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Title

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Abstract

The Child Support Agency Under New Public Sector Management : An Analysis Of The UK System Of Child Support After Separation Within A Next Steps Agency

Brian Sheffield

The subject of child support is one that crosses the boundaries of many academic disciplines, not least public and social policy. The formation of effective child support policy and the efficient implementation are fundamental requirements in order to sustain a fair and workable system for the provision of financial maintenance for children after the separation of their biological parents. This study considers the combination of changes brought about by the themes of new public management in the introduction and implementation of a controversial child support policy and the subsequent execution of child support legislation by the Child Support Agency. The emphasis is made on the Child Support Agency as a Next Steps Agency in analyzing its internal organization and operational performances within the themes of new public sector management. In this study comparisons are made between what child support policy was intended to achieve under the principles of new public sector management and the actual outcomes that have been realized.

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Declaration

The contents of this thesis are produced solely for the qualification of Doctor of

Philosophy at Durham University and consist of the author's original individual

contributions with appropriate recognition of any references being indicated throughout.

Statement of Copyright

Introduction

This study executes an analysis of the Child Support Agency (CSA) and considers its

role in implementing a controversial child support policy described in the Child

Support Act (1991). Particular consideration is given to identifying the CSA as an

organization and describing the experiences of its managers in performing their roles

in this area of social administration. The main purpose of the study is to evaluate the

changes that have resulted from an entirely new approach to child support policy,

with particular emphasis being made on the first decade since the CSA's introduction.

The study exposes the main problems faced by the CSA and refers to the

organizational features and operational inputs that affect the performances of the

Agency.

This is a study in social administration about what actually happens in an agency

undergoing both a transformation of type and a radical change in purpose. It is not

about the formation of policies although policy formation and the effects of policies

are relevant to it. More specifically the study is about what has actually happened in

an agency being changed from a Civil Service form into something else and, at the

same time, being given a highly contentious task to perform. The focus is on

implementation and the study relies on documentary and interview evidence to tell

the story of what has actually happened and why the agency seems to have

encountered so many problems in operation.

The effective and efficient provision of child support is stressed as a necessary

prerequisite for sustaining the well being of children after the separation of their

biological parents and in order to avoid child poverty. It was the recognition of the

importance of providing financial support for children placed in vulnerable positions

of potential hardship after their biological parents have separated, together with the

controversy associated with the introduction of the new child support policy, that

initially prompted the interest for this study.

Within the first year of the CSA's inception there was much speculation referring to

the failings and shortfalls of the new system of assessment. Many criticisms had been

directed towards the CSA and there was no shortage of adverse publicity referring to

inefficiencies of the Agency and the injustices experienced by separated biological

parents. The involvement of the CSA in family issues, although acting as an

instrumental vehicle of public policy and management, had placed the Agency in a

vulnerable position and in dealing with individuals the CSA staff experienced

responses of protest and demonstrations including life threats and suicides committed

by some of its customers (NACSA web page, 1998).

Following the negative publicity surrounding the new child support policy the initial

purpose of this study was intended to be an exploration for possible alternative

paradigms that might be applied to the provision of child support. It was also

intended to enter the grand debate as to what might represent a fair and workable

model of child support assessment.

Not long into these initial endeavours it became increasingly clear that there would be no ideal solution to this problem and no panacea for the financial problems surrounding the separation of biological parents. At best there might only be acceptable solutions, if not compromises, as to the amounts of child maintenance that absent parents should be made responsible to provide. The opinions of the public appeared to range from apathy to extremes from involved parties that were dependent upon their individual positions as resident or non-resident parents.

It became increasingly clear that someone had to financially support children after the separation of their parents and it seemed unreasonable that this burden should be directed to the taxpayer. It was not long after these initial considerations that the study took the course of analysing the new system as it had been implemented. In particular an appreciation that the CSA appeared to fit uncomfortably within this whole new system inspired a sense of purpose in removing the mystique surrounding the Agency and to provide a greater understanding as to its internal substance.

Aside from an appreciation of the involvement of human and emotive factors this study does not attempt to include detailed considerations of wider ethical issues or the circumstances of individual cases, however it identifies the effects of subjective influences on the performances of the CSA and the experiences of its staff. One of the early questions posed by the study was, why radical changes in the existing system of child support were deemed necessary.

In addressing the issues arising from the implementation of the new system of child support it is pertinent to identify the main drives for changes in both public sector management and child support policy and the overall aims and objectives that the Government had set for the CSA. Further, there was a whole new approach to public policy management that had introduced Next Steps Agencies of which the CSA was the first to be formed from first principles and this generated an interest for this study into how this was to develop changes in the whole approach to the implementation of child support legislation. As an alternative to considering individual cases and the inequities resulting from the introduction of the new system of child support, it was decided to view the policy and system from the perspectives of the CSA and its staff. The 'focal point' of this study thus lies with the medium that is applied to the assessment, collection and redistribution of child maintenance.

The main purpose of this study is in providing an understanding of the CSA as an organization and, in analysing the effects of the new approaches to public sector management and child support policy, it makes an evaluation of the changes that have transpired from the previous system. More specifically the study makes an internal organizational analysis of the CSA and its staff together with considerations of the measurements and interpretations of its performances. The question if the CSA has failed to improve on the existing system requires that analyses be made from various perspectives taken by the main stakeholders involved in the system of child support.

If the Treasury saves money in the provision of child support it might be argued that

the new system is successful, however, by questioning the effects on separated

parents such as the induction of extreme states of financial hardship and distress there

is the recognition of shortfalls in the fairness of the system. The reactions of the

CSA's customers to such problems can also be expected to affect its performances

and provide agendas of opposition and demonstrative actions to counter any attempts

at the pursuance of efficiency and effectiveness.

The wider question as to whether the new system has reduced, if not eradicated states

of child poverty, can be regarded as an extreme *'acid test'* as to the genuine success

of the new policy and its implementation by the CSA. Although the study follows an

internally directed pathway through the CSA, the external factors that influenced the

development of legislation and the operations and performances of the Agency are

referred to in the appropriate Chapters.

In order to conduct this study of the CSA effectively it was necessary to recognise the

main themes contained within New Public Sector Management (NPSM) and identify

the main concepts promoted by this new approach to public sector management.

Although NPSM might be regarded as an academic construct it is of fundamental

importance to assess how the main principles actually influence the workings of the

CSA and its identity as an organization.

It is significant to note that prior to the 1991 Act the provision of child support was negotiated through the courts and implemented by the Liable Relatives section (later Dependent Relatives section) of the DSS (later the Department of Work, Pensions and Social Security) and thus the CSA has replaced the operations practiced by a traditional State bureaucracy. This study sets out to question if the confluence of NPSM and new child support policy has resulted in a significant move from the State bureaucracy in the organizational typology of the CSA.

Although this study does not make a general appraisal of the principles of NPSM applied to other State provisions it searches for evidence of how NPSM themes have attempted to separate child support policy and its implementation and how the promotion of private sector styles have affected the internal operations of the CSA. Indeed a main argument developed in this study concerns the organizational features of the CSA and advocates that, although there are organizational complexities brought about by the flattening of hierarchical structure and the reliance of managerialism, the Agency still contains most of the features and traits associated with the traditional State bureaucracy. In questioning the CSA's resultant organizational form evidence is sought for arguing that bureaucratic processes are necessary to fulfil the Agency's tasks. Some reliance is made on organizational theories in searching for evidence of the presence of organizational features within the CSA that are associated with those contained in a typical bureaucracy. Conversely evidence is sought of deviations in the CSA's internal organizational traits from those associated with the typical State bureaucracy.

It is also proposed that the CSA's adherence to the main features of bureaucracy is in contradiction with the principles of NPSM. References are made to the classical theories regarding the features of a typical bureaucracy particularly those of Max Weber, however, it is recognised that there is no definitive empirical model of what constitutes a bureaucracy. As stated, by making comparisons with the main theoretical features of a bureaucracy and the organizational features found within the CSA, some indication of the Agency's organizational typology is found. In addition evidence of adherence to the Civil Service and its organizational culture by CSA staff and junior management is sought.

Such organizational features as structure, staffing, management and the effects of new managerialism are analysed in order to assess the classification of the typology of the CSA. This study recognises a divergence from what the principles of NPSM set out to achieve with the promotion of private sector approaches, together with a reduction in the organizational traits associated with the bureaucracy, and what has actually occurred. The question as to whether the CSA represents a innovative form of organization or just another bureaucracy is particularly important as it's roots were developed within the environment that promoted NPSM principles. If the CSA were considered as being a significant move from the bureaucracy in all its organizational features it would represent a fundamental change in the approach to the provision of State welfare.

In conducting internal analyses of the CSA an inductive case study approach is taken in recounting the experiences of its managers and, as far as possible, the study intends to use dialogues, interviews and references to CSA documentation in order to develop a picture of what is really happening within the Agency and how the changes in NPSM and child support legislation have affected its staff. An appraisal of the failings of the CSA is made in terms of the internal problems and the output results that were prompted by much adverse publicity surrounding the Agency and its repeatedly poor performances.

In the context of operational performances the main purpose of analysing the output results of the CSA is to assess whether the Agency is being held to account for inadequacies and the ineffectiveness of child support policy or whether the CSA has failed as a result of its operational inefficiency. Another main argument that is developed in this study is that the development of child support policy and its implementation by the CSA cannot be realistically and practically separated. This argument is in contrast to a fundamental theme of NPSM that promotes the discrete distancing of policy issues from policy implementation where the configuration of this principle is common to all Next Steps Agencies. In order to assess and evaluate the effects of policy on its implementation this study identifies the reactions of the CSA's customers and the public to child support legislation and the implementation by the Agency. Where possible the study combines some documented records of these reactions with the effects these have on the CSA staff and the effectiveness of the Agency's operations.

Although there is an underlying emphasis on the role of the CSA in social administration the study considers the interrelations between the business functions of the Agency and the legislations, missions and strategies that guide its operations and emphasis of control. It is of fundamental interest to this study to appreciate the possible frustrations and conflicts that might exist with CSA managers attempting to promote private sector methods and the injection of private sector style enterprises alongside the rigid application of NPSM despite the flexibility that this approach was supposed to introduce.

In addition to questioning the theoretical definitions and academic interpretations of NPSM themes questions are posed as to the specific effects on the CSA in delivering a service that is both firmly accountable and whose performances are closely compared with Secretary of State (SoS) targets and the practice of employing performance metrics. Unlike most private sector organizations the CSA is not directly driven by any profit making motive or the maximisation of shareholder wealth, however, it plays a role in reducing costs to the Treasury and, indirectly, to the taxpayer. The provision of performance metrics and the effects of various internal and external accountabilities together with the dominance of the Secretary of State directives pose questions as to how far the CSA is removed from 'bureaucratic' processes, if not wholly from the organizational typology of a typical State bureaucracy.

The major empirical aspects of this study are directed to the collection of evidence and opinions regarding the perceptions of the CSA as an organization.

Most of this research activity is made within the CSA headquarters in questioning the issues and problems of Human Resource Management, Quality Management and Operations of the Agency. Again, prompted by the adverse publicity surrounding the CSA, the study assesses the effects of external perceptions of the Agency on the morale and performances of its staff members. In taking this front line perspective it is recognised that the CSA has been made the focal point of criticisms and adverse demonstrations that are often misdirected.

Although anecdotal evidence from the public and CSA customers is not overemphasised in this study, it has been difficult to ignore some general sources of such dialogues and narratives that suggest that the system of child support has been misunderstood, if not maligned. However, the more radical and critical reviews of the system of child support in the UK inspired some impetus for this study in prompting questions and forming arguments related to the CSA's position within the whole child support system. Much attention is paid to the organizational details and internal practices of the CSA that include the use of business terminology and techniques documented in its publications. It is important to appreciate that there have been significant changes in child support policy that occurred during the period of this study.

The underlying theme of this study's search for data and information lies in the concept that the most relevant and useable information lies in the primary research sources.

The use of interviews and sustained contact with CSA managers have assisted in obtaining interpretations and perceptions of staff members as to internal issues. Much of this field research material has then been compared with documentation and references to other theoretical studies in finding commonalities and valid evidence.

In developing the study of the CSA's role in the system of child support it was difficult to decide whether the study should begin by making analyses of the economic influences and the social and political environments that were to form the drives for changes or commence by making a critical analysis of NPSM principles. As the study focussed on the CSA as an organization and the effects of public sector management styles, rather than performing a wider analysis of child support policy, it was decided to commence by considering the themes of NPSM.

In Chapter One consideration is given to the development of NPSM in the context of the CSA with the emphasis being made on the late 1980's and early 1990's coinciding with the introduction of the new system of child support. References are made to the imperatives of value for money, efficiency and accountability in the practice of public sector provisions. With the introduction of Next Steps Agencies the first main principle of NPSM is identified as the detachment of Ministerial roles in policy-making from the front line operations and practices of State agencies. The assumptions underlying this principle are in contradiction to the argument that the separation of policy is not practically and realistically achievable in implementing the system of child support.

The second main principle of NPM is the promotion of private sector methods in public sector agencies when the Conservative Government in the 1980's actively pursued privatisation agendas and private sector methodologies as the *'Holy Grails'* of enterprise. The effects of the injections of private sectors methods and management styles are considered in detail in the further internal analyses of the CSA.

Chapter Two adopts a historical perspective in considering the social, political and economic environments of the late 1980's and early 1990's, prior to the introduction of the new child support policy and the legislation of the 1991 Act. More specifically data is provided in order to identify the patterns of relationships and family structures that accompanied changes in attitudes to cohabitation, marriage, divorce, lone parenthood and childbirth outside of marriage. The upward trends in divorce rates and the number of lone parents together with increasing births outside marriage are identified as being the cause of potential problems for the Treasury and taxpayers in providing appropriate financial support. In order to assess the importance of the financial imperative it is necessary to stress the scale of dependency on State benefits and the financial shortfalls experienced by lone parents after separation. As with the restructuring of the public sector, the predominance of economic objectives and, more specifically, the reduction in costs to the State are argued to be the dominant drives for changes in child support policy. Chapters One and Two are intended to set the context of this study and it is stressed that there are two entities, NPSM principles and new child support policy, that set the themes and missions from which the CSA works from.

At this stage there is a need to refine the main questions and lines of enquiry that the study is to follow. This is clarified in Chapter Three together with a guide to the links between NPSM principles and the subsequent Chapters that follow a logical progression in focussing on the internal features of the CSA whilst linking with external influences on the CSA as an organization. Additional secondary sources of information are included in the style of an extended critical literature review in order to reinforce some of the aims and objectives of the study by background theories and selected opinions. CSA Annual Accounts, Business Plans and other Agency publications have been used together with some internal documentation provided by Agency teams for this study. It is not intended to list all the questions posed in interviews with CSA staff members however one of the objectives of Chapter Three is to set questions in wider perspectives that are used to map out specific areas of interest.

In commencing this study problems were anticipated in gaining access to information and cooperation from appropriate CSA staff due to the controversial nature of the new legislation and the adverse publicity surrounding the Agency. It was vital for the study to make an effective initial contact with appropriate managers in the CSA and to gain a level of trust from the Agency staff involved. It was important that the confidentiality of each interviewee was maintained and sound ethical standards were maintained throughout the study.

Chapter Four commences with a theoretical coverage of methodologies and their associated methods in order to select the approaches that are both appropriate and valid to this study. Although these methods form structured and tested approaches to research activities, it is stressed that there is a requirement for the general approach to be flexible and eclectic in nature.

In the main, the primary research methodologies are inductive and *'research driven'* by nature with field interviews providing the main sources of primary information in applying grounded theory. It is not intended that the emphasis on any theoretical method should create any barrier to the progress of the study as this might develop into a problem of manipulating the data to fit the method rather than adapting the method to collect valid and reliable data. Although the methods and techniques applied to this study did not change significantly as the study developed, the questions were rephrased and/or readdressed according to the coded subject of interest. It was necessary to use *'in vivo'* codes to categorise topics that were referred to in interviews and these were later related to the questions posed in Chapter Three. In addition to interviews sustained contact was maintained with CSA managers and specialists by dialogue, e-mails and letters. In summary, making honest and objective attempts to address the questions regarding the effects of NPSM principles and child support policy on the CSA drove the methodology employed in this study.

The study also utilizes sources of data and information found from CSA documentation and secondary publications in extending arguments and themes of questioning.

Although this study is unique in making a detailed internal analysis of the CSA in the context of NPSM themes, the use of narratives from other studies as alternative sources of internal information is made in making comparisons to the findings of this study.

The following Chapters of the thesis are intended to follow a logical *'top-down'* pathway through an analysis of the CSA. In effect Chapters Five to Nine form one main section that is the heart of the study. This starts with the inclusion of some details of legislation that should provide some appreciation to the reader of the legal aspects and statutory rules that the CSA has to adhere to. In addition this pre-empts the analysis of the CSA by linking the development of a highly contentious new child support policy by a Next Steps Agency operating within a relatively untested system of public sector management.

The main purpose of Chapter Five is to emphasise the haste with which policy and subsequent legislation were passed through Parliament without substantial opposition and this is an indication of the imperative to comply with demands from the Treasury. This legislation sets a general case approach to child support assessment and has received much public opposition and demonstration that has been compared to the campaigns against the poll tax reforms, only on a smaller scale (NACSA newsletter 1998).

More pertinent to this study is how legislation sets the instrumental details by which

the CSA operates and influences the formation of its missions and mission

statements. The fusion of child support policy and NPSM methodologies influences

the style of mission statements in declaring the aims and objectives of the CSA.

Particular attention is given to the terminologies and the emphasis placed on the

qualitative aspects of the CSA's missions together with the impact of the promotion

of private sector styles on mission statement narratives provided in the Agency's

documentation and publications. Following the consideration of child support

legislation and the CSA's mission statements Chapter Six highlights the strategies

that the Agency applies in fulfilling its missions and thus can be regarded as the

Agency's organizational methodology.

The analysis of the CSA as an organization commences by identifying the significant

features of its organizational structure compared with theoretical paradigms of

organizations. The main aim of this section is to identify the main fundamental

changes arising from the implementation of NPSM in forming the CSA as a Next

Steps Agency relying on managerialism. The effects of NPSM on the CSA's

organizational typology are considered in the context of organizational theories and

particular references are made to Max Weber's classical theories on bureaucracy (see

above). This section of the study is fundamental in assessing whether the levelling of

hierarchy and the localization of management responsibilities within the CSA has

created an organizational type that is removed from those described in Max Weber's

studies.

As referred to above, an attempt is not made to fit the CSA perfectly, or conversely, to a definitive and empirical model of bureaucracy from this study however, the descriptions of Weber's traits of the bureaucracy do provide some indications of commonality between the CSA as an organization and the themes of a typical bureaucracy.

To assist in analysing the CSA as an organization comparisons of the its internal organizational features are also made with the Aston Studies (Pugh and Hickson 1976) particularly with regard to the decentralization of management and the operational functions of the Agency. This section ends with a definition of managerialism and the applicability of new managerialism to the CSA. It is pertinent to appreciate that managerialism might be considered as another academic construct however the effects of applying the principles of managerialism might be seen to inject organizational complexities into the CSA as an organization.

Having performed a comparative analysis of the CSA's organizational typology with selected theories the internal analysis of the Agency continues by considering Human Resource Management (HRM) issues and the problems associated with the CSA's staff. This part of the study is 'people orientated' and, in identifying and questioning these issues in Chapter Seven, an attempt is made to search for evidence of the CSA's organizational identity in terms of its internal culture. The fact that CSA employees are also civil servants becomes a significant influence and is made evident by comments made during interviews with staff where reliance is placed on effective research methods discussed in Chapter Four.

Searches for evidence of any commonalities between the CSA's staffing structure and those found in typical bureaucracies are also made in this section. Such facets as hierarchical structures within the CSA and the existence of Civil Service staffing grades are considered in the context of theories of the bureaucracy.

Finally, Chapter Seven identifies internal and pragmatic problems that the CSA faces in the context of HRM. Such problems as low staff morale, absenteeism, illness and poor promotional prospects are questioned together with the organizational initiatives that are adopted in attempting to overcome these. This section serves to enlighten the reader of problems and internal complexities faced by CSA staff with particular emphasis on the search for an organizational identity and the effects of external influences on the staff and its performances. References to the reactions to child support policy are also made that are considered as evidence that the separation of policy and its implementation cannot be practically achieved and such responses have had detrimental effects on the operational performances of the CSA from the perspectives of its staff.

Chapters Eight and Nine are closely linked with the analysis of the CSA's performances and the influences of NPSM themes in measuring performances and setting organizational standards in common with other Next Steps Agencies. Chapter Eight commences by considering the subject of Quality Management and this is regarded as a logical starting point due to the reliance on staff cooperation and the development of an effective organizational culture referred to in Chapter Seven.

Although attention to the details and documentation associated with Quality

Management initiatives are contained in Chapter Eight, the main purpose of this

section is to outline the procedural guidelines as organizational ideals. The CSA's

approaches to Quality Management are common to those applied to many private

sector organizations however unlike most private sector organizations the CSA places

a great emphasis on the management of quality and the production of associated

performance metrics rather than the measurement of profit that is dominant in the

private sector.

The second part of Chapter Eight has two main purposes in that it links the

organizational issues referred to above with the actual commencement of the CSA's

formation and operations and commences the analysis of the Agency's performances.

Details of the CSA's primary operational structure and the associated staffing for its

first year of operations are provided. The analysis of the CSA's initial performance is

assessed separately from the subsequent years following the establishment of the

Agency. This is done in order to remove any distortions that might occur from the

implementation of a controversial new child support policy by a Next Steps Agency

created from first principles.

The analysis of performance measurement and operational performances are

fundamental to this study in providing evidence as to the efficiency or inefficiency of

the CSA.

It provides further evidence of the influences of NPSM themes in setting standard requirements for accountability, the audit imperative and the comparisons of performance metrics with Secretary of State (SoS) Targets, Customer Service Standards, Milestone Targets and Internal Targets. It is significant that the themes of NPSM that might be regarded, in the main, as academic constructs become evident as practical influences on organizational and operational directives.

The evaluation of performances is made in order to assess whether the new system of child support has been effective and/or efficient in delivering what it was intended to. In comparing what the new system intends to achieve and what are the actual *'bottom line'* inputs and outputs there are variances and it is questioned if these shortfalls in performances are due, in some part, to the reactions of customers to policy and legislation rather than by any inefficiencies of the CSA. In evaluating the CSA's performances and the measurement of operational performances in this study, the recurrent problem of separating policy provision from implementation (the implementation gap) is discussed (see above). The question of how the effectiveness of policy and the efficiency of operational implementation might be measured and distinguished is posed in this context in order that realistic interpretations of the CSA's performances might be made. It is suggested here that non-compliancy and non-cooperation not only reflect the reluctance of non-resident parents (NRPs) to fulfil the financial obligations set by the CSA's method of assessment but might be used to gauge the effects of policy rather than implementation.

This section ends by questioning if the CSA might be too constrained, if not stifled, by the dominance of linear criteria of performance assessment and references to alternative approaches to performance measurement and opportunity costs are made.

The aims of providing a better level of understanding of the CSA and its workings require that access were gained to valid information. As stated above, in maintaining relationships of trust with the various contacts made in the CSA it has been possible to provide original contributions to the knowledge of the Agency and the problems faced by its staff. In addition, the use of selected organizational theories and extensive sources of associated information has been made in addressing the main questions posed in this study (see Chapter Three). It is significant that there are strong interrelationships between organizational, staff, and performance issues and thus the route through Chapters Six to Nine is clearly connected.

In essence the study analyses the socio-economic ideologies and organizational ideals that underpin the new approach to child support policy and its implementation by the CSA under NPSM themes. Further, comparisons are made with these concepts and the actual results. The new system of child support was intended to replace one that was generally regarded as being inadequate and outmoded. If the rhetoric and narratives surrounding the new system were to be accepted there were suggestions that there was to be a streamlined organization replacing a State bureaucracy and the legal profession in delivering child support by the CSA that promoted private sector approaches in achieving efficiency.

This is questioned in detail throughout this study and the arguments developed

suggest that, although there have been fundamental changes in child support policy

and the styles and themes of public sector management, in the broader perspective,

there have been few changes in the situation following the introduction of the CSA.

Two inter-related key themes have emerged in this study from the necessity for

bureaucracy in fulfilling the CSA's administrative task by civil servants. At a

structural level it seems evident that something like bureaucratic form is actually

necessary for achieving the kind of administrative rule bound task which has been set

for the CSA. At a cultural level the CSA has inherited a culture of bureaucratic form

in which key staff both relied on the protection of bureaucratic status but also

understood the bureaucratic process to be the best way to carry out administrative

tasks. Despite the rhetoric of change, and efforts to promote charismatic management

of a different form, these influences have remained fundamental to the problems

encountered in organizational change and the delivery of service by the CSA.

At the culmination of this study the findings and the associated interpretations

demonstrate whether or not the CSA is perceived as practicing a whole new approach

to how welfare is delivered and whether or not the CSA represents an organization far

removed from that of a traditional State bureaucracy.

Chapter One

New Public Sector Management and The Child Support Agency

1.1   New Public Sector Management

During the 1980's and early 1990's some fundamental changes were made in the concepts and organization of public policy management in the UK with the introduction of new approaches to public sector management often referred to as New Public Management Sector (NPSM). The first principle of NPSM was that policy issues were to be placed into the domain of the Government with Ministerial responsibility, whilst the implementation and practice of policy was to be managed by specialised Next Steps Agencies. Secondly, in accordance with the ideologies of the New Right, there was to be a promotion of the application of private sector methods and methodologies to public sector agencies.

This study regards NPSM as an academic construct and a generic term encompassing the conceptual bases of changes in public sector philosophies and methods and the themes of NPSM refer to the details of how such concepts are organized by the introduction of Next Steps Agencies (see below).

The application of NPSM principles has significant effects on the structure, methods, responsibilities and modes of accountability that are required of public sector agencies and there is an implication that the themes of public sector management in the 1980's was in need of change.

The differentiation of policy and practice or, *'depoliticization'*, can be regarded as the separation of the spheres of influence and the tasks of politicians and managers (Du Gay, P. 107 – 108). The first principle of NPSM influenced the Ministerial role to be detached from the execution of policy, expressed as, *"steering rather than rowing"* by a *"catalytic government"* (Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. 1992: 25). The significance of this new approach to public policy management and the idea of *'reinventing government'* (Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. 1992) is fundamental to this study of the CSA since, as previously stated, one of the main arguments proposed in this study is that the separation of child support policy from its implementation by the CSA is not realistically achievable in practice (see Chapter Three).

The following reports and publications represent the main initial instruments that prompted changes in the management of the Civil Service and the public sector:

Table 1.1 Government Reports referring to Public Policy Management

Efficiency in the Civil Service (Cm. 8293, 1981)

The Financial Management Initiative (FMI, Cm. 8616, May 1982)

Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps, Report to the Prime Minister (The Ibbs Report, Efficiency Unit, Feb. 1988)

Civil Service Management Reform: The Next Steps (Cm. 524, 1988)

The Financing and Accountability of Next Steps Agencies (Cm. 914, 1989)

Improving Management in Government: the Next Steps Agencies Review (Cm. 1261, October 1990)

Competing for Quality (Cm. 1730, November 1991)

The White Paper: Continuity and Change (Cm. 914, 1989, July 1994)

The Civil Service: Continuity and Change (Cm. 2627, 1994)

Progress in the Next Steps Initiative (Cm. 1263, 1990)

The Next Steps Initiative (Cm. 1761, 1990)

Citizen's Charter (Cm. 1599, July 1991)

Competing for Quality (Cm. 1730, November 1991)

Private Finance Initiative (PFI, 1992)

Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money (1995)

In an historic context some commonalities can be found between the proposed

changes posed by NPSM principles in the 1980's and those referred to in the

Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854), the Plowden Committee (1961) and the findings

of the Fulton Committee (1966), published in the Fulton Report (1968). The findings

of the Plowden Committee (1961) included a recommendation that Ministers should

concentrate on the development of effective public policies rather than being directly

involved with operational details. The Fulton Committee (Fulton Report, Cm. 3638,

June 1968) made specific references to the associated management activities in the

following:

> *"A key theme of the Committee's findings was the promotion of efficiency in*
>
> *the Civil Service, and the Report was highly critical of the fact that too few*
>
> *civil servants were skilled managers, arguing that the higher Civil Service in*
>
> *particular tended to think of themselves as advisors on policy to people above*
>
> *them, rather than as managers of the administrative machine below them"*
>
> (Fulton Report 1968, vol. 1, para. 18)

The Fulton Report was described as the *'high-water mark of managerialism'* (Brown,

R. G. S. and Steel, D. R. 1979) and regarded as being imbued with *"a business-*

managerial philosophy" (Drewery, G. and Butcher, T. 1991: 195). The most

influential reports produced during the 1980's were, Efficiency in the Civil Service

(1981), The Financial Management Initiative (1982) and Improving Management in

Government: The Next Steps, Report to the Prime Minister (the Ibbs Report,

Efficiency Unit, 1988).

A general theme of these reports was to recommend changes to the structure of the traditional Civil Service for the pursuit of *'efficiency'* in the practical implementation of public policy and there was a recommendation to place a greater emphasis on management activities to be practiced by senior Civil Servants. This concept was contained in the promotion of new managerialism (see Chapter Six).

The White Paper: The Financial Management Initiative (1982) concluded that there was no single Government-wide method of achieving efficiency. Instead of prioritising bureaucratic efficiency, it recommended that central Government should be decentralised and task-driven, with the following priorities:

1.   *The work of each department must be organised in a way that focuses on the job to be done; the systems and structures must enhance the effective delivery of policies and services.*

2.   *The management of each department must ensure that their staff has the relevant experience and skills needed to do the tasks that are essential to effective government.*

3.   *There must be a real and sustained pressure on and within each department for continuous improvement in the value for money obtained in the delivery of policies and services.*

(Financial Management Initiative Cm. 8616, 1982)

The introduction of new formal processes and indicators of performance measurement in the pursuit of *'Value For Money'* (VFM) and efficiency were later referred to in the White Paper, *'Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Civil Service'* (1988). In addition, the Citizen's Charter (1991) set specific criteria and lines of accountability for the operational outputs of Government agencies that had been developed by the Financial Management Initiative (FMI, 1982) and were to be applied to all aspects of Civil Service activities (see below). It is pertinent to note that although there were changes made in the instruments and procedures of accountability there were no significant changes in the lines of accountability. Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, confirmed that Ministers would continue to be accountable to Parliament for all the work of their departments including the work of the Next Steps Agencies (Mellon, E. 1997: 2).

The promotion of NPSM ideals originated from the political ideologies of Margaret Thatcher's New Right with the emphasis on micro economic objectives (Minogue, M. 1998). Jan-Erik Lane (2000: 6) refers to NPSM rhetoric as having a *"distinct right wing tone"*, with the emphasis on economic efficiency, whilst neglecting criteria such as quality and equity. In the 1970's the ethical theory of management or *'New Public Administration'* questioned public responsibility not public sector efficiency (Lane, Jan-Erik, 2000: 36), however from the 1980's, public sector management had made a distinct move towards the dominance of financial criteria.

In providing services to the public reservations regarding the effects of such changes are given in the following:

> *"There is a risk in NPM reforms that individual and group interests will maximize the gains, while the public will bear the losses. This would be deeply ironic, since a major theme in the neo-liberal critique was that Government allows self-interested politicians and bureaucrats to abuse publicly provided resources."*
>
> (Minogue, M. 1998: 20)

Similar criticisms refer to the changes made as part of the, *"Thatcher-Rayner-Ibbs era"*, and pose questions as to if such changes would bring about, *"privatisation by stealth"* and *"a divided Civil Service"*? (Drewery, G. and Butcher, T. 1991: 231-234). There was some resistance to the proposed changes in referring to NPSM principles as, *'radical ambitions'*, and the creation of an, *'implementation gap'*, (Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R. 1992).

To assist in identifying the main features of NPSM, Christopher Hood (1991) lists seven doctrinal components as follows:

1. Hands-on professional management in the public sector

2. Explicit standards and measures of performance

3. Greater emphasis on output controls

4. Shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector

5. Shift to greater competition in public sector

6. Stress Private Sector styles of management practice

7. Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use

The endorsement of entrepreneurship and promotion of private sector methods in

public sector agencies placed an increased emphasis on market forces however, the

requirements of a perfectly free market make this a theoretical concept rather than a

practical reality. The possession of superior information by the CSA constitutes a

barrier to entry for competition and this acts as the *'hidden hand'* of market

operations (see Chapter Three). Such terms as, *'market-based public administration'*

(Lan, Z. and Rosenbloom, D. 1992), the *'post-bureaucratic paradigm'* (Barzelay,

M. 1992) and *'entrepreneurial governance'* (Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. 1992)

imply that the traditional paradigm of State bureaucracy, associated with the Civil

Service, was an inflexible and inappropriate medium for attaining efficiency. This is

referred to in the following:

> *"Monetarism and a belief in the market as a solution to all social and*
>
> *economic problems translated into the 'public-bad, private-good equation'.*
>
> *The 'frontiers of the state' were to be rolled back. The Civil Service together*
>
> *with local Government, the trade unions and the professions were perceived*
>
> *as vested interest groups, 'feather-bedded', holding back progress and*
>
> *making enterprise and efficiency impossible. The Civil service was the first to*
>
> *be tackled head-on."*

(Drewry, G. and Butcher, T. 1988: 7)

In promoting private sector methods the principles contained in NPSM intended to induce organizational flexibility and introduce mechanisms in order to 'operationalize' changes in the public sector (Du Gay, P. 2000: 6). The term 'entrepreneurial governance' referred to organizations being 'enterprise forms' and also individuals becoming responsible for themselves and thus entrepreneurs of themselves (Du Gay, P. 2000: 84). One consequence of the promotion of 'entrepreneurial governance' (see above) was a move towards 'self-development' and 'individual empowerment' and the replacement of permanent employment contracts in the public sector with shorter, fixed term employment contracts without standard national pay and conditions (Du Gay, P. 2000: 85). Further, Paul Du Gay (2000: 90 - 94) refers to the, "entrepreneurial style" of management applied to, "rational enterprises" acting under political constraints. Such radical changes in public policy management rely on many assumptions regarding the workability of the ideals of NPSM.

The application of the themes of NPSM to child support makes assumptions that ethical and individual requirements can be marginalized, not only for CSA customers, but also for its employees. The main objective of such managerial reforms implemented by the Government was that they sought to bring the commercial ethic into the public service (Bogdanor, V. 1994: 5) and there was concern as to whether the Armstrong code (1985), that had guided Civil Servants to work with basic ethical principles, might have been replaced with the 'profit making ethic'.

To reorganize all Government departments with the haste demanded by Government directives was to make titanic assumptions regarding the generality of the functions of public agencies and the markets that they operated within. Further, it is arguable whether the public sector could realistically compete, or should compete, with private sector organizations in providing all public requirements. The general principles of NPSM being outlined, the task of introducing these is considered in an organizational context.

1.1.1   Next Steps Agencies

The decentralisation of Government departments arising from the implementation of NPSM themes resulted in the reforming of State bureaucracies by the introduction of Next Steps Agencies into the public sector. The Financial Management Initiative (FMI, Cm. 8616, 1982) had already developed the concepts behind the Next Steps Agencies with the aim of increasing efficiency (Jordan, G. and O'Toole, B. 1995: 3 – 4). The most significant instrument of change produced by the Government's Efficiency Unit was the Ibbs Report, *'Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps'* (Feb 1988) (see above). This report was regarded as the twentieth century equivalent of the Northcote-Trevelyan report of the nineteenth century (O'Toole, B. J. and Jordan, G. 1995: 3) and set the platform for the introduction of Next Steps Agencies.

The Next Steps initiative was regarded as an opportunity to reduce the degree of

Ministerial overload arising from questions about operations as distinct from policy

(Davies, A. and Willman, J. 1991: 38). Reference to the division of Ministerial and

operational responsibilities in the context of the Next Steps initiative is made in the

following:

> *"Since the introduction of Next Steps in 1988, MP's have been advised to*
>
> *write direct to Agencies about operational matters rather than writing to the*
>
> *Minister who would then refer the letter to the Agency for reply."*
>
> (Ibbs Report, Improving Management In Government: The Next Steps, Feb 1988)

With this, the National Audit Office (Next Steps Initiative, 1989) stressed that the

Minister or respective Government department should not be involved with the

instrumental day-to-day activities of Next Steps Agencies instead the Chief

Executives were given operational autonomy and assumed authority that was

previously a dispensation of the respective departmental Minister. The Ibbs Report

refers to the Government insisting that the flow and quality of information to

Parliament would improve with the Next Steps initiative. The imperative for the

accountability of the CSA is focussed on outputs and this is directly linked with

operational performances (see Chapter Nine).

The influences of private sector methods were inherent in the Efficiency Unit (EU) and this was reflected in the staff selected to senior positions. The EU was set-up by an efficiency advisor, Sir Derek (later Lord) Rayner, the joint managing director of Marks and Spencer. The main objective of the EU was the pursuit of value for money (VFM) with Sir Robin Ibbs as the director and also the Chief Executive of ICI at this time, with other senior management recruited from private sector organizations. Sir Peter Levere of the EU promoted private sector methods in explicitly establishing performance targets particularly in relation to performance related pay. In addition, the drive for financial efficiency encouraged the use of market testing by public agencies.

One significant quote from the Next Steps initiative makes specific reference to this move to private rather than public management:

> *"Before any Agency is established, the need for the activity is reviewed, and alternative options, including contracting out the work and privatisation, are examined. Next Steps is primarily about those operations which are to remain within Government. But it cannot be ruled out that after a period of years Agencies...may be suitable for privatisation."*
>
> (Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps, 1988)

A broad definition of what constitutes a Next Steps Agency is provided in the

following contained in the Ibbs report:

> *"The Next Steps report which led to their creation recommended that*
>
> *Agencies should be established to carry out the executive function of*
>
> *Government within a policy and resources framework set by a*
>
> *department...we use the term Agency, not in its technical sense, but to*
>
> *describe any executive unit that delivers a service for Government."*
>
> (Davies, A. and Willman, J. 1991: 15)

Further:

> *"For purposes of definition an Agency is essentially chimerical, not a*
>
> *structure, not a process, not a culture, but an indeterminate combination of*
>
> *the three."*
>
> (Davies, A. and Willman, J. 1991: 93)

In order to attain these requirements the formation of Next Steps Agencies resulted in

the downsizing of Government departments (Richards, D. 1997: 39) and the

restructuring of existing departments with the division of Civil Service departments

into smaller units requiring directives for accountability and performance

measurement, without necessarily changing the lines of accountability (see above).

The White Paper: *'Financing and Accountability of Next Steps Agencies'* (Cm. 914, 1989), defines the lines of responsibility and the source of funding and emphasises that Next Steps Agencies were introduced in order to improve the efficiency of operations:

> *"The Next Steps proposals were the Next Steps in the Conservative*
>
> *Government's long-running Efficiency Strategy. That strategy had been set in*
>
> *place almost immediately the 1979 Ministry took office, when the new Prime*
>
> *Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, ordered a freeze on all recruitment to the*
>
> *Civil Service as the first step in 'rolling back the frontiers of the State'."*
>
> (O'Toole, B. J. and Jordan, G. 1995: 3)

With the development of the executive Next Steps Agencies, the State was taking the role of purchaser of the services offered by them. The White Paper, *'Continuity and Change'* (Cm. 2627, 1989), identified that better value for money could be achieved by:

1. Focusing more on resources consumed and not just on cash spent.

2. Treating capital and current expenditure in a way, which better reflects their economic significance.

3. Encouraging the discipline of a greater emphasis on outputs and the achievement of aims and objectives.

(Continuity and Change, Cm. 2627, 1989)

With the changes in the Civil Service, particularly the move to decentralized

executive agencies, the move for competitive efficiency set an imperative for

executive agencies to justify the function they carry out, the need for the function to

be conducted by Government and the reason for it being carried out by employed

civil servants rather than being contracted out to the private sector (Flynn, N. 1997:

1). From this it might be argued that Next Steps Agencies were substitutes for private

sector agencies. The following refers to the Next Step Agencies as an alternative to

privatisation in a political context:

"Ideologically the Next Steps initiative can be made to fit opposite political views.

Right –wing in so far as Agencies are semi-independent, neatly packaged outside

departments, emulating commercial management practices and established

concurrent with widespread privatisation programmes by an administration with a

minimal view of the role of Government. Left-wing in that a transfer to Agency

status can be made as an alternative to privatisation, as a means both of keeping a

function within Government and improving quality of service."

(Davies, A. and Willman, J. 1991: 3)

The application of private sector style organizational structuring within Next Steps

Agencies is contained in the Fraser Report, *'Making the most of Next Steps'* (1991),

where reference is made to the changes from the hierarchical paradigms to

subsidiaries as a move to *'corporatization'*.

This report cites such organizations as GEC, P&O, RTZ and Hanson plc as separate

holding companies that employed corporatization within their organizational

structures and its purpose is outlined in the following:

"The purpose of the Report was to persuade HM Treasury and core departments

that Agencies should be much more loosely tied to centralized financial and

personnel regimes, and to top-down direction by core departments. For this

reason, Fraser found it rhetorically convenient to assume a department where

Agencies have a high degree of operational independence, both from each other

and from the core."

(Bellamy, C. 1995: 63)

It is significant to appreciate that the formation of Next Steps Agencies, not only

resulted in radical changes in the structure of the Civil Service, but also redirected the

axes of control to the autonomy of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Senior

Management. The *'top down'* formalisation of the Next Steps Agencies was seen as

being invasionary in its approach to change (Levy and Merry (1986). Sir Peter Kemp

(1993), the first Next Steps project manager, referred to Next Steps Agencies filling

the gap in arrangements between the traditional, centralized and unified Civil Service

where Ministers should have hands-on and day-to day responsibility, but should still

remain ultimately accountable to Parliament for their performance. By the end of

1993 Next Steps Agencies accounted for 78% of Civil Service staff and by 1988 there

were 125 Next Steps Agencies including 11 in Northern Ireland.

By March 1998, 76% of all civil servants, some 383,000, were working in 138 Next

Steps Agencies. By the end of 1998, the end of the creation phase, it was estimated

that by 2000 there would be over 450,000 Agency staff representing about 80% of all

civil servants (Pilkington, C. 1999: 81). The distributions of DSS staff and

administration costs within specialised departments and Next Steps Agencies are

given in the following table:

Table 1.2 Distributions of Staff and Administration Costs amongst DSS Next

Steps Agencies

Date Created	Department / Next Steps Agency	% DSS Staff	% Admin Costs
24:05:89	Social Security		
	Resettlement Agency	0.6	1
02:04:90	Social Security		
	Information Technology Services	5.0	14
10:04:91	Social Security		
	Benefits Agency	78.1	53
10:04:91	Social Security		
	Contributions Agency	10.7	5
05:04:93	**Child Support Agency**	**2.7**	**3**
	Core Department	**1.6**	
	Corporate Expenditure		**19**

(Adapted from DSS and HM Treasury, 1993 in O'Toole, B. J. and Jordan, G. 1995:

57)

From this table it can be seen that the CSA consisted of about 4% of the DSS Next Steps Agencies staff whilst accounting for about 20% of its expenditure and this might suggest some comparative inefficiency.

The Government had anticipated some opposition to the Next Steps initiative and, although the Ibbs Report was finished in 1987, it was published in February 1988 after the 1997 general election as its findings were judged to be sensitive and thus kept secret (Pilkington, C. 1999: 73). A further criticism claimed that the Next Steps initiative was under-researched and too hastily implemented (Davies, A. and Willman, J. 1991). Owen Hughes (1998: 64 - 65) refers to the disaggregation of Government departments as having possible advantages in the increased efficiency of *'one-stop shops'* that formed agencies on a quasi-contractual basis.

In the context of micro-economic theory the Next Steps initiative has also been considered in the light of *'public choice theory'*, (Hughes, O. 1998 and Mueller, D. 1989). Here, the idea of decentralisation and the introduction of Next Steps Agencies is supported by the advantages that might be gained from the rational drive for economic efficiency and the enhancement of value for money by exploiting market driven opportunities and the improvement in the quality of the provision of public sector services. Next Steps Agencies have also been regarded as a useful two-way street between public and private sectors, bringing together the best practices from both (Davies, A. and Willman, J. 1991: 93). It is questionable whether these are just ideals of the Next Steps initiative rather than being practically realised.

It is important to recognise that the CSA was the first Next Steps Agency to be developed from scratch and represents a theme of a right wing agenda that intended to implement a policy to reduce the costs to the Treasury of providing child maintenance benefits whilst pursuing the aim to achieve economic efficiency for the Agency itself.

1.1.2   Public Sector Accountability

The transference of operational responsibilities from Government Ministers to CSA management prompted the need for directives of accountability within the themes of NPSM.   As stated above, although the traditional lines of accountability still existed, there were further requirements to widen the availability of information and the role of accountability and thus extend this role from the audit imperative to providing performance indicators for the analysis of CSA performances. The audit function and the role of stewardship are necessary to monitor the appropriation and allocation of resources by the CSA whilst the measurement of operational performance is required to assess outputs, productivity and efficiencies (see Chapter Nine). The main emphasis of accountability is placed on outputs with the internal lines of accountability being directed to CSA managers.

The increased availability of information is intended to open Government initiatives to scrutiny by Ministers and the public, alike. This increased access to information is also made openly available in order to promote market testing and place Government departments in competitive positions (see above).

The White Paper: *'Competing for Quality'* (1991) and the Service Level Agreements

(SLA) emphasise this market aspect of accountability in that there is an influence of

consumerism that suggests that there is almost a contractual obligation on the

providers of public sector services and goods to meet customers' and clients' needs

(Wilson, J. and Hinton, P. 1993: 128). This concept is practiced in the pursuance of

'best value' in public sector operations where evidence has to be provided of

competitive alternatives being less efficient that the contracts that have been

commissioned.

The overall effects of NPSM on accountability were to shift the emphasis from

probity, stewardship and the concept of *ultra vires* to managerial performance in the

effective use of resources and professional integrity (Wilson, J. and Hinton, P. 1993:

123 – 124). In searching for a definition of accountability the following lists the main

types of accountability found in public sector organizations:

1. *Political accountability*

2. *Managerial accountability*

3. *Legal accountability*

4. *Consumer accountability*

5. *Professional accountability*

(Lawton, A. and Rose, A. (1st Edn.) 1991: 23, (2nd Edn.) 1994: 26)

In emphasising a more overt approach to the subject of accountability, Day and Klein

(1987) refer to the political accountability containing a requirement for

'answerability' to people for their actions. Here, the three main elements of

accountability are identified to be those of *'fiscal/regularity'*, *'process/efficiency'* and

'programme/effectiveness'. In summary these aspects of accountability are promoted

to monitor that money is spent as agreed and allocated with the pursuit of value for

money and evidence that a course of action has achieved intended results.

In extending beyond stewardship, the justification of actions and the use of resources

suggest that there is an imperative for agencies to demonstrate responsibility. In

considering the forms and directions of accountability, questions of relationships are

fundamental to understanding the order and requirements of information and the

responsibilities for the accountability processes. The following refers to the widening

of overt accountability within the themes of NPSM:

> *"Agencies are fully accountable to Parliament through their respective*
>
> *Ministers. Next Steps has enhanced accountability to Parliament, as well as*
>
> *providing much information for customers, staff and the public, through the*
>
> *requirement for Agencies to publish their framework documents, annual*
>
> *targets, annual reports and accounts, and where appropriate, their corporate*
>
> *and business plans."*

(Efficiency Unit, 1993b para. 15)

In terms of public accountability in Continuity and Change (Cm. 2627, 1989: 15),

the benefits of transparency are referred to in the following:

> *"The Financial Management Initiative, Next Steps and the Citizen's Charter*
>
> *have all promoted greater transparency about what the Civil Service does,*
>
> *what is to be achieved, and who is responsible for achieving it ... The effect*
>
> *has been to strengthen accountability to both Parliament and public, building*
>
> *on the existing framework of Ministerial accountability and the particular*
>
> *responsibilities of Accounting Officers. Clarity is an essential part of*
>
> *Parliament's ability to hold the executive to account."*

<div align="right">(Giddings, P. 1995: 225)</div>

In practice there exists some confusion regarding the intricacy of being accountable to

many parties, referred to in the following:

> *"The principle behind this is easy to apply when the steward has to satisfy one*
>
> *master. It is considerably more difficult when a team of stewards (the*
>
> *Government) have to satisfy a large and disparate collective master (the*
>
> *electorate) through a divided group of intermediaries (Parliament), whose*
>
> *requirements are manifold, changing and sometimes mutually contradictory."*

<div align="right">(Giddings, P. 1995: 228)</div>

The Citizen's Charter (1991), referred to above, set further guidelines and directives

for the accountabilities of public sector agencies with this instrument mainly intended

to increase the choice and the involvement in competition for the interests of the

public (Hunt, M. et al 1996: 55). When the Citizen's Charter was published in July

1991, John Major, the Prime Minister at the time, vigorously promoted its

significance as a campaign feature. Under this Charter, public sector agencies are

expected to publish standards and performances against set targets that include

evidence of customer consultation, information about services, the pursuance of

efficient, value for money and courteous customer services with an easy use of

complaints procedures (Wilson, J. and Hinton, P. 1993: 125).

