**
  - **Top-Level Aims/Stremes**
  - **Core Stremes (Mapped in Ch. 4)**
  - **Key Episodes (Discussed in Ch. 5)**
  - **Key Outcomes for GNL**

- **"Shared Success"**
  - **1. Joint Vision Formulation**
  - **Vision**
  - **2. Joint Metric Formulation**
  - **Dashboard**
  - **3. Joint Initiative Evaluation**
  - **QIR**
  - **Brand Attributes & Metrics**
  - **Joint Initiative Evaluation**

**Streme Failure (Key Episode 1)**
- Vision paper at 1st Board Meeting
- (Modified) Dashboard
- QIR KPI a key target
- Key Editorial Indicators tracked
- Framework partially used

**Aligning Localised Stremes (Key Episode 2)**
5.2 Living in the Network

5.2.1 Experiencing Porosity, Misalignment, and Emergence

This section opens with some salient comments from directors and managers (from editorial, product development, sales, and marketing; at WN and BBC.com), on the difficulties of day-to-day management inside the complex network of stremes. They experienced an increasing interdependency of issues and stakeholders, making rational localised decision-making more difficult, together with frustration with emergent development in the absence of strong enough overall vision. It was noted in Chapter 2 that system complexity and an inability to communicate information across a large organisation could lead to differing conceptualisations of the desired future state, muddying the rationale for action. This appeared to be the case at WN, where increasing connectivity with other parts of the BBC, particularly BBC News and WW, had made decision-making harder:

a few years ago we could just make those decisions, in some ways it was easier… even though we probably made less decisions, because we were only having to think about ourselves. Now we're having to think about decisions in the context of Global News, and absolutely there are some decisions we would like to make that wouldn't fit in with Worldwide and we can't make those decisions, or equally, decisions are being made by other people which affect us and we can't influence that either (Director1(WN)).

From a streme perspective, this describes the network becoming increasingly interconnected. Other stremes were newly influencing the business in ways that could not be ignored and, at times, could not be controlled; there is an expressed need to “fit in” on an increasing number of issues; to align with them. The comment “it was easier a few years ago” harkens back to a simpler, localised, time, as did another reference to “external comment” on decision-making, “external” meaning another part of the BBC.
Sometimes, though, this new climate had positive network effects as higher-level strategies, in this case PQF, set a context for local investment which had not previously been present (Director2(WN)). The increasing network complexity had also driven a need to build political consensus across departments:

absolutely you have to have lots of people involved but if you had…. let's say you'd signed up several members of the board, but one very influential member of the board wasn't bought into it, then it wouldn't really matter how many of the others you'd signed up (Director2(WN)).

There was also a perceived need to have a longer-term, integrated narrative for individual decisions. “There should be an investment route map for the next three years, and we should have a probably better-articulated strategy…. linked to the five-year plan” (Director3(WN)).

In summary, the increasing network interdependencies meant that few aspects of work remained local; instead, they were an integral part of the overall flow, and indeed the whole premise of this project stemmed from a senior management desire for wider alignment, primarily between WN and BBC.com, but also with WW, WS, BBC News, and the UK imperatives of the higher-order strategies. At the time, I used the word “porous” in my journal (Journal 27/7/11, 11/8/11a, 11/8/11b) to describe the feel of the project’s ongoing interaction with the evolving streme network, both in terms of the complexity and number of issues that were ephemerally relevant, and the shifting specialist constituencies that transiently became involved. I term these two issues ‘cognitive porosity’ and ‘group porosity’ (Figure 5.2):
As porosity increases, managers have to process greater numbers of issues, and build alignments with greater numbers of stakeholders. This is reflected in the emails around this project, which encompassed a network of 137 people, some of whom I did not actually know. Another example was developing tapeless, file-based delivery of HD programmes from production to transmission. They came from different sources; BBC News, BBC Vision, and independent companies, each with different computer systems, metadata, and workflows. Unifying these into one delivery process that could support the last-minute demands of a news channel required consultation on detailed issues, with not only these different suppliers, but also the producers, technologists, and operations teams within them. In this project, porosity was observed to slow development as the alignments formed but could, eventually, lead to a more coordinated, legitimised move towards a common vision.

However, the complexity of issues could also sometimes increase localisation, either through lack of information, comprehension of wider concerns, or a desire to make faster, more immediately relevant progress. Lack of communication of wider rationales to departments appeared to be the main driver. In assisting with making the
case for some infrastructure investment proposals, I reflected that middle management authors sometimes didn’t know “how to frame the argument outside of their local context” (Journal 28/1/11). Arguments might be made for a technical development, or a marketing event, where departmental activity was uppermost in people’s minds: “their focus is on a localised outcome – getting the [board] paper through – rather than on a corporate one – [in this case] will it increase distribution [of the channel to new households]” (Journal 10/2/11). Comments from board members also sometimes reflected on cases not being aligned with wider considerations “there’s too much technical stuff in here, just because we’ve got lots of information…. it’s not what the decision will be based on” (Journal 3/2/11), and on the process not being seen as rational:

It’s a bad process… each individual area just comes up with things… it…. depends upon the energy or drive of the individual areas as to how much stuff gets pushed through…. people don't want to do it and it all takes too long and it's too painful (Director1(WN)).

A framework would help the conversation a lot…. some of the paperwork that comes to the board is really as formed as it should be (Director3(WN)).

The increasing complexity of the network also created confusion in understanding and communicating the basic values that underpinned the company’s rationale:

the confusion that we have, and I think it's only got worse in the last 18 months, are we commercial or are we public service…. so many mixed messages going out it's no wonder staff have no idea…. we haven't had clear direction and I don't think people have felt empowered (Director1(WN)).

It might be thought that publication of the GSR’s finding that news output was primarily for public purposes (delineated in Figure 4.4) might resolve this issue, but in a network of this size and complexity it was observed that it was imperfectly
communicated or, in some cases, rejected outright. At WN, the message at a staff meeting was that the GSR was:

‘the rest of the BBC finding out what we’ve known all along’. So the implication is that we’ve acted in accordance with this strategy already and so no behavioural change is required. (Journal 22/2/11)

Conversely within BBC.com, I had two conversations with people developing strategy who had never heard of the GSR or public measurement frameworks, and were naturally operating on a purely commercial basis (Journal 1/3/11, 14/3/11, Conversation8). Further, one interviewee felt the public rationale and implied increased porosity of the GSR was disastrous:

in the GSR, not only did I feel there was a total incoherence of what was wanted and a belief that spending more money was the answer – it sort of felt like an approach to an NHS [National Health Service] without even targets. Also there was this terrifying chart showing all the boards that everything had to go to and I just thought, this is a recipe for money to be ill-spent on nothing to happen (Director9(BBC.com)).

Communication of a future vision was thus sometimes lost in the network, being framed or simply rejected by localised conceptions.

Early in the process, misalignment between the dual outcomes sought was succinctly illustrated at a joint WN/BBC.com meeting, where a presentation depicted the public/commercial tension within the organisation, and a ‘desired future state’ (Figure 5.3).
The images visually summarise many of the considerations in this thesis. The first depicts two chunked streams, public service quality creation and commercial effectiveness in opposition to each other, reflecting the tensions experienced within the network. Moreover, the misalignment between these conceptual streams is embodied by human actors pulling in opposite directions, creating tension and stasis. The second image, of the desired state, shows the two streams/actors being mutually supportive, together achieving a complex state that they could not alone. Subsequent discussion of this presentation elicited further relevant comments. “Managing the public service – commercial tension is what our jobs are about” (Director15(News)), and “People like The Economist, or the FT, don’t have the quality vs. commercial debate in the polarised way that we do” (Director6(Joint)) were two of 12 comments I
noted that highlighted that the relationship between these stremes was fundamental and had to be managed through greater consensus. Reflecting on the day, I noted “there was clearly a desire to move into the supportive state.... but to my mind, no real mechanism to do so” (Journal 11/1/11).

The literature review noted Lewin’s conceptualisation of an environmental field creating forces that drove and restrained change, and proposed a set of forces on evolving stremes. In addition to a drive towards coordinated future vision, and restraint from exiting cultures, these included a globalisation effect, the result of taking time to correct existing misalignments, and a localisation effect when people make regionalised, but misaligned progress towards their own future vision. The observations above demonstrate some of the potentially negative consequences of these forces and the increased network porosity for a streme representing progress towards the desired future state. This is summarised in Figure 5.4. Although there was an expressed desire to move towards a coordinated state, there was no unified vision able to move things forward. Instead, the disparate, strong, cultures in the two business units impeded progress, leading to frustration. More widely, people appeared to feel trapped into resolving current misalignments between numerous interdepartmental misalignments, so a high globalisation effect restrained change. Local activities were proposed, and sometimes approved, in an attempt to make progress; but this was at the expense of coordination, making the situation yet messier. What was the way out? It appeared to be a more top-down, communicated, future vision, which would reduce localised conflict and also the restraining globalisation effect.
These issues also created the context for managers at the two businesses, who experienced incremental evolution rather than the planned development that they tacitly associated with strategy. Dialogue with a group of managers from WN and BBC.com is presented in Box 5.2:
Box 5.2: Participant Discussion on Strategy Formulation

NP: Because we don’t have an overall long-term strategy, it seems to me that strategy is basically about the way we allocate the limited resources we’ve got.

Manager8(Joint): It’s very sort of ad-hoc.

Manager3(WW): That isn’t strategy, that’s just what we do.

NP: Well, yeah.

Manager3(WW): That’s not a strategy (laughs). That’s just practice.

Manager8(Joint): It’s just building a set of cases.

NP: It creates evolutionary strategy rather than classical strategy or it’s making it up as you go along depending on whether you…

Manager3(WW): Well, it’s the latter isn’t it?

NP: You think that’s how it feels at the moment?

Manager2: No I think that’s right, and in a way that’s maybe served the business –

NP: But you could argue that in this flexible dynamic market place that you all work in, that there is no point in having a 5-year plan.

Manager3(WW): I think there’s absolutely no point in having a 5-year plan, because every 5-year plan I’ve ever done I’ve redone the next year.

Manager6(Joint): I think a 1-year plan would be a good start.

Manager3(WW): Doing a 1-year plan would be a great start. And I think that’s what we actually do need.

Manager6(Joint): I think that would enable all the different departments as well to go towards a common purpose and a common goal. Because I think right now we’ve got between –

Manager3(WW): Are we doing distribution or are we doing HD? Are we doing multi-channel or are we sticking with analogue television?

Manager6(Joint): Yeah.

Manager3(WW): What are we going to do?

Manager6(Joint): We could combine our resources to get there quicker and more effectively.

Manager3(WW): If we were all pointing in the same direction.
It is noticeable here that participants felt that progress unfolded in a messy, processual manner: “it’s very sort of ad-hoc” (Manager8(Joint)), with Manager3(WW) agreeing that “it’s making it up as you go along” (NP), but, positively “maybe that’s served the business” (Manager2). Whilst this may be a reasonable response to the environment, for three managers (2,3,8) this process was not ‘Strategy’, which they implicitly equated with a coherent longer-term plan, but was taking place at a more pragmatic, tactical level. Greater alignment, it was perceived, could lead to faster results: not a five-year plan, but at least a one-year plan, could create “a common purpose and a common goal” (Manager6(Joint)). Thus, the discussion appears to reveal a sense that a long-term plan was too rigid, but that some greater unification of vision and purpose was desired, recalling the “simultaneous loose-tight properties” of Peters and Waterman (1982, p.318). These people also perceived that individuals or departments had different visions of the desired future state, and that this mismatch was an impediment, slowing progress to reaching any given goal or implementing change. The sense that a one-year plan would be useful appeared to show that even short-term coherence, in terms of a unified vision, was not perceived, too many conflicting stremes being in play.

I, too, felt these pressures of expedient emergent development whilst an overall vision was clarified and communicated, and I also reflected on the extent to which any strategy was really ‘planned’ in this complex streme network. Whilst the overall system appeared processual, the degree to which I perceived particular change stremes as being planned or emergent depended on a number of factors. The processes that I was involved in and could influence felt more emergent, in that they took place over time, and involved ongoing negotiation and consensus building, with no clear endpoint beyond the desire of moving towards my desired future state. In contrast, the higher-
level strategy stremes that my work interacted with (for example, DQF and GSR) felt more like a semi-permeable black box, finally opened to reveal a defined outcome then handed down as planned. Within this box there may have been intertwining internal stremes and negotiated processes, which felt emergent/negotiated to those involved, but to me these appeared as ‘chunked’ stremes with largely defined timeframes, producing planned proposals with subsequent emergent effects during their messy implementation in a business unit. I agree with Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p.271) that all strategy has planned and emergent aspects, but I further deduced that the distinction somewhat depended upon observer/participant status, thus paralleling Quinn’s observer-dependent distinction between tactics and strategies (Figure 2.1). To the left of Figure 5.5, a chief executive sees a lower-level tactic being implemented, whilst the department enacting it perceives it as a more strategic programme. To the right, I see activities that impose strategic development upon me (the ‘strategised upon’), and on which I have little influence, as predominantly planned, whilst activities at my level that I have more control over and experience in greater detail feel more negotiated and emergent.

**Figure 5.5 Observer Dependent Planned and Emergent Strategies**
5.2.2  A Practitioner’s Taxonomy of Stremes

For a pragmatic middle manager, the preceding discussion of planned versus emergent strategy is less relevant than which stremes can or cannot be influenced, developed and aligned to move the system towards one’s desired future state. Stremes are now considered from this perspective, leading to a discussion of how they interact in the next section. I term the stremes I can change ‘unlocked’, and those I cannot ‘locked’. In addition, the maps in Chapter 4 depicted stremes as being either ‘constant’ during the activity, or ‘varying’ over time. These two attributes create a 2x2 matrix of streme types (Figure 5.6).

**Figure 5.6 Practitioner-Centric Streme Attributes**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>Varying</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlocked</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locked</td>
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The top-left quadrant is shaded; here lie innumerable unlocked stremes that could have been influenced but remained constant. They were likely irrelevant to the activation and not mapped; an example would be a process to supply Swedish news content, which I could have developed, but had nothing to do with this process. For the other quadrants, Table 5.1 lists the major stremes types observed, and positions them within the matrix.
Key stremes that were felt to be constant and locked to me are shown to the lower left. Subcultures are here; whilst culture changes over time, its resistance to change was noted in Chapter 2, and over the relatively short duration of this research, the cultural attitudes of different departments were broadly fixed considerations to be navigated. Most influentially, WN had a culture sympathetic to public values in comparison to the more commercial outlook of WW. Failing to bridge this distinction was what mothballed the core vision streme (Section 5.4). It also meant, for example, that WN representatives were broadly more amenable to UK/WS derived performance measures, as opposed to the profitability and brand metrics favoured by WW, and this distinction had to be appreciated and navigated. Another set of constant, locked stremes are those that comprise the organisational clocks previously discussed in Section 4.2.7, principally the approval clock of formal meetings and processes that had to be addressed for proposals to gain legitimacy. Other stremes in this category include existing measures, and miscellaneous processes and report formats outside of my sphere of influence, for instance the airtime sales booking system.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5.1 Observed Streme Types, Classified by Attributes</th>
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<td>Observed Streme Types, Classified by Attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>Unlocked (to change agent, within timeframe)</td>
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The greatest number of stremes involved in the process were changing and unlocked, and are summarised top-right. These are predominantly local stremes within or close to my own business unit, or things I was invited to influence by virtue of my role in the process, and include the five core stremes. There are other elements; processes and report formats that were either within the business unit or closely associated with it, and local tactical developmental planning. Finally, the changing but predominantly locked stremes comprised most high-level strategic developments, the changing views of influential opinion-formers (the effects of which were felt but reported second-hand), and events that changed the environmental context; a new Government, or BBC Chair. Life for a change agent would be far simpler if there were fewer moving parts which could throw one’s own work off course, or might be influenced: there is a lot to navigate. Before considering the ways in which alignments can be formed and legitimacy conferred, the next section depicts possible interactions between these streme types from a change agent’s perspective.

5.2.3 Streme Interaction Types

As the maps in Chapter 4 showed, there were numerous, complex interactions between stremes. This section presents a simpler set of interactions based on the taxonomy just described, to see how legitimacy, the currency of stremes, might be conferred and built by actors in the system.
The first case, depicted in Figure 5.7, is the simplest form, where a constant, locked streme influences a streme of mine. In this case, if I wish to build legitimacy for my streme through alignment with the constant streme, I cannot affect it, and so I need to demonstrate alignment with it in a one-way process. Socially, I need to show that my proposals ‘fit’ into the existing context. The clearest ongoing example was that of subcultures, discussed in the previous section with regard to WN and WW, but also applicable in interacting with other departments, including Central Strategy, and BBC News, which had a predominantly UK Public Service outlook.

