

MEASURING SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC SERVICES

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Abstract

This study used the 'delivery paradox' (Blaug *et al.* 2006, p.6) as a catalyst to examine customer satisfaction with the public services. The 'delivery paradox' exists where the rise in the level of delivery improvements does not elicit a corresponding rise in public satisfaction with services (*ibid.*). Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory underpins the measurement of customer satisfaction. However, a review of the literature by MORI (2002) concluded that whilst expectations are known to be shaped by many factors, the role of expectations in affecting satisfaction ratings was confused and over-simplified. This study explored the factors that influence public service customers' expectations, how expectations changed over time and what effect this had on satisfaction. The study used the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as a case study. The sample was drawn from users of Jobcentre Plus. The method used longitudinal interviews over a six-month period, to explore customers' experiences, expectations and satisfaction. Semi-structured telephone interviews with 20 DWP staff members were also carried out to examine how the DWP collects, collates and distributes information on customer satisfaction and complaints.

The study does not support the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory as the dominant model of measurement of customer satisfaction. Although expectations were an important factor, particularly in the initial stages of the relationship with Jobcentre Plus, in isolation they were not the main driver of satisfaction over time. Instead it was an interplay of expectations and orientation towards motherhood or employment that indicated the likelihood of a satisfactory outcome or not. Customers defined themselves in negative, collective terms but demanded a service that reflected individuality. Misinterpretation of service terms, such as 'personal' adviser contributed to dissatisfaction with the service. Personal advisers delivered a service based on negative, collective preconceptions of what the customer desired. The findings indicate redefining service terms in order to eliminate misinterpretation. Furthermore, moving from a traditional expectation based model of customer satisfaction to a process based one, established on negotiated and agreed inputs, outputs and outcomes, is recommended. Overall this work supports and contributes to the development of personalized services within public sector organizations.

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Abbreviations

BOC	Better Off Calculation
CTC	Child Tax Credit
DOA	Desirable Outcome Assumption
DSS	Department of Social Security
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EDT	Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory
FC	Family Credit
HCD	Human Capital Development
IS	Income Support
IWC	In Work Credit
JSA	Job Seekers Allowance
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
QWFI	Quarterly Work Focused Interview
UC	Universal Credit
WFA	Work First Approach
WFI	Work Focused Interview
WFTC	Working Families Tax Credit
WTC	Working Tax Credit

Chapter 1 Measuring satisfaction with public services: A case study of the Department for Work and Pensions

1.1 Introduction

Consumer satisfaction is a powerful driver of change. However, it can also deliver confusing messages. Chief among them is what is here termed the 'delivery paradox,' in which objective improvements in service provision fail to register change in consumer satisfaction.

Blaug *et al.* (2006, p.36)

The genesis of study stems from a paradox, an inconsistency in cause and effect. In the past decade public spending has increased by 83%¹. Despite this investment there has been little significant change in reported satisfaction with the public services. In the last decade, apart from minor fluctuations, the police service, education and transport have recorded no change in service user satisfaction (Blaug *et al.* 2006, p.15). The health service reports a similar situation with a rise in satisfaction only evident in its in-patient service (*ibid*). More detrimentally, local government has reported a decrease in the level of satisfaction reported by its customers (*ibid*). Similarly, satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus has continued to decrease, with a rising number of service users expressing low satisfaction despite spending on welfare increasing by 69%² (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: *Service user satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus*

Year	2005	2007	2009
Service users expressing satisfaction	*86%	*80%	*75%
Service users expressing low satisfaction	*8%	*11%	*12%

Source: Sanderson et al. 2005; Johnson and Fidler, 2008; Thomas et al. 2010 (respectively)

This decline in satisfaction remains even when targets are met, with expectations of improvements in service in the future also affected (Blaug, *et al.* 2006, p.36).

¹ Comparison of public sector spending 2000-2010 (Yearly budget figures)

² Comparison of public sector spending 2000-2010 (Yearly budget figures)

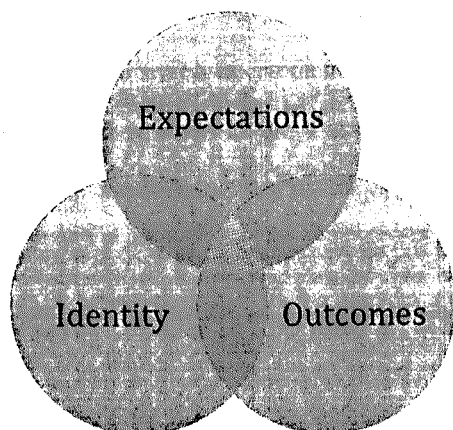
Several reasons for this contradiction have been suggested (Blaug *et al.* 2006, p.36). It is possible that the public are unaware of the service improvements that have been implemented. The notion of insufficient choice is considered also as a possible factor, as are unrealistic expectations of what the service can deliver. Finally, it is suggested, consumer satisfaction has not been considered sufficiently in the delivery of public services. Mortimore and Gill (2004 in Blaug *et al.* 2006, p.37) summarize the paradox as existing because “the public does not believe in, or does not know about, objective improvements in service quality” concluding that “communication of success is politically as important as the policy success itself”. In essence the paradox is said to exist through service user ignorance as opposed to service failure.

This study is a collaborative award with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Although the thesis is a study of measuring satisfaction with the public services, to enable meaningful investigation, a case study approach was taken and the DWP was the site of investigation. Diversity within the service users of the DWP meant that further narrowing down of the population occurred resulting in the selection of users of Jobcentre Plus. From this, and in consultation with DWP representatives, ideal criteria of service users were isolated. The criteria used were the potential to return a good sample size and stability of organizational structure, based upon known political reforms. Adhering to these criteria, the most suitable population was lone parents. Alongside service user interviews were interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff, both front line and management.

1.2 Theoretical framework – Core themes

The theoretical framework was informed by a methodical literature review (see Chapter Three, section 3.2). The research questions were used to identify keywords that formed the preliminary search terms. Initial findings identified three core concepts that were consistently returned in the search results (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Core concepts affecting satisfaction (author's own representation)

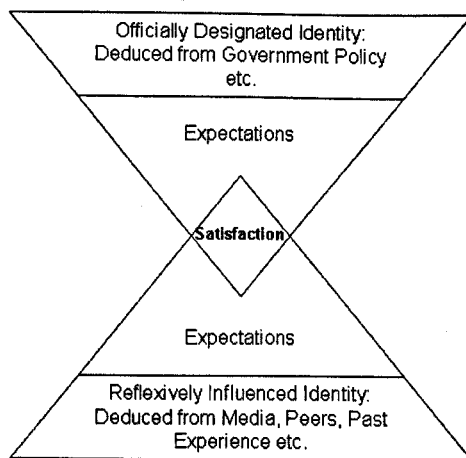


The importance of expectations in the experience of (dis)satisfaction emerged as a primary concept. The dominant theory of this theme, as applied to measuring satisfaction, is the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). This theory revolves around the relationship between prior expectations and the actualization of the experience. However, in much of the research literature or survey data (Purdon, 1997; Sanderson *et al.* 2005) the focus is on the present condition and points of view of the service users. Little attention is paid to what shapes initial expectations and, consequently, what the implications of this are for the way in which the public services present themselves and the way this presentation can influence indirectly satisfaction ratings. It is this gap that this research, in part, seeks to fill.

In an organization, such as Jobcentre Plus, where repeat visits are inevitable for the majority of service users, the overall outcome of the process of service use exerts a significant amount of influence on both expectations and, consequently, satisfaction. This was evident in the results returned through the literature review. The recent Freud (2007) report recommended the formulation of an outcome-based model to assess interventions in the labour market. Furthermore, contracting out provision for the hardest-to-help users of the employment service was to be on the grounds of outcomes rather than on the merits of the processes by which the service is to be administered. Despite this emphasis on outcomes, evidence of the interaction of expectations and outcomes is scarce, particularly in relation to services provided by DWP. The complex interactions between the service provider, service recipient, expectations and outcomes may be an off-putting factor. Furthermore, competing theories state the primacy of process (input-output-outcome) over just overall outcome of an encounter.

A further core concept that has emerged through the review of the literature is that of identity assessment and formulation. Recent research has revealed a juxtaposition between the way in which the Government promotes the identity of the public and the way in which the public perceive themselves as users of the public services (Clarke *et al.* 2007, pp.121-138). This research demonstrated that the majority of the public failed to see themselves as customers or consumers of public services despite this being the official title used in Government policy and literature. Explanations of the extent to which this disparity contributes towards the satisfaction clash (see Figure 1.2) between Government expectations of the service user as ‘customer’ (as perceived by the individual) and the expectations formed from identification as service user other than ‘customer’ would contribute to this debate.

Figure 1.2: *Top-down, Bottom-up; opposing identities and their effect on the service users perception of satisfaction (author’s own representation)*



Furthermore, the service users approached in this research, lone parents, also exercise identity formation based on social context rather than only that ascribed to them by government policy. This is based upon beliefs about the mothering role held by significant members of their immediate network as well as their own beliefs.

1.2.1 Sub-concepts affecting satisfaction

Examination of the three core concepts; expectations, outcomes and identity revealed a further concept that influenced both the formation and expression of satisfaction. Knowledge acquisition did not appear to directly contribute to perceptions of satisfaction but it was

implicated in the literature, particularly in relation to the use of qualitative methodologies. In the first instance, the way that knowledge of any given subject is formed and utilized suggests implications for its measurement. Whether expectations are embedded in a wider discourse of the knowledge of the individual, essentially falling into the category of 'tacit knowledge' is an important question, as is if existing measures of satisfaction are then able to reach it. Gourley's appraisal of this theory offers a comprehensive definition claiming that 'tacit knowledge is a non-linguistic non-numerical form of knowledge that is highly personal and context specific and deeply rooted in individual experiences, ideas, values and emotions' (2002, p.2). The originator of this theory, Polanyi, expressed tacit knowledge in a far simpler way saying 'we know more than we can tell' (1967, p.4). Polanyi suggests that access to this information is possible. Using the example of police e-fits, he demonstrates that an individual may not be able to articulate how they recognize a particular face but, given the constituent parts that make up a face, will be able to construct a likeness that expresses their knowledge (ibid, pp.4-5). The success of this process of extracting tacit knowledge is, Polanyi asserts, dependent upon co-operation between those seeking to extrapolate such tacit knowledge and those attempting to impart it (ibid). In this way then, although the individual may not be able to recognize and articulate their tacit knowledge, given the right tools and prompts they will be able to communicate their inner beliefs or thoughts on a subject. If this is so, the question of the reliability of current methods of measuring levels of satisfaction needs to be explored to determine if they can appraise this 'tacit' knowledge and identify factors that affect expectations. If they are not equipped to identify such knowledge how can other non-codified intangibles, which may be linked to expectation formation (such as health, well being, and personal circumstances), be expressed by the individual and how can these links be defined? If such issues can be demonstrated the dominant discourses, such as EDT and traditional methods of measuring service user satisfaction, that often rely upon mass produced survey style questionnaires, may not be appropriate for accurate and applicable methods of measuring satisfaction.

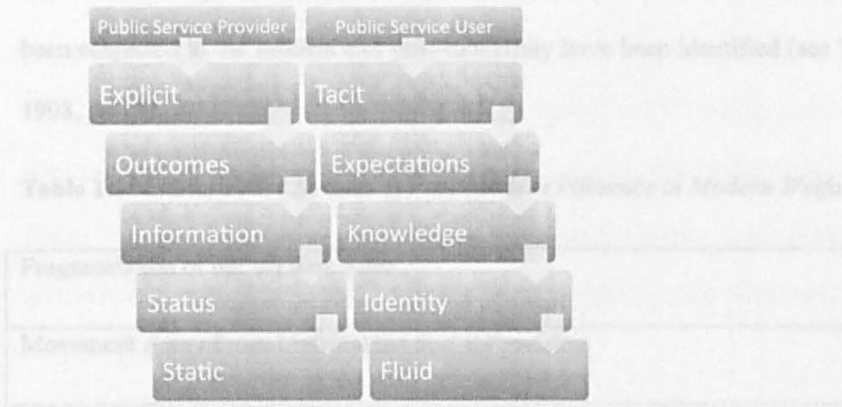
Across all of these themes the concept of time resonates. Examining expectations, a gap in the satisfaction literature regarding the importance of past influences was evident. Furthermore, the EDT model relies on notions of expectations predicted for the future. Moreover, in terms of

outcomes, the repetitive nature of the service users of Jobcentre Plus is significant. This becomes even more so when the notion of outcomes is contextualized within a process of interaction such as an input-output-outcome model. These service users may be engaging with the service for many years. Furthermore the overall outcome from one encounter will inevitably affect the way in which users approach future ones.

Finally, public service user identity changes across time. Identities such as claimant and client have now been confined to history but their existence in the past will have influenced perceptions of service users in the present. In addition, self-identity ascribed to an individual's role as public service user, may also have its roots in the past through family history or media representation. This element of exploring change over time is evident in public service research that aims to explore factors that impact on the effectiveness of programmes or interventions (for example Corden and Nice, 2006; Graham *et al.* 2005). In these cases, the same service users are interviewed on several occasions, sometimes over the course of years; in order that factors contributing to productive engagement, or not, with an intervention can be isolated. Similarly, when measuring satisfaction, surveys are administered periodically to different cross-sections of service users, in order that the level of satisfaction with the service can be monitored (in relation to Jobcentre Plus see Sanderson *et al.* 2005; Johnson and Fidler, 2008; Thomas *et al.* 2010). However, what fails to occur is longitudinal analysis of a panel in order to establish continuing trends of satisfaction with the service amongst the same group of people. In terms of measuring satisfaction current methods only take a snapshot at a particular time meaning that when inconsistencies, such as the delivery paradox, occur it is difficult to isolate the factors that are driving the phenomena. Therefore, the longitudinal element of this study is considered important, both in terms of methodology and analysis.

A further marker that informed the conceptual framework was the appearance of a pattern between groupings of these main and sub-concepts. Grouping these together revealed a dichotomy between the concepts (see Figure 1.3):

Figure 1.3: Sub-concepts of measuring satisfaction with the public services (author's own representation)



This grouping is used to illustrate the difficulties that exist in the measurement of satisfaction with the public services. It is not intended to imply that the concepts are divisible from one another. Synthesizing themes that seem to be contradictory can be problematic but it is within such analysis that factors contributing to the paradox are likely to be found.

1.2.2 Post-modern perspectives

It is difficult to offer an exact definition of post-modernity, its existence and what its implications are for political enquiry. The era can be viewed as being defined by fragmentation and individualism (Lyotard, 1979, p.15). Although this definition was conceived three decades ago, the traits are evident in contemporary public policy. For instance, a welfare policy review report compiled by Freud advocated fragmentation of service provision alongside increased individual responsibility (2007, pp.51-66) demonstrating the existence of post-modern thinking in recent policy. Boyne and Rattansi insist that the post-modern is 'political' and that its discourse revolves around questions of "how social relations should be organized and lived...about the social possibilities of our age" (1990, p.23). Conflict over post-modernity's existence is common in social and political circles. However, commentators note that "Even without ruling on the 'late' versus 'post'-modernism conundrum... what we used to call the welfare state has passed through *something*" (Carter, 1998, p.2).

In attempting to reflect the reality that exists in exploring satisfaction with public services Rosenau advises a rejection of 'positivist, philosophically materialist or objective' content for one composed of 'philosophically idealist, relative and subjective' approaches (1991, p.111).

Similarly the advancement of teleological explanations; taking into consideration the unconscious processes experienced by the individual, are appropriate also given the exposure of tacit knowledge (Rosenau, 1991, p.113). Five broad areas in welfare provision that have been subjected to the influence of post-modernity have been identified (see Table 1.2) (Carter, 1998, pp.171-173).

Table 1.2: *Clarke's Five Strands of Post-Modern Influence in Modern Welfare Provision*

Fragmentation of the Welfare State
Movement Away From Universalist Social Provision
Decline of Traditional Forms Of Authority
Abandonment of Conceptions of Social Progress Through The Welfare State
Intellectual Instabilities of Contemporary Social Policy

Source: adapted from Clarke in Carter, 1998, p.171-173

Carter describes the post-modern era as being one in which 'the customer is empowered' (1998, p.8). Certainly, in terms of governmental policy, 'the customer' has been empowered *in principle*. But something has been lost in translation, as the work on public service user identity by Clarke *et al.* (2007) demonstrates. Individuals are choosing to adopt identities that are reflected in the transactions that occur with the public service providers rather than be assimilated into identities prescribed by the state. Carter maintains that this process is directly attributable to characteristics that are representative of the post-modern condition insisting that:

People themselves are also less predictable and are no longer tethered to permanent or absolute identities. The post-modern self is multifaceted and collaged from a person's multiple locations and attributes. Moreover, these identities are also subjective constructions-designer lifestyles-chosen by the wearer rather than imposed by the sociologist or policy planner.

Carter (1998, p.8)

Sarap also agrees with this position reiterating that post-modernity accentuates disparate types of 'individual and social' identities that are embedded in the language of the era (1993, p.130).

Furthermore, post-modernism is described as the by-product of 'late capitalist modifications, in which citizens are told they are being given choice, options and power when these are legitimations of restriction, regulation and disciplining' (Carter, 1998, p.38). This post-modern perspective on identities is important given that they have emerged from the literature as an important theme affecting expectations and satisfaction. By focusing attention on the changes that are taking place in the post-modern self; in group and individual identities and lifestyles, policy makers are forced to look beyond conventional notions of dominant identities and accommodate the possibility of multiple identities that are interchangeable between contexts (Carter, 1998, pp.39-44).

The methodology for this study is indicative of the post-modern approach to exploring social phenomena. Lyotard stated "Simplifying to the extreme, I define post-modern as incredulity toward meta-narratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn pre-supposes it" (Lyotard, 1979, p.xxiv). The highly universalist nature of social policy, according to Fitzpatrick (2001, p.177), has left the discipline vulnerable to the belief of "universal human nature and universal human goals", a pursuit that has resulted in a distorted conception of social identity, desirable outcomes and welfare provision. The social world has become progressively more fragmented and diverse, characteristics that are difficult to encompass in the meta-narratives that have become evident through history. From a post-modernist perspective, governments have acknowledged this also, to an extent, moving from one-size-fits all policies to made to measure solutions aimed at the individual service user (OPSR, 2002; DWP, 2005a). Contemporary interpretations of Lyotard's work have identified his preference for "small, localized narratives" as opposed to the meta-narratives he rejects (Ritzer, 1996, p.610). This study engages with an intense examination of the experiences of a few service users by engaging in in-depth rich narratives as opposed to higher volume but more superficial enquiries.

1.3 Aims and research questions

The aims of this study are:

- To confirm the existence of the delivery paradox and explore the factors contributing to it.

- To examine the role of expectations in determining satisfaction, identifying factors that influence expectations and that elicit change; to assess expectations within the interaction with process, overall outcomes and satisfaction.
- To establish perceptions of identity in the relationship, both of recipient and provider, and how this affects expectations.
- To explore the existing method of collection and utilization of service user satisfaction data in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and particularly in relation to Jobcentre Plus; to evaluate existing measures of satisfaction.

From this starting point sub-themes for examination were identified; those of recipient expectations and identities and their interaction with organizational processes and overall outcomes and existing departmental practices. The themes are expanded and explored through further breakdown of these main areas;

1. Recipient expectations and identities and their interaction with organizational processes and overall outcomes

- i. How are initial expectations of the service formed? What influences those perceptions?
- ii. How do service users see themselves in the relationship? Does this influence their expectations?
- iii. How important are the notions of processes and 'overall' outcome in the formation of expectations? How do processes and overall outcomes interact with notions of satisfaction?
- iv. How do expectations change over time for DWP users and what effect, if any, does this have on satisfaction ratings? What factors change the expectations?
- v. Are there any other common factors that influence expectations, satisfaction or overall outcomes?