In practice the lines of accountability still follow a *'bottom up'* flow of data and

information from the operational level. To assist in clarifying the lines of

accountability in NPSM, the following illustrates the structure of relations within the

new Civil Service:

Figure 1.1 Accountability Relations in the New Civil Service

Parliament

Select   Select

Committees   Committees

Ministers

Core Department

| Agency | Agency | Agency | Agency |
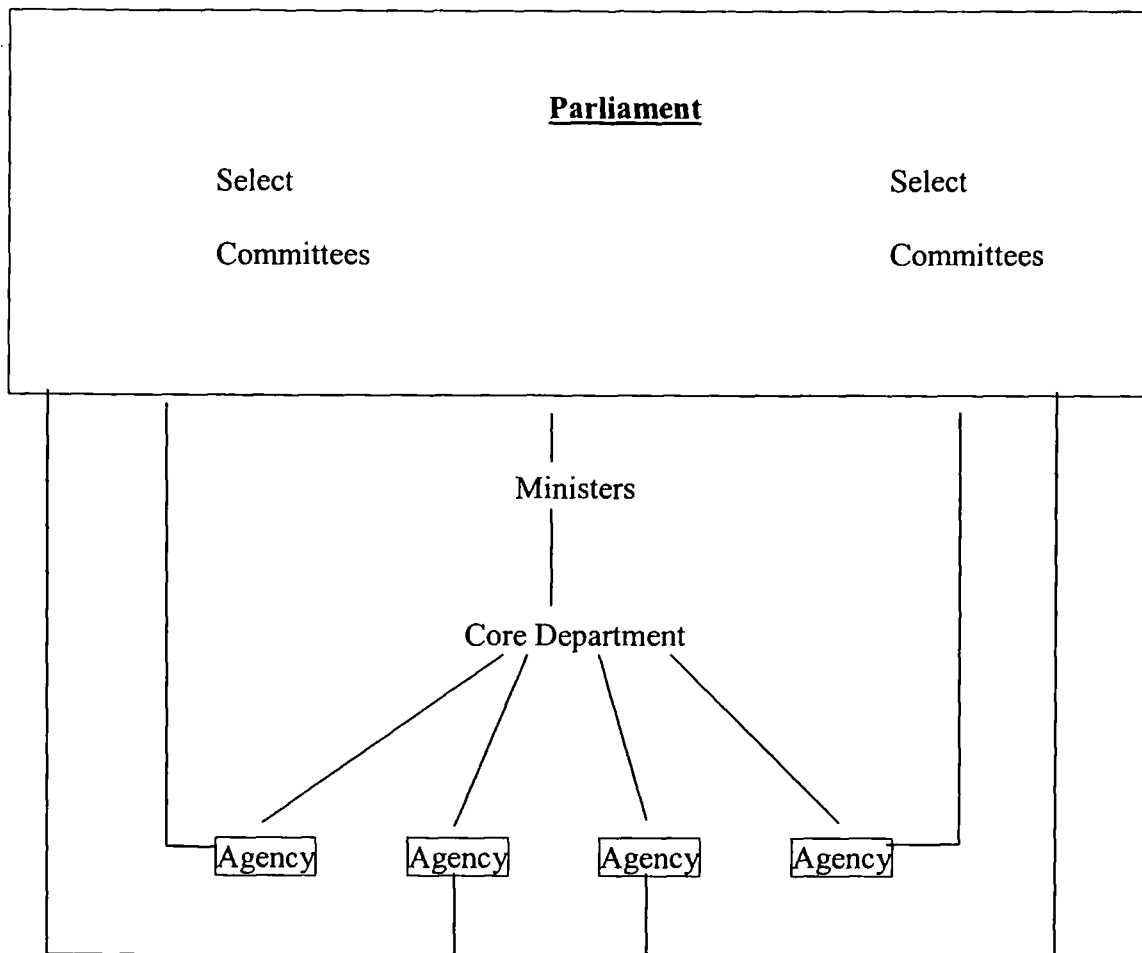
(Adapted from Dowding, K. 1995: 23)

The hierarchical nature of accountability to parliament is further emphasised in

considering the stages and levels addressed in the control cycle of performance

measurement (see Chapter Nine). Whilst NPSM themes intended to level hierarchical

structures and inject some managerial autonomy and flexibility into Next Steps

Agencies, the wider hierarchical relations are not far removed from the models

applied to traditional bureaucracies.

This adds support to the argument that there has not been a significant change from

child support being implemented by a State bureaucracy and the CSA under NPSM

(see Chapter Six). This is confirmed in the following:

"The theory of Governmental accountability still relies on the simple

Weberian account. The Agency has opened up some procedures to greater

public scrutiny. The popular version of individual Ministerial responsibility,

which has Ministers weighing up their own position whenever departmental

error occurs, has been empirically demolished."

(Dowding, K. 1995: 177 - 178)

In terms of *'explanatory'* accountability Chief Executives give evidence on behalf of

Ministers and the involvement of a Next Steps Agency's Accounting Officers result

in them being responsible for maintaining accounting procedures that are answerable

to the Public Accounts Committee (Giddings, P. 1995: 56-62). The following refers

to the accountability of Chief Executives:

"A key feature of Next Steps is the personal accountability of Chief Executives

to their Ministers for the discharge of their responsibilities as set out in an

Agency's framework document and for the achievement of performance

targets, the treasury Stated in 1989, adding that 'Chief Executives' authority

is delegated to them by Ministers who are and will remain accountable to

Parliament and its Select Committees"

(Cm. 914, 1989, par. 5.3)

Further reference to the difficulty of separating the accountability requirements for

Ministers and Chief Executives is made in the following:

> *"Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the policies and the frameworks*
>
> *within which the policies are carried out; 'operational' matters are for the*
>
> *Agencies. Such relationships, it is claimed, add 'transparency' to the*
>
> *accountability process. The question remains, however, where does the policy*
>
> *end and administration begin? It is a question which gives considerable scope*
>
> *for Ministers to pick and choose what they are going to be accountable for,*
>
> *yet at the same time retain the control they so desire."*
>
> (O'Toole, B. and Chapman, R. 1995: 136)

Such blurring of the issues of accountability reinforces the argument that the

separation of policy effectiveness and operational efficiency is a requirement of

accountability but difficult to achieve in practice.

The increased availability of Government information demands that information is

open to public inspection and scrutiny. One example of this is the placing of replies

from Chief Executive Officers to Select Committees, in the House of Commons

Library and Public Information Office, and access is also enhanced by making

information available on the Internet.

The accountability relationships in the private sector are regarded as representing the

models of best practice (Hughes, O. 1998: 227). The main independent and external

bodies that monitor the accountability of Next Steps Agencies include The

Committee of Public Accounts, The National Audit Office, The Central Adjudication

Services and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. William

Waldegrave, as Minister in charge of Office of Public Service and Science (OPSS),

appointed senior staff to specifically manage such functions of accountability. By

April 1997 there was a Senior Appointment Selection Committee (SASC) and the

introduction of priority-based cost management, benchmarking, process re-

engineering and resource accounting (Pilkington, C. 1999: 92). Select Committees

play a vital role in examining administration policy and expenditure and the House of

Commons Treasury and Civil Service Committee (TCSC) was introduced in February

1988 to produce annual reports in monitoring the Next Steps Initiative (NSI)

Giddings, P. (1995: 55). Process re-engineering is particularly associated with

private sector methodology that aims to re evaluate internal systems in the pursuit of

increased efficiencies.

In the context of accountability four areas of action are outlined in the Next Steps

Report (1997) in the following:

1. *Ministers to take close interest in targets, monitoring performance and
   how information is reported.*

2. *Best practice. Agencies should make comparative assessments in making
   their own appraisals.*

3.   *Agencies should cooperate with public and private bodies.*

4.   *The confusions of Accountability should be removed.*

(Adapted from Pilkington, C. 1999: 99)

The reference to Ministers being included with the accountability processes is expressed in *'Continuity and Change'* (Cm. 2627, Para. 2: 29), by stating, *"it is part of a civil servant's constitutional role to explain policy but it is Ministers who must be accountable for it and defend it"* (Giddings, P. 1995: 224).

In summary, the fundamental issue of accountability is an important part of NPSM principles and an obligation of Next Steps Agencies. The central form of accountability is paramount in allocating financial responsibility and the definition of what will be measured (see Chapter Nine). The Next Steps initiative (Cm. 524) has resulted in the introduction of the widespread creation of quasi-autonomous Government agencies with considerable financial independence with the devolution of financial responsibility. There has been an increased emphasis on efficient performance and a corresponding increase in the evaluation of behaviour and managerial accountability (Ganley, J. A. and Cubbin, J. S. 1992: 96).

As stated above, there has been a widening of the provision of published information and a requirement for Next Steps Agencies to publish reports and accounts that are available to the public. In addition, the use of performance metrics as assessment indicators is intrinsic to the requirements of accountability.

The measurement and interpretation of performance is considered in Chapter Nine

where the increased elevation of private sector methods applied to monitoring and

controlling the CSA has produced an increased penchant for performance metrics as

instruments of the appraisal of efficiency. In this context, the role of the Financial

Management Initiative (Cm. 8616, May 1982) is referred to in the following:

> *"The FMI was the catalyst for the proliferation of performance indicators*
>
> *throughout the Public Sector: the number of output and performance*
>
> *measures included in the Public Expenditure White Paper rose from around*
>
> *500 in 1986 to 2,302 in 1989, although there was considerable variation*
>
> *between departments in the 'coverage, amount, quality and detail of the*
>
> *published performance information. "*
>
> (National Audit Office, 1991a: 7)

In this study deliberation on the themes of NPSM is regarded as being fundamental in

setting the context within which the CSA was initiated as a requirement of the 1991

Act when the CSA was introduced as a Next Steps Agency in April 1993. Although

the concept of NPSM might be regarded as an academic construct in the reflections

provided in the discussions contained in books and articles, the main themes of

NPSM governs the style of the CSA's internal organization, management and

operations. NPSM principles mould the microenvironment of the CSA in placing

demands on the role of managerialism (see Chapter Six) and the accountability

imperatives and the injection of private sector methodologies drive the CSA in

fulfilling its role in the UK system of child support.

This study does not intend to make a full critique of the wider applications and suitability, or otherwise, of this system of public sector management, however, it identifies and questions the effects of the practices of such principles on the CSA. It is significant that the CSA was introduced from scratch and thus provided a new platform for the injection of NPSM themes.

This study analyses the effects of the promotion of NPSM themes on the CSA and compares these with the rhetoric and narratives referring to this new approach to public sector management. The themes of NPSM link with all the aspects of the internal analysis of the CSA starting from the organizational structure, typology and its staffing to the more detailed effects on its staff and the influence of accountability on the appraisals of its performances and adherence to private sector methods.

The promotion of NPSM themes can be seen as an attempt to increase organizational efficiencies with the emphasis on financial criteria. Of more specific interest to this study is the application of such principles to the implementation of a new approach to child support policy. Prior to making any detailed analyses of the new system of child support it is important to consider the factors that influenced the need for changes in policy and legislation and the subsequent developments that, together with NPSM principles, set the *modus operandi* for the CSA.

Chapter Two

The UK System of Child Support after Separation: Influences for Change

2.1   The Environment of Change

Having identified the main generic themes of changes in public sector management

and the associated political instruments, consideration is given to the environments

and influences that prompted fundamental and radical changes in child support

policy. In making historic analyses of factors that influence child support issues and

related problems the significant drives for changes in child support policy are

identified prior to the production of the White Paper, *'Children Come First'* (Cm.

1264, 1990) and the associated legislation detailed in the Child Support Act (1991).

Before commencing a detailed internal analysis of the CSA and the effects of child

support policy consideration is given to how the confluence of the themes of NPSM

and child support policy formed the CSA as a Next Steps Agency. The social,

political and economic environments that existed in the 1980's indicate that there was

a large scale and increasing problem faced by the Conservative Government at the

time.

More specifically the debate extends from recognizing the increasing number of divorces, the cohabitation of couples and births outside of marriage to identifying the increasing welfare dependency of lone parents as a major problem for the Treasury and State. The scale of the problem placed an enormous pressure of demand for welfare support from tax income on a Government that was attempting to reduce taxation on the individual under the initiatives of the New Right. Such welfare dependency illustrated the failing of the existing system of child support negotiated via the courts and implemented by the Dependent Relatives section of the DSS.

Although it is not intended to enter into details of the complexities of family circumstances an appreciation of the scale of the problem of child support is made together with an overview of family circumstances and patterns in order to recognise the main imperatives that prompted changes in child support policy. Finally the economic and political influences are considered in understanding the drives for policy changes and, together with the factors arising from the social environment, some indications are provided of the potential problems that the CSA might face in implementing a relatively controversial new policy.

2.2   The Social Environment

This analysis of the social environment includes considerations of the trends in marriages, divorces, cohabitation and family patterns that were to increase the number of lone parents and children living outside traditional family structures.

In taking an historical perspective of the social environment prior to the 1991 Act, with particular emphasis upon the late 1980's and early 1990's, patterns and trends in the types of relationships or partnerships and families can be identified with the associated changes in social attitudes and environments that had taken place over time. The influences on increasing divorce rates such as higher standards of living, increased availability of legal aid, the emancipation of women, the role of feminism and the increased acceptability of childbirth outside of marriage, and the *permissive society'* are referred to in various studies (Fox-Harding, L. 1996: 54).

Associated influences on birth rates also include attitudes to religion, employment and working environments, the influence of media and communications, increasing mobility, the increased acceptance of contraception and extreme states, e.g. war, etc. The data is provided as evidence of the increasing problem caused by lone parents dependent on welfare benefits and the transference of financial obligation to the State from non-resident parents failing to provide sufficient child maintenance after separation.

2.2.1   Patterns of Relationships

At this stage a search for evidence of any significant changes in the patterns of types of relationships between heterosexual couples is made prior to considering the subject of children after the separation of their biological parents. The three categories of relationships considered are those of marriage, cohabitation and separate habitations with the summary of marriages shown in the following table:

Table 2.1 Summary of Marriages 1981 to 2000

YEAR	1981	1991	1997	1999	2000
TOTAL MARRIAGES	351,973	306,756	272,536	263,515	267,961
FIRST MARRIAGE FOR BOTH PARTNERS	227,713	192,238	156,907	155,027	156,140
FIRST MARRIAGE FOR ONE PARTNER	67,048	63,159	62,911	59,540	61,550
RE-MARRIAGE FOR BOTH PARTNERS	57,212	51,359	52,718	48,948	50,271

(National Statistics: Population Trends, Spring 2002, No. 107, Table 1: 83)

It is significant to note that the number of marriages during the period 1981 to 1991

had decreased by some 45,000 with a decrease of some 35,000 marriages being in the

'first marriage for both partners' category. Another significant pattern associated

with marriages was the increasing median ages of partners at marriage that had

increased to 25.3 years old for a male and 23.3 years old for a female by 1987

(Kiernan, K. and Wicks, M. 1990) and this age continued to increase to above 26

years old for a male and over 24 years old for a female by 1991 (OPCS, 1991a).

The general decrease in marriage rates was mainly compromised of people who were under 25 years old (Elliot, B. J. 1991) and the increase in the number of couples remarrying and cohabiting prior to marriage had the effect of increasing the average age at marriage.

As marriage rates decreased there was a corresponding increase in cohabiting couples at this time that was highlighted by the estimate that between 1979 and 1991, the proportion of non-married woman who were cohabiting more than doubled from 11% to 23% (Burt, A. 1995: 16). Cohabitation continued to increase with a quarter of non-married adults, aged 16 to 59 in Great Britain, cohabiting in 2000/2001 (Social Trends, 2003: 41). Although data referring to separations by divorce are easily accessible, data regarding separations from cohabitations are more difficult to obtain. It is significant to note that alongside the increase in cohabitation one study estimated that cohabiting couples were more than four times more likely to split up than married couples (The British Household Panel Study, 1991-1992).

In 1987 it was estimated that 32% of marriages were likely to end in divorce during the first 20 years (Haskey 1989) and by 1993 the Government estimated that 40% of marriages ended in divorce with 20% of woman and 12.5% men being divorced by the age of 33 years old.

The following table shows the increasing divorce rates during the period 1971 to

1991:

Table 2.2 Patterns of Divorce: % UK Divorce Rates based on per

thousand marriages

YEAR	PERCENTAGE	SOURCE
1971	6.0	(CSO, Social Trends, 1991/92)
1972	9.5	(Allen, 1985)
1976	10.0	(CSO, Social Trends, 1991/92)
1979	11.6	(Allen, 1985)
1981	11.9	(CSO, Social Trends, 1992)
* 1990	12.6	(CSO, Social Trends, 1993)
1991	13.5	(England and Wales. OPCS, 1991a)

* *Second highest divorce rate in Europe (Denmark 12.8)*

(Adapted from Fox-Harding, L. 1996: 56)

The increasing divorce rates were augmented by the increases in re-divorce that was a

noticeable pattern from the early 1970's to the late 1980's. Divorces involving a

second, or subsequent marriage by one of the partners, more than doubled during this

period, from 7% of divorces in 1971 to 16% of divorces in 1989 (The Family Policy

Studies Centre, 1991).

Another feature of divorce was that it was less common among professional and managerial groups than in semi-skilled and skilled groups with even higher rates of divorce being recorded where the husband was unemployed (Fox-Harding, 1996: 60).

In summary, the decreasing numbers of marriages and proportionally increasing number of divorces together with the increased number of cohabiting couples who were more likely to separate than married couples set a problematic for a Conservative Government that was promoting traditional family values (see Sec. 2.4). More pertinent to this study is the influence of the trends in childbirth and changes in family structures that were to significantly increase the pressure of demand on the provision of financial welfare and prompt changes in child support policy.

2.2.2   Patterns of Childbirth and Family Typologies

Although the majority of childbirth was within marriage there was an increasing numbers of childbirths outside marriage and the upward trend in childbirths outside of marriage occurred while the overall fertility rates in the UK had diminished over the 1970's and 1980's. In 1971 the fertility rate was over two children per woman (CSO, Social Trends, 1991) and although this rate was still slightly over two children per woman in 1981 it decreased to 1.8 in 1989 and increased slightly to 1.84 by 1990 (CSO, Social Trends, 1992).

The total live births in the UK for the period 1985 to 2001 is given in the following

table:

Table 2.3 Total Live Births in the UK (000's)

YEAR	000's	YEAR	000's
1985	751	1994	750
1986	755	1995	732
1987	776	1996	733
1988	788	1997	727
1989	777	1998	717
1990	799	1999	700
1991	793	2000	679
1992	781	2001	669
1993	762		

(Office of Population Censuses & Surveys; Government Actuary, 1993 and Annual

Abstract of Statistics No. 139, 2003)

Further, the increasing proportions of live births outside marriage is shown in the

following table:

Table 2.4 Percentages of Live Births Outside Marriage (UK), 1975 to 2001

YEAR	PERCENTAGE	YEAR	PERCENTAGE
1975	9.0	1993	31.7
1980	11.5	1994	32.0
1985	18.9	1995	33.6
1986	21.0	1996	35.5
1987	22.9	1997	36.7
1988	25.1	1998	37.7
1989	26.6	1999	38.9
1990	27.9	2000	39.5
1991	29.8	2001	40.1
1992	30.8		

(Adapted from CSO Social Trends, 1992, Annual Abstract of Statistics, Table 5.16,

2003: 48 and National Population Trends Spring 2002 No. 107, Table 3.2: 69)

It is significant to note that the proportion of births outside marriage was

approximately 28% by 1990 with an increasing trend.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's it was estimated that about 10% of children were living with their natural mother and a stepfather whether they were married or cohabiting (Family Policy Studies Centre 1991). In 1996, the Lord Chancellor's Department produced figures showing 232,663 births (35.8%) were registered outside of marriage with 58% of these births showing the mother and father cohabiting at the same address (Shared Parent Information Group UK, 1999).

An indication of the proportion of cohabiting parents is given by the 1998 General Household Survey in reporting that 55% of live births outside of marriage in England during 1992 were registered jointly with both parents living at the same address. In order to clarify the classification of family typologies including the states of remarriages and serial monogamy, the following definitions are provided:

Table 2.5 Family Typologies and Definitions

'Nuclear'

Two parent forms:	Married ('traditional') families
	Married-step families
	Married-reconstituted families
	Cohabiting families
	Cohabiting-step families
	Cohabiting-reconstituted families
One Parent Form	Single-Lone Parent families

1. Married families are viewed as the *'traditional'* model. These exist where the family unit comprise of the married biological parents of any children in the household.

2. Married stepfamilies are represented by two cases:

i) The partners have married or remarried and only one of the partners is a biological parent of any children. This means that the partners have not had children as a couple and thus one of the partners is a stepparent.

ii) Neither of the married partners is a biological parent of any child or children in the household and thus are foster parents.

3. Married reconstituted families exist where either or both of the partners have children outside of the marriage and also have a child or children between themselves.

4. Cohabiting families represent the cases where the partners have a child or children and, although they live as a family household, are not married.

5. Cohabiting stepfamilies represent two cases:

i) The partners have not married nor remarried and only one of the partners is a biological parent of any children. This means that the partners have not had children as a couple and thus one of the partners is a stepparent.

ii) The partners act as unmarried foster parents.

6. Cohabiting reconstituted families exist where either or both of the partners have children outside of the relationship and have also had a child or children between themselves but are not a married couple.

7. Single or Lone Parent families represent the cases where only one of the biological parent is the person who is resident and with care of any children.

Although it might seem a laborious exercise to define the various family types such classification indicates the complexities of family structures and circumstances and the potential problems of applying a general 'one size fits all' model of child maintenance assessment.

In this study the emphasis is placed on the state of lone parenthood as the category most dependent on financial welfare support. Lone parents are sub-categorised as 'separated parents' and 'solo parents' with solo parents being those who have not been married previously (Rowlingson, K. and McKay, S. 1998). The following table shows the numbers of lone parents in identified categories for 1991:

Table 2.6 Categories of Lone Parents, 1991

Mothers	(000's)	PERCENTAGE
Single	440	34
Separated	250	19
Divorced	430	33
Widowed	80	6
Total Lone Mothers	1,200	92
Lone Fathers	100	8
Total Lone Parents	1.300	100

(Adapted from Ford, R. and Millar, J. 1997)

Government statistics for 1991 show that there were 1.3 million lone parents in the

UK caring for 2.2 million children with approximately three-quarters, some 1 million

of these parents, in receipt of Income Support. The average duration of lone

parenthood had also increased (Ford, R. et al 1995).

In 1971 there had been 570,000 lone parents with 16% having never married

compared with 1,690,000 lone parents with 38% having never married, in 1996.

Further, in 1971, 52% were employed with 37% dependent on Supplementary Benefit

(Income Support) compared with 41% employed and 59% dependent on

Supplementary Benefit (Income Support) by 1996 (General Household Surveys;

Social Security Statistics: Social Focus on Families, 1997).

A further concern regarding lone parenthood was that there had been an increase in

teenage pregnancies in the UK (Land and Lewis, 1997 and Lewis, 1989). This

increased trend continued with the UK having the highest rate of live births to teenage

girls in the EU during 2000 with a rate of 29 live births per 1000 girls aged 15 – 19

(Social Trends, 2003: 41).

Another study estimated that 57% of lone parents lived in public sector housing as

compared with the national figure of 25% for the general population. Approximately

44% were housed in public sector accommodation prior to breakdown of marriage

compared with 53% being housed in public sector accommodation after the

breakdown of marriage. Together with prescribed Income Support benefits lone

parents were dependent upon local council support for accommodation.

It was further estimated that, in the cases of marriage break-up, some 58% moved

from the matrimonial home (Bradshaw, J. and Millar, J. 1991). The Child Poverty

Action Group (CPAG) estimated that approximately 3.9 million children,

approximately one third were living in conditions of poverty with incomes below half

the national average. Of these, 76% were from lone families meaning approximately

three quarters of children in one-parent families were living in states of poverty and

approximately 25% of all children lived in households dependent on State benefits

(Oppenheim, C. 1993).

Of particular importance to this study is the fact that about 75% of lone parents

received no financial maintenance from absent parents and the majority of these cases

were wholly reliant on Income Support (The Family Resource Survey, 1993/94). A

study made by the CPAG stated that about one third of all woman placed complete

financial reliability on the man in the house and where there was no man in the house

such financial reliability was placed on the State (Daily Telegraph 11th-13th June

1990). Other studies found that any improvements in the economic well being of

lone mothers and their children were dependent on the lone mothers remarrying

(Bradshaw, J. 1989) and lone mothers who married or remarried boosted their

income levels and were most likely to move out of states of poverty (Millar, J. 1989).

In addition to the financial problems associated with lone parent families it was suggested that children from lone parent families were more prone to behavioural and educational difficulties than children from other family environments (Burghes, L. 1994).

Family breakdowns had resulted in the creation of an *'underclass'* and the alienation of children from society (Dennis, N. and Erdos 1992). In a social context the increased occurrence of lone parenthood, particularly from teenage pregnancies augmented the growth of a *'dependency culture'* (Murray, C. 1990) and high rates of female-headed families, illegitimacy, poverty, crime and unemployment (Cochrane, A. and Clark, J. 1993: 95).

Although lone parenthood had become accepted and any associated stigma had been diminished, one survey found that lone families were regarded as being the result of immoral and irresponsible ways and unmarried mothers had been careless about contraception or had deliberately chosen single motherhood for the advantages to be gained from being awarded priorities in housing and benefits support. This study quoted comments made about lone mothers that included references to them not wanting to work and neglecting their responsibilities as parents that resulted in an increase of juvenile delinquency (McKendrick, J. 1997).

Errant or feckless fathers were also criticized as having no intention of supporting their children having shirked their parental responsibilities and this opinion is expressed in the following:

"If there were insurance against marriage breakdown, would there be more breakdowns? Some would argue that social security has encouraged the breakdown of marriage. It was exactly that kind of logic that lay behind the creation of the Child Support Agency. Men should not be able to walk out on a wife and expect the State to pay...If young men had financially to support the children produced by thoughtless sex they might be more likely to wear a condom."

(Glennerster, H. 1997: 23)

The associated complexities of family circumstances amplified the problems of financial provisions for children after separation particularly where the fathers had been feckless or errant with their financial responsibilities and this influenced the emphasis of the new child support policy in placing financial responsibilities on biological parenthood.

In summary, following the increasing divorce rates referred to in para. 2.2.1, the separation of parents with children together with the significant increase in births outside of marriage placed a greater reliance on the State (White Paper: *'Children Come First'*, Cm. 1264, 1990).

Lone parents were more vulnerable to states of poverty and dependent on welfare benefits that prompted a social consciousness, however, there was an insistence that the State should not be responsible for the financial support of other people's children.

2.3 <u>The Economic Influence</u>

As stated above, the cost of providing additional prescribed financial benefits to lone parents to the State and subsequently gave impetus to changes in child support policy that became *'Treasury driven'*. This was authenticated in the discussions on the new system where, at the initialisation of child support, Mavis Maclean as Policy Advisor used the term, *"Treasury trumps"* (Maclean, Mavis, 12th August 1999). The emphasis on the financial objectives and the dominance of the Treasury in detailing the implementation of policy and legislation was confirmed in the following:

> *"The whole story of policy making in the 80's was to try and find ways of saving money on social security and all ways of saving money on social security are politically unattractive. Child support was seen as the politically more attractive way of doing it but there was no doubt that if we didn't get the money that way we would have to get the money some other way, and so of course it was a policy to save money."*
>
> (Punctuation added)
>
> (Whippman, Michael, Policy Director, Department of Social Security, 1994 – 1998, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*, Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999)

On a wider scale, both contributory and non-contributory benefits had been seen to increase over the late 1980's.

This was augmented with increased unemployment and a demographic shift causing

increasing numbers of retired, economically inactive people in the population. The

real growth in social security provision grew steadily from around £63 billion during

1984/85 to around £84 billion in 1994 (Dept. of Social Security 1993/94, Social

Trends, 1998). Child benefits had increased and, most significantly, it was the lone

parent group where the claims had increased disproportionately with the Government

estimating that, by 1990, 72% of lone parents would depend on prescribed Social

Security benefits (see para. 2.2.2). This meant that the number of lone parents on

benefits had doubled between 1980 and 1990 with approximately 80% of lone

mothers claiming benefits, receiving no money from absent fathers. It was thus

important that the new system would make savings in benefits and, to this end, the

CSA was given a target to save £530m to the Exchequer in its first year of operation

(see Chapter Eight).

The following tables highlight the upward trend in the financial dependency of lone

parents:

Table 2.7 Recipients of Selected Non-Contributory Benefits

(Number of Qualifying Children 000's)

YEAR	1981/2	1991/2	1993/4
TOTAL	13,079	12,401	12,662
ONE-PARENT FAMILIES	508	821	914

(Dept. of Social Security Social Trends, 1995)

Table 2.8 Family Benefits (Expenditure in Real Terms £ Billions)

YEAR	1986/7	1991/2	1993/4	1996/7
LONE PARENTS	3.9	6.0	8.0	9.8
TOTAL	66.4	70.0	80.9	86.2

(Adjusted to 1993/94 GDP Market Prices)

(Dept. of Social Security Social Trends, 1998)

During the period 1981-1982 this financial support had amounted to some £1.4

billion with the DSS reporting that this had increased to £3.2 billion in the period

1988-1989. During the period 1992 – 1993 the Treasury quoted that there had been

an increase of support given to lone parents of 170%, and eventually this reached £8

billion during 1996-1997.

The child maintenance system prior to the 1991 Act came under heavy criticism for

not providing a sufficient amount of maintenance from absent parents in meeting the

needs of parents with care and their children and it was generally thought that the cost

of keeping children was underestimated (White Paper: *'Children Come First'*, Cm.

1264, 1990). The previous system was deemed to have failed and incurred additional

costs to the Treasury. This was confirmed in the comment that, *"it had failed to*

bring the men of Britain to their senses and stop them from fathering more children

than they can afford" (Maclean, Mavis, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*, Evans Woolfe

Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999).

The proposed new child support policy was an example of the imperative to reduce public spending on social security payments across the whole spectrum of welfare benefits. In practice the new system was to redistribute wealth by using means testing with an earnings-related model. The intentions of the Treasury to cover State benefit payments and reduce public deficits placed the CSA in an extremely challenging position in increasing the aggregate payments of child maintenance and there is little disagreement that the new system introduced a shock wave in the realisation of financial commitment to children after separation.

The details of how the Treasury was to achieve savings by the new system included increased incentives to assist lone parents to seek employment with a disregard of £15 per week that was to be introduced in April 1992. Although this disregard did not apply to Income Support it applied to Family Credit, Housing Benefit, Community Charge Benefit, Disability Working Allowance and Council Tax Benefit, from April 1993. In addition the qualifying hours of employment for Family Credit and Income Support was reduced from 24 hours to 16 hours per week (see Chapter Five).

Following the introduction of the Child Support Act (1991), the Department of Social Security quoted the average assessment for an absent parent as being £39 per week in November 1996 with approximately one half of AP's providing maintenance from earned income with the amount being £22 per week for all AP's (Department of Social Security, 1997).

One study found that the average child support payment reported by lone mothers,

prior to the 1991 Act, was £30 per week and suggested that the maintenance

provision had reduced, *de facto*, following the 1991 Act (Bradshaw, J. and Millar, J.

1997). Another study estimated that 72% of women with the care of children were in

the same financial position after the introduction of the 1991 Act, with 8% being

worse off and 20% being better off. For the male Non-Resident Parent (NRP) it was

estimated that 15% were better off, 38% were worse off and 47% were in the same

financial position. In 37% of cases, the Treasury was better off, in 12% of cases the

Treasury was worse off, and in 51% of cases the Treasury was in the same financial

position (Davis, G., Wickeley, N. and Young, R. 1996).

A major problem was the non-compliance of NRPs to their maintenance assessments

and in November 1996 it was estimated that only about one quarter of AP's who had

been given an assessment, were paying the full amount. About one third of these were

paying part of their assessment with the rest paying nothing (Department of Social

Security, 1996, see Chapter Nine). These results questioned the fundamental

economic principles of the CSA assessment formula in that, although most

maintenance assessments had increased the level of financial contributions from

NRP's, the actual average amount of maintenance payments had reduced.

A full evaluation of the economic effects is a complex process as situations arise

where the system demands the giving of funds from one source and the taking of

funds from another (*'giving with one hand, taking with the other'*).

The actual cost of the administration of the CSA had yet to be assessed fully but there was an estimated saving of £1,740 million to the Treasury from April 1993 to December 1996 (House of Commons Social Security Committee, 5th report, 1997, par. 9). This was the result of maintenance contributions being deducted from Income Support and there were also reductions in *'passported benefits'* associated with Income Support (see Chapter Nine). The dominance of Treasury goals might also be regarded as being myopic in that there exist complex social conditions and individual circumstances that were disregarded by the new policy. Although the complex socio-economic factors are generally non-quantifiable, such conditions form a potential problem set for the effective practice of a rigid child support policy. In essence there was much more data required in order to make any realistic comparisons of the net financial gains in the new system of child support.

2.4   The Political Influence

In the context of social and public policies, it is significant to identify the political emphases of the Conservative Government who were in power at the time that the 1991 Act was introduced. The political environment of the late 1970's and early 1980's, referred to as the, *'New Right'*, was synonymous with *'Thatcherism'* and was regarded as combining, *'Toryism'* with a liberal political economy, together with traditional values upheld by the State, the family and minimal Government (Hall, S. 1983).

As referred to in Chapter One it can be seen that there was an emphasis on private

enterprise and economic liberalism with an associated move to developing an

enterprise culture and the promotion of the efficiency of markets, the liberty of

individuals and a non-interventionist State (Keat, R. 1991: 1). Although many

observations of the move towards a form of liberal capitalism refer to the private

sector, the same underlying philosophies have been applied to public sector

organizations via NPSM principles with liberalism being at the core of the New Right

(King, D. 1987: 20). The liberal market provision for welfare was contained in the

'laissez-faire model' rather than the more structured Keynesian welfare State model.

In the case of child support the intrusion by the State into family matters was intended

to reduce the dependence of the individual on welfare State benefits and thus set the

shift of emphasis to self-reliance. However, there are associated constraints placed on

individuals that can be seen to reduce the individual liberties and limit choices by

implementing the 1991 Act and introducing State control in family financial issues.

There is also a suggestion that social and public policies relating to the family had

been used as instruments of political campaign. Lorraine Fox-Harding (1996)

describes the emphasis of concern upon the role of the family that could be traced in

the 1970's, with both the Labour and Conservative parties claiming to be the, *'the

party of the family'*. In 1983 the Family Policy Group was formed as a Cabinet

Group in order to discuss family issues and, in parallel to the activities in the UK, the

Reagan administration formed an Executive Order to strengthen family stability in the

USA, (Fox-Harding, L. 1996: 219-220).

References to the family as a desirable and necessary state in fulfilling the social

agenda of any Government was favoured by politicians. Margaret Thatcher, as Prime

Minister, reinforced such ideals in addressing the National Children's Homes by

referring to her concerns for children's welfare as follows:

> "...children are in danger of seeing life without fathers not as the exception
>
> but as the rule...this is a new kind of threat to our whole way of life, the long
>
> term implications of which we can hardly grasp...But when one of the parents
>
> not only walks away from marriage but neither maintains nor shows any
>
> interest in the child, an enormous unfair burden is placed on the other.
>
> Nearly four out of five mothers claiming Income Support receive no
>
> maintenance from the fathers. No father should be able to escape from his
>
> responsibility and that is why the Government is looking at ways of
>
> strengthening the system for tracing an absent father and making
>
> arrangements for recovering maintenance more effective."

(Thatcher, Margaret, 17th Jan 1990, speech for National Children's Homes)

Further indications of Margaret Thatcher's attitudes to child support were made in her

statement to the, '300 group':

> "Government too must be concerned to see parents accept responsibility for
>
> their children. For even though marriages may break down, parenthood is
>
> for life. Legislation cannot make irresponsible parents responsible.

But it can and must ensure that absent parents pay maintenance for their

children. It is not fair for them to expect other families to foot their bills too. "

(Thatcher, Margaret 1990)

This can be regarded as being significant in the general Conservative party's

approach in its ideological agenda of strengthening the family (Wasoff, F. 1995: 80)

and the Conservative party's emphasis on traditional family values and roles were

absorbed into its political ideologies of its *'Back to Basics'* campaign (see below).

Such terms encompass ethical and moral conjectures and stress the *'rights'* and

'wrongs' of parental responsibilities with emotive undertones. Although this might

be regarded as mere political rhetoric, Margaret Thatcher's influence on changes in

child support policy cannot be ignored and this was emphasised in the following:

"I mean this was a Government, led from the front, with the handbag, and

was not really interested to hear about the difficulties. "

(Punctuation added)

(Maclean, Mavis, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*, Evans Woolfe Production, in association

with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999)

Such comment is particularly significant in view of the fact that Mavis Maclean was

not only an advisory member of child support working parties but also had close

knowledge of how the Government worked (see Sec. 2.3).

The Government moved quickly in publishing the White Paper *'Children Come First'*

(Cm. 1264, October 1990) and the policies were subsequently made statute in the

Child Support Act that received Royal Assent on 25th July 1991.

There was a limited series of debates and discussions in the House of Commons and

House of Lords (see Chapter Five) that included consultations with various interest

groups such as the National Council for One-Parent families. There was little

disagreement or opposition in the House of Commons with the main concerns being

expressed by the State departments, none of which wanted to take responsibility for

the new scheme. The Permanent Secretary of the Deputy of Social Security, Sir

Michael Partridge (1988-1995), confirmed this in the following:

> *"...there was a considerable argument in Government as to who should take*
>
> *responsibility for this scheme, whether it should basically be a tax-based*
>
> *scheme, run by the Revenue or whether it should be a benefits scheme, run by*
>
> *Security, and perhaps, unsurprisingly, as Permanent Secretary of State, I was*
>
> *very keen on Tax doing it and Sir Anthony Battersall, Permanent Secretary of*
>
> *Revenue was very keen on Security doing it"*

In the same broadcast, Peter Lilley MP, Financial Secretary to the Treasury (1989-

1990) stated that:

"if it had become intermingled with people's family disputes, that would had

eroded the general consent to paying taxes, so that I urged that it be done by

the DSS."

(Punctuation added)

("Can't Pay Wont Pay", Evans Woolfe production, in association with Brook

Lapping, 1999)

The White Paper: *'Children Come First'* (Cm. 1264, 1990) signified the beginning

of the CSA and defined it as central to the implementation of policy and legislation.

The main proposals of this White Paper are summarised as follows:

1.   To apply a formula to assess child maintenance demands.

2.   To establish a Next Steps Agency to be called the Child Support

       Agency, which would operate under the authority of the Secretary of

       State for Social Security.

As previously stated, this paper formed the outlines for the Child Support Act (1991)

and the subsequent introduction of the CSA that eventually commenced its operations

from April 1993. The 1991 Act was referred to as being, *"the most far-reaching*

social reform to be made for forty years" by the Social Security Committee and there

is little doubt that the legislation was planned to be a long-term instrument of social

and public policy (see Chapter Five).

On 10th April 1992 John Major replaced Margaret Thatcher as the new Prime

Minister and it was this Conservative Government that made the most significant

drives in implementing the changes to family issues and the introduction of the 1991

Act under the concepts that were encompassed in the phrase, '*Back to Basics*' (see

above). The main themes are summarized as follows:

> "*Children need roots, need stability, need consistency and need security.*
>
> *Children need to be able to make sense of their lives. That is the constant role*
>
> *for families. It is a responsibility which they must continue to bear despite the*
>
> *economic and social pressures they face...Being a parent entails a long-term*
>
> *commitment ...It is the same principle which underpins the Child Support*
>
> *Act...Families are private institutions. Long may that remain.*"
>
> (Virginia Bottomley, '*The Family-Responding to Change*', 26th May 1994)

Although this new approach to child support had cross-party support there were

growing concerns and oppositions from interest and opposition groups. Later, the

main thrust of opposition came, not only from Absent Parents (APs, later referred to

as Non Resident Parents, NRPs), but there were also negative responses from some

Parents With Care (PWCs) experiencing difficulties in securing financial settlements.

It was not long after the introduction of the Act, that it was beginning to be regarded

as a political '*own goal*' (Wasoff, F. 1995: 79). Together with excessive numbers of

letters of complaints sent to MPs, there was great disorder and chaos within the CSA

and it was therefore not unexpected that amendments to the Act were made less than

a year after it was made (see Chapter Five).

As referred to above, the 1991 Act contained many ethical and moral implications, not least was the effects of increased State control on the administration of child maintenance via the CSA rather than by individual family agreements (Lee, S. 1994: 132). In terms of child support policy the UK had moved away from the approaches taken by its European partners (Cannon, C. 1992).

In assessing maintenance to a set formula and subsequently collecting and distributing financial support, there were significant but often disregarded implications related to the concept of civil liberties and constitutional rights. The Government was regarded as refusing to endorse the EC's Social Charter (1989) and it opted out of the Social Chapter of the treaty on European Economic and Political Union in 1991 (see Chapter Five). There were also criticisms of this type of system of child support in the United States of which the following is an example:

> "...Economists had not paid sufficient attention to relationships between men and women or parents and children, and that, as a result, they had failed to provide a convincing analysis of economic development, political conflict, or social welfare"

(Folbre, N. 1994: 1)

The changes in child support policy were regarded by some as having the effect of reducing the propensity to marry whilst they were not seen as realistically deterring the separation of couples (Ford, R. and Millar, J. 1997).

In the late 1990's William Hague, as leader of the Conservative opposition at the

time, suggested financial incentives to married couples in the form of higher tax

allowances. It could be argued that such an incentive was proposed to secure a

political advantage in having a voting public and society that was ordered to the

institution of marriage.

Continuing the political progression in terms of the issues of child support the *'New*

Labour' Government, with Tony Blair as Prime Minister, did not immediately

instigate any major changes in the fundamental issues of child support policy other

than the consultation of the Green Paper: *"Children First: A New Approach to Child*

Support" (Cm. 3992, July 1998). The proposed changes included a flat rate

assessment system that would replace the complex formula for assessing child

maintenance. This was made legislation in The Child Support, Pensions and Social

Security Act (2000) (see Chapter Five).

In summary, the main political objectives were to support the economic objectives by

increasing the amount of maintenance paid by absent fathers and thus to shift the

emphasis from the provision of child support from the State to the individual. The

implication of this was that the State would dictate the financial obligations and

family business with regards to child maintenance after the separation of parents.

There was some incongruity derived from applying this paradigm that can be seen as

a vulnerable exception to a political agenda that had pursued the idea of individualism

and a laissez faire approach to welfare provision, with the State crossing the

thresholds of individual families.

In considering the social environment and the economic and political influences that were to effect changes in child support policy, the environment of change is described in the context of child support. Such changes were to be coordinated under NPSM principles (see Chapter One) with the introduction of the CSA and thus the Agency was to experience two significant influences from the State, both driven by micro economic goals. Although NPSM themes might be regarded as being directly identifiable in the CSA the social and financial circumstances of the Agency's customers form a problematical environment within which the Agency implements child support legislation.

Chapter Three

The UK System of Child Support: Addressing the Issues

3.1 Introduction

Having set the context of this study in terms of NPSM themes and the environments and drives for changes in child support policy this Chapter clarifies the main issues to be considered prior to embarking on an internal analysis of the CSA. This Chapter also serves to consolidate the issues raised in Chapters One and Two and describes how the subsequent Chapters are linked and structured. At this stage the main questions posed by this study of the CSA and the problems associated with the system of child support are specified. In order to clarify the main issues addressed by this study some refinements are made in order that the questions form an initial framework that can develop into an inductive process of field research (see Chapter Four).

The overall aim of the study is to provide some original contributions to the understanding of the CSA and how it is influenced by the themes of NPSM and the requirements of Government in providing a system of financial support for children after the separation of their parents.

In order to achieve this it is important to extend the consideration of NPSM principles beyond regarding it as a purely academic construct and make a critical appraisal of which features of the changes in public sector management are applied to the CSA acting as a Next Steps Agency. The CSA is regarded as being a vehicle of public policy that addresses the problem of providing regular financial support to Parents With Care (PWCs) whilst reducing the Treasury's expenditure on benefits payments. In discussing the main themes and principles of changes in public sector management in the context of child support policy the two main principles of NPSM are detailed together with a consideration of the promotion of public sector agencies in free market operations. It is not intended to enter into a wide debate of the provision of services by all public sector agencies however the idea of applying the *'privatisation agenda'* and the principles of privatisation to the CSA is argued, at this stage in the study, as being inappropriate to the provision of child support.

The development of the new child support policy and its associated legislation set the material with which the CSA has to work and is thus fundamental to the understanding of the operations of the Agency. Chapters Five to Nine are closely linked and having established the framework of the study, external and internal analyses are executed on the CSA with references to its organizational structure and typology (see Chapter Six). Although some comparisons are made with organizational theories the study aims to gather and categorize information by primary research with CSA staff and by referring to the Agency's documentation (see Chapter Seven).

In order to fulfil the main objectives of the study there are requirements for objective

and rational approaches to be taken in collecting and interpreting information and in

developing effective relationships with the CSA staff involved (see Chapter Four).

Questions are posed to assist in illustrating how the analyses developed in searching

for responses that were to guide the study. The first main question posed in this

section is whether the CSA consists, in the main, of the organizational features found

in any typical bureaucracy and can thus be regarded as just another bureaucracy or

have some influences of managerialism promoted by the themes of NPSM resulted in

an alternative organizational typology? In addressing this question in the context of

public sector management and in commencing the search for evidence of influences

of NPSM themes the question is posed as to what effects the changes in public sector

management have on the CSA acting as a vehicle of social administration? In order

to address this question a detailed study of the CSA as an organization together with

comparisons with organizational theories is required (see below and Chapter Six).

The second main question posed in this section is whether child support policy can be

realistically and practically separated from its implementation? If the detachment of

policy and practice has been realistically achieved then the introduction of the CSA

under NPSM themes has produced a perceived new approach to welfare provision in

the case of child support. In order to address this question analyses are made of the

implementation of the new child support policy and legislation and the reactions of

the CSA's customers, the effects on its staff and the operational performances of the

CSA.

Having stated the main questions that underpin this study the logical progression is

made in describing how relevant data and information can be collected by appropriate

methods and techniques. These issues are discussed in Chapter Four where

references are made to some relevant features of methodologies that are appropriately

applied to the research activities pursued in this study.

3.2   NPSM Themes and the Principles of Changes in the UK System of Child Support

In Chapter One the two fundamental principles of changes in public sector

management relevant to this study of the CSA are the separation of policy and its

implementation and the promotion of private sector methods to public sector

agencies together with the associated introduction of *'new managerialism'*. One

study of public sector management summarises the features of NPSM as being:

1)   Simply right-wing ideology.

2)   Nothing new but simply old contracting out.

3)   A special manipulative discourse.

4)   An incoherent mixture of popular ideas.

5)   A mere extension of micro-economic theory from the private sector to the public sector.

(Lane, J. 2000: 6)

In addition to NPSM being regarded as an ideology of the *'New Right'* this study

identifies the drive to achieve overall micro-economic efficiency in the public sector

as being paramount in considering the CSA as a Next Steps Agency. More

specifically in the context of public sector management the main assumption made in

the ideologies of the New Right was that there were financial advantages to be gained

from the application of NPSM concepts and principles in achieving value for money.

The first principle of NPSM that child support policy can be separated from its

implementation by the CSA is questioned above and the impracticality and

infeasibility of this is referred to in a wider sense in the following:

> *"Public Sector management is closely connected both with public policy,*
>
> *policy making and policy implementation that is, as well as with public*
>
> *administration. Yet, these concepts do not overlap, and there are differences*
>
> *in real life between the typical modes of action in public management, i.e.*
>
> *between policy-making and administration. It is impossible to make a sharp*
>
> *separation between managerial action, policies and administration in the*
>
> *Public Sector. Public Sector management embraces objectives and decision*
>
> *making, as in the policy-making, but it also takes into account how institutions*
>
> *constrain the employment of resources, as in administration. The effort in*
>
> *theory of Public Sector management is to integrate all three entities: goals,*
>
> *means and rules, modelling the daily running of the Public Sector."*

(Lane, J. 2000: 2)

Although this study does not attempt to make a wholesale evaluation of NPSM as applied to all public sector provisions, the suitability of the philosophies associated to NPSM are questioned in the context of child support. More specifically this study poses questions as to whether the wholesale application of NPSM principles to the system of child support is workable? Further, should the promotion of private sector methodologies to the CSA be regarded as an idealistic economic panacea that is, perhaps, misguided?

The promotion of private sector practices within the themes of NPSM intends to increase the involvement of State agencies in market operations and the pursuit of market testing where it is intended to place Next Steps Agencies open to market forces and to face competition from the private sector in the interests of *'stakeholders'* (see Chapter One). By 1992 the market-testing programme was established with the NHS and local government with the assumption that information was readily available to all suppliers and purchasers (Butcher, T. 1995: 125). The imbalance of information has detrimental effects on *'free market'* operations where the suppliers and/or purchasers possess *'differential information'*. In practice, the involvement of the CSA in private sector markets, although intended to stimulate free market competition is limited to suppliers of its resources and *'business products'*. In this study the CSA is regarded as not being significantly involved with competitive markets or any *'quasi markets'* and the objective of profit maximisation is replaced by cost reduction to the Treasury and taxpayer as the main objective of the Agency's mission.

With the emphasis being placed on cost reduction rather than profit maximisation the agency status of the CSA acting under themes of NPSM might pose some threat from competition and the privatisation of its services. The *'privatisation agenda'* purports to utilize external suppliers and providers of goods and services in replacing public sector agencies by independent private organizations in order to increase efficiency. For example, the privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), with some 3000 staff, resulted in a separate Trading Fund status as The Stationery Office (SO) in 1980. This releases it from the *'allied service'* principle and correspondingly released *'purchasers'* from the *'tied procurement'* principle (Gray, J. 1994: 117). The *'hiving off'* or *'privatising'* of services and suppliers provide a free market *'enablement'* that gives autonomy in self-regulation and control to such organizations. Although privatisation might have benefits in various *'housekeeping'* activities and in providing physical goods and services for various public sector agencies, the idea of replacing the CSA with a completely independent and private agency is regarded as being inappropriate, if not infeasible, in this study. Further, the task of handling and processing vast amounts of data and information by a private agency, external to other public sector agencies, is regarded as not to be viable or desirable.

The adherence to ethical codes by the CSA in dealing with family issues is regarded as a necessary requirement in implementing child support policy and legislation. The subjective moralistic, ethical and emotive issues encompassed in family issues and child support poses the question if more individualistic remedies might be more appropriate.

In this context it is regarded that the intrusion of the State into the private sphere of

the *'patriarchal family'* is inappropriate (Parker, S. 1994: 552). In the context of

child support legislation the CSA's involvement in family issues is regarded as an

ethical shift from a *'rights-based'* to a *'utility-based'* model of family law (Parker, S.

1994: 554). A problematic for the CSA is formed by two themes in that it is a Next

Steps Agency, derived from first principles, that is expected to adhere to the wider

principles of NPSM whilst applying rigid and controversial rules (*'one size fits all'*)

in moulding individual cases into discrete subsets for the financial provision of child

maintenance. This poses the question as to if any incongruence between individual

ideals and requirements and the ideologies underlying State legislation exists, has this

diminished the practical effectiveness of the implementation of child support policy?

This question links with the recurrent question regarding the separation of policy and

implementation and the effects on the performances of the CSA.

3.3   The UK System of Child Support: Policy, Legislation and the CSA's Mission

As previously stated, in replacing the role of the courts and the Liable Relatives

Section (later the Dependent Relatives Section) of the DSS in assessing child

maintenance agreements the new system was intended to reduce the costs of benefit

payments to the Treasury and elevate, if not eliminate, child poverty. The scale of the

problem in providing welfare support and the predicted increasing trends in

dependency placed the Treasury as the main catalyst of change in child support

policy.

In addition the social and political ideologies of the New Right associated with the

Thatcher and Major Governments in the late 1980's had promoted such campaigns as,

'going back to basics' and *'traditional family values'*.   The New Right also promoted

individualism and the minimisation of State intrusion and intervention that had

encouraged the adherence to a *'laissez faire'* welfare model and the localization of

responsibilities (see Chapter Two).   The new approach to child support policy is seen

to be contrary to the theme of individualism with the application of an algorithm of

assessment rather than individual negotiations via the courts.   It can be appreciated

that this exception to the common theme of individualism in welfare policy was made

in order to reduce the costs of prescribed welfare benefits for lone parents.

Although this study does not intend to make a wide evaluation of the policies

promoted by the New Right and a detailed analysis of the legal instruments used in

the implementation of child support, it is considered valid to trace the changes in

legislation and to recognize the significance of such changes and subsequent

adjustments in the law. From the Elizabethan Poor Law Act (1601) various

legislation and legal instruments have been directed to the provision of welfare

support for children after the separation of parents however this study focuses on the

Child Support Acts (1991 and 1995) and the significant changes that are contained in

the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (2000). The development of

child support policy and subsequent legislation is significant to this study as such

directives set the rules with which the CSA works with. It is significant that the CSA

was never intended to interpret the content of the various Child Support Acts however

the licence to enforce these laws are fundamental to the CSA's missions.