In some cases I symbolically demonstrated fit by repurposing existing metrics. Right at the outset of the process I spoke with the BBC’s Chief Economist (Journal 9/12/10) to explore how the existing UK RQIV framework might be adapted for international use, and Figure 4.7 showed how I later gathered a list of relevant metrics from stakeholders for possible inclusion in the GNL dashboard. In operationalising the dashboard, existing data availability and reporting systems in other departments needed to be taken into account.
Figure 5.8 My Streme Interacting with a Varying, Locked Streme

Figure 5.8 depicts interaction with a locked streme, which I cannot influence, but is varying. The position here is similar; my streme again needs to fit into the landscape, establishing alignment at the systemic level and consensus at the societal level in order to attain legitimacy – but now, the alignment, and thus the legitimacy, is time-dependent, since the other streme evolves in ways I cannot control. Examples here include many of the unfolding high-level strategic programmes. Their findings are expected to be of import, and thus there tended to be a high degree of speculation about the latest twists and turns in their thinking. Another example was the outlook of senior stakeholders in BBC News, in influencing the brand attributes that would be surveyed. When trust became a key measure for them (Journal 8/8/11), previous work with MC&A had to be revised (Section 4.2.5).
The third model is that of Figure 5.9, in which my streme interacts with another varying and unlocked streme, which can both change, in a two-way process, to develop alignment. Now things get interesting, as both parties get to contribute to constructing a new reality. The actors behind the stremes can have meaningful dialogue to build consensus, and thus mutual legitimacy, although one direction of influence may predominate. Given many unlocked, varying stremes, mostly local to my business unit, this is the most common case; I can work with colleagues to mutual benefit. As an example, in the initiative evaluation streme I was able to work with Finance teams in WN and BBC.com to agree that a 3-year ‘Net Present Value’ figure would be the common measure of financial return on investment. This suited me, as it formed agreement across both companies and was approved by the boards, and it suited finance managers, who had long wanted a consistent financial return to be applied, and were able to achieve it alongside my work (Journal 12/6/11, 16/6/11).
In cases where my streme becomes the dominant influence in this interaction, it becomes less influenced by the other streme, becoming an output of influence to it (Figure 5.10). In the extreme case, it could appear to others to be a varying, locked streme. Output stremes from this work went into company objectives, the GSR2 and TIN stremes, whilst outputs to GNL are shown to the right of Figure 5.1. I would not regard these as truly locked; they continue to evolve, although some would be hard to change; but, to some in the company, the initiative evaluation criteria became things that had to be navigated, the dashboard metrics had to be produced, and the project itself was just another fact of corporate life to be navigated.
Finally, secondary effects can be transmitted across the network as legitimacy is conferred. Numerous complex configurations could be envisaged, given the structures on the streme maps in Chapter 4, but one in particular was observed (seen to the right of Figure 4.13), with regard to two localised measures of quality being developed within MC&A (Section 5.5). If my streme’s legitimacy is dependent on the legitimacy of two or more other stremes with which it has an established relationship, it may become important to promote their legitimacy. Figure 5.11 depicts a situation where the local alignment between two other stremes contributes to their legitimacy within the wider network, in particular the two-way fit between them and my own streme. Were they to be perceived as being misaligned with each other, their loss of legitimacy would affect my streme. As an actor, I, therefore, have a utilitarian self-interest in fostering alignment between the other stremes, facilitating discourse between those.
involved, so as to strengthen the legitimacy of this subsystem, and its alignment with the narrative of the wider network.

These generic structures are simple in comparison to the maps, but they convey my perception reflecting on my experience. This approach depicts a change agent’s life as fundamentally simple: what can I, and can I not, influence within the network to move towards the desired state? In one sense, this feels like a logical incrementalist viewpoint, breaking down the problem to the point where I take rational, utilitarian action to promote my own self-interest at the expense of other, competing stremes. Conversely, though, these structures are part of the wider picture; thus it is likely to be by promoting alignment throughout my region of the system, building consensus through widespread discourse and political activity, that my stremes acquire legitimacy from the actors involved. This social legitimisation of change is discussed next, but this section has demonstrated that actors in the system experienced many competing demands for alignment, and the negative effects of them being unresolved.

5.3 Managing Legitimacy

5.3.1 Introduction

The previous section developed the idea that for a manager developing new systems, building aligned support in a sea of competing visions and narratives, some locked and others unlocked, is critical. The literature review identified change as the product of a legitimisation process (Pettigrew 1985), legitimacy being an important resource (Starr and MacMillan 1990, Zimmerman and Zeitz 2002) to overcome the “liability of newness” Stinchcombe (1965, p.148). In my model, legitimacy is thus the currency embodying the importance and influence of a streme, being akin to human political capital. It is cumulatively conferred by actors (Suchman 1995), those with more power...
having more influence, and thus is built through social processes and discourse, consensus-building paralleling streme alignment. As Pettigrew observed (1985, p.587), this building of legitimacy was proactive, as I sought to increase the influence of my work. This section identifies a number of social activities that were found to develop legitimacy, in particular the networked, interlevel dynamics of stakeholder approval from peers and boards; the incremental development of approval based on fit with existing concepts and utility; and the surprising (to me) importance of framing, narrative and symbols – being seen to respect the past, whilst moving into the future.

5.3.2 The Interlevel Dynamics of Legitimacy

It was observed that the interlevel dynamics predicted by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, pp.80-90) were relevant to legitimacy formulation during the activation. Firstly, legitimacy was derived from board sponsorship, both for the overall project, and for specific elements of activity. Following personal development of ideas for discussion, this then resulted in activity mostly, but not exclusively, at the peer level with specialists to develop iteratively a proposed solution. That was then taken back to boards for formal approval and adoption as a BAU process. This is shown in Figure 5.12, where my work forms the link between the specialists and the boards. The figure also depicts the influence of the key parent stakeholders, BBC News, and the BBC corporate centre, sometimes felt during and after the development when subsequent ratification was sought for particularly influential processes. Ultimate legitimacy was derived at the board level, but necessary contributory legitimacy was derived at the peer level, which was especially required for implementation. As ever, change formulation is not this clear cut – some board members took part in peer group discussions – but the general pattern was common.
Figure 5.12 Interlevel Dynamics and Legitimacy Formulation

- **Board:** Sponsorship and initiation
  - Me: Interlevel reflection through proposal material
- **Parent Stakeholders:** Influence
- **Board:** Approval and ‘business as usual’
  - Me: Interlevel reflection through board paper
- **Parent Stakeholder Board:** Approval and ‘business as usual’
  - Formal Board Legitimacy
- **Peers / Specialists:** Group development
  - Contributory Peer Legitimacy
- **Holistic Enduring Legitimacy**
Formulating peer group legitimacy, at the bottom of the figure, was impacted by the high porosity of the system; many specialists, with differing considerations, could become involved. Even then, their consensus could be overridden by changing attitudes and priorities from elsewhere in the network: varying, locked stremes, over which I had little or no control. A particular example was that of formulating a set of marketing metrics for international news that could be surveyed amongst audiences, as part of the brand attributes and metrics streme. This involved many specialists from MC&A, involving them in the formulation whilst building support for proposals that aligned with work in other news departments, including in the UK. A meeting of five peers and two directors from different news-related parts of MC&A was called to formulate aligned attributes (these might be dynamism, approachability, expertise) associated with the brand for GNL. A scene-setting email demonstrated the number of alignments to be considered:

[a] has his [BBC.com] brand strategy well developed. [b] has got a good handle on the overall BBC brand strat. [c] is working on a domestic News positioning. [d] is working on revising Challenging Voice for Global News.

We just need to pull these together, develop an overall draft narrative, then distill what aspects/values emanating from this narrative need measuring.

(Email 24/6/11, Director11(Joint) to NP, MC&A)

This was described in my journal (Journal 11/7/11) as “The big MC&A meeting called… to come up with common brand KPIs across BBC.com, WN, GN, and the BBC and BBC News brands. NB: THIS IS TRYING TO ALIGN THE WHOLE LOT!” (I note my use of ‘CAPS LOCK’ to express my emotions at the cognitive porosity, the complexity of the task, involved.) This was an expert group being consulted to create communally a validated solution in one area of the overall project.
and, in doing so, confer it with legitimacy through specialist approval. We discussed each area’s individual market position before talking about the appropriate brand attributes for this project, covering a flipchart with our ideas, and a table with our lunches. Director11(Joint):

hosted a flipchart session… which resulted in 7 brand attributes for the dashboard… this felt like a very positive, constructive session, with everyone from all stakeholders chipping in, and a result that appeared to be approved by everyone and I can take back (Journal 11/7/11).

This entry suggests the importance I attached to broad consensus approval in engendering legitimacy for the proposed measures; the importance of accruing specialist/peer legitimacy for my stremes. This is one, rather wide, example of peer legitimacy formulation, a demonstration of high group porosity, but it was a typical mode of working; proposals regarding the dashboard, on the QIR metric, and on initiative evaluation were developed predominantly with specialist peers. The exception was the initial work on the vision streme, where the key experts/influencers were at director-level.

Though expert communities could confer legitimacy onto proposals, changing attitudes or alignments elsewhere in the streme network sometimes impacted, and these could propagate from senior stakeholders to whom I had no access – an example of varying, locked stremes. Shortly after the MC&A meeting recorded above, I noted correspondence with the GN strategy team, who were reflecting the views of senior BBC News stakeholders in wanting a brand alignment prioritised with increasingly important trust measures under discussion in UK News, as opposed to between different aspects of the international operation (Journal 8/8/11):

THE QUESTION HAS CHANGED: GSR2 NewsCo/News alignment taking over. A flurry of emails today… questioning the brand attributes [agreed by the MC&A group], which in their view,
aren't closely enough aligned with Trust being the key component of News metrics… Not going to rewrite them lightly, as they are one of the few consensus developments so far…. They were accepted previously, but what’s now happening is that the previous concern of GSR – alignment between .com & WN – is now being overtaken… by a GSR2 desire for alignment between NewsCo [the nascent combined company] and News.

Here, alignment and legitimacy were changing over time, as remote, locked stakeholders changed the prioritised detail of the desired state. I was concerned that my group-formulated framework was derailed by a more remote network effect, although, from that perspective, a valid point was being made. Perhaps wider stakeholders should have been included at MC&A meeting, but I noted that the task had been delegated to the appropriate specialists, and that practically organising the meeting had already proved difficult. Since some stakeholders’ desired state was varying and propagating through the network, the legitimacy of the output of that meeting would always have been transient.

Another example of the desire for legitimacy through alignment with higher organisational levels showed network effects propagating even more widely. My initial proposal for this research had been to simply create a framework to appraise WN investment initiatives, but after initial discussions with my sponsors, I noted:

I started off just wanting to… incrementally impact on a local WN issue. Then it went: .com/GSR/DQF/MT/CP [.com > Global Strategy Review > Delivering Quality First > Mark Thompson > Chris Patten appointment]. So… this… is impacted on by the appointment of the BBC Chairman! (Journal 17/6/11).

Thus what I had perceived to be an issue that I could usefully address and manage locally quickly became influenced by a much wider number of shifting forces within the BBC, from organisational structures, through the role of WN and BBC.com in the context of DQF, and onward, to the perception of the organisation’s most senior
executives. This entry is thus a more extreme example of networked cognitive and group porosity, as noted by Director1(WN) in Section 5.2.1, as ever more people and issues are perceived to be involved in directly or indirectly legitimising a developmental streme. The legitimacy of my proposals became influenced by people’s perception of how they might align with the Director General’s and BBC Chairman’s perceptions; to me, very remote, locked, secondary aspects of the streme map.

The QIR measure of reinvestment into news output actually benefitted from the offstage, networked creation of legitimacy when it was positively discussed at a GN Board without my knowledge (Sections 5.4, 6.2.2), and later I also felt its legitimisation would be assisted if I discussed it informally with BBC News, the parent body stakeholder, to get feedback and input into its design. I met with a senior strategist there who was:

v supportive about the cycle, and the QIR idea…. We had a v stimulating discussion – and the main stakeholder for QIR thinks it has value and the supporting infrastructure works. Note how for him, like [at GN], the detail of the cyclical structure is important…. QIR needs an intellectual basis. (Journal 26/9/11)

Here, we see legitimacy being conferred at the stakeholder level, that legitimacy in turn arising from an intellectually justifiable underpinning that provided framing and conceptualisation in the stakeholder’s terms.

Finally, though, it was through the boards, and the approval clock streme, that this project’s progression and outputs were approved and formally legitimised, more powerful actors having greater import in cementing legitimacy, both personally and through official processes. Approval was initially by the WN and BBC.com business units, then at GNL, and its primary stakeholder, Newsgroup Board, as shown in
Figure 5.12. These final approvals were the result of cumulative commitment over time, discussed next.

5.3.3 Sequential Commitment and Utility

Alongside interlevel activity, a developmental sequence of building legitimacy through the conceptualising and operationalising of new processes was observed that accords with previous findings. Bower observed managers making “a series of small acts [that] create incremental commitments” to positions (1970, p.69), and Johnson outlined four stages of discussion: problem awareness, diagnosis, solution development, and referral to senior management (1987, p.23). Indeed, this research could be seen as part of forming incremental commitment to GNL and its precepts.

My findings were similar to Johnson’s, with concepts and processes largely accruing legitimacy, utilitarian social acclamation in stages, as shown in Figure 5.13:

**Figure 5.13 Staged Legitimisation**

The developments of the dashboard, QIR, and the initiative appraisal framework were depicted in the streme maps (Figure 4.6, Figure 4.9, Figure 4.14). Each broadly passed through these stages of legitimacy building: a problem emerged, somewhat tacitly; a proposal or framework was built from existing concepts and formulated through consensus building; it was then piloted and operationalised; and finally approved for BAU implementation by the relevant boards. As discussed in Sections 4.2.2 and 5.4, the vision streme fell at the first fence; I could not construct an intellectual framework
that was legitimised with stakeholders. For the successful stremes, it was the operational step that demonstrated utility. For example, although there was a lot of work formulating the theoretical reinvestment cycle behind QIR (Figure 4.10) the measure could only be utilised if it could be operationalised with the finance teams: turned into a calculable financial metric. Similarly, the dashboard went through a long iterative process of monthly practical data compilation; and the initiative appraisal framework was piloted before being operationalised and approved for wider use. From my perspective it is this operational aspect that was important for long-term legitimacy, since a process needs to demonstrate utility to stakeholders if it is to be maintained and, through true legitimisation, endure. Section 5.3.6 reviews the operational fate of many of this project’s outputs.

As discussed in the previous section, legitimacy of the proposals was then cemented through multiple formal board approvals. As an example, QIR was adopted as a pan-GN target and a key measure at WN and BBC.com at board meetings in Dec 2011. It was adopted as a key 12/13 target by the parent BBC Newsgroup in February 2012, and as the primary financial target for GNL at its inaugural board meeting in July 2012. One felt that legitimisation had then been achieved, given the number of boards and stakeholders that had approved the measure by that point.

5.3.4 Narrative and Symbols

From an interpretive perspective, the literature review discussed the importance of narrative and symbols in shaping discourse, forming organisational culture (Johnson 1987), developing shared understanding (Hoon 2007), and legitimising change with stakeholders (Cornelissen et al 2011). These effects were observed at many points in this activation, particularly the need to show respect for the past to maximise consensus for future vision: a craft aspect of facilitating change discussed in
Section 6.4.2, and in framing proposals so as to make them more resonant with stakeholders. My use of existing departmental performance measures as inputs to an initial discussion group to discuss dashboard development (Figure 4.6) could be seen as symbolic attempts to frame my work within the prior narratives of the departments I was trying to build legitimacy with, and provide reassurance that I would imbue them upon new systems. Prior to an initial meeting to shortlist possible measures with the business units, I emailed the representatives concerned:

Following the board discussion, I’d like to get a group meeting together to formulate a joint performance dashboard…. I can collate what measures are used now across both businesses, and in journalism, to use them as stimulus material. Could appropriate people please send me:-

- A WN monthly management report
- A .com monthly management report
- [The] latest .com 5 year strategy
- Audience measures being used in Journalism
- [Brand tracking consumer survey] measures used in WW

…and anything else you think relevant. (Email 1/6/11 NP to WN/BBC.com group)

Thus, the future was demonstrably to be built on the past, and furthermore, the layout of the dashboard (Figure 4.8), in displaying data from both companies in similar formats, aimed to show symbolically that there was alignment between the businesses. This was felt to have an effect on perception:

I think the joint sales and P&L reporting is a significant step forward actually. Am convinced that looking at monthly performance in this way will lead us all to think about the businesses really quite differently. (Email 9/6/11 Director6(Joint) to NP)

Symbolically, it is also notable how attention was paid to naming two aspects of the project in order to further build alignments and legitimacy with departments. I originally called my board proposal (Appendix 1) ‘Activating the Global Strategy
Review’, but Director6(Joint) thought this might be confrontational to those with more commercial mind-sets who disagreed with some of the review’s public service oriented findings:

[some] may regard it as an exercise in parking tanks on lawns. To that end- not sure you should call it ‘Activating the Global Strategy Review’. Perhaps something more banal like ‘Measuring shared success in commercial news’? (Email 11/3/11 Director6(Joint) to NP)

This more consensual name, usually shortened to the ‘Shared Success’ project, was used, with my addition of the word ‘Activating’. Another example was the QIR metric, which was designed to highlight an important narrative, and went through several names with symbolic significance. It measured financial reinvestment from GNL back into production, and thus embodied a narrative of the increasing value of GNL (then called NewsCo) to its News stakeholder:

Director5(Joint) wanted a basic narrative that went:-

- QIR demonstrates reinvestment from International Commercial News
- historically its broadly gone up in good times & bad
- next year, WN is projected to… increase… investment. This is demonstrated by further QIR.