2. Existing departmental practices

- i. How do staff within DWP collect, analyze, interpret and report service user satisfaction data?

- ii. What concepts, models or theories underpin the use of service user satisfaction surveys in the DWP?
- iii. How do managers utilize service user satisfaction data?
- iv. What is revealed about the relationship with the service user through existing practice?

Individual analysis of the two lines of enquiry will allow for an in-depth exploration of influential factors whilst a synthesis of the two will reveal inconsistencies in the perspectives and offer further areas to explore.

1.4 Methodological approach

Taking into account the concepts to be explored and the theoretical framework adopted longitudinal, qualitative semi-structured interviews with public service users and staff were selected. Interviews with service users were face-to-face in-depth explorations whilst those with staff were of much shorter duration and carried out over the telephone (see Chapter 3). Both involved a topic guide to ensure that key areas of enquiry were covered. Service user interviews were encouraged to digress from the confines of the topic guide in order that every chance to probe tacit opinions was taken. However, this guide was adhered to more rigidly with the staff interviews due to the time constraints on the interview imposed by the DWP.

The thesis includes the verbatim quotes of service users in order to illustrate the key points being made. These quotes have been 'smoothed' in order to make them more readable.

1.4.1 Fieldwork sites

At the time of the study a pilot of In-work Credit (IWC) was being carried out. This was to be rolled out nationally later on in the year. It was therefore decided to carry out the fieldwork in an existing IWC area in order that results could then be generalized to other areas, as they become part of the national roll out. Due to an unanticipated change in sample recruitment method (see section 1.4.2 and 3.6.1) it became necessary to locate the fieldwork in a district easily accessible to the interviewer. Two Jobcentre Plus offices located within the chosen county were selected using a computer generated random selection and permission to work within the offices was granted.

As the staff interviews were to be conducted over the telephone more flexibility of location was possible. Once again, areas that were part of the IWC pilot were listed and then using computer generated random selection four Jobcentre Plus districts were chosen. The district that had been used for customer recruitment was added to this list making five districts in total. The DWP non-academic supervisor for the study then provided a named contact in each district that, in turn, provided the contact details of four staff members who had consented to take part in the study. In all twenty members of staff were interviewed.

1.4.2 Service user respondents: Recruitment

Access to service users was to have been through a list of eligible participants generated by the DWP. However, unforeseen circumstances forced a change in recruitment to a canvassed quota sample. This entailed waiting within the designated Jobcentre Plus offices and approaching service users who were likely to be eligible for the study. This was made easier by being able to canvass in areas designated for lone parents waiting for their interview with their adviser. Cascade cards were left also on lone parent adviser desks in order that advisers could refer customers to the study in the absence of the interviewer in the office. On approaching the service user a short survey was administered to confirm their eligibility to take part in the study and to gauge their current level of satisfaction with the service. In this way thirty service users were recruited to take part in the study. This personal approach, although costly in terms of time and resources, enabled a personal relationship to be formed with the service users that resulted in a final retention rate of 97%.

1.4.3 Data collection

The 30 service users were interviewed over three waves. The first took place within a week of recruitment to the study, with the second and third wave taking place three and six months later respectively. Interviews were conducted in the service users' home. The first interview included an in depth personal history covering, for example, family background and academic achievement. This allowed for comparative analysis with known lone parent statistics to gauge how typical the sample was. Questions of general satisfaction, identical to those on the Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Surveys (Sanderson *et al.* 2005; Johnson and Fidler, 2008; Thomas *et al.* 2010), were asked as mapping questions, to establish current levels

of satisfaction and map change over time, and to compare to the nationally surveyed population. Service users were asked for retrospective accounts of expectations of and actual first encounters of Jobcentre Plus and Work Focused Interviews (WFIs). Their current experiences were also probed, as were their opinions of the future both service expectations and work aspirations. They were asked then about their experiences of complaining behaviour in a traditional consumer encounter, such as in a shop or restaurant. Finally, they were asked what identity they would ascribe to themselves as a user of Jobcentre Plus. Interviews varied in length between one and two hours.

The second interview repeated the mapping questions to inform the analysis of change in satisfaction over time. Any incidents of deviations from the previous level of satisfaction were probed to isolate the factors why change had occurred. They were asked if they had undertaken any work since the last interview and about any contact they had had with Jobcentre Plus. They were then given the opportunity to talk about any changes in their budgeting practices that may be because of the deepening recession. The interview concluded with their thoughts on what constituted good and bad customer service. Interviews lasted up to an hour.

The final interview, once again, started with the mapping questions designed to monitor changes in satisfaction over the course of the study. Once again any deviations from previous opinions were probed. As before encounters with Jobcentre Plus in the intervening months were described, including asking if the meeting had lived up to their expectations. In order to detach the influential factors in expectation formation, service users were asked directly what they thought influenced their perception of satisfaction. They were asked about their knowledge of complaining procedure at Jobcentre Plus and if they had ever complained. As previous interviews had uncovered difficulties in service users articulating the concept of overall outcome they were asked to compare what they perceived to be the overall outcome of their relationship with Jobcentre Plus with what they saw as the ideal overall outcome for Jobcentre Plus staff. Finally, contextual information was gathered regarding the marital and employment status of the service users' parents in the past and present. Service users were asked about their experiences and memories of the welfare system prior to the launch of Jobcentre Plus. These final interviews lasted between one and two hours.

The 20 staff interviews were carried out over a six-week period. At the beginning of each interview the respondent was asked about their job title and role. This was to see if gaps in their knowledge were attributable to their departmental role as opposed to poor communication within Jobcentre Plus. Four main areas of interest were explored. Firstly respondents were asked if they were aware of, or had been involved in, any satisfaction measurement that had been generated from within their local office. If they were, details of this initiative were collected and explored. Secondly, they were asked about their knowledge of district initiatives to measure satisfaction with any affirmative answers provoking a request for details. Respondents were asked to talk about their experiences of the mystery shopper exercise that every local office is periodically subject to. Thirdly, respondents were questioned on their knowledge of national initiatives such as the Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey. Finally, procedures for capturing service user complaints and compliments were explored. In each of these areas respondents were asked about the way that the information was collected, analyzed and disseminated and if they were circulated to service users as well as staff members. They were also questioned on changes in working practice that had occurred because of each of these types of service user satisfaction measurement.

1.5 Analytic approach: Longitudinal research

The data from Jobcentre Plus service user interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. The first wave analysis used a thematic framework comprised of known factors, for example previous, present and future expectations, and once these had been catalogued and numerically tagged emergent themes were layered onto the existing framework. The data were then combed for inconsistencies or verbal signals that indicated the presence of tacit knowledge or belief. Data collected from the subsequent interviews used this fuller thematic framework as its starting point for comparison, including longitudinal comparison. Data that fell outside of the framework were factored in to inform an enhanced thematic grid for the final wave of interviews. This process was repeated for the final wave of interview data. Numerical tagging across waves allowed for easier comparisons within and across themes. As far as was possible data was retained for analysis in the original structure of the transcript so that contextual nuances were not lost by removing chunks of text into a sterile, generic document prior to writing up.

As with the service user interviews, staff interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. Similarly a thematic framework, comprised of known themes, for example service user complaints, was initially used to organize the data. Emergent themes, and inconsistencies or verbal signals that may be indicative of tacit content, were added then to the framework and corresponding data was catalogued and numerically tagged for ease of access. Once again data were kept in the context of the complete transcript.

Analysis occurred then across the service user and staff interviews. This was important in order to find areas to support or refute the statements made by either party.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two introduces the key theoretical debates that have informed the study. The measurement of satisfaction is put into a historical context, charting its evolution from a private sector attempt to increase sales, to a public sector effort to ensure quality in the delivery of services to the general public. The continued importance of, and resistance to, longitudinal methods of measuring satisfaction within the public sector is debated and the flaws in those studies that have attempted it discussed. The focus narrows onto measures of satisfaction used by Jobcentre Plus and subsequently reflects on the policy changes exacted on lone parents that may have affected their ability to report objectively on service satisfaction. After this specific, contextual overlay of the public services in general, and sample population in particular, the core theoretical debates informing satisfaction are presented. The core concepts are expectations, knowledge, identity and outcomes. The transition from an outcome focus to a focus on processes is also charted. This chapter concludes with a summary of key themes and implications for the study.

Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the methodology used for the study. The steps taken to ensure a thorough literature review are recalled. The main method of data collection, qualitative interviews, is introduced, as are its advantages and disadvantages. Details of the service user sample and recruitment are given as well as the difficulties that were encountered and their ramifications. An analysis of the geographic location of the study, sample population and current satisfaction rates of the sample are given in order to gauge how typical the sample is. Similarly, the selection of staff respondents is detailed. Given the nature of the methods

employed a full account of the ethical and safety considerations is given. The topic guides used for both service user and staff interviews are detailed, as are the reassessments and revisions that occurred as the study continued. Steps taken in the analysis of the data and the overall lessons learned conclude the chapter.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of the experience as part of a process of inputs, outputs and outcomes as well as service users perspective on overall outcomes. The overwhelming feeling, projected from the majority of service users, of no visible overall outcomes as the result of their engagement with the service, opens the discussion of findings. This leads onto a theory of service user classification based on the hitherto neglected factor of the orientation towards motherhood or employment. Classification typologies are developed, including how these classifications affect the reported level of satisfaction for different service users. The chapter continues with a discussion of who benefitted from the service most, the user or the provider. Following this the concept of 'Desirable Outcome Assumptions' (DOAs) is introduced as a new model that has emerged from the data. A discussion of satisfaction levels from a longitudinal perspective follows. Finally the chapter is summarized and the implication of the findings for existing theories is considered.

Chapter Five relates the experiences, expectations and satisfaction reported by the service users of Jobcentre Plus. The chapter begins with retrospective accounts of the academic achievements and early aspirations of the service users. This retrospective continues with an analysis of service users' initial expectations as influenced by family and friends, memories of the Department of Social Security (DSS) and first experiences of Jobcentre Plus and the WFI. Moving on chronologically to the present, the service users' comments on the current economic climate and personal perspectives on returning to work, and the way that it influences expectations are discussed. This leads into a discussion about what the service users expect from the service and what they believe the service expects of them. This links to an aspect of the typologies presented in Chapter Four. Future expectations are then probed. In the penultimate section, the longitudinal trajectory of users' expectations and satisfaction are plotted. The chapter concludes with comparisons of the data generated with known theories and concepts.

Chapter Six explores identity as a service user. The importance of identity is discussed before the multiple perspectives that exist as a service user are introduced and analyzed. Perspectives that emerged were that of other service users, self-identity, opinion of staff perceptions and identity as a lone parent. The differences experienced as being a 'customer' at Jobcentre Plus as compared to a customer in a private transaction is debated. Issues such as reciprocity, choice and tangibility are discussed. Opinions of complaining behaviour both private and public sectors are presented followed by the longitudinal take on identity. The summary and conclusions bring to a close the chapter.

Chapter Seven contains the analysis of the data collected from Jobcentre Plus staff. The chapter begins by probing objective opinions by recounting Jobcentre Plus staff recollections of any local initiatives to measure satisfaction in their offices. It continues with an analysis of the information given regarding the mystery shopper exercise, the national customer satisfaction survey and customer complaints. The chapter continues with the evidence given of changes implemented because of service user feedback. Subjective opinions are then explored, giving the respondents a chance to comment on the value of existing measures of service user satisfaction. This section continues with a cross comparison of service and staff opinions highlighting areas of consensus and contention. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings and conclusions drawn from the evidence presented by staff of Jobcentre Plus.

Chapter Eight draws together the individual conclusions of the preceding chapters and offers overarching rationale of the findings. It demonstrates the success of the study in fulfilling the research aims, filling gaps in existing research and offering suggestions for future investigation. It returns to the delivery paradox and highlights the contributions made by this study on explaining the phenomena. It offers then an alternative approach for measuring satisfaction with the public services, that of a process based model. The key points that emerged in relation to identity are presented and examined from service user and service provider perspectives. The role of tacit opinions of service providers in the delivery of DOAs is explored. The suitability of a post-modern theoretical framework, based on the characteristics of the findings, is maintained. Suggestions are made to separate issues of quality from those of satisfaction when undertaking measurement of satisfaction in the public services. The chapter continues with a summary of the key points followed by a discussion of the implications of the

research findings. These are separated into the context of implications for theory and policy, service delivery and development and measuring satisfaction. Limitations of the study and the implications of these are examined and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future theoretical debate, service delivery developments and methods for measuring satisfaction with the public services.

The thesis continues with the literature review, as outlined in the thesis structure above.

Chapter 2 The context of measuring satisfaction with the public services: the relationship of satisfaction with the public services to the wider framework of satisfaction measurement

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature as relevant for the exploration of measuring satisfaction with the public services, specifically Jobcentre Plus and lone parents. This chapter's contribution is in providing a historical, methodological, political and theoretical background for the research. Section 2.2 provides a historical background to measuring satisfaction as developed as an economic business concept and its development into a customer relation exercise. The section continues with an overview of its utilization in the private sphere before reviewing the adaptations that have occurred to fit a private sector framework into the peculiarities of the public sector user. Section 2.3 discusses the particular value of longitudinal methods in measuring satisfaction with public service users and then continues with a discussion of reliable measures of satisfaction with specific reference to Jobcentre Plus. Section 2.4 then narrows down further to explore issues specific to lone parent employment and the changes in policy that have occurred in response. Section 2.5 demonstrates the scope of the theoretical concepts relating to measuring satisfaction, both private and public sector, introducing in more detail the dominant discourses; expectations, knowledge, identity, outcomes and processes. Finally section 2.6 summarizes the key concepts emerging from the literature review and finishes with some concluding remarks.

2.2 Lone parents and unemployment

The catalyst for policy interventions aimed at lone parents was the observation of an increase in the number of married mothers in work that contrasted with a decline in employment rates of lone mothers (Gregg and Harkness, 2003, p.4). This resulted in a gap between the two that remained static until recent policy intervention (Gregg and Harkness, 2003, p.4). Replacing the Family Income Supplement (FIS), Family Credit (FC), introduced in 1988, was designed to complement the income of families with children who had one adult working more than 24 hours per week (Dilnot and McCrae, 2000, p.71). During the next five years minor revisions were made to the scheme that saw the minimum amount of hours worked reduced to 16 and an

additional supplement being provided for those working over 30 hours (Gregg and Harkness, 2003, p.41) but it remained the main incentive to get lone parents and couples with children alike, into work.

The New Labour election victory in 1997 saw major policy reforms based on evidence provided by experimental policy trials in North America (Gregg and Harkness, 2007, p.2; Millar and Rowlingson, 2001). The two main ideas that emerged from the trials were financial incentives that ensured that the option to work was more attractive and help for people in making the transition from welfare to work (ibid). These manifested in British policy in two distinct ways; first of all, through the creation of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). This was rolled out nationally in three phases between July 1997 and October 1998 with the target group being lone parents whose youngest child was aged over five years and three months. The second major change to affect lone parents was the 1999 implementation of Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), which replaced the earlier Family Credit (FC). This benefit was significantly more generous than its predecessor costing the government £2 billion more than was expected under FC (Dilmot and McCrae, 2000, p.72). However, in line with aims of the reform in reducing child poverty, as opposed to the American aim of reducing welfare payments, there was no obligation to seek work. Also, enhanced payments were available for unemployed lone parents and there was no limit to how long an individual could claim benefit payments (Gregg and Harkness, 2007, p.2). In April 2003 WFTC was replaced by Working Tax Credit (WTC) and additionally, for those with parental responsibilities, Child Tax Credits (CTC). In 2010 the coalition government announced that the Universal Credit (UC) would replace WTC, IS and CTC. The integration of the existing tax credits to the UC is anticipated to be complete by 2017 (DWP, 2010b, p.37).

In 2000 NDLP was extended to include all parents whose youngest child was aged 3 years or over and this was followed in 2001 by several changes aimed specifically at getting lone parents into work. The Advisor Discretion Fund (ADF) was implemented which allowed personal advisers to award up to £300 to claimants, for any reason, if it helped them into work. Also at this time the offer of the NDLP scheme was extended to all lone parents on low incomes (Gregg and Harkness, 2003, p.41). Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) were introduced for all existing claimants whose youngest child was aged between 13 and 15 years and all new

claimants whose youngest child was aged five years and three months or over. WFIs are a “compulsory interview with a personal adviser and are intended to promote the benefits of paid employment, as well as encouraging participation in NDLP as a route into work” (Ray *et al.* 2007, p.10). WFIs occurred twice in the first year and then yearly thereafter. Requirement and frequency of WFIs continued to change according to the age of the youngest child until by April 2007 all existing lone parents with a youngest child aged 5-13 years were required to attend six monthly WFIs and from April 2008 all remaining claimants (with a youngest child aged 4 years and under) are also subject to the same regime. In October 2005 Quarterly WFIs (QWFIs) became mandatory for long term (over 12 months) Income Support (IS) claiming lone parents with a youngest child aged 14 years or over with further extension to include those with a youngest child aged 11 years and over as proposed in the Green Paper ‘A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work’ (DWP, 2006, p.16).

Furthermore in 2005 the government released the ‘Five Year Strategy, Opportunity and Security throughout life’ (DWP, 2005a) which detailed a range of incentives to be piloted most notably the Work Search Premium (WSP) and In Work Credit (IWC). WSP provided lone parents who had been on IS for more than a year an additional £20 per week if they voluntarily declared themselves as an active jobseeker whilst IWC paid an additional £40 per week, for a period of one year, following a long term lone parent’s entrance into paid work of 16 hours or more. These incentives were brought together with promises of enhanced support from Jobcentre Plus personal advisers under the ‘Pathways to Work for lone parents’ initiative.

Up until this point all lone parents, regardless of the age of their children were automatically entitled to receive IS until their youngest child reached 16 years of age. However, the Freud report (2007) suggested the previously unheard of step of withdrawing automatic entitlement to IS when a lone parent’s youngest child reached 12 years and the mandatory switching onto Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) with its increased obligations and stringent sanctions (p.17). In addition, further reductions in the age of youngest child would follow (*ibid.*). Later that year and using the Freud report as a basis, the government released its Green Paper ‘In work, better off: next steps to full employment’ (2007a). The resultant white paper, released in December 2007, ‘Ready for Work: full employment in our generation’ (DWP, 2007b) outlined the biggest series of changes to affect lone parents in nearly two decades. These changes were

implemented in order to support the government's aim of 80% employment (DWP, 2007b, p.47).

As a result of this, parents with older children would no longer be entitled to IS 'solely on the grounds of being a lone parent' (DWP, 2007b, p.37). Instead they would be required to change to JSA through a gradual phase-in, based on the age of the youngest child; 12 years and over from October 2008, 10 years and over from October 2009 and 7 years and over from 2010 (ibid). To make this change more palatable, support was pledged also in the form of skills training and advice as well as continuation of job interview guarantees and work trials. Job interview guarantee is a scheme whereby Jobcentre Plus aims to guarantee lone parents who are willing and able to work, a job interview with an employer. Work Trials allow an unemployed person to work for an employer, without loss of benefit, for up to 30 days, to demonstrate their suitability for the job. Furthermore from October 2008, in the year preceding a lone parent's loss of IS, they will be required to attend QWFIs in order that they are ready to become active jobseekers when required to do so (ibid, pp.44-45). Further support available for lone parents starting work was pledged through an enhanced package of in-work support that includes national extension of IWC and national rollout of the In-Work Emergency Discretion Fund. A pilot scheme that would ensure that if lone parents found they were not at least £25 per week better off in work they would be entitled to claim a new credit to raise their income further was also included (ibid).