In accordance with the principles of NPSM, specifically the promotion of private

sector themes, the CSA has produced a series of missions that are akin to the styles

used by many private sector organizations. In analysing the contents of the various

CSA mission statements this study identifies the widening of the Agency's

undertakings that incorporate qualitative narratives and contemporary terminologies

in defining the Agency's aims and objectives (see Chapter Five). The CSA's

missions are disseminated throughout the descriptions in its Business Plans and

Annual Reports and Accounts and, in analysing these publications the feasibility,

workability and styles of the mission narratives are broadly questioned.

Evidence of changes in mission narratives and styles intimate developments in the

CSA's approach in dealing with its customers and form the organizational agenda and

ideals by which the Agency is driven. In accordance with the CSA's strategic steer

later mission narratives show an increasing emphasis on internal factors of the

Agency, particularly its management of quality and human resources. In considering

the CSA's missions the study commences the internal journey into the Agency as an

organization with the strategies outlying the methodologies by which these missions

are to be achieved.

3.4   The CSA as an Organization

The analysis of the CSA as an organization is of fundamental importance to this

study, not least in searching for commonalities or deviations from the organizational

features associated with typical bureaucracies, but in realising the principles,

directives, structural framework and environment with which the Agency staff work

within. In conducting an internal analysis of the CSA consideration is given to the

effects of the themes of NPSM and the promotion of private sector methods. In

addition comparisons are made with selected organizational theories and the

empirical evidence found in interviews with CSA managers and provided in the

Agency's documentation. From the start of this analysis it is significant to appreciate

that the CSA consists of staff members who are employed within the wider structure

of the Civil Service.

The influence of the facets of Civil Service conditions of employment on CSA staff

develops from the fact that the Agency was originally an organizational subset of the

Department of Social Security (DSS) that was later placed under the supervision of

the Department for Work, Pensions and Social Security (8th June 2001).

Within this wider framework that encloses other Benefits and Contributions agencies,

the CSA falls into the category of a 'Transfer Agency' (Dunleavy, P. 1991: 20 – 21)

in providing a welfare service funded as a social expense that is dependent upon

legislation and the monopolistic powers given to it by the Secretary of State for

Social Security (SoS).

Prior to conducting a detailed analysis of the typology and structure of the CSA an

important link is made between the CSA's missions and the building of its strategies.

The search for evidence of the CSA's internal features and the promotion of

particular management styles is made in assessing the extent that NPSM themes have

influenced the workings of the CSA. The study of the CSA as an organization in all

its aspects is of central significance in developing any arguments referring to the

Agency's typology. In extending to making analyses of issues of quality

management and the measurement and interpretations of performances by the CSA,

evaluations of the effects of NPSM, child support policy and legislation on

implementations are made.

3.4.1 The CSA's Strategic Steer

The analysis of the CSA as an organization commences by following the progression from NPSM principles and child support policy and legislation to the resultant form of the Agency's missions. The analysis continues by considering the CSA's documented strategies that, like the production of mission statements, hold much in common with private sector businesses. The CSA's strategic steer is based on the 'moral campaign' and the 'administrative campaign' and is documented in an internal publication, 'Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003' (1998). These strategies are considered as methods forming a methodology of organizational 'software' by which the CSA's missions are to be accomplished.

The 'moral campaign' makes some appeal to moral and ethical responsibilities from the providers of child maintenance, usually absent fathers, to their biological children and such a campaign relies upon the trust and conscience, if not guilt, perceived by individuals. The 'moral campaign' is argued to be the more abstract component of the CSA's strategies and, perhaps, is too reliant on individual emotive responses to be effective as a standard and general strategic tool. The 'administrative campaign' contains the more instrumental agendas of the CSA's strategic plan and specifies the requirement for the efficient application of administrative resources and systems.

By considering the content of the CSA's Strategic Steer, Business Plans and Annual

Reports and Accounts, the narratives relating to strategic issues provides evidence of

a changing emphasis in the Agency's approach to integrating its strategies within the

organization and its operations. In questioning facets of the CSA's strategies in

interviews with Agency management, references to the *'moral campaign'* were

addressed to policy issues whilst comments regarding the *'administrative campaign'*

were directed to the internal operations that the interviewees appeared to be more at

ease in referring to. The *'administrative campaign'*, as with quality management

issues, demands the promotion of a coherent organizational culture and the need for

motivational imperatives for its staff members and this requires the coupling of

human resource management initiatives in applying strategic plans. In questioning

how the CSA promotes its strategic steer an insight can be gained into how the

strategic framework is applied in practice.

3.4.2   The CSA: Organizational Typology and Comparisons with Organizational Theories

As stated above, in questioning the roles and influences of NPSM themes on the CSA

this study extends to analyse the CSA as an organization and identify any

organisational typologies and/or features that might be applied to the Agency (see

Chapter Six). The question as to whether there are any fundamental differences in the

features of the CSA as an organization and the features of State bureaucracy prompts

the need to analyse the features of a typical bureaucracy and compare these with those

present in the CSA.

Such an analysis requires consideration of the structure and typology of the Agency

and a search for any evidence of influences from NPSM themes.

Whether CSA managers experience a greater level of autonomy with a reliance on

new managerialism than that awarded to managers in a typical State bureaucracy is

questioned. In the CSA's publications there is a declared localization of management

decision-making and the control of operations that is overseen by the CSA's Board

and Chief Executive. The reorganization of the DSS into Next Steps Agencies had

attempted to remove the label of bureaucracy and arguments against bureaucracy as

an effective medium of organisation are included in David Osborne and Ted

Gaebler's, *"Reinventing Government"* (1992) where the phrase, *"The Bankruptcy of*

Bureaucracy" is used to imply bureaucracy has become an out dated form of

organization. This idea is confirmed in the following:

> *"It is hard to imagine today, but 100 years ago the word **bureaucracy** meant*
>
> *something positive. It connoted a rational, efficient method of organization –*
>
> *something to take the place of the arbitrary exercise of power by*
>
> *authoritarian regimes."*
>
> (Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. 1992: 12)

Further, from comments made by CSA management, there is a general indication that

'bureaucracy' is a prejudicial term that is to be avoided at all costs.

In this study it is important to stress the distinction between the bureaucracy as indicated by organizational traits and '*bureaucracy*' as a generic term for administrative procedures and rigid bureaucratic processes (*red tape*). To customers of the CSA such administrative instruments have been perceived as being obstructive and counter productive (NACSA News 1998).

The question as to whether the CSA contains most of significant features of a typical bureaucracy (see above) does not enter into a detailed debate of the desirability of the role of bureaucracy rather the study searches for evidence of organizational, procedural and operational features that might be associated with the typology of a typical State bureaucracy. As previously stated to address this question effectively, comparisons of organisational theories, particularly the traits of the State bureaucracy described by Max Weber, are necessary in searching for evidence of the effects of decentralization from State bureaucracy to the CSA as a Next Steps Agency. Such comparisons extend beyond a critical literature review and the bland repetition of theory is avoided in favour of questioning what is the actual working schema behind the CSA.

Max Weber's work on the theory of bureaucracy identifies the main features that are applicable to the bureaucracy as an organizational type however, it is important to stress that Weber did not intend to rigidly define a bureaucracy as a complete empirical form.

Although bureaucracy as a style of organisation had been criticised as being too rigid and dominated by hierarchical structures perhaps most of the *'Weberian'* metrics of the *'ideal type'* bureaucracy are unavoidable in any large organization that attempts to achieve operational efficiency within the constraints of defined rules. Despite some of the fears expressed by Weber regarding this impersonal, yet inevitable role of bureaucracy, the positive contributions served from the role of bureaucracy include the perceptions of an established formal organization with an ethos of office experienced by its members (Du Gay, P. 2000). However, as stated above, it is considered as being impractical to set and test the hypothesis that a bureaucracy is the best form of organizational structure that might be applied to the CSA as there has been no alternative system in operation to make any realistic comparisons.

In referring to complexity within the CSA's organization consideration is given to alternative organizational and management theories that might be applied to the Agency. In the context of organizational analysis, the features of the CSA as an organization are compared with those provided by the Aston Research Programme (Pugh 1988, Pugh and Hickson 1976). Further, the organizational features referred to in the Aston Studies are compared with those included in Weber's analysis of bureaucracy.

Although NPSM principles are regarded, in the main, as being academic constructs, evidence is sought as to whether some of these themes are implemented as organizational steers in the CSA.

Of particular interest is an appraisal of the degree of autonomy awarded to

management in the CSA, referred to above, together with the declared flattening of

organizational structure in moving from a rigid hierarchy. Such issues are discussed

in interviews with CSA management in establishing if there exists a dichotomy

between the CSA being perceived as a bureaucracy and the CSA acting as a Next

Steps Agency. There is much evidence in organizational theories of increased

pluralism and induced complexities that exist in private sector organizations and

evidence of such phenomena being present in the CSA is sought.

Finally, in the context of organizational analysis, the question as to whether child

support policy and its implementation are not practically and realistically separable is

posed. Evidence of public responses to policy and the effects on CSA staff and

operations is sought. The extent of the vulnerabilities of the CSA and its Chief

Executives arising from the imperfections in policy is assessed. The problem set by

the autonomy and responsibility coupled to the role of Chief Executive is referred to

in the following:

> *"Leaving aside the technicalities associated with the mechanisms of*
>
> *accountability, as the Next Steps initiative gathered steam, it became clear*
>
> *that some Agency Chief Executives were adopting relatively high profiles as*
>
> *they accounted for the work of their Agencies. This was particularly*
>
> *noticeable in the case of Ros Hepplewhite, the Chief Executive of the CSA...*

...In her numerous dealings with parliamentary inquiries about the operation

of this controversial Agency, which was charged with the task of securing

maintenance payments from absent fathers, Hepplewhite was the antithesis of

the 'anonymous', 'unaccountable' civil servant. None the less, she was

always at pains to differentiate between her responsibility to account for the

management and operation of the Agency, and the accountability of Ministers

for the policy and legal framework within which the Agency operated. When

it became clear that the CSA had failed to achieve its key targets, and in the

wake of revelations that a team of management consultants had been called in

to review the management of the Agency, Hepplewhite resigned in September

1994. "

(Pyper, R. 1995: 142)

This suggests that policy and practice are not discretely separable in practice (see

above) and, in this case, it is predominated by the lines and themes of accountability.

The inference that Chief Executives are *'sitting ducks'* to the fallibilities of ineffective

policies is particular relevant to the considerations of the CSA in implementing a

highly controversial and ambiguous new policy. In addition the complexity in

assessing policy effectiveness lends some protection to the Ministerial role whilst the

emphasis on monetary results and financial efficiency places the emphasis of

responsibility on the CSA and its management (see Chapter One). Chief Executives

have also been handed the potential to use charismatic authority that indicates an

intended move to practice charismatic management styles within the themes of

NPSM.

Chapter Six commences the analysis of the CSA as an organization and the role of managerialism that forms the main axis of this study. The internal analysis of the CSA continues with consideration of associated organizational issues starting with the subject of Human Resource Management (HRM) and staffing issues within the Agency.

3.4.3   The CSA: Human Resource Management and Organizational Culture

The analysis of HRM issues within the CSA commences with data on staff numbers in comparing the relative complements of various Next Steps Agencies, particularly those distributed within the DSS. Although CSA staff was initially made up from about 68% of existing DSS personnel, the Agency recruited new staff specifically appointed as CSA employees. It is questioned whether the plurality of CSA employees also being members of the Civil Service and the DSS (later Department of Work, Pensions and Social Security) poses potential problems of preferred identity. In the HRM context, the organizational structure is considered in terms of levels of authority and lines of accountability and particularly evidence is sought of existing organizational hierarchies within the CSA.

Information selected from CSA documentation was combined with responses taken from interviews with Agency managers and these responses provided bases for posing further questions on staff related issues during subsequent visits. The rewording of questions in interviews was guided from the *'coding'* process associated with grounded theory (see Chapter Four and Appendix One).

Such HRM and staffing problems as absenteeism, migration, promotion opportunities, low morale and high staff turnover were broached in discussing HRM issues with CSA managers. Consideration is also given to the CSA's accreditation with Investors in People (IiP) status that is extensively referred to in publications and interviews. The CSA employs various instruments to monitor staff issues such as attitude surveys, a staffing index and individual *'return to work'* interviews. The use of such methods is questioned to evaluate if they are perceived as instruments for monitoring, appraisal and control rather than for identifying and appeasing staff problems?

Perhaps the most abstract organizational feature that is questioned in the context of HRM in the CSA is the subject of its internal culture and, in searching for a definition of organizational culture, some reliance is made on contemporary organizational theories. The traits and role of organizational culture at the CSA are pragmatically linked to staff performances and quality management with the employment of *'Culture Audits'*. A search is made for evidence of how the CSA's internal culture is developed beyond references to *'values'*, *'vision'* and *'mission'* documented within the Agency's publications. In the context of organizational performance and quality management consideration is given to how the CSA's internal culture might affect its performances (see Chapter Eight). The perceptions and interpretations of staff members regarding the facets of organizational culture within the CSA were expressed during interviews and in order to assist in broaching this subject some theoretical coverage and use of appropriate terminology were valuable in providing appropriate prompts during these interviews.

The use of business terminology, logos and corporate symbolism are evident in the

CSA's publications and are compared with such instruments used in private sector

organizations.

3.5 The CSA Operations: Quality Management, Performance and

Performance Measurement

In considering issues of quality management and operational performances by the

CSA it is important to appreciate the links between these and the HRM initiatives

declared in the Agency's publications. Quality issues are given prominence in

various CSA publications and internal documentation that provides evidence of the

promotion of private sector methods via the themes of NPSM. In addition to the

adherence to public sector charters the CSA's publications stress that the quality of its

performance is an integral part of performance measurement. The link between

quality management and performance measurement is made in Chapters Eight and

Nine in identifying the promotion of NPSM themes and the requirements of

accountability for the CSA.

In addition this section of the study makes a link with the organizational structure of

the CSA, geographical locations and the distribution of its staff by considering the

initial operations of the Agency separately from the proceeding years since its

introduction.

The separation of the analysis of the CSA's first year of operations from the preceding years when the Agency became established is made in order to avoid any distortions in making any realistic comparisons with future performances. It is questioned how the relatively poor initial operations has affected the work of the CSA and the morale of its staff.

The analyses of performance measurement and performances is made in assessing the efficiency and effectiveness, or otherwise, of the CSA in its operations. In addition evidence is sought of reactions to policy that might detrimentally effect performances and thus suggest that policy and its implementation are practically inseparable (see above).

3.5.1   Quality Management in the CSA

The main problem in analysing quality issues at the CSA is the separation of the measures of operational quality from operational performance or, at least, in identifying the areas of commonality. The question is posed as to how quality measurements are distinguished from those relating to operational performance by the CSA. The use of qualitative narratives in adhering to the themes of total quality management (TQM) distinguishes the evaluation of quality management from that of operational performance.

Although the term *'quality'* might be argued as being a subjective concept this study

takes a pragmatic emphasis by referring to the qualitative and quantitative approaches

to quality management within the CSA.

Much of the theory of quality management is commonly found in business texts

relating to operations management and most of this theoretical coverage defines lists

of desirable goals and methodologies that are conceptual and broad. In questioning

the subject of quality management in the CSA it is necessary to firstly find similar

directives from the CSA's documentation and publications. The practical

implementation of quality systems in the CSA was questioned in interviews with

management and administrative assistants and attempts were made to prompt

comments regarding the effectiveness of quality agendas.

As stated above, it is also significant to evaluate the promotion of quality

management initiatives that have been developed from the principles of NPSM where

quality management directives are dominated by the use of comparative metrics,

targets and benchmarks similar to those employed by private sector organizations in

deriving competitive advantages. The measurement and assessment of operational

quality is intrinsic to the role of accountability described in themes of NPSM and is

also closely coupled with the definitions and measurement of performances by the

CSA (see Chapter One). The measurements of timeliness and accuracy are common

metrics used in assessing operational performances with the latter being particularly

relevant in appraising the *'quality'* of the CSA's performances.

Rather than relying upon bland listings of quality and performance objectives the study questions the processes of quality initiatives as referred to in the CSA's documentation and used by specific teams in the Agency.

3.5.2   Operational Performance and Performance Measurement in the CSA

Considerations of the CSA's performance and performance measurement are of principal importance in making an analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the CSA in this study. The effective implementation of policy within the themes of NPSM and the efficiency of the operations of the CSA form the culmination of the analysis of the Agency as a vehicle of child support policy. In isolating the CSA's contribution to the whole child support system, the problem is convoluted by the effects of external responses to policy that make it difficult to separate the Agency's effectiveness from its efficiency (see above). Operational performances are further affected by the constraints of working within the bounded principles of NPSM and its related imperatives for accountability. Whether the stress on accountability and performance measurement produces more visible and overt reporting of details from the CSA is questionable. In addition the comparisons to internal budgets and external targets pose potential problems in driving the emphasis of operations and the use of resources.

The Annual Reports and Accounts published over the first decade of the operations of

the CSA provide the main source of performance data, however, from April 2003 the

flat rate system was initialised as part of the Child Support, Pensions and Social

Security Act (2000) and sufficient comparative performance data is not yet available

for this study. In order to evaluate the CSA's performance, ratios assist in describing

relative efficiencies. Although such ratios are limited in that the values of benefits

and outcomes are often difficult to assess, they provide a set of quantitative metrics

that are the bases of many performance indicators (PIs) and go someway in defining

what is meant by performance. It is of use to consider some theories regarding

performance efficiency, for example efficiency is often considered as being

composed of *'allocative efficiency'*, the resources distributed, and *'productive*

efficiency', the most efficient production. In measuring efficiency six criteria are

identified by which policies or services could be evaluated as follows:

1. *Economy - minimizing inputs or spending as little as possible.*

2. *Productive efficiency – ratio between inputs and outputs.*

3. *Allocative efficiency – allocation of outputs to the public at*
   large.

4. *Effectiveness*

5. *Cost-effectiveness – Choosing the cheapest option between*
   equally effective policies.

6. *Equity – The prescription of equal treatment*

(Pollit, C. 1992: 24)

In order to make a distinction between policy effectiveness and efficiency, politicians refer to 'productive efficiency' (Downing, K. 1995: 39).

Further, the following nominated categories provide wider performance criteria appropriate to service organizations:

> Results, Service Quality, Flexibility, Resource Utilisation, Innovation, Choice & Implementation
>
>   (Fitzgerald, L. et al, 1991)

Such performance criteria are particularly relevant to public sector agencies such as the CSA and provide alternative perspectives for assessing policy effectiveness and the associated output benefits from the system of child support.

In addition to the performance metrics and results published by the CSA there are also interpretations of the Agency's performance produced by external bodies. Qualitative reviews provide indications of some of the systematic caveats in the child support assessment processes such as avoidance, fraud and evasion and the associated potential opportunity losses or opportunity costs that render the system ineffectual. As stated, this study focuses on the CSA as an organization within the child support system without making specific references to individual case details, however there are valuable sources of information, appraisals and opinions regarding the child support system that are provided by individuals and external interest groups.

In summary, this section of the study identifies the main performance criteria and metrics employed by the CSA and, in assuming policy and implementation are practically linked, the question is posed as to how policy effectiveness and the efficiency of the CSA might be discretely separated and measured in evaluating the performance of the Agency? In extending consideration of performance the study also questions if there are alternative criteria and metrics that might be used in assessing the performance of the CSA.

3.6   Summarizing the Main Issues

In identifying the main themes of NPSM and the main influences for changing child support policy the basis for these imperatives for change is set. The themes of NPSM are recurrently referred to throughout the study, particularly the promotion of private sector methods and styles that might influence certain internal features of the CSA. Although detailed studies of the social, economic and political environments and the subsequent development of policy and legislation are not pursued, they go some way towards identifying the problems and directives with which the CSA is faced.

Whether the promotion of NPSM themes, particularly new managerialism, really has resulted in a break from old managerial and administrative practices is questioned. The main question is whether the CSA represents a radically new organizational typology or is just another bureaucracy? If the CSA has developed into an organization that is clearly distinguishable from that of a bureaucracy it will represent a new approach to welfare provision.

From internal and external organizational analyses of the CSA it is questioned

whether there exists an institutional inertia that inevitably draws the Agency towards

the form of bureaucracy.

Having established the relationship between the details of the CSA's missions and its

outlined strategy, the decision on how to commence and develop the internal route

into the Agency sets a problem in itself. The interrelationships between established

lines of authority and accountability and the internal details of HRM issues and the

main components of the work practiced by the CSA are multiple and required some

structuring in order to address the questions and clarify the arguments set by this

study. The case study approach assists in performing the empirical research activities

and in addressing the main issues however the study does not intend to produce a

bland narrative of *everything you wanted to know about the CSA'*. More specifically

the case study approach is developed to address the questions outlined above and to

compare empirical evidence with theories and develop related arguments by inductive

processes (see Chapter Four).

A systematic approach is taken in looking at the CSA's organizational structure and

the lines of authority and accountability. In turn the CSA's organizational typology is

assessed by comparison to theories, particularly those of Max Weber. The main

empirical research was undertaken in the CSA with interviews with staff in order to

evaluate the effects of NPSM themes and the implementation of a controversial

policy as experienced by its staff, particularly its managers.

The study proceeds from wider organizational aspects to consider the issues of HRM

and staff related problems. In addition, consideration is given to the development of

the CSA's internal culture and how this might affect the performance of the Agency.

The imperative for accountability, the development of an organizational culture and

the problems experienced by staff and management are firmly linked in considering

issues related to the CSA's operations and performances.

Quality issues are clearly emphasised in many publications of the CSA and thus the

route from HRM and quality management is taken in order to establish a link between

staff motivation, internal culture and the implementation of Total Quality

Management (TQM) within the Agency.

Finally, by considering the CSA's initial operations associations are made between

the CSA's structure and staffing. In addition this commences the analyses of the

CSA's performances and the influences of NPSM themes on performance

measurement. Indications of the CSA's effectiveness are provided together with

suggestions of how performance is affected by the rejection of issues of policy and

legislation by the Agency's customers, as reflected by non-compliance and non-

cooperation. It is also questioned if the CSA's poor initial performances have

stigmatised the Agency significantly.

The emphasis of this study is placed on analyses of the CSA in the context of social

administration and whether this has resulted in a transformation of the way in which

welfare is understood and delivered.

In order to address the questions posed in this section of the study it was necessary to search for evidence and information from a wide range of sources. This prompted the need for the application of original methods and valid methodologies in order that reliable data and information were obtained. The discussions and comparisons of methods for this study became extensive and, although some references to theories and documentation were employed selectively at appropriate stages with the collection of information and data being research driven. In questioning the issues relating to the role of the CSA in the system of child support an original contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the Agency is made together with the application of effective methods in forming the main arguments developed in this study.

Chapter Four

Methodology and Research Methods

4.1   Defining Methodology and Methods

The processes of designing and applying appropriate research methods are

fundamental to any effective, valid and reliable research contributions. In developing

suitable research methods to be applied in this study of the CSA the overall research

strategy was formed by firstly comparing and assessing the potential effectiveness of

various methods as part of the methodology. In the context of social research,

methodology might be defined as a way of thinking about studying social reality

whilst methods are considered as a set of procedures and techniques for gathering and

analysing data (Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1998: 3). The distinction between the

definitions of methods and methodology is made further in the following:

> *"A methodology defines how one will go about studying any phenomenon. In*
>
> *social research, methodologies may be defined very broadly (e.g. qualitative*
>
> *or quantitative) or more narrowly (e.g. grounded theory or conversation*
>
> *analysis). Like theories, methodologies cannot be true or false, only more or*
>
> *less useful.*

Finally, methods are specific research techniques. These include quantitative

techniques, like statistical correlations, as well as techniques like observation,

interviewing and audio recording. Once again, in themselves, techniques are

not true or false."

(Silverman, D. 2000: 79)

Established definitions of research terms are adopted in this study as follows:

Table 4.1 Basic Research Terms

Term	Meaning	Relevance
Model	An overall framework for looking at reality	Usefulness
Concept	An idea deriving from a given model	Usefulness
Theory	A set of concepts used to define and/or explain some phenomenon	Usefulness
Hypothesis	A testable proposition	Validity
Methodology	A general approach to studying research topics	Usefulness
Method	A specific research technique	Good fit

(Adapted from Silverman, D. 2000: 77)

Although it was necessary to adopt eclectic and pluralistic approaches to the research

strategy and the schema of applying methodology and methods, the use of qualitative

methods was dominant in the overall methodology applied to this study. In gathering

information and data regarding the system of child support and in order to perform an

internal analysis of the CSA the use of qualitative methods was regarded as the most

practical and feasible approach. In making an analysis of the CSA the study follows

some conventional levels of analysis that are illustrated in the following:

Figure 4.1 Levels of Analysis

Models

↓

Concepts

↓

Theories

↓

Hypotheses

↓

Methodology

↓

Method

↓

Findings
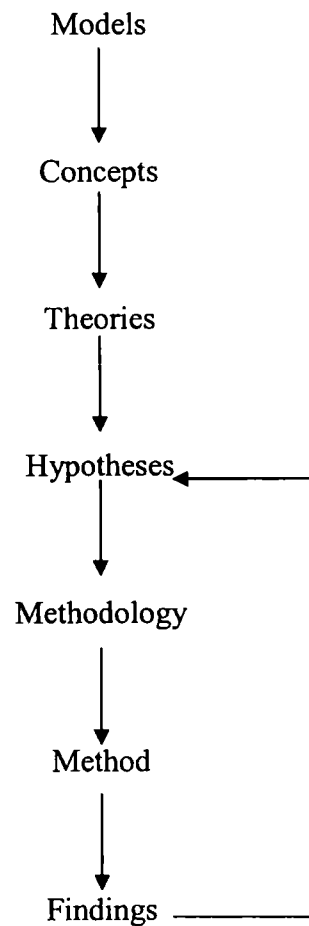
(Silverman, D. 2000: 79)

By setting questions regarding the features of NPSM applied to the CSA the research activities were initialised with deductive processes and as the research developed an inductive approach was taken in order to derive evidence and findings that might be matched with the areas in question and develop appropriate arguments (see Chapter Three).

In order to develop the inductive processes the principles of *'grounded theory'* were particularly applicable to this study (see para. 4.2.2). The idea that theory is grounded in data resulted in an inductive effect where questions and arguments were adjusted and developed as the study progressed. Grounded theory emphasises that qualitative research methods are research driven and validated by practice and this was particularly relevant in collecting information and data from CSA managers in face-to-face interviews (see para. 4.3).

In extending on this format and of particular relevance to this study the structured flow of research activities is illustrated by the following:

Figure 4.2 Research Activities

1. General research questions

2. Selecting relevant sites (s) and subjects

3. Collection of relevant data

4. Interpretation of data

    5b Collection of further data

    5a Tighter specification of the research question(s)

5. Conceptual and theoretical work

6. Write up findings/conclusions
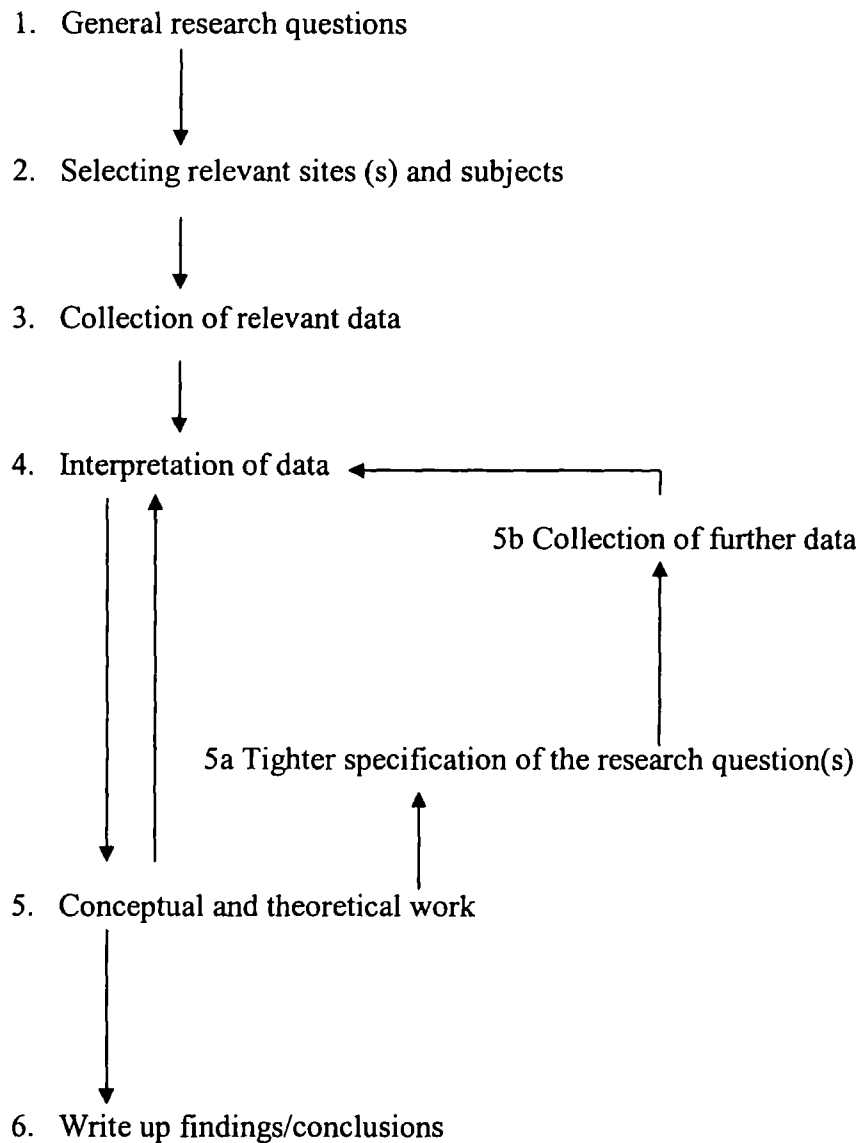
(Adapted from Bryman, A. 2001: 267)

As stated above, the significance of feedback was fundamental to developing

inductive research strategies and this is emphasised by stages 5a, tighter specification

of the research question(s), and 5b, collection of further data.

This process was repeatedly performed throughout the empirical data and information collection activities applied to this study.

The choices of methods and approaches to methodologies demanded originality and, although comparisons with established research methods were necessary, many methods were considered to be inappropriate to this study. Conflict can exist between what is theoretically desirable and what is practically possible (Buchanan, D. et al 1988: 53). Harry Wolcott, an unorthodox American ethnographer even suggests that researchers should not have to defend qualitative research methods in the following:

"There is no longer a call for each researcher to discover and defend [qualitative methods] anew, nor a need to provide an exhaustive review of the literature about such standard procedures as participant observation or interviewing. Instead of having to describe and defend qualitative approaches, as we once felt obligated to do, it is often difficult to say anything new or startling about them. Neophyte researchers who only recently have experienced these approaches first-hand need to recognize that their audiences probably do not share a comparable sense of excitement about hearing them described once again."

(Wolcott, H. 1990: 26)

Such an opinion might be regarded as being too radical or, perhaps, an expression of the frustrations experienced from the pursuance of numerous formal research supervisions.

In essence, methods are driven by feasibility and practicality and an example of one

initial problem faced by this study was that, due to the initial poor performances of

the CSA and the demonstrative extremes of opposition directed at the Agency, there

existed an awareness of security and protectionism exhibited by members of staff in

forming initial links for pursuing fieldwork. The practicalities of sustaining contact

and in being provided with restricted documentation by the CSA demanded that the

research methods and techniques were periodically reviewed and reassessed.

Methodology and methods are regarded as being unique to each individual social

research activity that demands a compromise between formality and practicality and

this view is expressed in the following:

> *"So whatever carefully constructed views the researcher has of the nature of*
>
> *social science research, of the process of theory development, of data*
>
> *collection methods, or of the status of different types of data, those views are*
>
> *constantly compromised by the practical realities, opportunities and*
>
> *constraints presented by organizational research...This argument is based on*
>
> *the view that doing research is a different kind of enterprise from thinking and*
>
> *writing about research. "*

(Buchanan, D. et al. 1998: 54)

This view is taken further in making reference to a deluge of non-productive academic research activities (Buchanan, D. et al. 1998: 55), certainly it would be counter productive if the research subject were to be distracted or diverted by an adherence to some inappropriate theoretical research methodology. The need for effective qualitative research is expressed in the following:

> *"If there is a 'gold standard' for qualitative research, it should only be the standard for any good research, qualitative, social or natural science. Namely, have the researchers demonstrated successfully why we should believe them? And does the research problem tackled have theoretical and/or practical significance?"*
>
> (Silverman, D. 1997: 25)

The historic considerations of what prompted the changes in public sector management and child support policy were made, in the main, from secondary data and information sources. The study employed findings from interviews and correspondence with CSA management and much of this was validated by documentary evidence referring to such issues as organizational features, quality management and human resource problems. More detailed references follow in discussing the methods employed in the research activities applied to this study.

4.2 Qualitative Research Methods

As stated above the nature of this study and the field research environments within which questions were posed made a greater reliance upon qualitative methods rather than quantitative methods. Prior to entering into details of the particular research activities applied to this study it is useful to clarify the theoretical definitions and issues of qualitative research methods. The following provides a general description of qualitative research:

> *"Qualitative research can be described as any social science research that produces results that are not obtained by statistical procedures or other methods of quantification. Some of the data may be quantified, but the analysis is qualitative. It can refer to research about people's lives, their stories, and behaviour, and it can also be used to examine organizations, relationships, and social movements."*
>
> (Bouma, G. D. and Atkinson, G. B. J. 1995)

The initial stage of the qualitative approach required a critical literature review in order to gain a more detailed and specialised coverage of the subjects related to child support, NPSM and the CSA (see para. 4.4.1). In forming part of the methodology this process was valuable in collecting secondary data and information for later comparisons and in adding alternative perspectives to the study.

References to past findings and theories relating to wider issues of child support and public sector management assisted in forming a coherent *'focal point'* on the most significant research questions that would be applied in interviews with members of the CSA staff. In this way the literature review is closely linked to applying methodology. In commencing the study with a critical literature review it was not intended to rely on a rigid framework and pursue *'pattern matching'* from theory (Yin, R. K. 1994), rather the topic areas (*'codes'*) referred to from literature were used as an initial guide of background knowledge that is regarded as an acceptable preliminary stage of grounded theory (see para. 4.2.2).

As stated above, the effective applications of qualitative research methods had to be workable in conducting interviews and maintaining communications with CSA staff. It is important to justify why qualitative methods were considered appropriate to this study and consider the strengths and weaknesses of employing the various methods to linking the questions and arguments to empirical evidence. Qualitative social and behavioural research has the added ingredient of complexity in terms of comparing responses with set theories and it has value in developing considerations of methodologies and methods. This is confirmed in the following:

> *"The beauty of qualitative research is that its rich data can offer the opportunity to change focus as the ongoing analysis suggests. However, such changes of direction, like the original research proposal, do not come out of the blue but reflect the subtle interplay between theory, concepts and data."*

> (Silverman, D. 2000: 63)

Further, with the emphasis of this study placed on collecting data and information from within the CSA, it was necessary to detail appropriate and established research methods in order that the reliability and validity of the study were maintained.

4.2.1   Validity and Reliability

The use of qualitative research methods and flexible techniques should combine open-ended approaches with tested methodologies in order to produce sound and valid research findings. One definition of validity in research refers to validity as being the truth in findings accurately represent the social phenomena to which it refers (Hammersley, M. 1990: 57).

Reliability should also be encompassed in the research methods employed and designed within the techniques used for data and information collection. The requirement for reliability of research activities demands that methods and techniques could be consistently tested and repeated. Reliability in the context of research refers to the degree of consistency assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Hammersley, M. 1992: 67).

Further, a comparison of research validity and reliability is given in the following:

"Research is valid when the conclusions are true. It is reliable when the findings are repeatable.

Reliability and validity are requirements for both the design and the

measurement of research. At the level of research design, we examine the

conclusions and ask whether they are true and repeatable.

At the level of measurement, we examine the scores of observations and ask

whether they are accurate and repeatable. "

(Kidder, L. 1981: 7)

Many methods of testing the validity and reliability of qualitative research related to

social groups were not appropriate to this study. It was important that the study did

not rely totally on anecdotal evidence and also, although a case study approach was

taken in the early interviews, the study extended beyond this in posing questions and

pursuing sound inductive methods. Reliability and validity are considered by

positivists to be part of the research tradition of quantitative methodologies whereas

qualitative social research might encounter problems in exacting such facets of the

research process. The need to combine original qualitative research methods with the

requirement of repeatability, as part of reliability, is confirmed in the following:

"Qualitative researchers can no longer afford to beg the issue of reliability.

While the forte of field research will always lie in its capability to sort out the

validity of propositions, its results will (reasonably) go ignored minus

attention to reliability. For reliability to be calculated, it is incumbent on the

scientific investigator to document his or her procedure. "

(Kirk, J. and Miller, M. 1986: 72)

In order to ensure that this study employed methods and techniques that were reliable

it was decided that a combination of primary data and information collection could be

reinforced with secondary data and information from related studies and reference to

CSA documentation. The need for validity and reliability prompted the need for

objectivity and some degree of triangulation was provided from comparisons to such

secondary data and information.

Although the exact detail of interviews with CSA staff made by alternative studies

might not follow the exact course of the interviews in this study, if adherence were

made to the same questions in each interview it would be expected that the process

could be repeatable and have a significant commonality of responses from the

respondents. It was thus imperative to avoid subjective interpretations from

interviews at the CSA in order that the findings were not biased by opinion. In order

to achieve this the interviewer assumed the role of the remote and rational observer

employing semi-structured interviews to focus on set questions whilst prompting

open-ended responses. As stated above, the combination and comparisons of audited

and reputable sources of data and information were made with sources derived from

other research findings wherever possible.

4.2.2 **Grounded Theory**

With the emphasis placed on qualitative research the use of grounded theory was

considered as being the most appropriate approach applied to the inductive stages of

this study of the CSA in the context of NPSM. Grounded theory appears to

coordinate, if not formalize, some features of past social research, particularly such

research undertaken by members of the famous *'Chicago School'*. The use of

inductive methods was expected to have the advantages of being flexible to changing

states and there was certainly much that was not know regarding the internal issues of

the CSA. As stated above, grounded theory has been applied to many research

activities and it has been well established as an appropriate method for use in social

and behavioural studies. As the empirical research progressed there was an

increasing need to develop interviewing skills in collecting data and information and

this represents an experiential learning process for the interviewer.

The main originators and advocates of grounded theory, as a significant contribution

to social research, are Glazer and Strauss (1967) who describe grounded theory as:

> *"a strategy for handling data in research providing modes of*
>
> *conceptualisation for describing and explaining."*

(Glazer, B. and Strauss, A. 1967: 3)

As a paradigm of methodology grounded theory is an analytical tool that assists

analysts integrate structure with process (Silverman, D. 1993: 123). By constantly

comparing the research data with theories, grounded theory sets a standard for data

driven research methodology. In this study this was practiced when the information

provided from the CSA interviewees were compared to more conceptual arguments.

This is expressed in the following:

> *"The original version of grounded theory stressed the idea that theory*
>
> *emerged from, and was grounded in, data. Careful analysis of data items*
>
> *using the constant comparative method would lead to the emergence of*
>
> *conceptual categories that would describe and explain the phenomenon under*
>
> *study."*
>
> (Melia, K. 1997: 27)

Grounded theory is not without its critics and some of the fundamental procedures are

scrutinized as a research methodology and the main questions concern the formality

and structure of such a methodology. There has been some disagreement between the

originators of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (Melia, K. 1997: 27) and, without

detailing the differences in opinion, a more procedural approach to grounded theory

has emerged (Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1990, 1998).

In order to grasp the main principles of grounded theory a later definition stresses the emphasis on the *'real'* situation and expresses the process as follows:

"Theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another. A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory). Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the "reality" than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation (how one thinks things ought to work)."

(Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1998: 12)

Glaser, B. (1978) stresses the importance of *'theoretical sensitivity'* that is pertinent to the methodology used in this study. Theoretical sensitivity, as part of grounded theory, is dynamic in searching for data that leads to a constructive development of conceptual ideas (see above). Glaser and Strauss describe this where data collection and analysis develop side by side until a core category emerges and becomes *'saturated'* (Melia, K. 1997).

In contradiction to grounded theory, David Silverman (1993) stresses that data should also test theories in addition to developing theories however, as stated above, this deductive approach was only used in initialising the field research and these initial theories took broader perspectives than the eventual *'focal point'* of this study. The continual comparisons of data and the theories regarding the CSA were made in accordance with theoretical sensitivity. In referring to the main steps of qualitative research the generation of theories in grounded theory is a preferred sequence from testing theories (Bryman, A. 2001: 269). This repeated development and comparisons of theories follow a natural course throughout the whole of the research activities applied to this study and to assist with the practical application of grounded theory a set of coding procedures was used whose purposes can be summarised as follows:

1.   *Build rather than test theory.*

2.   *Provide researchers with analytical tools for handling masses of raw data.*

3.   *Help analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena.*

4.   *Be systematic and creative simultaneously.*

5.   *Identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory.*

(Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1998: 13)

Although Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress that the coding procedures are not meant

to be over simplistic or set rigid rules for the researcher, they assist in relating

research structure to the phenomena being examined. The responses from open-

ended questions from interviews with CSA management and subsequent enquiry

required some categorizing or ordering, with the use of coding, in order that common

themes and comparisons were found. One definition of coding describes the

procedure as follows:

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

(Strauss, A. 1988: 20-21)

Coding in grounded theory can be loosely compared to mapping subsets in

mathematics or factor and cluster analyses applied to statistical analysis. Coding can

be subdivided into three sub codes, *'open coding'*, *'axial coding'* and *'selective*

coding' that are used in this study where open coding commences the disaggregation

of data and information into units or categories. Axial coding is the process of

recognising relationships between categories and selective coding integrates

categories to produce a theory with selective coding used to find relationships and

links between categories.

The use of 'in vivo' codes were made during each field visit to the CSA headquarters and these assisted in preparing and rephrasing questions for future visits and also for referring to literature and documentation (see Table 4.3 and Appendix One).

Examples of coding are provided in identifying the most significant features of NPSM that are applicable to the CSA and the questioning of the Agency's organizational typology (see Table 4.3). Further details of the grouping of topics and questions regarding the features of bureaucracy contained within the CSA's organizational structure and staff issues are given in Appendix One. The Chapters are structured according to the stages of questioning and theories and the empirical findings are placed in the appropriate sections. Such coding or categorisation of data and information resulted in the mapping of responses to the appropriate sections in the study and also served in comparing these with the questions and issues referred to in Chapter Three. Alan Bryman (2001) refers to such tighter specification of the research question(s) and the collection of further data in his flow of research activities (see Fig. 4.2). Such activities describe the iterative processes that adhere to grounded theory and these were practiced longitudinally as data was collected for this study

Following this discussion of the methodology applied to this study and the selection of appropriate research methods more detailed consideration is given to the empirical and secondary collection of data and information.

4.3   Primary Information Collection: Interviews and Sustained

Contact

There are few primary studies of the CSA as an organization and most other studies

refer to such issues as client satisfaction and case histories of the Agency's customers.

As stated above, in order to address the questions posed in this study in Chapter

Three, some original approaches were required in contacting the CSA and in

developing effective research relationships in order to perform interviews and

maintain contact with CSA management after visits were made to the Agency's

headquarters (Long Benton Newcastle upon Tyne). One objective of this study is to

make an original contribution to detailed knowledge of the CSA and this prompts the

need for original research methods and their applications (see Chapter Three).

The fieldwork provided the sources of primary data and information and contact was

made with CSA managers actively involved with Research, Quality Management,

Operations, Training, Human Resource Management, and Data Collection. The first

interview was conducted with a team of three managers on higher executive, senior

executive and executive officer grades. Later interviews were made with specialist

team leaders on senior management grades and these led to contacts with other team

members, some on administrative assistant grades, with specific responsibilities.

There were six extensive interview sessions made at the CSA headquarters during

November 1998, March, June and October 1999 and April and December 2000.

The November 1998, October 1999 and April 2000 interviews occupied most of the

full working days at the CSA.

Table 4.2 A Summary of Research Field Visits to CSA Headquarters

YEAR	MONTH	STAFF SPECIALISMS	STAFF GRADES
1998	NOVEMBER	PUBLIC RELATIONS	EO
		SECTION LEADER	SEO
		HRM - TRAINING	EO
1999	MARCH	HRM	EO
		QUALITY MANAGEMENT	HEO
1999	JUNE	QUALITY MANAGEMENT	EO
		PERFORMANCE	AA
		MANAGEMENT	EO
1999	OCTOBER	RESEARCH	HEO
		ADMINISTRATION	AA
		OPERATIONS	EO
2000	APRIL	RESEARCH	SEO
		DATA ADMINISTRATION	AA
		IT ADMINISTRATION	AA
2000	DECEMBER	RESEARCH	HEO
		SECTION LEADER	SEO

This summary gives details of the roles of the staff that were interviewed and, in addition, some open discussions were held on later visits with Administrative Assistants who did not specify their particular job details. After the interviews and visits, contact was maintained by phone, e-mails and correspondence that also included the sending of additional summary questions. A CSA staff member with specific interests in research and with responsibility for liaisons with academic establishments assisted in coordinating contacts with appropriate staff members and teams within the CSA. This first hand contact with a CSA manger with such research interests enabled tailor-made and usually restricted information to be provided for this study. Such contact and fieldwork was deemed necessary in order that realistic and coherent lines of inquiry could be sustained throughout the years of this study.

The value and need for such involvement, even as a remote observer, is substantiated by the following:

> *"Organizations cannot be studied at a distance. Conversely, 'organizational studies' which did not describe the structure of positions, rules and hierarchies, etc. would also be suspect, however sensitive and insightful the observers account in other respects."*
>
> (Crompton, R. and Jones, G. 1998: 72)

Aside from this involvement of interest and the forming of workable research relationships empirical findings from the interview process were dependent on assuming the role of the *'rational observer'* in order that objectivity was maintained. This is described in the following:

"The ability to achieve a certain degree of distance from the research materials and to represent them fairly; the ability to listen to the words of respondents and to give them a voice independent of that of the researcher."

(Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1998: 35)

Objectivity is a term so often applied to research activities and can be questioned at length in philosophical arguments as being, perhaps, not totally achievable. The emphasis on the importance of objectivity and remoteness were maintained throughout all the information collection activities in this study although it is appreciated that the removal of individual and subjective drives that motivate much research activity is difficult to achieve fully in practice. With this, assuming the researcher is not excluded from society, the idea that a researcher can be independent and suspended from societal issues might seem contradictory.

The main problems in arranging contacts and interviews with the CSA management arose from maintaining the emphasis on security and confidentiality.

In order to establish a relationship of trust it was necessary to provide details of the

outlined objectives at the commencement of the study and to agree to the anonymity

and confidentiality of CSA staff that were interviewed. This is not just an ethical

requirement but promotes the overt ness of the interviewer that is reciprocated by the

interviewee. The problem of restricted access in constraining pertinent research and

the availability of primary information is referred to in the following:

> *"One of the most vexed areas for many researchers is quite simply getting*
>
> *into organizations. In much the same way that survey research can engender*
>
> *uncomfortably low response rates, qualitative researchers often report*
>
> *considerable difficulty in getting access to organizations for in-depth*
>
> *studies. "*

<div align="right">(Bryman, A. 1989: 161)</div>

The presumption was made that the managers at the CSA headquarters were

constrained by the terms of the Official Secrets Act signed by most Civil Servants. In

addition there existed a background of controversy and adverse media coverage

regarding the Child Support Act (1991) and the action of the CSA that has fashioned

a move to protectiveness by its staff (see above).

The decision to use a semi-structured approach was made in order that some

professional formality was maintained in communicating with staff members and

open-ended questions were used to prompt less formal responses as the interviews

developed. Semi structured interviews employ questions in a general form and the

sequence of questions can be varied and the interviewer has some latitude to ask

further questions in response to significant replies (Bryman, A. 2001: 110). Such

interviews formed the basis of the inductive processes where verbal accounts made by

CSA staff members and observations of the Agency as an organization were

combined to make a joint participation to the study. In this context the interview

might be regarded as being a socially situated activity that is a joint accomplishment

between the interviewer and respondent (Dingwall, R. 1997: 56). It was important

to distinguish between the formalised and inert responses and the responses that were

less affected by the restrictions set by any member of staff being conscious of being a

representative of the CSA and thus a gatekeeper of information.

The interviews also incorporated reflexive processes in order that a rapport was

gained and that some common ground of mutual experience was developed. Further,

reference to the environment of the interview situation and the need to identify the

subjective inputs from this form of information collection is referred to by Severn

Bruyn (1966) in listing six indices of what he calls *'subjective adequacy'* to enhance

the understanding of the researcher and thereby the validity of the research. These

indices are time, place, social circumstances, language, intimacy and social

consensus.

Although this might be interpreted as a structured positivist approach, it assists in

addressing the actions necessary for reflexivity in the interview situation. As stated

above, interviews took place in the workplaces of the CSA employees at the

headquarters in Long Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne conforming with the idea that

systematic inquiry must occur in a natural setting rather than an artificially

constrained one such as an experiment (Marshall and Rossman 1989). A further

advantage to interviewing in the workplace was gained from the interviewer gaining

some insight, if only superficial, into the atmosphere and a general feel of the

workplace environment at the CSA. The following supports the value of such

perceptions, avoiding subjective interpretations:

"It would appear that field research involves observing and analysing real-

life situations, of studying actions and activities as they occur. The field

researcher, therefore, relies upon learning first-handed about people and a

culture."

(Burgess, R. 1980: 1)

As stated above, although it is difficult not to involve subjective interpretations of the

CSA workplace entirely (phenomenology and interpretivism) such perceptions were

developed later in the study and also assisted in appreciating the findings contained in

one secondary study where the authors had also visited CSA premises in Dudley

(Davis G. et al. 1998).

The stress on anonymity of the interviewee provided a positive basis for credible responses with an implied relationship of trust and an assumption that the researcher was to be responsible and ethical in using any data or opinions that were provided by the respondent or interviewee (see above). It was mandatory that interviews with the CSA staff members adhered to the Agency's *'steer'* that was agreed by the civil servant's union. The use of a cassette recorder was not allowed in interviews on the CSA's premises but sufficient allowances were made for notes to be taken. Open note taking was preferred and indeed was of benefit in directing themes and prompting questions and discussion.

Most questions were open-ended with closed-ended questions only being posed about specific practical details and once the interview process commenced the questions became directed by the preferences of emphases from the respondents. The disadvantage of this was that certain questions could be avoided or marginalized. In order to overcome this problem where such divergence occurs, questions were rephrased and by returning to topics the respondent could answer or provide a response that provides the interviewer with references to where data or information could be found. As stated, the commencement of the study took a deductive route that was replaced by an inductive approach according to the concept of grounded theory (see para. 4.2.2). The comments and perceptions of CSA staff members were noted and placed in the relevant sections by coding the responses in order to find common themes.

At this stage it is of use to introduce a summary of the coding of responses from

interviews and field visits that were used in forming arguments and for structuring the

sequence of Chapters in this study.