(Email 22/3/12 from NP to WN Finance, cc. GN Strategy)

I originally called the measure AIR (Audience Investment Return), encapsulating reinvestment into activity that directly benefitted the audience. However, following discussion of the concept with Director6(Joint), I recorded:

Much of the conversation was about NewsCo/News alignment. At the end of it, we’d renamed AIR QIR (Quality Investment Return), and I needed to redev the [reinvestment] cycle… with QIR feeding back into both domestic and int news…. I gave in on my personal attachment to AIR being the primary measure and agree that it should be Q[Quality], as with domestic… with AIR as an enabler. (Journal 4/8/2011)
This conversation was about whether AIR/QIR could have sufficient legitimacy with BBC News to become a key measure for the business, by demonstrating alignment between its rationale and that of its primary stakeholder. Notable here is that the measure was renamed to connect explicitly with reinvesting in quality and, by extension, the higher-level PQF strategy. This is the seeking of legitimisation and alignment in practice: I had to adapt my model, and the symbolic name of the measure, to incorporate domestic News interests locked to me. From a symbolic perspective, my demonstration of the public service value theory behind QIR (Section 5.3.2) was also presented (Appendix 3) in a framed, contextual language of public service investment that resonated with the News stakeholder, symbolically reflecting the past and noting its utility in providing future reinvestment. However, when the measure was formally adopted at GNL’s inaugural board, it was noted that the name had still not achieved traction within News, and another new name was sought that would get engender more immediate recognition. In another example of legitimisation formulation from specialist stakeholders I canvassed opinion from editorial staff and, as a result, proposed creating a term from the following words, which captured some aspects of its underlying purpose for different people (Table 5.2):
Table 5.2 Possible New Names for AIR/QIR

Source: Email 1/8/12 from NP to Editorial team

The words Editorial Dividend were selected, the new name again representing the underlying narrative, even though the measure itself had not changed:

Ed Div captures well the story we want to tell to the wider BBC.

(Email 6/8/12 from Director5(Joint) to NP)

Symbolically, for the legitimacy of the project, it was important that I had joint sponsors from both business units to engender trust (Section 6.4.3), and a specific symbolic achievement, I felt at the time, was that the first ever joint board session – there were separate board meetings, with a joint agenda item at their intersection – with members from both WN and BBC.com was called in May 2011 to discuss my paper on formulating a combined vision. This was an important symbol of actioned convergence; a statement of intent. I noted that the Chair:

introduced the joint sessions [as] an experiment…. The work had started off being conceptual, but was moving to practical outcomes and this was about bringing together two groups with very different heritages and purposes. (Journal 26/5/11)

This was one of five board occasions which I regarded has having a symbolic component, the others being further events that brought the boards together; the first
board meeting in New Broadcasting House, an architectural symbol of future working; and finally the first GNL board meeting of the converged company, composed mostly, but not exclusively, from board members of the old businesses. These are highlighted in Table 5.3:

**Table 5.3 Board Meetings, Showing Key Symbolic Components**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>WN Meeting</th>
<th>BBC.com Meeting</th>
<th>Symbolic Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2011</td>
<td>11/01/2011 Joint Awayday (Royal Soc. Arts)</td>
<td></td>
<td>First joint awayday of WN and BBC.com Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 2011</td>
<td>(No Board)</td>
<td>17/03/2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2011</td>
<td>19/4/11</td>
<td>09/05/2011 Awayday (Bush House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>26/5/11 Joint Session</td>
<td>26/5/11 Joint Session</td>
<td>First joint session between WN and BBC.com boards, to discuss vision paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
<td>16/06/2011</td>
<td>16/06/2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>25/7/11</td>
<td>21/7/11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2011</td>
<td>19/10/2011 Joint Session</td>
<td>19/10/2011 Joint Session</td>
<td>First meeting held at New Broadcasting House, the future location of converged news production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
<td>23/11/2011 Joint Awayday (Centrepoint)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint session (Departments present Joint Manifestos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2011</td>
<td>20/12/11</td>
<td>15/12/11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 2012</td>
<td>31/7/12 First GNL Board</td>
<td></td>
<td>First GNL Board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table also notes another deliberate use of symbols. This was my request for different departments to each produce manifestos for parallel working for presentation at the joint November 2011 awayday. The morning session began with a marketing presentation, about which I noted the importance of common language and narrative:

This is the first time I’ve seen WN & .com [audience demographics] presented as one target group, all looking at int. [international] news. We’ve agreed a language!.... The presentation ends in a JOINT proposed brand narrative. (Journal 23/11/11)

Indeed, narrative alignment was explicit following the presentation; Director5(Joint) asked “is the [brand] offer congruent with the BBC and News?”, with Director11(Joint) affirming that “the narrative is congruent with the BBC News UK brand, and the BBC master-brand.” The sales presentation was “Also talking across the piece in common formats, and comparing/contrasting… across platforms” (Journal 23/11/11). It was this common formatting of departmental presentations that, I felt, demonstrated that alignment was forming, often independently of this project, the day-long meeting representing a major step forward in terms of congruence. Here were different business units using similar symbols and languages to facilitate alignment, and to seek group buy-in – legitimacy – for their proposals.

I briefly note one other proactive event that I saw as largely symbolic and about building alignments through congruent narratives. A key aspect of the activation demonstrated by the streme maps is that the process was overwhelmingly internally focused. A rare external-facing moment was the commissioning of an external consultant by the strategy team to write a discussion paper on the philosophical underpinning of the concept of Public Value, as used elsewhere in UK public organisations (Section 4.2.4). The purpose was to provide additional theoretical justification to the GSR2 strategy group and other senior stakeholders for the site-
specific metrics I was developing. The paper was a symbol of alignment with commonly accepted external public value measures and the narrative that underpinned them elsewhere, although the extent to which it swayed the discussion is unclear to me as any debate took place offstage.

5.3.5 Output and Exchange

The issue of networked legitimacy impacting my streams has already been discussed; conversely, several months into the activation, I began to observe that both my work and I were being asked to feed into related streams. This may have been a reflection that it had amassed enough legitimacy in my part of the network to have an effect elsewhere, or simply that the amount of parallel work on these topics was increasing. The first time I observed this was when the planned GSR2 process began in Central Strategy, seeking to operationalise the preceding GSR by setting out governance mechanisms for the formation of GNL. Part of this work, paralleling my own, was exploring the formation of possible performance indicators for the business, and I noted that it began by taking a ‘theories in use’ approach, asserting “we’ve got PS [public service] KPIs that can easily be used” (Journal 22/7/11). Domestic measures might not have worked in practice, but this does demonstrate that alignment was again being assumed between UK and international metrics, and that using recognised metrics would confer legitimacy on the new business unit. I was eventually asked to provide a paper of more practical KPIs for the GSR2 group, recording that:

from the point of view of… the group, I am the person to bring KPI proposals, I am not facilitating the debate. In effect, I am presenting the T2 [Topic2 KPI] findings of my AR project, modifying them to the needs of this new context. (Journal 10/08/11)
My streme acted as an output on this specialist topic, but I perceived the high-level GSR2 process to have greater overall legitimacy, in that it was duplicating much of my work (for instance on the vision streme, by this point stalled at my level) but with the backing and involvement of more senior stakeholders from the core BBC. Nevertheless, this was an example of mutual legitimacy transfer – my streme benefitting from association with GSR2, and GSR2, in great Blue Peter ‘here’s one we prepared earlier’ tradition, obtaining pre-aligned KPIs by inheriting from my work. The process subsequently reported into various stakeholder boards: another component, this time from Central Strategy, into the overall alignment forming incremental commitment to GNL’s formation.

In another case of legitimacy transfer a further piece of BBC strategy work, TIN, followed on from GSR2, becoming the key prelude to the merging of WN and BBC.com. In March 2012, I noted how TIN’s own legitimacy was being (marginally) increased by building alignment with my previous work, at least in one specialised respect. The group was looking at measuring returns from international public service news, and we were able to agree on a mechanism by which their work could become a special case of my more generalised return model, that also took commercial service return into account. Thus we were able to conceptually unify the two models, and present an aligned, coherent message to stakeholders. I noted:

I suppose [TIN] was building narrative legitimacy… by seeking if I had any insight. The core thing we agreed was that [TIN’s] public measures should be common across all outlets, and the format of the vert [vertical, financial] axis. I will change my PS [public service] score system if [Manager14(GN)] comes up with a better one! Then for commercial… proposals, you add the vertical axis to form the 2x2. Hence we got alignment across PS & CS [commercial services] in GN, generalisability from the specific PS to the more complex CS case, and mutual legitimacy in that we’ll both be saying the same thing about this in the future in diff forums. (Journal 7/03/12).
Here, there is mutual interaction and legitimacy building taking place but, as is often the case, it was a momentary interaction, a phone call. I do not know if these concepts were reflected offstage within the output of the process, although TIN appeared to succeed and engender actual structural change in a way that preceding efforts had not. It was satisfying to discuss the broadening of a local model into a new area to bring unification. The commercial services were viewed as a generalisation of the public services, moving from one axis of performance measurement to two, but built on the same, aligned rationales.

5.3.6 Enduring Legitimacy: The Fates of the Stremes

The preceding discussion and Figure 5.12 noted that a key stage for legitimacy accrual was formal legitimisation when the relevant boards approved a process for it to become BAU, but true legitimacy involves a concept becoming taken for granted and enduring (Cornelissen et al 2011). Aside from the investments that were approved, all of which were enacted, the practical fates of the key outputs of the core project, at the time of writing (November 2013), are summarised in Table 5.4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Streme</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Fate as at November 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>GNL board paper (limited output)</td>
<td>GNL operating according to vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dashboard</td>
<td>Dashboard of Measures</td>
<td>In use, somewhat modified by new actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QIR</td>
<td>QIR Measure</td>
<td>Tracked as a key target, called ‘Editorial Dividend’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Attributes and Metrics</td>
<td>Key Editorial Indicator Brand Metrics</td>
<td>In use and regularly tracked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative Appraisal</td>
<td>Investment Appraisal Template</td>
<td>Used for all investments, although some aspects have little impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investment Appraisal 2x2 Matrix</td>
<td>Forgotten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GNL was functioning as a business unit, built on a common vision, although only a part of that vision was derived from this work. The key brand and reinvestment performance measures were regularly tracked and reported through a somewhat modified form of the dashboard. The initiative appraisal template was used for all initiative proposals, although the 2x2 portfolio matrix had been dropped, its perceived utility presumably not justifying the workload needed to maintain it. I had left these processes behind, so the fates of the stremes were in others’ hands; I depicted at the right of Figure 5.12 that I saw their sustained use as a product of the views of both peers and board members.

5.4 Key Episode 1: Legitimacy Breakdown: (Failing to) Agree a Vision

A number of activities observed in building legitimacy for change have been discussed in this chapter. Two key episodes during the activation are now discussed, to portray a more integrated view using some ideas already presented, including the forces on, and classification of, the relevant stremes, how stremes competed and aligned, and how legitimacy developed. The first episode, from the top-left of the vision streme map, Figure 4.5, concerns not legitimacy building, but legitimacy breakdown. This was a major setback, and since much of this thesis concerns consensus-building and alignment formulation, it is helpful to illustrate what prevented all the stremes merging into a harmonious state. In essence, I was seeking to form alignments between two very different subcultures, with no agreed vision on the way forward. I made proposals about desired profitability, and the nature of the metrics to be used, but these issues were essentially proxies for the cultural misalignment, and my ideas could not gain enough legitimacy to be carried forward locally, conflicting as they did with some stakeholder’s perceptions not only of the desired future state, but in some ways of the
current state. My work stalled; and it was higher-level offstage activity elsewhere that had the legitimacy to force resolution, with the creation of GNL.

I began work on this topic through my early conversations (Conversations 6-12) with the majority of the board directors across WN and BBC.com. I sought their views on the desired future state following the GSR’s call for cross-platform working. As indicated by the symbolic renaming of the project (Section 5.3.4), this was a sensitive issue, given the different GN and WW subcultures, their different perceptions of the import of the GSR findings (Section 5.2.1), and different conceptions of the current system state. My key concern, professionally and academically, was accurately reflecting opinions back to the boards. There were areas of agreement, such as brand positioning, but also two related difficulties: levels of future profitability versus reinvestment, and the prioritisation of metrics; the commercial measures more aligned with WW culture vying for influence with the public performance measures more in keeping with GN/UK News. I sought alignment between these and the GSR outcomes.

The forces impacting on ‘my’ core vision streme at this point, and the stremes with which interacted, are summarised in Figure 5.14. Two strong, misaligned subcultures were espoused by board directors, all of whom wanted the new company to reflect their existing departmental outlooks. This acted as a high retardant force against change. So did the unfulfilled call for globalisation: the GSR had called for alignment, creating an imperative to correct misalignments between the disparate views of the ‘proxy’ issues of profitability and metrics before moving on. Any legitimised solution would need to resolve these. In comparison, the progressive forces for change were weak. There was no consensus around an agreed, GSR-aligned future vision, and none of the basic options for progress – my proposals, WW’s, or GN’s – could be carried forward locally, since none would have legitimacy across stakeholders.
Figure 5.14 The Forces and Stremes Impacting on the Vision Streme

- **HIGH**
  - Misaligned elements of Vision
    - ✓ Brand attributes
    - ✗ Profitability
    - ✗ Metrics
  - Constant

- **LOW-MISALIGNED**
  - Aligned, GSR/PS derived, Vision
    - Aligned brand attributes
    - Aligned approach to profitability
    - Aligned approach to metrics/targets
  - Varying

- **HIGH**
  - BBC.com/WW Subculture
    - Proxy issues
  - WN/GN Subculture
    - Proxy issues
  - Constant

- **LOW-MISALIGNED**
  - Aligned, GSR/PS derived, Vision
    - Aligned brand attributes
    - Aligned approach to profitability
    - Aligned approach to metrics/targets
  - Varying

### Locked
- (to change agent, within timeframe)

- GSR Outcomes
  - BBC UK RQIV Framework
  - BBC.com/WW Subculture:
    - WN/GN Subculture:
      - Proxies: brand attributes, profitability, commercial and public value metrics
- [GN board outlook, high-level discourse, and GSR2, then TIN]

### Unlocked
- (to change agent, within timeframe)

- The Vision Streme: NP proposals for convergent working QIR, Reinvestment Cycle
From my perspective, most related streams, being subculture-related, were in the constant, locked quadrant of the matrix; all that was unlocked to me was to formulate ideas that could make progress by being legitimised by those involved. My proposal discussed ‘sustainable profitability’; a situation of reinvesting in editorial output at a level to maintain profitability across a business cycle, rather than maximising profit, and also included a reinvestment model designed to formulate consensus. Rather than prioritising either public measures of quality and audience impact, or the more commercial measures of audience reach and value/profit, I depicted them in a positive causal loop (Figure 5.15):

**Figure 5.15 Reinvestment Cycle Presented at BBC.com Meeting**
Foreseeing this issue, I had initially discussed possible causality within the UK model in conversations, particularly with the BBC’s Chief Economist (Section 4.2.4), and so this formulation sought wider alignment/legitimacy by building on UK RQIV performance measures. He had noted that their relevance depended on the vision for the company, demonstrating why the cycle was more relevant to public value than commercial sensibilities:

I think it really really really starts from where the organisation is in terms of objectives…. that leads to everything. I’ve no objection in principle… the more public value led World is trying to be, the more the RQIV type framework would appear useful. But if the overriding objective is profitability then you’re overriding metric has got to be a cost-reduction, income-maximising metric. (Manager1 (BBC))

I often tested ideas before exposing them to higher-level organisational politics, seeking support prior to meetings, a behaviour previously observed by Quinn (1980, p.52); here I discussed my summary with Director7(BBC.com) and Director8(BBC.com), noting (Journal 19/4/11):

I repeatedly went out of my way to say that I was trying to capture and represent all perspectives, and demonstrate consensus whilst also reflecting areas where there were differences of view. [Director7(BBC.com)] made a number of constructive points [about profitability] (which I’ll incorporate) and requests for clarification. But he thought the paper was sound, and ‘there weren’t any sharp intakes of breath’.