In July 2008 the government published a Green Paper (DWP, 2008a). In this consultation document they announced an intention, when resources allowed, to move 'all lone parents onto JSA instead of keeping those with young children on IS' (ibid, p.55). However, lone parents with young children would not be required to look for work or take a job until their youngest child was 7 but, by removing the 'inactive' IS and replacing it with JSA would underline the message that 'work is the best way to improve their families prosperity' (ibid). These changes would be commensurate with other proposals to streamline and simplify the benefits system by making JSA the cornerstone of the benefits system that would provide "personalized and dynamic support sensitive to changes in customers circumstances" (ibid, p.56). Furthermore, to facilitate the transition from unemployment, it proposed that lone parents should undertake extra activity as appropriate when their youngest child started in full time education at the age

of five years old (ibid, p.56). Specifically the paper proposed that lone parents would be required, if appropriate, to attend a skills check when their youngest child reached five years (ibid). Also proposed was, following the skills check, a requirement that lone parents attend skills training to address barriers to beginning full-time work in the near future (ibid). For those lone parents with children aged less than five years any voluntary participation in these activities would be rewarded with a premium paid on top of their existing benefit entitlement (ibid).

Also as part of these reforms, a report was commissioned (Gregg, 2008) to evaluate the role that conditionality might play in the latest reform of the welfare system. This report supported the need for personalized conditionality regimes that should be implemented and maintained despite the current economic downturn and rising numbers of people claiming JSA (ibid, p.7). It suggested the need to recognize service users as being one of three groups, a 'work ready' group, a 'progression to work' group and a 'no conditionality' group (ibid, p.8) with a corresponding series of rules based on self-directed steps to ensure a return to work at the soonest possible point in the future (ibid). This was to be achieved through greater 'adviser' flexibility and clearer modes of sanctions for those service users who failed to comply (ibid, pp.8-9).

The resultant White Paper "Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future" published in December 2008 dispelled immediately the possibility of a downturn in conditionality commensurate with the economic downturn declaring that the Government would not repeat the mistakes made in past recessions by lowering the expectations on those claiming benefits (DWP, 2008b, p.10). Furthermore it supported the finding of the Gregg review, accepting the creation of the three new categories of claimants and announced a pilot implementation of personalized conditionality from late 2010 (ibid, pp.13-14). Specifically the report stressed the importance of engaging with lone parents before their youngest child reached the age of seven and proposed a pilot to ascertain what the support would look like for parents with children aged three to six (ibid).

These series of reforms show a sustained and consistent move towards encouraging lone parents back into employment. In a relatively short period of time, sanctions have been employed to remove automatic entitlement to IS based on the age of the youngest child. This

will culminate in full withdrawal of IS for lone parents, based on the age of their youngest child, in the near future.

2.3 Measuring customer satisfaction: Historical perspective

Prior to 1980, according to Szwarc, customer satisfaction as a business concept was practically unheard of outside of the United States and Canada (2005, p.6). This was due, in part, to booming post-war production and an influx of new products and services that made gaining new customers relatively easy (ibid). However a prolonged recession in the early 1980s meant that companies had to work hard at enticing consumers to spend what little money they had on their products. In the first instance this was achieved by offering after sales service on consumables, at a price. However, the cost of such services soon became untenable and producers turned their attention to making their products more durable as well as monitoring what aspects of after sales services were attractive to their customers (Szwarc, 2005, pp.6-7). This strategy achieved relative success but was compromised when Japanese companies hypothesized that it was more cost effective in the long run to produce 'zero defect' products and to endorse the reliability of their goods by offering extended warranties and free after sale service (Szwarc, 2005, p.8). Rothschild (1984, p.125 in Szwarc, 2005, p.8) maintained that this 'bundling' up of services was pivotal in the elevation of customer opinion in new management theories. A decade on and a further recession in the early 1990s once again saw businesses looking for ways to decrease costs whilst improving productivity. This climate saw the rise in popularity of Customer Relation Management (CRM). Szwarc (2005, p.9) accredited this theory as being the reason that attention turned towards individual customer needs and the development of personalized services.

2.3.1 Personalized services: Private sector approaches

Customer satisfaction has been an intrinsic part of marketing strategy for most private companies for decades. As Brookes (1995, p.7) described 'meeting and exceeding customer expectations' formed the basis for both immediate and long-term company profitability. Despite the implementation of customer satisfaction measurement in most companies there remained confusion and contention over how and what to measure. This was in spite of accusations of academic saturation in the field of customer satisfaction (Brookes, 1995, p.7).

Furthermore, Brookes (1995, p.8) asserted, some companies, particularly those who were part of a larger chain, became focused on achieving high scores on satisfaction surveys at the expense of 'satisfying their customers'. In effect this led to a situation whereby long-term change for the benefit of the customer became difficult as companies dealt with complaints at a local level rather than reporting concerns to head office. This meant that faults with services or products went unreported at the level where something could be done about it and so remained in circulation to the detriment of other consumers. However, despite Brookes' (1995, p.7), concerns of over-research in the field of satisfaction and the misuse of customer satisfaction data it has remained an important facet of most company policies.

2.3.2 Public service adjustments

In the last twenty years the importance of gathering and analyzing customer satisfaction data has been adopted and implemented in public sector organizations. This implementation has come mainly through public sector reforms that focused on reducing bureaucracy in the public services, specifically the perception of the public, their position and their rights within it. The reforms of local government have really been reforms of two halves. In the 1980s under the Conservative government, local authorities saw their role severely curtailed by the removal of much of their autonomy in the delivery of public services. They maintained a presence by becoming the self-styled antithesis of central control as well as providing a 'proving' ground for policy innovations (Newman, 2001, p.75). However moving into the 1990s, and with the advent of a Labour government, local authorities found themselves being pushed to the forefront of the government's desire to get 'in touch with the people' (rather than being 'out of touch' with the government). The Department for the Environment, Transport and the Region's (DETR) white paper 'Modernising Local Government' contained the following advice:

Modern councils succeed when they put people first, when they work and take decisions in a culture of openness and accountability to local people. They succeed when there is trust between them and their local community...They strive for continuous improvement in the delivery of services.

Newman (2001, p.75)

Bovaird and Loffler (2003, p.189) reported that local politicians embraced this initiative seeing engagement with the public as a means of substantiating their claim to be 'close to the citizen'. Bovaird and Loffler. (2003, p.22) maintained that many local politicians saw their role as being advocate for the community when policies have been seen to fail; often seeing them embroiled in what they called 'patch politics' and continuing to be a source of irritation to government officials. Throughout the reforms, continuing to the present, consistent references were made to the public as customers with the same notions of choice as usually attributed to those in the private sector (Herden, 2006; HMGovernment, 2007).

This desire to get 'in touch with the people' was triggered by the publication of John Major's 'Citizens Charter' in 1991. The charter's key principles promised not only the publication of acceptable standards of service but also the validation of performance against these standards (Major, 1991, p.6). Therefore, as part of the continual appraisal and re-evaluation of service standards the measurement of customer satisfaction became commonplace. However, as stated in the previous chapter, a perplexing 'delivery paradox' has become evident (Blaug *et al.* 2006, p.6). This paradox exists where the rise in the level of delivery improvements does not elicit a corresponding rise in public satisfaction with services (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Blaug *et al.* maintained, the public's expectations of improvements also remain consistently low despite real delivery improvements (*ibid.*).

Contributing to the paradox are the peculiarities of public service provision that mean that, unlike the private sphere, customer satisfaction is not always the primary aim. In some instances it may not be in the best interest of the Government to prioritize satisfaction over service aims. This is evident in the case of Jobseeker's Allowance and in cases where safety, efficiency or redistribution is more important than customer satisfaction (Donovan *et al.* 2001, p.6). The aims of traditional satisfaction measurement, to increase levels of consumption, are not always applicable to the public sector. Furthermore, some services would be seen to benefit by an actual decrease in its consumption, such as health or social services (MORI, 2002, p.3; Donovan *et al.* 2001 p.6). The conclusion of the report is that traditional models of satisfaction that have been designed with the needs of the private sector in mind are not appropriate for use in the public services without substantial adaptation (MORI, 2002, p.3).

Another approach to this problem, Barker (2001, p.6) suggested, is to attempt to foster a method based on understanding and engaging with customers which will allow for a relationship between service user and service provider that still leaves scope for satisfaction on both sides. Herden's (2006, p.5) recommendation that central concepts of satisfaction measurement should be avoided and more individualized engagement is administered by the organization delivering the service would be especially applicable in such areas. The limited scope of these generic investigations, that offer little opportunity to build relationships, leave little scope for the peculiarities of public service administration. These are being acknowledged and accordingly personalized services are being recognized in Government policy (Cabinet Office, 2007, p.29). Animosity towards investigating customer satisfaction may be provoked in the tax paying public, when customer service initiatives, such as satisfaction measurement, absorb funds from an already overstretched budget (Donnelly *et al.* 1995, p.15). Both service providers and service recipients may question this use of limited resources, especially in the climate of the aforementioned delivery paradox. Without clarification of the aims of measuring satisfaction, its stability and quality; the inevitable result will be the mis-allocation of resources and no progress in the attempt to increase reported satisfaction with public services (Donovan *et al.* 2001, P.6).

2.4 Measuring satisfaction: A longitudinal outlook

Advocates of longitudinal studies in Social security research have been evident for over a decade, criticizing traditional methods used in policy research for being weak in the ability to determine factors that influence the trajectory of a benefit recipient (Ashworth and Walker, 1998, p.1). Stafford (1998, p.357) also maintained that longitudinal data could be 'invaluable' in investigating processes of change. Despite this, and calls from other reports (see Elam and Ritchie, 1997, p.58; MORI, 2002, p.44; Devlin *et al.*, 2002, p.134), there was a continued reluctance of government departments to undertake qualitative longitudinal studies despite evidence that the method offered "a unique insight into the factors underlying the impact, or lack of impact, of an intervention within the complex context of individual's lives" (Molloy and Woodfield, 2002, p.43). This may be attributed, in part, to the promotion of them in methods literature as being time consuming, costly, organizationally complex and slow in producing results (Burns, 2000, p.571). Suggestions such as linking different kinds of

longitudinal data from various sources by, for example, mixing retrospective recall interviews with administrative records, were made alongside the criticism in an attempt to minimize the financial impact of such studies (Ashworth and Walker, 1998, p.27). Increasingly, more studies are recognizing the value in longitudinal studies. Some have adopted the above recommendation of using of pre-existing data (Graham *et al.* 2005) whilst others generated all data in the course of the study, sometimes over a period of many years (Corden and Nice, 2006; Ridge and Millar, 2008).

Many existing longitudinal studies tend to be focused round customer loyalty and service quality as opposed to customer expectation (Hays and Hill, 2001; Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). This tendency was discerned and specifically addressed by Clow *et al.* (1998). They maintained that existing studies either manipulated consumer expectations or only measured expectations prior to or immediately after service encounters. The resulting study of 484 university students explored the stability of service expectations over a period of three months. Participants were asked to predict their future expectations of a restaurant that they had knowledge of but had never visited. Three months later, and following a visit to the outlet, the participants were asked to give an evaluation of the service they received as well as a retrospective account of their expectations *immediately* prior to the encounter (Clow *et al.* 1998, p.67). The work concluded that customer expectations were stable over time and were not affected by mood, timing or measurement effect (Clow *et al.* 1998, p.70). It also proposed that service users who had prior negative expectations were more likely to report changes in their expectations immediately prior to and following the experience by the service encounter than those whose prior expectations were positive (Clow *et al.* 1998, pp.70-71). Furthermore, consumers appeared to downgrade their expectations immediately prior to the service encounter (compared to the expectations expressed in the past) in order that their prior expectations were lower than their actual evaluation (*ibid*). Finally, and most importantly, in terms of judging how effective are the methods of measuring customer satisfaction, the study discovered that customers modified their expectations over a number of 'attributes' in order that their *overall* opinion of the experience was supported. Therefore, they concluded, an accurate measurement of service quality relied upon measurement of consumer expectations 'prior to' the service encounter (*ibid*).

Although this was an original approach, that yielded some interesting findings, the study itself used a list of 19 items that related to six constructs (price, tangibles, product, image, time and staff) that were evaluated using a 7-point semantic scale. This was then analyzed quantitatively (ibid, pp.67-68). This approach left no scope for individual opinion as respondents were presented with a list of items that the authors had deemed important. It is possible that the customers themselves may have different opinions as to what they considered crucial in anticipating and evaluating service encounters other than the six constructs offered by the researchers. Another study (Lundberg *et al.* 2000) looked at the effect of customer familiarity and its effects on expectations and concluded that long-term use of a service impacted negatively on customers' notions of satisfaction. However, the study failed to include retrospective accounts of satisfaction with a service and so the longitudinal element was reduced to the immediate timeframe (which was not specified) and could therefore not isolate pre-existing factors that may have affected customers' initial perceptions.

2.4.1 Satisfaction with public services: A focus on Jobcentre Plus

Identifying a reliable measure of satisfaction of public services is difficult. One overall indicator comes through the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) who collate the results of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) collected from local authorities and then compile them into the Best Value User Satisfaction Survey Report. The general study demonstrates overall satisfaction with the service provided by the local authority to be only 54%, and a drop of 1% from the 2003/2004 survey (DCLG, 2007, p.7). The 2006/2007 survey of benefit claimants revealed that overall 77% of users were satisfied with the local authority benefits service but again this is a drop of 1% from the previous survey (Audit Commission, 2007). These figures relate to housing and council tax benefit recipients amongst other claimants and so direct comparisons with Jobcentre Plus users in general is difficult. Furthermore service users will include non-lone parents as well. Comparison to surveys carried out by Jobcentre Plus at the same time reveal an overall satisfaction with the service provided by Jobcentre Plus of 80% (Johnson and Fidler, 2008, p.20). This is higher than that reported in the Best Value User Satisfaction Survey Report. The same study also reported that lone parents generally were more likely to be satisfied than other user groups (Johnson and Fidler, 2008, p.4).

The DWP has invested in researching service user satisfaction (see Elam and Ritchie, 1997; Purdon, 1997). National surveys of service user satisfaction are carried out periodically for Jobcentre Plus (Dowson *et al.* 2004; Sanderson, 2004; Sanderson *et al.* 2005; Johnson and Fidler, 2008). These surveys, until recently have replicated the previous year's survey, in as far as is possible, using identical sampling techniques, questionnaire and survey methods and undertaking the study at the same time of year (Sanderson *et al.* 2005, p. 13). In this way the authors were confident of the validity of year on year comparisons. As mentioned above the 2007 survey revealed that 80% of service users were satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service they received from Jobcentre Plus (Johnson and Fidler, 2008, p.20). However, this was a drop of 6% from the year 2005 (Sanderson *et al.* 2005, p.55). Similarly, the latest figures for 2009 show a further drop of 5% to an overall service satisfaction of 75% (Thomas *et al.* 2010, p.38). As these results indicate levels of service users reporting low levels of satisfaction rose from 8% in 2005 to 12% in 2009. Longitudinal comparison in service user opinions of change in service quality have been made difficult due to alterations in the phrasing of the survey question. Previously, service users were asked, "Over the past 12 months (or since the start of your current claim if this is less than 12 months) do you think the service you have received has got better, worse or stayed the same". However, in the latest survey, the question was phrased thus; "Overall, compared with what you expected, how would you rate the services provided by Jobcentre Plus?" Responses to the question were given in terms of much better than expected, better than expected, about as well as expected, worse than expected and much worse than expected.

Although subtle, this change is asking a different question to the ones in previous years. Service users are being asked to judge the service by their expectations as opposed to the reality. The results of asking if any changes in service have been experienced over time are not consistent. Between 2005 and 2007 there was a decrease in those reporting that the service had got better of 10%. This figure then rises by 17% for the year 2009. Arguably, this final figure says more about the expectations of the service user than the service quality they have experienced. The study itself admitted that the "analysis suggests that many customers have relatively low expectations of the service" (Thomas *et al.* 2010, p.43). This being the case, then

exceeding low expectations are the likely outcome of the interventions, thus explaining the increase in the percentage of service users who reported service improvements.

The overall drop in reported satisfaction provides support for the claim that despite a rise in investment in the service a corresponding rise in satisfaction levels has not materialized (OPSR, 2004). However, without evidence of the investment that has been put into the service, the paradox cannot be accepted conclusively. Using figures from the full budget reports for the years 2006 (Healey, 2006), 2008 (Kennedy, 2008) and 2010 (Timms, 2010) it is possible to strengthen the argument for the existence of the delivery paradox within the DWP (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: *Comparison of service investment with satisfaction and service quality over time*

Year	2005	2007	2009
Expenditure on benefit (billions)	*121.5	138.5*	*163.7
Work and pensions resource budget (billions)	*7.8	*8.1	*9.1
Users expressing satisfaction	**86%	**80%	**75%
Users expressing low satisfaction	**8%	**11%	**12%
Users expressing improved service	**30%	**20%	**37%
Users expressing no change in service	**65%	**65%	**47%
* From Healey, 2006; Kennedy, 2008; and Timms, 2010 (respectively)			
** From Sanderson <i>et al.</i> 2005; Johnson and Fidler, 2008; Thomas <i>et al.</i> 2010 (respectively)			
<i>Figures in italics from re-phrased questions</i>			

As the figures demonstrate there has been increased spending, both in terms of benefit expenditure and resource budget, over the period 2005-2009. However satisfaction with the service has continued to decline over the same period. With the exception of the most recent survey, where changes were made in the phrasing of questions regarding service improvements, those reporting service quality as improved has fallen. Also supporting the concept of the 'delivery paradox' is the 65% of those surveyed that reported that they had experienced no change in the service from the previous year.

Recent research has suggested the need to put “customer satisfaction in context” when applied to public services (Nunn *et al.* 2009, p.73). Concluding research into levels of satisfaction with first contact with Jobcentre Plus, caution was advised if conceptualizing user satisfaction of benefit claimants in the same way as a commercial service provider (*ibid.*). Although users were identified as being vulnerable and therefore entitled to expect to be subject to an ‘obligation of care’ in their time of need, providers had to work within the constraints of the legislative framework which governs welfare provision (*ibid.*). This framework:

...is established by (our) elected representatives and determines what support should be offered to individuals in different and specific circumstances. The ‘customer service’ role of Jobcentre Plus is heavily circumscribed by these decisions both in the sense of its organizational role and purpose in relation to the complexity of the system of criteria which are set out to differentiate between these different sets of circumstances.

Nunn *et al.* (2009, p.73)

The best that can be expected in these circumstances is to apply the criteria fairly, effectively and consistently and treat all ‘customers’ with respect whilst doing so (*ibid.*).

2.5 Conceptualizing satisfaction: Theoretical perspectives

Brookes (1995, pp. 9-10) identifies three approaches to the measurement of customer satisfaction: Equity Theory (ET), Attribution Theory (AT) and (the dominant discourse) Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) (Engel *et al.* 1968; Bartikowski and Llosa, 2004, p.68). As well as these approaches recent literature has focused upon the importance of emotions and the need for happiness as opposed to satisfaction (Weiner, 2000; Price *et al.* 1995). These theories have been developed mostly in and for the private sector. However, some of the studies (NCSR Report 22, 2005; DSS, 1998a; DSS, 1999; DWP, 2005a; Elam and Ritchie, 1997; MORI, 2002; Blaug *et al.* 2006) used as an illustration in this chapter have been carried out in a public service context.