Table 4.3 A Summary of Coding Procedures used in Interviews

INTERVIEW	MAIN TOPICS *'Open Coding'*	CATEGORY RELATIONSHIPS *'Axial Coding'*	CHAPTERS
1998 NOVEMBER	Policy Issues Organization Civil Service Staff Problems	Policy & Legislation NPSM CSA as Organization HRM	2, 5, 1, 6 & 7
1999 MARCH	Organization Quality Issues Staff Problems Outputs & Results	HRM Quality Management Performance	7, 8 & 9
1999 JUNE	Outputs & Results Quality Issues	Performance Quality Management Initial Operations	9 & 8
1999 OCTOBER	Policy Issues Public Responses Administration & Operations Quality Issues	Policy & Legislation NPSM CSA as Organization Quality Management Initial Operations	2, 5, 1, 6 & 8
2000 APRIL	Organization Civil Service Staff Problems Outputs & Results	CSA as Organization NPSM HRM Performance	6, 1, 7 & 9
2000 DECEMBER	Organization Civil Service Public Responses Outputs & Results	CSA as Organization NPSM Performance	6, 1 & 9

The main topics are arranged in the above according to the chronological order in which they were referred to in interviews and these topics were grouped from interview notes as being the most significant areas of discussion. In addition to structuring the results from interviews by the topics discussed and grouping the contents as *'codes'*, shown above, the notes from interviews were kept as working documents where selected quotes or summarised comments were referred to in the subsequent Chapters. Further categorizations are given in Appendix One that refers to the questioning and discussion of the organizational components of Weber's main features of the bureaucracy and the dimensions referred to in the Aston Studies (see Chapter Six).

In retrospect it might have been of benefit to attempt an initial interview with the Chief Executive of the CSA, as this would have endorsed some authority on the subsequent contacts that could have enhanced the confidence of staff members who were interviewed during subsequent visits. Conversely, the possible disadvantage of this might have been the provision of bias and/or guarded responses by the Chief Executive and further reserve from CSA staff members who were to be interviewed.

4.3.1   The Use of Documentation as Primary Sources of Information

As the study progressed the use of correspondence and e-mails provided a wide variety of documentary evidence to support the collection of data and information. With this, in addition to the field research conducted by interviews, the CSA specialist teams provided tailor made restricted documents for use in this study. Such a provision enhanced the originality of the research methodology and formed a medium of primary data and information sources referring to the questions posed in Chapter Three.

Table 4.4 Primary Documentation Sources

'Organisational Research – Response for Brian Sheffield (Restricted Management)',

5th Sept 2001), Performance Measurement Strategic Assurance Team

'The details of the PACTS system (Performance, Accuracy, Compliance, Timeliness

and Service)' (28th Nov 2001), Performance Measurement Strategic Assurance Team

'Performance Measurement in The CSA' (2nd Dec 2002), Analytical Services

Division

'The Cultural Audit in the CSA', (Jan 2003), CSA HRM Section

E-mails from CSA Research Liaison Officer (5th Sept – 8th Jan 2003)

The tailor made responses and e-mails were sent in responses to inquiries that referred to the CSA's internal issues, particularly those of measurement of performance and quality management. These were used to accommodate the questions posed in the study, including those contained in Chapter Three, and assisted in giving a comprehensive coverage beyond that provided in some of the CSA's standard publications. The CSA's Research Liaison Officer coordinated the links by addressing questions to the appropriate team leaders. Responses to questions by e-mails were mainly accompanied by attachments referring to administrative and managerial issues within the CSA. No previous studies have used this original documentation and the information was used in comparing actual procedures used by the CSA and those referred to in the Agency's publications.

On one occasion a questionnaire that had been sent to all the regional managers at the CSACs (Child Support Assessment Centres) was returned by most of the CSAC managers to the CSA's Research Liaison Officer. This was not an unexpected response and confirmed the sensitivity of CSA management to any lines of inquiry. Although this centralisation of information resulted in the collection of information being focussed on the headquarters it prompted an increased level of cooperation in providing first hand information.

The other main sources of primary information were those obtained from external interest groups whose representatives provided some valuable first hand responses to questionnaires in addition to secondary information.

Although some responses, perhaps, exhibited some element of bias they have been used in directing searches to further sources of information. Most interest groups are involved with the wider effects of the child support policy outside the scope of this study, whereas most CSA staff members tended to restrict their comments and responses to the operations of the Agency and the associated procedures.

In summary, the use of CSA documentation as primary sources of information, particularly from the analysis of the internal operations have assisted in addressing questions and in developing and validating arguments regarding the Agency as an organization. The use of documentation as secondary sources of information is also relevant in identifying issues that are directly related to this study.

4.4 Using Secondary Qualitative Information and Quantitative Data

4.4.1   The Critical Literature Review of Appropriate Literature Sources

A wide search of relevant literature referring to public sector management, child support issues and the CSA was made prior to commencing field research. In addition, studies relating to organizational theories and business techniques were used to make comparisons between these and the methods and techniques applied within the CSA. In applying this process it was important to discuss and compare theories as a critical process in order that quotations were made in context to the main themes of this study.

Secondary information sources were used selectively in to validating some general

arguments, finding definitions and in making comparisons with empirical findings.

The critical literature review in this study was used initially in extending the

background knowledge particularly for setting the context of the study (see Chapters

One and Two) and in providing information to initialise the field research visits. In

terms of the requirements of any research activity a literature review requires an

efficient use of information resources in finding data, information and ideas relating

to the nature of the topic being investigated (Hart, C. 1998: 13).

The comparisons and critiques of various literature sources prompted further

questions for the study rather than being limited to providing bland sources of

quotations. In this way the critical literature review formed the initial lines of enquiry

and analysis in addition to finding further sources of information quoted in

publications that could be followed up.

4.4.2   Additional Sources of Secondary Information

As stated above, the use of related studies formed much of the exploratory stage of

the research process and had practical advantages in terms of the convenient

utilisation of research resources. One potential problem arising from the use of wide

sources of qualitative data lies in the fact that the study might have been spread too

superficially wide in its coverage.

There was thus a requirement to be selective in the topics and issues that were

searched and collected in order that information could be utilized in focussing the

study on the CSA operating within the themes of NPSM.

The CSA provided publications used in this study such as the Annual Reports and

Accounts (1997 – 2002) and the Business Plans (1997 – 2001) that contain some first

hand narratives and reports that were used in addressing such issues as organizational

performance, Quality Management and Human Resource Management within the

CSA. In addition the Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003 was donated at the first

interview with CSA management and provides insights into the plans and

organizational changes that the CSA set in the context of its strategic management.

The National Client Satisfaction Surveys extend considerations of the CSA's

performances to include customer perceptions and responses to the operations of the

CSA. Although not totally relevant to this study these surveys provide evidence of

how the CSA is made accountable to independent external analyses and provide

indicators of customer perceptions of the performances and quality of service

provided by the Agency. The British Social Attitude Surveys (BSAS) were also used

in deriving background information for analysing the social environment prior to the

introduction of the new child support policy. Examples of other media used included

the Internet, newspaper and journal articles and television reports and documentaries

that made reference to the CSA.

As part of the *'Desk research'* activities the use of the Internet and references to

relevant web pages provided invaluable and convenient sources of information

concerning child support issues, external interest groups and the CSA. In addition

this medium increased the speed of communications and the timeliness of information

in order that current reports might be accessed. Such newspapers as the Independent

and the Guardian were particularly noted for providing critical comment and

information regarding the CSA from its origins and the implementation of the Child

Support Acts. Some newspaper articles made references to individual cases,

however, these were not used in the context of this study and any subjective views

that might have sensationalised the errors and misdoings of the CSA were also

avoided.

One of the most useful source of secondary information was contained in a

documentary series produced by Brooke-Lapping, in association with Evans-Wolfe

for Channel Four television, *"Can't Pay Won't Pay"* (2000). Although some of the

content was, perhaps, too superficial by nature to be of any valid use, this series

contained some interviews with Civil Servants, Politicians and Ministers providing

valuable sources of some first hand retrospective opinions of the new system at the

time of the introduction of the CSA. In addition this series also included some

interviews with past and existing employees of the CSA where references were made

to specific problems faced by the Agency in its infancy.

As a summarative source of data and information this series also provided an insight

into the concerns and the retrospective considerations of the changes in child support

policy and the subsequent actions of the CSA. Although much of the content was

based on a critique of policy and the misdoings of the CSA it assisted in removing

some of the mystique so often associated with the Agency. In order that this study

makes an original contribution to the knowledge of the role of the CSA in applying

child support policy, secondary data is used in setting the scene and in addressing

initial questions and arguments as to the effectiveness of the Agency in this role. The

responsible use of secondary information sources also induces the critical process of

forming arguments based on experiences and utilising research skills held by a varied

range of commentators and authorities. It is a difficult exercise to quote the

experiences and opinions of others and remove any elements of bias from their

interpretations. Quotes and opinions are placed in the appropriate sections of the

study in order that such evidence can be mapped to the question posed and final

arguments developed in this study.

4.4.3 Quantitative Research Methods and Secondary Data Collection

Although the methodology applied to this study mainly employs qualitative research

methods some consideration was given to the use of quantitative research methods,

however, it was decided that purposive or judgemental sampling was more

appropriately applied to the collection of data and information by interviews rather

than the application of statistical sampling techniques.

The main sources of secondary data with references to the Chapters in which they are

implicitly and/or explicitly used are given in the following table:

Table 4.4 Main Sources of Secondary Data

Secondary Data Source Various Years	Data	Referred to in Chapters
Social Trends, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS)	Birth Rates & Patterns Marriage Patterns Divorce Rates & Patterns Age Distributions (Marriage & Divorces)	All 2
CSA Quarterly Summary Statistics of Statistics	Compliancy Rates Customer Age Distributions Maintenance Payments	9 2 2 2 & 9
British Household Panel Study	Cohabitation Expenditures	All 2
Family Expenditure Survey	Family Incomes Family Expenditures	All 2
General Household Survey	Employment & Housing Family sizes Family Incomes	All 2
CSA Annual Reports & Accounts 1997/8 – 2001/2	Gross & Net Turnovers (Throughputs) Compliance Rates Redistribution Times Contribution Levels Costs (Gross & Net) Staff Numbers Customer Numbers	8 & 9

In addition there are many secondary data sets derived from previous studies

available on the Internet and in Government publications regarding such subjects as

patterns of relationships and birth rates and these were used in setting the context of

change in child support policy (see Chapter Two). All these sources were utilised in

this study as the requirement to obtain data sets on a national scale made any

collection of primary data not a viable option as the costs and time that would have

been involved in collecting such quantitative data from primary sources would have

rendered this process infeasible. These sources are reliable and commonly used in a

wide range of studies.

The requirements of NPSM and the audit function sets the imperative for accurate

and reliable reporting of financial performances in declaring such details as receipts,

expenses and the assets held by the CSA. The CSA's own publications such as its

Annual Reports and Accounts provide reliable data regarding issues of performance

and staff distributions that are used in calculating metrics for evaluating the overall

performances of the CSA and the possible effects of policy (see Chapters Eight and

Nine).

4.5   Conclusions

In summary, the use of primary and secondary data and information was dictated by practical constraints in terms of feasibility, accessibility and availability. As previously stated, although the emphasis was made on primary information collection and the appropriate use of research methods, the use of secondary data and information was of great value in contributing to the research processes. In addition the qualitative research strategy was directed towards the methodology and methods contained in grounded theory (see para. 4.2.2).

A variety of sources of evidence have been drawn upon in this study in order to address the central questions that the thesis is addressing (see Chapter Three). This evidence base informs the account of the CSA that is presented in topic areas contained in Chapters Five to Nine. The content of Chapter Five is included following references to policy and legislation that were made in interviews with CSA senior management (see Table 4.3). This Chapter represents a pre-empt to the internal analyses of the CSA as it stresses the development of policy and legislation that dictate the substance of the rules that the Agency has to work with. In addition the subsequent link between policy and legislation are included in the mission statements produced by the CSA.

From the responses to questions and additional comments derived from the field

research interviews the grouping of topics (*open coding*) have been categorised (*axial*

coding) and relationships and links between the topics (*selective coding*) have been

used to find subject areas that can be related to each other in structuring the Chapters

Six to Nine (see Table 4.3).

Chapter Five

The Child Support Agency: Policy, Legislation And Mission

5.1   Introduction

This Chapter follows the progression and development of child support policy and

provides details of legislation that the CSA implements. There is a close relationship

between policy and legislation where it can be seen that, *"Law is a purposive activity*

and policymakers expect results" (Barlow, A. 2000: 1). Further, this study

questions whether policy and its implementation can be truly and completely be

separated. Not only are references made to child support policy and legislation in

much of the background literature in the context of child support but CSA staff made

numerous references to such issues in interviews. The main purpose of this Chapter

is to outline the legal requirements of the CSA and its customers and to appreciate

how child support legislation sets the basis for the Agency's missions. In addition the

changes and amendments to the 1991 Act are detailed in considering whether there

exists any fundamental flaws that challenge the workability and/or fairness of the new

system. In addition the adherence to rigid legislation and the use of a means testing

model of child maintenance is not only paramount to the CSA's operations but also

forms the rules with which the Agency's staff are to work with.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the CSA replaces the negotiated court agreements for child maintenance assessments and thus diminishes the roles of the legal profession in acting under the auspices of the Secretary of State for Social Security. Such radical and controversial policy changes have been viewed by many as an intrusion by the State into family issues via the CSA (see Chapter Two) and this study argues that the efficiency of the operations and performances of the Agency have been weakened by the reactions of customers to such changes. The Child Support Act (1991) initially set the legislative agenda for the CSA in stipulating the liability and maintenance requirements for parents after separation and in implementing this legislation the CSA has been perceived as *the law* by many of its staff and customers (CSA interview, November 1998).

The haste by which the new child support policy was passed through parliament, together with the lack of opposition, is also considered as an indication that the CSA might experience problems in the implementation of legislation that might have benefited from more intensive research and debate (see Chapter Two).

5.2   From Policy to Legislation

In Chapter Two consideration is given to the socio-economic and political environments of the late 1980's that influenced the changes in child support policy with the dominant drive being to reduce Government expenditure on social security payments.

The proposed new policy in employing a *'one size fits all'* method of assessment was regarded as a move from individualism to collectivism and this formalization of policy was regarded as being divergent, if not contradictory, to the promotion of individualism by the New Right.

The common ground for the proposed new policy on child support was that of dissatisfaction with the inconsistencies of existing system previously arranged through the courts. Court orders contained irregularities and the system was slow to recover maintenance payments resulting in a build up of arrears. Together with the relatively low assessments awarded, mothers experienced financial hardship and the idea that this system had failed is given in the following:

> *"One third of Magistrates Court cases involving maintenance orders had been subject to enforcement action at some time; but such action is not always taken when payments fall behind."*
>
> (White Paper: Children Come First, 1990, Cm. 1264, par. 5.1.3)

Further:

> *"Government figures stated that in 1979, 50 percent of lone parents on income support received maintenance payments and that ten years later the figure had dropped to 23 per cent... The present system is unnecessarily fragmented, uncertain in its results, slow and ineffective. It is largely based on discretion.*

The system is operated through the High and County Courts, the Magistrates'

Courts, the Courts of Session and the Sheriff Courts in Scotland and the

offices of the Department of Social Security. The cumulative effect is

uncertainty and inconsistent decisions about how much maintenance should

be paid. "

(Children Come First, 1990, Cm. 1264)

At this time a system operating in the United States had prompted interest from the

policy makers and a working party for the reform of child support, including Tony

Newton as Secretary of State for Social Security, visited the operations centre in

Wisconsin during spring 1990 in order to appraise the system implemented there.

The Wisconsin system stressed that parental responsibility was dominated by

monetary factors, however, this system placed its emphasis on the redistributing of

child maintenance funds into the whole system as the *'first rule'* rather than such

funds being reallocated to other State departments:

"Don't make budget savings the principle objective from the start. Whatever

savings come out of the system would be put right back into the system in the

form of an assured benefit and that would further reduce poverty and

dependence on public assistance. So the objective was never, in Wisconsin, to

save public funds. "

(Punctuation added)

(Irwin Garfunkel, Professor of Social Policy, University of Columbia, *"Can't Pay*

Wont Pay ", Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for

Channel Four, 1999)

The US system imposed penalties for non-compliant non-resident parents (NRPs), the majority of whom were men, with impositions that included the withdrawal of driving, professional and hunting licenses and inclusion in a *'gallery of shame'*. The UK system was to differ from that used in the US in that it was dominated with the intention of reducing Government spending on prescribed Benefits payable to families after separation, estimated at £6.6 bn in the late 1980's (see Chapter Two).

"This was motherhood and apple pie, and, I think we all thought it would bring about a more balanced and fairer relationship between the taxpayer, the mother and the father in the interests in each party playing its role in the upbringing of the child."

(Punctuation added)

(Andrew Mitchell, Social Security Minister 1995 – 1997, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*, Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999)

The child support systems in operation in Australia and New Zealand had also prompted much interest from the UK policy advisors team and all these approaches had greatly influenced the origins of the UK system that had very little in common with systems used in Europe. Although there was no equivalent child support system employed in Europe, the new system proposed to provide a greater proportional maintenance payments than in most countries in Europe (Bradshaw, J., Ditch, J. Holmes, H. and Whiteford, P. 1993).

Many European systems examined the details and circumstances of the absent parents and did not apply a standard formula to all cases. In Germany, for example, unmarried parents were assessed at the absolute minima (JRF *'European approaches to child maintenance payments'* June 1999, Ref. 619). Many European countries also placed child support policy within the context of family policy that was non-existent in the UK.

Some ministers and advisors expressed their reservations regarding the new policy proposals and there was evidence of Government departments wanting to avoid having to steer the proposed changes:

"I don't think anyone was keen to tackle this one. I think it was understood by fissions to be far more difficult that it looked. I mean we are talking about Poll Tax days; good ideas had come unstuck already. There was certainly no enthusiasm for the project."

(Punctuation added)

(Mavis Maclean, policy advisor, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*, Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999)

Further, although the existing policy was regarded as being inadequate, an appeal for caution is expressed in the following:

"I was in favour of doing something about the fairly unsatisfactory situation

that we had, in respect of maintenance at the end of the 1980's. There was no

difference of opinion about that. If Margaret Thatcher saw me as hostile I

think this was a more difficult problem than some of my colleagues

appreciated and that did inform my attitude and indeed, my caution,

throughout these discussions."

(Punctuation added)

(Lord Newton, Social Security Secretary 1989 – 1992, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*, Evans

Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999)

The small timescale in which the fundamental and radical changes in child support

policy were processed is referred to in the following:

"it is bad enough that your Lordships should be treated as a sausage machine

for government legislation. It would be quite intolerable if your Lordships

were required to work the treadmill in order to operate that machine."

(Lord Simon, Hansard, HL Debs. Vol. 531, col. 529, 22nd July 1991)

The new policy and subsequent legislation was passed through the House of

Commons and House of Lords, being *'rolled out'* with momentous speed (see

Chapter Two). There was a period of six weeks allowed for comments on the

proposed new policy and there was only a limited opposition to the Bill although

doubts were raised in retrospect regarding the lack of questioning that the Bill

received from the opposition.

"I wish the Labour Party had pushed us harder in the detailed committee

scrutiny in the subsequent parliamentary stages on the bill because I think it

really does help to make you think. In terms of, particularly, the practical

implication of the measures it would have been nice to have been pushed a bit

harder. "

(Punctuation added)

(Michael Jack MP, Social Security Minister, 1990 – 1992, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay",*

Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four,

1999)

A further expression of the concern regarding the lack of opposition is given as

follows:

"Everybody was in favour of this thing. It looked good, it looked right and

they wanted it to happen so I don't think it got the proper scrutiny that it

should have got. "

(Punctuation added)

(Peter Kemp, 2nd Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office, 1988 – 1992, *"Can't Pay*

Wont Pay", Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for

Channel Four, 1999)

Politicians were aware of the political ground that could be made from supporting a child support policy that would increase payments to mothers and their children, whilst reducing the burden to the taxpayer, and it would be regarded as being politically disadvantageous to argue against the principles of a Bill that purported that, *"Children Come First"* (see Chapter Two).

In Davis, G. et al (1998: 8 - 10), reference is made to the Child Support Bill receiving widespread support with the principle of a formula being accepted but the specific formula receiving reactions of opposition. The Commons usually consider controversial legislation first, but the Child Support Bill was introduced in the House of Lords. Legislation is supposed to be subject to detailed scrutiny in a Standing Committee, however this Bill was considered for seven morning sessions, a total of just 17½ hours. The Bill then returned to the floor of the House for its third reading, where it was disposed of in little over 3¼ hours.

The White Paper: *'Children Come First'* (Cm. 1263 and 1264, vol. 1 and 2) was published in October 1990 and a bill followed on 14th February 1991 two months to the day after the closing date for responses to the White Paper. The general aims and objectives of this White Paper are given as follows:

> 1. *Parents honour their responsibilities to their children whenever they can afford to do so.*

2. *A fair and reasonable balance is struck between the liable*

   parent's responsibilities for all the children he or she is

   liable to maintain.

3. *The system produces fair and consistent results.*

4. *Maintenance payments are reviewed regularly to reflect*

   changes in circumstances.

5. *Parents' incentives to work are maintained.*

6. *The public receives an efficient and effective service.*

7. *Dependence on Income Support is reduced.*

   (Children Come First 1990, Cm. 1264, vol. 1, Sec. 2.1)

One of the rare voices of opposition referred to the involvement of the DSS, the CSA

and the courts as, *"a tripartite prescription for chaos, slackness and slowness"* (MP

Emma Nicholson, Hansard, HL Debs. Vol. 195, col. 536, 18th July 1991). Michael

Meacher M.P. for the opposition, described the proposals as being, *"seriously*

flawed". Prior to the Bill being received in the House of Commons there were also

criticisms raised in the House of Lords:

   "We must acknowledge that the Bill will cause far more tears, anger,

   resentment and violence than its authors imagined. It is an intrusion by a new

   arm of bureaucracy into the most delicate, emotional and difficult aspects of

   human relationships."

   (Lord Houghton of Sowerby, Hansard, HL Debs. Vol. 526, col. 812, 25th Feb.

   1991)

The Bill was also quoted as having:

> *" aroused general hostility in your Lordships' House from the two dozen or so members who took a particular interest in it. No-one except the two ministers in charge of the Bill had anything good to say about it. "*

(Lord Simon of Glaisdale, Hansard, HL Debs. Vol. 531, col. 466, 22nd July 1991)

The new child support policy became legislation by the introduction of the Child Support Act (1991) that received its Royal assent on 25th July 1991. After 12 new clauses and 135 amendments it came into force on 5th April 1993 and this legislation commanded that the CSA was formed in order to implement assessments, collection and redistribution of funds for child maintenance.

5.3   The Development of Child Support Legislation

The 1991 Act overrode any previous court orders for child maintenance provision and disregarded any *'no maintenance'* or *'clean break agreements'*.

> *"The Child Support Agency is intended to have sole jurisdiction over child maintenance save in limited cases. "*

(Children Come First: 1990, Cm. 1264)

Further:

> *"Where the Child Support Agency has jurisdiction, the courts had no powers*
>
> *to make, vary or revive any maintenance order in relation to the child and*
>
> *absent parent concerned"*

(Child Support Act, 1991 sec. 8(3))

The general principles of the Child Support Act (1991) are given as follows:

1. *Both biological parents of a qualifying child, i.e. The Absent Parent (AP) and Parent with Care (PWC) are responsible for the child's financial support.*

2. *The financial support is applicable whether the child lives with a Lone Parent or with a married or unmarried couple.*

3. *The assessment is made in accordance with a formula and the liability is met when and Absent Parent makes the relevant payments dictated by that assessment.*

4. *The processes of contacting absent parents and assessing and collecting child maintenance were to be made by the Child Support Agency acting as a 'Next Steps' Agency.*

Further, the key provisions of the Child Support Act (1991) are given as follows:

1.   To establish the Child Support Agency, 'The Agency,' who will assess and collect child maintenance from absent parents, non-resident parents, and redistribute the necessary funds to the parent or person with care.

2.   To use a set formula in the assessment of maintenance payments.

3.   All lone parents claiming Income Support, Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance must cooperate and agree to the recovery of maintenance from an Absent Parent. This requirement will only be waived on 'reasonable grounds' such as children suffering violence, abuse, harm or undue stress.

4.   Non-cooperation by the PWC claiming the referred prescribed benefits will result in a 20% reduction in the prescribed benefit for 6 months and a 10% reduction for a further 12 months.

5.   £15 per week will be disregarded prior to any payments being deducted (1993 amendment).

(Child Support Act 1991)

The 1991 Act placed the emphasis on *'biological parenthood'* rather than *'social parenthood'* and the distinction was made to *'parental maintenance'* rather than *'spousal maintenance'* (Maclean, M. 1998: 230). The emphasis of responsibility was also placed on the NRP's first family and, although NRPs were allowed an amount of protected income, many NRPs in the lower income bracket who had a second family, had experienced problems of impoverishment (NACSA web page 1999). Where arrears were outstanding a limit of 30% to 40% of a NRP's net income could be negotiated for deduction of maintenance.

Two much quoted cases illustrate the sharp contrast in the priorities of the 1991 Act

and the previous system. In Berry v Berry (1986, FLR. 618), it was decided by the

Court that any order made against the absent parent should not bring his living

standards down to subsistence level. In Delaney v Delaney (1990, 2FLR. 457) the

findings summarized that it was not unreasonable for a man to spend his money on a

house for himself and his new partner although his former wife and children were

dependent upon welfare payments. It was also stated at the time that a man might be

excused payments in the long term, at least, if he was found to be a, *'genuine*

struggler', and was not merely *'feckless'* (Eekalaar, J. 1991).

The subsequent changes in legislation relating to child maintenance issues can be

seen to be consistent with themes in other child related legislation such as the

Children Act (1989) where the interests of children are given priority over parental

requests after separation. Further, the amended Social Security, Matrimonial,

Divorce and the Family Law Acts influenced a general move to involve the State with

agreements of separation, where children were involved. These included the

following:

Divorce Reform Bill (1995), The Family Law Act (1996), The Family Law Reform

act (1997), The Matrimonial Causes Act (1973), Social Security Contributions and

Benefits Act (1992), Social Security Administrations Act (1992) and Social Security

Act (1998)

In order to implement the 1991 Act the CSA provided its staff with a book of

legislation and rules (*The Orange Book: Guidelines to CSA staff*). The contents of the

'Orange Book' embodied the rules by which CSA staff worked with in front line

operations and in dealing with queries.

The CSA's front line customers are parents or persons with care (PWCs), usually

mothers, and absent or non-resident (APs and NRPs) who are defined as the

biological parents of any child not in residence with the qualifying child, the vast

majority of whom are fathers. Qualifying or dependent children are defined as

children under 16 years old or between 16 and 19 years old and pursuing a course of

full-time education up to Advanced Level GCSE.

It is mandatory that the CSA arrange assessments and the redistribution of child

maintenance after the separation of parents, when the PWC claims any prescribed

State Benefits such as Income Support (IS). The CSA is also discretionally involved

with cases where the parents have separated and the Agency's services have been

requested. Although the vast majority of cases involve the parent as the PWC, there

are cases where a *'person with care'*, other than a parent, makes the claim. If the

father contests biological parentage DNA testing is made to test the claim and the

CSA provides this service at a discounted rate. The biological father is liable for the

costs of a positive test otherwise the CSA is liable where the test is negative.

The elements of contributions under the 1991 Act were separated into four main parts i.e. Family Expenses (Family Premium), Carer's Allowance, Children's Allowance and Additional Payments (Excess Payments). Most of the maintenance replaced child welfare allowance on a *'knock for knock'* basis and, in most cases the payments lifted the PWC's income beyond that for qualification for Income Support. This coordinated the 1991 Act with the Social Administration Act (1992) that consolidated the principles of the Social Security Act (1986) and allowed any payments of Income Support made by the Benefits Agency to be recouped from liable relatives in the form of maintenance. Half of any remaining assessable income was assessed at 15% as an additional payment with no threshold limit.

This principle is expressed in the following CSA correspondence:

"The principle behind the additional element of the maintenance formula is that children should share in a parent's increased prosperity as they would if they lived with that parent."

(CSA, Correspondence Officer, 1998)

This objective of the new child support legislation is seen as being to maintain the child's position at a level comparable to the normal two-parent family on these income levels (Parker, S. 1991). The main problem is how to quantify obligations and apportion these between two parents (Eekelaar, J. 1991).

The assumption is made that additional children in a household mean decreasing marginal costs in maintenance requirements and thus the allocation of household and maintenance costs are assumed to decrease the actual unit costs of children in larger families.

The 1991 Act was criticized as taking too narrow a fiscal approach to the whole area of child support and was seen as targeting *'responsible middle class'* men as *'soft targets'* (NACSA newsletter 1992). Further, the inflexibility of the system resulted in many families experiencing conditions of financial poverty and was not sensitive or considerate to the relationships of *'broken families'* (Social Security Select Committee, 1993, para. 28). One problem of the new system arose when the NRP had limited and unsatisfactory access to his/her children and/or diminished involvement with parental decisions regarding the children. Additional complications also occurred where parents agreed that their children could share residencies (*'shared parentage'*). Where there had been previous transfers of capital, the appeals system was introduced in order to adjust assessments accordingly however, only about 2,000 cases led to an application for appeal to a Child Support Appeal Tribunal.

The system of assessment was proving to be over complicated and CSA staff members were experiencing difficulties in interpreting the rules of assessment, the appeals for assessment and the payment of arrears (CSA interview, June1999).

The administrative processes commenced with the PWC completing a Maintenance

Application Form (MAF) and submitting this to the CSA who, in turn, contacted the

AP/NRP with a Maintenance Enquiry Form (MEF). On receipt of the completed

MEF all assessments then followed the algorithm defined in the set formula. *'Good*

Cause' exemptions were made in cases where there had been evidence of threats or

behaviour that might jeopardize any child.

Further, mothers had the right of appeal to the Registrar General against contact by

potentially violent or abusive fathers (Bainham, A. 1995). The increasing pressures

from appeals, together with civil disobedience, extreme forms of opposition and the

poor initial performances of the CSA prompted the need for changes in legislation

and responses by individuals, the media and feedback from the CSA had fuelled the

imperative for changes in the 1991 Act (Wellbank, J. 1991).

In 1993 a disregard of some proportion of maintenance payments for the PWC was

introduced and in February 1995, the 1991 Act was replaced (Improving Child

Support, Cm. 2745, 1995). The most significant change included in the 1995 Act

was the introduction of the Departures Scheme where separated parents could

negotiate mutually agreed settlements without the involvement of the CSA. The

Departures Scheme was managed by the Independent Tribunal Service and was

applicable to cases where previous agreements had involved *'clean break'*

settlements, including the transfer of property and/or capital.

The Departures Scheme practiced the principle that individual discretion-based

assessments would be prescribed by the CSA as being valid. Other changes included

an increase in the level of protected incomes for NRPs and allowances made for

significant traveling expenses incurred by the NRP in their employment. The 1995

Act was an indication that the application of a general rigid formula had failed to

fully accommodate the complexities of individual cases (Davies, G. et al. 1998: 36).

The amendments in the 1995 Act were also more likely to have affected the middle

and high-income sectors, where property had been transferred after separation, rather

than the lower income sector. The lower income sector were also, perhaps, more

likely to avoid or evade increased payments in child maintenance since the marginal

decrease in disposable income and thus marginal utility was disproportionately higher

for this sector than for NRPs on higher incomes.

After the election of Tony Blair's New Labour Government in 1997, a project of

welfare reform was promised together with a review of the benefits system. Lone

parents were to be encouraged to return to work rather than be totally dependent on

prescribed benefits such as Income Support (Green Paper: *"Supporting Families"*).

This New Deal assumed a universal model of the *'rational economic man'* in which

people maximize their own personal gain and promoted the work ethic as *'the right*

thing to do' (Daily Mail 10.2.99). Where claimants failed to attend *'back to work'*

interviews their benefits were stopped and thus this could be regarded as a threat

rather than an incentive for lone parents (Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. 2000: 1).

The most momentous changes in child support policy were proposed in the Green

Paper, *"Children First: A New Approach To Child Support"* (Cm. 3992, July 1998),

that was issued as a consultation document for the Social Security Select Committee.

After a consultation period, which ended on 30th November 1998, the Green Paper

was succeeded by the White Paper: *"A New Contract For Welfare: Children's Rights*

And Parents' Responsibilities" (Cm. 4349 July 1999) where it was stated that:

> *"Governments do not bring up children – families do. But families differ in*
>
> *their ability to give children a successful upbringing."*
>
> (White Paper: *"A New Contract For Welfare: Children's Rights And Parents'*
>
> *Responsibilities"*, Cm. 4349, July 1999)

The main recommendation of this paper was the replacement of the existing formula

by a simplified flat rate assessment system where NRPs earning over £200 per week

would be obligated to pay 15% of their net income for one child, 20% for two and a

maximum of 25% for three children or more (the 15/20/25 rule). The need for a

cultural change was promoted with the new system relying on the willingness of

fathers to pay and the cooperation of mothers. The system was intended to make it,

"easy to pay and difficult not to pay" further, *"good fathers do want to pay"*

(Baroness Hollis, BBC Parliamentary News, March 1999).

The effects of this new policy posed some potential for major changes in the

operations and the organization of the CSA in that a simplified flat rate assessment

system had the potential to be coordinated with the activities of other State agencies

and the integrated use of IT (CSA interview, April 2000). In principle the CSA was

to handle less items of information and perhaps the most controversial feature of the

2000 Act was that the PWC was not to be assessed as a contributor of child

maintenance and thus no information of financial circumstances were requested from

this party. The new policy also claimed to make more realistic assessments for

Schedule D, self-employed customers. The principles of the 'Children First' policy

were transformed into the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (2000)

however, due to IT problems, the introduction of this new system was postponed until

April 2003. The new system was implemented with new claims where the two

systems ran in parallel until all claims were eventually transferred to the new system.

The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (2000) also awarded the CSA

additional authority to recommend actions to ensure compliance. Tougher sanctions

were introduced with parties who refused to co-operate with the CSA and it was to be

made a criminal offence to fail to provide information or misrepresent one's

circumstances to the Agency. Those who were found to have done so would face a

fine or possibly a jail sentence with persistent late payment also resulting in fines

however, penalties for not providing accurate information was only imposed from 31st

January 2001 when it became an offence to give false information to the CSA.

The CSA was also given access to tax records so that a true picture of the income of the self-employed was made available.

Parents with care who were on Income Support were allowed a disregard and to be able to keep up to £10 per week of maintenance paid to their children and the 2000 Act incorporated allowances for shared care where a new default or interim rate was made payable together with the recognition of voluntary payments (White Paper: Children First, 1999). Another feature of the new scheme was the introduction of an upper limit, however, if the NRP was a high earner the PWC was be allowed to appeal in court for the maintenance to be *'topped up'* and thus this *'upper limit'* was negotiable and not specified in the CSA rulebook.

Having traced the development of child support policy and legislation it is stressed that it is pertinent to this study to appreciate the importance of legislation in setting the rules that the CSA implements and the details of procedures and assessment calculations are fundamental to its dealings with its customers. However fair or effective the new system of child support might be policy describes a broad set of aims and objectives by which the CSA is guided and, together with legislation, they provide the mandatory components and objectives for the CSA's mission statements.

5.4   Forming the CSA's Mission

Mission statements have developed in private sector organizations by extending their declared *raison d'être* beyond the memorandum of articles and the focus of profit and shareholder wealth maximization. Most private sector mission statements include wider references in their narratives than just the pursuit of profit. The styles differ but the general themes include statements that justify their roles in a social context. Although public sector departments and the Civil Service had missions they were less explicit and not clarified in the form of a mission statement. The move to agency status has motivated public sector agencies to produce private sector style mission statements that make references to internal and external social roles even extending to ethical issues. Within the themes of NPSM the missions that were previously an integral part of political and parliamentary policies have been made more visible and transparent with the introduction of Next Steps Agencies.

Although descriptive in nature the CSA's mission statement outlines the broad intentions and terms of reference in abstract form. In effect it recounts the reasons for its existence and, to some extent, some justification of its roles. It would seem logical that, prior to making any detailed analysis of the CSA as an organization, consideration should be made to the overriding missions that the Agency attempts to fulfill. In order to assess the content of the CSA's missions references are made to the Agency's publications and working documents that were provided by the Agency's various internal teams (see Chapter Four).

From a wider perspective mission statements extend from communicating objectives to include corporate credo in declaring organizational or corporate identity in a set of ideals. The terminologies and phraseologies used in mission statements are fundamental to the declaration of organizational ideals and portray the organizational image where language is regarded as bolstering corporate symbolism (Mittroff and Kilmann, 1976 and Pettigrew, 1979).

The organizational terminologies employed in mission statements, particularly in the private sector, often extend to general *'corporate speak'* and with the promotions of private sector methods by NPSM the CSA was certainly not excluded from using metaphors to express its missions in its annual reports (see below). Reference to the use of corporate metaphors are given as follows:

1.   *Organizations are no longer described by what they produce or do; they have mission statements instead.*

2.   *Mission statements are meant to 'cascade down' the organization and are the means of individual 'empowerment'.*

3.   *This empowerment in turn leads to great teams who run hot, play passionately (even chaotically), towards the corporate mission, united in their common vision.*

4.   *Organizations are no longer run by managers but by heroes who are*

insanely great in what they do. They turn threats into opportunities,

presumably by constantly gazing through that double-glazed window

of opportunity towards the distant horizons of total quality.

(Wilson, D. C. 1992: 79-80)

The CSA produces mission statements as part of their business publications or

'business products' in declaring the adherence to child support policy and in

expressing their priorities for internal operations. The overall role of the CSA is

quoted as being to:

"Bring together in one organization all matters to do with the assessment,

collection and enforcement of child maintenance in the great majority of

cases. "

(Tony Newton, Secretary of State for Social Security, 1991, House of Commons

Official Report, vol. 192, para. 179)

The three key areas quoted in the CSA's mission statement are, *'Customers, People*

and Performance' and these are stated as being integral parts of the *'Agency's*

objectives', *'Critical success factors'* and *'Agency measures'*. The CSA's original

mission statement included detailed targets, aims and objectives set by the

Government whose initial goals are given as follows:

1.   That 200,000 more lone parents will receive maintenance regularly

when the Child Support Agency is fully operational.

2.   About 500,000 caring parents will no longer be dependent on income

support because they will be receiving maintenance.

3.   That there will be an estimated reduction in social security benefit

expenditure from improved arrangements for assessment and payment

of maintenance of £400 million per annum.

(Children Come First 1990, Cm. 1264)

By 1995 the Secretary of State for Social Security outlined the following targets for

the CSA:

Maintenance: £300 million of maintenance to be collected, or arranged for

direct payment from absent parent to parent with care, in 1995/96.

Payment: 90% of payment made to parents with care within 10 working days

of receipt from an absent parent.

Accuracy: To achieve a rapid and continuing improvement in accuracy, so

that in at least 75% of cases checked during March 1996 the cash value will

be for the correct amount.

Reviews: Where a client is dissatisfied with a Child Support Officer's

decision and requests a review, 50% to be cleared within 13 weeks, 80% to be

cleared within 26 weeks; and no more than 20% to be older than 26 weeks as

at 31 March   1996.

Maintenance Assessment

Clearance Time: 60% of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and as at 31 March 1996 no more than 10% of all maintenance applications received by the Agency to be over 52 weeks old.

Client Satisfaction: To achieve a score of 65% on an index of client satisfaction with the Agency's service, as determined by an independent national survey.

Budget: To manage the Agency's resources so as to deliver its Business Plan within the gross budget application.

(Child Support Agency: Business Plan 1995/96, HMSO)

By 1998 there is evidence shown in the CSA's publications that it was varying the emphases made in its previous mission statements to include qualitative narratives. References to improved levels of service, communications and values are made among its aims however, in supporting families, it is stressed that the primary responsibility rests with parents. The CSA's aims and values are divided into three areas:

1. *Our Vision: Putting children first*

2. *Our Mission: To help parents actively meet their responsibilities so all children receive the right maintenance.*

3. *Our Values: We will always try to:*

give excellent service to every customer

involve, invest and deal fairly with our people

work effectively with our partners and resources

continually improve everything we do

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts, 19998/99: 43)

The 1999/2000 Business Plan continues to state the specific Secretary of State (SoS) targets to collect maintenance and arrears from 70% of NRP's. It was estimated that they expected approximately £850 million in maintenance to be collected and arranged. The plan continues to list the objectives as follows:

The cash value of all assessments checked in the year to be correct in at least 78% of cases. To reach a specified level of performance in a series of customer service standards. The proposed standards are:
65% of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 20 weeks.
97% of payments made to the parent with care (or their bank or building society) to be made within 10 working days of receipt from the non-resident parent.

Where a client is dissatisfied with a Child Support Officer's decision and requests a review; or where a change of circumstance requires a review; 88% to be cleared within 12 weeks. The National Enquiry Line (NEL) to respond to 80% of telephone calls within 20 seconds.

60% of letters to be answered within 10 working days of receipt.

97% of clients to be seen within 10 minutes of the time of a pre-booked

appointment.

90% of complaints to be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt.

To respond with a full reply to 75% of complaints within 10 working days

of receipt.

80% of telephone calls to client help lines to be answered first time.

90% of customers surveyed on quality callbacks (following contact with

National Enquiry Line, client help lines and face to face) to be at least

satisfied with the service they have received.

To reduce the number of complaints received compared with current

caseload to less than 0.28%. The Minimum Service Standards to deliver

existing services within the running cost total implying an annual

efficiency gain of at least 4%.

In addition to these operational targets the CSA's plan lists the following

development stages or *'milestones'*, as follows:

1.   *Develop a debt reduction measure*

2.   *Deliver decision-making and appeals*

3.   *Develop an efficiency/cost measure*

4.   *Develop a staffing index*

5.   *Develop a service first charter*

(Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000: 19 - 20)

The terms, *'quality'* and *'culture'*, are progressively referred to in the context of the CSA's aims and objectives and there is also an inclusion of wider organizational concepts in the CSA's mission, referred to in the following:

> *"It will also help our people establish a climate in which change can flourish and will ensure that all our systems and processes support and encourage the behaviour we require."*

(Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000: 18)

This Business Plan also refers to, *"customers' emotional needs"*, and itemizes its three main priorities to which it was to direct its efforts as, *"Customers, People and Performance."* This provides evidence of a change in emphasis of the CSA's missions from the citations of policy objectives and detailed targets to include considerations of its employees and customers. In taking these internal and external perspectives of human needs this change of emphasis in the CSA's mission might be interpreted as recognition that such factors cannot be discounted if the Agency was to improve its performances (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

The White Paper: *"A New Contract For Welfare: Children's Rights And Parents' Responsibilities"* (July 1999, Cm. 4349) referred to above, changed the methodology of child support implementation rather than the overall missions and this paper refers to the aims of improving CSA service.

It states that the CSA should aim to raise cash compliance rates from 66% to 80%

under the new system and Faith Boardman, the Chief Executive at this time, stated:

> *"The Agency intended to reduce error and prevent fraud, provide a system*
>
> *that is effective and easy for people to use and make the best use of the*
>
> *available resources."*
>
> (Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000: 3)

The objective of reducing fraud was also stressed following a Benefits Fraud

Inspectorate (BFI) report on the CSA after an inspection during October 1998 (see

Chapter Nine). An outline of the CSA's objectives from it's 2002/03 Business Plan

shows much similarity to the grouping of objectives and the Business Excellence

Model (BEM) (see Chapter Nine), with the emphasis placed on *'Enablers'* and

'Results'.

5.5   Summary and Conclusions

In summary, it can be seen that child support policy, legislation and the CSA's

missions are inter-related. The 1991 Act represented a *'quantum leap'* in the

principles and approach directed to the provision of child maintenance after

separation that was passed through parliament at haste and with limited opposition

and research into its potential effects.

The emphasis on the liability of biological parents providing financial support to first families was sustained throughout the amendments and developments in legislation (see above and Chapter Two). The CSA's role is detailed in its missions that confirm the commitment to child support policy and legislation and translate these into organizational ideals. Within the context of NPSM themes, mission statements provide confirmation of private sector influences and it is evident that the CSA pays much attention to the narratives in its publications. Such mission statements describe the broad criteria for accountability to the State and extend to refer to wider qualitative goals. The detailed objectives are listed as targets of performance that are subject to change and reviewed on an annual basis. Such targets and budgets are adjusted according to the CSA's performances, ideally, in order to form a realistic set of objectives. In considering the CSA's missions and the developments of its mission statements, it is pertinent to identify similarities and links to the methods and methodologies that the Agency employs in measuring its performance (see Chapters Eight and Nine).

It is also significant to appreciate that mission statements produced by private and public sector organizations exhibit some common ground with the style that they express wider social objectives such as their role in society and for making provisions for the public. The CSA's missions link with the Agency's strategic plans that describe the methods by which such missions are to be achieved.

There are also interrelationships with the CSA's organizational cultural and quality issues that are regarded as fundamental to the successful achievement of the Agency's mission goals (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

Having described the set of formal rules that the CSA is to operate with in terms of NPSM principles, policy and legislation, the internal focus on the CSA as an organization commences by considering the strategies and methodologies that the Agency employs in implementing these rules within the system of child support. Although there have been some significant changes in legislation the question as to whether this has been reflected in the organizational typology of the CSA is addressed. Further, the haste and lack of in depth research that accompanied the changes in child support legislation might go some way to explaining the shortfalls in the CSA's performances in implementing an ill conceived policy.

Chapter Six

The Child Support Agency: Strategies, Organizational Structure, Theories and Managerialism

6.1   Analyzing the CSA as an Organization

In Chapter Three questions were posed that refer to the CSA as an organization acting within the themes of NPSM. In order to address these questions and commence an internal analysis of the CSA references were made to organizational features outlined in the Agency's publications that were later questioned in interviews with senior management (CSA interviews 1998, 1999 and 2000, see Chapter Four). The initial topic areas derived from publications were those of the CSA's missions and its subsequent strategic plans. Further analyses were conducted into the structure and typology of the CSA that were given considerable attention during interviews with the Agency's employees. In addressing these matters there exists, not surprisingly, significant commonalities with Human Resource Management (HRM) issues and the perceptions of CSA staff and its customers.

As stated previously the CSA was placed in a susceptible position in implementing a controversial new child support policy and the associated legislations (see Chapter Five).

The CSA was formed from scratch within the themes of a relatively new approach to public sector management and was to replace the roles of courts and the DSS that had acted as a State bureaucracy (see Chapters One and Three). The main purpose of this Chapter is to assess how far removed the CSA has become from the organizational form of the bureaucracy and what have been the significant effects of the themes of NPSM during its first decade of operations.

The promotion of private sector methods is evident in the CSA's mission statements (see Chapter Five) where there are suggestions that the public was to be the recipient of an intended new approach to welfare provision from an agency rather than a large-scale public sector department that was closely associated with the ministerial department that instigated the policies. So far in the study the CSA has been regarded as an instrumental vehicle of public policy and described as a Transfer Agency (see Chapter Three) that redistributes child maintenance from NRPs. More pertinent to this study is the detailed analysis of the effects of NPSM themes and child support policy on the staff and customers of the CSA. It should be remembered that there exists some element of duality experienced by the staff members who are still employed with Civil Service status within the wider environment of the DSS (later Department of Work, Pensions and Social Security).

The internal analysis commences by linking the CSA's missions discussed in Chapter Five with its strategies that are outlined in the, *'Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003'* (1998) and also referred to in its Annual Reports and Business Plans.

As stated in Chapter Five, strategies are considered in the context of organizational

methods and methodologies employed by the CSA in fulfilling its aims and

objectives. As with the CSA's mission statements there is much evidence of private

sector terminology used to describe its strategies and the subsequent management of

change and these strategic campaigns are explored.

Consideration of the management of change is of paramount importance to this

section of the study in identifying which organizational features, if any, have

significantly moved from the traditional hierarchical structure associated with the

State bureaucracy and the DSS. The study follows a logical progression with a *'top*

down' approach by searching for evidence of any flattening the CSA's hierarchical

organizational structure and form so often referred to in interviews with Agency

management (CSA interviews October 1999, April and December 2000). The

associated areas of responsibilities, the lines of accountability, employee specialisms

and the status quo of CSA officials are considered in the wider organizational context.

By making comparisons with the details of the CSA's organizational features such as

distributions of authority and the influence of the Civil Service infrastructure with

those referred to in organizational theories, particularly those of Max Weber, it can be

assessed as to how far removed the Agency's organizational features are from those

features found in the organization and operations of the typical bureaucracy.

Although this study emphasizes field research rather than being dominated by a theoretical coverage, further reference to organizational theory is made in comparing the CSA's organizational traits with those outlined in the *'Aston Studies'* (Pugh 1988) (see Chapter Four).

Finally, consideration is given to the reliance on new managerialism in adhering to the principles of NPSM within the CSA. Managerialism is regarded as being the keystone in applying the theories of NPSM and, as previously stated, this study commences with a case study approach in identifying how managerialism might influence management experiences within the CSA. In order to address the effects of managerialism some references are made to theoretical definitions and critiques of this approach to localizing responsibilities and increasing the autonomy of CSA management.

6.2   Building the CSA's Strategies

The building of effective strategies is of fundamental importance in guiding the role of the CSA and focuses on the instrumental methodologies that direct senior management as distinct from the wider agendas of policy and legislation. In this study strategy is regarded in the wider context of methodology rather than just the specifications of a planning process.

The main theme of the CSA's strategic plan is one of reform and defines two strategic routes, *'The Administrative Campaign'* and *'The Moral Campaign'*. The *'Administrative Campaign'* is a strategy that focuses on effectiveness and internal efficiency, whereas the *'Moral Campaign'* refers to the involvement of wider ideologies and ideals that includes an appeal to ethical and moral public stakeholder conscience (see Chapter Three).

6.2.1 The Administrative Campaign

The CSA's administrative campaign is part of the overall strategy that applies to the Agency working within NPSM guidelines to achieve effective organization and operational efficiency. This part of the CSA's strategy is directed to the organizational structure and internal features of the Agency that includes development of new processing procedures and the utilization of IT resources. This campaign is also intended to coordinate operational changes with changes in organizational culture in order that CSA staff members are motivated in cohesive aims and objectives (see Chapter Seven). The development of an effective organizational culture is also influential in implementing quality management directives and the pursuit of operational efficiency and output results (see Chapters Eight and Nine).

The hardware of the CSA's administrative strategy has developed from the initial

organizational structure with the hub of administrative control being maintained at

Long Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne with the Dudley office being in close support. In

addition, the six regional Child Support Assessment Centres (CSACs) were

established on new premises, usually contained in Business Parks in areas of

relatively high unemployment. The local field offices were originally based on

Benefits Agency premises (see Sec. 6.3 and Chapter Eight).

The administrative strategy incorporates an IT strategy that is of vital importance to

the operations of the CSA. The computer system that the CSA initially introduced

was already in use in Wisconsin, US and was seen in operation during a visit by

officials to Florida in 1992. This system has since been replaced after a controversial

decision where the contract was awarded to the Texas firm EDS (see Chapter Nine).

There were only two companies in the bidding for the new computer system, EDS

and Lockheed, with the corporate ownership of both these organizations being

General Motors. An addendum to this was that Margaret Thatcher's son, Mark

Thatcher, had been an employee at EDS at the time the bid was accepted (NACSA

Newsletter 2000).

In implementing the maintenance assessment formula, the main administrative

functions include the collection of required information from separated parents, the

assessment of required maintenance and the subsequent collection and redistribution

of these funds.