However, the difficulty of formulating agreement between subcultures (and the practical difficulties of democracy in AR) arose at a May BBC.com meeting. Some elements of vision could be aligned, for instance the brand positions, but:
When I spoke about [levels of] profitability… (Director13(BBC.com)) immediately interrupted and asked ‘why is this still the question’, as though it had been resolved yonks ago. But… the ensuing disco [discussion] showed that it is not agreed. (Journal 9/5/11)

My term ‘sustainable profitability’ sparked spirited debate. It was described by one participant (Director13(BBC.com)) as “meaningless”, although others demurred and one (Director7(BBC.com)) spoke of “a need to seek consensus” on it. I wrote in my journal entry that this “Quickly showed that despite my interviews and attempts to find compromise, there is not a single shared vision for success”, even though the majority appeared to be supportive of the proposed model. I next presented the reinvestment cycle, but this attempt at consensus formulation also failed. It was described by one very commercially-orientated participant (Director9(BBC.com)) “as an ‘unhelpful UK model’ [and]… strongly rejected” (Journal 9/5/11), since, as he had stated in our earlier conversation, the funding model was different: “I would have a strong rejection of RQIV as a measure because I think… ‘reach’ as a concept is embedded in the universality of the licence fee within the UK” (Director9(BBC.com)). Even measuring quality caused some concern: “Quality is a wholly subjective thing. I think we should look to measurable issues about what impact we’re having on the audience” (Director9(BBC.com). Another (Director13(BBC.com)) reaffirmed that quality measures “have to be output measures”, and proposed using the proprietary brand measures already used by WW. Conversely, a WN director (Director6(Joint)) spoke up for the UK measures: “These are commercial businesses owned by a public service BBC. Being able to demonstrate that we deliver on the public purposes is important… [WW brand measures] could feel culturally distant.” To me, both sets of metrics felt like output measures of quality, but “people are very protective about them” (Journal 9/5/11).
Here, two alternate narratives were expressed from two ‘churches’, each relying on theories in use to address a new situational context (the formation of GNL). Each proposed preferred mechanisms that were symbols to carry their cultural values into the new company, increasing its legitimacy with their stakeholders, BBC News or WW, and altering the practicalities of its operation. From an AR perspective, the ability of key stakeholders to veto, or at least stall, what appeared to be majority consensus is also apparent. I had insufficient legitimacy or political capital to force agreement. There was "not enough corporate buy in" to validate my proposal, Director3(WN) told me afterwards (Journal 9/5/11), and I reflected:

I was surprised by the level of agreement in interviews, and how fast it seemed to fall apart once all in room… There is NO shared desired state: on profitability, input v output measures, RQIV vs. [WW] framework, desirability of reinvestment as a measure (Journal 9/5/11).

Any localised profitability/measurement framework from the meeting – the WW, GN, or ‘NP’ options – could not command sufficient legitimacy from all the stakeholder boards; all were unviable. ‘My’ vision streme collapsed, so I started the dashboard and metrics stremes, where I could progress. Resolution came through the varying but locked stremes on the Figure 5.14 matrix; on-going offstage discussions over which I had no control, including the GSR2 and TIN stremes. These involved more senior people who could imbue their joint vision proposals with greater stakeholder legitimacy than I. Also offstage, my reinvestment cycle gained legitimacy at a GN board that thought it had merit (Sections 5.3.2, 6.2.2). It thus returned to inspire the QIR measure (Section 4.2.4). Over time, my localised, insufficiently legitimised proposals involuntarily became more aligned with the increasingly unifying, strengthening vision force from senior stakeholders. The retarding influences of the
subcultures and globalisation effects subsided as high-level alignment built and, a year later, GNL was formed.

5.5 Key Episode 2: Engendering Secondary Alignments: Key Indicators

This second key episode concerns formulating secondary alignment, the streme interaction type in Figure 5.11. An email from a senior stakeholder vividly encapsulated many issues in this thesis, and it is also interesting that it involved visually demonstrating somewhat esoteric, conceptual alignments to stakeholders, in a manner eventually communicated more widely. Section 4.2.5 described how an issue arose for my brand attributes streme, when two parallel MC&A stremes both sought audience feedback on the quality of news output in accordance with DQF and the GSR. The first ‘Brand Tracker’ derived from my vision streme, and the discussion recounted above, about quality being measured externally by surveying audiences’ attitudes to the WN/BBC.com brand attributes. The second streme, a focus group approach, termed a ‘Quality Sphere’, had stemmed separately from a GN objective to measure output quality (Journal 9/1/12). Both stremes, depicted lower-right in the KPI streme map (Figure 4.13), were formed by specialist peers, and had localised legitimacy from their stakeholders in the MC&A and editorial teams but, having derived from separate sources, they used different terminology and data, and were not aligned. Each would, I felt, be undermined if they did not form part of the greater, connected whole; practically my company dashboard was about to report on one set of metrics, whilst actual newsroom output would be influenced by the other set. In navigating the stremes, my concern was not which was ‘right’, but that there was a single, agreed, approach. I noted the problem of engendering hierarchical alignment, and of parallel, localised, varying stremes:
The [quality sphere] measures have been derived from meetings with the editorial team… without reference to the other strategy [programmes: my stremes and TIN]. So [Manager13(GN)] was concerned about their alignment with TIN, then I expressed concern that they weren’t aligned with the Brand Attribute metrics (which we derived across MC&A, and hence with News’s Trust/Quality) outlook.

Even when you think you’ve got metrics agreed… other areas are still running parallel processes…. [it’s] very, very hard to get outcomes to stick (Journal 9/1/12).

Given the number of issues this quote again highlights cognitive porosity. There were many interconnected issues, and insufficient information transfer across the network; the left hand no longer knew what the right hand was doing, so acted quasi-locally.

Another internal email, regarding the Brand Tracker’s fit with wider News strategy, illustrates many of the issues in this thesis (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1 ‘Brand Tracker’ Email

| From: Director of Strategy, BBC Global News |
| To: MC&A |
| Sent: 06 March 2012 09:52 |
| Subject: BBC WN and BBC.com brand tracker |

…I am extremely interested in trying to do whatever we can in measuring our performance in terms of quality/reputation at least as well as we measure our reach and I think it is great that we are investing more in this. However, I looked at the list of measures… and found myself asking the following questions (which may in part come about because of my own lack of understanding). But here’s what I asked myself:

- Do these measures link clearly to the overall BBC News Group mission and vision? (If so it would be useful to see those links laid out in a chart/diagram)
- Are all of these measures of equal importance or are some more important than others? (For example I’m thinking about [News]’s commitment to Trust above all reputational indicators)
- Are we sufficiently confident that the indicators we wish to track are not going to change as a result of the Transforming International News project? (One view would be that it would be a bit odd if we spent six months transforming our international news strategy and then decided to leave our performance indicators unchanged)
- If we aspire to have a single international news strategy, should these measures not also apply to World Service outlets (or at the very least World Service English radio)?
- How, both in principle and practice, does this brand tracker work relate to the single Quality measure reporting that [y] developed?
This director’s desired state saw quality and reputation as being as important as reach – a view in alignment with the GSR vision of tracking public value alongside commercial return across international news outlets. Whilst the email was, therefore, supportive, it is notable that if the Brand Tracker was to have value – legitimacy – it needed to align with a hierarchy of several other stremes, an example of cognitive porosity. These are summarised in the matrix in Figure 5.16. To those creating the Brand Tracker survey, most influencing stremes were locked, and so it was the tracker that had to be modified to create alignment. The force diagram in the figure also summarises the situation. The Brand Tracker (and indeed the Quality Sphere) busily made localised progress, but had low legitimacy in the wider context. The email above attempted to coordinate this localised thrust of development back into the whole, raising the globalisation imperative – thereby trading speed of development for greater alignment and legitimacy across a number of stremes. (It also raised timing issues, advising that the outcomes of TIN might change the situation.)

In summary, at this point, there were two localised sets of proposed metrics, the ‘Quality Sphere’ and the ‘Brand Tracker’, and a concern that they did not sufficiently align internally with each other, or with higher-order strategies. As a result of the email comment that “it would be useful to see those links laid out in a chart/diagram”, I set out demonstrably to create alignment that would benefit my stremes:

I was trying to align two new pieces of work… into a new framework which would get buy in from GN Strat, Boards, News., because a) it aligned with TIN, and b) it was internally congruent. This seems to me to be a key example of the need for alignment in being able to explain something to wider stakeholder groups… (Journal 6/3/12).
Figure 5.16 The Forces and Stremes Impacting on the Brand Tracker Streme

- **HIGH**
  - Misaligned rationales
    - BBC News - mission and vision
    - BBC News - trust
    - TIN
    - WS output metrics
    - WS (and wider) Quality metric
    - KPI Core Streme

- **LOW**
  - Broadly aligned
    - GN Subculture
    - WS Subculture
    - BBC News Subculture
    - MC&A Subculture

- **LOW-MISALIGNED**
  - Aligned, GSR derived metrics across international news outlets
  - Option – illegitimate
    - Continue with unaltered Brand Tracker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>Varying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlocked (to change agent, within timeframe)</td>
<td>(Own) Brand attributes Quality Sphere/KEI streme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locked (to change agent, within timeframe)</td>
<td>BBC News: trust measure High-level strategy: TIN Brand Attributes and Metrics streme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Increased Legitimacy
- Decreased Legitimacy
I am trying to create alignment between two marketing measurement models, and the higher TIN and News outlooks. None of these are, directly, my bailiwick. But they have little legitimacy at present because they are not building into a bigger picture. And their lack of alignment is reducing the legitimacy of my work, which utilises the brand attribute work. So I find that I… increase alignment elsewhere to get legitimacy myself – a sort of 2nd order, or networked, legitimacy. (Journal 27/3/12)

The structures in Figure 5.17 attempted to group the Brand Tracker attributes with the KEI components of the Quality Sphere, becoming progressively simpler and more integrated with wider considerations. Demonstrably ‘Putting Quality First’, the top two structures start with Quality, which is progressively broken down into brand attributes for measurement. The first structure used elements of WN’s brand positioning at the second level, but quickly became messy. The second version, following MC&A consultation, incorporated some developing GN brand positioning, and the KEIs from the Quality Sphere, but was later abandoned. Version three depicts the influence of the GN strategy team, who amended the roots to align with BBC News and GN objectives.
Figure 5.17 Brand Attributes Alignment Formation

Version 1: Initial Draft (6/3/12)

Version 2: With TIN, Brand Positioning, Trackers, and KEIs (12/3/12)
Version 3: Moving Reach and Engagement before Quality (28/3/12)

Survey Based Measurement and Tracking

Reach and Reputation

Reach global audience of xx

Global News Objectives Core Requirements Brand Trackers KEI

Quality

Trust

Reach global audience of xx

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

Attribute

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Attribute

KEI 1

KEI 2

KEI 3

KEI 4

KEI 5

KEI 6

KEI 7

Version 4: With Unified KEIs / KBIs prior to tracking metrics (11/4/12)

Survey Based Measurement and Tracking

Reach and Reputation

Reach global audience of xx

Global News Objectives Core Requirements KEI’s/KBI’s Brand Trackers

Quality

Trust

KEI / KBI 1

KEI / KBI 2

KEI / KBI 3

KEI / KBI 4

KEI / KBI 5

KEI / KBI 6

KEI / KBI 7

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The root layers having satisfied the need for PQF and News alignment, my final iteration (Version 4) created a simpler correspondence between the lower-level Quality Sphere KEIs and the Brand Trackers. The rightmost column identified the practical survey measures, with data collated into the higher levels for management reporting, thus demonstrating utility. Symbolically, I emphasised the alignment to the teams by applying the previous KEI name to the Brand Tracker attributes as well, creating Key Brand Indicators (KBIs):

- we flip it – the KEIs also become KBIs – Key Brand Indicators
- [The measures] group nicely under Trust & Engagement,
- These are [what] we report AND… we talk to the newsrooms about,
- The last column shows original brand trackers… but for… reporting we amalgamate back up into the higher levels.
- It’s far cleaner to explain and report (Email 11/4/12 from NP to MC&A, cc. GN Strategy).

This, in retrospect extremely arcane, development thus brought localised stremes visually into alignment with higher-order needs, increasing legitimacy, satisfying the retardant need for globalisation, and strengthening unified vision, enabling change. The layout was adopted for GN’s 12/13 staff communications, and the KEIs were subsequently tracked and reported.

In summary, parallel, localised thrusts of development were observed that, to a key stakeholder, appeared to be getting out of alignment with the network. His email paralleled Quinn’s observation that executives try to moderate those thrusts, encouraging actors to move in directions congruent with future vision (1980, p.52). A legitimisation process was initiated, which took time but brought the network into closer, more enduring alignment as a result. Here is the change agent as facilitator, configurer, integrator; acting pragmatically to modify other stremes so as to increase
the networked legitimacy of his own stremes, aligning them with his future vision. It is apposite that this involved visual alignment, restructuring, and presenting abstract concepts in a structured way that enabled discourse not only between specialists and directors, but also with wider staff.

5.6 Summary of People Findings

This chapter addressed the evolution of the stremes mapped in the previous chapter from a people perspective. The pragmatic considerations here, for a change agent, were which stremes were varying, and more importantly, which could be influenced. The interaction models were simple, involving only a few stremes, but it was observed that an important feature of the activation was its porosity: many networked considerations were involved and, by extension, so were many actors, with different conceptions of both the present and the desired future state. It appeared that other directors and managers had also been grappling with overwhelmingly emergent, interdependent considerations, attributing a lack of progress and localised behaviour to a lack of comprehension of the wider network, and the need for a clearer, more unified strategic vision, integrating public and commercial imperatives.

The chapter then considered the different types of legitimisation observed. Interlevel legitimacy came from both board approvals and from consultation with specialist peers. Symbols, narrative, and framing were frequently important in demonstrably building on past stremes, making new concepts relevant to stakeholders, and constructing aspects of the future. Legitimacy was mutually built through exchange processes between stremes: with such high porosity, there appeared to be little mileage in local progress. It is perhaps possible that a very localised initiative might have high operational utility, but even then it would take others to confer legitimacy upon it
through a wider social process. Finally, the chapter portrayed two key episodes; one where I was unable artfully to create alignment between two locked, entrenched subcultures, and their disparate desires for the future; and another where alignment between two audience measurement streams was constructed visually.

More widely, the system porosity was seen to lead to an increase in globalisation activity, with managers and directors expending resource trying to fix misalignments. This seemed apparent in three specific cases: from the conversations recorded early in the process (Section 5.2.1), from the MC&A meeting where so many streams were to be aligned (then undermined by others entering the fray) (Section 5.3.2) and finally in the Brand Tracker email (Box 5.1). This email did indeed lead to greater cohesiveness, but also illustrated how development could be held back whilst results from higher-level strategies were awaited: the change-slowing globalisation effect in action. Decisions are delayed, as Quinn’s (1980) incrementalist model depicted, whilst allegiances are developed. Building incremental commitment and group legitimacy takes time and so, in the absence of sufficient unified vision, there may be little forward progress. What development there is may come through less coordinated local imperatives and activities, managers making home-grown progress thrusts which may be directed back towards the main network flows.

My observations cannot resolve Quinn (1980) and Pettigrew (1985)’s debate over the extent to which actors act logically/rationally, or socially/politically. Like Johnson (1987), I perceive these, and the interpretive viewpoint, as differing but equally valid, and often integrated, descriptions. Within this stream network of socially constructed, evolving systems, it appears to be rational to act politically, using symbols and narrative. The complexity and porosity of the network thus impact the actions of those within the system. There is thus a delightful constructivist interdependency; the
activity of actors may underpin the network, but the network context also partially shapes their actions (Figure 5.18).

**Figure 5.18 Actor / Network Constructivist Interdependency**

![Diagram showing the interdependency between actors and the network](image-url)
6 Strategic Craft and Action Research
(Practice Findings)

We have the words ‘Done is better than perfect’ painted on our walls to remind ourselves to always keep shipping.

- Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook (BBC News 2012)

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

- John Donne (Meditation XVII: Devotion Upon Emergent Occasions 1624)

6.1 Introduction: Crafting the Network with AR

This final, practice-based, chapter of findings builds on the discussion of the craft of strategy in Section 2.5, and the principles of the AR methodology in Section 3.3, exploring the extent to which these were observed to be employed, modified, and to succeed in this porous organisational setting. Excepting Reason’s unbounded position that “there is no difference between good action research and living a good life” (2006, p.199), the AR effort is often portrayed in literature as being the centre of attention for participants. Here, however, many observations support the perspective
of Donne (1624) above, and of Gummesson (1991, p.103); this was a collaborative process within the wider network, and porosity impacted upon many aspects of the idealised AR methodology.

