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**A Typology of Commitment In Local Government and the  
Public Ethos**

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## Abstract

Organisations in both the public and private sectors have been exploring ways in which employee commitment can be increased. Employers consider that greater commitment will encourage higher performance and better quality of product. Those organisations adopting Human Resource Management often adopt strategies aimed at increasing employee commitment by stating values and mission objectives which appeal to staff. These values and mission fulfil the need of employees to feel they are part of an organisation working towards objectives they understand and share.

Local Government's employed professional staff are said to have once experienced a "public sector ethos", a shared sense of mission and values focussed on service to the local community and public at large. Twenty-five years of Central Government initiatives aimed at introducing a new sense of mission and values, based on commercialism and market values, sought to replace this public service orientation. This research found, however, that the public service ethos still exists amongst professional staff, and identifies factors which help define the nature of the public service ethos.

## Introduction

English Local Government has been under constant pressure to change its way of working and thinking over the last twenty-five years, with the objective of improving standards of service (McNulty, 1997). The major thrust for this change came from the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s (Hood, 1991). The process has continued, albeit with a different approach, by the current Labour Government, which seeks improved performance and quality through its Best Value initiative. The Conservative Governments programme of implementing commercialism and managerialism into local government was aimed at achieving attitudinal, cultural and practice-based changes in the way that professional staff work and think (Hoggett, 1994). These changes caused many local authorities, in the 1980s and 1990s to react with their own modernisation programmes, customer-care programmes, internal markets, and a contract culture aimed at introducing a commercial ethos to local government (Deakin & Walsh, 1994). Despite efforts to introduce this commercial ethos many of those who work within Local Government hang on to a belief in a public service ethos, a key reason why they chose to work within Local Government (Pratchett and Wingfield, 1994). The concept of "public service" and the ethos it inspires remains unclear and difficult to define, even by those who adhere to it. However, the absence of a common definition as to what constitutes this 'public service ethos' does not lessen its importance to individual local government staff (Frances, 1995). What seems clear is that the existence of the ethos suggests that many employees feel some kind of commitment to local government and local government organisations.

## **Commitment to the Public Service**

The ethical ideal that public organisations should serve the community was promoted, initially by Haldane who as President of the Institute of Public Administration in the 1920's sought to gain acceptance of the ideal of service. The following quote from Haldane reveals his idealistic image of public service whose, "...*first and dominant common objective ought to be the service of the public in the most efficient form practicable. Virtue is its own reward here as elsewhere*" (see Scheingold, 1988: p.123). This was a call for efficiency, altruism and collective commitment, in the face of the increasing strength and influence of trades unions and professional associations in seeking better working conditions for public servants. The ethos was promoted in an attempt to ensure that the public servant placed the ideal of service to the community before the narrow interests of professional attachments (see Kingdom, 1992; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994). The public sector esprit de corps arising from Haldane's work did not define the ethos or whose standards would determine what is in the communities interest. Naturally, the dominant professions in local government and the state would both suggest that their standards reflect the service ideal.

In centralising control over local government, it was essential to the New Right Conservative Government, on their return to power in 1979, to ensure their definition of public service was dominant over that of the professions (Clarke and Stewart, 1987).

Evidence exists that the strengthening of the management ethos in local government by the Conservative Governments, since 1979, has undermined the traditional public service ethos. Anthony (1990) recognises the contemporary management values of elected members and managers in local government as being concerned with the efficient allocation of resources. As such, these values are in conflict with the values and culture of professional staff who identify the primacy of delivery of service to clients as paramount. Anthony (1990) recognises this difference when he states that, "...*there is no doubt that the allegiance of the [professionals] to a common culture is reinforced by a tradition of moral concern...the internal values...are shared by the inhabitants who influence the culture of their organisations because they regard its institutions as instrumental to their practices...*". The fact that such an ethos is so integral and such a core value for people who work in Local Government highlights it's importance (McNulty, 1997). The substitution of a commercial ethos in place of one based on service must, seemingly, lessen the commitment to local government of those who believe in working for the community and public good. If this is so, what effect might this have on local government? In the next section the importance of employee commitment will be examined.