ET is described by Brookes (*ibid.*, p.9) as being the perception of balance between the inputs of the customer and the outcomes given by the provider. Therefore satisfaction can only occur, if the time and effort invested in the transaction by the customer is seen to be equal to the actual

outcome of the encounter. Oliver and Swan (1989, p.373) expanded on this maintaining that consumers assess their input and outcome and then compare it against the input of, and outcomes for, the service provider. Furthermore, Chan *et al.* (1996, p.349) asserted that (dis)satisfaction is further formed relative to the contribution that other customers are expected to make. It is the extent to which the exchange is seen as 'inequitable' that determines how satisfied the customer will be (Oliver and Swan, 1989, p.373). However, Lapidus and Pinkerton (1995, p.108) maintained that simple notions of satisfaction do not adequately describe the emotional response to perceptions of inequity that may arouse feelings of 'resentment, anger or guilt'. Attempts to suppress the tension created by this emotional response may lead the customer to change the manner of their inputs, alter their perception of the outcome or abandon the transaction (Lapidus and Pinkerton, 1995, p.109).

AT revolves around the perceived success or failure of a service interaction being attributed to internal factors (the customers skill or effort expended) or external factors (difficulty of the interaction, effort made by others in the transaction, advice taken or luck) (Brookes, 1995, p.9). Weiner (2000, p.384) continued that, in terms of AT, expectations based on repeated negative or positive interaction are difficult to alter. One negative experience after several positive ones is unlikely to change the perception of the service as the anomalous encounter will be attributed to 'unstable' factors (e.g. a known member of staff being off sick). The inverse of this, one positive encounter following several negative ones, is unlikely to occur as individuals are unlikely to return to a service where the encounter was judged to have been bad. However, and of particular interest when applied to users of the public services, Weiner (*ibid*) expressed the belief that where there is no choice in service provider the opposite becomes true. Customers will attribute 'good' experiences to 'unstable factors' and bad experiences to 'stable' ones (such as overall poor management).

The significance of emotion in the formulation of satisfaction is a further important theme. Consumer linked emotions span a range of feelings along several different continuums; joy to fear, pleasantness to un-plesantness, relaxation to action and calmness to excitement, to illustrate a few, and many theorists agree that satisfaction is at least partially constructed through opinions based in emotional experiences (Wong, 2004, p.366). However, the feasibility of using emotions to assess satisfaction is difficult to evaluate and has, therefore,

remained largely unexplored (Price, *et al.* 1995; Weiner, 2000; Wong, 2004). Pure emotions are 'virtually impossible to obtain...in any research setting' and are impossible to separate from satisfaction (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999, pp.190-201). Therefore it is debatable if customer satisfaction is in itself a unique entity or a sub-category of positive emotions. However, Weiner (2000, pp.384-385) emphasized the importance of emotions in service encounters asserting that emotions "bridge the gap between past and future"; the gap traditionally seen as being occupied by expectations. Furthermore, and of importance for business' offering a service as opposed to a product, Wong (2004, p.365) maintained that the service provided is 'inseparable' from the contact employee. Therefore the employee exerts considerable influence over the formation of customer satisfaction through the quality of service they personally provide. Wong goes on to state that the way the customer feels about the contact employee is pivotal for the degree of commitment shown to an organization as well as the satisfaction reported about the service as a whole (*ibid.*).

Specific to the public services are two theoretical approaches, the Work First Approach (WFA) approach and the Human Capital Development (HCD) approach. The WFA is acknowledged to underpin existing employment policies of the government (Lindsay *et al.* 2007, p.540). Brown (1997) defined the "overall philosophy" of WFA in that:

'...any job is a good job and that the best way to succeed in the labor market is to join it, developing work habits and skills on the job rather than in a classroom. Work first programs also share a strong message that, for participants, employment is both the goal and the expectation. Beyond this common philosophy, however, work first programs vary significantly in the services they offer, the sequencing of their activities, the extent to which participation is required and enforced, and even their goals and approach'.

Brown (1997:2)

In contrast, the HCD approach focuses on improving the skills and education of an individual through training and counselling, taking a 'longer-term' perspective (Lindsay *et al.* 2007, p.539) to an individual returning to meaningful paid employment. The consideration of HCD in employment interventions has previously been identified as 'important' in evaluations of

government approaches to tackling unemployment (Evans *et al.* 2003, p.93). Lindsay *et al.* (2007, p.540) suggest that recent developments in employability policy reflect that this importance has been recognized in policy. They cite community level 'Working Neighbourhoods' and 'Pathways to Work' as evidence of a shift towards the more 'holistic HCD-orientated' approaches currently being used (Lindsay *et al.* 2007, p.540). However, the research finds that although recognized in policy, in practice there "remains a reluctance to provide for the resources and flexibility required by such approaches" (Lindsay *et al.* 2007, p.540).

2.5.1 Expectations as the dominant discourse

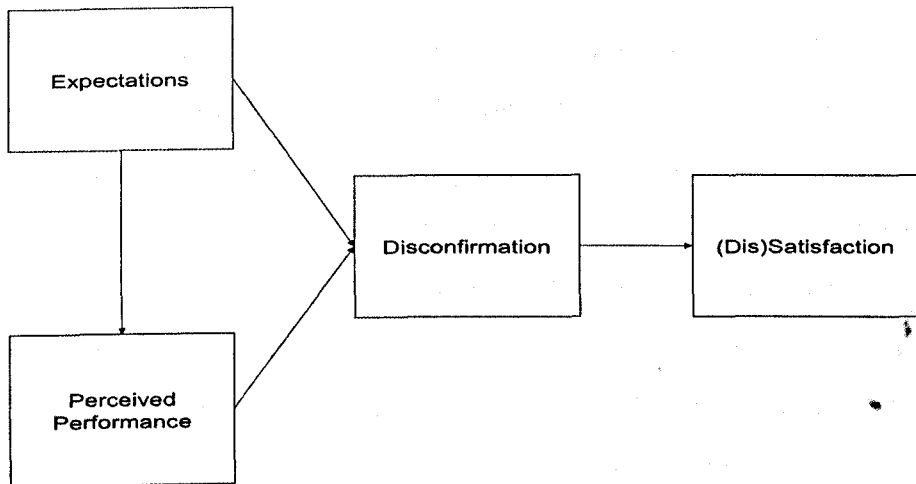
EDT represents the dominant discourse in relation to measuring customer satisfaction (Brookes, 1995, p.10). EDT was originally conceived by Oliver (1980) and presented as the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm. Devlin *et al.* (2002, p.119) summarized Oliver's theory as being that 'expectations are an adapted standard which provide a frame of reference for evaluative judgments, thereby making satisfaction a function of the baseline effect of expectations'. Essentially, Oliver was saying that customers predict the outcome of service encounters, based upon their expectations of that service:

Consumers are believed to form expectations of product performance characteristics prior to purchase. Subsequent purchase and usage reveal actual performance levels that are compared to expectation levels using a better-than, worse-than heuristic. The judgment that results from this comparison is labelled negative disconfirmation if the product is worse than expected, positive disconfirmation if better than expected and simple confirmation if as expected.

Oliver and DeSarbo (1988, p.495)

Brookes (1995) identified three preceding factors to the satisfaction/dissatisfaction outcome. Firstly he cited prior expectations, based on previous experience; secondly, performance assessments made on comparisons against expectations; and finally, the (dis)confirmation based on post-purchase judgments of service received (Brookes, 1995, p.10) (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: EDT Schematic



Source: adapted from Nevo (2005)

Brooke's observations were a simplified version of the EDT process as described above and illustrated the stages involved in making an individual judgment on personal satisfaction.

EDT, by definition, revolves around the notion of expectations. Brookes (1995, p.11) suggested that individuals catalogue expectations in different ways. These can be on notions of *ideal* or 'wished for' level of performance that may be at odds with the notion of *expected* performance, usually based upon broad perceptions of previous encounters. Further assessments about satisfaction may be drawn on the *minimum tolerable* level acceptable to the customer or on *brand* reputation where brand norms are known and established. The final notion that Brookes (1995) proposed, and that which may prove to have particular relevance for expectation formation of users of public services, is the level of performance that is deemed to be *deserved* by the service user.

Negative perceptions of those claiming benefits persist as demonstrated in the 2005 British Social Attitudes Report (NCSR Report 22, 2005). This document reported that a quarter of people disapproved of the welfare state with the underlying belief expressed as "it's not right that some people benefit from services they haven't helped to pay for". These views of the public have been enhanced by the Government's sustained targeting and tough stance on benefit fraud (DSS, 1998a; DSS, 1999; DWP, 2005b). This perception of claimant as negative may be formed and maintained by individuals not receiving benefits themselves. If these

individuals internalize this negative identity and then find themselves in a position of need, requiring state support, then their expectations of the service they are entitled to receive may be influenced accordingly. Elam and Ritchie (1997, pp.37-39) confirmed that the internalization of negative attitudes is a reality for many claimants with recipients describing themselves as feeling criminal, guilty, scrounging, degraded and '(being on) the lowest ebb of society'. Schneider and Bowen (1999, p.35) confirmed the potential damage such an outlook could have on customer satisfaction. They proposed two categorizations of emotion associated with disconfirmation of expectations, annoyance and victimization. These categories typify a continuum of emotion. Whilst annoyance, at one end of the continuum, is a minor irritation, victimization, at the other end, is altogether more emotionally driven and characterized by feelings of 'ire, frustration and/or pain' (ibid, p.36). They concluded that if a customer perceives themselves to have been subject to victimization, rather than simply subject to annoyance, in the course of a service interaction this will be harder to recover from and expectations formed as the result will become fixed and harder to change.

Further complications arise when expectations are influenced by the 'halo effect'. Expectations are not always formed that far ahead of the event; indeed the very first point of contact in an interaction is likely to influence the overall satisfaction with a service. If the initial encounter is negative then any subsequent interaction, no matter how exemplary, will be perceived and fed back negatively (Davis and Heineke, 1997, p.64). The halo effect could potentially 'contaminate attribute specific satisfaction methods' (Devlin *et al.* 2002, p.120). This needs to be considered when exploring measures of satisfaction.

The post-purchase range of 'consumption emotions and cognitive satisfaction judgments' may be too complex to be adequately measured and defined by single measure means (Brookes, 1995, p.11). Emotional factors play a greater role in both forming and measuring customer satisfaction than many theories recognize. By concentrating on extreme emotions such as delight and outrage, as opposed to simply satisfaction and dissatisfaction, a more accurate understanding of customer behaviour will be revealed; as well as exposing the importance satisfaction with service plays in affecting the expectations of other potential customers (Schneider and Bowen, 1999, p.36). Notions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are essentially un-ambivalent and it is in these terms that most of the surveys undertaken are framed. When a

customer experiences what they perceive to be extreme reactions of 'outrage' or 'delight' at a service encounter, the emotions become the pivotal axis around which others will form their expectations. Outraged customers become 'terrorists' recounting an emotionally charged story that is likely to be exaggerated at subsequent telling and conveyed to others. Similarly, customers who have been 'delighted' in their service encounters will become 'apostles' for that service and will feel compelled to tell others, ultimately becoming a service ally through 'unsolicited advocacy' (Schneider and Bowen, 1999, pp.36-37). This is an important factor in expectation formation, indeed more realistic measures could be achieved by concentrating on the concept of dissatisfaction rather than satisfaction. It is possible that 'intense emotions have greater impact than less intense emotions on (dis)satisfaction' (FitzPatrick *et al.* 2004, p. 123). Customers themselves acknowledge that 'spreading the word' is initiated more often after negative, rather than positive, encounters (Davis and Heinke, 1997, p. 65). Users of a service nearly always report more satisfaction with that service than those who have no first hand experience of it (Donovan *et al.* 2001, p. 5). However, the extent to which family, friends and media act as drivers of expectation formation is disputed (Blaug *et al.* 2006, p. 7).

That the SERVQUAL model is the dominant EDT model, upon which the vast majority of satisfaction research is based, is proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988 in Devlin *et al.* 2002, p.118). This is a model based upon the conception of expectation, as described in the service quality literature. The authors claimed to be working in the area of service quality appraisal using customers' perceptions of quality as the defining feature (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988, p.13). They emphasized the importance of recognizing the difference between perceived quality and objective quality, with the former displaying subjective traits that construct an overall 'attitude' derived from comparisons of expectations with perceptions of the interaction (*ibid*, p.15). The authors produced a survey that compared expectations with perceptions. The survey consisted of two sections of short statements relating to service-quality dimensions. The first section asked the respondent to indicate by means of a Likert scale what they felt the level of service in a particular company should be; whilst the second section asked them to respond in terms of their most recent encounter with a company (*ibid* pp.17-19). Using statistical analysis, the survey, originally consisting of nearly 200 cases, was refined to include only the most pertinent

factors resulting in a final pool of 22 items that represented five distinct dimensions (Table 2.2) (ibid p.23)

Table 2.2: The Five Dimensions of SERVQUAL

Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Assurance	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
Empathy	Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers

Source: Parasuraman et al. 1988, p.23

Of utmost importance to the SERVQUAL authors was that the resulting scale could be applied across multiple service sectors and still retain high levels of reliability and produce meaningful results (ibid, p.19). Notwithstanding its popularity, this method has been criticized for its failure to accommodate other meanings of 'expectation' such as that proposed in the satisfaction literature and the overall validity of measures that are ultimately subjective in origin (Buttle, 1996). Following a review of SERVQUAL, Morrison-Coulthard (2004, p.491) noted "the conceptual, methodological, and interpretative problems (with SERVQUAL) may be more serious than is generally acknowledged". This was due, in part, to the use of Likert scales (see Figure 2.3) that introduce bias as a result of influences exerted on the respondents' cognitive processes (ibid, p.492). This influence is a result of two main factors. Firstly, Likert scales exert a 'forced-choice' due to the absence of a 'don't know' option which may lead respondents to use the midpoint to record responses that they are not qualified to answer. Secondly, if, as in the case of SERVQUAL, only the extreme endpoints are labelled respondents are more likely to overuse these extreme endpoints and, in particular, show bias towards the positive end of the scale (Morrison-Coulthard, 2004, p.489).

Work commissioned by the OPSR (MORI, 2002, p.3) urged caution when referring to models that were formulated in relation to private sector services and products. Applying such theories to the public sector, they insisted, must be done with two caveats in mind. Firstly, public

services are answerable to both 'clients' (and/or customers) and 'citizens'. Clients/customers are those directly receiving the service and, as such, assess the service directly and at point of need. Citizens, however, are investors in the service (through compulsory taxation) although they may not use the service directly. Therefore, it may be more accurate to measure their satisfaction in terms of value for money. These terms 'client' (and/or customer) and 'citizen' imply distinct, and often competing, characteristics with the potential for conflicting assessments of satisfaction depending on the individual's point of view (ibid). Furthermore many of the models were developed with the aim of increasing consumption of goods and/or services which, in some cases, is the antithesis of the aims of government departments such as those providing healthcare and unemployment assistance. Further complicating the measurement of satisfaction with the public services is that they are seen to be 'monopoly suppliers' that can compel individuals to consume through regulatory measures and compulsory taxation (ibid).

2.5.2 The impact of knowledge on measuring satisfaction

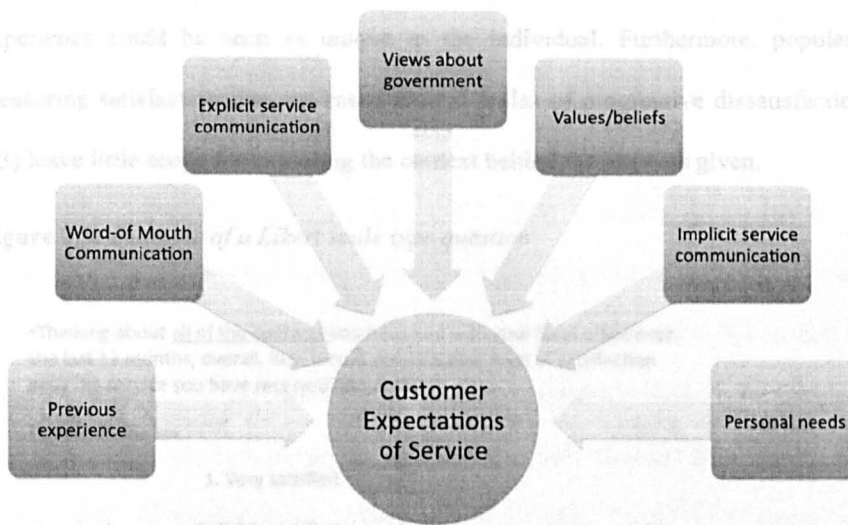
The notion of expectations and the way in which they are articulated is evident in much of the literature on measuring satisfaction. The way that acquired knowledge is then utilized in judgments of satisfaction is also a factor for consideration. Equally important is exploring how easily individuals find it to articulate the precise meaning of thoughts on a subject and if conventional methods of satisfaction measurement allow for accurate expression of feelings. By doing this it can inform evaluations of the validity of both methods and results of measuring satisfaction.

The antecedents of expectations have been largely overlooked in the literature on service quality and customer satisfaction (Devlin *et al.* 2002, p.121). Where research into precursors of expectations had been undertaken, it tended to highlight the effect of experience on expectations. Other exploratory research has theorized that expectations can be classified in two distinct ways, predictive and desired, and that these, jointly, are affected by several factors (Devlin *et al.* 2002, p.122). Firstly there are explicit and implicit service promises. The former exerts its influence through sanctioned advertisements for the service that explained the company's 'ideals' to the customer whilst the latter is reflected in factors such as image and reputation (Devlin *et al.* 2002, pp.122-123). These two observations are connected with what

the service contributes to the formation of expectations. Two further factors, previous experience and, as discussed earlier, word of mouth encounters, are essentially unique to the customer. It is suggested that previous experience is not only specific to one branch of a service but to the entire 'class' of services which, in the case of this study, would translate to not just being typical of the DWP but of the public services in general. Complementary studies (Zeithaml *et al.* 1993; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000) cite two factors, personal needs and personal service philosophy, which affect desired expectations (Devlin *et al.* 2002, p.124). The former encompasses the 'physical, social and psychological desires' whilst the latter is formed through the meaning of the service that has been internalized by the customer (*ibid.*).

MORI (2002, p.8) adapted this model to demonstrate the way in which knowledge informs expectations of the public services and how it is acquired.

Figure 2.2: MORI's influences of customer satisfaction (MORI, 2002,p.8)



The model depicts the influences that affect customer expectations of the service they receive. It retains, with adaptations, some factors proposed by Devlin *et al.* (2002, pp.122-123); explicit and implicit service communication, previous experience, word of mouth communication, and personal needs. It adds also the factors of values and beliefs and views about government. The adaptations were made in order that the factors related to the public services. For example implicit and explicit *promises* are both presented by the less constraining term

communications. The influence of the media and audit agencies was highlighted under the word of mouth heading and previous experience is promoted as customers drawing on comparisons that they had encountered between the public service and similar private services (MORI, 2002, p.6). Finally, when discussing personal needs they conclude that only by understanding such needs, which are highly variable between services and customers, can an 'appropriate' service be designed (ibid). However, Donovan *et al's* observation that rates of satisfaction vary according to the client group asked are omitted from both of these studies (2001, p.13). This evidence of the strong influence exerted on expectations by factors such as social class, age and ethnicity, which were demonstrated through the research, is described as crucial (Donovan *et al.* 2001, p.13). This point may be relevant to work in measuring satisfaction in the public services as some services may attract groups of individuals that share a common characteristic such as financial need (welfare benefits) or age (pensions).

Some of these concepts are based essentially on subjective knowledge and, as such, the extent to which these views can be compared alongside those of others is questionable, as each experience could be seen as unique to the individual. Furthermore, popular concepts of measuring satisfaction that are based around scales of progressive dissatisfaction (see Figure 2.3) leave little scope for exploring the context behind the answers given.

Figure 2.3: *Example of a Likert scale type question*

•Thinking about all of the contacts you have had with your local office over the last 12 months, overall, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with the service you have received? Are you...