These findings are in three sections; the first discusses the project structure. There was a pre-step in which a problem was identified, followed by a looped action/reflection structure which, importantly for legitimacy, was linked to board meetings and thus the organisation’s approval clock (Section 4.2.7). Nested iterative work on detailed topics, with specialists, supported the formulation of interlevel legitimacy and, indeed, could sometimes dominate effort, divergent as well as convergent iteration being observed. Akin to Zuckerberg’s comment above (BBC News 2012), the process was one of shipping imperfect versions of documents for subsequent discussion and improvement. A post-step was observed after the main project, as changes were implemented, and streme evolution continued. The process took much longer than envisaged; a result of cognitive and group porosity.

Participation, democracy and learning are then discussed. Porosity also impacted here: many actors transiently became involved in a host of interlocked, shifting issues and, understandably, this project only commanded partial attention from them. My role was to form spaces for debate and to impartially link peers and boards, but it could be debated whether this was AR. I strove to act as a facilitator, to derive solutions from group consultation, and to impartially represent views; but the numerous other, sometimes transient, participants did not – they carried on with their regular work and, frankly, there was no reason why they or the BBC should have an interest in AR or that I should have high-handedly subjected them to lectures on it. Meta-learning took place for me, if not for the organisation, and the different types of reflection I noted as the project progressed are listed.
The final section returns to the craft of the change agent. Pragmatism in making progress, alongside the principled representation of views, were both seen to be important, as was engendering trust, if consensus was to be built. Facilitating the discussion of change was central, often by being seen to ‘respect the past whilst proposing the future’ through the utilisation of symbols and narrative (Section 5.3.4). Finally some of the emotional impacts on the researcher are noted, especially frustration when progress was slow, or consensus hard to find.

The needs of the wider, hierarchical, organisation modified the classical depiction of AR that sees a core group take control of its own destiny; but I felt that this research was carried out in its principled, humanitarian, spirit. Although the methodology did not always unfold in the manner described or anticipated, many interlinked facets of AR and strategic craft were observed, and worked, in handling emergent complexity, and producing practical outcomes alongside academic knowledge.

6.2 Structure and Process

This first section reviews the characteristics of the AR structure in practice; the basic Lewinian configuration, consisting of a pre-step, followed by iterative developmental cycles, was described in Section 3.3.3. Coghlan and Brannick’s version (2010, p.8) is repeated here, as Figure 6.1:
The cycle was broadly maintained in this case, punctuated by board-meeting approvals, and provided a framework that helped to structure the project inside my head. It also ensured visibility with, and thus opportunities to demonstrate utility to, senior stakeholders. This section will discuss some of the ways that the project structure deviated from expectations in literature, often as a result of streme network effects.

6.2.1 The Pre-Step

The start of the project was a process of identifying a real-world problem, outlining the process that would be undertaken through consultation with stakeholders and, finally, taking the proposal (Appendix 1) to the WN and BBC.com boards for formal approval. Hence the approach to the project itself, as with many of the processes developed within it, was one of building legitimacy through consultation, and
demonstrating the potential utility of its eventual outcomes. I, and most other stakeholders, were rich with pre-existing specialised knowledge and perspectives: whilst I was, somewhat artificially, starting an academic project, I was also intervening within an existing stream network that had evolved from its prior history. Gummesson (1991, p.105) argues that pre-understanding is needed; here, I would argue, it at least speeded up the identification of shortcomings in the organisation.

Those involved had professional expertise, and many knew and trusted me. In addition, pre-understanding helped to facilitate many discussions between specialists in enabling me to credibly represent the past state (Section 6.4.2). My observations during the pre-step conversations show that concerns regarding facilitation, legitimacy formulation, and the balance between leading debate, or allowing ideas to arise from participants, began at an early stage:

The conversation interview dichotomy: want to get their views, want it to be a dialogue, but need relevant outcomes so steer, and get them to reflect on my ideas without pushing. (Journal 13/3/11)

I am trying to make the interview a naturalistic conversation as that’s how I think I’ll get most honesty from the interviewee.

BUT I have to keep it on track, steer the debate – and in particular, though I am seeking their opinions, I’ve thought about the issue far more than they have (e.g. [Director8(BBC.com)] doesn’t know about RQIV), so I am almost cast in the role of “expert” proposing ideas and seeing if they agree, rather than letting ideas come from them – which is what I would prefer.

I also find that I am wording phrases / topics to build consensus – trying to be demonstrably even handed, seeking areas of commonality….

And I find I am stressing the need for practical outcomes… of things I want to… improve. (Journal 14/3/11)

The problem initially identified, in consultation with others, was shortcomings in the way that initiative evaluation and resource allocation took place at WN; the
correspondence with the pre-step AR approach is notable, since I had not yet decided to use this methodology. However, the first unexpected event of the project – the request from the sponsors to incorporate BBC.com – widened its scope and complexity, and also demonstrated a limitation of representative democracy in AR. This was not ‘the voice of the people’, but hierarchical, top-down problem-definition, albeit one which, I felt at the time, “Can benefit the BBC in the way I want and trigger my research into actionable focus” (Journal 24/2/11), and I later reflected had been in alignment with my consultative process (Journal 10/8/11). I integrated three factors in selecting a topic (Journal 4/3/11, 5/3/11, 17/3/11, 19/3/11); my sponsor’s proposals, issues from conversations, and what I wanted to achieve. These were combined into the proposal for the WN and BBC.com boards (Appendix 1) to establish formal legitimacy for both topic and approach. From an academic perspective, this also showed how the emergent nature of AR could limit data availability, since the exploratory data-gathering only represented WN, not both of the business units eventually involved. This was compensated for by ensuring representation from both companies in project sponsorship (Section 6.4.3) and, overtly, in the first research loop, when I deliberately sought numerous perspectives from many at BBC.com.

6.2.2 Loops and Iteration

The streme maps presented in Chapter 4 depicted the complexity of the system, but an observer would not, from looking at the stremes, be able to detect the myriad unexpected events or daily twists and turns of the project, and nor would they see any sign of the Lewinian cyclical process of action and reflection that characterises reflective learning and AR. However, nested, looped, partially iterative processes were observed to underpin the project (20 journal entries mention loops or cycles, whilst 27
mention iteration). The basic cyclical structure is shown in Figure 6.2, and closely parallels that presented (Figure 6.1) by Coghlan and Brannick (2010):

**Figure 6.2 My Action Research Cycle**

![Diagram of Action Research Cycle]

Though it was a natural, tacit decision at the time, I reflect that connecting the research cycle to the approval clock of approval mechanisms was an important step, providing the interlevel legitimacy described in Section 5.3.2 through boards and peers, linking my stremes into the wider network, and providing momentum through regular review. At the top of the figure the, usually monthly, board meetings provided physical and symbolic punctuation to the process, where progress was reviewed and a mandate for further action sought, refreshing legitimacy and maintaining an explicit loop structure. This mandate was clearly easier to obtain where there was consensus; when this failed, as in the early proposals for a common vision (Section 5.4), I reflected the problems within subsequent board meetings, and observed that I needed to slow the loop,
‘banking’ progress rather than taking action, attempting to re-establish a mandate in a more limited field (Journal 11/5/11):

Did I go too fast and try to get too much done in the first loop? – slow down, be more incremental (but then people might lose interest)... I had seen the boards as the point of agreement for next loop, but this was too grandstanding / confrontational / non reflective. Maybe it has to be done by the project sponsors after the board. This part of the loop now feels like REFLECT (myself and sponsors) / BANK (what consensus / direction I have) / PLAN / ACTION (as appropriate).

Subsequent to board meetings, the loop depicts my resultant planning action, which I would argue was a more personal, pragmatically driven process than that depicted by Coghlan and Brannick (2010). It is at the bottom of my loop, the action process, where the predominant interaction with peers took place, before progress was reviewed, and board papers written to drive the process into the next loop. Whilst Coghlan and Brannick (p.11) note that there may be shorter, nested loops within an AR project, it was observed here that the cognitive porosity of the project meant that they were an extremely prominent feature of the process; the ‘taking action’ element of the main cycle itself comprised iterative sub-cycles of activity, where the real nitty-gritty work was performed in a developmental, consultative process with peers and directors. Since formal board meetings did not govern these side cycles, they were more tacit and integrated than the more delineated main loop. Rather than these nested loops being characterised by having shorter time cycles than the higher ones, my experience was that, with the networked structure of issues, this was not always true; rather, they were more detailed, but sometimes ongoing, work, whose outputs fed into the bigger picture. Chapter 5 described many examples of the retardant globalisation force resulting from stremes needing to be aligned, and other stremes frequently threw my detailed work off track or, at least, delayed progress. This contributed both to the
localised breakdown of the nested structure, and to my transient frustrations with making limited headway. The mostly iterative nature of the side cycles is captured in some of the sample documents already presented in this thesis, which depicted how concepts were developed step by step into practical structures; the QIR cycle (Figure 4.10), the brand/editorial attribute alignment process (Figure 5.17), and the initiative evaluation matrix (Figure 4.16). In addition, the performance measurement dashboard (Figure 4.8) and the initiative evaluation template (Figure 4.15) developed iteratively. Building the main dashboard was a month-by-month iterative process with the boards, and I observed that many side iteration cycles were appearing as I consulted with the individual departments involved to draft the format of each page, and to gather the business data to populate them. This multilevel iterative structure is shown in Figure 6.3.
This pattern felt like an inherent feature of the system, and impacted upon project duration:

Here again are side iterative cycles, alongside the main work. The EMS&PAX charts [audience survey pages in the dashboard], the MC&A layer, the ATS [airtime sales] layout, the Finance layout, have all been iterative. I suspect that most things in business that have multiple stakeholders are iterative as you’re always seeking approval – which is why they can go on & on without termination. (Journal 13/7/11)

Another example of this nesting (Figure 6.4) was developing the initiative appraisal work, with the overall approach being approved by the boards, the frameworks used being built in consultation with departmental stakeholders, and individual investments being evaluated, especially during the pilot project. (Journal 8/12/11).
Whilst this multilevel layout provides an outline, it is idealised. As one gets further into detail, the more defined cyclical structure is lost, both within the day-to-day push to make progress, and within the complexity of the detailed streme network; multiple loops, topics, and considerations being addressed in parallel.

The issues around creating the MC&A audience-facing measures of quality within the brand attributes and metrics streme (Section 4.2.5) were an example of how the difficulty of aligning and legitimising detailed subcycles of the process could completely dominate my attention. I noted “KPIs are now a MASSIVE SIDE ITERATION CYCLE just taking over everything else” (Journal 8/8/11). My manager’s perspective is that many of the subcycles, although structurally subservient to the main cycle, did not feel so. The detail and porosity of the project meant that they could come to dominate day-to-day attention: strategic “hands get dirty, [and] steps
are small” (Whittington 2001, p.22), so there could sometimes be a lot of grind for what felt like little forward progress.

Allied to the cyclical nature of AR is the concept of iteration; ideally, it might be hoped that a problem-solving community would converge towards a solution. What was actually observed was a mixture of (sometimes lengthy) convergent and divergent iterative progress. Some journal entries reflect on meetings or developments that felt truly convergent and iterative; for example, a group coming together to design the investment template (Journal 20/9/11). But a description of the October 2011 board, regarding the structure of the dashboard’s audience metric page (Figure 4.8) stated:

A LOT of fruitful, iterative, but irritating (for me!) discussion…. [there is some] true iteration – and discussions were valid, useful, constructive…. but it feels like back to sq. [square] 1 on the R&E [Reach and Engagement] page” (NP), with Director5(Joint) commenting “It’s fine that we’re adapting it and learning new things as we go.” (Journal 19/10/11).

This facet of the dashboard, previously developed iteratively, was then not seen as presenting digestible information – so the reset button was pressed. More often, though, divergence sprang from elsewhere in the porous network, other streams influencing, in unpredicted ways, a solution that appeared to have been determined, but which turned out to be too localised. One example is the impact of BBC News’ focus on trust as a measure that overrode what had seemed to be a decisive group debate on brand attributes (Section 4.2.5). Another was the more fundamental structural change for the project in moving away from considering formulating common vision, as a result of that streme’s collapse and the parallel arrival of the (non-AR) GSR2 project to take work forward (Journal 25/7/11). I observed (Journal 9/8/11):
The process feels open again, not iterative and closing, as GSR2 asks different questions from GSR1.... I feel buried in the detail of issues and the [overall] structure feels shaky again. To what extent is this even AR anymore? Am I kidding myself that any of the original intent still exists?

Reported comments from the Director General on GNL formation led me to observe that “activity is going on at multiple levels and my AR project is just one small component, a low-level piece on the grander political chessboard” (Journal 7/7/11), the overall web of initiatives again impacting upon my own project. It has already been observed that the simple linear progression I originally envisaged (Figure 3.3), that the vision streme would be resolved and lead onto the KPI streme, and thence onto investment appraisal, was hopelessly naïve, nonlinear maps of interacting stremes springing forth. Whilst these are examples of other stremes creating divergence, conversely there was a particular example where an influential, locked streme elsewhere in the network, but outside the AR process, put the project back on course.

Within the process, I stopped work on the QIR reinvestment cycle when I felt it had failed to engender sufficient consensus legitimacy amongst stakeholders. Without my knowledge, it had been discussed at a GN board that brought together WN and WS directors, creating influential high-level support for developing the idea (Sections 5.3.2, 5.4). I noted (Journal 26/7/11) “QIR is, surprisingly, go”, upon finding out that it had gained traction elsewhere in the network. Months later, right at the end of the process, in an explicit example of iterative divergence at the behest of a remote, locked streme, the measure was renamed Editorial Dividend, as a result of reported feedback from BBC News (Section 5.3.4).
6.2.3 Duration and Speed

My original, hopelessly optimistic board paper (Appendix 1) proposed a five-month process, but the project took around 18 months, including the post-step (the end point not being clearly defined). This slow progress was a result of the cognitive and group porosity of the streme network; there were many more detailed intricacies to the work than I had appreciated, and many more stakeholders to consult. Even partially resolving all the relevant streme misalignments to an extent great enough to legitimise my work took time, a project-wide demonstration of the globalisation effect retarding change. Additionally, there were timing interdependencies between stremes, especially where pronouncements from higher-level, locked strategic programmes were awaited to provide legitimacy for more detailed, local proposals. The approval clock was also key, regulating the speed of the AR cycle. In principle a board meeting took place monthly, leaving plenty of development time within each cycle. However I noted (Journal 9/6/11) that since it could take at least a week to organise a meeting following a new board mandate, and that board papers had to be submitted at least a week prior to the next meeting, there was a more limited time of around a fortnight during which progress could be made within the lower half of the cycle in Figure 6.2 before attention turned to reporting back. Of course, some processes occurred outside of the formal reporting mechanism but, where approval was required, this became a constraining deadline, lest a month be lost. Indeed, the group porosity meant that the time taken to convene meetings of the all the stakeholders who would ideally contribute to a consensual AR process was a key problem. During the formation of performance indicators the board proposed that MC&A specialists from across UK and international news should come together to align brand attributes – a substantive development but one that, at one point, couldn’t be diarised for two months because of
the group of five peers and two directors involved, group porosity stemming from the
cognitive porosity of the issue (Section 5.3.2). A heartfelt plea went out:

Diary congestion is rife, I know, but please oh please oh please try to be flexible with this one….

[my PA] will have the unenviable task of herding us cats now.

(Email 24/6/11, Director11(Joint) to NP, MC&A)

I reflected: “This won’t work… it again shows the impossibility of the neat and tidy
AR process in which a limited number of actors are required, and are available for
regular meetings” (Journal 29/6/11). Indeed, group porosity was observed to govern
the speed of much of the process; developing the dashboard became the most iterated,
legitimised, and protracted element, since it sought to encompass the needs of both
WN and BBC.com, and to include a range of public and commercial performance
measures. It, therefore, necessarily involved consulting a very wide range of specialist
peers to establish legitimacy and practicality.

This trade-off between participation and progress is discussed further in Section 6.3,
but here I note that at several points I was concerned that slow process would
undermine the project’s perceived utility, and thus legitimacy. Early on, I pushed the
vision streme too fast, into breakdown, trying to formulate consensus across
entrenched subcultures (Section 5.4) entirely within the first AR loop. Retrenching,
through a board paper I described as “tentative” (Email 19/5/11 NP to
Director6(Joint)), I conversely felt the:

first sign that ppl [people] are getting bored with the project, and that it might be seen as
unhelpful… Momentum, fashionability and running out of time – I was right that I needed to be
seen to make progress in the earlier loop – and that’s what I need to do now. (Journal 2/6/11)

When there was a delay in organising the MC&A meeting above, I similarly noted a
concern that by the time it happened “everyone will have lost interest and I will have
lost credibility” (Journal 29/6/11). The extreme example of this was when I recorded the only overt suggestion, from Director4(Joint), that I abort the project, as “it could get bogged down…and the GSR2 [core strategy] project meant that it was now a sideshow” (Journal 19/7/11). I finally note that mundane events could also cause delays, especially if an entire cycle was lost, as when a key paper of mine wasn’t discussed at a board meeting since it hadn’t been distributed (Journal 29/9/11). My concern in all these entries was that the need to produce overt results in a utilitarian timeframe was in tension with the AR and processual approaches of long-term consensus building across such a large, porous group. Hence the lure of localised development to move things ahead in a specific area and, perhaps, a lesson to align the pace of a change project, neither too fast, nor too slow, with that of the wider network.