## **The Importance of Employee Commitment to Local Authorities**

The importance of employee commitment to local authorities, as to any organisation, is profound and well recorded (Storey, 1992). A number of

studies have illustrated the importance of having employees whose commitment is based on more than simple compliance (Jaros et al., 1993). This is because commitment based on compliance has been found to be significantly related to intentions to leave the organisation, with its resultant cost and disruption in service delivery (Bateman and Strasser, 1984). Put simply, staff are less likely to show commitment to organisational objectives or to stay with their employing organisation if their attachment to it is based on mere compliance (Iversen et al., 1996, p. 40). Beyond these points, commitment is associated with the Human Resource Management concept of employees performing to a higher standard, going "one-step further" and exhibiting pro-active behaviour in the workplace, behaviours that all employers wish to encourage (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990).

## **Types of Organisational Commitment**

Organisational commitment is a construct which attracts many definitions (see Jaros et al., 1993, p. 989). Porter et al. (1974, p. 604) defined commitment as *"the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation"*. For the purposes of this study this definition needs redefining in recognition that the public service ethos covers multiple organisations within a specific sector of public organisations, local government. The approach taken by this work, an assessment of measures of motivation, identification with the values of the organisation, and employees' intentions of remaining members, can be adapted and adopted for this study (Kelman, 1958; Becker, 1960). This means that this empirical research is based on the idea that local government is, itself, one organisation, offering continuity and consistency of service to its professional staff, and retaining common features and a common culture. This recognises that, while employee commitment can be approached from a number of different perspectives, key themes in its research are still constant. One such theme is that identified by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) who highlighted Kelman's (1958) belief that the centrality of the psychological bond linking the individual and the organisation, is the key issue in all the various approaches to commitment. This approach to employee commitment has been adopted by other researchers such as Jaros et al. (1993) in an attempt to come up with a sharper definition of commitment. This research has provided the following types of commitment:

1. continuance or compliance commitment (where the employee feels compelled to commit to the organisation because the monetary, social, psychological and other costs associated with leaving are high).,
2. affective commitment (commitment based on an emotional bond); and,
3. moral commitment (based on internalisation of norms and identification with organisational authority; the degree to which an individual is psychologically attached to an employing organisation through the internalisation of its goals, values and mission).

Each of these dimensions of commitment - (i) compliance; (ii) identification; and, (iii) internalised (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986) are threatened by any

process of cultural or organisational change, which may disrupt and alter the nature of the relationship between individual and organisation. Specifically, any change which results in alterations to the organisation's core underlying values poses a significant threat to internalised commitment on the part of employees (Buchanan, 1974). The introduction of a commercial ethos in place of the traditional public service ethos clearly posed a threat to the underlying principles and values of staff in local government. Such change would remove the shared values on which such internalised commitment is based. Compliance commitment can, similarly, be affected by fundamental organisational change in a number of ways. The obvious case is where organisational change results in economic changes to terms and conditions of employment (Ackroyd and Soothill, 1994). Similar changes were associated with the preparation for Compulsory Competitive Tendering and the cost-cutting exercises in local government of the late 1980s early 1990s (Cochrane, 1991). It can also be argued that compliance commitment may also be affected by changes in identification and internalised commitment, the dissolution of shared values between the individual and the organisation, may lower individuals' internalised and identification commitment even amongst those whose principal attachment is compliance based (Kelman, 1958). Many of the strategies identified for overcoming the barriers to change emphasise the need to ensure continued employee commitment in times of change (Legge, 1995). The findings of this paper provide some hope in that in many instances continued commitment is possible, even if it requires a new form of commitment between the organisation and its employees, based on an interpretation of the new organisational values and practices acceptable to the majority of employees.

## **Research Population and Methodology**

This research sets out to see if the public service ethos, as a type of organisational commitment, exists. Also, if it does exist, what sort of commitment is it, within the definition set out by Jaros et al., (1993). To achieve these aims a mechanism needed to be found to measure the perception of individual professionals that desired attributes were present in their work environment to a sufficient extent to ensure the individuals commitment to the organisation. The mechanism used draws on the work of Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982) who found that persons working in environments highly congruent with their personality will be more satisfied than those whose personality-environment congruence is low. The measure of commitment therefore is determined in this study by the degree of congruence reported by individuals in key areas of their work environment. That is the congruence or match between the individual and the organisational situation which affects what behaviours occur and therefore the potential value of the individual to the organisation and vice-versa. This congruence is related to the (i) perception of reciprocation for their contribution in the form of their feeling valued; and, (ii) perceived value of their contribution; and, (iii) their belief in the public service ethos.