The original administrative campaign had previously included a preference for focusing on *'quick wins'* and *'easy targets'* in achieving its goals (See Chapter Seven and Eight). The strategic emphasis changed and the later administrative campaign included in CSA documentation referred to the initial implementation of the flat rate system of assessment contained in the 2000 Act (see Chapter Five). The underlying schema of the introduction of the associated changes required that two administrative systems were to run in parallel. As part of its administrative strategy the CSA outlines the phases of implementation of this process in its 1999/2000 Business Plan, *"Steps along the way to the new Child Support System"*, as follows:

Table 6.1 Stairway to Agency Reform

Time	Phase	Level
October 1997	0	Getting the Basics and People Right
April 1998	1	Putting Customers First
April 1999	2	Simplification and Changing Behaviour
September 1999	3	Getting Fit
April 2000	4	Shaping Up
April 2001	5	Dual Running

(CSA Business Plan 1999/2000, 1999: 24-25)

In terms of the administrative strategy the agenda of performance objectives is given as follows:

- *Continuously improve accuracy and quality*

- *Significantly improve compliance, actively support the Benefits Agency in their fraud prevention and detection work, and develop our own Fraud strategy*

- *Ensure maintenance is paid regularly and on time*

- *Work in partnership with other agencies and organisations to deliver a whole person service*

- *Deliver a service that is cost effective and efficient for the taxpayer*

- *Make full use of electronic means of delivery*

(CSA Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003, 1998: 9)

This is further detailed as *'critical success factors'* as follows:

- *Process and organisational improvements driven by customers' need*

- *Maintenance assessments made promptly*

- *Backlogs cleared and caseload kept up to date*

- *Debt reduced to a minimum*

- *Closer working with Benefits Agency extended successfully*

- *Partnerships developed with other agencies, government departments and organisations*

- *Improved accuracy, quality, security and better results for the*

  Benefits Agency in their fraud prevention and detection work

- *Efficiencies delivered to give best value to tax payers*

- *Payments compliance maximised*

- *Use of easements already in place maximised and solutions*

  sought where additional easements are required

(CSA Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003: 11)

In addition to the stress on efficient and effective administrative performances there is

an initiative to coordinate administrative activities and information resources with

other State agencies with the concept of a *'Joined-up Government'* (CSA interview,

March 1999). The coordination of information with other agencies was referred to as

being significant to the future of the CSA particularly in view of the fact that the new

method of assessment had been simplified to flat rate deductions that were being

similarly administered by the Inland Revenue (CSA interview, December 2000).

Reference to making stronger liaisons between the CSA and the Inland Revenue in

assessing maintenance from the information provided for tax assessment and the

centralization of IT facilities is made in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill (1999).

Together with the Contributions Agency and the Benefits Agency, the CSA was

intended to centralize its IT resources and coordinate an IT system with other Next

Steps Agencies, but the centralization of such vast amounts of data was seen as a

mammoth, if not, an impracticable task by CSA management (CSA interview,

October 1999).

6.2.2 **The Moral Campaign**

The moral campaign links the social and political ideologies associated with the

Conservative Government's stress on, *'Back to Basics'* and *'pro family'* values with a

reduction in, *'Welfare dependency'*. Although Margaret Thatcher was associated

with these ideologies as part of the New Right's political campaign, she resigned on

22nd November 1990, and was replaced by John Major who continued the party's

stress on these traditional family responsibilities (see Chapter Two).

In terms of marital separation the cause of separation by any *'fault'* by the parents

becomes disregarded and, is perhaps, transposed to the *'fault'* of NRPs failing to

support children after separation. As stated in Chapter Two, there is an implication of

condemnation of men who fail to fulfill their parental obligations and are thus

regarded as feckless and errant with their parental responsibilities that results in the

transference of their financial obligations to the taxpayer. Fundamental to the moral

campaign is the question of, *'who pays?'* and the stress on conscience that the

taxpayer shouldn't *'foot the bill'* as they should not be obligated to provide parental

responsibilities for other parent's children.

The moral campaign is an instrument of the political motive to promote the

acceptance of the new child support policy, assisted by political rhetoric. It intends to

appeal to social conscience and *'fairness'* perhaps even interpreted as an appeal to

nostalgic values and emotive sentiments.

The portrayal of the family and the helplessness of children after separation of parents are also concepts endorsed by various religious bodies. The idea of children being supported *"emotionally"* is cited in the CSA's 1999/2000 Business Plan, but the role of the Agency is limited to financial responsibility rather than any involvement with emotional responsibility. As stated above, the CSA is an instrumental State agency that is not directly concerned with moral issues and it only employs the backdrop of the moral campaign to achieve better performances. The CSA's moral campaign does, however, extend beyond the administrative campaign to refer to wider policy ideals. In this way the CSA has drawn upon the general principles of child support ideologies and the themes of the Business Plans and the Strategic Steer suggest that the Agency aspires to be seen as an all embracing organization and not just a revenue raising monopoly.

6.3   The CSA's Organizational Structure

The CSA was developed from an Information Technology (IT) project named the Child Support Unit within the Liable Relative Unit (later Dependent Relatives Section) of the DSS based at Long Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne (see Chapter Nine). The CSA headquarters are accommodated on premises that had been originally constructed as an over-spill hospital facility for casualties from the Second World War that was not required. Although much of the policy liaison and decision-making processes are based in London the Resources and Business Development units are at the CSA's headquarters.

The Resources section is made responsible for budgetary control, financial policy,

resource management, personnel policy, HQ personnel and accommodation. The

Business Development section is responsible for strategic business planning,

communications, IT system developments, policy liaison and public relations. CSA

operations are organized through three regional divisions with each consisting of two

local Child Support Assessment Centres (CSAC's) controlled by an Operations

Director. The divisions are divided into areas of responsibility and the work is

distributed amongst six front line Business Units (BU's), acting as large processing

centres, as shown in the following table:

Table 6.2 Locations of Regional Divisions and Child Support Assessment

Centres (CSAC's)

REGIONAL DIVISION	CHILD SUPPORT ASSESSMENT CENTRE	AREA OF OPERATIONS
North	Belfast	Anglia and East Midlands
		Yorkshire and Humberside
	Falkirk	Eastern (Edinburgh to
		Leeds)
		Scotland (excluding
		Lothian and Borders)
Midlands	Dudley	West Midlands and
		Chilterns
	Birkenhead	Wales and Merseyside,
		Lancs, Cumbria, Cheshire
		and Greater Manchester
South	Hastings	London and the Downs
	Plymouth	East London, Essex and
		Kent

Initially there were ten divisional managers for the field operations and each CSAC

operated in areas that were the responsibility of area managers in the local CSAC

offices. There was also a seventh Business Unit (BU) dealing with centralized

appeals, special payments and parliamentary correspondence from offices in Lytham

St Annes, Dudley and Newcastle upon Tyne. There were also some 450 local offices

dealing with the information gathered by personal contact with clients but such

administrative tasks were moved from small units to larger regional centres. This

move was intended to increase efficiency and offer customers a better service. The

cost efficiencies achieved were intended to provide five times as many officers to

deal with customers face to face (Children First Business Plan 1999/2000: 78).

The organizational structure follows the form that is typical of other Next Steps

Agencies with the Chief Executive having overall supervision and the CSA Board

consisting of Directors with specific lines of responsibility. In the first interview two

Senior Officers referred to the CSA's initial organizational structure as being

relatively flat in comparison to the organizational structures previously employed in

the Civil Service (CSA interview, November 1998). The hierarchical organization

structure is a fundamental feature of a bureaucracy and the triangular representation

of authority and power representing few controlling many, recurs throughout many

wider studies associated with the social sciences.

Although the CSA structure still incorporates a broad hierarchy of responsibilities and accountabilities, there is evidence of *'clusters'* and a task-centred emphasis (*'objectified intelligence'*) that promotes the autonomy of managers in controlling their specific areas of responsibility. One CSA manager referred to the rigid hierarchy based on Civil Service grading and internal *"pecking orders"* as still being in existence to some extent. However the dominance of hierarchy was said to have diminished with the increased emphasis on training and the involvement of CSA staff with organizational changes and the application of the specialist skills of its staff members (CSA Interview November 1998). The leveling of the internal hierarchical structure was referred to in later interviews and confirmed in the CSA's internal documentation describing the reorganization of the Agency during 1998/99.

In line with the concepts of NPSM, the main factors that dictate organizational changes are those of accountability, cost reduction and the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness. The original allocations of responsibilities within the CSA Board were reorganized during 1998/99 as part of the *'Operations Reorganisation Project'* where this organizational transformation was intended to streamline the Agency in making it more cost effective. The original CSA Board consisted of Personnel, Operations, Business Development and Support and Financial directorates. After the reorganization of 1998/99, the CSA Board consisted of the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Operations Director, Human Resources Director, Modern Service One Design Manager and the Resources Director and, in addition, there were two Non-Executive Directors.

The number of components of the CSA Board was reduced to three areas, Support Services, Business Control and Frontline Operations following the reorganization of 1998/99. One significant change was that Personnel had been integrated into Support Services rather than standing alone as a separate directorate function (Annual Report and Accounts, 1998/99: 21). There was more autonomy given to local management in issues of personnel with recruitment and training needs becoming the responsibilities of local unit managers (CSA interviews October 1999 and April 2000).

The outline of the CSA's organizational structure after the reorganization of 1998/99 is illustrated in Appendix Three. From top-down, the CSA's overall structure has maintained the three main sections, the Board, the Headquarters and the Business Control with its frontline operations and support units. The hierarchy of Civil Service staff grading and the clustering of staff specializations into units are influential factors of the CSA's organizational structure. The promotion of managerialism inherent in the themes of NPSM has resulted in a general flattening of the CSA's internal organizational structure and has increased the levels of autonomy of Agency managers, however, the lines of accountabilities of the clustered units still follow a 'bottom up' hierarchical structure to the CSA's Board directors. Further details on the initial structuring of CSA staff are given in Chapters Seven and Eight. The organizational structure of CSA is outlined in order to identify any significant organizational traits that might be used in deriving a classification of the Agency's organizational typology.

In considering the analysis of the CSA as an organization comparisons are made between the internal features found in the Agency and those associated with the bureaucracy.

6.4   The CSA as a Bureaucracy

As previously stated, before the introduction of NPSM themes into the public sector, the functions of the public sector had been traditionally dominated by the presence of State bureaucracies and the roles of the Civil Service. The examination of the CSA's internal features and the comparisons with theories of bureaucracy are fundamental to this study in assessing how far removed the Agency has become from the organizational typology of the bureaucracy (see Chapter Three).

In the context of organizational typologies one theme associated with NPSM principles is that bureaucracy was regarded as an out dated form of organization (see Chapter One). This premise would not be accepted by those regarding traditional State bureaucracies as possessing a higher level of public acceptance and trust as a time-tested medium of organization in directly linking Government policy. In support of bureaucracy Paul Du Gay (2000) refers to bureaucracies as possessing an *'ethos of office'* in his critique, *'In Praise of Bureaucracy'*, that he regards as a necessary organizational medium of democratic administration.

Although NPSM themes might have dissipated some theoretical traits of bureaucracy,

it is difficult to conduct a study linked to public sector organization and management

without considering bureaucracy as a significant form of organization and, in

attempting to define bureaucracy in organizational terms, the distinction is made

between bureaucracy as an organizational type rather than referring to a whole system

of bureaucratic processes ('red tape') (see Chapters One and Three).

References to Max Weber's analyses assist in identifying some common features

associated with bureaucracies, particularly the 'ideal type' bureaucracy (see below).

Many of the studies and observations of Max Weber refer to social and economic

organization and the process of rationalization that he saw as leading modern

industrial society into the 'iron cage' of a totally bureaucratized order (Dawe, A.

1979: 391). The 'iron cage' of bureaucracy refers to the rigid organizational

structure and the hierarchical 'top-down' distribution of authority from management

that organizational members ('cogs') are subject to. Weber views the State

bureaucracy as independent of any individual Government that possesses flexibility in

serving any interest whether purely political or economic (Weber, M., 1968: 990).

This idea is confirmed in regarding the bureaucracy as lending itself to such functions

as warfare, internal repression, the production of cars or distributing benefits (Moore,

W. E. 1979: 356). Weber observed that bureaucracy was an increasing facet of

modern society that required to be controlled in order to defend democracy

(Abrahamson, B. 1993: 46).

Max Weber also refers to the duality of *"Economic Sociology"* and the *'exclusion'* or

'closure' of social relationships in which *'instrumental rationality'* was of paramount

'value' (Weber, M. 1947: 30-35: 40). Rationality describes a calculated choice of

effective means for given ends without being the basis for the ends pursued (Moore,

W. E. 1979: 356). The pursuance of rationality might be seen to apply to the CSA

in attempting to separate policy from practice.

Max Weber refers further to the idea of *'instrumental rationality'* as the best means to

a given end and *'intrinsic rationality'* as a substantive value *('wert')* that determines

the superior appropriateness in achieving a given end (Weber, M. 1968: 24-25).

Other characteristics of bureaucracy applied to the CSA are those of a legal and

administrative system possessing the *'general norms'* of predictability allowing for a

high degree of calculability (Abrahamsson, B. 1993: 42) and the pursuance of

efficiency by the Agency acting as the *'efficient machine'*. In regarding the

bureaucracy as being a *'rational'* and *'efficient'* type of organization Weber refers to

the bureaucracy as being a technical instrument and an independent force in society

since it has an inherent tendency to overstep its proper function as a technical

instrument and an inherent tendency to exceed its proper function (Beetham, D.

1985).

In moving from social actions to authority, Weber identifies three different types of

authority for large organizations, as follows:

1. Rational Legal Authority

> Respect and belief for rules and regulations.
>
> Acceptance by employees that organization is centralised.

2. Traditional Authority

> Following of traditional rules and methods
>
> Progression up hierarchy not necessarily due to knowledge and
>
> expertise. Possibly due to nepotism.

3. Charismatic Authority

> Authority due to ability
>
> Tend to have original ideas and good relationships with staff
>
> Leaders tend to have charismatic/friendly personality.

As with the bureaucracy the most dominant form of authority adopted by the CSA is

that of rational legal authority with the Agency implementing legislation as rules (see

Chapter Five). Although some early considerations of bureaucracies stress the

concept of *'traditional authority'*, this contrasts with the conformity to new rules

developed by the CSA in adhering to the principles of NPSM and in implementing

new legislation. This distinction is referred to in the following:

"Even actual innovations are justified by the fiction that they were once in

force but had fallen into disuse and only now are brought back to their

rightful position of authority.

One of the important consequences, and symptoms, of the existence of

traditional authority is that there can be no such thing as new 'legislation'."

(Weber, M. 1947: 60)

The implementation of new legislation by the CSA clearly conflicts with this idea of

traditional authority and thus the emphasis is placed on rational legal authority by the

Agency however an adherence to traditional authority by the CSA is witnessed in the

association with the Civil Service and the grading of its staff (see Chapter Seven).

In the context of administrative bureaucracy, Weber classifies authority and specifies

the different levels of power as being sub-classifications of the different kinds of

traditional authority in terms of variation in the development and role of

administrative staff. Weber regards *'charismatic authority'* as relying on emotional

commitment of the human agent in a community where such emotional commitment

is directed to an individual and the qualities held by such types. There is an

implication of a *'sacrifice of the intellect'* and blinding obsequiousness from

subordinates. The dependency of subordinates on charismatic leadership as,

'superordinates', means that subordinates can only migrate from the *'iron cage'* with

the replacement of another *'superordinate hero'* (Dawe, A. 1979: 395).

Charismatic authority might be appropriately associated with the CSA's Chief

Executive (see Chapter Three) and unit managers who have been awarded increased

levels of autonomy with the reliance on managerialism (see below).

The promotion of NPSM themes places a greater importance on the application of charismatic authority and the promotion of this approach to managerialism. Unit leaders practice the localization of authority and charismatic authority to motivate and lead staff (CSA interview, April 2000).

Weber extends the idea of the bureaucracy as a *'rational organization'* in identifying *'ideal type'* bureaucracies where the *'ideal type'* refers to a measure of organizational facets rather than a definitive empirical type of organization (see Chapter Three). The *'ideal type'* bureaucracy is characterized by a hierarchical organization of offices with recruitment based on merit (Abrahamsson, B. 1993: 5).

Weber's rationalization method, used in his social research on testing for an *'ideal-typical'* bureaucracy, contains the following qualitative comparators:

Table 6.3 Ideal-Typical Bureaucracy: Defining Characteristics

1. Individual officials are personally free, but constrained by their employment when performing the impersonal duties of their offices.

2. There is a clear hierarchy of officials.

3. The functions of each official in the hierarchy are clearly specified.

4. Each official has a contract of employment.

5. Officials are selected by professional qualification, ideally through competitive examinations.

6.   Officials have a money salary, usually with pension rights, and reflecting their position in the hierarchy. Officials may leave their jobs when they desire and their contracts may be terminated under certain circumstances.

7.   The official's post is his sole or major occupation.

8.   There is a clear career structure with promotion by seniority or merit according to the judgment of superiors.

9.   The official may not appropriate for his personal use the post or its resources.

10.   The official is under a unified control and disciplinary system.

The formalization of rules and procedures are still integral to the organization of the CSA's tasks and are included in the contractual requirements of its employees. There has been no previous detailed analysis of the CSA as a bureaucracy defined within the classical *'Weberian'* features and it is of use to compare these main listed organizational features of a bureaucracy adapted from Max Weber (1948) with those that might be found in the CSA. In referring to the main features associated with the bureaucracy in interviews with CSA staff (CSA interviews 1998 to 2000) the responses are categorized within each of the listed theoretical features in the following:

1. Specialism

Each office has a clearly defined sphere of influence or set of tasks.

Although most of the administrative tasks might be considered as being homogeneous there are specific tasks assigned to CSA employees in their job descriptions. Reference to this is specifically made to the management accountants at the CSA who have specialized roles in adjusting their costing systems to those demanded under NPSM. Units are formed that are responsible for specific tasks and there is some degree of specialization of management and staff that are assigned to these units.

2. *Hierarchy*

There is a clear chain of command from top to bottom.

As stated above (see sec. 6.3), the lines of accountability follow a *'bottom up'* flow of answerability and a *'top down'* application of authority (see Chapter One). Although this broad framework of the hierarchy can be seen in the organizational structure (see above) there has been a significant flattening of the CSA's hierarchy within its Child Support Assessment Centres (CSACs) and Business Units (CSA interview, October 1999). This extends to the clustering of responsibilities by functions, even within the CSA's Board (see sec. 6.3). It is this flattening in the dissipation of ultimate authority that injects some organizational complexity and modifies the organizational structuree of the CSA from that of the traditional Weberian bureaucracy. This is further demonstrated with the increased levels of autonomy awarded to CSA unit managers and the reliance on managerialism (see sec. 6.3).

As stated above, in the wider perspective, the hierarchical structure still exists in following the lines of authority upwards to the CSA Board. The adherence to the hierarchical structure is still present internally with staff being ranked according to the Civil Service staff grading system.

3. *Rules*

There are clearly defined rules to enable the efficient running of the organization. It is evident that the CSA depends upon set rules where staff members refer to the *'Orange Book'* that is the documented internal source of reference in dealing with all cases (see Chapter Five). The rules have been developed from legislation and compiled for the Operations Director with the authority of the Board. There are also rules that direct the procedures for staff in terms of Human Resource Management (HRM) and quality management issues within the CSA and there is some commonality with other Next Steps Agencies acting under NPSM (see Chapters Seven and Eight). These rules are evident in the CSA's internal documentation provided for this study (see Chapter Four). The requirements of accountability also demand that formal rules and procedures are adhered to by all CSA staff.

4. *Impersonality*

The formal conduct of employees is formally impersonal, both internally and externally.

The emphasis of professionalism and the adherence to legislative issues such as the Data Protection Acts and Human Rights Act place an imperative on the impersonality of CSA employees in dealing with their customers. The stress on security is also an important factor in maintaining the anonymity of CSA staff. CSA administrative staff members are also instructed to distance themselves from questions addressed to policy issues when dealing with their customers in the practice of front line operations and this is achieved by the citing of legislation and the rules of assessment provided for call centre staff (CSA interview, November 1998). The contractual demands of the Civil Service require that there is an adherence to professional standards of internal behaviour (Osmotherly Rules). In addition there is an insistence to comply with the conditions contained in the Official Secrets Act that prompts the use of 'steers' that, similar to operational rules, act as guidelines that promote impersonality ('cogs').

5. *Appointment*

Employees are appointed on the basis of technical competence.

Although the subject of recruitment and appointments within the CSA were not questioned in depth, reference is made to the recruitment of staff from outside the public sector and the provision of training for the administrative roles (see Chapter Seven). The extensive use of IT demands levels of technical expertise however, much of this support work is provided from outside agents.

The requirements of the reporting of financial performances (see Chapters One and Nine), demand that professionally qualified accountants are appointed within the CSA. The appointment of staff by technical competence is practiced in the employment of specialisms within the specialist units (see above).

6. *Progression*

Promotion is based on merit to enable a 'life long' career.

Promotion and career progression within the CSA links with the specialisms and appointments to roles that demand technical expertise (see above). Although one manager referred to a move from promotions by Civil Service grade to recruitments and promotions that are based on specific skills or qualifications, the eventual career progression is still based on Civil Service grades that reflect increasing levels of authority.

7. *Exclusivity*

Holding an office is the individual's sole and primary occupation.

The contractual terms associated with executive positions demand that such positions represent an individual's sole and primary occupation. Adherence to the Civil Service employment requirements and the CSA *'steers'*, that act as guidelines for employees, require that executive staff must regard their positions as being exclusive to the Agency and must not be involved with any external employment that might influence their job performance (CSA interview, December 2000).

8. *Segregation*

Official activity and resources are regarded as distinct from those outside the

organization.

The adherence to *'steers'*, security procedures and demands on confidentiality

that accompany the responses to enquiry posed by this study is an example of

segregation in that internal activities are separated from those practiced by

external parties. As stated above, the requirements for employment within the

Civil Service sector and the CSA demand that employees conduct their business

in a confidential and ethical manner. The influence of NPSM themes has

increasing use of external resources in participating in market activities,

particularly with the IT contract held by EDS and the use of external consultants,

however, such activities are not fully integrated with the CSA's infrastructure.

9. *Accurate written records*

The rules, procedures and information are documented to guide future conduct

and ensure impartial treatment of employees and clients.

As with all Civil Service staff employed in Next Steps Agencies there are formal

rules and procedures that are documented in order to maintain consistent conduct

within the CSA and in dealing with its customers (see above). Information

regarding customer details is a necessary requirement of the assessment process

and customer information is documented and stored according to legal

requirements (see Chapter Five).

The practice of HRM policies and current legislation demand that records are kept on staff members regarding disciplinary procedures and staff development (see Chapter Seven). Other internal rules and procedures are guided by the requirements of Investors in People (see Chapter Eight), the Business Excellence Model (BEM) in quality management (see Chapter Nine) and the demands of accountability and adherence to the principles of *'Open Government'*.

To assist in mapping the theoretical features associated with a typical bureaucracy, referred to above, topics referred to in interviews are categorized accordingly and the use of *'in vivo'* codes were made in interviews that are summarized in Appendix One. This grouping and the use of codes link Max Weber's classic features of the bureaucracy with other topics particularly those of HRM and operational performances derived from interview responses. For example, the responses that held data regarding Specialism, Appointment and Progression came from questioning the general issues regarding staff and HRM. Such features as Hierarchy, Rules, Impersonality, Exclusivity and Segregation were questioned in interviews that referred to both HRM and the influence of the DSS and the Civil Service on the CSA. Direct questions such as *"Would you regard the CSA as a bureaucracy?"* were avoided in favour of being more specifically directed to the individual features listed above. It was more productive to ask *"How are staff grouped into areas of their specialisms in the CSA?"* or *"How are staff selected and promoted within the CSA?"* If the responses deviated from the subject of bureaucracy to staff problems the questions were rephrased in order to readdress the lines of enquiry.

With the emphasis being on qualitative inductive research methods such rephrasing

was made without distracting the interviewee or deviating the flow of topics that were

being discussed. Some skill was required to ensure that the interviewee's

concentration was not interrupted and thus rephrasing was usually left until the end of

an interviewee's narrative or response. References to CSA documentation and

publications were initially made in prompting the discussions of organizational topics

in interviews (see Chapter Four).

The inevitability of the existence of bureaucracies and the potential for a bureaucracy

to reach the maximum degree of technical efficiency prompted Weber to argue that

the bureaucratic mechanism was, *"objectively indispensable"* and practically

indestructible (Abrahamson, B. 1993: 43). Weber also associated the inevitability

and increase in bureaucracy with similar changes in democratization (Dowding, K.

1995: 16).

Contrary to this, some theorists suggested the possible moves from bureaucracies and

this is expressed as a feature of, *'demassification'* (Toffler, A. 1974), and the

transformation from State bureaucracies to very small organizations (Abrahamson, B.

1993: 46). This was clearly the intention of promoting NPSM themes that attempted

to fracture the wider Civil Service bureaucracy into Next Steps Agencies and

decentralize authority and operations.

Although the dispersion of one hierarchical structure and the delegation of specific

responsibilities and power have changed the face of organization and style of

management under NPSM themes, in comparing the findings taken from interviews

and documentation, it can be seen that the CSA contains much adherence to the

theoretical features associated with a typical bureaucracy. These features are

summarized in the following:

1. *Consistency requires rules commonly observed. That is what*

   bureaucracy, in its strict sense, provides.

2. *Accountability upwards to a political master means a chain of command*

   downwards.

3. *The dangers of non-compliance by local Agencies to political goals and*

   standards require tight supervision and inspection.

(Niskanen, W. 1971: 33)

In summary, the role of the bureaucracy has been identified as being a rigid

instrumental medium of organization that is dominated by the pursuit of efficiency in

performing well-defined tasks within set rules. Although references are made to the

undesirable traits of such an organizational typology the fact that bureaucracies exist

on a mass scale suggests that such organizations have definite roles to play in

achieving administrative efficiency and reliability (Du Gay, P. 2000).

In making the comparative analysis of the traits of the bureaucracy and the CSA, although there are some deviations from the Weberian paradigm following the implementation of NPSM principles, there exists much consonance with it. The CSA can thus be regarded as a new form of a bureaucracy, more specifically the implementation of NPSM principles by a bureaucracy. This subtle separation can be regarded as NPSM themes plus bureaucracy with the effects of NPSM themes being demonstrated by an overall leveling of hierarchy and the increased levels of authority awarded to managers in the promotion of managerialism (see Sec. 6.6).

6.5   Applying Relevant Organizational Theories to the CSA

In this study further considerations of organizational theories were made to search for any comparable traits and styles that might be applicable to the CSA. In order to find organizational theories relevant to the CSA it was necessary to consider a wide range of organizational paradigms in mapping any commonalities with the organizational features of the Agency (see Chapter Three). Although a comprehensive coverage of organizational theories lies outside the main body of this study one of the most relevant and quoted lists of organizational features is provided by the, *'Aston Studies'*, in which it is suggested that organizational structure is likely to be built out of five main dimensions in the following:

The Aston Studies

1.   *Specialisation*

        The degree of division into specialized roles.

2.   *Standardardization*

        The degree of standard rules and procedures.

3.   *Formalization*

        The degree of written instructions and procedures.

4.   *Centralization*

        The degree of decision-making authority at the top.

5.   *Configuration*

        Long vs. short chains of command and role structures, and

        percentages of 'supportive' personnel.

        (Pugh 1988: 128, Originally Pugh and Hickson 1976, The Aston Research

Programme)

The first three dimensions are applicable to the CSA but the centralization and

configuration of authority is affected by the emphasis on managerialism and the

associated increase in managerial autonomy. The management of specific

responsibilities affects the degree of centralization and is configured into the

organizational structure by using units that are sub-sets defined by operational

functions. The configuration of the CSA is inevitably determined by the function of

size of sub groups or teams within the Agency.

In Appendix One the grouping of the organizational features associated with the

bureaucracy and the five organizational dimensions referred to in the Aston Studies

are shown side by side as they were structured in interviews (see Chapter Four). The

organizational dimensions listed in the Aston Studies also have much commonality

with the features of Weber's features of bureaucracy and this is shown in Appendix

One.

6.6   The Role of Managerialism in the CSA

In Chapter One reference is made to the reliance that is made on the role of new

managerialism in public sector agencies in order to promote the themes of NPSM.

The forced feeding of managerialism to the public services re-enforced the prevailing

philosophy of the New Right and Thatcherism where the application of private sector

management principles was regarded as a panacea for the public sector. Both

Thatcher and Reagan, as heads of right wing Governments, promoted

decentralization, accountability, tendering and delegation of State authority to

Government agencies (see Chapter One). The term managerialism can be defined as

a set of beliefs and practices that assume better management might be effective in

being an, *"effective solvent for a wide range of economic and social ills"* (Pollitt, C.

1990: 1).

Although Pollitt (1990) refers to the wider introduction of managerialism in the public sector, particularly the NHS, the same principle applies to the CSA.

The Chief Executives and managers of Next Steps Agencies act as *'change agents'* in the agenda of public management reform where the stress of economic efficiency and savings in public expenditure sets the criteria by which they are to be appraised and judged. The idea of public management reform being a means to an end in increasing the effectiveness of policy implementation can be expressed in the following:

*"Public management reform is usually thought of as a means to an end, not an end in itself. To be more precise we should perhaps say that it is potentially a means to **multiple** ends. These include making savings (economies) in public expenditure, improving the quality of public services, making the operations of Government more efficient and increasing the chances that the policies which are chosen and implemented will be effective."*

(Pollit, C. 2000: 6)

A significant effect of managerialism as a theme of NPSM is the move from traditional administrative roles to management roles in conducting State business and applying Government policy (see Chapter One).

In tracing the progression of the *'New managerialism and social security'*, Tom Ling (1994: 32) refers to management as being a neutral activity in most studies on social security with new managerialism being associated with its own distinct processes and outcomes.

In this study the promotion of managerialism can be seen to have influences at the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) level and also within the internal organization of the CSA. In Chapter One reference is made to the accountability and answerability required of the CSA's CEO in providing explanations for the shortfalls in the Agency's performances as part of the principles of NPSM (Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps, Report to the Prime Minister (The Ibbs Report, Efficiency Unit, Feb. 1988). In section 6.5 references are made to the effects of managerialism in leveling the hierarchical organizational structure of the CSA and a move towards the task orientated clustering of units within the Agency and the increased levels of autonomy awarded to managers responsible for the operations of these units.

Pollitt (1990) also makes the connection between managerialism and neo-Taylorism in that there is an application of scientific management to public administrative processes and Hartley (1983) refers to the justification of ideals as forming the subset of managerialism that, in turn, sets more specific definitions of quality of performance and organizational culture (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

Many concepts inherent in managerialism have been transposed from large business and military organizations. In common with bureaucracies, managerialism relies on specializations and attempts to focus the role of CSA executives and management to task centred objectives without the wider involvement in policy. In considering the promotion of managerialism in the CSA the emphasis of budgetary control and the localization of budgetary responsibility to Agency managers is also a significant requirement of managers in linking the imperatives of accountability inherent in NPSM principles. The promotion of managerialism is fundamental to the role of the CSA and, in addition to localizing and transferring responsibilities to the Agency's senior managers there is an implied shift of responsibility from the ministerial level to that of the Chief Executive (see Chapter One). As previously stated, the major problem associated with this theme of NPSM is the separation of the CSA's operational performances and its *'efficiency'* from the effectiveness and workability of child support policy (see Chapters One, Three and Nine). The effective transference of the macro-ideologies of child support policy to the micro-ideals of the CSA is questioned in this study particularly with the recurrent argument that child support policy and its implementation cannot be realistically separated in practice (see Chapter Three).

6.7 **Summary and Conclusions**

In this Chapter consideration is given to the CSA's main strategies consisting of the

'moral campaign' and the *'administrative campaign'* with the latter being more

relevant to this study. The CSA's strategies communicate the methodologies applied

in fulfilling their missions outlined in Chapter Five. The internal focus on the CSA as

an organization commences by considering the structure of the Agency, particularly

the geographic location of its operations and the constitution of the Board. Here,

evidence is sought of the flattening of traditional hierarchical structures often referred

to in interviews with CSA managers (CSA interviews November 1998, October 1999

April and December 2000). The main evidence of such a redistribution of authority is

found in the localization of management responsibility and accountability and the

injection of managerialism with greater autonomy awarded to unit managers at the

operational level that adheres to the principles of NPSM. The role of managerialism

is not only of paramount importance to the operations and management of the CSA's

service units but also the imperative of accountability placed on the Agency's Chief

Executive Officer illustrates the dependence of managerialism at a higher

organizational level (see Chapter One).

In searching for a categorization of the organizational typology that might best fit the

CSA, comparisons are made between the Weberian traits of the traditional

bureaucracy and those of the CSA.

Although it is stressed that there is no definitive empirical definition of the

bureaucracy there is some reliance made on the listed theoretical features of the

bureaucracy and comparisons are made between these and the references taken from

interviews and documentation provided by CSA managers (see Chapter Four and

Appendix One). It is found that most of the traits of the bureaucracy still exist within

the CSA, however, the reliance on managerialism and the resultant leveling of

operational authority, referred to above, injects some complexity into the Agency's

organizational paradigm. The comparison of organizational theories and studies, such

as the Aston Studies (Pugh 1988), confirms that the CSA has inherited much of the

classic features akin to many large organizations. The promotion of managerialism

within the principles of NPSM has developed an organization that can be regarded as,

in most parts, a bureaucracy with the injection of NPSM themes (bureaucracy plus

NPSM).

The customers of the CSA are, in the main, oblivious of the themes of NPSM and still

perceive the Agency as a bureaucracy that operates on bureaucratic practices and

principles (red tape). This perception is confirmed in some interviews with CSA staff

and, although most of the interviews were with Senior Executive Officer (SEO)

grades, some staff on the executive and administrative grades referred to the Agency

as being a bureaucracy (CSA interviews October 1999, April and December 2000).

The organizational structure and typology of the CSA not only determine the work environment and the employment status of staff but they are fundamental influences on the operational performances of the Agency. In analyzing the CSA as an organization it can be seen that there is a direct link between the Agency's organizational features and its internal culture. The bureaucracy is perceived as developing a rigid and formal internal culture supported by the security of the State and the Civil Service whilst the promotion of managerialism reduces the scale of this influence (CSA interview, April 2000).

The study resumes the organizational analysis of the CSA by assessing the internal effects of NPSM themes and managerialism on the management and staff of the CSA. Further indications of the management experiences, perceptions of its staff members and the effects on the CSA's organizational culture form the main themes of this study and employ some components of grounded theory with a set of inductive processes used in interviews (see Chapter Four and Appendix One). Some of the more abstract organizational features of the CSA such as internal culture and complexity are difficult to question in interviews without developing a dialogue from specific questions (see Chapters Three and Four). The questions that initiated discussions were directed at more instrumental details such as implementation of legislation (see Chapter Five), quality management and performance results (see Chapters Eight and Nine) and these became more open-ended as interviews progressed.

The mapping of subject sets described by the terms used in open and axial coding

(see Table 4.3 and Appendix One) shows that the study of the CSA as an organization

was driven by the field research into the area of HRM and the associated problems

experienced by the Agency's staff and management.

Chapter Seven

The Child Support Agency: Human Resource Management and Organizational Culture

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter Six an analysis of the CSA as an organization was made in terms of its operational locations, typology and the role of managerialism. It is significant to assess the effects of the promotion of private sector methods, particularly the reliance on managerialism, and recognize that there is evidence of an increased autonomy awarded to CSA managers and an emphasis on their management skills applied to task centred units. The localized internal structuring of the business units has had the effect of leveling the hierarchical organizational structure and this extends to the CSA Board and the roles of directors. However, in comparing the CSA's organizational features with theories of the bureaucracy it is found that the Agency still contains the main organizational features associated with typical State bureaucracies. It is particularly significant that the CSA staff members are also civil servants and retain similar contractual terms and conditions that existed prior to the introduction of the Agency (see Chapter Six). The analysis of the CSA as an organization continues by examining the CSA's staff numbers from 1997 and the proportion of Agency staff within the DSS.

The study focuses on staffing issues and the associated perceptions of managers and staff to their roles within the CSA. The main purpose of this section of the study is to examine the *'People'* issues referred to in the CSA's publications and consider the responses that were related in interviews with staff and managers.

In extending on the analysis of the CSA's typology and structure (see Chapter Six), references are made to quality issues and the Agency's organizational culture in the context of HRM. A case study approach is taken in collecting information about the CSA's staff distributions and inductive processes are employed in questioning staff issues and related problems (see Chapters Three and Four). This section of the study relies on the application of effective interview techniques and the use of coding to readdress questions and redirect the use of information according to grounded theory (see Chapter Four). Questions are posed about HRM issues and evidence of the influences of private sector methods promoted under NPSM themes is sought. The perceptions of staff lend some weight to any argument referring to the classification of the CSA's organizational typology.

In addition, links are made with HRM issues and the administrative campaign (see Chapter Six), where evidence is sought of the contribution of the development of internal staff cultures to the implementation of quality management initiatives and the operational performances of the CSA (see Chapters Eight and Nine).

7.2   Human Resource Management and Staffing in the CSA

In 1993 the CSA initially consisted of some 4,700 existing employees of the DSS and some 2,200 new recruits. The Dudley Assessment Centre was not typical and consisted of approximately 30% existing DSS staff and 70% new recruits (Davis, G. et al 1998: 64). The first regional CSAC's were Hastings, Dudley, Belfast and Falkirk that were opened in April 1993 with Plymouth and Birkenhead following in October 1993 (see Chapter Six). Of some 5,000 staff, almost 3,000 were based in the CSAC's and the remainder operated from some 450 local field offices (Garnham, A. and Knights, E. 1994: 54). After the introduction of the CSA, about 60% of the staff was recruited from outside the Civil Service and Field Officers replaced the role of the past Liable Relatives Section of the Benefits Agency (see Chapters Two and Six).

"The majority of field officers were recruited from the liable relatives sections of the Benefits Agency - a matter of some concern to CPAG given the experience under the old system...Most Staff training did not start until the beginning of 1993 and some of it was not completed until after the CSA began operation. Field Staff had three or four weeks training, including one week on interviewing skills provided by RELATE, the former Marriage Guidance Council."

(Garnham, A. and Knights, E. 1994: 54)

CSA management referred to the Agency recruiting new staff from outside the public

sector in order to establish a separate identity from the system that it was replacing

(CSA interview, June 1999). Reference to the CSA attempting to develop its

organizational individuality is given in the following:

> *"In terms of recruitment, ethos and training of Staff it wants to create a*
>
> *different style from the Benefits Agency. It wishes to be seen as part of the*
>
> *family law system, not part of the social security system"*

(Clout, I. 1993: 9)

After the first three years of operations the CSA's staff numbers and costs continued

to gradually increase, shown in the following table:

Table 7.1 CSA Staff Numbers and Costs 1997 to 2002

YEAR	FULL & PART-TIME STAFF	FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STAFF	COSTS (£ 000's)
1997/98	9,100	8,445	145,479
1998/99	9,299	8,156	141,156
1999/2000	10,811	8,545	153,963
2000/01	11,792	9,187	157,665
2001/02	13,113	9,471	176,771

(Annual Reports and Accounts, 1997 to 2002)

A snapshot count of CSA staff shows the relative size of the Agency within the DSS:

Table 7.2 Civil Service Staff in Post: Summary Table at 1ˢᵗ April 1999

	Permanent Staff Full-Time Equivalent	Permanent Staff Headcount	Casual Staff Full-Time Equivalent	Casual Staff Headcount
Total	**459,597**	**480,691**	**16,772**	**17,534**
Executive Agencies	270,615	283,961	12,108	12,691
Next Steps	**356,078**	**374,384**	**13,257**	**13,878**
Inland Revenue	61,344	65,453	744	773
DSS (excluding Agencies)	2,858	2,947	227	238
Benefits Agency	68,251	73,427	2,865	2,996
Child Support Agency	**7,708**	**8,337**	**464**	**480**
IT Services Agency	1,943	1,995	55	58
War Pensions Agency	841	889	47	49
DSS Total	**81,601**	**87,595**	**3,658**	**3,821**

(Departmental Returns and Mandate, 2000)

These tables show that the CSA's total staff numbers increased by about 44% from 1997 to 2002 and the full time equivalents staff numbers increased by about 12% during the same period. This suggests a greater proportion of part time staff being used and this is reflected in an increased cost of 22% during this period.

As civil servants, CSA staff members have contracts of employment and associated benefits such as pension rights with the potential for promotion by merit and public reputation (Niskanen, W. 1971: 27 – 28). Although job titles are unique to the CSA in some cases all posts are ranked according to the Civil Service grades (see Chapter Six). Examples of job titles unique to the CSA are those of Child Support Officers and Chief Child Support Officers where the former deals with cases acting under the supervision of the latter.

Many CSA staff members see greater promotion and career development opportunities with other Government agencies, with specific reference to the higher status of Inland Revenue staff. They also perceive the general initial grading of CSA staff as being pitched below the general DSS grades that are the accepted norms. There is a tendency for staff to be placed on the administrative grades with increasingly fewer first management and middle management positions (Executive Officers) and Higher and Senior Executive Officer grades being available. Gradually such pressure did prompt the CSA to introduce a general staff upgrading including grade 7, business unit management posts within the Agency however this only affected top management (CSA interview, April 2000).

Another major cause for concern is that the CSA has a high level of staff absenteeism that is perceived to be due to the dissatisfaction of staff and low staff morale at the Agency (CSA interviews, March 1999 and April 2000). Specific reference to staff absences is made in the following:

"We recognise that our staff have a stressful and difficult job to do dealing in every case with two customers who are at an emotional time of their lives and who have different wishes. Staff absence levels have been a cause for concern in the past and several measures have been taken to reduce and control sick absences. These have resulted in a reduction in sick absence levels from 8.4 per cent in 1994/95 to 4.2 per cent in 1997/98"

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1997/98: 31)

A significant outcome from one staff survey, as part of the CSA's *'cultural audit'* was a request for guidance in the management of work pressures (CSA annual report 1997/98: 31). The pressure of work and the related stress placed on staff is acknowledged as a cause of low morale, high staff turnover and high absenteeism. A *"Stress Audit"* was conducted on 1,800 staff (with a 62% response) to address the concerns with staff absences. This was conducted by the *"Trades Union Side"* and analyzed by the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (CSA interview, March 1999).

Significant points resulting from this survey are summarized as follows:

> *"The result as a whole showed that sources of stress within the Agency were*
>
> *significantly worse than for the general working population. Using the same*
>
> *comparisons it also showed that Agency Staff made more use of support*
>
> *services eg. Social, home and work relationships."*

(CSA Annual report and Accounts 1999/2000: 26)

Reference to the problems of high staff turnover and absenteeism is also made in the following:

> *"While the Child Support Agency is often characterised as a faceless*
>
> *bureaucracy, some Staff have been deeply affected by their contact with*
>
> *members of the public. It is also worth bearing in mind that for Field Officers*
>
> *this contact may be face-to-face. They may find themselves conducting a*
>
> *home visit to an angry parent. It is unsurprising therefore that the Child*
>
> *Support Agency has suffered absenteeism and high Staff turnover...I've never*
>
> *known such wastage of Staff...they don't seem to be worried about stress*
>
> *management control, when and why people are leaving, and you get so little*
>
> *support from management...we are very disillusioned, it's heartbreaking. I*
>
> *go home at the end of the day with a splitting headache...and I just worry*
>
> *about the workload."*

(Child Support Officer, Dudley, Quoted in Davis, G. et al 1998: 68-69)

The worst period for staff at the CSA was in the early years of its introduction where backlogs in maintenance claims and assessments had reached unbearable levels resulting in administrative bottlenecks. NRPs returned Maintenance Enquiry Forms (MEFs) and Maintenance Assessment Forms (MAFs) in an incomplete state as a tactic to delay the assessment process. In general, the new system was badly received resulting in staff being subjected to abuse and threats over the phone and in correspondence. CSA management referred to staff experiencing high stress levels and even fear from reactions of opposition to the new system. Staff witnessed demonstrations at various CSAC's and administrative staff had to screen correspondence for various foreign objects such as *"razor blades, rabbit droppings and prophylactics"*. Reference was made to poor training in using the complicated assessment formula and increasing backlogs of work (CSA interview, June 1999) (see Chapter Eight). The words of a former CSA Accounts Officer summarizes the climate in the workplace at this time, as follows:

> *"Morale in the early days was very, very low. I have never ever worked anywhere where Staff were so despondent. Sickness was horrendously high. People could not face coming to work. There is no way I would ever admit to working in the CSA. I used to just say it was some government Department. I think people thought I worked for MI5 or something but I was quite happy for them to think that rather than work for the Agency."*

(Punctuation added)

(Former CSA Officer, "Can't Pay Wont Pay", Evans Woolfe Production, in

association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four, 1999)

CSA staff were advised to be covert in their dealings with the public so as to avoid

any risks of reprisal and such caution was extended to this study with the identity of

interviewees being requested to be withheld (see Chapters Four and Six). Due to

large backlogs of work and pressures in workloads, referred to above, Child Support

Officers did not follow individual cases through and thus customers found that

different staff members were dealing with their cases. Although this was a cause of

frustration for customers, one study refers to a positive safeguard that resulted from

this distribution of work in the following:

> *"In another sense this lack of case ownership may actually protect Agency*
>
> *Staff from the pains associated with having responsibility for difficult*
>
> *customers. We were told that disturbing or threatening phone calls were a*
>
> *major source of stress."*

<div align="right">(Davis, G. et al 1998: 68)</div>

The high staff turnover, referred to above, was regarded as being detrimental to

quality performance and efficiency as it imposed wastage in recruitment and training

resources. The 1999/2000 Annual Report states that staff turnover had decreased

from 28% in 1998/1999 to 17% by 2000, and this was regarded as a significant

improvement. This report refers to low pay as being a major influence on high staff

turnover and suggests that recruitment and retention allowances, together with an

above inflation pay rise in this year, had reduced the level of staff turnover.

The problem of high levels of staff turnover and a movement of trained staff to
private sector posts was exacerbated by the poaching of CSA staff, even during lunch
hours, by other organizations often located in the same Business Parks for posts
requiring good telephone enquiry skills. CSA staff members who had trained and
qualified in such areas as accountancy found the prospect of career moves into the
private sector as being more financially rewarding. The high staff turnover was
regarded as a problem and the phrase, *"rats leaving a sinking ship"*, was used in this
context (CSA interview, March 1999).

Factors that might influence the rational choice of emigration to private sector
employment include the offer of relatively increased incomes, better career
opportunities, higher levels of job satisfaction and the avoidance of the negative
effects arising from low morale within the CSA. One CSA manager referred to the
dilemma of low morale among the Agency staff and perceived this as a general
problem throughout other Next Steps Agencies (CSA interview, October 1999). In
assessing the scale of this problem the Observer commissioned a study of staff morale
within the Civil Service to an independent body (ICM) in March 1996. Although Sir
Robin Butler, Head of the Civil Service, warned that the survey should be ignored,
10,000 questionnaires were given to two Civil Service Unions and 1,911 were
returned completed (Pilkington, C. 1999: 103).

Some results of this survey are summarized as follows:

> *92 per cent of civil servants believed that morale was much lower in 1996*
>
> *than it had been in 1992.*
>
> *91 per cent believed the government had gone too far in its privatisation of*
>
> *Civil Service functions.*
>
> *77 per cent said they would welcome a change of government.*
>
> *73 per cent claimed that they would not recommend the Civil Service as a*
>
> *career to young people today.*
>
> *Only 28 per cent of respondents believed that their jobs were secure*
>
> (Observer/ICM survey, 1996 quoted by Pilkington, C. 1999: 7)

These results indicated a significant dissatisfaction within the Civil Service working under the themes of NPSM and this was evidence of a lack of job security, commitment, and job satisfaction. In all the interviews with CSA staff members it was significant to note that they referred to themselves as being Civil Servants rather than Agency staff. This extended from the management staff to administrative assistants where one employee said that she still referred to herself as being an employee of the *"Ministry"* (CSA interview, April 2000).

Another CSA senior manager cited the positive features of working for the Civil Service as including job security, a favorable pension scheme, allowances for staff development and study leave with the added benefit of the *'flexi time'* system (CSA interview, April 2000).

With reference to job security in Civil Service posts one past study compared clerical employees in the public and private sectors and found that staff in the public sector assumed that they had a higher level of security in their employment than that experienced by most clerical workers in the private sector (Weir, D. 1973).

A further cause of concern among the CSA administrative staff members arose from them being dispirited in facing unreasonably high Government targets for the assessment and collection of maintenance (CSA interview, October 1999). The pursuance of such targets placed an emphasis on the strategic *administrative campaign* that advocates the motto, *'work smarter not harder'* and a shift in emphasis of work was made to pursue *'soft targets'* for fast returns (see Chapter Eight).

In interviewing administrative assistants autonomy was regarded as the privilege of senior management and the prerogative of the Chief Executive. The level of autonomy experienced by employees who were graded below Senior Executive Officer was regarded as non-existent (CSA interview, April 2000). The analogy of *'cogs'* in the *'machine'*, associated with staff roles in a bureaucracy, was evident for these employees (see Chapter Six) and this lack of autonomy and discretion experienced by CSA employees did little to enhance such concepts as job satisfaction and job identity.

In order to increase the levels of discretion and consistency in case handling, one scheme, referred to by the House of Commons Social Security Committee (1996a), was the CAST (Complete Action Service Team) system. The Hastings CSAC piloted this scheme where small teams followed cases through, rather than individuals handling discrete stages of the assessment processes. The scheme was intended to induce some familiarity and identity into the handling of cases and inject some job satisfaction to the role of Child Support Officers.

A significant boost to organizational confidence came from the CSA being accredited with the *'Investors in People'* (IiP) award in January 2000. The IiP status qualified the CSA in setting standards for recruitment, training and the provision of staff opportunities and was associated with quality issues within HRM (see Sec 7.3 and Chapter Eight). The CSA also carried out a number of internal surveys to assess staff attitudes and monitor areas of staff concerns with a staffing index being developed to measure some of the key areas affecting staff morale, skills and productivity. The 1999/2000 Business Plan refers to such things as, *"Drawing on the Staff Attitude Survey, we will introduce policies and systems to help release the full potential of our people and enable them to make a full and meaningful contribution."*

In addition to monitoring staff absenteeism, staff appraisals were to be placed in the perspective of, *"Output Performance Analysis"* (Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000, 1999: 19).