6.2.4 Ending(s), and the Post-Step

When does AR end, in a processual environment? Ten months into the core project, the December WN and BBC.com boards gave approval to transition the processes that had been developed into BAU. Knowing that implementation lay ahead, I described my project-ending board paper as a “determination, slightly artificially, to bring closure” (Journal 13/12/11), but this approval, at year’s end, felt like an appropriate full stop. I predicted:

On paper, this is all agreed. BUT I know the implementation across businesses and into teams of the investment stuff remains…. I will have to push all this in Jan. to make sure implementation is carried through…. There is no defined end to strat[egy] – this is an artificial end – it just keeps going. (Journal 23/12/11)

Subsequently, during the first half of 2012, I observed a very extended post-step of systems implementation, as the detailed processes of other departments were taken into account, and processes were introduced to new stakeholders for use. From my
perspective, final closure came when GNL formulation unified the business units, timing determined by offstage developments including TIN, not this project. One of my sponsors was appointed Managing Director of the new business (Journal 21/5/12), and GNL’s first board meeting on 31 July 2012 adopted many of this project’s outputs (Section 5.3.6). My contributions into GNL’s opening agenda item at its first board meeting marked what I saw as the actual project closure, so the six-month post-step lasted almost half as long as the core project. This post-step is not found in AR literature, and it could be argued, was the result of my trying to close the project too abruptly. However, it also derives from the nature of streme evolution; the influence and development of this project’s outputs propagate onward, even now, through the network. In this sense, there is no defined project end.

6.3 Participation, Democracy, and Learning

It was noted in Chapter 2 that participation, democracy, and learning are central to AR (Greenwood and Levin 1998, Reason and Bradbury 2001, Coghlan and Brannick 2010). These tenets were all influenced by the porosity of the streme network. Participation is central to a consultative process, and emails regarding this project reached 137 people. Some were involved throughout, others were only present for a single meeting; others I have never heard of. This is a far cry from a constant, core set of AR participants. Bringing together the right set of specialists could result in constructive meetings (Journal 20/9/11, 11/7/11), but shifting group porosity meant that it was practically impossible to involve everyone concerned in ongoing work on a particular topic; Section 6.2.3 noted that it could take weeks to get seven people together to discuss MC&A metrics. Other cross-departmental meetings typically involved around six people, whilst meetings within a department (finance, or sales)
could involve two or three. I was concerned during the early, vision, stages of the process that the focus had become too board-centric, an initial intent of undertaking more peer group discussion having evaporated:

I note that I have stopped consulting below board level, though the detailed work is starting to involve others – there is enough politics and difficulty maintaining alignment between the boards, let alone involving others who might be disinterested, and certainly won’t at this point bring influential views. (Journal 23/06/11)

Although later I brought together specialist peer groups, I felt that the representation of voices in the vision streme was mostly at board level, the hierarchical structure of the context trumping the popular action envisaged in AR literature, and cognitive porosity providing plenty of issues for me to deal with. My observations thus supported Grant et al’s (2008, p.595) concerns that time constraints could be a barrier to participation. Others’ network relationships meant that they were also ‘time-poor’ with limited availability or willingness to contribute, creating a tension with the approach of consensus-building between stakeholders. A particular example was in piloting the initiative evaluation framework (Section 4.2.6). Some colleagues were willing to pilot the draft template (Figure 4.15), whilst others, who had previously supported the overall research, were unwilling, seeing it as duplicating work on prioritising investments elsewhere – another example of parallel stremes – and thus having insufficient utility to devote time to (Journal 20/10/11). This position had to be respected, and was managed by my providing support: explaining the rationale (Journal 26/10/11), partially taking on the task myself, and asking my sponsors to emphasise utility by communicating its connection to the upcoming budget-round (Journal 10/11/11). Indeed, I did note people’s engagement growing, and them
pitching more forcefully for investments, as crucial budget decisions got closer, and the work was seen to be more influential (Journal 7/12/11).

The large number of active streams meant that it could also be difficult to get oversight and engagement with the project. Board meetings, which provided the project with fundamental legitimacy, consisted of many of the most time-poor actors getting through a wide agenda. Table 6.1 summarises project oversight at the WN, BBC.com, and GNL board meetings relevant to the project, based on journal entries:
## Table 6.1 Summary of Board Meeting Oversight of Core Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>WN Meeting</th>
<th>BBC.com Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2011</td>
<td>11/01/2011 Joint Awayday (Royal Society of Arts)</td>
<td>17/03/2011 Ran an hour late; my item 2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 2011</td>
<td>(No Board)</td>
<td>17/03/2011 Ran an hour late; my item 2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2011</td>
<td>19/4/11 Not discussed; out of time</td>
<td>09/05/2011 Awayday (Bush House) My item about 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>26/5/11; First Joint Session Good introduction and discussion</td>
<td>26/5/11; First Joint Session Good introduction and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2011</td>
<td>16/06/2011 long discussion</td>
<td>16/06/2011 Ran 45min late, so brief, at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>25/7/11 Good discussion, no-one from BBC.com</td>
<td>21/7/11 Not discussed; referred to WN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2011</td>
<td>19/10/2011 Joint Session Good discussion</td>
<td>19/10/2011 Joint Session Good discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2011</td>
<td>23/11/2011 Joint Awayday (Centrepoint)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2011</td>
<td>20/12/11 BAU approved; not present</td>
<td>15/12/11 BAU approved; good discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 2012</td>
<td>31/7/12 1st GNL Board; long discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To contextualise this summary, in my 22 years at the BBC I have never known any other issue being accorded so much ongoing board access (over 11 review cycles) as this project. Despite this support, it is apparent that cognitive porousness again impacted. There are five occasions when this project was due to be discussed but other issues took precedence, making the monthly approval process diluted or unclear. Most starkly, it is not clear that the WN board, in March/April 2011, ever actually approved the project, whilst its approval at BBC.com was briefly within an item where “two
other strategic projects were being discussed at the same time.” (Journal 17/3/11). In July 2011, I was transiently so uneasy about participation that I noted:

I have had no approval for the dashboard from .com…. (with the advent of GSR2)…. I feel the consensus part – always shaky – is possibly over, and I need to [re-] establish this [through my sponsors] (Journal 25/7/11)

Here, I surmised that participation was being influenced by interaction with a locked streme elsewhere, the GSR2 programme, although other invisible factors, or simple unavailability, may have been the cause. I also noted the consultative nature of AR as a problem, when people wanted to be presented with answers regarding the dashboard:

this is a limitation of AR – presenting all voices… means that the 1st iteration looks messy, even though I feel taking it further… would be me pushing my views on others’ input. Representing all voices is too slow – ppl lose interest – and makes for a messy narrative when they want clarity… (Journal 16/6/11).

This need to ‘propose the future’ as part of facilitation is discussed in Section 6.4.2.

In summary, it was apparent that this project was one of many issues occupying the boards, and that I had limited access, which could not be predicted until the meeting. There are thus limits to participation and, although in the literature change is sometimes portrayed as a threat, it is perhaps often, and more mundanely, a chore or a distraction that, therefore, needs continually to demonstrate its utility and legitimacy.

Turning to democracy, the more demanding calls in literature, to create more self-managing, liberated, popular action (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008, Greenwood and Levin 1998), did not suit this networked, hierarchical organisation, and are likely impossible to fulfil except in the simplest structures. The importance of involving specialist knowledge to gain legitimacy was noted in Section 5.3.2, and I observed that:
AR democracy doesn’t take account of… specialisms. Once you have an initial consultation, it invariable moves to a specialism to develop it… These people ‘own’ their areas, and are going to trump consensual debate, if they don't agree with it. (Journal 23/6/11)

However, the project did appear to support a more basic level of democratic ambition: that of creating spaces for debate that respected hierarchical diversity and, to some extent, linked departmental peer groups with boards. In particular, my AR cycle (Figure 6.2), and the interlevel dynamics diagram (Figure 5.12) show how I felt that my work linked boards and peer groups in a two-way process where, at best, the ideas and views of both were taken into account, contributed to legitimacy, and were “making the road while walking” (Reason and Bradbury 2008, p.24). There were limitations; alignment priorities could change in influence, sometimes leading to tension between aligning the two business units with each other, and aligning them with GSR considerations, as depicted in my initial proposal (Appendix 1). The BBC Trust’s desired future state, as expressed in the GSR, and my (similar) notion of it, put a boundary on the overall democracy of the process:

[There is a] tension between [the] top down objective: the trust have said x in the GSR, and consensus building…. Aim is to implement GSR – but exactly how should be up to the teams (Journal 17/6/11).

I also saw it as my responsibility, within an AR approach, to represent my findings impartially, and to represent peers to external groups, such the Central Strategy GSR2 project:

I tried to separate my views from project outcomes where I reflected both sides. (Journal 15/6/11)
I am presenting the [KPI] findings of my AR project, modifying them to the needs of this new context, whilst also standing up for the consultative process… [My aim is] be the voice from below board level... (Journal 10/8/11)

These entries demonstrated a desire to present my findings in a way that respected their group formation, and how I felt I could contribute a different, middle manager perspective. Later, I felt I took on a similar role in representing the investment aspirations of those who contributed to the piloting of the initiative appraisal matrix in the annual budget round: “My role is to raise things on behalf of the group” (Journal 8/12/11). So, although there were democratic limitations, here again I was an interlevel bridge, linking peer groups with board members.

Finally, this section turns to findings on learning. AR seeks positive learning outcomes for the participating group; but this was limited by strong pre-existing cultures, and the porosity of the project. At the outset, I deliberately outlined (Appendix 1) “An ongoing, shared process… both at board level, and within the teams that pitch investment initiatives”, and in inviting people to participate, I characterised its practical, consultative approach. However, it was not appropriate to high-handedly bore others with the philosophical derivations of AR: I part-jokingly reflected “no one would want to know about feminism and Marxism” (Journal 17/6/11). This was one small project within the streme network, so the way it was conducted was not going to meaningfully influence overall culture or attitudes to learning. Moreover, not all of those involved with the project could be expected to be “playing the same game”, although hopefully they benefitted from its consultative nature. The overall organisational state was changed by, and could be said to have learnt from, the project’s practical outcomes, as could those who now work within this encoded
framework at GNL. However, I detected no group meta-learning or wider reflectivity occurring. Indeed, I would not have expected it: this is the methodology I chose to explore, but others had their own ways of working.

Personally, however, I did observe meta-learning taking place, centrally in my journal. As can be seen from many of the quotes in this thesis, reflection took place during data-gathering, somewhat blurring the distinction between data and findings. I noted different types of reflection during and after the project, particularly in one journal entry (Journal 11/8/11), updated and expanded in Figure 6.5:

**Figure 6.5 Types of Reflection Observed During the Process**

- **Ongoing Reflection - "Navigation"**
  - often around trying to keep the process structured and moving forward (partly driven by the desire for academic success/viability)

- **Immediate Reflection**
  - right after meetings/events

- **Slightly More Structured Reflection**
  - as I write up meeting/event notes

- **Mid-term Reflection**
  - picking through recent journal entries and emails

- **Longer-term Reflection**
  - "looking for structure across the whole process, which is what has been driving me to start to pull some overall structural timelines out of the journal"

- **Post-process Reflection**
  - iteratively examining and coding data, mapping streams, reading literature, and writing up
The top half of the figure shows the first-level reflection that was taking place. Firstly, I noted a sense of overall ongoing reflection, as I strived to keep the project on track (for both professional and academic reasons). The metaphor of ‘Navigating Stremes’ relates to this first reflective mode, as I managed my way through the network; it is also the closest of the types to reflection in action, in that the ongoing distinction between them became imprecise, although I would maintain that one is always doing one or the other. The middle entry on the top row relates to reflection immediately after meetings or events, where one naturally considers how it went and what it means for the future; whilst, in the right-hand box, the mere process of recording it in a journal, and summarising key points, naturally starts to bring some structure and distance to the reflection, which is still immediate enough to be acted on. The bottom half of the figure shows meta-learning, second-level reflection on the process so far, which as Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.27-28) and Moon (2006) predicted, took place primarily through journal entries and other documentation, over different timeframes, and in parallel with the core research cycles. Mid-term reflection enabled recent progress to be evaluated and next steps considered, just lifting me out of the day-to-day complexity to take a slightly wider perspective. Longer-term reflection was just starting to take place when this journal entry was written, ten months into the process. The quotation in this central box shows how I needed to start to picture an overall structure, and get a feel for what the entire process looked like, and so started to timeline events whilst it was still taking place. These reflections had a sense of increasingly needing to step back and gauge progress as an antidote to getting lost in the ongoing, enveloping porosity of the project itself. Finally, to the lower right, there has been significant (struggling and) learning during a very non-linear process of analysis and writing up, as data has been structured and themes identified. This post-
project reflection has continued right up until the typing and redrafting of this sentence, when I find myself reflecting on reflection about reflection, and will no doubt do so right up until this thesis is complete – and possibly beyond.

Though day-to-day pressures could make entries in my journal brief or hurried, I observe that many more provide lengthy insights from the time that would otherwise have been forgotten. It was invaluable that entries could be searched, dated, and coded, enabling cross-referencing with other data. The journal also acted as a place to ‘let off steam’. This reflective writing style cannot capture the emotional highs and lows of the process in the way that more immediate, informal journal entries could, sometimes through impassioned use of ‘CAPS LOCK’. Emotional aspects are discussed further within the next section, which turns to the craft of the change agent.

6.4  The Craft of the Change Agent

6.4.1  Pragmatism, alongside Principle

This section considers some of my key behaviours during the activation, reflecting on the craft of the manager acting as change agent. The first characteristic is pragmatism, bounded by the principles of consensus formulation in the building of streme alignments. In the next section, facilitation will be depicted as another core craft, to sensitively build upon the past system state and frame proposed changes in ways amenable to stakeholders. This required trust and impartiality; not always a given when I was associated with one of the merging business units.

AR takes a pragmatic approach, measuring the value of outcomes by practical utility, and my basic reflection on the navigational process was my pragmatic orientation to making progress. At various points I observed myself acting pragmatically. I needed flexibly to change my perspective in response to events; for example abandoning the
stalled vision streme to start afresh on the dashboard (Section 4.2.2), or jettisoning preconceptions I had regarding the KPI framework required:

What perception shifts does this need from me? …ditching a lot of the work I’ve done on RQIV and trying to build support for the alt frame, if it gets used (Journal 10/5/11)

I also noted how sometimes I was prepared to override my notion of the ‘rules’ of AR to make progress. Once the QIR reinvestment cycle I had proposed at the BBC.com meeting failed to engender broad agreement (Section 5.4), I let the subject drop, since I felt that sufficient consensus had not been achieved. When it revived offstage at a GN board, I saw, pragmatically, that it could make a useful contribution, recording:

the AR project can have useful & unexpected outcomes outside its core remit (in which I had rejected it as there was no consensus between the stakeholders) (Journal 26/7/11)

A feature of the maps in Chapter 4 was that emergent activity took place in the ‘space’ created whilst awaiting outcomes from the high-level strategy stremes. This was a localised, pragmatic desire for faster progress, but led to mixed results. The wider project was useful for this:

in lieu of some new commandments for WN and dotcom being handed down from the mountain the work you have been doing to enable a joined-up view across the businesses is the most constructive way forward for now. (Email 11/10/11, Director6(Joint) to NP)

Conversely, after a board setback regarding some KPIs that I proposed, I determined that a pragmatic perspective ultimately implied building alignments between stremes governed by others:

I, therefore, see my role in this project as encouraging the work of those external projects to come together and become aligned, as opposed to doing it myself – because I can’t. (Journal 22/6/11)
In this sense, McKernan’s (2006) notion that, in solving issues, pragmatism must be married with principle, played out in practice, as I reflexively sought to formulate support for concepts across the widest possible constituencies, often through facilitation, as discussed in the next section.

6.4.2 Facilitation: Connecting the Past to the Future

Given the importance attached throughout this thesis to aligning streams through consensus-building, it is no surprise that the central change-agent characteristic observed was facilitation, as predicted by Greenwood and Levin (1998), Mackewn (2008), and Coghlan and Brannick (2010). As summarised in Figure 6.6, I found that this facilitation crucially involved both demonstrating sensitivity to participants’ concerns and subcultures by respecting the past, often through symbols, and opening up discussion of possible futures by seeking collaboration around some ‘strawman’ discussion proposals: components of a desired future vision. This is a specific example of the facilitation craft of the change agent aligning with the tenets of the methodology, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.7); “Action research builds on the past and takes place in the present with a view to building the future”.