Given the essential nature of commitment, that it is predicated on shared values, it is appropriate to expect that internalised commitment would vary

across employee groupings within an organisation (Benkoff, 1997). Younger employees with less service would be expected to share less in any underlying traditional public service ethos of the organisation. This would be due to their reduced exposure to the public service value system and their greater exposure to “commercialised” local government values. Similarly, longer serving employees would be expected to display comparatively higher levels of internalised commitment arising from their longer socialisation process in the traditional public service culture. A further factor is that older, longer tenure staff are more likely to have left the organisation if they have rejected the current organisational values, since high internalised commitment is associated with higher intention to stay (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Under stable conditions internalised commitment would also be expected to be higher on the part of more senior members of staff. This view is based on the assumption that the high levels of internalised commitment, and the ability to adopt new values, would have been instrumental in securing long tenure and promotion for such individuals. In order to capture these differences, respondents to the questionnaire were placed in four groups:

Table 1

<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure</b>
Over forty years of age	Over five years tenure
Over forty years of age	Less than five years tenure
Less than forty years of age	Over five years tenure
Less than forty years of age	Less than five years tenure

These groupings were adopted in order that the influence of the traditional public service ethos, and that of the new commercial ethos, might be identified in its influence on younger and older professional staff. This division might help identify what has happened in practice when one partner in this relationship, organisation and individual, has changed its values, undermining the shared values contract. It appears logical to argue that as a direct result value congruence between individuals and the organisation will be lessened, at least in the short term. As a consequence, a period of socialisation may be required to allow employees to adopt the new core organisational values through a process whereby they re-establish internalised commitment. This period of socialisation may be identified by a lack of congruence across the measures used, especially in older respondents with lower tenure. A preponderance of employees whose attachment is based on compliance commitment would constitute a worrying sign for an organisation wishing to encourage commitment and retention.

The research population used consists of chief officers from one professional discipline. The choice of one profession is intended to ensure a degree of homogeneity amongst the respondents. As such differences between individuals and professions in terms of their socialisation, training or work experiences, that might influence their views on commitment, will be reduced. In order that the influence of commitment on staff retention, at different ages and lengths of tenure, should be fully appreciated respondents are identified as “stayers” or “leavers”; those indicating their intention to stay with the organisation and those intending to leave. The respondents were drawn from



261 district, county, metro, unitary and London borough local councils so that the responses could produce a number of outcomes which could be generalisable across English and Welsh local government.

Table 2

<b>Men</b>	207 (79.3%)	<b>Women</b>	54 (20.7%)
	<b>Stayers</b>	<b>Leavers</b>	
<b>Men</b>	170 (65.13%)	<b>Men</b>	37 (14.17%)
<b>Women</b>	47 (18%)	<b>Women</b>	7 (2.7%)
<b>N = 261 Total</b>	217 (83.14%)		44 (16.86%)

The questionnaire examined both intrinsic and extrinsic features of the individual's job. All of the facets or features used on the questionnaire were important links and contributors in the commitment, job satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and turnover process. Each question compared the perceived level of desire for each factor against the perceived level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced. A satisfaction measure is derived from a sum of the discrepancies. The statistical measurement used was based on the correlation between the importance of need for each feature and the individuals perceived experience of that need being met within his or her workplace. High-low or low-high scores would not produce a correlation. A simple ranking of job/work feature's by importance for each respondent was also requested so that it could be compared against the correlation information. Thirty professional staff were interviewed based on a representative sample of the age, gender and tenure of the respondents. The interviews were semi-structured, and all but ten were completed by telephone due to the distances involved. A questionnaire was put out to a further thirty of the respondents to seek wider views on the accuracy and relevance of the interviewees' responses.

## Findings

These findings confirm the view that those less committed to the organisation and who may feel alienated from its objectives are more likely to consider leaving. This finding illustrates the importance of commitment in ensuring the retention of staff. In the measures of commitment used in this study feeling valued is used as a measure of the importance of esteem to the individual when compared with his or her perception of the organisations recognition of his or her value. An indication that he or she feels valued suggests a need met to some extent by the organisation, which implies affective or moral commitment.