Please tick one box

- 1. Very satisfied
- 2. Fairly satisfied
- 3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- 4. Fairly dissatisfied
- 5. Very dissatisfied

Source: Elam and Ritchie (1997), p.78

It is this contextual knowledge that Polanyi classified as 'Tacit Knowledge' (Polanyi, 1967). This concept was expressed as "we know more than we can tell" (ibid, p.4). At first this

phrase seems to imply that such knowledge is locked inside each individual who, even if aware of its existence, is unable to express it. However, this is not so, but the translation of it is dependent upon the co-operation of those whose inner knowledge is being sought (Polanyi, 1967, p.5). A recent study that sought public service user and provider opinion on consumer voice remarked:

In our in-depth interviews we were consistently told by service providers that a lack of user voice simply meant that service users must be happy with the service. Yet we did not have to press them far before they accepted that there might be other alternatives.

Simmons (2009, p.60)

This example demonstrates 'layers' of probing, initiated superficially but then facilitated to a deeper 'tacit' level by "press(ing) them". This is evidence that supports the possibility of unlocking tacit knowledge through mutual co-operation. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995 cited in Gourley, 2002, p.2) express the importance of tacit knowledge by building their 'Theory of Knowledge Creation' around it and insist that organizations should 'find ways of communicating and capturing tacit knowledge'.

Furthermore, Baumard (in Gourley, 2002, p.3) suggests that despite the apparent subjectiveness of tacit knowledge, it resides within groups or collectivities; a claim that is both supported (Choo, 1998; Gourley, 2002, p. 3) and refuted (see von Krogh and Roos, 1995 in Gourley, 2002, p.3). If Baumard's theory can be confirmed it supports initiatives to incorporate the exploration of tacit meanings into satisfaction measurement across social groups. Furthermore, Alexander *et al.* (1991 cited in Gourley, 2002, p.11) suggest that all 'prior knowledge' is tacit until activated by on-going activity. As much of the satisfaction literature is based on the notion of expectations, *or prior knowledge*, it is possible that appropriate satisfaction measurement could be the catalyst to 'activating' tacit thought. However, Hildreth and Kimble (2002), whilst agreeing that both explicit and tacit knowledge must be addressed, caution that some knowledge, although it can be articulated, cannot be externalized and projects that aim to probe for such knowledge need to be aware of this. Moreover as

knowledge ultimately resides in people it is subject to 'fluidity and change' that can lead to incomplete articulation and incorrect translation (ibid).

These considerations are important for this piece of research. If the aims of the study are to be achieved then it will be necessary to identify evidence of tacit knowledge and the process by which it has been articulated and recognized. If this is accomplished it will be possible to make recommendations as to how the process of facilitating the articulation of such tacit opinions can be embedded into measures of satisfaction. By using a qualitative approach and engaging respondents in retrospective and speculative narratives there is the possibility of revealing comparative inconsistencies which may be evidence of tacit opinions coming to the fore.

2.6. Theorizing identity in the framework of satisfaction measurement

Although the primacy of the citizen has been earmarked as an essential part of public sector reforms, the tendency for those in power to pay little more than lip service to the enterprise is evident or as it has been succinctly expressed "In our rush to steer maybe we are forgetting who owns the boat" (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003, p.23). Up until now, focusing the initiative on serving and empowering citizens had been a hit and miss affair across departments (Newman, 2001, p. 23). Furthermore, the process was inevitably a reciprocal one whereby citizens could be incorporated into the solution to social problems, if only they were enabled to become involved (ibid). Part of this integration has been to change the perception of the public as passive recipients to active consumers as would be found in the private sector. However there are fundamental problems to integrating the public service experience into the private service framework or as the National Performance Review stipulated "providing customer services equal to the best in business" (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003, p.58).

The reality of public services is often construed as being one of apathy and obstruction, an attitude fostered by the knowledge that consumer loyalty in the private sector is bound by notions of choice whereas in the public sector notions of true choice are often contested with the 'consumers' often having no choice at all. Moves to change this have taken place on two fronts. Firstly, directives by the United Nations (UN) have been made to change the way the citizen is treated by the system:

State institutions should be made to work for all and should not be seen, nor act as repressive or “unfriendly” to the majority of citizens. State institutions should not be “abusive” in the way they deal with citizens, but should be more open, transparent and work for and with, rather than against citizens.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2003, p.72)

Although this appears to be a positive statement it is not conclusive as the wording “to the majority of citizens” implies. This still leaves scope for exclusion if individuals are seen to be behaving in a way contrary to the ‘good’ consumer. Secondly, moves have been made to address this problem through central government increasing the amount of service providers in order to increase the amount of consumer choice (Batley and Stoker, 1991, p.58). Even if the issue of widening choice for the consumer is addressed effectively there are still reforms necessary to switch from the outdated principle of ‘one size fit all’ to a concept of services being tailor-made. A recent ODPM report has within its first paragraph, and ahead of the need for greater choice, the challenge (for local government) of “making public services more effective and responsive by *tailoring them to the needs of their users...*” (ODPM, 2005, p.7). Indeed as the UN states in its defence of new public management techniques it has certainly succeeded in reaffirming the rights of individual citizens by a ‘rolling back of the state’ allowing for competition and choice to materialize (UN, 2001, p.54).

The advent of the citizen as customer and the need to react to the demands of the consumer in the public service left the government charged with the task of monitoring ‘customer’ satisfaction within its services. The principles of new public management demanded that the monitoring of satisfaction was an integral part of public management in a contemporary government (Bovaird and Löffler, 2003, p.127). However, definitions of satisfaction are not always consistent and some areas have included this type of appraisal in their performance measures utilizing numerical analysis of service user complaints, survey results and participative processes (UN, 2001, p.105).

Interesting insights into the way the public viewed themselves as users of public services and how this contrasted with the way government literature portrayed them have been revealed in recent research (Clarke *et al.* 2007; Simmons, 2009). The results showed that despite a drive by

the government to promote users of the public services as consumers or customers the public failed to identify with these terms (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p.128). Furthermore, they failed to adopt the term 'citizen' which leads to the conclusion that terms promoted by the government were not being seen as important by the general public (*ibid*). Service users report that these government-ascribed identities are abstract and superfluous (Simmons, 2009, p.61). Interviewing users and providers of social care, housing and leisure services, it was found that concepts of identity are catalogued as either personal/individual or social/collective in order to render them concrete (*ibid*). How the user sees the relationship with the service will determine which of these types of identity is used at any time (*ibid*). The study concluded that service users employ a mix of personal/individual or social/collective identities demonstrating the complexity involved in constructing a universal label for service users. However, this view of users choosing to use a mix of identities is disputed. A study of users and providers of health, policing and social care found that the public identified with more "service specific terms" that defined a relationship with a particular service and, more generically, terms that "invoked a sense of membership or belonging, such as member of the public" (*ibid*). This identification with larger collectivities, such as the public or the local community, helped to locate an identity for the individual and also expressed a relationship of ownership (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p. 128). This sense of belonging can be liberating and a reaction against the perceived lack of choice that has been suggested above. Simmons maintains that it is an 'interaction' between individual and collectivist identifications that give the service user their point of view (2009, p.62). However, in concession to the importance of collective identities, the study recognized that collectivities that issue a sense of "membership, solidarity or support" can mobilize the customer voice to rise above the "confines of choice" (Simmons, 2009, p.58). Furthermore, "individualistic motivations to participate in collective action are often outweighed by collectivistic motivations such as a sense of community, shared values and shared goals" (Simmons and Birchall, 2005, p.262).

However, as Clarke *et al.* (2007) asserted the public, although not aligning themselves in identical terms to those the government promotes, are capable of conceiving their identity as being relatively fluid. Depending upon the context of a transaction, the public are able to adjust their outlook according to time and place (Clarke *et al.* 2007, pp.127-128). The authors

describe the public's ability to change and adapt their service identity themselves as the 'relational reasoning' of reflexive subjects whose flexibility is not adequately defined in the dichotomous relationships (active-passive; citizen-consumer) suggested in dominant discourse in this area (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p.137). Furthermore, people choose to take on characteristics of the stereotypes that are ascribed to their position as a service user (Simmons, 2009, p.59). These views are consistent with work by Giddens (1991, p.5) who insisted that during the era he classifies as 'high' or 'late' modernity, new experiences that have to be negotiated have caused self-identity to become a 'reflexively organized endeavour'. He stated that this 'project of the self' is subject to diverse and continuously revised narratives based on multiple lifestyle choices (*ibid.*). The work of Giddens (1991) also supports Clarke *et al.*'s (2007) notion by insisting that, despite popular belief, lifestyle choices are accessible at all social levels; and in this case, even under severe material constraint, lifestyle patterns adopted may deliberately reject the 'widely diffused forms of behaviour and consumption' (Giddens, 1991, p.6).

However, in their findings Clarke *et al.* (2007) did not explore the reasons why the public do not place themselves in the context of citizen, consumer or customer. Kaufman (2003) proposed that in order to adopt an identity individuals need to actively construct that identity through their actions. This questions if an individual is unable to demonstrate their identity in appropriate actions; if, as a customer they cannot exercise choice or voice and exit if dissatisfied as is the case in many of the public services, then can they adopt that identity at all (Hirschman, 1970). Further explanation of the way individuals choose one identity over another can be explored through the use of Identity Theory.

This theory has two distinct strands. Firstly it is analyzed in terms of 'external social structure and the structure of self' and secondly in terms of 'internal mechanism' (Stryker and Burke, 2000, p.285). Stryker and Burke (2000) explained the former strand as being "social roles that are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships; identities are internalized role expectations" (p.286), whilst the latter resides in notions of behaviour in response to the perceived identity and the consequences of extreme emotions on the replication of identity (p.288). The theory continues that, in keeping with the notion of hierarchical structures in society, identities are classified to reflect their importance. Their position in a hierarchy will determine if they are activated in a given situation and their activation will

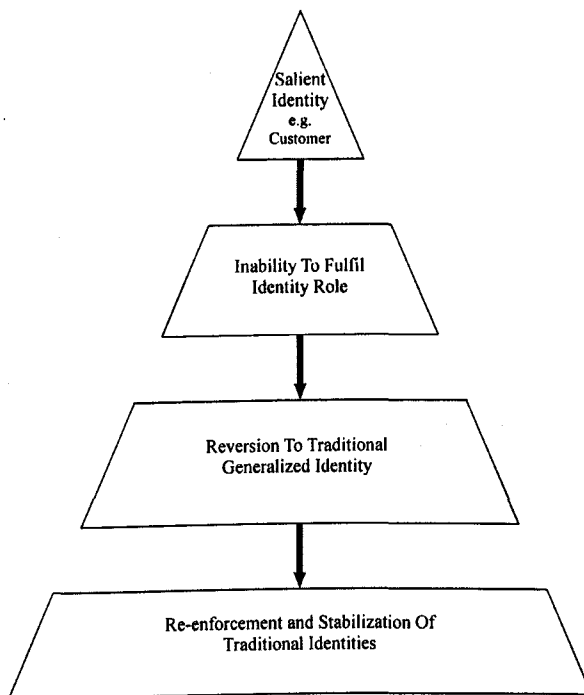
determine the range of behaviours displayed. As with satisfaction, identities are formed in response to expectations of behaviour in a certain circumstance. This theory is evident in Clarke *et al's* (2007) findings above whereby the respondents were able to discern what they considered appropriate identities and exercise the corresponding role in different contexts. However, the importance of the catalyst for individual choice of identity has been said to be overrated and instead it is the 'who speaks' as opposed to the 'who chooses' that should be explored (Simmons, 2009, p.59).

The hierarchical notion in this theory hints at the importance of the relationship between service provider and service recipient. Clarke *et al's* (2007) work also gauged the opinions of service providers about what terminology they thought appropriate to use when dealing with service users. They found that there was some concern about the issue of the name to be used and that many agencies acknowledged that the complex relationships they encountered meant that they were unable to be classified generically (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p.127). This was especially the case in sectors where the service user may not be engaging with the service on a voluntary basis such as with the police or mental health service. It was in these encounters that the term 'customer' was deemed to be particularly inappropriate (pp.122-123). Overall, as in the work with service users, service providers reported a reluctance to label their users as customer, consumer or citizen; less than a quarter of the service providers questioned identified with these terms (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p.126). There is evidence, however, that far from service providers believing that generic labels cannot be applied to service users, there is a common tendency for them to apply generic stereotypical labels to service users (Simmons, 2009, p.65). Due to the fluidity of service user identity, according to time and situation, these stereotypical identities are often inaccurate and negative (*ibid*). Service providers, therefore, routinely use their own perspectives and interests to construct, and project, an identity onto the service users (Simmons, 2009, p.66). In turn the service user accepts, negotiates or contests them (*ibid*). In terms of Identity Theory this may indicate the perpetuation of traditional and stereotypical roles, by the service user, as a response to the way the service provider expects their users to behave in a given situation. If the cue to act as a 'customer' is not given out during the encounter then an individual is unlikely to exercise 'customer' as the salient identity. This demonstrates the reciprocal, yet hierarchical, nature of relationship between user and provider

(Clarke *et al.* 2007, pp.121-138). The long term impact these actions have are further compounded in that, in terms of Identity Theory, identities exhibit stability and “salience across time and situations” except when they are unable to act in accordance with the salient identity (Stryker and Burke, 2000, pp.286-287).

Considering this, if the ‘salient identity’ being promoted is that of customer with its implications of choice (as in Government literature) and an individual acts in accordance with that identity but is unable to fully actualize the role (through service providers mis-cueing or lack of choice, voice and exit opportunities) they will abandon the unfulfilled identity for one that they can fulfil. This may then contribute to the apparent stability and popularity of more traditional identities for users of the public services (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: *Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement Construct (author’s own representation)*



This conclusion is supported in the belief that:

...identities may or may not be confirmed in situationally based interaction. ...If the identity confirmation is successful, the salience of the identity will be reinforced; if the process is unsuccessful, the salience of the identity is likely to diminish, perhaps considerably.

Stryker and Burke (2000, p.289).

As well as Identity Theory the relevance of the Theory of Self-Concept should not be overlooked. Rosenberg cited Cooley's (1902) concept of the 'looking glass' self as being particularly relevant (1989, p.37). He expands on Cooley's famous metaphor by describing the Self-Concept as being a consequence of social interaction and, importantly, that society and self as 'twin-born' (ibid, p.37). This casts the individual as being indivisible from society. Rosenberg supports this theory with the work of Mead (1934 in Rosenberg, 1989, p.38) whereby he argued that:

Eventually people come to see themselves more or less as they are seen by others and to judge themselves in terms of the internalized attitudes of the community as a whole.

Rosenberg (1989, p.38)

Shavelson and Bolus (1982, p.3) defined the Self-Concept in terms of seven critical features (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Seven critical features of Self-Concept

It is Organized	People categorize information
It is Multifaceted	Particular aspects reflect the category system adopted
It is Hierarchical	Self-perceptions at the base move through specific sub-categories until they are embedded in a general belief
General Self Concept is Stable	As concepts descend the hierarchy, self concept becomes situation specific and less stable
It Increases in Versatility	Becomes more multi-faceted as the individual progresses from infancy to adulthood
It is Both Descriptive and Evaluative	Individuals characterize <i>and</i> appraise themselves
It Can be Differentiated	Is distinguishable from other more tangible constructs such as educational achievement

Source: Shavelson and Bolus (1982, p.3)

The concept of a hierarchical structure to self-concept is supportive of the Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement Construct above (see Figure 2.4). When context-specific sub-identities are exercised and rejected they become, in Shavelson and Bolus' (1982) words, unstable and so the individual reverts back to identity categories that are more general. These ideas are supportive of the belief that individuals choose to adopt terms that are non-specific and inherently 'general' in origin e.g. 'member of the public' or 'member of the local community' (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p.128).

However, despite these theoretical opinions the customer or service user may not invest that much energy in notions of identity. Consumers, some insist, are not 'rocket scientists' and that they are driven by much simpler needs, such as answers to why service has been unsatisfactory and if such poor service is likely to be repeated, rather than the complex interplay between conferred titles such as citizen and consumer (Weiner, 2000, p.387). Furthermore, the existing literature does not address the issue of if the service user perceives the identity of customer as positive. Recent research in improving quality in the public sector has challenged the assumption that to be labelled as customer in the public service is a positive conception:

Individuals are seen as customers, buying products from the government, and the government is customer-orientated and serves customers in its shops...The negative effect is the creation of a customer mentality in which citizens do not feel responsible anymore...they behave like customers: passive and demanding.

Teeuwen (2011, p.xi)

Diminishing personal responsibility is seen as a by-product of accepting the label of customer and this translates into a dis-empowering encounter as opposed to one that should mobilize change, both in the attitude of the service user and service provider (*ibid*).

2.6.1 Lone parents and prioritizing identity

It has been recognized in policy reforms that the role of primary, and often only, caregiver affects the ability of lone parents to enter employment. Up until recently lone parents were entitled to receive IS until their youngest child was 16 years of age. However, as detailed in section 2.4, this age limit was gradually decreased until IS was withdrawn from lone parents

when their youngest child reached the age of seven years. The impact of this was greater than anticipated given that some lone parents viewed parenting as legitimate work.

Duncan and Edwards (1997) examined the failures of the 'rational economic man' approach when applied to lone parents and economic decision making (1997, p.29). They contend that this approach to examining the employment choices of lone parents does not take into account the social processes that influence the decisions made (ibid). These 'non market' criteria that influences perceptions of what is socially right given a certain social context are not individual and gender free but inevitably collective and gendered (ibid, p.32). It is this element that the authors label 'gendered moral rationalities' (ibid). Although an economic costs and benefits appraisal is important for lone parents it is secondary to the answers to social and moral questions. These questions challenge issues such as parental responsibility, affect on children of the caregiver entering employment and the expectations of others and how they will treat them in consequence of their decision to enter employment (ibid, p.32).

This latter point indicates the influence of power relations in respect of exerting pressure on lone parents to conform to the norms and expectations of others. Duncan and Edwards insist, "some people have more power than others and are able to impose their tastes on others either directly or indirectly" (1997, p.34). In one example a lone mother is unable to return to work as, although her own mother is available to provide childcare, her own mother believes that mothers should stay at home to look after the children and so refuses to become a carer for her grandchild (ibid, p.32). In this way she is indirectly exerting an influence on her daughters decision making in relation to taking paid employment. This perspective indicates an oversight when analysis of lone parent work trajectories concentrates purely on economical factors as opposed to considering both social process and context (ibid, p.37). Therefore the authors conclude:

The notion of "gendered moral rationalities" which we propose as an alternative focuses attention onto the social relations of lone mothers (especially their position in social networks and gendered labor markets) and onto their social understandings (in particular, ideas about motherhood and children's needs). In a more formal sense, it is these social relations and understandings which we see as primary factors in explaining the uptake of paid work; while human capital,

individual resources and constraints remain important, in a causal sense these are now seen as contingent, or secondary factors.

Duncan and Edwards (1997, p.40)

Given the regularity with which Better Off Calculations (BOC) are given to lone parents during their WFI's, this view of the primary and secondary positions of importance given to mothering and employment needs to be considered when organizations ask service users about their present work status, opinions about returning to work and satisfaction with the service.

2.7 The importance of overall outcomes in policy literature

In 1998 the Government declared substantial changes to the existing welfare system (DSS, 1998b). In terms of employment, the outcomes contained within it were ostentatiously directed towards the benefits to the government, not the citizen *per se*. The four primary outcomes, at this time were:

1. A reduction in the proportion of working-age people living in workless households.
2. A reduction in the proportion of working-age people out of work for more than two years.
3. An increase in the number of working-age people in work.
4. An increase in the number of lone parents, people with a long-term illness and disabled people of working age in touch with the labour market.