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The use of symbols in respecting the past was discussed in Section 5.3.4, but I found it was also important to proactively shape proposals for the future. The literature review discussed the “garbage can model” (Cohen et al, 1972) assertion that decisions require problems, solutions, and participant energies to coincide at a time and place where a resolution is expected. The model’s random nature underplays the strategic intent and the control observed in practice, yet the implication that the presence of a draft solution facilitates decision-making contains a lesson in shaping conditions for agreement. I found that proposing possible outcomes to participants made discussion and agreement much easier than starting from scratch. This was not how I saw AR, but I had to change my approach, since proposing options for discussion at board level was too time consuming:

my “discussion / paper / board” cycle has failed twice and is discredited. I am now breaking out of that loop, and trying a different approach. This has [a] democratic basis behind it – I will present
something and get a group response – but isn’t action research proper as I am blatantly going to present my idea rather than let it arise organically. (Journal 17/6/11)

Later, the investment evaluation template (Figure 4.15) was created through two meetings of representatives from business units, where this principle was seen to work. The first centred around a blank sheet of paper, with me facilitating debate, and ‘respecting the past’, by proposing existing measures that could be included. At the second, I had built a subset of the measures into the draft template, ‘proposing the future’, and observed of the meeting:

V constructive & open… A true iterative process, but it takes… a facilitator to push things along… by drafting a form for discussion. Important that I created a v1 from ideas suggested by the group, and used this as stimulus material for v2. Helped the discussion a lot that we had something concrete to say ‘shorten it’, move that there, does this section help, etc… better to push forward and produce a draft for iteration than wait for perfection to spring from thin air. (Journal 20/9/11)

A similar effect was noted in creating a portfolio analysis of the initiatives (Section 4.2.6). It proved difficult to get the commercial team to identify numerically the likely financial return on an investment when details weren’t precise, so judgement was involved. The following perspective was typical:

there's no way I can peg on a commercial return at this point… with the details… here. I suspect the sales team would be hesitant to put down a figure as well.

(Email 16/11/11 Manager7(BBC.com) to NP cc Director4(Joint))

This particularly applied where the causality of a quality-led investment return was unclear, for example employing a new Chief Business Correspondent, or providing HD to a territory. My aim, meanwhile, was a comparative judgement, rather than detailed commitments:
The idea… is to narrow the field by mapping them [the investments] – i.e. to look at their relative merits – not to come up with exact costs & returns that we sign up to in blood!

(Email 28/10/11 NP to Manager4(WW) cc. WN Finance, Director6(Joint))

I found that the evolving 2x2 portfolio (Figure 4.16) indeed acted as a map, a draft solution that enabled discussion. Contributors were far more comfortable in expressing judgements about the relative placing of the proposals, jointly annotating a draft to move data points on the financial return axis (Journal 6/12/11). Group construction of the future was thus facilitated by the visual mapping of possible alternatives.

Finally, on this topic, I connected the recent past to the future when I sought support for the framework at the directors’ meeting that reviewed my initiative appraisal pilot (Section 4.2.6): presenting a summary narrative; reminding them of the original problem; the process undertaken; and proposing a solution. Key slides are in Figure 6.7:
Figure 6.7 Key Presentation Slides on Initiative Appraisal Rationale

- "There needs to be more trust, even though we work in a very political environment."
- "Our ability to make an investment that might produce a commercial return – it’s important that we find a way to do that."
- "Every single penny of profit should be reinvested in improving the programmes. Superprofits are not an area we should be aiming for."
- "People like the The Economist, or the FT, don’t have the quality of commercial debate in the politicians way that we do."
- "Managing the public service – commercial regard/looking after jobs and all about."
- "We can’t even tell the licence fee payers or another if this is to be invested.
- "We don’t act like a business – believing in something and putting money into it."
- "We need to have a higher appetite for risk."

Joint News Success Project

- Converging Vision
- Joint KPI’s (The Dashboard)
  - Joint Commentaries
  - Common Financial Formats
  - Reach & Engagement (BBC & competitors)
  - Common Brand Attributes & Impact Tracking (BBC & competitors)

Joint Initiative Appraisal

Initiative Appraisal Aims

- A Common Approach
- Outcome Based
- Align with Dashboard Metrics
- Encourage Consideration of Both Businesses
- Build a Library of Proposals
- Go Beyond Boards
- Enable Portfolio Evaluation

Crowd(?) Sourced Template

- Financial Value
  - 5 year NPV
  - [Peak funding, etc]
- [Other commercial benefits]
- [Brand equity?]
- [Profitability?]
- [Fit with Brand Attributes]
- [Strategic Fit]
- [Differentiation / Competitive Advantage]
- [Cross-Platform Synergy]

- Non-Financial Value
- [Reach and Engagement]
- [Strategic Fit]
- [Relevant across Business]
- [Mitigating Risk across Businesses]

What does Success look like?
This presentation described facets of the developing AR project. Slides two and three used quotes from directors, and symbolic imagery, to demonstrate the original problem and the desired state. Slide four summarised the three core aims and the consultative development cycle, whilst slide five reviewed the aims of this appraisal streme. Slide six emphasised that the components of the proposed evaluation format were consultatively ‘crowd sourced’, even if by a small crowd. The final two slides showed the results – the draft appraisal template and the portfolio matrix – with some (redacted) investments plotted. Here the approach was less successful; perhaps because the language is as much that of this project as of the organisation, unlike the more familiar symbols previously used. The argument seemed to be accepted, but I recall some laughter when the matrix was shown; it was esoteric and underdeveloped, so its utility was probably unclear. However, as the company headed into its annual budget round, more sophisticated versions were used to discuss priorities (Section 4.2.6), the mapping of possible futures again enabling debate.

Several journal entries contain other reflections on proactively facilitating consensus at meetings (Journal 10/5/11, 11/5/11, 24/6/11, 31/8/11, 13/10/11, 21/10/11, 26/10/11, 8/12/11, 11/1/12). Tactics included identifying areas of potential commonality between participants to build from; pushing at some topics, whilst downplaying more contentious areas; summarising a practical success and communicating it to sponsors; identifying an important upcoming meeting as an event where work could be integrated, and practical steps taken, to avoid a talking shop; finding an opportunity to pilot processes on a small scale; and explaining the story so far to encourage buy-in from new participants. Key was creating spaces for dialogue and, having local knowledge, not to exert power but to act as a friendly outsider, as foreseen by
Greenwood and Levin (1998, p.93-108). One entry relates to preparing to facilitate specialist discussion on formulating brand alignment between the companies:

I have to also be able to input into and guide brand strategy to host an AR project you need to be able to debate/steer many different specialisms and be credible…. these people know their specialisms better than I. (Journal 24/6/11)

Knowing the appropriate specialists to involve was clearly seen as important, but so were other attributes: having enough knowledge to guide and contribute to the discussion, much of which I felt, like Gummesson (1991, p.105), derived from pre-understanding providing credibility. Paralleling some of the dynamics of helping (Schein 2011) the aim was to make space for specialists to formulate proposals. Similarly, when the company boards were brought together in the second phase of the vision streme (Section 4.2.2), the goal was to present practical proposals for joint working. I observed that my role was to create a framework to open up discussion of these practical proposals:

I’ll suggest that at the end of each section [i.e. departmental presentation] there is a joint manifesto of say, 5 points that the speaker puts to the assembled group for approval…. I will facilitate, but the businesses themselves need to be made responsible for doing it (Journal 21/11/11).

6.4.3 Impartiality and Trust

The importance I attached to facilitation was portrayed in the previous section, but I felt it relied on my being trusted, and thus proactively being seen to be impartial in representing differing viewpoints. I was encouraging alignment between two business units with different ownership structures and cultures, but I was closely identified with one of them, having worked in WN for many years. Within the boundaries set by the GSR, and my own sympathy with its outcomes, I was, therefore, keen to demonstrate impartiality to the two groups. I perceived, however, an inherent asymmetry, the more
publicly focused GN/WN group being more comfortable with the GSR findings than the more commercially focused WW perspective:

One SBU [business unit] is far more in favour of the high-level aim than the other.

And I am seen as partisan – and have greater access to one – than the other.

And I have a defined output in mind – despite bending over backwards to take all views into account. (Journal 17/6/11)

My concern with building trust was not just ethical; I wanted to increase people’s propensity to participate, and the resultant legitimacy of my proposals. It was noted in Chapter 2 that Grant et al (2008, p.591) “consider relationships to be the foundation on which the success of participative action research depends” and see “trust as the central challenge”. I attempted to build trust from the outset, using introductory meetings to explain the project’s rationale. It was also symbolically important that there was joint sponsorship of the research across the business units, primarily by the Director of Strategy at GN and the Finance Director of BBC.com, and also through the joint Chair of the companies. I aimed to take proposals to both boards, although practical limitations meant that oversight was sometimes limited or tacit (Table 6.1). All board papers were jointly sponsored; I knew this was symbolically important, although I was pragmatically more concerned with actual progress:

The June board papers have gone out with just [a WN Director] as sponsor. It has to be both – to be seen as a shared effort – but OTOH [on the other hand], frustrating that it actually matters...

(Journal 15/6/11)

Another journal entry (Journal 25/5/11), and two emails (Email 19/5/11, NP, Email 26/7/11, NP), also recorded my concerns when I felt that feedback on proposals was asymmetric between the companies. Early in the vision streme, I was overtly
demonstrating my impartiality to BBC.com; I “tried to demonstrate even-handedness by critiquing WN as well as .com during the call” (Journal 19/4/11).

When the business units proposed different performance measurements based on their subcultures (Section 5.4), I was concerned with practical outcomes rather than their source, but I cannot know whether this was recognised:

I am trying to be impartial between the two – my interest is in operationalising the [GSR] strat[egy] via a joint framework, no matter which stakeholder it comes from. (Journal 10/5/11)

In summary, I felt an ongoing tension created by the asymmetry of my position between the business units, which I proactively strove to correct. Through much of the process I experienced great willingness to help and cooperate with the project. At some points, though, I felt I couldn’t escape my heritage: “clearly cannot get over my status as coming from the GN [WN] side of the tracks” (Journal 28/7/11).

6.4.4 Emotional Responses (or, small things seemed big at the time)

Two of the characteristics of the maps in Chapter 3 are their non-linearity and the long duration of the project. In Section 6.2.2, I noted how the detailed work within iterated loops could sometimes take over from core development, and in the vision streme breakdown (Section 5.4), or the MC&A brand attribute formulation (Section 5.3.2), apparently banked progress was undone. My journal was an emotional outlet for frustrations over slow progress or setbacks, the day-to-day change agent role being a more human one that is apparent from this detached writing style. Many entries and emails reflect this, including some (Journal 23/6/11, Journal 10/8/11, Journal 17/10/11, Email 22/9/11 NP to MC&A)) noting how I wanted the project to stay on track, and felt pressured when it didn’t, because of parallel stremes, unexpected events, or insufficient progress from a meeting diverted onto other issues. Following
the collapse of the vision work, and my subsequent presentation of too many KPI options for consideration, I seriously questioned whether the process could continue:

This is the lowest I have felt about this project – wondering if its over. (Journal 17/6/11a)

My learning model is failing – as I don't feel I have sufficient “supportive culture”. (Journal 17/6/11b)

Later, a lack of practical progress despite ongoing iteration, and a suggestion from Director4(Joint) that I abandon ship, caused me to reflect on the partly artificial academic nature of the core project:

I have started to find the endless iteration and board processes dispiriting given the level of agreed action that has been produced. In fact, more than once over the past few weeks, I’ve realised that I would have given up on this process by now… were it not for the academic driver to continue. (Journal 1/8/11)

I’d feel dreadful if I gave up now – I am personally committed and intellectually want to see how far I can get with producing useful outcomes. (Journal 19/7/11)

In retrospect, most transient setbacks were overcome, now seeming trivial. Positive emotions were also recorded:

Feels good when there is a minor breakthrough like this. (Journal 31/8/11)

Actual QIR note sent out. Feels good! (Journal 2/9/11)

Major QIR Triumph!!! – .com data! Feel elated that this small thing is nevertheless a step forward (Journal 21/11/11).

…as was the importance of support, advice, and encouragement from others (Journal 24/11/11, Journal 30/11/11, Email 9/6/11 from Director6(Joint) to NP, Email 12/6/11 from Director5(Joint) to NP, Email 11/10/11 from Director6(Joint) to NP).
These emotional responses are necessarily personal, but they reflect day-to-day reactions to managing within this complex, porous network. Porosity meant it sometimes felt that new issues could spring from nowhere faster than old ones were resolved, and conclusions might not be reached before transient legitimacy was lost. This project was not my full-time job, but as an insider action researcher I felt somewhat of an outsider from both of my dual roles, not fully an involved professional, nor a detached observer.

6.5 Summary of Practice Findings

This chapter considered some key ways in which the AR approach was observed to be modified, to work in practice, and to align with the crafting of strategic change. The cognitive and group porosity of the wider streme network was seen to affect many aspects of this project. In short, any given initiative quickly developed network interdependencies, and many time-poor actors become involved, all of them already dealing with multiple issues, thereby limiting participation, democracy, and oversight. Though many of the more lofty aspirations of AR to create a better, freer society or to move participants into a more self-liberated state (Greenwood and Levin 1998) feel secondary to day-to-day problem-solving in a hierarchical, commercial organisation, the overriding methodological finding of my research is a positive one. As an academic practitioner, I agree with their assertion that AR’s flexible, social, pragmatic approach was able to embrace evolving complexity, and provided a framework for creating practical knowledge, in a way that a more theoretical deep dive into an artificially isolated, narrow aspect of the issue could not. The methodology, somewhat modified, did, therefore, live up to claims (Susman and Evered 1978, Reason 2006) that it could successfully address an issue of practitioner concern; relevance perhaps
trumping robustness. Useful practical knowledge was forged through the participatory
dialogue envisaged by proponents (Creswell 2012, Grant et al 2008), although
‘proposing the future’ for discussion was found more useful than ‘blue-sky thinking’.
The Lewinian structure of a pre-step, followed by iterative, nested cycles of action and
reflection was observed and provided a useful mechanism for maintaining visibility
with the boards. Detailed work took place within somewhat nested cycles, which, at
times, could take over from the main process. The processual, evolutionary
environment meant that there was no absolutely defined project end, a significant post-
step continuing after the boards had signed off on project completion.
The looped structure also paralleled the interlevel dynamic of legitimacy formulation,
somewhat democratically connecting director-centric approvals with peer-centric
development. However, some of the wider participative, democratic, learning
aspirations of the methodology were less successful. Group porosity and cultural
differences meant that there was no core group, and amongst up to 137 participants,
not everyone was ‘playing the same game’, heading towards a unified, participant
agreed vision, although many forums for debate were formed. Locally, the
methodology was an “enabling science” (Susman and Evered 1978, p.599), but I
would argue, reflective meta-learning for myself aside, there was only specific
problem-solving, rather than any change in participants’ approach to problem-solving
itself. Perspective is key: this was a local project, in a big network of long-lasting
subcultures, and it was not appropriate nor practical for me to lecture others on the
tenets of AR. Rather, I sought to apply its values within my workplace, in search of
practical results. Another concern was the time taken in an organisation expected to be
commercially competitive. Whilst this was partly the result of porosity, there was also
a pronounced tension between the ideals of consultative democratic empowerment, and a pragmatic need for results.

This chapter also considered the craft of the change agent. Given the themes of alignment and consensus-building prevalent in this thesis, it is unsurprising that facilitation was key. In navigating stremes the task was, indeed, to formulate consensus between participants, the tenets of AR paralleling the craft of configuring strategy. It was observed that ‘Respecting the Past’ through symbols, whilst ‘Proposing the Future’ through engendering collaboration around key components of that future, was a repeated approach once earlier efforts had failed. Interpersonal skills were also required (though whether they were sufficient, I cannot judge), and having pre-understanding to shape discussion between specialists was important.

Finally, for me personally, a strong emotional component was captured in my journal, which reflected the stresses of the day. Although the unusual position of being an insider researcher could make one feel like an outsider, it was having the AR framework, the impetus of the journal, and the academic aspect of the project, that enabled me reflect, learn, and ultimately, to see it through to the end. In summary, despite some limitations, the somewhat moderated, flexible, even pragmatic use of the main elements of an AR approach was appropriate in crafting the activation of strategy.
7 Conclusions and Personal Reflections: So What?

From any single perspective, power always seems to be elsewhere.