Table 3

<b>Work Feature</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Leaving</b>	<b>Staying</b>
(1) Feeling Valued	Up to 40 years	Over 5 years	.33	.54
(2) Feeling Valued	Up to 40	Less than 5 years	.17	.52

	years			
(3) Feeling Valued	Less than 40 years	Over 5 years	.37	.60
(3) Feeling Valued	Less than 40 years	Less than 5 years	.24	.41

*Leavers N=44 r significant at => .478 at .005 one-tailed test \* and .432 at .01\*2 and .364 at .025\*3 and .306 at .05.\*4*

*Stayers N=217 r significant at =>.478 at .005 one-tailed test \* and .432 at .01\*2 and .364 at .025\*3 and .306 at .05.\*4*

Only the youngest and shortest tenure “stayers” group does not report a congruent relationship between importance and experience of feeling valued. This was found at interview to be due to the particular stage in organisational entry and socialisation this group are experiencing. They were found to be preoccupied with other work factors, such as job security, finding a niche in the organisation and being accepted by colleagues. This finding suggests concern that these new starters are not receiving positive feedback and being instilled with a feeling of being valued at a time when it has been shown that feelings of acceptability and personal importance are important on organisational entry (Schein, 1967). All those indicating on the questionnaire their intention to leave, record no congruence between the need to feel valued and their experience of feeling valued.

Together with feeling valued, it has been found that the extent to which an individuals contribution to the organisation is recognised is also an important measure indicative of moral commitment and the degree of internalisation of the organisations values. Contribution to the authority as a measure of commitment was uniformly reported as the most important work feature by all groups of “leavers” and “stayers” stressing the importance of organisational commitment to them all.

Table 4

<b>Work Feature</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Leaving</b>	<b>Staying</b>
(1) Contribute	Up to 40 years	Over 5 years	.37	.78
(2) Contribute	Up to 40 years	Less than 5 years	.65	.55
(3) Contribute	Less than 40 years	Over 5 years	.50	.93
(3) Contribute	Less than 40 years	Less than 5 years	.27	.69



*Leavers N=44 r significant at => .478 at .005 one-tailed test \* and .432 at .01\*2 and .364 at .025\*3 and .306 at .05.\*4*

*Stayers N=217 r significant at =>.478 at .005 one-tailed test \* and .432 at .01\*2 and .364 at .025\*3 and .306 at .05.\*4*

In these measures clearly the “stayers” perceive that they are both valued by the organisation and that their contribution and commitment are recognised. They appear to have a positive orientation to the organisations power system and positive involvement with the organisation. The “leavers” appear to be alienated from their employing organisation with negative commitment to it.

Table 5

<b>Work Feature</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Leaving</b>	<b>Staying</b>
(1)Public Service	Up to 40 years	Over 5 years	.63	.57
(2)Public Service	Up to 40 years	Less than 5 years	.49	.56
(3)Public Service	Less than 40 years	Over 5 years	.42	.49
(3)Public Service	Less than 40 years	Less than 5 years	.49	.53

*Leavers N=44 r significant at => .478 at .005 one-tailed test \* and .432 at .01\*2 and .364 at .025\*3 and .306 at .05.\*4*

*Stayers N=217 r significant at =>.478 at .005 one-tailed test \* and .432 at .01\*2 and .364 at .025\*3 and .306 at .05.\*4*

This further measure clarifies the earlier results in identifying that the commitment held by both “leavers” and “stayers”, those intending to leave and those intending to stay, is to the public service as a general concept, not just the employing local authority. This finding is evident from the high proportion of “leavers” reporting commitment to the public service ethos as separate and distinct from their employment. As can be seen from the Table results differ for this professional group at different ages and stages of organisational tenure. Generally, though the results indicate that these professional staff retain a notion of public service almost twenty years after the first Thatcher Government came to power in 1979. This suggests that local government professionals have either rejected the new commercialisation ethos or successfully assimilated it within their existing notion of the public service ethos. These findings are discussed below.