The introduction of the CSA's staffing index (see Sec. 7.3) was perceived as an instrument for monitoring and controlling absenteeism rather than identifying and rectifying the causes. The following comments signify a lack of trust held by the staff:

> *"Although morale had slightly improved and Staff wastage had decreased from 25% to 19% in the previous year, the 'chats' with Staff after illness leave left most Staff suspecting a hidden agenda."*

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, March 1999)

In employing such instruments as surveys and staff indices (see Sec. 7.3) the emphasis of HRM initiatives is placed on improving the CSA's performances. The HRM imperatives to improve performance is reinforced by the following:

> *"At the same time, through improving people management, we will meet our customer service and business needs, compete more effectively in the labour market and enable people to better balance their work and family responsibilities."*

(CSA 1999/2000 Business Plan, 1999: 15)

A summary of the proposed changes that would affect staff are listed in a number of key areas:

1. A Better Life

>   Equal Opportunities
>
>   Family Friendly
>
>   Good Health Programme
>
>   Community Strategy

2. Effective Leadership - from supervision to 'leadership'

3. Training and Development

>   Customer Service
>
>   Positive Customer Contact
>
>   Signing for the deaf
>
>   Managing continuing improvement

4. Culture

5. Measuring People Satisfaction

>   Staff turnover rates and reasons
>
>   Sick absence and Reasons
>
>   Number of quality ideas and number of Staff receiving awards
>
>   Achievement of Investors in People
>
>   Percentage of Staff budget spent on training and development

(CSA 1999/2000 Business Plan, 1999: 15)

At this time forecasts predicted an increase in workloads, in terms of *'numbers of cases per staff'*, and concerns were expressed by CSA operations managers regarding the difficulties of handling vast amounts of data and processing assessments and claims within short time periods whilst improving levels of accuracy. One possible solution was suggested in that Next Steps Agencies might combine IT resources. Other suggestions included the introduction of a simpler system of assessment and the introduction of State identity cards that might assist the CSA in its work. Managers felt that CSA staff should have more resources and time to search for non-resident parents who required assessment (CSAC questionnaire 2001). The possible improvements included the promotion of the, *'face to face'*, interview strategy where it was stressed that this would require more local offices and a requirement for,

"Outsourcing to cover a wider area of family policy instead of the present 'touchy feely' process that is in existence" (CSA interview, December 2000).

In summary, from field visits to the CSA Headquarters, the comments and opinions of managers suggest an uncertainty as to their identity within the DSS and Civil Service. The CSA has moved from the Department of Work, Pensions and Social Security (formerly DSS) and the recurrent references to this base department and their *'marriage'* with the Civil Service appear to be significant in describing employee identities (see Chapter Six). Low morale, absenteeism, high staff turnovers and a perceived lack of opportunity for development set a problematic for the CSA that promoted HRM agendas to improve staff performances.

The use of HRM instruments to address the problems of absenteeism and high staff

turnover were regarded as being intrusive and viewed with suspicion by employees.

The reactions of customers to CSA staff have had a detrimental effect on employees

and the Agency's performances. This also provides evidence that policy and

implementation cannot be realistically separated in practice (see Chapters One and

Three). The low grades awarded to staff compared with other agencies, particularly

the Inland Revenue resulted in further frustrations for the Agency's employees. As

previously stated, promotion and progression prospects were also regarded as being

lower than in other agencies and the introduction of IiP initiatives was hoped to

provide increased opportunities for staff training even if this was perceived as being

restricted to higher grades. The branding of the CSA with IiP status (see below)

coincided with the Agency's declared emphasis on quality issues that is a

predominant feature in both public and private sector organizations and was

recognition of a structured approach to training and staff development (see Chapter

Eight).

7.3   Quality Issues in Human Resource Management

In terms of HRM issues the most significant quality management initiative is the

Investors in People (IiP) accreditation that the CSA achieved as a national standard,

in common with other Next Steps Agencies.

IiP was developed in the late 1990's with the support of the Department of

Employment in awarding recognition to organizations that practiced its directives for

staff training and development. Further, constituents of IiP link quality management

to business strategy and this package of *'good practice'* can be summarized as

follows:

Principles of Investors in People

Commitment

> *An Investor in People makes a commitment from the top to develop all*
>
> *employees to achieve its business objectives.*

Planning

> *An Investor in People regularly reviews the needs and plans the training and*
>
> *development of all employees.*

Action

> *An Investor in People takes action to train and develop individuals on*
>
> *recruitment and throughout their employment.*

Evaluation

> *An Investor in People evaluates the investment in training and development to*
>
> *assess achievement and improve future effectiveness.*

(Collard, R. 1993: 185)

In one CSA publication these features are referred to as part of strategic objectives, as follows:

- *Ensure Staff are well trained, developed and equipped to deliver a first class service*

- *Value their efforts and commitment*

- *Further develop managers' skills and leadership*

- *Promote teamwork and learn from others*

- *Work together to improve communications*

(CSA Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003: 8)

The CSA's commitment to IiP is confirmed in the following:

"We recognise the importance of Investors in People, and how this will help our aim of continuous improvement and focus our investment in developing and informing our people. We will achieve Agency accreditation by January 2000"

(Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000, 1999: 15)

Recommendations for the practical implementation of IiP is given in the following:

"Pilot the concept in a small, self-contained, autonomous part of the organization. When choosing the part of the organization to try it out it should be ensured that that part is representative of the whole organization so that the lessons learnt are meaningful and can be applied to the remaining parts."

(Taylor, P. and Thackwray, B. 1996: 86)

In achieving standards of good practice, IiP declares training as the main investment, not as a cost. A general reference to IiP is given as follows:

> *"Most organizations that have started work on becoming an Investor in People see the 'journey' as far more important than the actual destination. This, of course, is entirely within the spirit that created Investors in People in the first place."*

> (Taylor, P. and Thackwray, B. 1996: 19)

The IiP approach and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) encourages the de-layering and flattening of organizational structures and the reduction in the number of managers working at different levels with different *'pecking orders'*. In interviews with staff references to the IiP initiatives were less enthusiastic and, as stated above, the impression was given that training provision was biased towards senior management levels (CSA interviews October 1999 and April 2000).

In addition to the promotion of IiP in the CSA references are made to the Agency's *'culture/quality'* agenda in its publications. Chris Peters, CSA Human Resources Director, refers to the objectives of this agenda in the following: ·

> *"Becoming more focused on customers and being more cost effective will require us to change the way we do things, and improve the skills of both managers and Staff."*

> (CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1997/98: 29)

It is significant that the emphasis is made on staff performances and the reduction of costs and this is confirmed in the HRM's approach to staff performance appraisal in the following:

> *"The Agency has a formal Staff appraisal system whereby Staff are reported upon annually. The appraisal system considers if an individual has delivered their key work objectives and if they have demonstrated the required skills. Key work objectives are standard within each grade and as an example of the Executive Officer Grade includes the following:*
>
> - *Contribute to and deliver your SEO's annual plan;*
>
> - *Deliver tangible improvements to internal and external customer service;*
>
> - *Develop your own potential and that of any Staff you may have;*
>
> - *Promote equality of opportunity in your team/area. Etc.*

The skills required to be demonstrated, in the achievement of the key work objectives include:

- *Leadership*

- *Customer focus*

- *Managing people*

- *Communication*

- *Managing work and resources*

- *Deciding and solving issues*

- *Managing change; and*

- *Job specific skills*

The performance of an individual should be subject to ongoing review with

continuous feedback on performance supported by optional mid term reviews and

culminating in a formal end of year review. "

(CSA Performance Management, Strategic Assurance Team (SAT): 2001)

This systematic approach to implementing organizational quality by individual

development is intended to involve each member of an organization as a, *'Learning*

Organization ' where members are reciprocally linked to the enhancement of their

staff development. The stress of the HRM's contribution to quality initiatives is

placed on *'people management'* as *'enablers '* in implementing the Business

Excellence Model (BEM) and the development of staff as promoted by IiP. Theorists

refer to the *'top down '* and *'bottom up '* participations in the promotion of

organizational quality within the themes of Total Quality Management (TQM) (see

Chapter Eight) and this width of involvement and the reliance of fidelity to

disseminating the general themes of quality management, places reliance upon

'emotional work ' by employees in an organization.

A prominent HRM instrument used by the CSA is the staffing index that includes

evaluations of staff incentives, staff wastage, staff motivation and an analysis of staff

sickness absences with set targets for the reduction of absenteeism (*'Staffing Index*

milestone targets ').

The HRM department was given the aim, *"To work with the Department in developing a staffing index and contribute to the reduction in public sector sick absences by 6% in 1999/2000"* (CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1998/1999: 37). The staffing index was also used as criteria for monitoring other targets by the Secretary of State and consisted of the following factors:

The CSA's Staffing Index

1. Staff turnover rates and reasons

2. Sick absence and reasons

3. Number of quality ideas and number of Staff receiving awards

4. Achievement of Investors in People accreditation

5. Percentage of Staff budget spent on training and development

(Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000, 1999: 18)

The qualitative approaches to the problems of absenteeism that affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the CSA is referred to in the following:

> *During 1999/2000 we increased our focus on the need to reduce sick absence levels. To address this we:*
>
> - *Introduced a target to measure levels of Staff absence*
>
> - *Undertook a Stress Audit to determine the factors which lead to stress related sick absence*
>
> - *Carried out 'welcome back' discussions with Staff when they return to work after sick absence. This discussion can identify if extra support is required.*

- *Secured agreement to establish a team who will look at all aspects of long term sick absence over 28 days*

Further:

"Although these measures were introduced our sick absences continued to remain high at 5%. This is an increase of 0.1% against 1998/99 figures of 4.9%, and equates to an average of 12.29 days of sickness per person per year. The increase in sick absence was due to:

- *Changes to the calculation methodology*

- *Widespread cases of flu in Winter 1999*

More than half the calendar days lost due to sickness relate to periods of long term sick absence."

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1999/2000: 25 - 26)

In summary, the involvement of HRM in implementing quality management initiatives places an imperative on staff performances, training issues, the induction of a *'quality culture'* and the monitoring and control of unfavorable effects from high staff turnover and absenteeism. Little reference is made to executing specific remedies to such problems other than the broad qualitative agenda included in the term, *'People'* referred to in the CSA's publications. The general implicit theme contained in the CSA's publications is to promote initiatives and methods that improve the operational productivity and quality of performances by its staff members by developing an effective internal organizational culture.

7.4   The CSA's Organizational Culture

The subject of organizational culture is an increasingly important aspect of modern

management theory and organizational analyses. Although this study does not intend

to include a detailed and wide coverage of the theoretical concepts of various

organizational cultures some selective references are made to theorists in finding

definitions that are relevant to the organizational analysis of the CSA. It is stressed

that an effective analysis of organizational culture within the CSA cannot be made in

isolation from such organizational features as structure, typology, strategies,

missions, functions, HRM, quality management and operational performance.

In moving from the selected definitions and associated theories specific references are

made to the CSA's internal culture as documented in its publications. Finally,

consideration is given to how the Agency staff members perceive their internal

organizational culture. It is significant that staff members experience dual influences

on their perceptions of organizational culture as they are employees of the CSA and

also civil servants. One definition of *'organizational culture'* confirms the

integration of many other organizational concepts and features in the following:

> *"A useful catch-all, incorporating broad aspects of organization, including*
>
> *control, commitment, socialization, manipulation (looking at groups and*
>
> *individuals) and structure, design and corporate performance (at the*
>
> *organizational level of analysis)...*

...culture can only be understood in terms of symbols, subjective meaning,

language and context, or is a set of identifiable factors which can be managed

directly towards a given end. "

(Wilson, D. C. 1992: 69)

Further detailed components of organizational culture is referred to in the following:

"As individuals come into contact with organizations they come into contact

with dress norms, stories people tell about what goes on, the organizations

formal rules and procedures, its informal codes of behaviour, rituals, tasks,

pay systems, jargon, and jokes only understood by insiders, and so on. These

elements are some of the manifestations of organizational culture. "

(Martin, J. 1992: 3)

Organizational culture can also be considered in terms of a configured system that

develops a cultural process in the initial stages of an organization, but is dependent

upon change and the associated chaos that occur thereafter (Grint, K. 1997: 71).

This is particularly relevant for CSA staff members who have experienced significant

changes in child support policy and the promotion of NPSM themes (see Chapters

One, Two and Five). A broader definition of corporate culture refers to *'the way we*

do things around here' (Bower, Marvin, 1966) and, although organizational culture is

often regarded as a *'fuzzy'* concept, there are numerous attempts to model the main

components, particularly within the business context.

Organizational cultures are also regarded as containing organizational values described as follows:

1. *They stand for something, that is, they have a clear and explicit philosophy about how they aim to conduct their business.*

2. *Management pays a great deal of attention to shaping and fine-tuning these values to conform to the economic and business environment of the company and to communicate them to the organization.*

3. *These values are known and shared by all the people who work for the company-from the lowliest production worker right through to the ranks of senior management.*

(Deal, T. and Kennedy, A. 1982: 22)

It is suggested that the internal culture of the CSA relates to *'organizational culture'* while the Civil Service culture encompassed a wider *'professional* culture'. The bureaucracy and its associated features of organizational culture, derived particularly from hierarchy, impersonality and segregation, are regarded as incongruent to the themes of NPSM promoted in the CSA.

In comparing theoretical analyses with the CSA's internal culture it might also be regarded as a culture of differentiation and collective action within a stable and segmented organization (Martin, J. 1992: 171).

Particularly within the context of NPSM principles, the *'efficiency role'* and the *'administrative problem'*, referred to by Greiner, L. E. Miles, R. E. and Snow, C. C. (1978) can be seen to be significant factors in molding the CSA's internal culture. The promotion of private sector methods under NPSM themes encourage less formal approach to developing internal culture than that taken by typical State bureaucracies with particular emphasis on promoting local decision-making (managerialism) and unit teamwork within the CSA (see Chapter Six). Whether such organizational ideals are achieved in the CSA is questionable and this is assessed by considering the statements relating to culture in the CSA's publications and the responses made by staff in interviews (see below).

The most important central theme is that the forming and development of organizational culture is dependent upon people and this sets a problematic in that there is added complexity in respecting the traits of individuals working within the CSA while following general organizational themes. In this context, individual perceptions of culture are subjective whilst organizational culture is intended to be objective and thus the analogy of *'herding cats'* or forming a unity from *'the unequal sum of illogical parts'* might be applied to the study of organizational culture as an abstract concept rather than one definitive state.

Evidence of the CSA's need to use cultural facets to improve performances is given

in the following:

"Our vision makes a strong link between our people and their ability to

deliver a first-class service to customers. If our culture does not support our

people in delivering improvements, the pace and effectiveness of change will

be much slower. A good example of this is where we want to give our people

freedom to put things right for the customer but our current culture stops them

doing so. We are introducing a culture change programme to help our people

understand the changes they must make to encourage the right behaviour to

take things forward. This will help our people to recognise our customers'

emotional needs (where these have a bearing on compliance) as well as

sorting out their maintenance. It will also help our people establish a climate

in which change can flourish and will ensure that all our systems and

processes support and encourage the behaviour we require. "

(Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000, 1999: 17-18)

The benefits that might be gained from guiding behaviour are identified in one study

by such factors as the Business Environment, Values, Heroes, The Rites and Rituals

and The Cultural Network. This is reinforced by idea that a strong system of informal

rules enables people to feel better about what they do and work harder (Deal, T. and

Kennedy, A. 1982: 13).

As with the use of *'cultural audits'* (see below) and the staff index referred to in

Sections 7.2 and 7.3 the pragmatic emphases of developing staff related initiatives are

placed on the CSA's results and performances.

Ros Hepplewhite, the first Chief Executive, referred to the move from a culture of

bureaucracy and the emphasis of change to a customer-based culture. Her

replacement as Chief Executive stressed this in the following objective:

"to switch the culture from being an organization that was perhaps more

concerned with paper to one that was focused very much on the customer"

(Faith Boardman *"Can't Pay Won't Pay"*, Evans Woolfe production, in association

with, Brook Lapping, 1999).

Later agendas referring to the CSA's internal culture include other facets such as

'values' in reflecting organizational culture:

"Our values have also been revised and simplified so that everyone can

identify with them. They reflect the culture we want to develop and need to be

the foundation for everything we do at every level in the organization. All of

this under pins our aim of continued improvement and attaining Business

Excellence throughout the organization. This can only be achieved with the

support of all our Staff delivering improved performance and a quality

customer service."

(Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003, 1999: 3)

The CSA Board set 'values' as qualitative goals in the following:

1. *Understand and respond to the needs of our customers.*

2. *Continuously improve our business performance.*

3. *Value the contribution of our people.*

4. *Work together to achieve business excellence.*

5. *Accept responsibility for our actions and behaviour.*

6. *Support Ministers' objectives to develop an ACTIVE Modern Welfare State.*

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1997/98: 28)

The terms, *'Customers, People and Performance'*, are referred to in the context of, *'Values, Vision and Mission.'* This is expressed in the following:

"We have set our intention to increase customer satisfaction through improved service delivery. But it is our people who deliver our service. It can only be achieved therefore by involving Staff in determining how things are done, equipping everyone-managers and Staff-with the right skills to do their jobs and recognising and rewarding their efforts. We must also work hard to minimise any feelings of distance between different parts of the Agency and involve more and more people in planning our future-when we all work together and pull in one direction it is much easier to concentrate on satisfying customers."

(Child Support Agency: Strategic Steer, 1999/2000 to 2002/2003, 1998: 7)

Organizations are not isolated from the wider themes of social phenomena and there it is significant to recognize such links and ties (Collins, D. 1998: 5). The inclusion of structure, technology, symbols, ideologies, language, beliefs, rituals and myths are also considered as tangible aspects of organizational culture (Pettigrew, A. 1976: 11). The promotion of private sector methods is a significant factor in influencing organizational culture at the CSA with the use of business terminology, logos and 'corporate speak'. Such embracing of the features already prominent in private sector organizational cultures provide evidence of 'mimetic isomorphism' encouraged by NPSM themes, where organizations adopt and imitate organizations that have been perceived as being successful (Di Maggio & Powell 1983). The CSA's internal culture is bolstered by the use of corporate images, metaphors and terminologies in its publications. There is evidence of cultural introspection where staff referred to the Civil Service or 'The Ministry' (CSA interview, April 2000). Such introspection can be viewed rather on the lines of a private club where the patterns of egalitarianism might be referred to as constituting 'social glue'.

From contact with CSA staff made throughout this study, it is also evident that there is a sensitivity and concern regarding their external image and one response refers to the need for the CSA to promote a "good public image" through the media (CSA interview, June 1999). The appointment of a Press Officer was made on the advice from an external consultant in promoting the CSA's external image and in liaising with the media.

In terms of strategies the CSA attempts to promote an organizational culture that might be regarded externally as possessing *'Social Responsibility'* (Fombrum C. and Shanley M. 1990) and this aligns to its moral campaign (see Chapter Six).

In summary the term, *'organizational culture'*, is found to denote the practices and values held by people who work within an organization and also extends to the gestures, logos, and methods used by an organization in branding its identity. Some theorists refer to the type of organization, structure and the products and/or services that it works with as influencing internal culture. This is certainly regarded as a significant influence on the internal culture of the CSA. Although some common features are identified in attempting one definition, the influences of macro-cultures, sub-cultures and individuals challenge any definitive treatment due to the complexity inherent in many organizations.

Within the terms of reference for this study some perceptions and interpretations of organizational culture in the CSA are derived from interviews and the Agency's internal documentation and publications (see Chapter Four). The responses from interviews with CSA management found that they referred to the pragmatic facets of culture rather than the more abstract interpretations. Such responses adhere to rationalist approaches to the management of organizations in referring to instrumental objectives, rather than the human aspects, in identifying the main components of organizational culture (Mintzberg, H. 1979: 480).

In order to analyze the perceptions of CSA staff members to the Agency's

organizational culture questions were posed in interviews that referred to how they

would summarize the culture in the Agency. Also the question was posed as to what

staff identified as the dominant factors that influence aspects of the Agency's internal

culture. In addition where responses or comments were made that referred to CSA's

internal cultural facets this was noted within the open code of 'organization' (See

table 4.3, Chapter Four). The search for empirical evidence of staff perceptions of the

CSA's internal culture was difficult to perform and this continued throughout all

interviews undertaken in this study. References to CSA's publications, referred to

above, were made to prompt responses. It became questionable whether the formal

narratives of the proposed cultural changes in the CSA truly reflected the perceptions

made by its staff.

In general, managers seemed guarded in their responses but, perhaps, the concept of

internal culture is too abstract and intangible to prompt any prolonged comment. As

stated above, any questions referring to the concept of organizational culture in the

CSA were open to subjective interpretations regarding the meaning of this term. The

significant issue regarding organizational culture is that it links with all aspects of the

organizational analysis included in this study of the CSA.

In questioning the perceptions of the CSA's internal culture, perhaps the most

informative response was given by one manager in the following:

> *"It is a 'guilt culture'. Staff are very defensive and with their 'backs against*
>
> *the wall'. There is a defensiveness of policy and an internally imbedded*
>
> *'blame culture' ... the Agency works on a blame culture with the constant*
>
> *shifting of blame. There is an element of local pride in the HQ and there*
>
> *exists singular competition between the HQ and the various Business Units as*
>
> *a 'defensive culture'."*

<div align="right">(Punctuation added)</div>

<div align="right">(CSA interview, April 2000)</div>

The use of terms such as *"guilt culture", "blame culture"* and *"defensive culture"*

imply negative perceptions of the CSA's internal culture that are far removed from

the idea of an *'enterprise culture'* promoted in the philosophies of NPSM. Such

negative perceptions of identity and internal culture at the CSA are, perhaps, tainted

by the poor initial performance of the Agency and the agendas of opposition to child

support policy (see Chapters Six and Eight). External criticisms of the Agency

include disparaging reports from Government bodies and one report even refers to the

CSA adopting a culture that accepts fraud and incorrect responses from its clients

(BFI report, October 1998).

During one interview reference was made to, *"flavour of the month terminology"*,

where mottos and steering phrases were employed to, *"motivate the troops"* (CSA

interview, March 1999). In searching for staff perceptions regarding the CSA's

internal culture another manager referred to the extensive use of abbreviations and

acronyms by the Agency in the following:

> *"This is the land of the acronym, it makes it less real if it is an acronym.*
>
> *Internal business terminology loses meaning and such rhetoric often means*
>
> *that we don't actually do what we say."*

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, November 1998)

Such use of private terminologies, particularly abbreviations and acronyms, amplify

the barriers of external communications with customers and members of the public

and such exclusive terminologies are prevalent in public sector bureaucracies such as

the Civil Service (*'Segregation'*, see Chapter Six). As with the questioning of HRM

issues (see Sec. 7.2), there were many references to the employees identities being

linked with the Civil Service including references to *'maintaining ethical standards'*

and *'developing a level of trust with customers'* (CSA interviews, March 1999 and

April 2000).

In questioning the issues and influences on the CSA's internal culture, reference is made to the use of consultancies as outside advisors on cultural development, in the following:

> *"Consultants tended to devalue the public sector and worked from the premise that the private sector is better. In their visits, many consultants made liberal references to past experiences in advising large private organizations. All this seemed to draw a negative effect on CSA staff confirming what was termed 'a crisis of confidence and confirmation of blame. One consultant used the phrase, 'putting the heart back into child support' ".*

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, April 2000)

External consultants reinforced the impetus derived from private sector methods and addressed such issues as the improvement in staff morale and the advancements for internal and external communications.

7.5   Summary and Conclusions

The analyses of HRM and staff issues together with the consideration of organizational culture in the CSA are integrated with the analyses of the CSA as an organization made in Chapter Six.

The typology and organizational structure of the CSA are inseparably linked to the distribution, categorization and status of the Agency's staff and the promotion of managerialism under the themes of NPSM. The organizational structure of the CSA indicates the lines of authority that directly influences the levels of responsibilities held by staff and unit managers. All CSA staff members are ranked according to Civil Service grades and work within the generic contracts of employment associated with national agreements and steers. The classification of employees thus adheres to the traditional Civil Service paradigm and thus is aligned to the formal working conditions and contractual agreements experienced by employees prior to the introduction of the CSA and the promotion of NPSM principles. Although there have been attempts to amend employment contracts, particularly for part-time staff, the alliance of CSA employees to the Civil Service, referred to in interviews, confirms that most of the organizational features associated with the State bureaucracy still exist (see Chapter Six).

Evidence of private sector methods can be seen in the descriptions used in the CSA's publications and follow similar styles to the narratives and lists produced in the Agency's mission statements and strategic steer (see Chapters Five and Six). Although the formal organizational inputs can be seen to be policy, legislation and missions (see Chapter Five), the role of CSA staff and HRM themes are of fundamental importance in describing the organizational form of the Agency. It is clear that the accent of HRM initiatives is clearly placed on improving the output performances of the CSA.

This is confirmed in the CSA's approach to overcoming some of the staff problems that it experiences and the Agency's references to developing its internal culture featured in its Business Plans.

In considering HRM issues in the CSA the most significant theme lies in the evidence of problems such as a generally perceived lack of promotion opportunities, high absenteeism, high staff turnover and low staff morale. Such problems are referred to in the CSA's Annual Reports and confirmed in interviews with Agency management (see above). Of particular importance to this study is the fact that reactions and responses of customers to child support policy and the new system of assessment have had a detrimental affect on CSA staff members and the subsequent performances of the Agency. The idea of totally detaching policy from implementation has thus not been achieved in practice and this is amplified in cases where CSA staff members are also customers of the Agency.

In addition to CSA staff being ranked according to Civil Service grades the job titles are based on the personal specializations of employees or the business units within in which they work. The CSA promotes staff development in employing the IiP initiatives and criteria that are integrated with quality issues in its HRM. Various instruments such as staff attitude surveys, cultural audits and the staff index are employed to monitor and manage HRM problems and many staff members regard these as dubious methods of control (CSA interview, April 2000).

The numbers of CSA staff, particularly part time employees, have gradually increased

since its introduction (see Table 7.1) when appointments of candidates from outside

existing Government agencies and the Civil Service were preferred at the start of the

CSA's recruitment. Although this study avoids a reliance on anecdotal evidence (see

Chapter Four), the responses from interviews suggest a preference from employees,

particularly at administrative assistant level (Administrative Assistants), to be

associated with the Civil Service and this suggests that a greater level of employment

security is perceived in being allied to the wider Civil Service organization. The

organizational culture of the CSA is significantly affected by the duality that exists

with staff perceiving themselves as civil servants rather than employees of the

Agency in isolation. Customer, public and Government responses exacerbate the

insecurity of CSA Staff following the CSA's unsatisfactory performances coupled

with its implementation of an unpopular child support policy (see Chapters Eight and

Nine).

In questioning the features of the CSA's organizational culture it is evident that the

development of any internal culture is linked to its missions, strategies, organizational

structure and typology, the promotion of managerialism and private sector methods

and also HRM issues (see Sec. 7.2). Organizational culture can be seen to contain

abstract concepts and, from evidence provided from interviews and references to

cultural issues in CSA publications, it is seen that the Agency's organizational culture

does not fit unerringly with any of the theoretical models commonly applied to other

studies of organizational culture (see Sec. 7.4).

With this, the internal and external complexities that influence any features of organizational culture in the CSA, intimate that it is impracticable, if not invalid, to describe the Agency's internal culture by any definitive paradigm.

Any realistic considerations of the CSA's organizational culture should also stress the importance of external influences that appear to have prompted the use of the terms, *'blame'*, *'guilt'* and *'defensive'* in questioning the aspects of organizational culture within the Agency (see above, CSA interview, April 2000). In referring to cultural issues in the CSA's publications, terms such as *'values'*, *'vision'* and *'business excellence'* are used (see above) and the association between the CSA's culture and the promotion of quality initiatives within the Agency is made very clear in the publications. The link between the concepts of culture and quality initiatives is common to the agendas of many organizations and is confirmed in the phrase, *"Cultural Change = Total Quality"* (Atkinson 1997: 21). There is also evidence of changes in emphases towards the CSA's staff and their welfare declared in the Agency's publications. Although the perceptions of staff members are not always congruent with the CSA's declared intentions it is evident that the Agency recognizes the importance of developing a compatible internal culture that promotes higher levels of effective performances in terms of quality, efficiency and effectiveness.

The analyses of the CSA as an organization continues by considering the Agency's

approach to quality issues and the implementation of quality management initiatives.

Further, an analysis of the CSA's initial operations is made in the context of

operational performance with references to the details of targets and operational

strategies being made.

Chapter Eight

Operational Issues in the CSA: Quality Management and The Initial Operations

8.1   Quality Management and the CSA

In Chapter Seven the references to *'quality'* issues have been made in the context of HRM in identifying the need to develop an effective internal organizational culture within the CSA. As the organizational analysis of the CSA moves towards the subjects of performance and performance measurement the connection is made between the organizational features of the Agency and its staff related issues and the quality of its operations and performances. More specifically the main purpose of this Chapter is to find evidence of the CSA's quality agendas and witness how quality management is coordinated and integrated within the Agency. In addition this coverage gains some appreciation of the importance of quality management in the context of the CSA's staff participation, operations and its performance outputs. The staff and operational inputs are closely linked to the CSA's missions, strategies, organizational structure, typology and the development of an effective organizational culture (see Chapter Seven).

Finally, consideration is given to the commencement of operations and the performances of the early years, particularly during the first year from the introduction of the CSA. This is dealt with separately from the subsequent operations in order to make balanced assessments and evaluations of the results of its initial performances and compare these to the performances once the CSA had become established (see Chapter Nine). The first year of operations is regarded as being of paramount importance to the recognition of the CSA since failing to achieve targets would fuel any arguments regarding the suitability of the policy and the Agency that would have detrimental effects on staff morale and the image of the Agency. The CSA was under public scrutiny since it was a new Next Steps Agency operating within the themes of a relatively new system of public sector management in implementing a controversial new policy of child support (see Chapters One, Three and Five).

Some relevant theories of quality management are selected for discussion prior to making a more detailed analysis of how these concepts are applied to the CSA. In this section of the study some reliance is also made on references to quality management in CSA publications and internal documentation. All references to quality issues made in staff interviews were coded in the interview notes (see Table 4.3). A specialist team provided valuable tailor-made documentation for this study (see below and Chapter Four).

It was interesting to note that there were extremely cooperative and enthusiastic

responses to questions and discussions referring to quality management in the CSA

that suggested quality issues might be regarded as justification for the Agency and

replaced such goals as the pursuit of profit.

The subject of quality management is much embroiled within the field of operations

management theory and the associated terminologies that are attached to developing

quality management systems. Most of the concepts that underpin quality

management initiatives in the CSA are closely linked with the methodology of Total

Quality Management (TQM) with particular reference to the European Foundation for

Quality Management's (EFQM) Business Excellence Model (BEM) paradigm (see

below).

In order that any system of TQM can be implemented effectively there is a reliance

on staff to be involved with the processes and procedures as part of the development

of organizational culture, referred to in Chapter Seven. Quality management in the

CSA is also encompassed in the administrative campaign of the Agency's strategic

steer (see Chapter Six). It is found that there are close associations between some of

the theoretical quality models and those employed by the CSA and many other public

and private sector organizations.

Although some terms used in quality management paradigms might be considered to

set broad agendas of ideals there is a requirement that the Agency develops quality

management initiatives that are documented as processes that can be made

accountable. The problem of measuring and assessing quality in a public sector

organization is referred to in the following:

"The basic problem in the public sector is that it may not be possible to

measure quality in a simplistic way. Although it may make sense at a

strategic level to try to achieve cultural change by getting managers to

concentrate on a few key indicators which relate to an external market

orientation, the issues may not seem so straightforward at the operational

level where quality is actually delivered. "

(Adnum, D. 1993: 48-52)

In many private sector organizations quality management initiatives are pursued in

order to gain competitive advantages and *'stamps of approval'* are awarded by the

external benchmarking of quality standards by such authorities as the British

Standards Institute (BIS) or Lloyds and are regarded as essential organizational

requirements for any organization competing in the market place (Taylor, P. and

Thackwray, B. 1996: 53). Although the CSA is not placed in the same competitive

situation as a commercial profit making organization, its credibility as an effective

practitioner of policy and quality standards is fundamental to its very existence (see

above).

The traditional approaches to quality management had been historically based on quality assurance and quality control, particularly used in production and manufacturing industries with the setting of quality standards being monitored by product acceptance and attribute sampling. Of particularly relevance to service industries was the standard set by the BS 5750 package, later replaced by the international quality standard code, the ISO 9000 series. Briefly, the ISO 9000 series is a package of procedures covering operational and administrative aspects of an organization's activities.

As stated above, the main methodology applied to quality management in the CSA is TQM and although this approach is commonly associated with many Japanese multi national organizations, it was developed in the USA during the 1940's. Although an intensive evaluation of TQM lies outside the focus of this study, some references to the main features of TQM is relevant in appreciating the approach to quality management taken by the CSA. For the applications of TQM ideals to be effective there is a reliance and emphasis placed on all people, at all levels in the CSA, to participate in a *quality culture* (see Chapter Seven). The main features of any TQM system are summarized as follows:

1.   *Lead by Management, including the most senior level.*

2.   *All departments and people are involved in an organization wide effort.*

3. *The chain effect of every product or service having a customer means that there is a responsibility for both internal and external quality. In the CSA this was referred to as Purchaser/Provider.*

4. *Prevention of inferior output and quality improvement is practiced as poor quality costs money.*

5. *Increasing efficiency and cost saving are the theme of continual improvements in quality.*

The benefits of TQM are listed as follows:

1. *Increasing the performance and profitability of the organization by getting things 'right first time'.*

2. *Creating a process of business improvement.*

3. *Giving those actually doing the job more opportunity to use their experience and know-how.*

4. *Providing a means for tapping knowledge of all employees.*

5. *Improving both productivity and quality.*

6. *Winning commitment to the organization and improving employee relations.*

7. *Improving customer satisfaction.*

Further, the concepts of quality associated with TQM is given as follows:

1.   *A philosophy of getting things 'right first time' or 'zero defects'*

2.   *A systematic approach to improving the overall quality performance of*
      the company based on a body of principles and methods.

3.   *A central strategy to the company based on an integrated system*
      involving all processes and all people.

4.   *A focus on customer requirements.*

<div align="right">(Collard, R. 1993: 100 - 103)</div>

The CSA adopts such quality management agendas to reduce wastage by errors and internal inefficiencies that incur expenses categorized as prevention, appraisal, internal failure and external failure costs.

The EFQM was formed in 1988 by fourteen leading Western European businesses and regulates the internal quality issues in the CSA by the BEM (see above) and the Agency has been awarded with this benchmark of quality management. The BEM refers to *'people'* as *'enablers'* stressing the link from HRM and staff training to the actual practice of an effective paradigm of quality management in the CSA. This model takes a structured approach in identifying elements of quality that can be used to compare best practice within the organization and between organizations.

The Business Units have staff trained in the use of the BEM and quality management

planning in the CSA is based on the concept of assessment and continuous

improvement (CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1997/98: 29). More current

references to the BEM refer to *'Change Managers'* being appointed to promote this

paradigm of quality management and the CSA refers to promoting business

excellence and the integration of the BEM into the planning progress as a diagnostic

tool (Annual Report and Accounts, 1998/99: 34). The EFQM is also referred to as a

model of excellence by CSA management who confirm their allegiance to its

application to quality management in improving the service that it provided to its

clients (CSA Business Plan 2002/03: 8). A summary of the inter-relationships and

functions of the main elements of the EFQM's BEM is shown in Appendix Five and a

summary is provided in the follwoing:

Enablers

Leadership - the behaviour of all managers in driving the organization

towards total quality.

Policy and strategy - the organization's mission, values, vision and strategic

direction and the ways in which the organization achieves them.

People management - the management of the organization's people and how

the organization releases the full potential of its people to improve its business

continuously.

Resources - the management utilization and preservation of resources and

how the organization's resources are effectively deployed in support of policy

and strategy.

Processes - the management of all the value-adding activities within the organization and how processes are identified, reviewed and, if necessary, revised to ensure continuous improvement of the organization's business.

Results

Customer satisfaction - what the perception of external customers is of the organization and of its products and services.

People satisfaction - what the people's feelings are about their organization

Impact on society - what the perception of the organization is within society at large. This includes views on the organization's approach to the quality of life, the environment and to the preservation of global resources.

Business results - what the organization is achieving in relation to its planned business performance, in terms of both financial and non-financial measures.

(Collard, R. 1993: 185)

Although this provides a theoretical framework by considering the CSA's functions, in terms of internal causes and external effects there exists the recurrent problem of applying theory to practice setting many pragmatic challenges (CSA interview, March 1999).

The wide qualitative themes, listed above, are also applied to all Next Steps Agencies and, as previously stated, the problems associated with delivering and measuring the qualitative features within quality management creates a wide arena of debate.

Reference to the realization of the practical problems involved at the *'sharp end'* of

delivery is given in the following:

> *"There has been much confusion within all levels of operations regarding*
>
> *such terms as, 'Investors in People' and 'Business Excellence Model', for*
>
> *although these terms have evolved from management theorists, in order that*
>
> *the Agency gains the necessary accreditation, Staff have to document specific*
>
> *activities to these concepts."*

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, March 1999)

Such organizational ideals are emphasized in the CSA Business Plans as part of the

CSA's strategy and this is confirmed in the following statement made by the CSA

Board to accompany the 1999/2000 to 2002/2003 Strategic Steer:

> *"We must continue to improve our performance and service delivery, and to*
>
> *do more to involve and invest in our people who make improvements possible.*
>
> *Last year's Steer was based on the Business Excellence Model to help*
>
> *embedded business excellence into the Agency. We have made a great deal of*
>
> *progress due to the work carried out by Change Managers and through*
>
> *Business Plans which were structured around the model. We must now*
>
> *concentrate on our three main themes, Customers, People and Performance."*

(Boardman, Faith et al. 1999, Strategic Steer)

Reference to related organizational changes in reducing the reliance on target metrics

is given in the following:

> *"In moving the Agency forward, its culture will have to change. The old*
>
> *culture of an organization devoted to the achievement of numerical targets,*
>
> *whilst valid in the early years of the Agency, must change to one where*
>
> *serving the public is paramount."*
>
> (Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000: 18)

In summary, the CSA is seen to take similar strategies in incorporating quality

management issues to those practiced by other public and private sector

organizations. The use of the EFQM's BEM is intended to promote good practice

and improve the internal and external quality of operations of its administrative

campaign strategy. TQM initiatives attempt to promote the pursuit of business

excellence by the CSA and this approach is reliant upon employees at all levels being

involved with the practice of this organizational philosophy. To promote the

involvement of people the IiP programme is another instrument of quality

management that is applied to the training needs of the staff (see Chapter Seven).

TQM is regarded as a qualitative approach to quality management rather than just

applying quantitative criteria by performance metrics and its effective implementation

is dependent upon the development of an adherence to an ethos of quality within the

CSA's organizational culture.

8.2   Applying Quality Management in the CSA

Most of the quality initiatives practiced by the CSA are geared to the general

assessment of operational performance by internal audits and most of this information

is not made generally available to external bodies. Although qualitative approaches

are taken to internal quality management, performances are externally evaluated by

quantitative measures (Children First: Business Plan 1999/2000, 1999: 19-20).

Quality accreditation for the ISO 9000 series requires that evidence of quality

procedures are provided, rather than analyzing the details of internal operations at the

CSA, however, the Agency's quality management system has to have administrative

procedures that would rectify substandard levels of service. Qualitative approaches to

evaluating the CSA's performance have become increasingly evident particularly

with the internal emphasis on the development of its staff ('People') and the

awareness of customer needs ('Customers') as referred to in the Agency's

publications

Although it might be argued that qualitative approaches inject realistic flexibility and

an increased width of perspectives into quality management it might be also be

argued that more abstract criteria allied to quality management at the CSA have been

introduced to cushion the blows of quality metrics that might expose areas of weak

performances by the Agency to the public domain.

The references to quality issues contained in CSA publications also contain many descriptive narratives that might be interpreted as being organizational ideals that attempt to improve the public image of the CSA. The qualitative approaches to quality management are applied in juxtaposition with the use of more formal procedures and quantitative instruments used to assess quality of performances.

In promoting and implementing quality management to the CSA's operations, procedures are set in place that follow the stages of quality auditing throughout all the Agency's operations. The PACTS system is employed, summarized by the following five performance dimensions:

Productivity: *Work was completed efficiently*

Accuracy: *Accurate data was collected and correct assessments and decisions were made.*

Compliance: *Customers conform to the Agency's requirement for payment provision.*

Timeliness: *Work was completed and services were delivered in a timely manner.*

Service: *Overall quality and responsiveness to stakeholders, particularly customers.*

With the emphasis on performance efficiency the CSA cannot circumvent the

inevitable use of metrics and the quantitative measures of quality as part of the

measurement of performance and, as with the measurement of operational

performance, the Agency sets targets for comparative analysis (see Chapter Nine).

The main quantitative measures of the quality of performance demanded for external

accountability are those of accuracy and timeliness of maintenance assessments and

the time taken to process and deliver such financial support. The main references to

the CSA performances are contained in the Agency's Annual Reports and Accounts,

the Business Plans, the Strategic Steer and the Child Support Agency Quarterly

Summary of Statistics. The latter covers a wider context of child support and

analyses of family related issues. The methodologies applied to the assessments and

evaluations of quality are extended to include surveys that question features of

delivery by the CSA and the associated customer satisfaction of the service it

provides. Customer opinions are also compiled from responses in the National Client

Satisfaction Surveys that are examples of external and independent quality

assessments (see Appendix Four). The following categories define the aspects of

performance that the National Client Satisfaction Survey attempts to assess:

1.   *Communication*

      Being told what would happen next, clarity of messages,

      rationale for contact, tone and communication.

2.   *Timescales*

      Speed of response to client initiated contact, waiting time at the

      office.

3.   *Staff*

        General characteristics, communication, ease of

        understanding, approachability

Basic Factors and key elements that influence satisfaction with service:

        <u>*Office Facilities*</u>

                The interview room, waiting room facilities

        <u>*Leaflets*</u>

                Content, clarity

        <u>*Form*</u>

                Information requests, user-friendliness

        <u>*Access to CSA*</u>

                Ease of getting to office

(Speed, Mark, Crane, Jo and Rudat, Kai, CSA National Client Satisfaction Survey

1993)

The National Client Satisfaction surveys are intended to produce an external and

objective view from the analysis of customer perceptions of quality and satisfaction

and combine qualitative and quantitative methods within their methodologies. The

significant features of the National Client Satisfaction surveys are that they apply

alternative methodologies in assessing the overall quality of performance by the CSA

and the use of external parties in producing these reports complies with the themes of

NPSM accountability (see Appendix Four).

Other facilities regarded as inherent to delivering quality performance include the development of Client Help Lines (CHL), the National Enquiry Line (NEL) and the allocation of Independent Case Examiners (ICE). An attempt to increase the quality of performances in such areas has resulted in working hours being increased and the availability of such services being extended to Saturdays in order to promote an increased level of communications between CSA staff and their customers.

As part of the CSA's agenda on the quality of performance, the assessment of fraud is extended from monitoring accuracy to include the validation of information. Fraud is regarded as taking various forms including total evasion of payment by the provision of false information. With reference to the reliability of the information provided by CSA customers the assessment of self-employed cases is also regarded as a problem area that has been identified as having a potential for much improvement even though assessments were expected to become more realistic with the simplification of the model of assessment from the rigid formula (2000 Act) (see Chapter Five). The Benefits Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) produces guidelines that follow a similar agenda to that of quality management at the CSA where fraud is tackled on four fronts:

1.   *Getting it right – benefit payments should be right from day one.*

2. *Keeping it right – ensuring payments are adjusted as circumstances change.*

3.   *Putting it right – detecting when payments go wrong and taking*

        prompt action to correct them with appropriate penalties to prevent

        recurrence.

4.   *Making sure the strategy works – by monitoring progress, evaluating*

        the strength of our defences and adjusting them in the light of

        experience.

(A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social Security, 2000, BFI homepage)

Further, in promoting quality initiatives in the context of fraud prevention, the BFI
use CSA *'secondees'* who inspect on site activities using the following methods:

- *A walk-through of the business process with the CSA operational*

  managers.

- *Interviewing CSA operational Staff and management and BA Staff.*

- *Seeking expert advice as necessary.*

- *Workshops with operational Staff.*

- *Observing CSA working practices.*

- *Sampling individual MAs (maintenance assessments) and cross-*

  checking them against information held on BA systems.

(BFI inspection of CSA, October 1998)

In connection with the prevention of fraud the CSA also practices risk analysis as part
of its security strategy.

Although statements on security are addendums to the CSA's overall strategic steer,

training in the awareness and risk profiling are recognized tools applied to,

"enhancing performance results and the quality of assessments for the Agency" (BFI

inspection October 1998).

NPSM principles have also prompted the imperative for the open provision of

relevant information regarding the CSA's performance. The Citizen's Charter (Cm.

1599, July 1991) sets criteria by which Government agencies are to comply in order

to promote efficiency and quality of delivery (see Chapter One). The main themes

are listed as follows:

1.   *Quality*

      A sustained new programme for improving the quality of standards.

2.   *Choice*

      Choice, wherever possible between competing providers, is the best

      spur for quality improvement.

3.   *Standards*

      The citizen must be told what service standards are and be able to act

      where service is unacceptable.

4.   *Value*

(White Paper: Competing for Quality Nov. 1991)

The Citizen's Charter is translated to the *'Child Support Agency Charter'* that

outlines the standards of service that the CSA provides and these directives are

detailed from the aims stated in the mission statements and Business Plans. In one

interview a CSA manager refers to the, *'Charter Mark'* as follows:

"When the Agency commenced operations, the Citizen's Charter was being

introduced. The present 'Charter Mark' is complex and weighty in its

practical monitoring and there is great detail paid to rating scales."

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, June 1999)

In employing the *'Charter Mark'* Staff attend induction courses on the related quality

processes but the effectiveness of these courses are recognised as being diminished

due to the high levels of staff turnover (see Chapter Seven). With reference to the

'Charter Mark' the assumption is made that the monitoring of quality is subject to

changes and staff appear to view this instrument of measuring quality as peripheral

(CSA interview, June 1999).

In the context of external monitoring the Open Government (Cm. 2111, July 1993)

scheme refers to the availability of information and this is also, to some degree, an

associated requirement of the Data Protection Act (1998).

As with the Citizen's Charter, the guidelines within Open Government provide an assurance that the CSA complies with directives in making information held by the Government departments available to members of the public and thus enhances the overt style of accountability. This directive gives provision for ombudsmen to be used through MP's in assessing the validity of appeals and for assessment information to be made available. In accordance with the practice of Open Government principles one CSA manager referred to panels and network groups having frank and open discussions:

"There is a definite attempt to put into action the concept of the 'Open

Government' and this is the only way to move in such an ethical minefield."

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, April 2000)

In this interview further questions were posed to ascertain how the principles of the Open Government are practiced. The interviewee referred to the importance of involvement and promotion of quality initiatives in dealing with partner agencies and the CSA's suppliers as an inclusive approach to quality management.

As previously stated, the assessment of quality, as with operational performance, is not deemed to be a wholly isolated internal process and the ultimate questioning of the CSA's performances is made through the Social Security Select Committees in analyzing any areas of weakness or inferior quality of performances. To assist in this the CSA tracks the progress of performance strategy by the following measures:

- *Results of monthly customer surveys*

- *Percentage of enquiries and complaints resolved satisfactorily within Charter Standards*

- *Percentage reduction in complaints against caseload*

- *Achievement of Charter Standards*

- *Achievement of Charter Mark*

- *Percentage of resources spent on customer service improvements*

<div align="right">(CSA document provided during interview, May 1999)</div>

In using performance metrics and performance indicators there is some commonality with the metrics applied to operational performance (see Chapter Nine). The 1998/99 assessment processes attempted to measure quality in terms of the following areas and compares the results with set targets:

Measures of Quality

1.   *Maintenance Assessments - Target not achieved.*

2.   *Reviews - Target achieved.*

3.   *Payments - Target achieved.*

4.   *Accuracy - Target achieved.*

(Annual Report and Accounts, 1998/99: 28-29)

These four factors are referred to by CSA managers as being tangible features of

quality monitoring by the use of performance metrics (CSA interview, October 1999).

The 1998/99 report commences its coverage of performance by referring to customer

service as follows:

"Previously we have focused our performance on achieving targets without

taking full account of the impact on customer service. During the year we

adopted a more balanced approach in combining improved performance and

cost effectiveness with the new customer service initiatives. "

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts, 1998/1999: 27)

Links between various features of organizational culture and the methodologies that

are applied to quality management are made in various staff induction and re-training

sessions.

An example of the listed objectives is provided in the following, *"agreed set of values"*, from the CSA Board featured in a section entitled, *"Changing our Culture"*:

- *Understand and respond to the needs of our customers*

- *Continuously improve our business performance*

- *Value the contribution of our people*

- *Work together to achieve business excellence*

- *Accept responsibility for our actions and behaviour*

- *Support Ministers' objectives to develop an ACTIVE Modern Welfare State*

(Annual Report and Accounts 1997/98: 28)

It is significant to identify this declared shift towards a qualitative and descriptive dimension applied to the assessment of performance and the references to quality issues (see Sec 8.1).

Evidence of this qualitative emphasis in the terminology used in CSA publications is provided in the following section entitled, *"Performance"*:

> *"We have continued to combine improved performance and cost effectiveness with customer service initiatives and have developed an overall target package that reflects a balanced approach to measure our performance across the business. This year our target package will deliver:*
>
> - *A range of measures that will show how the Agency is performing as a whole*

- *A balanced approach in the key areas of Customers, People and*

   Performance

- *A progressive programme which will put us in the best position to deliver*

   the Child Support Reforms

- *A more enhanced service delivery to both customers and stakeholders as*

   unified areas of the business will share common targets

Further:

"Our current performance management arrangements will be enhanced by

setting up a Performance Management Unit which makes comparisons

between the business units encouraging the sharing and adoption of best

practice to move to a standardised (improved) level of service delivery."

(CSA Business Plan 2000/01: 25)

This section refers to the reforms that were to be instigated from the 2000 Act and the

role of the Performance Management Unit as the coordinator of best practice. Other

initiatives that address performance issues are those of the Strategic Assurance Team

(SAT) whose members provided specific information for this study including tailor

made responses to questions and requests by e-mail (see Sec 8.1 and Chapter Four).

As stated above, the CSA is conscious of customer perceptions of the levels of

service, overall quality and responsiveness to customers that it provides.

In improving accuracy and promptness New Client Teams (NCT's) employ

'scorecards' for the monitoring of performance and any subsequent errors in

assessments are referred to from these records.

From this analysis of quality management in the CSA it can be seen that external

stakeholders drive the imperative for the quality management initiatives. The main

influence is the Secretary of State for Social Security in applying instruments of

accountability within the themes of NPSM (see Chapter One). The PACTS system is

employed by a team of quality assessments specialists in applying the quality agendas

referred to in the CSA's publications and documentation (see above) and this is

contained within the measurement and evaluation of overall operational

performances. In addition the CSA adheres to the guidelines contained in the

Citizen's Charter (see above) and is subject to various instruments for making internal

quality assessments, particularly in the field of HRM (see Chapter Seven).

In the main such assessments are based on quantitative data in using metrics to assess

levels of accuracy, timeliness and service. Qualitative methodologies employed in

the CSA are significantly influenced by private sector approaches particularly with

the implementation of TQM. As an integral part of performance, the theories of

quality management are applied as instruments to encourage a pride in performance

and the maintenance of best practice procedures as part of the organizational culture.

Surveys are employed internally, particularly for HRM issues (see Chapter Seven),

and externally by the opinions contained in surveys such as the National Client

Satisfaction Surveys.