- Attributed to Bertrand Russell (Monbiot 2012)

7.1 Discussion of Findings

This thesis explored the activation of strategic change from a practitioner’s perspective, during a somewhat emergent merger between two differing cultures. My key finding is straightforward: activating strategic change within a large organisation is very, very, messy, both practically and academically. Using a three-level structure, the research connected the broad contextual picture with the detailed actions and craft of a change agent. It highlighted the importance of portraying interdependent perspectives, by placing the change programme within the broader organisational and environmental processual context, before focussing in on the people involved, and the practices they used to promote and develop their work. The conceptualisation and mapping of relevant elements as networked, co-evolving streams provided a new way of discussing change from these perspectives, and demonstrated how porous and complex the set of evolving influences was, even in this local part of the BBC. Centrally, the research explored how not only did the actions of people shape the
network, but characteristics of the network also helped shape those actions (Figure 5.18). Strategy to me, and as observed, is not predominantly positivistic, centralised, and carried out with PowerPoint. Instead formation and implementation are inextricably entwined, being socially constructed; today’s activities both building on the past to create the future, and collectively forming an overall strategic posture.

From my middle manager’s perspective within the BBC, strategy was of a processual nature – there were multiple goals that could be difficult to reconcile and the relevant stremes were overwhelmingly internal, creating a long, unfolding process of negotiated outcomes, and a strong, emergent component alongside planned activity.

The following findings concerned the management of change inside this system, and the effects of cognitive and group porosity, the cross-streme dependencies that had the capacity to make decision-making more difficult. More interdependent issues involved more people, which, without a clearly communicated vision and strategic plan, could lead to frustration. Actors created the map whilst navigating towards conceived goals, and the work of the strategist was one of configuration and integration as the stremes co-evolved, actors building consensus and legitimacy for their work through alignment with other stremes. From this observer-dependent perspective, stremes were most usefully classified according to which I could influence, and a number of possible interactions were outlined. A number of ways of building sequential, interlevel legitimacy across peers and boards were described, and the sensitive use of symbols and narrative was found to be prominent.

As a result of the internal environment, conceptual change forces were seen to act upon them, summarised as comprising retardant globalisation and cultural effects, and progressive localisation and vision effects. Competition between narratives and stremes, for influence, was eventually overridden by a wider alignment imperative -
regional activity might fulfil localised desired visions faster but, in this case at least, wider company culture did not normally grant it sufficient legitimacy to progress.

The third set of findings discussed the extent to which an AR-based methodological approach had assisted in crafting strategic activation towards a successful conclusion. In this complex, hierarchical organisation, AR needed to be pragmatically modified, since this project was just one porous set of stremes amongst many in the network context. It, however, delivered practical knowledge and provided a frame for the emergent multi-perspective academic exploration of the process. If all epistemologies are fallible, it seems to me that using multiple, linked, perspectives and applying a utility criterion to findings is a useful approach. AR’s looped structure was beneficial in keeping the project visible to stakeholders, driving interlevel legitimacy, and helping the change agent navigate to a conclusion. On the other hand, it took far longer than expected, and there was a post-step of implementation.

Whilst I had decided to utilise an AR approach, I could not impose that upon the wider business. More idealistic notions of consultation and representative democracy were at odds with the day-to-day need for progress, and for top-down strategic alignment that satisfied the demands of stakeholders. In addition, participation was limited by group porosity; very large, transient teams became involved, and individuals had limited availability. Thus, this was not a classic AR group of researchers; rather I facilitated discourse amongst relevant participants for each topic. Successful facilitation was identified as demonstrating sensitivity for the past through the use of symbols, and collaborating to develop components for the future. Learning took place for the change agent, the organisation as a whole (through the encoded practical outputs), and for participants in forming them, but I do not believe that this localised project
meaningfully changed behaviours or created meta-learning, outside of my own reflective, academic process.

7.2 Generalisability, Limitations, and Quality of Findings
As someone with a positivistic, scientific background, I struggle with the generalisability of this research, and thus its wider implications, even though I appreciate the utility of its practical findings and I find interest in its conceptualisation. Pettigrew (1985, p.25) understandably calls for analysis of change that explores alternative input conditions and cultures, explanations and outcomes. That has not been possible: the demands of AR and DBA resourcing mean that here there is one project, and one me. Indeed, this may have been an abnormally complex case of change, with multiple business units, subcultures, and future visions resulting in an atypically large number of participants. However, although the maps of this experience are mine, conversations in this process, and my wider experience, suggest that other managers across the BBC face similar networked issues. Whilst there cannot be an absolute claim that the findings are generalisable, the BBC represents a large, complex organisation comprising different interacting departments, some with varying interests, and large numbers of middle and senior managers. Inductively, these findings are likely to have resonance for the many similar organisations that exist. Further, my research built upon the other important and established theory cited, and I hope, demonstrated the close connection with empirical reality called for by Eisenhardt (1989), thereby having some claim to trans-contextual credibility.

I attempted to set the research into a wider social context, but this was somewhat at odds with the internal focus of the organisation. Additionally, it has been impossible to capture all the convolution of the narratives that I, and others, experienced in our
journeys through the stremes. Appropriately for the streme metaphor, the research did ‘go with the flow’, embracing intended and unintended outcomes. For me, the key limitation has been that as this thesis has become more about portraying my experience, so the experience of other participants has been somewhat sidelined, perhaps more so than AR would normally countenance. This may be a fault of mine but, I feel, it is also a reflection of the pragmatic need for progress in a porous environment. Furthermore, I felt that participants’ time was already demanded by the core project, and it would be intrusive to ask more from them for academic discussion, as well as distorting the day-to-day process.

As to quality, the approach could be said to have been broadly successful, in that it solved a real-world problem, and developed practical knowledge for the organisation. This outcome was “integrated in a meaning construction process that generates new knowledge” (Greenwood and Levin 2008, p.82) through the streme conceptualisation, which allowed me to express ideas about the effects of the wider network through a framework that could be applied elsewhere. In these ways, it made some contribution to constructing a new reality.

7.3 Implications for the BBC, Other Organisations, and Academics

I hope this research can stimulate future development in three contexts: at the BBC, in other organisations, and academically. At the BBC the story continued, with the dashboard, the QIR/Editorial Dividend measure, and the brand measurement framework all used at GNL, modified by new actors. More work could be done to break down the components of QIR reinvestment, so that it not only demonstrates the value of GNL back to BBC News as a whole, but to the UK licence-payer specifically, by determining how much internationally funded activity appears domestically.
Furthermore, as the commercial activity of WW becomes more closely aligned with the BBC’s wider public purposes, new performance measures may be sought, and approaches developed here may apply.

More widely, it is becoming increasingly common for public service organisations to generate commercial income, supplementing central funding. As with GNL, stakeholders will likely seek a mixed set of metrics, and could utilise a public/commercial return matrix for investment appraisal, as developed here. In addition, a useful generalisable concept would seem to be how much reinvestment they can return into their core mission as a result of commercial activity. This implies that the QIR measure, modified for the activities of an organisation, could have wider application. The QIR reinvestment cycle, developed through this work (Section 4.2.4), and reproduced in Figure 7.1, shows how commercial activity can work in harmonious alignment with public funding, rather than in opposition to it. This visually expresses what my career at the BBC has been about, and so gives me the most personal satisfaction, as I reflect upon my work.
Figure 7.1 Aligned Commercial Reinvestment into Public Purposes
Academically, this research implies that the strategy work of the 1980s still has value, and extends it with a new approach that connects the detail of human activity with far wider systemic and environmental considerations. Properties of system complexity and human interaction indeed underpin strategic development in large companies and, in addition, they are inextricably intertwined. It also demonstrates the importance of narrative, symbolism, and shared discourse, and that incremental, but, therefore, slow, progress can be made through iterative loops: it is indeed easier to build support for small steps, on the way to developing the whole. Furthermore, AR, in modified form, showed its value in bringing about meaningful change, and may be a way forward for improved understanding between practitioners and the academic community. There is space for researchers to examine the efficacy of my key findings in other contexts, should they wish to do so. I would find it rewarding to see other practitioners’ mapping of the stremes relevant to their work, so that the topography of the maps from different industries and organisation types could be compared. It would also be interesting to hear others’ accounts as to the relevance of, and tactics used in, streme alignment.

My concern in reviewing some recent literature on business, presumed to be an applied field, is that the academic community can become insular, discussing theoretical abstract concepts and semantics until their connection with, and value to, practitioners is lost. I have huge respect for the clarity of thought of many of the authors I have read, which I cannot match, but it would be a wonderful contribution if, in some small way, I could encourage more direct engagement with the day-to-day concerns of practitioners, including through DBA programmes.
7.4 Final Reflections

The quote attributed to Bertrand Russell (Monbiot 2012) at the start of this chapter beautifully summarises my feelings as I reflect on my research. Whilst there may be some outlying omnipotent owners of powerful businesses, most organisational actors, even at a senior level, operate within a complex network of evolving stremes, only some of which they can influence. The perspective here was that of a middle manager, but I suspect the sensation of navigating through a sea of complex issues with only limited control is a common one at every level of all but the simplest organisations; although in other situations the stremes may be fewer, more externalised, or more pliable.

I have found my doctoral research challenging, academically, professionally, and personally, but learning to navigate the interconnectedness of all things has been very rewarding, and I am pleased to have made some contribution to the bodies of theoretical and practical knowledge. Within the processual context of BBC Global News, this research produced many useful outcomes… eventually; and they endure… at least for a while.
Appendix 1: Project Proposal: Joint Board Paper

Measuring & Shaping Joint Success in Commercial News

17th March 2010  (v5)

Introduction: The Global Strategy Review

The Global Strategy Review has now been published, and determined the following overall strategy for BBC international news services:-

- The BBC's international news mission is public purpose-led
- The public mission shapes a single strategy for international news, which delivers an audience proposition focused on putting quality first and ensuring ‘the best Journalism in the world’ delivered via an appropriate mix of territories and platforms
- The strategy is supported by a hybrid funding model, varying by service, with access to both public and commercial funds, subject to fair trading and state aid requirements.
- Near-term, pragmatic changes to the international news services include increased structural integration between BBC Global News and BBC.com
- For the BBC’s international English Language services, the public purpose means prioritising ‘influence’ over ‘need’.

This paper describes a project which aims to enact practical outcomes from the GSR across BBC World News and bbc.com/news, resulting from these high level goals and closer future integration between the two companies.
Aims of this Project

The core aims are:-

- To determine what would be perceived as a successful outcome from closer working between the two companies, e.g. Greater editorial coordination? Territory and resource prioritisation? Higher joint revenues and lower costs? - What would success look like?
- To establish a joint performance measurement framework: What are the key components and how are they prioritised? Is a modified “RQIV framework” appropriate? What practical measures could be used?
- To focus the evaluation and prioritisation of future initiatives across WN & .com/news on external outcomes that align with the GSR. How can teams jointly focus on external opportunities and manage any tradeoffs?

- Information will also be used to draft 2011/12 objectives for Helen Boaden’s News Group (being developed with Mark Bunting).

Thus, the desired outcome is not simply a board paper which describes a set of performance measures and objectives. It is a framework which is used and developed on an ongoing basis to facilitate dialogue, and to help to evaluate competing demands for internal resources, so that they are in alignment with GSR goals.

The project therefore aims to vertical alignment through the businesses, and well as horizontal alignment between them:-

![Diagram showing alignment between GSR, Boards, and Teams]
In this way, it is hoped to create a means of resolving some of the key debates that currently take place, for example discussing the optimum positions across:

- Free digital content distribution and Pay TV distribution
- Investment in core news and investment in sponsorable programmes or verticals
- Content investment and infrastructure investment.

**An Ongoing, Shared, Process**

**Within The Organisation**
The approach of the project will be to involve key stakeholders across the two companies, both at board level and within the teams who pitch investment initiatives. An initial round of conversations and focus groups has begun, which will help to formulate initial frameworks in April.

After that, a less formal ongoing consultative process is envisaged, as key points of concern are addressed, and the frameworks are iterated and implemented.

Monthly updates will be provided to both WN & .com boards, and agreement sought on next steps.

**Academic Aspects**
This project forms the core of Neil Parkinson’s BBC sponsored academic work, and so data will be gathered for academic use. Initial interviews are being recorded and transcribed, but individuals will not be personally identifiable and commercial confidentiality respected, in that detailed business performance will not be published. The focus of the research is on the enacting of top level strategy and the development of the organisation through this ongoing shared process, rather than on business performance measures.

**Timeline (Flexible)**

- **March:** Project Proposal, Initial Interviews
- **April:** Draft / Outline "Success Visions", KPI Framework, Objectives
- **May:** Draft initiative evaluation framework for implementation
  Updated "Success Visions", KPI Framework, Objectives
- **June onwards:**
  Reflect on frameworks in practice
  Revisions as needed

*(Source: NP Internal board paper, March 2011)*
Appendix 2: Conversation Schedules

A2.1 Pre-Step Conversations

(Flexible) Schedule

Introduce research: aims, and process. This is introductory, narrowing down the topic. Explain that it will be published, quotes will be used, but that individuals won’t be identified, and ask if it is ok to record the conversation.

How are new initiatives or investments currently appraised at WN?

Does it vary for

Editorial

Technical

Business / Market Initiatives?

Is there a structured process?

Is it an annual cycle or ongoing?

How are initiatives shortlisted?

What is the effect of an unstructured process?

What are the key considerations that determine whether an initiative gets approved?

How influential is the expected commercial ROI?

How influential is the public purpose of WN?

How influential is the “putting quality first” strategy?

How influential is the effect on reach?

How influential is the effect on impact?

Which is dominant?

Is it purely quantitative? Are qualitative measures / commentary relevant?
How are initiatives evaluated after they are actioned?

How would you like the process to change?

How would that change outcomes?

(Economist only, at start of conversation)

What was your involvement in the formulation of the RQIV framework?

In the UK, is it primarily used for service performance measurement and PVT testing pre launch?

Does it have relevance elsewhere? How does it influence day-to-day decision making, or the translation of high level strategy into lower levels?

Is it purely quantitative?

In both the UK and globally, the BBC’s strategy is entitled “PQF”.

What does Quality mean here? Is it all about output?

Does PQF mean that Q has primacy in RQIV?

Is there causal linkage between RQIV?

Can we now talk about RQIV in some different contexts: Commercial & International…. 
A2.2 Loop One Conversations

(Flexible) Schedule

Introduction to Project

Context / Aims:
Activating the GSR
Greater shared vision / working across WN & .com
Improved resource allocation through focus on outcomes at all levels

Governance
Academic / Business Duality: Research will be published. Am recording, and will use quotes but without identifying individuals.

Long term aspiration for the two companies
What would success look like?
News on all platforms? FTA?
Joined up multimedia commissioning?
Projects?
Level of profitability?

A joint performance measurement framework
How should we measure performance as a result of the GSR?
IRR / Business / RQIV?
What are the key components and how are they prioritised?
What practical measures could be used?
R Q I V

How should future initiatives and investments be evaluated and prioritised across WN & .com?

Is there a long term strategy?

How can we jointly focus on opportunities and outcomes, and manage any trade-offs?

Anything else you’d like to mention that we haven’t covered?

Thanks for your time and input.
Appendix 3: A Quality-Reach-Value Framework for International News

The Putting Quality First strategy in licence-fee funded news sees quality as closely related to trust in our journalism. This is then seen as a driver of reach, and hence public value, with financial considerations portrayed in value for money terms.

The rationale for commercially funded BBC news can be portrayed in a parallel manner, with only minor alterations:

- Value for money is replaced by commercial performance, which seeks sustainable profitability, alongside rising revenues for reinvestment, and,
- The domestic public service drive for universal reach may be replaced by a more targeted need/influence approach.

These public and commercial value chains are linked by the available returns from commercial activity that are reinvested back into quality-driven news production, benefitting both public and commercial news activity.
(Source: NP Internal BBC document, August 2011)
Appendix 4: Principles of the BBC's International News Strategy

The GSR, some aspects of which this project sought to activate, summarised the “Enduring Principles” of the BBC’s international news services as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience proposition</th>
<th>Business and funding model</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The <strong>territory mix</strong> should reflect the public mission, rather than just commercial potential. Within this the portfolio will comprise both public service and commercial territories.</td>
<td>• The <strong>mixed funding model</strong> for international news should be retained, with commercial income of critical importance (subject to proper transparency and funding separation, consistent with fair trading and state aid requirements).</td>
<td>• The organisation of all international news services must be <strong>optimised to support the public mission.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International services must seek to <strong>put quality first</strong> and be assessed against UK services.</td>
<td>• The governance framework for the new organisation should <strong>ensure that the BBC’s total international spend is proportionate</strong> and does not diminish investment in UK PSB.</td>
<td>• <strong>International and UK news services should be integrated</strong> to maximise editorial and cost synergies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The portfolio should adopt BBC Journalism’s <strong>cross-platform approach outside the UK</strong>, with an integrated online offer as one of the pillars of the portfolio.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Governance of all news must be streamlined</strong> at the Executive and Trust level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• BBC must ensure that all international online activity is coordinated with BBC.com to maximise efficiencies (i.e. WS websites).</td>
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</table>

Source: The BBC’s Global Strategy: An Overview from the BBC Executive (2011, p.5)
References