## Discussion

This results and findings confirm the long believed view that for some groups of professional staff, employment in local government has allowed them the opportunity to serve their local community and the wider public good. While these findings indicate a public service ethos exists, they do not provide a definition of what it is, or what it means to those who believe in it. One view put forward by the majority of those interviewed is the common bond and understanding that exists at organisational level and between local authorities on their leadership role in the local community. Considering that at this time, commercialisation, managerialism and CCT were being brought into local government by the then Conservative Government, there was little consensus between the new public management form and professional staff on the meaning of "public service" (McNulty, 1997). This unifying theme was still being promoted at the beginning of the 1990's as the traditional consensual arrangements between central and local government were virtually abandoned. John Smith (1991) then the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke out on behalf of the public service ethos. He said that:

*"It is my belief that the public sector serves, and unites, the community in which markets and enterprise flourish. Socially and economically, public services play a vital role within the modern mixed economy. Socially the public services enable fair provision of essential services for the whole community. And economically, they support our infrastructure, help to overcome market failures, and encourage efficiency and competition".*

One professional employed in local government echoes this sentiment by stating:

*"I am not alone in my commitment to public services. Many other solicitors did their articles in local government out of choice and have stayed. Others like myself came into local government by different routes as it became in many areas more outgoing, innovative and responsive to local needs".*

Clearly, these views demonstrate the view of many local authority workers who chose a career in local government or who joined later in their working life. This view is that the services and leadership role provided by local councils can provide a meaningful working environment where individual staff can contribute and feel valued, not as such to their employing organisation itself, but to the wider public service ethos it represents.

## Different Explanations of the Public Service Ethos

The view that there is a clear ethos associated with community leadership is not shared by all the professional staff interviewed. A minority of the interviewees saw the traditional public service ethos as a cover for those professional staff who had an aversion to the strictures of the private sector work environment. He explained this view by stating:

*"I do not recognise a public service ethos although I have heard a lot about it, rarely from colleagues, it is only in the last five years that people have really been pushed at work, and not able to finish early. I suppose that the new customer care regime is the nearest thing I have seen to a customer responsive or if you like public or community service ethos".*

This view is confirmed by another Chief Officer who believes that self-interest is the basis for professional staff seeking employment in local government. Their commitment to local government is based on their personal work and career aspirations rather than any altruistic service ethos. As the interviewee states:

*"My articles were completed in local government because they agreed to sponsor a mature student and pay a living wage, I do not understand how as a Solicitor I can serve the community, as you put it, although as an officer of the court I can understand that role".*

These views are not those of the majority of questionnaire respondents or of those interviewed. Others agree that local government service has wider and deeper implications for professional staff, who through their role as advisers and managers and their contact with elected council members, have a role in determining service delivery priorities and the quality of such services. The role of local government as a service for local people run by local politicians figures prominently in accounts of the experience of the public service ethos. One Chief Officer represents this view by stating:

*"The authority plays a central democratic, social and welfare role drawing together diverse parts of the community, this was represented during my time by contract compliance as regards equal opportunities and the spreading of social justice by this and other means".*

A colleague presents an almost evangelical view of local government service, almost akin to the affective commitment style discussed above. This interviewee views the public service ethos from the viewpoint of the local authorities community leadership and support role. He comments that:

*"...the district supports through its grant aid projects many local groups from the scouts to local welfare groups, less now than it did, being part of an organisation that leads the community by example, as it were, is as worthwhile in its way as being employed by Oxfam..."*

The sense of mission identified in these words is reflected in some of the functions provided to the community by the local authority. This community leadership role is seen by Kingdom (1992) as:

*"...state servants...promoting civitas, a sense of community spirit, thereby facilitating and serving local democracy. The job must carry a sense of vocation and those lacking this need not apply."*

Those interviewed for this study were well aware that the public service ethos or mission has been damaged by the years of financial restraint and

commercialisation of local government. They presume that commercialism, cost-centre management, CCT and now Best Value will replace public service with a culture based on conflict and competition. The majority of interviewees also identify a counterbalance in the creation of cabinet local government, which they see as revitalising the democratic and local leadership role of local authorities, and possibly reconstructing the public ethos or sense of mission experienced by many professional staff. A Chief Officer in considering the last few years of change stated:

*“When I was very young and before my professional training I think I actually believed that the authority was serving the community, certainly in the 1980s and 1990s. Members seem only to serve national political agendas, very vocal interest groups, or just themselves; the officers had a busy enough time keeping out of trouble. In the future local authority members will be more strategic and officers will see quality of service to the local community become more important”.*

Certainly, the minority who considered that continuance commitment explained why local government professionals sought public service employment, were willing to admit that while they still believed such commitment was the chief motivating factor, it was not the only one. This group considered that recognition of contribution and feeling valued by the employing authority were important in their own right, and a failure to experience the emotional aspects of these factors was sufficient to cause professional staff to consider leaving. In this respect, the differences between local authorities and the organisation of different professional groups within them, becomes of importance. While those interviewed support the view that local government is homogenous and might be treated as one organisation, the differences in culture over matters such as outsourcing and competitive tendering are important in identifying the nature of the commitment. The view of those interviewed was that Conservative ran authorities, which retained features of the contract culture era, were more likely to seek a commitment from employees based on a form of continuance or compliance.