This Green Paper marketed the outcomes as 'success measures' and for those that failed to contribute to them sanctions were threatened (*ibid*, p.31). Eight years later and 'A new deal for welfare: empowering people to work' (DWP, 2006) stated the projected outcomes of the new wave of reforms, claiming that participation in the welfare to work and new-deal programmes would result in an employment rate of 80% of the working-age population (p.3). It further promised a reduction by one million of those on incapacity benefits and an increase by one million of older workers (*ibid*).

Recently further proposed reforms (Freud, 2007) have stressed desirable outcomes in terms of financial benefit to the government. Although it purports to support the ethos of individualized

and personalized services the overall benefit of such an outcome-based model, as proposed by Freud, is given in purely material terms:

The fiscal prize is considerable. Achievement of the 80% employment aspiration would boost GDP, reduce benefit spending and increase exchequer revenues to a material extent.

Freud (2007, p.75)

There are no references to the physical and mental benefits to individuals of self-sufficiency through employment opportunity or reference to anti-child poverty measures, and no recommendation of individualized outcome-based frameworks that take into account personal history and individual need. Indeed the prime criterion as far as the service user is concerned is the category within which they fall and the level of handling that will be required to get them back into work. However, in contrast to Freud's proposal, The Green Paper 'No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility' (DWP, 2008c) marketed its streamlining of the benefits system as 'delivering better outcomes for individuals and the country as a whole' (p.105).

This approach continues in the report commissioned by the government into increasing conditionality and personalized support for benefit claimants (Gregg, 2008). The report includes justification of why work should be the desired outcome citing unemployment as having links with, ill health and reduced psychological well-being (ibid, p.26). Furthermore, it states, children can 'gain from their parent being in work' both psychologically and economically even in incidences where the parents are in low skilled jobs (ibid). It does however acknowledge that in some instances work is not the best outcome for benefit claimants and as such promotes the need for a personalized approach in future welfare reforms (ibid). The report also recognizes the impact of pre-conceptions on satisfactory outcomes, specifically for lone parents (ibid, P.38). Quoting evidence from a study by Goodwin (2008) the report concluded that:

Perceptions of the whole system can also have an impact on outcomes. For instance, a large number of lone parents felt the main aim was to get them quickly into employment and some saw this work-first nature as a negative

aspect of the regime (Goodwin, 2008). Where this was the case lone parents tended to feel like they were being pushed to enter work even when this was not appropriate, and this could lead to a lack of co-ownership and might hinder engagement with the regime.

Gregg (2008, p.38)

Therefore outcomes play a large part in the service user's estimation of the service and the government's direction for future policy; both concepts that exert an influence on overall perceptions of satisfaction.

As well as contributing to perceptions of service quality, outcomes make an important contribution to the perception of satisfaction with the public services (Elam and Ritchie, 1997). Strong outcome effects were observed in the 1993 then Benefits Agency's National Customer Satisfaction Survey (ibid, p.9). This was based on overall satisfaction rates with applicants whose claim for benefit had been successful being higher than for those whose claims had failed (ibid). Less clear were the reasons why this happened. Questions raised were if "unfavourable outcomes were delivered differently to favourable ones" or if outcome was simply the primary driver over delivery. Furthermore, was poor service 'shielded' by good outcomes? (ibid). The conclusion reached was that it was not just a 'successful claim' that constituted a successful outcome although generally a successful outcome was seen as "getting what I wanted" (ibid, p.52). Notable recurring patterns were also observed. Primarily, the importance of outcomes, were judged according to the level of service being accessed. For example, outcomes were more influential in an initial claim for benefit as opposed to at the last contact (ibid, p.53). Three levels at which outcomes contributed to the assessment of satisfaction were identified. These were either the outcome completely overrides the assessment of service; or the outcome modifies the assessment of service; or the outcome is disregarded in the assessment of service (ibid, p.53). It is unlikely that the extent to which these patterns of outcome and satisfaction could ever be mapped effectively and it would be very difficult to 'dis-aggregate' outcome from service in any realistic way (ibid, p.54).

An evaluation of the NDLP linked 'unrealistic' expectations of the programme's ability to deliver the lone parents expected outcomes, especially in its inability to solve childcare issues,

with low satisfaction with the service (Dawson *et al.* 2000) p.i). This outcome was seen to have stemmed from incorrect interpretations of publicity material in particular television advertising. As a result a further outcome was the recommendation to actively 'create and manage', in as far as is possible, service user expectations. The report went on to explore the relationship between programme outcome and satisfaction of participants (p.146). Overall those who had found work as a result of NDLP tended to report good levels of satisfaction with the service whereas many of those who had not tended to find work were critical and uncomplimentary about the service and the programme. Those in the latter category had unrealistically high expectations of the programme, often fostered by media advertising. This finding conforms to the predictions of EDT.

The most recent reforms however have taken the step of promoting outcomes that are good for the government as outcomes that will be good for the service user. The Green Paper 'No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility' (DWP, 2008c) marketed its streamlining of the benefits system as 'delivering better outcomes for individuals and the country as a whole' (p.105). If, as Elam and Ritchie (1998) maintain, the importance of outcomes are judged according to the level of service being accessed, then this outcome, aimed at simplifying the terms of entitlement, could be one that yields positive measures of satisfaction from the service user, as well as positive outcomes for the department.

2.7.1 Processes as contributing to (dis) satisfaction

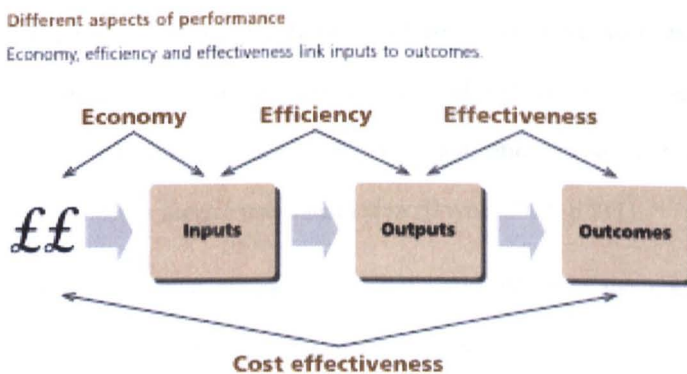
As demonstrated in Chapter One (p.3) the literature review suggested core concepts associated with satisfaction measurement in the private and public sector, outcomes being one. However these outcomes are not defined clearly or presented in the context of the process by which they were achieved. This oversight disguises the importance of the processes that either lead to a (dis) satisfactory outcome or provoke emotion in their own right. Furthermore, given the lack of focus on process what has been described as an outcome may be an output. Bouckaert and Van Dooren (in Bovaird and Löffler, 2003, p.130) maintain the importance of this distinction, describing outcomes as "not what the programme or organization itself did, but the consequences of what the programme or organization did". Furthermore, they continue, outcomes are distinct "events, occurrences, or changes in conditions, behaviours or attitudes" (ibid). Given that key concepts, identity, satisfaction and outcomes, were reported to be stable

over time, it is possible that these were the output and the continuing status of unemployment the outcome. However, taken out of context of a process this would be difficult to identify.

This method of contextualising the actions of an organization is evident in methods of performance measurement in the public services, many of which do not rely exclusively on outcomes. The input-output model of performance management represents a systematic examination of the way in which the organisation functions (Bouckaert and Van Dooren in Bovaird and Loffler, 2003, p.129). Using strategic objectives to form specific and measurable targets, operational objectives are formed. These then inform an input-activity-output cycle (ibid, pp.129-130). Inputs are utilised in activity appropriate to the strategic objectives (ibid). It is only when the output leaves the organization, to be absorbed into society that they may manifest as outcomes. As Bouckaert and Van Dooren asked “the crucial question is whether and what outcomes result from the outputs” (in Bovaird and Loffler, 2003, p.130).

Uses of these models of performance indication are common, however, they have not always been employed in order to improve the customer experience and increase customer satisfaction. The Audit Commission (2010, p.8) links the input-output-outcome framework to economy, efficiency and effectiveness (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: *Input-output-outcome as financial framework (Audit Commission 2000, p.8)*



This is a similar perspective as that taken in some outcome based models where the benefits were only expressed in financial terms (see section 2.7). Other public sector organisations use similar input-output models to contribute to service quality or monitor the effectiveness of interventions. The Local Better Regulation Office (LBRO), which supports effective performance specifically in environmental health, fire safety, licensing and trading standards,

commissioned the development of the impacts and outcomes toolkit (LBRO, 2010) the aim of which was to aid the delivery of sustainable outcomes through the application of an input-activity-output-outcome/impact model of service quality (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: *Example of public sector input/output model (adapted from LBRO, 2010)*

Input	Activity	Output	Outcome/Impact
Staff	Prosecution	Removal of waste	Recovery of removal costs
Skills and capacity	Enforcement	Fixed-penalty notices	Deterrence of fly tipping
Resources for rubbish removal	Environment action day	Environment action day	Cleaner environment
Investment budget	Investigation	Court cases	Less pollution
Intelligence about fly-tips	Site visits	Education activities	Reduced cost to taxpayers
Powers to enforce and investigate	Rubbish removal	Cautions	Pride in area

The evidence suggests that models based on process as opposed to outcome do exist within frameworks of performance measurement in the public service. However, in terms of service user satisfaction the focus remains on the outcome section of the input-output-outcome-impact process. Boyne (2003, p.216) maintains that this focus on outcomes challenges the validity of reported positive shifts in outcomes. In order to improve validity the focus of attention must change to accommodate variables that are controllable such as inputs and outputs (ibid). However because concepts and measures of service improvement are political rather than technical outcomes remain as the best indication to support or deny claims of service improvement or service user satisfaction (Boyne, 2003, p.211).

These models have predominantly been adapted from the manufacturing rather than the services sector. Manufacturing theory is built on the tenet that activities physically change materials to tangible goods whereas a services approach allows for an intangible transaction to occur (Normann, 2002). Based on this precept, Osbourne (2010, p.2-3) identifies three contradictions in using a manufacturing theory in a public service context. Firstly, in agreement with Normann (2002), a product is 'concrete' whilst a service is intangible, akin to a process not merely an output (Osbourne, 2010, p.2-3). Secondly, the production of manufactured goods can be compartmentalized into production, selling and consumption

consumption (ibid). However in a service encounter 'production and consumption occur simultaneously' (ibid). Finally, the role of the consumer is distinct in each example. The relationship to manufacturing is simply one of purchasers or consumer whilst in a services relationship the consumer is a 'co-producer of the service' itself (ibid). This evidence indicates the unsuitability of building measures of satisfaction based upon manufacturing theory models. In terms of services management the 'missing product' theory (Gronroos, 2000, p.63) is indicative of the dangers of concentrating solely on an outcomes driven model of satisfaction. Gronroos documents that even in an organization that delivers what appears to be a clear service outcome (in this case a repaired elevator) the customer reported that it was actually the 'quality of the process that counted' as the key determinant of service quality (Gronroos, 200, p.65). That notwithstanding, services management theory would need to evolve in the context of a 'public' services management theory that could accommodate the peculiarities of the public service sector (Osbourne, 2010, pp.1-2).

This disembodiment of process from satisfaction is an important factor in itself and indicative of the political directions currently being pursued (see section 2.7, p.52). However, in the course of the interviews with service users, even though the interview enquired in terms of outcomes, in common with the 'missing product' theory (above), the service user was not disengaged from the process itself. Discontent and satisfaction with different elements of the service were described. The initial contact and opinions of the quality of training courses emerged as particular areas that contributed to the way that the overall outcome of the visit was perceived. Life events such as pregnancy also demonstrated instances where the process, in its own right, provoked (dis) satisfaction on terms different from that of the outcome.

2.8 Summary and conclusions arising from the literature review

This chapter has provided a thematic account of historical progress and key conceptual theories relating to measuring service user satisfaction in the public services. The background of customer satisfaction measurement in the private sphere is given as a context to the adjustments that have occurred in the public services to make customer satisfaction a core issue. The driving phenomenon behind the study, the 'delivery paradox', is contextualized in the nature of the public services that make traditional reasons for increasing service user satisfaction, increased consumption, the antithesis of the public sector. The increasing

recognition of the importance of researching and measuring satisfaction longitudinally is also discussed.

Consideration was then given to the existing levels of satisfaction, and the methods of recording them, for Jobcentre Plus. It was within Jobcentre Plus offices that the empirical fieldwork was carried out for this study. Using both BVPI and biennial National Customer Satisfaction Surveys for Jobcentre Plus, support is demonstrated for the notion of the 'delivery paradox' as well as noting relevant changes to some aspects of questioning on the surveys. A section is then included giving a historical overview of policy changes that lone parents have been subject to in the last fifteen years, the sample for this study having been drawn from lone parents. These are presented as factors that could explain changing expectations with the service.

The main body of this introductory chapter is given over to illustrating the conceptual framework that has informed this study. Key theoretical concepts of measuring satisfaction in both the public and private sector are summarized before an in-depth analysis of the dominant discourse, EDT, is presented. Further concepts that contribute to, or criticize, the dominant discourse are examined. The inadequacies of measures such as Likert scales, that fail to produce in depth, contextual data, lead into a discussion of the importance of service user knowledge. This introduces the idea of 'tacit' knowledge and why it can be important to engage in measures of satisfaction that enables the customer to articulate it. The implications of this for the study are considered.

The influence of identity, both self and conferred, is explored. Public opinions of government identities such as customer or citizen are examined and the duality of individualistic and collectivist identities discussed. The fluidity of identity, as a user of the public services, is framed in the idea of 'the project of the self' (Giddens, 1991, p.5) and as indicative of high-modernity characteristics of a 'reflexively organized endeavour' (ibid). Lone parent orientation towards mothering or employment is discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of outcomes and how the promotion of desirable outcomes can be manipulated to be either beneficial for the government, the tax paying public, or the service user. The occurrence of 'outcome effects' were noted with the conclusion being that in many cases a good outcome

was reduced to 'getting what I wanted' (Elam and Ritchie, 1997, p. 52). The gaps in outcome based measurements are discussed and the merits of a process based approach outlined.

This study aims to further explore the notion of and reasons for the 'delivery paradox'. Through this study it is anticipated that factors contributing to its sustainability can be confirmed and new, as yet unappreciated, dynamics can be revealed. Furthermore, at present the literature review suggests a dominant tri-partite interplay of expectation, outcome and satisfaction. It is likely that through the in-depth interviews with service users other factors that contribute towards an opinion of satisfaction can be recognized.

It is hoped to gain further support for using longitudinal methods in measuring satisfaction in the public services. This would be evident if clear links could be found between pre-existing opinions or characteristics, and the effect that these have on both present and future satisfaction. This would be of more value if the same characteristics could, theoretically, be found in users of public services other than in the context of a lone parent in Jobcentre Plus.

Through the evidence it is possible that challenges to the dominant EDT theory can be found as well as support for other concepts proposed in the literature review. That notwithstanding, being sensitive to instances where tacit knowledge is revealed, could support criticisms of EDT that promotes quantitative measures of subjective phenomenon such as in the SERVQUAL model.

Identity has been a major concept presented in this chapter. Inconsistencies in research findings have occurred. This study aims to explore if service users conceive their identity in an individual or collective framework in an attempt to support or refute these existing theories. The proposed theory of the Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement Construct (see Figure 2.4) will also be addressed through the research by defining the attitudes of service providers and the reactions of service users in response to these. Analysis of service user accounts will be sensitive to the existence of lone parent orientations towards mothering or employment and findings will be analyzed in that context. Through identifying the concept of outcomes as being prevalent in satisfaction literature it was in these terms that service users were asked to describe their satisfaction. However, further exploration of the notion of outcome as part of a process, as opposed to a stand-alone entity, necessitated the need to be sensitive to contextual

service user engagement. However outcome, as an individual concept, is retained in the definition of Desirable Outcome Assumptions (see Chapter Four) as these judgments by the service provider are issued without taking into account the importance of the process and in terms identified in the original literature review (see section 2.7).

The next chapter describes the methodological approach taken to examine the thesis. Steps taken to ensure a thorough literature review are detailed and the choice of qualitative interviews is explained. The means of procuring the sample, and the difficulties encountered in obtaining it are explained. Comparisons with a range of criteria are made to substantiate how typical the sample was compared with the national population. The steps taken to ensure the ethical treatment of the respondents and the safety of all parties involved are also included. The topic guides used are discussed and the justification for any revisions to them is given. Finally, how the data was handled and analyzed precede the summary that concludes the chapter.

Chapter 3 Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design used to address the questions raised in this study. The enquiry examines DWP service user and staff perspectives on satisfaction. The initial aim is to identify factors that influence service user expectations and, subsequently, satisfaction with the service and how these can change over time. The study also establishes the existing methods of measuring satisfaction used by the DWP. Adaptations or alternatives using the analysis of this data are suggested.

The research design was dictated by the nature of the questions raised in the research. The approach, therefore, had to allow the research questions to be explored and answered as fully as possible. However, this had to be balanced with the needs of the population being studied. Furthermore, the diverse nature of DWP service users demanded flexibility of methods, which could be applied across race, gender and levels of understanding.

A case study approach, isolating DWP service users as one case and DWP staff as another, was decided as being most appropriate for the nature of the enquiry. Furthermore, in seeking to address the issue of change over time, a longitudinal element was inevitable. The method adopted was that of semi-structured, qualitative face-to-face interviews with a cohort of DWP service users and semi-structured, qualitative telephone interviews with DWP staff. The DWP service users selected to take part were lone parents. A comprehensive literature review, to identify themes for inclusion in the interview, also formed an initial stage of the research design. Analysis of the data was through the “framework” method as proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994).

This chapter opens with an outline of the ontological direction that guided the methodology and subsequent choice of method. A dialogue of the case study approach is presented which includes an insight into the steps taken to ensure the literature review was thorough. It goes on to introduce the methods used within the study, qualitative interviews within a longitudinal study. A discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the method is presented. This is followed by an explanation of the steps taken to reduce the risk to the study because of the latter. The process is described for specifying the sample and how the recruitment was

achieved, despite, in the case of the service user sample, unforeseen difficulties. Through comparison of sample characteristics with area and national data the sample was found to be broadly typical of the sample population. Precautions taken to ensure the ethicality and safety for both service user and interviewer are detailed. Details of the topic guides used for all interviews, and the revisions made following the pilot ones, are discussed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the method of data analysis and an examination of lessons learned from the overall process.

3.2 Ontological influence

This study is approached in the belief that service users and providers are conscious of themselves as individuals in their relationships with other service users, service providers and society as a whole. They are able to choose the behaviour they display in order to confirm or deny their identity in a given situation thereby consciously (explicitly) or unconsciously (tacitly) constructing their social reality. This ability to choose means that behaviour is not always predictable and is subject to the meaning given to it by the service user. It is this capacity for subjectivity that questions the legitimacy of existing methods of measuring satisfaction. The interactions necessarily take place within real social contexts and any evidence that emerges as a result will be context bound and as such will not be applicable across all people and situations. This aspect is amplified in this study through the necessity to focus on one group of service users amongst many. This fluidity, therefore, makes it impossible to offer a definitive truth. Although commonalities amongst service users are apparent this is not indicative of generalisability. Burrell and Morgan explain the existence of apparent patterns of behaviour amongst groups of individuals as being because:

...the social world is no more than the subjective construction of individual human beings who, through the development and use of common language and the interactions of everyday life, may create and sustain a social world of intersubjectively shared meaning.