Although the detailed features of the CSA's quality management system are mainly

restricted to internal implementation and scrutiny there is recognition that the CSA

should present a favourable image of itself as part of its overall administrative

strategy in portraying efficient performances for external monitoring by regulatory

bodies and its customers. For this reason it is argued that the production of

favourable quality and associated performances metrics can be regarded as equivalent

measures of profitability allied to profit making organizations. Quality management

practice and the measurement of quality are thus means for the justification of the

CSA's existence. The importance of quality management is re-enforced in the CSA's

publications and documentation and confirmed in interviews with managers (CSA

interviews, June1999 and October 1999). As stated above there was a high level of

cooperation in the provision of documentation for this study and an exhibition of

commitment and adherence to quality paradigms and theoretical ideals directed

towards this facet of the CSA as an organization.

Effective quality management systems need to link organizational functions and the

involvement of staff with all parts working in synchrony. In order to implement such

systems the CSA's specialist teams produce formal documentation of procedures and

rules that must be followed by staff in administering the Agency's operations.

The same requirements are applied to the wider management and monitoring of the CSA's operational performances and the study now extends from this analysis of quality management to the subject of overall performance and its measurement. This aspect of the organizational analysis commences by considering the initial operations of the Agency, particularly the first year of operations, separately from the preceding years. As previously stated, the CSA started from scratch in implementing a radical and controversial child support policy (see Chapters One and Five) and the first year of its operations was subjected to exceptional scrutiny. As there are no previous data that can be used to realistically compare the performance of the CSA in its infancy only a general appreciation of the CSA's problems can be made in considering its commencement of operations.

8.3   Initial Operations of the CSA

Having considered the CSA's approach to implementing Quality Management Systems within the guidelines of NPSM and considering this as an aspect of overall operational performance, the study continues to consider the Agency's operational performances by analyzing the commencement of business of the Agency. The initial operations and performance of the CSA had the potential to endorse the validity of the new child support policy and to promote the Agency as a proficient vehicle of legislative accomplishment.

The CSA commenced operations on 5th April 1993 and included in its missions were

the following priorities set for April 1993 to April 1996:

1.   *To assess and collect maintenance from former partners of lone parent*

      families receiving income related benefits such as Income Support,

      Disability Working Allowance and Family Credit.

2.   *To assess newly separated couples who would have previously used*

      the courts, whether or not there was a claim for prescribed means-

      tested benefits. From April 1996 the use of the Agency could be

      requested voluntarily i.e. Child Maintenance Order (written

      agreements) ceased to be effective from April 1996.

The specific targets for the CSA's first year of operations is provided as follows:

1.   *Arrange maintenance for 60% of people with the care of children*

      making eligible applications.

2.   *Make benefits savings of £530m.*

3.   *Manage its resources so as to deliver its business plan within a total*

      budget of £115m.

4.   *Satisfy 65% of clients with its service, to be measured by an*

      independent survey.

(Garnham, A. and Knights, E. 1994: 55)

The financial targets were set to provide £450m for the Treasury with £80m being

redistributed to lone parents (Guardian 13:09:93: 4). By 30th June 1993 the CSA had

commenced operations from four regional centres (see Chapter Six) with only 4000

assessments having been made.

The initial assessment of performance in July 1993 claimed that 858,000 Maintenance

Application Forms (MAFs) had been issued with approximately 600,000 being

returned and some 205,000 being completed (Social Security Select Committee

Review December 1993). There was an acute backlog of work that prompted

references to chaos from staff in the following:

> *"This is complete chaos. It might be organized chaos but at the end of the day*
>
> *it is chaos, and you just don't feel it is getting any better...I mean, it's got to*
>
> *get better. It couldn't get any worse. "*

(Child Support Officer, Dudley CSAC, quoted by Davis, G. 1998: 61)

Such comments confirm those made with reference to the high levels of stress

experienced by the CSA staff (see Chapter Seven). The results of the first year

operations are summarized in the following:

> *"The CSA was given a target of £530 million in benefit saving for its first year*
>
> *of operations, 1993 to 1994.*

From the CSA report of this year, the Agency only saved £418 million with

31.5% of maintenance claims being converted into arranged payments, and

not 60% as was targeted."

(Rodger, J. 1996: 120)

The £418m savings was reached by 31st March 1994 and included money paid under

pre-existing maintenance arrangements. An apology for this poor performance was

provided as follows:

"Overall, our standards of service did not reach acceptable levels...we

apologise to our clients for the difficulties thay have experienced because of

our shortcomings."

(Ros Hepplewhite, Chief Executive of the CSA, 1993 – 94)

In terms of accuracy about 95% of assessments were incorrect during the first year of

operations. The Central Adjudication Services found 14% of monitored assessments

as correct from their sample and over £700m of maintenance was unpaid during the

first year (Annual Report of the Chief Child Support Officer, 1993-1994, 1994). The

initial targets proved to be impracticable and unrealistic and the poor initial

performance of the CSA negated the organizational ideals of its mission and

questioned the suitability of the 1991 Act. Apologies were made for poor initial

operations including late responses etc. (The Guardian 5:07:94).

After the initial few years the CSA had planned to reduce the backlog of assessments outstanding and from April 1996 the processing of claims were planned according to the surname of the PWC, as follows:

8th April 1996   A - D

1st July 1996   E - K

2nd October 1996   L - R

6th January 1997   S - Z

(Clout, I. 1993)

From the introduction of the 1991 Act PWCs were required to name the AP (NRP), usually the biological father, and refusals to cooperate were penalized by a six-month stoppage in associated financial Benefits (see Chapter Five). Initial applications were taken through local CSA staff in local DSS offices prior to being handled by the appropriate CSAC. As stated in Chapter Seven, Child Support Officers (CSOs) handled individual cases in the CSACs under the supervision of Chief Child Support Officers. The CSOs were regarded as the *'frontline'* in the operational process and were subject to much of the pressure in applying the cases to the rigid formula of assessment. The most complicated cases were those where the NRPs were self-employed, Schedule D earners.

Particularly in the early days of the CSA operations, the emphasis was placed on

handling quantity rather than putting any organizational ideals of quality into practice.

"...at first the emphasis was more on quantity, but then they said to us: 'hang

on, slow down, even if you get less assessments through, they have got to be

right'."

(Child Support Officer, Plymouth, quoted by Davis, G. 1998: 73)

In an interview with CSA management it was stated that assessment officers would

pursue relatively *'straight forward'* cases in preference to *'difficult cases'* and in this

way targets were more easily met. One CSA manager expressed the economic

advantage of using this strategy in that, *"it was better to get ten 'X's' than nine 'X's'*

and one 'Y'", where *'X's'* were completed assessments and *'Y's'* were *'difficult*

cases' (CSA interview, March 1998). This is confirmed in the following:

"The name of the game is maximising the maintenance yield – don't waste a

lot of time on non-profitable stuff."

(CSA internal memo 1994, quoted in The Guardian, 1994, *"Can't Pay Wont Pay"*,

Evans Woolfe Production, in association with Brook Lapping for Channel Four,

1999)

This tactic was referred to as *'Quick Wins' ('Can't Pay Wont Pay'* Evans Woolfe

production, in association with, Brook Lapping, 1999) and questioned the CSA's

ethical directives prompting resentment from AP's (NRP's). This emphasis on

pursuing *'easy targets'* or *'soft targets'* reinforced the criticism that the CSA had

failed to trace, assess and collect maintenance from *'errant fathers'* and this had done

little to reduce child poverty (see Chapter Five). Following an emergency meeting in

the County Hotel, Newcastle upon Tyne, members of the CSA management made a

further desperate and controversial strategic decision to pursue NRPs who were

already contributing maintenance to their children by former agreements *('Can't Pay*

Wont Pay', Evans Woolfe production, in association with, Brook Lapping, 1999).

References to the poor first year operations by the CSA is given in the following:

"The controversial CSA, only set up in 1993, has been the subject of intense

media interest, being heavily criticized for long delays in deciding

maintenance orders, slowness in responding to enquiries and for making too

many errors in assessments. Concerns about the way the CSA worked were

acknowledged by the Cabinet Minister responsible, with the Agency being

given a 60% increase in its budget and management consultants being

brought in to inject business efficiency into its operations. "

(The Times 6th July 1994)

In order to assist the system, revised regulations were set through Parliament on the

1st and 2nd February 1994 and a major debate took place on the 10th February 1994

following a request from Earl Russell (House of Lords 9th February 1994). Of the

numerous initial criticisms, the following summarizes some of the main factors

highlighted by many commentators and interested parties:

1.   The new system resulted in excessive and 'punitively high'

      assessments.

2.   There was little evidence of any research as to the reasonable costs of

      maintaining a child.

3.   Initially no allowance was for previous settlements that included

      transfer of property or capital.

4.   It de-motivated parents from working or seeking employment. It was

      regarded by some as another instrument of the *'Benefits Trap'*.

5.   It was vulnerable to fraud and manipulation.

6.   Self-employed, schedule D earners, were more difficult to assess in

      comparison to employed, Schedule E earners.

7.   It did not provide sufficient consideration for 'serial monogamy'

      where AP/NRPs wished to start a new family.

8.   The system was regarded as over-complicated and often the frequent

      changes were incomprehensible.

9. The payment backlogs and evasion of payments resulted in poverty for

      families.

10.   It created undue stress and strain upon parents and family

       relationships.

11.   It intruded on an individual's privacy and civil liberties.

12.   It was unduly threatening and punitive to absent parents.

(Adapted from responses from National Association for Child Support Action and

Families Need Fathers publications, 1999)

The initial operations of the CSA were significantly affected by the reactions of

opposition provoked by the enforcement of the 1991 Act and many cases were

difficult to assess due to the resistance of the parties involved or their particular

circumstances. The new system had also failed in realistically reducing child poverty

and had increased the hostility and acrimony within separated families with additional

violence and antagonism in the relationships of 'broken families'. Much of the harm

and undue stress were a consequence of maintenance assessments being punitively

high (Social Security Select Committee 1993 para. 28). One study states that two

years after the 1991 Act came into effect (1985), only one of 53 mothers in this

sample had begun to receive regular maintenance through the CSA (Clarke, K. et al.

1996: 15).

The continued build-up of claims resulted in a backlog in work and the failure to deliver maintenance claims, even to compliant customers. By December 1994 the pressure from the number of uncompleted assessments caused the CSA to postpone work on existing clients where the lone parents had not responded to initial enquiries from the CSA and the plans to re-assess non-Benefit claimants were abandoned altogether. After the first year of CSA operations the performance of the Agency showed some slight improvements but these were still regarded as being unsatisfactory (see Chapter Nine).

The House of Commons Social Security Committee session (1995- 96), questioned the high proportion of errors in maintenance assessments, the elongated time scale for the effective maintenance payments to become effective and the resulting large build up of payment arrears. These factors, together with problems arising from the enforcement of an unpopular policy, led to a £700m unpaid deficit for this period (House of Commons Social Security Committee 1995-96).

Although the CSA and Government representatives acknowledged that the initial targets for compliance and collection of maintenance contributions were unrealistically high, the Committee of Public Accounts regarded the targets for lowering error rates as not being too ambitious. Having monitored the CSA, The Central Adjudication Services and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration stated that:

"The 1996 Report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration,

whilst acknowledging that the Agency had made "significant progress",

observed that this "has not been far enough or fast enough to avoid a great

number of people sustaining injustices as a result of maladministration.""

(Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, 3rd report 1995-96, *'Investigation*

of complaints against the Child Support Agency', 1996: iii, para. 3)

In analyzing the compliance of assessments, it was estimated that by November 1996

approximately one quarter of NRP's who had been given an assessment were paying

the full amount with one third paying part of the assessment and the rest paying

nothing (Dept. of Social Security, 1996). PWC's who had been married previously

had generally better maintenance deals (Clarke, K. et al. 1996: 7). For all cases,

including NRPs who were receiving some prescribed Benefit it was found that the

average assessment was £22 per week (see Chapter Two). The average assessment

for NRPs who were on earned income was £39 per week but these NRPs only

constituted approximately half of all cases (Dept. of Social Security, 1997).

In December 1996 it was stated that £438 million was outstanding on full

maintenance assessments of which £271 million was being repaid by installments

(House of Commons Select Committee, 5th report, 1997, para. 11). It was not

surprising that CSA was being increasingly scrutinized in terms of its performance,

not only in achieving set objectives, but also by the social effects it was having.

Such scrutiny also extended beyond the internal lines of accountability to monitoring by external parties.

8.4 Summary and Conclusions

Quality management in the CSA forms part of the internal analysis in this study together with considerations of the Agency's organizational typology, structure, HRM issues and its internal culture. An analysis of the operational performances by the CSA is fundamental to this study and quality management initiatives are considered in the context of performance. The adherence to the concepts of TQM and the BEM places an overall reliance on a cooperative and participative internal culture within the CSA whereas the PACTS system (see Sec. 8.2) represents a more specifically defined and systematic approach to quality management within the CSA's administrative framework. As previously stated, the quality agendas employed by the CSA are common to many private sector organizations and this aligns with the themes of NPSM in the promotion of private sector methods.

The inclusion of IiP as a feature of internal quality improvement is directed to providing training for its staff and in developing professional competencies. This programme of development confirms the requirement for staff involvement and intends to be a provision that extends beyond increasing the efficiency of operations to addressing staff needs and promotion potentials (CSA interview, April 2000) (see Chapter Seven).

The metrics applied to the assessments and evaluations of quality include accuracy,

timeliness and service levels (see above), and this is not restricted to internal analyses

but extends to external assessments by the use of such instruments as the National

Client Satisfaction Surveys. As stated above, the CSA is further examined by such

authorities as the Central Adjudication Services, the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate and

the National Audit Office in addition to assessments from various Select Committees.

The Child Support Agency Charter, developed from the Citizen's Charter, also places

demands on the CSA to deliver standards service levels in order to achieve its charter

mark. In addition to complying with legislative constraints (see Chapter Five), the

CSA is placed in position of intense scrutiny and regulation beyond many private

sector organizations.

In pursuing quality management initiatives the CSA places an emphasis on adhering

to established paradigms and prescribed administrative systems. Although narratives

contained in the CSA's publications refer to the Agency's internal culture and the

pursuance of quality of performances, the emphasis is made on the manipulation of

the behaviour of its employees (see Chapter Seven). It is evident that the CSA's

agenda on quality are very much tied to the Secretary of State for Social Security's

influence and the themes of NPSM applied to all Next Steps Agencies. As stated

above, it is stressed that the overall style of quality management in the CSA is formal,

if not rigid in its approach and complies with commonly accepted theoretical models.

Another significant theme of the pursuance of quality management initiatives is the

high level of importance that is attached to this both internally and externally. It is

argued that such prominence on the compliance and promotion of quality agendas by

the CSA represents the justification for its operations. In accordance with other

operational performance criteria (see Chapter Nine) quality related metrics reflect

performances that might be regarded as alternatives to the pursuance of profits and

the maximization of shareholder wealth exercised by *'for profit'* private sector

organizations. Although this idea reflects the themes of NPSM the adherence to rules

and formalities conform to the methods and approaches associated with the features

applied to a typical bureaucracy (see Chapter Six).

In considering the CSA's initial performances separately from the preceding years an

indication is given of the organization, or disorganization, of the new system of child

support. Further, some evidence of the initial acceptance or rejection of the new

system by the CSA's stakeholders is provided. As with all considerations and

analyses of the CSA's performances the recurrent problem of separating policy and

legislative effectiveness from the efficiency of implementation occurs. This is indeed

a main argument of the study in that such separation is regarded as being

impracticable (see Chapters Three and Nine). More specifically any attempt to

measure internal productivity and efficiency of performance should qualify any

findings by considering the effectiveness of policy and legislation.

Any valid analysis of organizational performance also requires a realistic evaluation

of the limitations in the use of metrics in the external and internal assessments of

quality and operational performance (see Chapter Nine).

Another significance effect of the relatively poor initial performance by the CSA in

implementing the instrumental details of Child Support Act (1991) was that it fuelled

any agendas of opposition to the new child support system that had already been the

subject of much surrounding controversy (see Chapters Seven and Nine). The CSA's

reputation had been tainted by not achieving its targets and by not being observed to

be delivering a high standard of provision for child support. This resulted in an

increased scrutiny of the CSA's operational performances in the preceding years and

further questions were raised as to its effectiveness and efficiency. In addition the

CSA was seen to fail and there was an associated stigma of failure that was to affect

the future management, staff morale (see Chapter Seven), legislation (see Chapter

Five) and the emphases placed on its operations. At this stage the study commences

its analyses of the CSA's performances by defining operational performance and the

practice of performance measurement within the themes of NPSM after the initial

years of its existence.

Chapter Nine

Operational Issues in the CSA: Operational Performance

and Performance Measurement

9.1   Defining Operational Performance in the CSA

In Chapter Eight an analysis of quality and quality management issues is made within

the context of operational performances by the CSA. The subject of operational

performance is pursued in this section with the emphasis being placed on

performance measurement and the financial results achieved by the CSA during its

first decade of existence with the first year of operations being considered as separate

(see Chapter Eight). The purpose of this section of the study is to outline what

defines operational performance for the CSA and, as stated above, to extend on this in

analysing the measurements and results of these performances.

A broad definition of operational performance is the actions and activities that are

part of the organizational inputs, outputs and value added benefits. Operational

performance includes performance management that applies methodologies to

measuring operational performance and is applied to the role of control and allocation

of resources.

In order to study this aspect of the organization reliance is made on secondary data sources, publications and tailor made documentation containing period accounts and annual records of data (see Chapter Four).

The main activities pursued by the CSA are the assessment, collection and redistribution of child maintenance and these are exercised within the dictates of legislation and under the themes of NPSM. Operations also encompass the peripheral activities of the pursuit of HRM and quality management initiatives within the themes of the CSA as an organization. As stated in Chapter Eight, the recurring challenge in this study is to attempt to make separate analyses of policy effectiveness and the operational efficiency of the CSA. As stated in numerous contexts, a main argument sustained in this study is that child support policy and its implementation are pragmatically inseparable and this is highly significant when consideration is given to the reactions of stakeholders to the workings of the CSA (see Chapters Seven and Eight). The fact that the CSA acts under the umbrella of a relatively unestablished system of NPSM adds further to the problematic in identifying the causes and effects of its efficiency in terms of organizational inputs and outputs. In defining the CSA's operational performance it is evident that there are interrelationships between the Agency as an organization including all its forms and features and there is an injection of complexities arising from the pursuit of managerialism and change management.

In order to assess the operational performances of the CSA it is necessary to make

relative and comparative analyses in examining the productivity, utilization of

resources and efficiency of the Agency in terms of throughputs (turnover), returns

and input costs. Further, suggestions as to how performance measurement might be

extended to estimate opportunity losses or costs are made in this section of the study.

9.2   Measuring Operational Performances in the CSA

The imperative of accountability within NPSM is dominant in deciding what has to

be measured, the methods and criteria that are employed in measuring the various

features of operational performance of the CSA (see Chapters One, Three and Eight).

In Chapter Three, references are made to some theoretical formulae relating to the

subjects of performance and performance measurement that might be applied to the

CSA working under NPSM. The maximisation of efficiency by Government

agencies in order to achieve value for money for the public, particularly the taxpayer,

is a fundamental feature of NPSM and is confirmed in the following:

> *"There must be real and sustained pressure on and within each department*
>
> *for continuous improvement in the value for money obtained in the delivery of*
>
> *policies and services."*

(UK Efficiency Unit 1988: 7)

As stated above, the emphasis of performance measurement is placed on results and

the requirement for transparent accountability with the stress being placed on

compliance, receipts and associated operational costs. Additional metrics are used to

measure the timeliness, accuracy and service levels in the processing of maintenance

claims associated with the quality of performance (see Chapter Eight). Analysis of

the CSA's operational performances and performance measurement in the CSA relies

to a great extent on relative and comparative performance metrics with the setting of

Secretary of State (SoS) targets as yardsticks and quality metrics used as benchmarks

(see Chapter Eight).

The CSA, like other Next Steps Agencies, adopts a simplified approach to

performance measurement.

> "In many cases, Agencies' activities fall into the 'volume processing' or 'case
>
> work' categories, and measurement presents few problems. "
>
> (Ganley, J. A. and Cubbin, J. S. 1992: 50)

The CSA's Annual Reports and Accounts include financial data indicating the scale

of operations in terms of caseloads, receipts and costs with the number of assessed

cases and the amounts of funds received being recorded as throughputs (turnover).

These measures are used as the bases for performance indicators (PIs) referred to in

the following:

"The distinction between output and outcome was significant in a number of

contexts in the PI debate. Outputs were sometimes also termed 'throughputs'

of the service and were measured by the flow through of service users...In

contrast, outcomes refer to the objectives of the service per se."

(Cutler, T. and Waine, B. 1994: 34 – 35)

Performance indicators (PIs) are used by the CSA in common with other Next Steps

Agencies under the themes of the NPSM's imperative of performance measurement

and accountability (see Chapter One). Whether the most appropriate measures of

performance and valid interpretations are made is questionable and this is referred to

in the following:

"In some areas such as the Department of Social Security, the same

performance indicators were being used in 1985 as in 1975 and they still

reflected the traditional administrative culture of promptness, accuracy,

clearance time, and avoidance of error in payment...it was estimated that by

1987 there were some 1,800 measures relating to VFM initiatives."

(Horton, S. 1993: 136)

Further:

"Performance indicators involve deploying data to allow normative

judgements of the 'product' of public sector service providers.

However, this general definition must be supplemented by examining the

plurality of variant forms which performance indicators may take."

(Barrow, M. 1990: 29)

One of the most important of the performance indicators is the compliancy rate that gives some indication of the acceptance of child support policy by NRPs. In this study this metric is significant in attempting to address the recurrent problem of separating the measurement of policy effects and the efficiency of the CSA (see Chapter Three) and it is argued that compliancy rates reflect the levels of opposition to policy and subsequent legislation. With this, assuming that the CSA makes its maintenance demands by standard procedures and documentation, the proportion of cases that are non-compliant might indicate resistance to policy legislation, perceived high assessments or inadequacy to comply with the formulated assessment, rather than these cases indicating the lack of efficient operational performance by the CSA. The compliancy rate represents the number of recorded cases that are active contributors of regular child maintenance payments as a proportion of the total of the assessed maintenance cases that are liable for maintenance payments.

Arrears and debtors are classified by the possibility of these being eventually realised (see below) where compliancy rates, arrears and the lengths of time required for contributions to be redistributed are recorded in the Annual Reports and Accounts. The occurrence of evasion and avoidance of maintenance payments are further indications of resistance to policy rather than being due to any inefficiency on the part of the CSA. The following definitions, taken from the CSA's Annual Reports, assist in further detailing categories of compliancy rates:

Full Compliance

Indicates that payment/s have been made to the regular

payment accounts during the last three months and nothing was

outstanding.

Partial Compliance

Indicates that payment/s have been made to the regular

accounts during the last three months and an amount was

outstanding.

Nil Compliance

Indicates that no payment has been made to the regular

payment accounts during the last three months and there was

an amount outstanding.

Nothing Due Compliance

Indicates that no payment has been made to the regular

payment accounts during the last three months and nothing was

outstanding.

In analysing compliancy a full analysis of the loss of contributions cannot be made in

the cases where there is no cooperation and evasion with the CSA's assessment

system since some non-compliant cases do not complete the maintenance assessment

enquiries. The losses due to fraud and evasion might also suggest some problems

with the effective implementation of policy by the CSA.

Further, uncollected maintenance that is *'written-off'* is regarded as a contributor to

inefficiency in terms of operational performance and is reflected in the CSA's ratio

analysis.

In the CSA's Annual Reports arrears are classified as being *'collectable'*, *'possibly*

uncollectable' and *'deferred debt'* where *'possible uncollectable'* debts indicate the

assessed maintenance that is to be *'written-off'* when clients have complied with an

assessment or are subject to an interim maintenance assessment but have not made

any payments. The *'deferred debt'* is the amount of arrears that might be negotiated

with the CSA and is also used as an indication of performance of the Agency. This

uncertainty increases the difficulties in measuring this aspect of performance by the

CSA and increases the mean turnabout for maintenance processing.

Opportunity costs or losses are difficult to estimate and thus negate the complete

measurement of effectiveness and efficiency of the child support system.

Performance measurement is also limited by the assumption that customer

information is accurate and the maintenance assessments are correct. Incorrect or

inaccurate maintenance assessments are viewed in terms of the quality of operational

performance and distort any attempt to measure operational performance accurately.

Outstanding maintenance or debt arrears also affect the time aspect of performance

where the amount of arrears and lapsed payments are publicised as important

measures of operational and quality performances (see Chapter Eight).

The most direct measure of timeliness used by the CSA is the speed of payments and

this is expressed as a percentage of payments made to PWCs within ten days of

receipt from the APs. The time value of money and the delays in receiving

maintenance payments are a subject of much antagonism to PWCs.

Much of the emphasis of the analysis of internal performance lies within the domain

of financial and cost and management accountancy practiced by the CSA where the

Agency employs a traditional hierarchical cost centre structure based on management

units. Specified cost centres form sub-sets or directorates where cost centre managers

control their budgets and are accountable to the CSA senior management (see Chapter

Six). To assist CSA management on an operational scale, the employment of the

'Management Information for Ministers' (MINIS) information system is intended to

increase the availability and distribution of internal information particularly in the

area of performance evaluation. In order to provide timely information for cost centre

managers a mainframe computer system is used (Financial and Management

Information System FAMIS) where cost centre managers can readily make access to

updated information (CSA interviews, April and December 2000).

The CSA's expenditure monitoring team produce monthly reports for the directorate

from this information and detailed prices of the internal services required to meet

outputs are also calculated. A more direct approach to internal costing is the project-

based setting of costs that can be allocated to each case in assessing efficiency.

The main improvement of the CSA's Management Information System has been the development of the Child Support Computer Systems (CSCS). The use of formal hierarchical information and accounting systems adheres to the typical structure of accountability applied to the bureaucracy with the project costing system being more directly related to the localization of management responsibilities to coordinated activities (managerialism) (see Chapter Six).

As stated above, resource utilization ratios are used to assess the internal efficiency of CSA operations and rely on accurate estimates of costs and budget allocations where the main measures of resource utilization are productivity (Output/Input) and efficiency (Target vs Outturn) (see Chapter Three). In linking the outputs to the resources that are employed in operations the internal accounting system uses unit out costs within an Internal Purchaser Provider (IPP) system. It is claimed that the Internal Purchaser Provider system has improved accountability and value for money (CSA interview, March 1999).

During 1998/99 the CSA had spent a total of £208.8m against its allocation of £208.4m although it was expected that cost efficiency would increase (Annual Report and Accounts 1998/99: 31). Reference to the main problem of employing such budgeting systems is made in the following:

"The problems associated with the measurement of inputs and outputs, and

the related evaluation were partly cultural. For many years the emphasis in

most public sector organizations has been on receiving money and spending

it, rather than measuring costs, evaluating whether good value has been

received and focusing on results achieved. "

(Hyndman, N. 1993: 28-30)

The instruments of costing and recording accounts have assisted in managing internal

input costs but the main problem for the CSA is how it can increase its receipts. As

stated above, the main detailed measures of performance are reported to the Secretary

of State for Social Security (SoS) and the Annual Report and Accounts are made

available to the public based on the year ending every March. These reports make

reference to broader perspectives of CSA operations and performance (see Appendix

Six) and, not only does this provide standard accounting statements such as the

balance sheets, but also comparative analyses are published between *'Targets'* and

'Outturns'. The CSA attempts to increase the ratio of Throughput to Input Costs.

This is stressed in the CSA's Business Plan (1998) that promises to deliver increased

workloads and improved services with reduced resources.

In terms of purchaser/provider (see above) financial performance is measured relative

to resources and the context of *'value for money'* where the CSA Board, as purchaser,

pays a standard price to all the frontline services, as providers, for three key outputs:

1.   Maintenance Assessments cleared

2.   Maintaining the caseload

3.   Amount of Maintenance collected

The CSA summarises the main categories of performance measures in the Annual

Report and Accounts as follows:

Service Results, Measure of Throughput, Measures of Quality, Milestone

Targets, Efficiency – Target vs. Outturn, Case Compliance, Cash Compliance,

Quality – Accuracy & Clearance

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1998 - 2000)

The following stresses the importance of cost effectiveness for the CSA:

"For 1999/2000 many of our Secretary of State's targets were new or revised

to provide a more effective measure of business performance, and the results

indicate how effective our customer service improvements were. It was

important that we adopted a new approach in combining improved

performance and cost effectiveness with the new customer service initiatives.

This approach would form the basis for successful performance in future

targets and Child Support Reform."

(CSA Annual Report and Accounts, 1999/2000: 31)

Three members of the Performance Management Strategy Assurance Team (SAT),

previously called the Performance Improvement Team, from the CSA headquarters in

Newcastle upon Tyne provided comprehensive answers to questions relating to

performance measurement for this study (see Chapters Four and Eight). The

following categories of performance measures are provided as follows:

- *Secretary of State Targets (SoS)*

- *Customer Service Standards*

- *Milestone Targets; and*

- *Internal Targets; including*

- *Operational Priority Targets*

- *Staffing levels*

- *Intake volumes*

- *Outputs*

- *Productivity*

- *Performance against profile*

- *Capacity for the remaining part of year*

- *Sickness & wastage rates; and*

- *Local problems that have affected performance*

(CSA Performance Management, Strategic Assurance Team 2001)

Within this document significant references are made to the PACTS system of

measurement (see Chapter Eight) that was designed to meet the needs of multiple

stakeholders and cover the CSA's three principle performance dimensions of

'Mission', 'Value for Money' and *'Service'.*

In referring to private sector influences on the performance measurement at the CSA, the response was affirmative and continued to elaborate on this as follows:

> *"PACTS was a good example of the Agency utilising consultants with past*
>
> *experience of Performance Management and using their experience to*
>
> *develop a 'balanced scorecard' approach to Performance Management*
>
> *within Operations. PACTS has been rolled out across the Agency, and was*
>
> *attempting to improve the amount and quality of MI at the lowest possible*
>
> *level. It was also trying to establish a balanced approach to understanding*
>
> *how targets can compliment each other and also work against each other e.g.*
>
> *quality v quantity."*
>
> (CSA Performance Management, Strategic Assurance Team 2001)

In summary, the operational performance of the CSA is dominated by the use of metrics, as quantitative instruments, and this influences the definitions of the features of performance. Performance Indicators are employed in the analysis and evaluation of efficiency, productivity and timeliness (see above).

The CSA produce performance indicators as part of the NPSM principles of accountability and comparisons to targets are limited to directly measurable inputs and outputs.

Much of the content of the CSA's Annual Reports and Accounts is predominated by the recording of financial information that is dictated by accounting standards employed within the auditing and stewardship processes, most of which are common to private sector organizations.

Performance measurements are vulnerable to misinterpretations, particularly from the initial operations and the setting of arbitrary targets (see Chapter Eight) and this is significant where so much reliance is made on comparisons to SoS targets. References to the CSA's performances made in their publications verify that an increasingly qualitative emphasis is placed on its performance measurement methodologies and interpretations. These publications are prone to promoting the CSA's performance in a favourable light and need to be placed in context with external evaluations in order to reduce any possible biased interpretations. Also comparisons of Annual Reports and Accounts from 1997 to 2002 show performance measures that were replaced or discontinued and this suggests either, the metrics were no longer applicable, or their amendments and/or omissions might have not been beneficial in promoting the CSA's attainments.

Any full and effective interpretations of the CSA's performance is constrained by the availability of data that has been limited by the uncertainty of securing compliancy and timely maintenance payments.

In this study it is argued that the measurement of performance by standard metrics tends to be myopic within the wider context of the child support system and lacks any consideration of wider criteria such as opportunity costs, added value and the *'knock on'* effects of the CSA's operations. Further, the effects of changes in legislation and the associated compliance levels and acceptance of policy over time introduces further complexity to any considerations of performance. Such changes in causes and associated relative effects suggests that a multivariate analysis is required and that there is a further requirement to consider the interrelationships between policy and the effectiveness and the efficiency of the CSA's operations. In identifying that there are areas of commonality between quality and operational performance criteria and realising that the practice of performance measurement is influenced by complexities, there is perhaps a need for a pluralist, if not holistic approach to considerations of performance.

9.3   Performance Metrics and Interpretations of Operational Performances

In this section of the study examples of performance metrics are taken from selected Annual Reports and Accounts from 1997 to 2002. These data relate to the CSA's performances in applying the standard assessment formula but no comparative data are provided from the employment of the *'flat rate'* assessment method following the 2000 Act. The most successful year of the CSA's operations was 1997 – 1998, and reference to this is made in the following:

"This year, for the first time since the Agency was set up, we have met or

exceeded all our Secretary of State targets – the most demanding yet. "

(CSA: Annual Report and Accounts 1997 – 1998: 12)

The first performance indicator to be quoted in the CSA's Annual Reports and

Accounts is the percentage compliancy measures based on throughput and their

respective comparisons to Secretary of State (SoS) targets (see Sec 9.2). The

following data show these compliancy rates over the period 1996 to 2002:

Table 9.1 Percentage Compliance Rates based on Throughputs (1996 – 1998)

	1996/97	1997/98
Full Compliancy	31.6	41.0
Partial Compliancy	31.5	28.7
Total	63.1	69.7

(N.B. Full and Partial Compliancy categorisation was discontinued from 1998)

(adapted from CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1996 – 1998)

Table 9.2 Percentage Compliance Rates based on Throughputs (1999 – 2002)

	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02
Case Compliance			
Target	70	71	71
Outturn	70.1	71.3	72.9
Cash Compliance			
Target	67	68	68
Outturn	67.7	69.9	71.2

(Adapted from CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1999 – 2002)

It can be seen that the overall compliancy rates have increased only slightly over this period with the actual cash compliancy falling behind case compliancy and therefore incurring deferred payments as arrears. For 1999/2000 the following comments were made with reference to compliancy rates:

> *"Our case compliancy rate has not increased but our cash compliancy rate*
>
> *has. It was still a higher compliancy rate than the US. We were told to 'work*
>
> *smarter not harder'"*

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, April 2000)

As stated above compliancy rates do not include the amount of arrears outstanding or the times for maintenance funds to be collected and redistributed to PWCs.

An indication of uncollectable debts arising from non-compliancy or failure to pay

maintenance is provided by the value of *'probably uncollectable'* debts, and these

amounts are given as follows:

Table 9.3 Probably Uncollectable Debt 1998 – 2002

Year	Uncollectable Debt (£ m)
1998/99	97.8
1999/2000	168.7
2000/01	182.9
2001/02	197.9

(Adapted from CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1998 – 2002)

This shows an increase in *'probably uncollectable debt'* along with an increase of

throughput. An alternative categorization analysis of debt shows the respective

values and percentages of debt as follows:

Table 9.4 Analysis of Outstanding Debt (£m and %) from 1996 to 2002

Year	Collectable	Possibly Uncollectable	Deferred Debt	Total
1996/97				
£m	230.6	81.2	6.0	317.8
%	72.5	25.6	1.9	
1997/98				
£m	240.3	160.2	11.7	412.2
%	58.3	38.9	2.8	
1998/99				
£m	337.81	155.41	18.32	511.54
%	66.0	30.4	3.6	
1999/2000				
£m	334.85	157.95	28.64	521.44
%	64.2	30.3	5.5	
2000/01				
£m	286.58	208.72	32.5	527.8
%	54.3	39.5	6.2	
2001/02				
£m	325.6	147.66	36.12	509.38
%	63.9	29.0	7.1	

Table 9.5 Outstanding Debt (£m and %) as at 31ˢᵗ March 2002 and 2001

	2002	2001
Collectable (£m)	325.60	286.58
(%)	63.9	54.3
Possibly Uncollectable (£m)	147.66	208.72
(%)	29.0	39.5
Deferred Debt (£m)	36.12	32.5
(%)	7.1	6.2

(Adapted from CSA Annual Report and Accounts 2002 and 2001)

Although the figures above are a balance sheet 'snapshot' of outstanding debts in different categories, in comparisons with the 'probably uncollectable debt' category, there is a suggestion that most of the 'possibly uncollectable' category become 'probably uncollectable'. This is shown in Table 9.5 and Table 9.3 with possible uncollectable debts being £208.72m and £147.66m and the probable uncollectable debts being £182.9m and £197.9m for 2001 and 2002, respectively. The fact that probable uncollectable debts are greater than the possible uncollectable debts for 2002 is due to the cumulative effect of debts. Over the period 1996 to 2002, approximately 30% of all assessments were regarded as bad debts and 'possibly uncollectable'. In July 2001 the problem of the CSA's poor record in collecting maintenance was raised in parliament by Steve Webb, the Liberal Democrat work and pensions spokesman.

"The child support agency was owed more than £1 bn in maintenance and has

written off two thirds of it as uncollectable...uncollectable child maintenance

now stands at more than £500m, while £200m was considered to be possibly

uncollectable, and a further £500m has been written off.

(Guardian 11th July 2001)

In this article it was also is stated that the poor performance of the CSA had prompted

calls for the Government to scrap the CSA.

Further criticism of the, *"controversial child support agency"* was made by Steve

Webb in August 2002 who stated that the CSA had written off £2bn owed by absent

parents since it was set up nine years ago while another £150m was considered

"possibly uncollectable".

Further:

> *"The figures, hidden in a footnote to the Agency's annual report, came after*
>
> *parliament's financial watchdog, the national audit office, refused to approve*
>
> *the Agency's accounts for the eighth year running because of a "legacy of*
>
> *error"."*

(Hencke, D. Westminster Correspondent, The Guardian, Wednesday August 7, 2002)

In this article a comparison is made with the Inland Revenue that collects 91% of the

debt that it is owed while the CSA writes off around £200m of the £700m it aims to

collect each year.

It is stated that the CSA make 300,000 enquiries to the Inland Revenue about missing parents each year and another 20,000 about the earnings of self-employed parents and could not function without this assistance. Further, the CSA costs around £290m a year and it is suggested that responsibility should be switched to the taxman. Further, Sir John Bourn, the comptroller and auditor general, is quoted as estimating that 36% of receipts collected by the CSA from non-resident parents and 81% of maintenance assessment debts were incorrect. The following shows selected performance measures (also see Appendix Six):

Table 9.6 Selected Performance Measures (1996 to 2002)

1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02
Caseload (000's)					
	525	924	731	1049	1082
		£ millions			
Throughput					
Target					
380 – 400	500	750			
Outturn					
399.89	547.14	661.2	730.9	778.2	795.6
% Increase					
	36.8	20.8	10.5	6.5	2.2

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02

Receipts (£000's)

| 220,931 | 318,231 | 409,819 | 473,609 | 516,976 | 544,503 |

% Increase

| | 44.0 | 28.8 | 15.6 | 9.2 | 5.3 |

% Receipts/Throughput

| 55.2 | 58.2 | 62.0 | 64.8 | 66.4 | 68.4 |

Net Operating Costs (£000's)

| 224,525 | 225,942 | 231,174 | 260,333 | 250,046 | 285,468 |

% Net Operating Costs/Throughput

| 56.1 | 41.3 | 35.0 | 35.6 | 32.1 | 35.9 |

% Net Operating Costs/Receipts

| 101.6 | 72.0 | 56.4 | 55.0 | 48.4 | 52.4 |

Output-Input Efficiency Ratios

Throughputs/Net Operating Costs

| 1.8 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 3.1 | 2.8 |

Receipts/Net Operating Costs

| 1.0 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 2.1 | 1.9 |

Receipts/Caseload (£)

| | 606.2 | 443.5 | 459.8 | 493.9 | 503.0 |

Net Operating Costs/Caseload (£)

| | 430.4 | 250.2 | 252.7 | 238.4 | 263.7 |

Quality

Accuracy

Cash value of all assessments checked in year to be correct in at least x% of cases:

Target

N/A	85	75	78	78	Discontinued

Outturn

N/A	86	77	70.5	67.4	Discontinued

(Adapted from CSA Annual Report and Accounts, 1996 - 2002)

(Percentages calculated to one decimal place of accuracy)

The table above shows that throughputs have increased but the proportional increases have decreased. There is a slight increase in the values of receipts as proportions of throughput values and this is reflected in the reduced increases in receipts being higher than those of the increases in throughputs. A significant value is the ratio of receipts from clients for the distribution of maintenance to the net operating costs of the CSA and this value is approximately half the value of all its receipts during this period. Receipts show a gradual increase as with the caseloads that the CSA handles and the level of accuracy in making correct assessments reaches about 70%. The ratios of receipts and net operating costs to caseloads are fairly constant but there is a significant decrease from 1997/8 to 1998/9.

Figures taken from the balance sheets also show one significant increase in *Tangible Assets'* or fixed assets, as follows:

Tangible Assets (£000's)	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02
	8,359	5,975	31,431

The 2001/02 tangible assets value shows a £25.5 million increase that is mainly explained by the investments in IT equipment for the Child Support Computer System (CSCS) purchased under a Private Funding Initiative that rose to at least £50m above budget up to 2002 (BBC News Ceefax 8th August 2002: 108). This project employs the Texas based company Electronic Data Systems (EDS) and is projected until 2010 (see Chapter Six).

The *'flat rate'* system, due to be *'rolled out'* from April 2002 (originally April 2001), was delayed until April 2003 with the delay reported as being due to glitches in the computer system. The total cost of the new system was to be about £500 million and was reported to have had major system faults in erasing customer file data. For 2003 the system costs had risen to over £29m over budget. The CSA had about 1.2 million cases with about one third not paying any maintenance contributions and, under the 2000 Act, an enforcement team consisting of some 200 staff members were prosecuting 100 of these non-contributors (BBC Watchdog 27th Oct 2003).

As stated in Chapter Eight further performance measurement and evaluation exercises are made from the perspectives of the customers in the DSS Research Reports on National Client Satisfaction Surveys.

One of the major problems in measuring client satisfaction is the inaccuracy of

responses caused by biased responses to questions regarding the CSA prompted by

the disagreement of customers with the child support policy. MORI was used in the

National Client Satisfaction Survey (1993) where the sample size and sampling

methods were considered in its methodology (see Appendix Four). The National

Client Satisfaction Surveys identify the reactions of sampled customers as follows:

"A significant proportion of clients (in particular AP's) cited dissatisfaction

with policy as a reason for dissatisfaction with service. Similarly, most

complaints were directed towards policy – related rather than service-related

issues...The level of maintenance was a fundamental source of dissatisfaction,

particularly for AP's...Issues such as attitudes towards policy or the levels of

maintenance set were termed as 'non-service factors' but can affect client

satisfaction with the service they received from the Agency."

(Speed, M., Crane, J. and Rudat, K. CSA National Client Satisfaction Survey 1993:

10)

The use of quantitative, open-ended, questions confirmed that attitudes to policy had

an effect on clients as distinct from attitudes to service:

"The findings of the qualitative phase of the survey, where clients had the

opportunity to raise issues of importance to them, showed that policy issues

had an effect on clients."

(Speed, M. and Seddon, J. 1994, CSA National Client Satisfaction Survey 1994: iv)

This provides further evidence in support of the argument that policy and practice are not practically separable and thus no matter how efficient the service of the CSA is, some customers will still fail to make maintenance payments. As stated above, this might be due to the perception that assessments are too high or it might be a demonstration of a resistance to the principles of policy. Either way it confirms the link between policy and implementation and shows how policy can affect the performance of the CSA as a service agency.

The qualitative survey responses also assist in identifying the main problems regarding service factors. Examples of some summarative and individual responses from one survey regarding complaints, are given in the following:

Reasons for not complaining

Felt waste of time	54% APs	47% PWCs
Not be bothered	11% APs	12% PWCs

Further, related comments are given in the following:

"I really couldn't be bothered anymore, I've really gone past the point that I care I suppose." "It's not really any use getting angry with someone at the end of the phone. They were not the decision maker, they're just somebody who was repeating what they were told to say."

(DSS Research Report No. 39, CSA: National Client Satisfaction Survey,

1994: 118 - 119)

In questioning the customer's perceptions of efficiency expected from the CSA, one

survey report summarises these as follows:

"Efficiency, as defined by the clients, involves getting something right first

time and within a reasonable timescale. "

(DSS Research Report No. 39, CSA: National Client Satisfaction Survey, 1994: vii)

It can be seen that this definition of efficiency differs from the formal use of metrics

used to assess the CSA's operational performance (see above).

Performance assessment by such surveys are defined by specific factors and,

arguably, some of the subject areas of questioning might be regarded as being paying

too much forensic detail to superficial issues e.g. the décor and cleanliness of waiting

rooms, the presentations of pamphlets etc., notwithstanding, they provide an insight

into customer perceptions.

The surveys include some dichotomous choices within the questionnaire designs and

these results are published in the CSA Business Plans, for example, the service

satisfaction plan (1993 - 1994) sets a target for 65% of customers to regard the

service as being satisfactory. The actual results indicate that only 44% of customers

found the service satisfactory. Further, 52% of the PWC's and only 32% of the

NRP's found the service satisfactory (CSA National Client Satisfaction Survey 1994:

xiii).

Other sources of external opinions regarding the CSA's performances are included in media articles that are significant considering the Agency's sensitivity to bad publicity (see above and Chapter Eight). One example is given by the report by an independent examiner who summarises the CSA as delivering a, *"disturbingly poor service"*, further the Agency is criticised for being, *"too slow to learn from its mistakes and for making only grudging apologies to clients, even when it knows that it was in the wrong"* (Ann Parker, 26th August 1999, The Times: 2). As stated above, the measurement of the CSA's performances can be seen to adhere closely to the requirements of NPSM principles and the associated Government guidelines for charter standards and the Agency has conformed to the lines of accountability from the Chief Executive and Board to the Department of Social Security and Select Committees who report to the Government. These various levels and forms of accountability influence, if not dictate, what is measured in terms of performance. Although there are many shortfalls in the system of child support that are reflected in the performance metrics CSA publications contain evidence of narratives that affirm the areas of performance that have fashioned relatively positive results.

There is a perceived danger in the adherence to a rigid culture of performance measurement in that, *'what gets measured gets done'"*(Likierman, A. 1993). There is an implication here that everything should be measured and this extends beyond the audit function for the CSA.

Two senior CSA managers refer to this in the following:

"There seems to be an obsession with measuring everything and quoting any

measure that can shine a favourable light on the Agency. If it doesn't and

isn't required it was discarded. A recent survey was made using members of

the public who weren't customers or involved with the CSA at all. In the

discussions that followed there were many comments saying that the system

wasn't fair and they didn't see a need for a special agency for this. I think the

results were 'binned' weren't they? (Question to senior manager who replied,

"yes")."

(CSA interview, March 1999)

It is suggested here that the CSA extends beyond its remit of accountability in order

to portray any favourable responses to the Agency's performances.

The data provided in Table 9.6 indicate slight improvements in the CSA's

throughputs and receipts but there have been significant amounts of maintenance

revenues written off or committed to arrears. With net operating costs of about

£250m per year that represents about 50% of its receipts and about 35% of its

throughput, in terms of output-input efficiency ratios, this represents receipts that are

nearly twice the net operating costs with throughputs being about 2.5 to 3 times the

net operating costs.

In making interpretations from performance indicator metrics, some problems and

benefits of their use is provided from experience of their use in the US:

Problems in comparing Performance Indicators in different Organisations

1. *Differing objectives mean that organisations have differing*

   performance indicators, thus making comparison difficult.

2. *The degree to which inputs can be directly related to outputs varies*

   from organisation to organisation.

3. *The number of objectives pursued by each organisation varies greatly,*

   making the allocation of overheads to each problematic.

4. *The 'pay back' time for different policies varies greatly; this may*

   tempt policy-makers to opt for short-term rather than long-term

   solutions to problems.

Beneficial Functions of Performance Indicators

1. *Set specific goals for management.*

2. *Facilitate budget justification.*

3. *Stimulate cost reduction and organisational improvement*

4. *Permit control of operations.*

5. *Allow for improvements in motivation.*

6. *Improve accountability.*

(Jowet, P. and Rothwell, M. 1988: 4 adapted from 1976 report to presidential and

congress of the Joint Financial Management Improvement Programme: Washington

D.C. Office of Management and Budget, General Accounting Office and Civil

Service Commission)

In one interview reference was made to the imperative for performance indicators to

meet targets that often resulted in dictating the priorities of work:

> *"The Civil Service Economic Unit were responsible for producing the*
>
> *assessment formula and we assume, rightly or wrongly, that someone*
>
> *somewhere knows what they were doing though I often wonder...Again we*
>
> *don't always measure what we should measure. The fact that we have to meet*
>
> *certain measures influences how we work. I remember that one administrator*
>
> *had to drop everything and contact the employers of non-resident parents to*
>
> *arrange DEOs (detachment of earnings orders). The men were paying but*
>
> *her manager had told her that her ratio of DEO payers was too low."*

<div align="right">(Punctuation added)</div>

<div align="right">(CSA interview, April 2000)</div>

This signifies a problem of performance appraisals from various stakeholders

influencing the emphasis on what is being performed and in this way performance

measurement has the potential of shifting the emphasis of the *'administrative*

campaign' in the CSA's strategic management (see Chapter Six and Eight).

9.4   **Summary and Conclusions**

It is evident that any valid analysis of performance by the CSA is convoluted by

inherent underlying complexities and the interrelationships between policy and

practice. More questions are prompted as to the objectivity of measurements and any

subsequent interpretations in order to provide realistic suppositions. By taking wider

perspectives in the approaches to performance measurement that include

methodologies to identify associated causes and effects embroiled in the CSA's

performances, some indications might be found as to what can be done to improve

performances. Further, any interpretations of performance should attempt to achieve

an ordered and reasoned investigation into the dimensions and scale of the

consequences of performance by the CSA and this relies on appropriate, accurate and

timely measures of performance in forming any valid initiatives for improvements.

More specifically, the fulfilling of objectives in reaching targets and subjective

interests of the parties measuring performance are possible sources of distortions and

bias. Most interpretations are limited to comparative analysis of inputs and outputs

and/or the identification of significant values and factors derived from performance

measurement and this is certainly the case with the CSA.

The methodologies applied to performance measurement should also be extended to

include any additional savings in prescribed benefits that result from the collection of

child maintenance. Such calculations are complicated since not all child maintenance

results in a *'knock for knock'* replacement of benefits from other sources.

This becomes further complicated with the introduction of working families tax

benefits, tax credit allowances and the transfer of other related benefits including

financial support from local authorities. As stated above, further considerations of

opportunity costs and losses due to evasion, avoidance and fraud by the CSA's

customers are also needed in order that the full effects of policy and its

implementation are evaluated.

The most significant performance results taken from Table 9.6 are those that show

that the CSA's net operating costs represent about a third of its throughput (turnover)

and half of its receipts (see above). A further problem arises from the estimated 70%

compliance rate, in that the CSA has written off approximately £700 million of

maintenance as being uncollectable (see above). The performance results taken from

the CSA Annual Reports and Accounts 1996 to 2002 (Table 9.6) show that the

Agency did not deliver the required target outputs across all its performance metrics.

It is also pertinent to note that at 2002 the CSA appears to have reached a steady state

of saturation and a projection on these figures does not indicate any significant

improvement. As stated above the discontinuations and replacements of some

recorded metrics suggest that such measures might have been removed since they

indicate ineffective and/or disparaging performances by the CSA. The increased use

of qualitative narratives might also be interpreted as attempts to moderate any

discrediting perceptions that might be construed from harsh metrics.

Detailed internal performances of the various CSA units are not provided due to

Agency staff not complying with this request (see Chapter Four). This outline

depiction of the approach to performance measurement and the relatively poor results

give indications of what the CSA staff members are challenged with (see Chapter

Seven). In questioning the improvement in performances one CSA manager gave the

following response:

"We don't ask the right questions. We have no 'joined-up' agenda and we

don't follow up such things as grandparents, employers etc., enough.