## **Commercialism and its Impact on the Public Service Ethos**

Certainly, the viewpoint mentioned above raises the question of the effects of commercialism and CCT on the public service ethos. These effects may be viewed as being quite considerable concerning the impact on work relationships, the role of professional staff and the disruption of clear career paths for expert staff. One view of this impact, representative of the majority of interviewees, was given by one Chief Officer who stated:

*“In my view the trading account culture and other so-called reforms, such as CCT and local government review, dismantled the principle of public service and turned all professionals into fee-earners or managers mimicking the heartless commercialism of the private sector. Putting money first and not people is not the role of the public service”.*

Another Chief Officer echoed this sentiment:

*“Working in public service as a work ethos and career motivator is finished with the fragmentation of local government. Some day all services will have been outsourced under Best Value which will mean introspective professionals acting as quasi-consultants interested only in profit, service to the community will have no relevance”.*

All those interviewed recognised the imperfections of local government and the aspects of self-seeking professionalism recognised to be part of the culture of local councils. However, despite this view, those interviewed believe that a public service ethos exists which recognises the importance of local government in promoting a sense of community and local democracy. As Kingdom (1992) states, local government has a duty to ensure that: *“Faith in the professions must also be restored”*. Often the service ideal has been promoted as a mitigating factor or accommodation for local government professionals to the inequity of public versus private sector pay. It has also often been used as an excuse for the pursuit of their own welfare under the guise of being gatekeepers of the public good. The legal professionals interviewed recognised that promoting their belief in the public service ethos is in their own self-interest and it is apparent that they believe that their interpretation of the public interest is the only valid one. Other criticism’s of professionalism concentrates more on their focus on uniformities of accepted practice than on local choice; that they are more concerned with established expertise than with the pressures of political involvement; and, that they focus more on particular functions than on the wide ranging needs of the community. Professionalism seen in this way could be said to challenge the key purpose, values and attributes of both the public service ideal and local government. The public service ethos may be a reality for some professionals in local government, but there must be doubt whether it has acted in the past as a unifying force for the professions. It certainly seems to have failed as a means of providing customer responsiveness and cost-effective services to each authorities’ local community.

## **The Changing Nature of Commitment in Local Government**

This research has found that the, different forms of commitment used in this study, can be found, to different degrees, in local government. Those interviewed have suggested that many professional staff employed in the 1980s exhibited an attachment to local government based on exchange (involvement in return for extrinsic reward) while other staff recruited in earlier years retained the moral attachment where organisational involvement is based on value congruence (between the individual and the organisation), (Kelman, 1958; Becker, 1960). The reason given for this change has been given by the majority of those interviewed as a deliberate attempt to employ professional and managerial staff from the commercial sector throughout the 1980s. In part the reason for this was the repopulation of local government by staff whose skills and knowledge of commercial practice were required in response to the introduction of internal markets and Compulsory Competitive Tendering. These newcomers brought with them a predilection to a form of commitment based on exchange of involvement for extrinsic rewards. As a means of changing the wider culture of local government this process seemed

to have some success with the centrality of the psychological bond linking the individual and the organisation changing causing a new form of commitment to local government. Further evidence of this new commitment has been indicated, by those interviewed, as being symbolised by the increased salaries of senior managers and professionals within local government, particularly amongst those recruited from the commercial sector. Using the typology of employee commitment used by Jaros et al. (1993) the questionnaires and evidence of those interviewed informed this. A table of the type of commitment most likely to be found amongst the different age and service tenure groups used in this study was produced, as shown below:

Types of Commitment	Up to 40 years Over 5 years	Up to 40 years Less than 5 years	Less than 40 years Over 5 years	Less than 40 years Less than 5 years
Type 1 continuance commitment	Less Likely	More Likely	Less Unlikely	More Likely
Type 2 affective commitment	More Likely	Least Unlikely	More Likely	Least Unlikely
Type 3 moral commitment	Highly Likely	Less Unlikely	Highly Likely	Less Unlikely

Commitment type 1 - where the employee feels compelled to commit to the organisation because the monetary, social, psychological and other costs associated with leaving are high;

Commitment type 2 - commitment based on an emotional bond; and,

Commitment type 3 - based on internalisation of norms and identification with organisational authority; the degree to which an individual is psychologically attached to an employing organisation through the internalisation of its goals, values and mission.