Burrell and Morgan (1979, p.260)

Construction of common languages in a contemporary context are complicated by images from the mass media that transform dialogue into stereotypical representations of certain groups in

society. Both lone parents and the DWP are subject to these stereotypical descriptions meaning that they exist in relation to not only to their own shared, common language but also to the shared understandings of others. The methodology reflects the belief that it is impossible to produce irrefutable facts and statements. Instead, space is created so that service user and service provider can describe reality from their viewpoint and within the framework of their own understanding. The quality of their understanding is interpreted from the perspective of it being relative to them as an individual. Common themes or shared perceptions, both by and of the service user and provider, are interpreted within a model of intersubjective shared meaning (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.260). Accordingly, the method of longitudinal in-depth interviews is sympathetic to the ontological position adopted in this study.

3.3 The case study approach

Yin advocated case studies as a viable design when:

...how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.

Yin (1984, p.1)

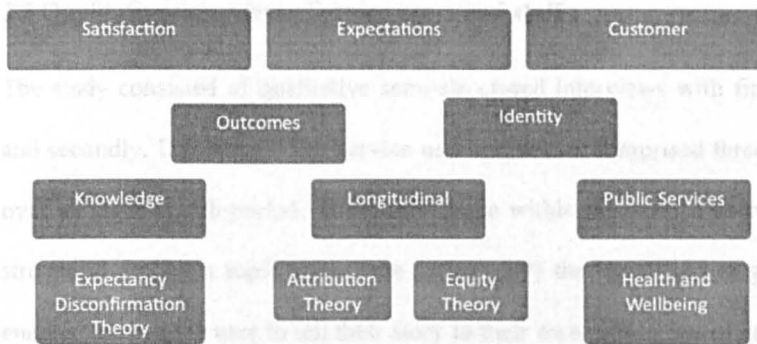
These conditions are applicable in this study and so support the intention to use a case study approach. Furthermore, as Burns maintains the principle of the case study design should be the use of multiple sources, in order to improve the reliability and validity of the data and findings (2000, p.469). This strengthens the choice of research design as the method entails multiple interviews across time, carried out with multiple service users. Furthermore, Burns continues, these multiple sources allow for “triangulation” of the data thus improving the reliability and validity of the study (2000, p.469). This is important particularly when the number of cases is small and the study liable to criticism on its inability to generalize across the population. However, as Bryman insisted the question of “generalizability” is not applicable to a case study design, instead what is desirable is how well the researcher generates theory out of the findings (2001, p.51). This view is commensurate with the aims of the study, whereby factors that exert influence on, and affect service user expectations, are isolated.

3.4 The literature review

The multifaceted dimension of the research questions indicated an ordered and focused exploration of the existing literature. The literature search was structured using a sequencing algorithm consisting of a feedback loop from the bibliographic references of known articles to the main concepts. This structure was adopted as it ensured a thorough investigation of all sources of information connected with the research questions, including the need to continually feedback to the start of the algorithm as new terms of reference were defined.

Keywords were established using the research questions (see section 1.3). An inter-changeable 'keywords wall' was built that isolated these terms, as well as additional theories and terms associated with the methodology (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: *Keywords Wall (author's own representation of Alton and Austin's (2002) Keywords Wall)*



These keywords, together with any new terms generated through the search, were used together to focus the search. Boolean operators; AND, OR, NOT, were used to refine searches to generate relevant results. Identified articles were saved, where possible, both electronically and materially. The searches themselves were carried out through a series of databases as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: *List of databases employed in literature search (functional at time of review; 2006)*

Database
ASSIA: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (CSA)
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (EBSCO)
Intute: Social Sciences
Social Theory
Sociological Abstracts (CSA)
Web of Knowledge (ISI)
ESRC Society Today
DWP Resource Centre
Google search

The bibliographies of the relevant articles were then checked to obtain further sources for reference. The resultant articles were catalogued according to topic and degree of relevancy. These articles were analyzed and the material synthesized to form related or contrasting points of support for this thesis.

3.5 Qualitative interviews: Service users and staff

The study consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews with firstly, DWP service users and secondly, DWP staff. The service user interviews comprised three waves of interviewing, over an eight-month period. These took place within the service users own home. They were structured around a topic guide (see section 3.9) that was used to guide the narrative. This enabled the service user to tell their story in their own words, but offered prompts in order that all themes were discussed. Enquiries covered pre-service experiences and present opinions. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The aim of these interviews was to establish the trajectory of service users' expectations over their benefit history and isolate the factors that caused changes. Furthermore, service users were asked to describe their satisfaction alongside the exploration of their expectations. In this way, it was possible to observe the interactions between expectations and satisfaction. Finally, the interviews revealed how service users felt about being labelled a 'customer' of Jobcentre Plus and if this contributed to their opinions of service satisfaction. Service users received a cash gratuity to compensate for any inconvenience the interview might have caused.

The staff interviews were carried out over the telephone and lasted, on average, 15 minutes. The short duration of the staff interviews was unavoidable, as they had to be integrated into

their working day. Therefore, the topic guide (see section 3.11) was more strictly enforced, although the staff were allowed as much time as needed in answering the questions. These interviews were carried out in order to supplement the existing literature, which tended to be focused on the private sector. It also served to put in context the fieldwork with service users. Using a semi-structured approach, and including queries on service user involvement in department initiatives elicited additional information that illustrated how the DWP viewed the notion of service users as customers.

3.5.1 Service user interviews: A longitudinal approach

As mentioned previously, the main empirical phase comprised of a qualitative longitudinal study of service users of the DWP. Thirty service users were recruited for interviewing over three waves. Each interview at wave one was preceded by the administration of a closed question survey that confirmed the service user conformed to the eligibility criteria (Appendix 1). This survey also included two questions (see Table 3.2), replicated from the 2007 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey (Johnson and Fidler, 2008). These questions measured general satisfaction with the service as a whole. This enabled comparisons to be made with previously reported satisfaction levels, as well as mapping change in satisfaction over the course of the study.

Table 3.2: Questions replicated from 2007 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey (Johnson and Fidler, 2008)

1. Thinking of all the services provided by Jobcentre Plus, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall?
2. Over the past 12 months (or since the start of your current claim if less than 12 months) do you think the service you have received has got better, worse or stayed the same?

The first phase of interviewing established the nature of the service users' interactions with the service, expectations, and satisfaction levels, as well as background information. Service users' notions of identity were also explored. The second and third phases took place three and six

months later, respectively. These interviews focused on changes in expectations of the service and, retrospectively, recorded service user contacts with the DWP (and other relevant agencies). These longitudinal interviews allowed for the exploration of changes in service users expectations over time. They also identified factors and themes leading to changes in expectations. Furthermore, they exposed the resulting changes in satisfaction levels as well as further opinions on identity. The eight-month timeframe allowed for the capture of changes in attitudes, as well as a wide range of different types of transactions.

3.6 Justification and advantages of the methods

Strauss and Corbin advocate qualitative methods, as they are amenable to substantive areas where the aim is to obtain 'intricate' details about "feelings, thought processes, and emotions" that are difficult to extract through more conventional research methods (1998, pp.11-12). As previous studies, detailed in the literature review in chapter two, demonstrated many of the theoretical propositions are based on subjective phenomena such as knowledge, identity and expectation (see Clarke *et al.* 2007; Brookes, 1995; Polanyi, 1967). Exploring concepts such as these requires more than the quantification of respondents' feelings or thoughts. Quantitative positions may be in danger of reflecting the interviewer's concerns whereas qualitative methods investigate the respondents' perspective.

Qualitative enquiry entails determining what respondents mean when they refer to an issue, how they arrive at that conclusion and how it affects their beliefs at that time and in the future. This type of understanding is relayed through language that may require interpretation in order that it can be related to other respondents. If this information is locked within the tacit segment of an individual's experience it is unlikely that this can be released through superficial enquiry. Polanyi states that such knowledge is only accessible through a *co-operative* relationship with those being studied (1967, p.5). Without interaction and understanding between respondent and researcher it is difficult to see how this could be achieved. Using qualitative methods, which in this case were the interviews, allows for this relationship between the parties to occur particularly as part of a longitudinal study. Pesaran and Weale maintain also that reliable responses are more likely to be obtained through qualitative means than by asking precise questions (2005, p.737).

In justifying the use of qualitative methods, many of its strengths are revealed. However, the type of interviews used can be further defined and appraised. The qualitative interviews carried out in this study could be classified as semi-structured in nature. A topic guide is used to guide, but not constrain, the enquiry. May insists that incidents where a respondent goes 'off topic' can be more revealing of their concerns, and as such interviewers need to be open to such digressions (2001, p.125). In summary, May insists the strengths of semi-structured interviews are in their flexibility and in the discovery of meaning (ibid).

Stafford highlights the valuable contribution of longitudinal studies to the literature on customer contacts specifically that "information on how contacts can change over time is gained" (1998, p.357). The importance of this method was also evident in the MORI Report where it was found that the study of changes in expectation over time had been widely neglected in the literature (2002, p.44). Devlin *et al.* acknowledged this also, calling for "more longitudinal research aimed at isolating trends in and influences upon expectation standards over time" (2002, p.134). It is this concept of capturing change over time that Molloy and Woodfield record as being a defining feature of any longitudinal study claiming that such a methodology allows the researcher to "*describe, measure, explain or to examine the implications of changes over time*" (2002, p.6).

The most prominent advantage of a longitudinal design, recognized by many authors (Dale and Davies, 1994; Molloy and Woodfield, 2002; White and Arzi, 2005), is the ability to observe change over time. When combined with a qualitative approach the benefits are amplified. Lewis maintains, "...qualitative research explores the broader context within which change takes place, and so can capture the full set of factors that participants perceive as contributing to change or outcome" (2008, p.54). Furthermore, as Molloy and Woodfield (2002, p.6) explain longitudinal qualitative research represents the most reliable way to gain a deeper understanding of "how and why change occurs, rather than to measure the extent to which it happens". This is confirmed in work by Ridge and Millar (2008, p.16) that, whilst acknowledging the inability to generalize and quantify from such work, insists that longitudinal qualitative methods allowed researchers to "gain insight...through the richness and depth of (mothers and children's) accounts". Molloy and Woodfield (2002, p.6) insists also that this is particularly important in government social research where it is the 'factors'

accounting for change that it is important to isolate, as in this study. The ability to allow recipients to compare *themselves* was also cited as an advantage of this methodology (White and Arzi, 2005, p.147). This was a factor included during subsequent rounds of interviewing and allowed for comparison between service users' explanation of why change had occurred and theories and beliefs commonly attributed to such change.

3.6.1 Disadvantages of the methods

Criticisms levelled at qualitative methods are well documented and arise in the attempt to compare them with their quantitative counterparts. Bryman summarizes these as the problems of subjectivity, replication, generalization and transparency (2004, pp.284-285). The underpinning aspect of these criticisms, Bryman maintains, is in the lack of systematic recording of the process of researching in this way (*ibid*). He stated that, often in qualitative studies, there was no clear explanation of how the researcher decided on what was significant and important. Furthermore, what the researcher did and the means of analysis are not made clear (Bryman, 2004, pp.283-284). These concerns can be addressed through a clear and factual account of the methodology used, from initial literature review to final conclusions. Using systematic means of analysis and demonstrating a logical process of drawing conclusions will support the credibility of the study.

The longitudinal element of the methodology raises further concerns. As Molley and Woodfield reported sample attrition is a particular problem with this method due to refusals, changes of residence or in some cases death of the respondent (2002, p.30). This is especially harmful in cases where the original sample size is small. The target group in this study, lone parents, was one of the more stable populations when measured in terms of the above criteria of changes of residence and death. Changes of residence were minimized due to having children in local schools and the resulting discontinuity of education that relocation could precipitate. Likewise, as the sample of lone parents had relatively young children the service users themselves were not of unduly advanced years making death amongst them a rarity. However certain steps were taken to minimize damage to the project through sample attrition (see Table 3.3)

Table 3.3: Actions to reduce sample attrition

Initial sample numbers higher than target sample number
'Opt out' rather than 'opt in' for service users
Confirmatory contact prior to interview
Building relationship with first contact (Molley and Woodfield, 2002)
Asking 'tracking' questions at first contact (Molley and Woodfield, 2002)
Booking next appointment at time of first interview
Providing financial incentive on completion of the research
Leaving means of contact with the service user to report changes in contact details
Instigating written contact between interviews

To further minimize the impact of attrition, and attempt to retain the minimum sample number required, an analysis of the most recent longitudinal projects commissioned by the DWP and involving lone parents was made³. From the most comparable studies the retention rate was 48% at phase one interviewing. This reflected an attrition rate of 52% of the initial contacts. Retention rate at phase two was 64% and at phase three was 52%. Using these figures it was calculated that in order to achieve 24 third wave interviews 122 initial contacts were needed.

Despite attrition being seen as problematic with studies of this kind, the steps taken above achieved a good degree of success. Due to a change in means of recruitment (see section 3.5.1) only 30 service users were recruited for wave one interviews. Despite this initial number of contacts being much smaller than anticipated, at wave two this had only decreased to 29, this figure being retained for wave three. The overall retention rate was 97%, ruling out any possible problems traditionally associated with attrition. First contact was particularly important and, to some degree, the change in means of recruitment worked in its favour. By recruiting in person, as opposed to through the sending out of a letter, service users were not

³ These were taken from, as yet, unpublished studies and so only details pertaining to attrition rates were released. Therefore no exact references are available.

letting a 'stranger' into their homes. Furthermore, as Molley and Woodfield stated, by building an "intense relationship between respondents and researcher at first or second interview stage there tends to be less attrition due to refusals at follow-up stages" (2002, p.30). This was an important aspect of the process and the interviews themselves took place in the context of a dialogue. Service users were contacted by telephone prior to the first interview to confirm the arrangement was still convenient. At the end of the interview the next appointment was booked and contact details for the service user were confirmed as correct. Details of the next appointment were given in writing, as were contact details for the interviewer so that the service user could report any changes in contact details prior to the next appointment. Eight weeks after this initial meeting an informal, personal postcard was sent to the service users reminding them of the date and time of the next interview, and again giving contact details for the interviewer should there be any changes to report. This process was repeated at the following two waves. At the conclusion of the study the service users were paid a cash gratuity. These steps positively impacted on the attrition rate for the study and contributed to the high retention rate over an eight-month period.

Molley and Woodfield (2002, pp.33-34) warned of the influence that may be exerted on respondents through repeated interviews that focus on the same subject. Das *et al.* (2007) describing this as panel conditioning. This, they explain, "arises if responses in one wave are influenced by participation in the previous wave(s)" (Das *et al.* 2007, p.1). Although some of these influences may be positive; familiarity with the researcher may induce the respondents to be more 'forthcoming', other consequences may be less so. The respondent may alter their behaviour with regard to the topic being explored, therefore skewing the results obtained (Molley and Woodfield, 2002, pp.33-34). Being stimulated by the discussion, they may also seek further knowledge on the topic in between interviews. Furthermore, as they begin to understand the nature of the enquiries, respondents may supply the answers they think the researcher wants to hear rather than a true reflection of the phenomena (ibid). Furthermore, Das *et al.* report respondents may learn the ideal answers that require the least input from them (2007, p.3). The influence of such effects on this study is believed to be small. The repetition of questions in each wave allowed for comparison of attitudes over time. Where a difference of opinion was noted, service users were asked to explain in detail why their opinion had

changed. This included asking about specific encounters with the service. Furthermore, service users were also asked about any discussions between friends, relatives or voluntary agencies that may have influenced the way they acted. In terms of panel conditioning effects, this focus on behaviour and attitudes of the service users, supports the belief that any effects were minimal. Das *et al.* (2007, p.4) report that work by Coombs (1973) found differences in knowledge may occur during repeated interviews, but there was little impact on behaviour and attitudes. Molley and Woodfield maintain that these situations can be recognized and avoided by the researcher remaining alert to the possibility and adapting a flexible interview technique (2002, pp.33-34).

3.7 Measuring satisfaction with the DWP: Specifying the service user sample

DWP service users were listed and appraised according to the criteria, relative stability and probability of a good sample size (see Table 3.4). The research needed to focus on one or two client groups because differences between members of different groups were potentially too large for the factors that drive expectations and satisfaction to be identified. By focussing on one or two client groups the chance that differences arose from between-group variations were minimized.

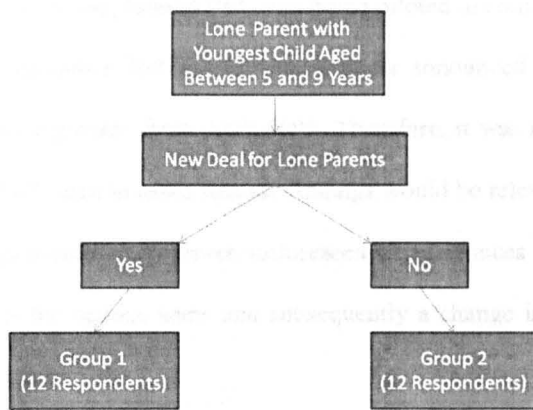
These attributes used to appraise inclusion suitability were established in discussion with a DWP representative. The stability of an organization was determined by any known reforms that may affect it in the immediate future. The exception to this was the Pensions service where customers had limited contact over the duration of their claim.

Table 3.4: Criteria for Inclusion by User Group

User group/benefit received	Criteria for Inclusion	
	Stable organizational structure	Chance of good sample size
CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY	In State of Reform	Criteria Fulfilled
THE PENSION SERVICE	Minimal Departmental Contact by the Public	Criteria Fulfilled
DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE/CARERS ALLOWANCE	Approaching Reform	Criteria Fulfilled
INCOME SUPPORT (LONE PARENTS)	Criteria Fulfilled	Criteria Fulfilled
JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE	Criteria Fulfilled	Criteria Fulfilled
INCAPACITY BENEFIT (NOW EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE)	Approaching Reform	Criteria Fulfilled
OTHERS (E.G. SOCIAL FUND)	Criteria Fulfilled	Small Sample Size

From this, two groups were identified as being suitable. These were unemployed people and lone parents. However, unemployed people are too heterogeneous a group for this study, whilst lone parents could be considered as being pre- or post- New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). This was an advantage as any 'programme effect' on service users' expectations, and hence satisfaction levels, could be (potentially) assessed by comparing lone parents on NDLP with those not (yet) volunteering for the programme. Although lone parents were also a diverse group it was felt that samples could be sufficiently matched to make meaningful analysis possible. Therefore the sample was comprised, initially, as Figure 3.2 shows. However, this construction changed due to circumstances that are outlined below.

Figure 3.2: Criteria for inclusion within the lone parent service user group



The decision to restrict inclusion to lone parents with a youngest child between the ages of five and nine was made because of the recommendations of the Freud Report (2007). These recommendations meant that parents with older children would no longer be entitled to Income Support (IS) “solely on the grounds of being a lone parent” (2007, p.37). Instead they would be required to change to Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) through a gradual phase-in based on the age of the youngest child; 12 years and over from October 2008, 10 years and over from October 2009 and 7 years and over from 2010. Therefore, it was felt that the publicity about these changes might bias opinions on services, and affect expectations and satisfaction levels, in ways that could not be controlled. It was reasoned that, as a cut-off point, the conditionality for those with a youngest child aged nine years and under was still a relatively distant event (being two and a half years until implementation) and so would be unlikely to affect their opinion at the time of the interviews. Furthermore, those with a youngest child under the age of four years were felt to have specific, full time, childcare needs and this may influence the extent to which they can access the resources provided by the DWP, with regard to returning to work. They may be influenced negatively also, by the cost of full-time childcare.