Although the Agency had witnessed an increase in ministerial scrutiny,

particularly under the Labour Government, policy planning produced some,

'red herrings'. For example, on the question of teenage fathers so often

referred to, this only accounted for 0.4% of all our absent fathers. If this

present Government (New Labour) gets another term of office I can see a

definite move to coordinate child support to family support. I think that we

should be involved with sex education in schools, not taking the work of the

Department of Health, but teenagers should know that they would have to pay

for their children. We cannot remove the father as the 'breadwinner'. We

should practice 'signposting' as a support to positive divorce education. We

seem incapable ourselves of looking at the receiving end of child support.

Then again the Agency needs to feel confident in itself."

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, April 2000)

This statement makes significant references to the possible improvement of performances being coordinated with wider policy issues and suggests that the operations of CSA should be more actively linked with policy agendas. It is significant to note that this member of staff had been actively involved with some progressive research into family policy and the contribution of child support to this wider area. Further references were made to the CSA needing to move forward by being, *"customer involved"* and criticized the staff attitude as, *"lacking in customer focus"* and being the *"antithesis of customer service"* (CSA interview, April 2000).

Further comments were made in this interview that refer to the interrelationships between policy and practice:

> *"Although the principles of policy might be sound in theory it is designed with the assumption that parents are reasoned sensible people which is not exhibited in many cases...the use of the rigid formula was a big mistake that let down the whole process... The 'joined-up' agenda of 'better fathers' gives mixed messages and compliancy has not increased in 1999/2000, only the amount collected from cooperative absent parents has increased"*

(Punctuation added)

(CSA interview, April 2000)

As stated above, in making any valid interpretations of the CSA's performances the effects of the complex interrelationships of policy and practice together with those of the CSA's internal organizational features, there is a requirement for more thorough and sophisticated analyses.

Chapter Ten

Conclusions

10.1 Introducing the Main Issues

The main questions and arguments developed throughout this study are directed

towards the convergence of the themes of a new approach to public sector

management and the implementation of a controversial new system of child support

that introduced the CSA as a Next Steps Agency. In this study NPSM is regarded as

being a generic term and an academic construct and the underlying themes of

achieving value for money (VFM) and improving the efficiencies of State agencies

have developed from numerous Government papers (see Chapter One). The

principles of NPSM are regarded as being greatly influenced by the ideologies and

micro economic objectives of the New Right and although the restructuring of the

public sector and the introduction of NPSM principles were in process prior to the

introduction of the CSA, the Agency is distinctive in that it was the first Next Steps

Agency to be formed from scratch.

The two main themes promoted by NPSM are the separation of policy from practice and the application of private sector methods and management styles to public sector agencies. The former has resulted in policy issues being placed wholly in the ministerial domain whilst Next Steps Agencies have been given the responsibility for the implementation of policies. In the context of child support the promotion of private sector methodologies were intended to guide the CSA from the organizational typology associated with the typical State bureaucracy towards a corporate style organization with a significant reliance being placed on new managerialism. Both these ideals have the commonality of transferring responsibility from the Government to State and in the case of child support this could be interpreted cynically as *passing the buck'*.

The financial imperative is argued to be the dominant drive for change in child support policy with the Treasury and subsequently the taxpayer being faced with increasing demands in providing financial support in the form of prescribed welfare benefits to lone parents. With this, the increasing scale of the problem placed the Treasury as the dominant influence in driving child support policy with the changes being *'Treasury driven'* (Mavis Maclean, "Can't Pay Wont Pay", 1999, see Chapter Two). The imperative to reduce expenditure on welfare benefits has resulted in social ideologies being marginalized (Social Security Select Committee, see Chapter Two).

The New Right promoted social policies based on ideologies resulting in the diminution of traditional family roles inherent in British culture in favour of the perceived supremacy of private markets and financial imperatives (Cochrane, A. and Clark, J. 1993: 94). It is significant that the new system of child support defined in the Child Support Act (1991) deviated from the laissez-faire paradigm and the New Right's promotion of individualism in favour of State involvement. The Child Support Act (1991) represented some fundamental changes in the approach to child support in that there is an application of a general case algorithm of assessment by the CSA in preference to individual negotiations through the courts with the emphasis of financial liability being shifted from present families to children from previous biological parenthood.

Further, the haste with which the White Paper: *'Children Come First'* (Cm. 1264, 1990) and the subsequent 1991 Act was passed through the House of Commons and the House of Lords, together with the lack of any significant opposition to the Bill (see Chapter Five), are argued to be greatly influenced by the imperative to reduce costs to the Treasury. Although the CSA is not a profit making organization it is an instrumental vehicle of policy that is guided by the financial imperatives of making savings in welfare benefits and by improving efficiency and value for money within a changed form of public sector management (see Chapters One and Two).

The promotion of private sector methods under NPSM principles extends beyond the

reorganization of public sector organizations and is regarded by many as being the

touchstone of efficiency and success (Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. 1992). The

themes of the New Right also confirm the idea that private sector practices are the

'*holy grails*' of organization, based on financial criteria, with the most influential

paper being (The Ibbs Report, Efficiency Unit, Feb. 1988, see Chapter One) where

the Government promoted the idea that, *"public was bad and private was good"*

(CSA interview, June1999).

In the context of NPSM principles reference is made to the undesirable features of

bureaucracy and the idea that bureaucracy represents an outdated form of

organization even though bureaucracies promote administrative efficiency and

rational legal authority. (Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. 1992).

10.2   Policy Effectiveness, Efficiency of Implementation and The CSA's Performances

This study makes a detailed analysis of the CSA working within these themes of

NPSM, in implementing a controversial new child support policy.

Contrary to the intended institutional ideologies and organizational ideals the main arguments made in the study are that child support policy and its implementation are not realistically and practically separable and, further, the CSA posses an organizational typology that contains most of the features associated with a bureaucracy. Further, the argument is made that the new system of child support has failed in delivering effective financial provisions for children after the separation of their biological parents. More specifically the CSA has failed to implement child support policy that is reflected in recurrently poor performances. The CSA defines operational performance measurement in terms of compliancy rates, throughputs, receipts and the quality of performance employing relative performance indicators whereas 'for profits' private sector organizations place the main emphases on profit and the maximization of shareholder wealth. To some extent, the inability to separate policy from practice implies that the failings of the CSA in its implementation of child support policy is due to some extent by ineffective and inappropriate policy.

The initial operations of the CSA are considered separately from the performances of the subsequent years since the first year is regarded as being a unique case and the metrics that are provided cannot be used for making realistic comparisons. The initial operations fell short of set targets in terms of receipts, payments and prescribed benefits savings to the Treasury and there were significant backlogs of work and assessment returns due to errors and inaccuracies.

Although the Government set initial targets that were unrealistically high and

arbitrary (see Chapter Eight) the initial poor performance has stigmatised the CSA as

being ineffective and inefficient and has resulted in the Agency being placed under

extreme scrutiny. In analysing the CSA's performances over the preceding years it is

clear that the Agency has failed to delivered what was intended despite many

Secretary of State (SoS) targets being adjusted and some comparative targets being

discontinued. The discontinuation of such metrics limits the potential to make

relative comparisons with actual performances and targets over time and it is

suggested that the Government and/or CSA have chosen to avoid using such metrics

that might cast a 'bad light' on the Agency's operational performances and prompt

further criticisms (see Annual Reports and Accounts 1993 to 2003, Chapter Nine and

Appendix Six).

A significant measure of performance is given by the ratio of the Agency's net

operating costs that represent about 50% of receipts and about 35% of throughput

(see Chapter Nine and Annual Reports 1993 - 2003). It is difficult to interpret this

fully apart from concluding that the CSA operates with a productivity ratio of

approximately 3:1 and an efficiency ratio of approximately 2:1. It is evident that the

CSA's management are concerned with the lack of any substantial improvements in

current performances (CSA interview 2000) although Agency publications readily

quote that compliancy rates have reached about 70% (Annual Report 2002).

Where maintenance is due to be collected by the CSA about 45% receive the full

amount, 25% receive part-payment and the remaining 30% get nothing, based on

compliant NRPs (CSA Quarterly Statistics August 1999). From this it can be seen

that, in the strictest analysis, it is only the minority of NRPs (45%) that fully comply

with child support legislation. Further there is an indication of the performances of

the later years of 1999 to 2002, considered in this study, reaching a level of saturation

or a steady state where subsequent performances are not improving with returns being

about two thirds of recorded compliant throughputs and caseloads (see Chapter Nine).

The 2001/02 broad stroke figures show a throughput of some £795.6 million with

receipts being £544.5 million, representing about 68% of throughput. It should be

noted that receipts for any year do not necessarily refer to the throughputs for that

year due to the payment time lags. The assessment process relies on accurate and

timely data provided by both parents and thus Annual Reports provide only a

'snapshot' of actual financial circumstances that are subject to changes and appeals

and the CSA is then obliged to make numerous case adjustments resulting in further

backlogs and inaccuracies. Child Support Managers regard this as posing an

impossible task and the introduction of the flat rate system is not expected to

eliminate such problems (CSA interview April 2000).

Reference is also made to £500 million having been written off and a further £200

million being considered as possibly unrecoverable (Steve Webb, Liberal Democrat

Advisor, Guardian 11th July 2001, see Chapter Nine) and this is augmented by the

estimate that £2 billion of cumulated maintenance has been written off during the first

nine years of the CSA's operations. Reference is also made to 81% errors in

assessments and 36% errors in receipts by Sir John Bourn, the comptroller and

auditor general, highlights problems in the accuracy of assessments (Hencke, D.

Westminster Correspondent, The Guardian, Wednesday August 7, 2002, see Chapter

Nine). In addition one National Client Satisfaction Survey report found that only

52% of PWC's were satisfied with the service they received by the CSA, while not

surprisingly, this figure was only 32% for NRP's (see Chapter Nine). Although a

direct comparison between the present system and the system in place prior to the

1991 Act is difficult to make due to the lack of data available for out of court

settlements. In 1991 the DSS estimated that the average court order was £16 and

would be £45 but, as a CSA assessment covers all qualifying children and a court

order is made for each separate child, a direct comparison cannot be made (Dept. of

Social Security, 1991).

As stated above, the relatively poor performances by the CSA, in terms of relative

low outputs and the inaccuracies of its assessments suggests that the system has

clearly not achieved what was intended and thus the CSA and/or child support policy

has been perceived by many stakeholders to have failed particularly with the

emphasis of NPSM themes being placed on output results and efficiency.

The responses from NRPs to the new child support policy have not only had a detrimental effect on the compliancy and performances of the CSA but also have weakened staff morale in the Agency. Policy effectiveness has not be subjected to the same level of scrutiny as the operational performances of the CSA and perhaps this is due to the *'bottom up'* hierarchical approach to accountability. Aside from the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) that estimates levels of fraud and evasion, there are no references made to opportunity losses or costs that arise from avoidance and evasion arising from the withdrawal from employment of NRPs. Such non-compliances can incur associated knock on costs from NRPs not contributing to the Treasury and also resorting to claiming prescribed benefits rather than pursuing paid employment (see Chapter Nine). It is suggested that the imperative to use Secretary of State (SoS) targets as yardsticks and benchmarks of performances has limited the CSA's initiatives in measuring and interpreting its performances. For example there is no evidence that the CSA includes external assessments of child poverty that should be part of the fundamental criteria in evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of any system of child support. Conversely there is only a limited amount of data relating to the savings made by the system in reducing the costs of Income Support and other related financial benefits for which PWCs can no longer qualify.

Such omissions in performance measurement make a full interpretation of the CSA's

wider performance unachievable and it is argued that performance measurement

should develop beyond the rigid framework of SoS targets and the themes of NPSM

accountability and pursue wider and more inventive strategies in identifying causes

and effects of the shortfalls in performances. These methodologies will only be valid

if they are used in close liaison with policy development rather than changing the

criteria of assessment to search for favourable metrics ('shifting the goalposts ').

There has also been a lack of any considered agenda of research into the subject of

child support and the haste that changes have been made have set a potential

environment for future problems where amendments to Acts (1993, 1995 and 2000

see Chapter Five) provide evidence of shortfalls in the 1991 Act and were prompted

by sustained opposition and campaigns for changes from stakeholders and

exacerbated by the repeated weak performances of the CSA (see Chapter Eight and

Nine). References to the system being fair and workable (see Chapter Two) omit to

include that any system that purports to support the child should also be trusted and

the main consequence of all this is that the CSA implements child support policy

regardless of its validity, reliability and workability. The argument that policy and

implementation are realistically and practically inseparable poses a problem in

measuring the operational efficiency of the CSA separately from measuring the

effectiveness of policy.

It is further suggested that if the CSA were to operate with 100% efficiency, the compliancy rate in terms of cash receipts would not reach 100%. Thus any flaws in policy or insensitivity to individual cases imbedded in the system of child support places the CSA in a precarious state and are detrimental to any of its operational functions and subsequent performances.

Further examples of the effects of resistance to the assessment system are provided by the relatively low compliancy rates and the amount of bad debts that have been written off by the CSA (see Chapter Nine). The main reasons for non-compliance by NRPs are argued to be as a reaction to policy or a refusal to pay maintenance that is perceived as being too high. In attempting to measure the effectiveness of policy separately from the efficiency of the CSA's operational performance it is suggested that some indication of the negative effects of policy is provided by non-compliancy rates. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the recorded cooperation by NRPs does not necessarily connote absolute compliance and thus there is a distinct difference between cash and case compliancy. Where customers are procedurally compliant but not payment compliant, adjustments have to be made with bad debts being discounted later from the CSA's turnovers ('Throughputs') and such adjustments are only estimated as probable or possible non-recoverable debts or arrears and this is a cumulative sum (see Chapter Nine).

Although compliancy rates might provide some indication of policy acceptance the

question as to why customers do not comply is not fully answered for all cases and, in

order to address this question, it would be of value to research the causes of

avoidance and non-compliancy by employing appropriate qualitative methods.

The problematic issues associated with implementing a 'one size fits all' model of

means testing are intensified by the increased complexities in family patterns and

circumstances, including more second marriages, shared parentage and states of serial

monogamy that result in multiple parentages with about three quarters of the

population cohabiting in their first partnership (Care for The Family web page, 2000

and Chapter Two). Although this study does not include references to individual

cases much evidence exists of emotive responses to the implementation of child

support policy including recorded suicides by NRPs faced with maintenance demands

(NACSA web page).

More pertinent to this study is the consideration of the reactions and opposition to

child support policy and the effects these have on the performances of the CSA and

its staff in implementing and administrating child support legislation. The actions of

opposition and resistance to child support policy experienced by the CSA in

attempting to enforce legislation and implement policy provide further evidence to

support the argument that child support policy and its implementation are realistically

inseparable.

Throughout this study the effects of policy on implementation are recurrently evident

in the findings composed from field research in the CSA and secondary information

(see Chapters Five, Seven and Nine). In addition to MPs being overwhelmed with

constituent complaints there is evidence of much antagonism directed to the CSA

staff experiencing expressions of opposition ranging from threats to the sending of

foreign objects in the post (see Chapter Seven). Although such responses from

customers of the CSA are examples of extreme reactionary actions of opposition they

have detrimental effects on the general staff morale within the Agency (CSA

interviews 1998 to 2000).

The responses to questions relating to HRM issues indicate that the CSA experiences

significant problems that are also referred to in its publications. There exist high

levels of absenteeism and staff turnover with the latter being explained to some extent

by perceived low promotional prospects, relatively low staff grading and more

favorable opportunities available with other organizations, predominately within the

private sector. To exacerbate the problem of high staff turnover there is a high level

of migration to other Next Steps Agencies, Government departments and even the

poaching of CSAC staff in their lunch breaks by public sector organizations based in

the same Business Parks as the CSA (CSA interview 1998 and Chapter Seven).

There is also a suggestion that staff members are dissatisfied with their roles in the

CSA that is substantiated by comments made by employees.

Short and long-term absenteeism are explained by illnesses, particularly stress and the CSA has reacted to this problem by introducing *'back to work'* interviews and the use of a *'staffing index'* that are perceived as retaliatory instruments by its staff rather than being objectively preventative. In short these methods are regarded as being used to control absenteeism by intimidation rather than being a realistic attempt to identify the main causes of staff concerns (CSA interview 2000 and Chapter Seven). The problem of relatively high levels of staff absenteeism is linked with low staff morale and it is difficult to assess the specific causes of low staff morale without referring to the facets of internal organizational culture found in the CSA. In questioning the subject of the CSA's organizational culture the most pertinent response is given by the reference to the CSA having a *'guilt culture'* and *'blame culture'* (CSA interview, 2000 and Chapter Seven). It is evident that CSA staff members associate themselves with the failings of the Agency and the stigma arising from its repeatedly poor performances (see Chapters Seven and Nine). It is also significant to stress that the hostile reactions from customers intensify the problem of low staff morale and some staff regard the CSA as being in a *'no win'* situation, being criticised by all its stakeholders. Administrative Assistants also referred to less job security for lower grade employees and there is evidence of a higher level of disassociation with the CSA and a higher level of association with the Civil Service and the Department of Work, Pensions and Social Security that might be due to a perception of a greater job security and the standardization of terms of employment supported on a larger scale by trade union steers.

More pertinently it is argued that this association with the Civil Service and the

Department of Work, Pensions and Social Security suggests a preference for working

within a State bureaucracy and the perceptions of more established levels of

employment security (CSA interview April 2000 and Chapter Seven).

The CSA's responses to its staff problems provide evidence of the implementation of

formal instruments and further rules to influence the behaviour of its employees and

improve the efficiency of its operations. The CSA's approach to develop facets of

organizational culture is also pragmatically based on results and this is clearly evident

in its publications and documentation (see Chapter Seven). Although narratives on

the CSA's organizational culture include references to *'People'* and *'Customers'* in

its Annual Reports and Business Plans the internal documentation (PACTS) makes

close associations with the imperatives to improve results, efficiencies and the

promotion of Quality Management initiatives (Children First: Business Plan

1999/2000 and Chapters Seven and Nine).

Quality management is regarded as part of operational performance and it is found

that the CSA's employs agendas that are common to all Next Steps Agencies and

adheres to much quality management theory. The metrics applied to operational

quality include those of accuracy, timeliness of claims and waiting times for phone

calls at the National Enquiry Centre.

Internal quality management paradigms used by the CSA extend to the adoption of the European Foundation of Quality Management's Business Excellence Model (see Appendix Five and Chapter Eight), as part of Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives (see Chapter Eight). TQM strategies promote the drives for *'right first time'* and *'zero defects'* in the CSA's operations and this is documented as part of the internal organizational culture in the context of administrative procedures.

In summary, the approaches taken to HRM issues, staff problems, the development of organizational culture and Quality Management provide evidence of the employment of formal instruments, paradigms and rules (see above). It is argued that such approaches are typical of the organizational styles associated with bureaucracy and bureaucratic procedures in achieving systematic efficiencies. In addition the flaws in child support policy and the subsequent reactions from its stakeholders have resulted in problems for the CSA's staff and have had detrimental effects on the development of a positive organizational culture within the Agency. There is also an inference that the promotion of initiatives to develop an internal culture and organizational identity within the CSA is driven by senior executives and management for the pursuit of improving operational performance and productivity. Whether the narratives used in the CSA's mission statements, Annual Reports and Business Plans are too idealistic to be workable is questionable.

There is a significant difference between the responses from Administrative

Assistants and Executive Officers and Senior Executive Officers with more senior

management tending to chant the CSA's *'corporate mantra'* in justifying the

Agency's existence whilst middle and lower management appear more critical of the

whole system (see above and Chapter Seven).

10.3   NPSM Themes and Bureaucracy

This argument of that policy and practice are inevitably linked is not limited to this

study and is supported by many theorists. An example of this is given in the

following:

> *"Policy and the implementation of policy are intimately linked and it is*
>
> *anachronistic to suggest otherwise.   However, the fundamental premise of the*
>
> *Next Steps report reasserts the anachronism."*
>
> (O'Toole, B. and Jordan, G. 1995: 122)

More relevant to this study is the following that supports this argument in that an

inadequate child support policy has had detrimental effects on its implementation:

"The policy to be implemented is based upon a valid theory of cause and

effect: this refers to the creation of 'bad' policies, which cannot be properly

implemented simply because they are based upon a poor understanding of the

problem being addressed and the extent to which it can be resolved. It might

be argued that the example of the CSA and the implementation of the policy

designed to make 'absent father' pay more money towards the upkeep of their

children provides us with a case study in this category. "

(Pyper, R. 1995: 101)

This highlights the disparity that exists between policy ideologies and policy

implementation (the *'implementation gap')* with the failings of Government in

translating policy into action and this exemplifies the consequences of managing

public sector activities by separating policy and practice as two independent entities.

In analysing the CSA as an organization the evidence found by internal investigation

indicates that, despite the rhetoric of the CSA's senior management and the narratives

contained in the Agency's publications, the Agency is essentially formed from

bureaucratic characteristics. In questioning whether the CSA represents an

organization that is far removed from that of a typical bureaucracy in practicing a

whole new approach to welfare provision (see Chapters Three and Six) a detailed and

original analysis of the Agency's organizational features has been made.

In order to address this question links are made with the Next Steps initiative together with the associated imperative and lines of accountability and the contributions from selected organizational theories. References to CSA documentation and the substantial use of interviews with staff have assisted in identifying the organizational traits that actually exist within the Agency.

An inductive approach is taken in finding evidence of commonalities between the organizational features of the CSA and those associated with the bureaucracy. In making comparisons with the main organizational features particularly described by Max Weber, searches for evidence of any deviations from such internal traits are also made.

The main argument developed in this study is that, despite the influences of NPSM themes and the promotion of private sector methods, most of the changes have been relatively superficial and most of the main organizational features of the CSA still adhere to those of a bureaucracy. Although Max Weber's analyses of bureaucracies do not provide an exact empirical paradigm in defining a bureaucracy they refer to such organizational features as specialisms, rules, accurate written records, impersonality, exclusivity, appointment progression, segregation and hierarchy associated with traditional bureaucracies. In making comparisons with the CSA's organizational characteristics and the theoretical features of a typical bureaucracy a comprehensive alignment of theory and practice is made in this study (see Chapter Six).

Such comparisons reveal that the CSA consists of the main components of a typical

State bureaucracy and has developed into an organization that is composed of the

features of a bureaucracy with NPSM influences (see above). Although the

promotion of private sector themes by NPSM has injected some complexity into the

organizational features of the CSA, with the levelling of the hierarchical structure and

the reliance on managerialism, the resulting organizational typology of the Agency

can be regarded as that of a bureaucracy plus NPSM adaptations (see Chapter Six).

Although the emphasis is made on rational legal authority in the CSA with the

implementation of policy legislation and the use of formal organizational rules, there

is some move to developing charismatic authority within the Agency. The promotion

of managerialism has afforded managers the potential to develop their roles as leaders

rather than just being administrators possessing authority. Charismatic authority has

become more applicable to the CSA's management styles in motivating and leading

staff (see Chapters Three and Six). Charismatic authority is also associated with the

Chief Executive's role and this indicates a move from the reliance on traditional

authority directly linked to the Government. Whether the influences and potential

benefits arising from the application of charismatic management have been fully

applied is questionable however, it is clear that this was intended in promoting

managerialism within the themes of NPSM. Charismatic authority is commonly

referred to in studies on private sector organizations and perhaps this approach should

be developed further by the CSA.

In making an internal analysis of the CSA evidence of private sector influences can

be found in the CSA's publications, referred to as *'Business Products'*, with the use

of business style terminology (*'corporate language'*) and referred to in interviews

with Agency managers (CSA interviews 1998 to 2000). The use of such terms as,

'stakeholders', *'customers'* and *'people'* portray the CSA as a business model with

the child support system being composed of three main stakeholders, the

Government, the CSA and external parties. The Government instigates policy and the

medium by which it is implemented whilst external parties consist of CSA customers,

members of the public, taxpayers and external interest groups. This is reflected in

CSA's strategic plans that are expressed in styles that have similarities to statements

of strategic management techniques associated with profit making organizations in

the pursuit of competitive advantages and organizational goals (see Chapter Six).

The CSA's strategic plans are regarded as methodologies by which their missions are

to be achieved with two distinctive lines of strategies being the *'Administrative*

Campaign' and the *'Moral Campaign'*. The former promotes the efficient use of

resources and the concept of *'working smarter, not harder'* whilst the latter is a

persuasive instrument used to promote compliance to policy and relies on ideals in

order to prompt the consciences of NRPs (Strategic Steer 1999/2000 to 2002/2003,

1998 and Chapter Six). In the context of accountability the Annual Reports and

Accounts are produced in the formats typical of those used by commercial private

sector organizations. The analyses of profits and profitability are replaced by the use

of performance indicators, particularly productivity based on throughput or turnover

(see Chapter Nine).

Consideration is given to the CSA's involvement in competitive markets that is

promoted within the themes of NPSM, however, it is argued that the CSA cannot be

regarded as a realistic player in any perfectly free market operations by very

definition since it has unique legislative powers and access to information that would

otherwise be unavailable to private sector organizations working in competition (see

Chapter Three). Although one CSA manager referred to the superior efficiency of the

Dutch child support system and stated that the issue of competition should not be

totally discarded from future discussions (CSA interview 1998), the idea of the UK

system being operated from any overseas agency is argued to be an impracticable and

radical option. Further, the CSA's transference to the privatisation agenda is regarded

as being inappropriate and not feasible in contracting out the whole child support

system in the UK due to the scale and interactions with other State agencies (see

Chapter Three).

The CSA is regarded as only having a superficial involvement in private markets for

the supply of its utilities, however, it employs the Texas based, Electronic Data

Systems (EDS) for its IT systems and support as part of a Private Funding Initiative

(PFI). The use of EDS created some controversy since all three bidders for the DSS

contract were under the corporate ownership of General Motors where EDS had

employed Mark Thatcher in a senior marketing position (The National Association

for Child Support Action, NACSA Newsletter 1998).

Further controversy arose when the IT problems at the CSA contributed to a two year

delay in the implementation of the flat rate system and ran over budget to the sum of

£50m within the first year of operation. This poor performance casts doubts on the

benefits of efficiency and value for money that might be gained from the involvement

of external private sector agencies (see Chapter Nine).

Although it is found that the promotion of private styles approaches are evident in the

CSA's publications and the use of terminology by Agency such narratives and

rhetoric have no significant influences on the organizational core of the Agency. It is

evident that such styles of internal communications are intended to portray the CSA

as a modern private sector style organization however this is not evident from

interviews with its staff members who still perceive themselves as civil servants. It is

pertinent to stress that the CSA staff also still perceive that the traditional

organizational paradigm of bureaucracy is still present within the Agency (see

Chapter Seven).

In terms of staff grades it is apparent that most CSA staff members are conscious of

their status within the Civil Service system and within the Department of Work,

Pensions and Social Security (formerly DSS). There is evidence of a split

organizational identity between the established Civil Service structure and that of the

CSA (CSA interviews, 1998 to 2000, see Chapter Seven).

In interviews with CSA staff members it is significant that many referred to being civil servants and even working for the *'Ministry'* still allied to the Civil Service with terms of employment and relative job security associated with a State bureaucracy. These references are not restricted to staff members who had been previously employed in the DSS prior to the introduction of the CSA. Further, there is an implied preference for being regarded as civil servants rather than CSA staff members and such evidence suggests that the CSA experiences a high level of disassociation by its staff members (CSA interviews 1999 and 2000). There is evidence of a suggested *'cultural comfort'* that is perceived by CSA employees in adhering to the civil service form and this is regarded as being due to the perceived security that is afforded to civil service posts. In addition an association with the larger DSS would seem to offer more support in implementing child support policy within the whole spectrum of welfare.

It is also significant to highlight that the CSA is still perceived by its customers as a bureaucracy employing bureaucratic processes and this is fundamental in stamping its organizational identity and image (NACSA homepage 1998). With this, any changes in organizational structure and typology have been perceived as being subtle, if not disregarded, by CSA customers and the general public (CSA interview 2000). The effects of NPSM organizational influences can be witnessed in the structure of the CSA that is based on business units or teams responsible for specific tasks that are made accountable to the respective representatives on the CSA's Board, acting as a Board of Directors.

Like many private sector organisational structures the emphasis is placed on being

task-orientated with a levelling of hierarchy and the localization of managerial

authority, rather than employing a rigid hierarchical structure based the centralisation

of authority. The reliance upon new managerialism has awarded greater autonomy to

the CSA's managers however the formation of the Agency's *'business units'* is based

on specialisms. Although the CSA attempts to reduce the emphasis on formalization

associated with the traditional Civil Service structure there still exists an inevitable

reliance on operational rigidity and some hierarchical status arising from Civil

Service staff grading (see below and Chapter Seven). In addition the *'Bottom up'*

lines of accountability still adheres to a hierarchical flow from employees to unit

managers, from units to the CSA Board and from the Board to the Secretary of State

for Social Security.

The CSA still adheres to specialisms, formal rules, impersonality and appointment of

staff and their progression based on assessment and merit. There is strict compliance

to professional accounting standards applicable to private sector organizations that are

presented by financial records published in the Annual Reports and Accounts. The

CSA also relies on accurate written records in practicing its administration of child

support and maintains the exclusivity of its employees within the Civil Service and

segregation in dealing with outside agencies (see Chapter Six).

As stated above although influences of the themes of NPSM are evident in the style and terminology used in its publications the fact that child support policy and legislation represent the rules by which the CSA operates makes it is difficult to envisage the Agency functioning without formality and organizational rigidity. This argument reinforces Max Weber's premise that it is inevitable that the typological features of any large public sector organization will develop, in the main, to those of a bureaucracy (see Chapter Six).

In extending on Max Weber's studies of the bureaucracy by questioning the CSA as an organization and comparing its features with those found in organizational theories, another appropriate study is found to be that of the *'Aston Studies'* (see Chapter Six). The organizational features listed in the *'Aston Studies'* are specialisation, standardization, formalization, centralization and configuration and have much commonality with Weber's listed traits of bureaucracy. More significantly the characteristics of specialisation and standardisation exist within the CSA with the employment of its staff and its practice of procedures and use of internal documentation (see Chapters Seven and Eight). There is, however, a move from centralization that has become limited to the CSA's administrative protocols and the physical organization of resources where authority is designated to the managers of Child Support Assessment Centres (CSACs) that are located in premises on Business Parks throughout the UK.

The findings of this study further indicate that the bureaucracy is not an out dated

paradigm of organization and, in common with some of the conclusions made by Paul

Du Gay (2000) in his critique of bureaucracy, this study concludes that most of the

'Weberian' features of bureaucracy are necessary and unavoidable in structuring

efficient operations of the CSA.

Any valid study of the CSA cannot dismiss the organizational paradigm of

bureaucracy and the CSA has developed into an organization that is not far removed

from that of the previous State bureaucracy associated with the DSS that previously

implemented the administration of child support in the UK. In assessing, collecting

and redistributing child maintenance the CSA acts as a *'Transfer Agency'* and in

order to pursue this role it has become a de facto arbitrator in implementing child

support policy and legislation. In frontline operations the CSA is challenged

simultaneously by the *'claimant'* (PWC) and the main *'contributor'* (NRP) and this is

particularly significant where customers regard the policy as being contentious and

divisive. In this way the CSA acts as an instrumental vehicle of public policy that can

be regarded as the *'middle field'* in the system of child support but is perceived by

many as the instigator and originator of policy and legislation that accentuates a series

of misunderstandings inherent in the whole system of child support in the UK.

Whilst the 'top down' lines of Ministerial accountability are detached and more abstract in nature from the 'bottom up' lines of accountability, demanded from the CSA within the themes of NPSM, there is a further link between policy and practice with the Agency being made accountable for its operations and performances. This direct line of upward accountability was demonstrated in the case of Ros Hepplewhite who's resignation as the CSA's first Chief Executive was seen as being prompted from her being publicly associated with the policy that the CSA implemented (Du Gay, P. 2000: 131). Sir Angus Fraser, the Prime Minister's advisor on efficiency, refers to the involvement of Chief Executives in policy issues that reinforces the argument that the remote separation of child support policy and its implementation is not realistically achievable (Evidence to HC 496, 1990 – 91: 55). The question as to whether the integration of policy and practice is achievable in other sectors of public provision encompasses wider issues relating to the whole concept of democracy that lies outside the context of this study.

10.4 Conclusions

In view of the evidence derived from the findings of this study it is clear that the CSA is faced with numerous problems in terms of its poor operational performances, high staff absenteeism, high staff turnover and low staff morale. In addition it faces a rejection of its role by many of its stakeholders and this, together with the scrutiny that it is exposed to, places the Agency in a vulnerable position.

Further, the narratives contained in CSA publications represent unachievable

aspirations and ideals that have not been accomplished in practice (see Chapters Six

and Seven). The argument that child support policy is linked with its implementation

was recurrently in interviews with staff referring to acts of resistance and opposition

to the principles contained in the 1991 Act (see above). The expressions of

opposition to policy have had detrimental effects on the development of a positive

organizational culture within the CSA that has been already stigmatised by its failing

initial performances.

In turn the continued non-cooperation and non-compliance of its customers have

resulted in the CSA's performances being repeatedly substandard. Although it is

concluded that the confluence of NPSM themes and child support policy has failed to

deliver what was intended there is a strong inference that the CSA has carried the

burden of ineffective policy within a questionable system of public sector

management.

One distinguishing feature of this study is its pursuance of what is really happening

within the CSA in attempting to fulfill its role within the whole system of child

support. Although there has been some acceptance that the CSA and its stakeholders

should play a more active role in policy formation (*Children First*, 1998, see Chapter

Five), it is suggested that further integration of policy and practice should be

promoted in the interests of improving effectiveness and efficiency.

Such integration might be achieved by involving CSA staff at all levels and this

supports the concept that policy should be influenced by all stakeholders rather than

being entirely driven by the State. This idea also supports the concept that policy and

legislation should be market driven to some degree that would adhere to the theme of

promoting private sector initiatives within NPSM. At present the discretion awarded

to CSA staff in making decisions is limited to implementing current legislation and

applying the general assessment formula in determining maintenance payments.

Although some of the wider issues surrounding the UK system of child support

stimulated some initial interest for this study the emphasis is placed on the CSA as an

organization and the facets of NPSM that have influenced the Agency as a vehicle of

social policy and administration. In essence this study compares the ideologies that

underpin NPSM principles applied to the CSA and the associated child support policy

with its practical implementation. From empirical evidence the findings assert that

the CSA is an organization that can be considered, in the most part, as a bureaucracy

with some influences derived from NPSM themes (see above). The evidence shows

that the organizational features contained in the CSA and the adherence to Civil

Service identity by its staff contradicts with the themes of NPSM. This is one of the

most significant findings of this study that concludes that despite all the rhetoric and

narratives that refer to the themes of NPSM being promoted within the Agency all the

institutional inertia, staff culture, organizational dynamics and the pursuit of

administrative efficiency have pressured the CSA's organizational structure and

typology towards that of the traditional State bureaucracy.

Although the principles of NPSM are repeatedly confirmed in the narrative styles

contained in the CSA's internal documentation and publications, the actual practices

of NPSM themes are only superficially evident. The promotion of private sector

methods contained within NPSM themes has placed a greater reliance on

managerialism and resulted in a levelling of hierarchical structures but such changes

have not been sufficiently significant to shift the CSA from the organizational styles

and components associated with the bureaucracy.

This is incongruous with the principles of NPSM that attempted to implement

alternative approaches associated with private sector efficient management. It is also

argued that the design of a system that satisfies all parties can only be regarded as an

ideal rather than being realistically achievable. Problems are exacerbated by emotive

factors associated with the separation of families that prompt appropriate moral and

ethical remedies in allowing some flexibility in arranging the provision of child

maintenance. The fundamental search for responsibility for the financial provision

for children after separation has guided this study to the significance of effective

policy making. The detrimental effects resulting from an ineffective child support

policy suggest that there is a need to pursue more intensive research in order to

achieve a realistic, fair and workable system of child support in the UK. As stated

previously, this study has provided some original material and evidence of the inner

workings of the CSA and the effects of policy and implementation as experienced by

its staff, particularly the Agency's management (see Chapter Seven).

In addition it is concluded that wider criteria in the assessment of the CSA's

performances should be pursued in order that realistic and equitable interpretations of

the Agency's performances should be considered in its contribution to welfare

payments.

Finally, the CSA does not represent a whole new approach to the provision of welfare

that is implied within the recommendations of NPSM themes and the failure to detach

policy from implementation together with the adherence to organization features of

bureaucracy contravenes the main principles of NPSM (see above). The lines of

governance and the administrative and organizational moulds having been set, the

repeatedly poor performances by the CSA together with the out of kilter assessments

imposed by the system of child support (see Chapters Five and Nine), clearly indicate

the need for further changes in policy and possible radical changes in the vehicle that

is employed to implement it.

Appendices

Appendix One: Integrating Topic and Category Codes with

Organizational Theories

The following table indicates how the main topics covered in interviews (see Chapter

Four, Table 4.3), are grouped in categories that are linked in Chapters Five to Nine.

Main Topics Open Coding	Categories Axial Coding	Weber's Feature of Bureaucracy	Aston Studies Organization Dimension
Policy Issues	NPSM Policy & Legislation	Rules Impersonality Segregation	Formalization
Organization	NPSM CSA as an Organization	Hierarchy Specialism	Centralization Configuration Formalization
Civil Service	HRM CSA as an Organization	Hierarchy Specialism Impersonality Segregation Appointment Progression	Centralization Configuration Formalization
Staff Problems	HRM	Progression Hierarchy Rules Exclusivity	Specialisation Centralization Configuration Formalization
Public Responses	HRM	Impersonality Segregation	
Quality Issues	NPSM Quality Management	Rules Accurate Written Records	Standardization Centralization Configuration Formalization
Administration & Operations	NPSM Initial Operations	Specalism Accurate Written Records	Specialization Centralization Configuration Formalization
Outputs & Results	NPSM Performance	Accurate Written Records	

Appendix Two: CSA Objectives 2002 – 2003

Leadership

Embedding "values"   Management development
Agency business plan   Visibility

People

Investors in people
Agency learning strategy
Training for delivery of
new child support scheme
Diversity
Health and safety

Policy & Strategy

Customer service strategy
Improving communication
Signposting strategy
Complaints improvement
programme
Risk management

Partnerships and Resources
Working in partnership:
- Customer groups
- Private sector partners
- Public and commercial services union

Processes

Improving customer service   Standardising processes

Corporate governance   Capacity planning

People Results
Listening to staff
Supporting staff
through change
Management
training and
development

Customer Results

New child support
scheme
Charter Mark
Client service
targets

Society Results

Environmental
issues

Work in the
community

Key Performance Results

Operational priorities   Secretary of State's targets

(Adapted from CSA Business Plan 2002/03: 9)

Appendix Three: The CSA Senior Management Structure, 1998

```
                              ┌──────────────────────┐
                              │   Chief Executive    │
                              └──────────┬───────────┘
        ┌──────────────────┐             │
        │  Support Staff    ├─────────────┤
        └──────────────────┘             │
                                         │
          ┌────────────┬──────────┬──────┴──────┬──────────────┐

     Operations     Resource    Human Resource    Development
     Director       Director    Director          Director

          │             │                             │

     Operations     Resources                     Development
     Control        Control                       Control
     Team           Team                          Team

                        Business Control

                                │
              ┌─────────────────┴─────────────────┐

   ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────────┐
   │                     │      │            Support           │
   │                     │      │                              │
   │     Frontline       │      │  Business   Resources  Development │
   │                     │      │  Support    Support    Support │
   └─────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────────┘
```
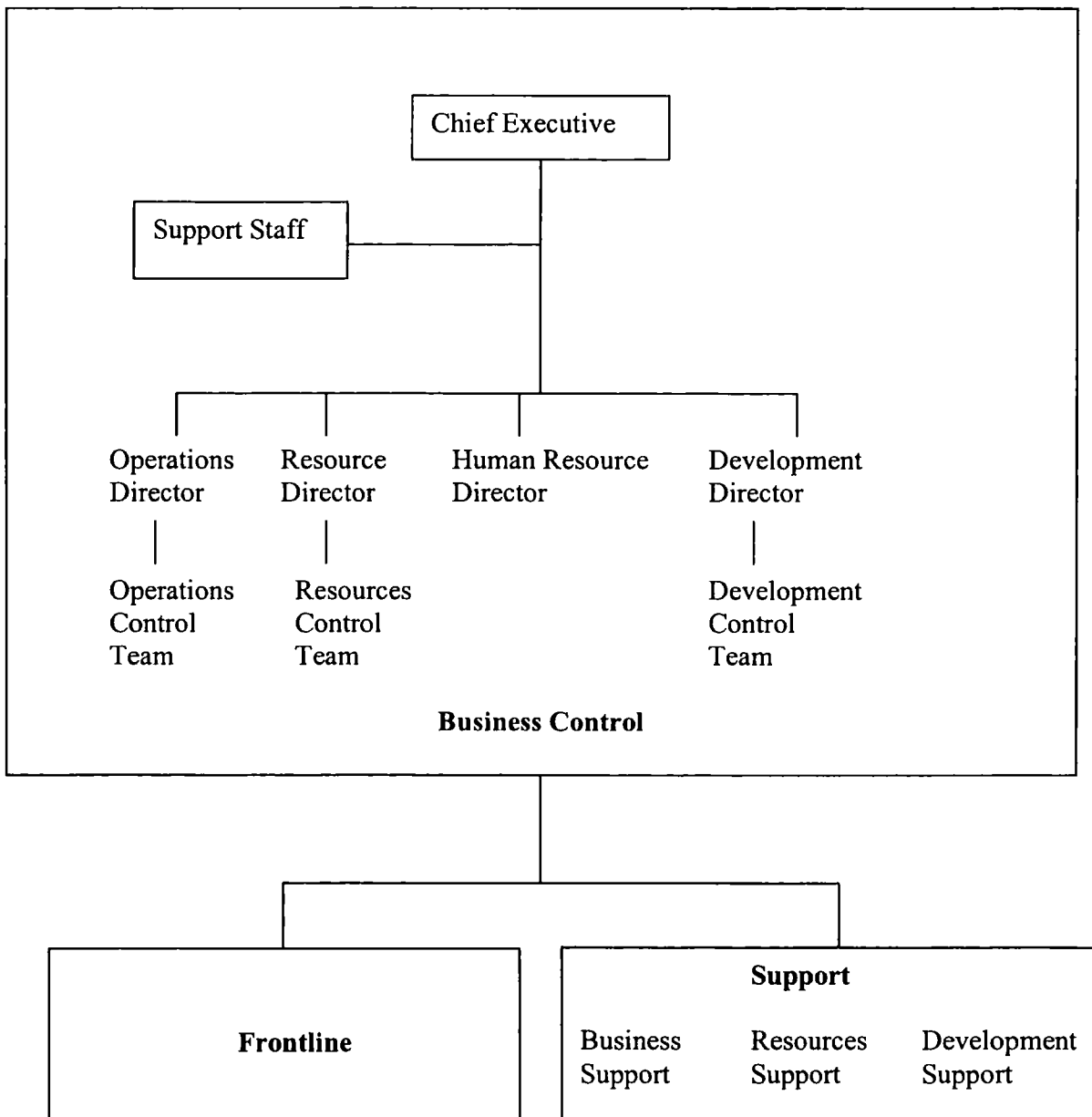
(Adapted from *'Children First'* Business Plan, 1999 - 2000)

Appendix Four: Aspects of Methodology for the National Client

Satisfaction Survey

The methodology used to measure such performance factors contains responses from

questionnaires. For example options for customer satisfaction ranks were as follows:

Very satisfied   1

Fairly satisfied   2

Neither satisfied or dissatisfied   3

Fairly dissatisfied   4

Very dissatisfied   5

(DSS Research Report No. 39, CSA: National Client Satisfaction Survey, 1994: vii - viii)

There were 23 questions ranking various factors of satisfaction.

(DSS Research Report No. 39, CSA: National Client Satisfaction Survey, 1994: xiii)

The specific methodology applied to the reactive measurement of the quality model was

correlation analysis, factor analysis and multiple regression analysis.

Each independent variable was assessed by a question within the appropriate factors:

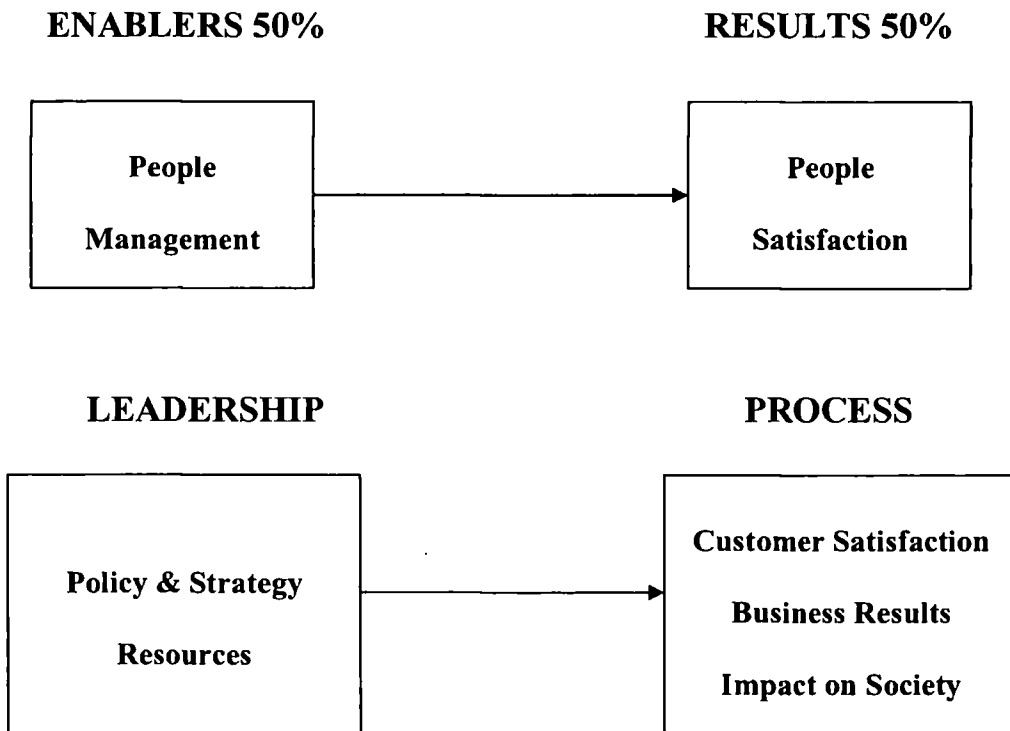| Factors	Independent Variables
Attitudes towards the staff	9
The interview room	2
Access to the office	2
Cleanliness of waiting area	1
Waiting time	3
Waiting area facilities	2
Being told what would happen next	3
Sign posting in waiting area	2

(DSS Research Report No. 39, CSA: National Client Satisfaction Survey, 1994: 1 - 2)

The satisfaction model identifies these eight factors which are broken down into further key elements. Two levels of results are produced by multivariate analysis:

1. The relative strength of the different determinants of satisfaction (the strength of the models).

2. The determinants of client satisfaction for each form of contact (the satisfaction models).

(DSS Research Report No. 39, CSA: National Client Satisfaction Survey, 1994: 3)

Appendix Five: The Business Excellence Model

ENABLERS 50%   **RESULTS 50%**

| People Management | → | People Satisfaction |

LEADERSHIP   **PROCESS**

| Policy & Strategy Resources | → | Customer Satisfaction Business Results Impact on Society |

(Adapted from CSA Annual Report and Accounts 1997/98: 29)

Appendix Six: Selected Measures of Performance 1999 - 2000

Measure of Efficiency

To deliver existing services within the running costs total implying an annual

efficiency gain of at least 4%.

This target was new for 1999/2000. It had always been a requirement that we live

within our allocated resources each year. Although we received additional

funding to strengthen the Agency for reform, we did live within our core business

resources, and as a result achieved the required 4% efficiency.

Measure of Throughput

Case Compliance

To collect child maintenance and arrears from 70% of non-resident parents with

maintenance liability due to be paid through the Agency's collection service.

Of the 353,780 cases where payment was due in the last quarter of the year

249,420 were actually made. Further analysis of target area shows:

45.2% (159,860) cases are now fully compliant

25.3% (89,560) cases are partially compliant

29.5% (104,360) cases are nil compliant

This shows for the last quarter we achieved 70.55 with an overall target

achievement of 70.1% for Case Compliance.

Cash Compliance

To collect 67% of child maintenance and arrears due for payment through the

Agency's collection service.

Of the £648.4m full assessment that was due £438,8m was actually collected.

This resulted in a Cash Compliance rate of 67.7%.

Underpinning Measure – 'Collected and Arranged'

£850m of child maintenance to be 'Collected and Arranged' for direct payment

from the non-resident parent to the parent with care.

During 1999/2000 we collected and arranged a total of £730.9m (£661.2m

1998/1999), representing an increase of £69.6m (10.5%). This improved

performance is shown by:

£492.2m collected (£435.4m 1998/1999), our highest figure to date an increase of

£56.8m (this includes full maintenance and interim maintenance)

£238.6m arranged (£225.8m 1998/1999) and increase of £12.8m.

Measures of Quality

Accuracy

The cash value of all assessments checked in the year to be correct in at least 78%

of cases. It was disappointing that we were unable to maintain the successful

performance against this target as we had during 1998/1999. We failed this target

by achieving an accuracy rate of 70.5%.

Minimum Service Standards

To reach a specified level of performance in a series of customer service standards. We failed the overall target, but achieved nine of the eleven Minimum Service Standards.

Pre Maintenance Assessment

We failed this target in achieving only 51.0% against the required target of 65%. Although the 1999/2000 target was more challenging in the reduction in the number of weeks of which new maintenance applications were to be cleared from 22 weeks to 20 weeks; it is key that we can reduce the time taken in processing a maintenance assessment to be in the best position for Child Support Reform.

National Enquiry Line

In order to give a better service to our customers we considered a number of means to improve the customer service offered by the National Enquiry Line. As a result we changed their role in year to deal with cases specific enquiries as opposed to general enquiries. This resulted in an increase in call duration making it increasingly difficult to answer calls within 20 seconds. Therefore only 28.1% of telephone calls to the National Enquiry Line were responded to within 20 seconds.

Milestone Targets

Debt reduction

To develop and agree with the Department and HM Treasury a robust debt

reduction measure by 30 June 1999 to be run as an internal measure for the

remainder of the year.

We achieved £103.6m reduction in debt. This measure forms the basis for the

milestone target in 2000/2001.

Staffing Index

To work with the Department in developing a staffing index and contribute to the

reduction in public sector sick absences by reducing absences by 6% in

1999/2000. This milestone has been partially achieved. The wording and

measurement for the 2000/2001 staffing target has been agreed and was effective

from 1 April 2000. Sick absences still remains an issue for the Agency; with

various initiatives (such as Stress Audit) being carried out to identify what

problems remain. However, problems were compounded by:

New policies and procedures for managing sick absence were only launched in

December 1999, with little time to impact. 55% of the Agency's sick absences is

for long term, (over 28 days) an area, which we are investigating.

(Source: CSA: Annual Report and accounts 1999/2000: 31 – 43)

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