As O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that each of these dimensions of commitment (i) compliance; (ii) identification; and, (iii) internalised; are threatened by any process of organisational change, which may alter the nature of the relationship between individual and organisation, the possibility of movement between these dimensions may be possible. The changes in local governments core underlying values in the 1980s, created by the introduction of commercialism was seen by many professional staff to pose a significant threat to the internalised commitment they felt. The introduction of a commercial ethos in place of the traditional public service ethos was perceived to be a threat to the shared values on which such internalised commitment is based.

As those interviewed revealed, despite this significant cultural change, the majority of them sought to embrace the new compliance commitment to a greater or lesser extent. This acceptance was in response to the realisation

that resistance to the preparation for Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) and the cost-cutting exercises in local government of the late 1980s early 1990s, was pointless. As such, it is not surprising to find that those staff recruited in the 1980s who evidence compliance commitment have also been affected by changes in identification and internalised commitment, and the dissolution of shared values between the individual and the organisation, caused by the change from CCT to Best Value. Those interviewed have suggested that this change has reduced the commitment to local government amongst those individuals' whose principal attachment is compliance based. In future change strategies the techniques used in overcoming the barriers to change will have to emphasise the need to ensure continued employee commitment in times of change, even where such commitment may rely on a radically different relationship between organisation and individual (Legge, 1995). The findings of this paper provide some hope in that in many instances continued commitment is possible, even if it requires a new form of commitment between the organisation and its employees, based on an interpretation of the new organisational values and practices acceptable to the majority of employees.



## Conclusion

Clearly, a concerted effort was made in the 1980s and 1990s to change the culture of local government and with it the work and service ethos of the local government employee.

The findings in this study provide evidence to support the contention that even where change is fundamental and affects the organisation's core values, it is possible to find individuals retaining their original values, despite the imposition of new cultural values. At the same time, the basis of the core constituents of organisational commitment, whether based on internalised commitment, compliance commitment or affective commitment can, from the evidence found here, be eroded during a process of change, with implications for all forms. The almost inevitable outcome from this latter process is one of alienation and eventually departure from the organisation by some or other means.

As all these forms of commitment can be positively associated with behaviours essential for the successful implementation of cultural change, the failure to offer some kind of opportunity for engaging employees and obtaining their commitment, has serious implications for the organisation. While encouraging internalised commitment clearly causes managers problems, due to the complexity of the values involved, it is believed by those interviewed to be the most effective and enduring form of commitment. Those employees whose values were once congruent with those of the organisation will be forever lost in terms of internalised commitment following fundamental change to the organisation, unless efforts are made to consult them on both the process and objectives of the change. This also has serious implications for the organisation, given the argument that employees originally holding the highest levels of internalised commitment will probably occupy senior positions within the hierarchy (the pro-social, extra-role behaviours associated with such commitment having been instrumental in gaining promotion for such employees). Many of the techniques advanced in the literature for ensuring continued employee commitment in the face of change do not address the fundamental nature of these problems. For example, increased employee involvement in the change process may increase understanding and lessen uncertainty, but if employees' personally held values do not concur with the new value system within the organisation, then such approaches will do little or nothing to restore internalised commitment. Similarly, the use of informal leaders and methods aimed at convincing employees of the need for change do not address the core issue 'of ensuring value congruence between employees and the organisation'. It can be argued that such techniques may be successful where change affects the level of work practices, but does not disturb underlying organisational values. In such cases, logic and understanding of the need for change are required, to ensure continued commitment. However, when the change occurs at the level of values, more fundamental approaches are required. The aim of these must be the re-establishment of internalised commitment, not its continuance (as, by its very nature, this is not possible). Such approaches are likely to include intense periods of employee socialisation. However, it remains distinctly possible that

some employees will find that the mismatch between their own personal values and the new organisational values is an unbridgeable gap. For such employees, future commitment will be based on compliance and identification, which carry their own implications for employee performance.

One hope is that the new forms of local governance implemented through the Local Government Act (2000) together with the Best Value concept, will refocus the commitment of local government professionals on the ideal of service to their local community.

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