Access to service users was to be negotiated through the DWP and was in the form of a DWP generated list of contacts. It was anticipated that they would be located in one geographic region. The research needed to be geographically clustered in order to facilitate comparisons within one labour market. If not, clustered differences over time between sub-groups might be due to differences in service delivery by different local Jobcentre Plus offices and variations in the performance of the local labour market. Further constraints on where to locate the sample

became necessary due to an impending national rollout of the IWC. At the time the fieldwork was being planned IWC was being piloted in counties across the United Kingdom. However, in September 2007, the Prime Minister announced that this was to be rolled out nationally for lone parents from April 2008. Therefore, it was necessary to locate the sample in an existing IWC area in order that the findings would be relevant and applicable to the national population post-rollout. However, unforeseen circumstances led to a substantial change in the recruitment of the service users and subsequently a change in the service user group criteria (see section 3.6.1).

3.7.1 Sample recruitment: Negotiating unforeseen difficulties

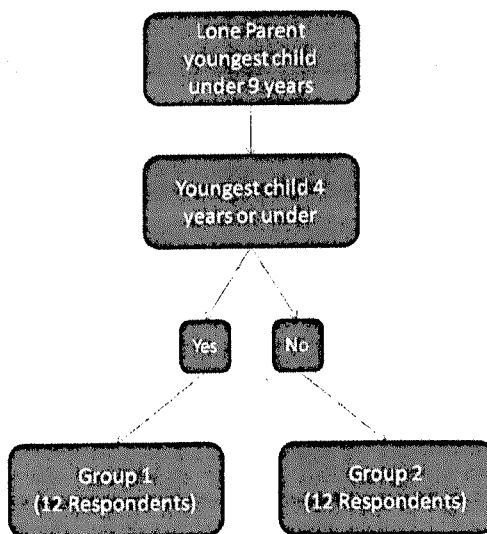
Unforeseen circumstances meant that the DWP were unable to provide a sample frame for the study. Due to the loss of two data discs containing the personal details of over 25 million individuals a data freeze was put in place (Wintour, 2007). This commenced in November 2007 and as of April 2008 was still in place. As no change was anticipated, and given the time constraints of the project, the decision was made to go ahead with a campaign whereby the researcher actively recruited service users to the study.

Working within a tight timeframe and small budget the implications of having to employ a canvassed quota sample, unexpectedly, seemed immense. The sample characteristics would remain the same (see Figure 3.3) but instead of a list of a sample being generated from the DWP it would be inducted through recruitment in Jobcentre Plus offices. As, detailed above, recruitment would be in an existing IWC county. However, due to restrictions of time, budget and availability, identified due to the change in method for sample generation, the choice of county was constrained. Therefore the IWC area in the closest proximity to the interviewer's base was selected from which to recruit the sample. As IWC was to be rolled out nationally shortly after the initial interview it was felt that comparisons with and explanations of deviations from, the national average would be sufficient to justify this unavoidable selection criteria. The choice to include two Jobcentre Plus offices was made to increase the possibility of obtaining the sample size required. On days where predicted attendance by the target sample population was low, recruitment could be moved to offices predicting a higher footfall of service users. Permission was obtained from the DWP to recruit inside Jobcentre Plus offices (see Appendix 2). The calculation used to estimate the number of initial contacts was again

employed. It was estimated that to achieve a sample of 24 at wave three, 59 service users were needed at wave one interviews. For ease of use this figure was increased to 60 and the target groups of NDLP and Non-NDLP comprised 30 service users each. To further enhance the chances of recruitment, cascade cards were designed that could be left on all Lone Parent Adviser (LPA) desks in the two offices.

Recruitment commenced in April 2008. Sign-ups to the study were very slow. This was not due to refusals by lone parents, but due to them not fitting the criteria. As it transpired, every lone parent spoken to, eligible or not, was receptive to the idea of the study. The recruitment period was set at six weeks (governed by budget constraints). However, by the end of four weeks only 15 service users had been recruited due to the sample criteria. Revisions were made based on emerging findings from interviews that had taken place (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: *New criteria for inclusion within the lone parent customer group*



During initial interviews, concerns were expressed about lack of childcare provision for older children. Conversely, lone parents with children aged four and under, who had engaged in conversation at the Jobcentre Plus recruitment locations, admitted that finding childcare was not the issue, but it was their personal preference not to place their child in public childcare facilities. Furthermore, as interviews progressed confusion over the NDLP was revealed. One of the screening criteria used at recruitment was whether the person was NDLP or non-NDLP. What transpired was that many of customers asked were unsure if they were on NDLP or not. Some of them reported taking part in some element of training or study but were unsure if this

was as part of the NDLP programme. Consultation with a DWP adviser confirmed that it was not unusual for lone parents to be referred to an element of the NDLP programme whilst not being classified as wholly on NDLP.

These factors, and the slow recruitment rate, led to the change in criteria for inclusion in the study. The comparison between NDLP and non-NDLP was dropped on the grounds that there was no way to ensure, at recruitment, and lacking DWP administrative data, if the person was fully participating in NDLP. This had the potential to lead to an imbalanced sample that would make comparative analysis of results difficult. Furthermore, the assumption that those with children under the age of four would have too specific childcare needs was revised. It was the group that had been anticipated to have better access to childcare (those with children aged between five and nine years) that appeared to be disadvantaged.

The comparison, therefore, was decided by the age of youngest child; either four years and under, or between five and nine years. Therefore, participation in NDLP was no longer a factor for inclusion in the study. Recruitment ceased after six weeks with a total of 30 service users. Although this was only half the estimate needed to achieve 24 interviews at wave three, the limited timeframe for the fieldwork could not accommodate any further recruitment drives in the Jobcentre Plus offices.

As stated above, recruitment by canvassed quota sample yielded 30 service users for wave one interviews. Recruitment cards, left on LPA desks, yielded only one service user. The study was carried out over eight months with each service user being interviewed on three occasions. At wave three the retention rate was 97%. This result contradicted much of the literature quoted earlier, and the results upon which attrition estimates for this study were based.

3.8 Area characteristics⁴

The study was situated in two Jobcentre Plus districts, within the same county. Population in district A was approximately 108,000 whilst in district B was under 76,000. Both were a mixture of urban and rural communities, with a history comprising of agriculture but were now predominately manufacturing communities. The age distributions of the districts were similar although district A had a slightly higher proportion in the age category 65 and over (19%

⁴ All data compiled from Local Authority profiling and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2007 (unless otherwise stated); Figures rounded to nearest whole number

compared with 16%). The proportion of the working age population for district in A was 61% and in district B was slightly higher at 64%. Both districts displayed similar gender differences in the working age population, the proportion of females (51%) being slightly higher than males (49%) (ONS 2008).

Both districts, A and B, suffered from socio-economic problems and had an average score on the Indices of Deprivation range of 18.44 and 19.76 respectively. District B showed a higher percentage of the population living in deprived areas. Furthermore, this comparison showed district B demonstrated rising levels of the population living in the most deprived areas, in the year 2004 compared to 2007, with a corresponding fall in those living in the least deprived ones.

Levels of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C varied between the districts. Compared to a national average of 60%, district A achieved 62% whilst district B only 57%. Adult skills in both districts showed a high proportion of the population having no qualifications (16%). Accordingly, a low proportion of the population of both districts had higher-level qualifications. At NVQ level four (academic equivalents; BTEC Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND), or City and Guilds Full Technological Certificate / Diploma or above) was just 25% in district A and 19% in district B, against a national average of 29%.

Against a national unemployment rate of just over 5% in June 2007, District A had an unemployment rate just under that figure (4.8%). Benefit claims were made up of 11% Jobseeker's, 52% incapacity benefits, 14% lone parents and 9% carers. Furthermore, 10% of all benefit claimants had been claiming for over 12 months. District B had an unemployment rate of just over 5% (5.1%). Claims in this district were made up of 13% Jobseeker's, 47% incapacity benefits, 14% lone parents and 9% carers. As with district A, benefit claims of more than 12 months was 10%.

Life expectancy in both districts was broadly in line with the national average. District A, however, had an infant mortality rate of 7.4 per 1000 compared to a national average of 5.1 (2006). District B had high rates of conceptions in women aged under 18, recording 52 per

1000, against the national average of 40.6 (2006). Crime was similar in both areas with higher levels than the national average in recorded vehicle crime, violent crime and burglary.

3.8.1 Sample characteristics

All 30 service users were women. The ages of the sample ranged from 19 to 42 with a median age of 32 years old. The majority (66%) of the sample were aged 30-44 years. The number of children each service user had varied. Families with two or less children comprised 52% of the sample, with three or four children 34% and with five children 24%. Of the total sample 66% conceived their first child before the age of 21, and of those, 42% were before their 18th birthday.

Educational achievement was low with only 14% having left school with five GCSEs at grade A*-C (or equivalent) and 38% having gained no educational qualifications at all. Only 10% had worked in the preceding 12 months and 28% never had a job. The longest reported length of time since having last worked was 18 years; 45% of the sample said they were not actively seeking work at the time due to their role as a lone parent.

Of the entire sample 55% were brought up in a household where both parents worked and a further 34% said that one parent had worked. Only 10% of the sample was brought up in a household where none of the adults were in employment. Forty-five percent of the sample had been brought up in a lone parent household. Of these, 46% involved the main carer working full time. All except one had been brought up with their mother as main carer.

3.8.2 How typical was the sample?⁵

According to the organization Gingerbread (2009), nine out of ten lone parents are women, with a median age of 37. Only 2% of lone mothers are teenagers. This is comparable with this study. The median age was slightly lower at 32 but the number of teenage lone parents in the sample was slightly higher at 3%.

Table 3.5 shows comparisons of known characteristics of lone parents nationally with characteristics of the sample.

⁵ Figures based on DWP data 2008, unless otherwise stated. Figures rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 3.5: Comparison of national (see footnote 3) and sample characteristics; age of claimant, number of dependent children and duration of current claim

	Age of claimant		
	18-24	25-34	35-44
Lone parent (National data)	22%	38%	31%
Lone parent (Sample)	17%	41%	41%

	Number of dependent children				
	1	2	3	4	5
Lone parent (National data)	45%	32%	15%	5%	2%
Lone parent (Sample)	24%	38%	24%	10%	3%

	Duration of current claim					
	Up to 3 months	3 months up to 6 months	6 months up to 1 year	1 year and up to 2 years	2 years and up to 5 years	5 years and over
Lone parent (National data)	6%	6%	10%	15%	26%	38%
Lone parent (Sample)	7%	3%	7%	14%	17%	52%

Comparison of the data shown in Table 3.5 shows the age of the sample to be broadly similar to that in the national population of lone parents, with a bias to older lone parents. The number of dependent children was higher in the sample group but this may be as a consequence of the sample containing older lone parents than the national population. Finally, duration of claim was comparable up until over two years. At this point the sample displayed more longer-term claimants (five years and over) than the national population. This again can be attributed to the older age of the sample population and the characteristics of the district as a whole.

These comparisons suggest that the sample is broadly typical of the lone parent population as a whole. Slight deviations from national percentages are due to the sample containing more individuals in the 35-44 age bracket than in the 18-24 one.

3.8.3 Sample satisfaction compared to the 2007 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey (Johnson and Fidler, 2008) is a national telephone survey of Jobcentre Plus customers that allows for comparison of service user satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus over time. The 2007 Survey took place approximately one year prior to this fieldwork. Two questions from the 2007 Survey, regarding overall satisfaction with the service, were integrated into each wave of interviewing for this research (see Table 3.2). This gave a basis for exploring any changes in satisfaction over time and for isolating factors that may have contributed to the change. In order to establish how typical the sample was at time of recruitment, comparison of initial, wave 1 responses of the sample and the national survey responses were made (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: *Comparison of Jobcentre Plus 2007 survey and wave one sample responses; satisfaction with jobcentre Plus and change in service in the last year*

	Satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus		
	Dissatisfied	Fairly satisfied	Very satisfied
Lone parents (Jobcentre Plus survey)	6%	42%	41%
Lone parents (Sample)	10%	28%	34%

	Change in service in the last year		
	Better	Stayed the same	Worse
Lone parents (Jobcentre Plus survey)	23%	66%	5%
Lone parents (Sample)	28%	55%	17%

The figures from the 2007 Jobcentre Plus Survey were incomplete. The categories 'Neither satisfied or dissatisfied' and 'don't know' were excluded from the findings on overall satisfaction. Similarly, the figures for 'don't know' were excluded from the findings for change in service over the past 12 months. For comparative purposes, in Table 3.6, the same categories have been excluded from the sample findings for this study.

The Jobcentre Plus Survey concluded that lone parents were, on average, more satisfied than other customers and were more likely, than average, to have perceived an improvement in the service. Least satisfied customers included those that had been claiming benefit for a longer

period of time. The sample population reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction (both fairly and very) than reported in the Jobcentre Plus Survey. Correspondingly, they reported also higher levels of dissatisfaction. The sample population who perceived the service to have improved in the last year was 5% higher than in the Jobcentre Plus Survey. However, those who perceived the service to have got worse were 12% higher in the sample population.

These variations in figures may be explained by other characteristics of benefit claimants. As mentioned above, the Jobcentre Plus Survey noted from its data that longer term claimants were least likely to be satisfied, whereas lone parents were more likely to be satisfied. As the sample population was made up from a higher than average amount of long term claimants then this may be indicative of length of claim being a more significant factor than that of being a lone parent. The disparity in the figures for how the service user had perceived changes to the level of service received may have been influenced, in the sample population, by changes in policy that would not have been announced when the Jobcentre Plus Survey was administered. These changes, (DWP, 2007b) announced shortly before the sample population was interviewed, included increased conditionality and withdrawal of Income Support (IS) for lone parents with older children. They also announced more help for lone parents in finding a job and offering training in order to make lone parents work-ready. The majority of the sample (87%) alluded to one or both of these changes in some way during the first wave interview. Depending on the individuals' attitude to returning to work, some may see this as evidence of the service getting better and some as the service getting worse.

3.9 Measuring satisfaction with the DWP: Specifying the staff sample

As with the service user sample, the selection of staff interviews was based on those areas participating in the IWC pilot. This was to ensure the results were applicable to all areas following the national roll-out of the scheme in the near future. Each district within the IWC Pilot was allocated a number. To ensure random selection, web based software (Haahr, 1998) was used to generate four numbers and the corresponding districts comprised the sample for DWP staff interviews. Additionally, the district in which service user interviews were being carried out was also added to the staff interview areas, giving a total of five districts in which to carry out enquiries into the collection and use of service user satisfaction data.

3.9.1 Sampling Frame

The names of the five districts selected were given to the DWP non-academic supervisor who produced a field letter and appropriate paperwork (Appendix 3). Through this documentation, requests were made for a named contact in each district who would provide the contact details of four staff members, including at least one Customer Service Champion from Jobcentre Plus offices within their area. These named contacts would communicate directly with the researcher. Although the original request was made to include a Customer Service Champion in the sample there was no control over the positions held by the remaining staff. This was left to the discretion of the named contact, although guidance on the nature of the enquiry had been given to them in the field letter. Contact was then made with the 20 participants and an interview schedule constructed. The fieldwork was then conducted over a six-week period beginning 22nd September 2008.

3.10 Data collection: Ethical and safety considerations

In undertaking this research certain ethical considerations were made. As well as upholding good practice, this was to ensure compliance with the University of Nottingham's research code of conduct. All aspects of the research were subject to ethical scrutiny by the University of Nottingham. The ethical considerations were organized in terms of three sets of themes, harm; informed consent, voluntary participation and deception; privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. These considerations were made using the guidance of the following key literature and regulations:

- University of Nottingham Research Code of Conduct
- Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (BSA)
- Data Protection Act 1998
- ESRC Research Ethics Framework
- Doing the Right Thing: Outlining the DWP's approach to ethical and legal issues (Bacon and Olsen, 2003)

Bryman, (2001, p.479) using work by Diener and Crandell (1978) defines harm in five ways: physical harm; harm to participants' development; loss of self-esteem; stress and "inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts", by these definition alone the concept of harm is not

always clear-cut. Bryman (2001, p.480) acknowledges that this multiplicity of terms can lead to a situation whereby it is not always possible to identify whether harm may occur. The British Sociological Association (BSA) reminds sociologists of their responsibility to protect the physical, social and psychological well-being of the participants through anticipatory planning.

Furthermore, Burns (2000, p.18) cites informed consent as being the most fundamental of all ethical principles in the field of research. Bryman (2001, p.481) urges that each participant should be given enough information so that an 'informed' decision can be made about if they are to participate in a study. Using guidance from the Social Research Association (SRA), he continues that this information not only concerns the nature of the study but also the nature of the research process. Bryman, (2001, p.481) questions the extent to which participants can be fully informed of every nuance of the research and criticises the ethical guidelines in this area as being 'easier said than done'. Furthermore Burns (2000, p.18) demands also that any consent by participants should be given without coercion. Moreover the research must be presented for what it *is*, otherwise claims of deception may be levelled at the researcher (Bryman, 2001, p.483). The threat of deception, maintains Bryman (2001, p.484), is unacceptable and liable to 'damage the reputation of sociology' as well as deterring the public from participating in future research projects.

In terms of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, Burns (2000, p.20) maintains that the key factor is the agreement between researcher and participant over the use of any data provided. This is reflected in the actions taken by the researcher to disguise the identity of any individual, or location, through the use of pseudonyms. If the researcher is unable to convey their commitment to maintain confidentiality it is unlikely that individuals will participate or if they do may refuse to answer anything other than the most perfunctory questions. Primarily based on the University's own ethical guide, but using guidance also from the aforementioned publications, an ethical 'checklist' was constructed (Appendix 4) and adhered to throughout each phase of the study. This applied to the qualitative interviews with public service users and DWP staff.

As well as participant well-being, the safety of the researcher was considered also during the course of the project. It was not possible to foresee the possible locations of interviews and any

particular risks they may present. That notwithstanding, DWP guidelines (Bacon and Olson, 2003, pp.33-34) discourage the practice of discriminating against geographical locations on grounds of the interviewer's 'discomfort' and advise that consideration of this problem be made at the planning stage. General safety precautions taken whilst in the field included a pre-arranged contact with a third party before the interview commenced, indicating that the interviewer was happy with the situation. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the interview a further contact with the third party confirmed a safe exit from the interview. Arrangements were in place so that this exit contact had an optimum time which, if exceeded, would trigger firstly, a telephone call to the interviewer and subsequently contact with local police. The third party was provided also with an interview schedule, including locations, which was returned and destroyed in accordance with Data Protection protocol, at the cessation of the fieldwork.

3.11 Interview topic guides: Service users

The topic guide was not used as a verbatim interview schedule, but as an *aide-memoire* to ensure all service users were given the opportunity to express their opinions on the same topics. The interviews were delivered in a relaxed, home environment and took the tone of a narrative on behalf of the service user. Interviewer intervention was minimal and occurred either as a result of having strayed off topic or in the course of guiding the service user to certain areas of enquiry.

3.11.1 Wave one (see Appendix 5)

The initial interview established the service users' characteristics, including familial and educational background, as well as their work history. This allowed some degree of comparability with known characteristics of lone parents, to establish how typical a sample they presented. They were also asked questions regarding current levels of service satisfaction and their opinion of changes in service quality, identical to those asked on the official Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey. These acted as mapping questions and, again, gave an indication as to how comparable their responses may be to the nationally surveyed population.

It then asked for retrospective accounts of *first* encounters with Jobcentre Plus and, if appropriate, its predecessor the DSS. Service users were asked to describe the encounter and

how it compared to what they had been expecting. Focussing down, service users were again asked to recall their first WFI and, if relevant, their *first* experiences of the NDLP. Again the enquiries revolved around descriptive accounts of the encounter itself and how the reality compared to their expectations. Finally they were asked to reflect on their *last* encounter with Jobcentre Plus, what it was for, how it measured up to their expectations and how satisfied they were with it. This was in order that any pre-conceptions of the service, based on first or previous, encounters could be recognized.

They were invited then to talk about their future work aspirations. They reflected on how confident they felt about getting a job at the present time, a query repeated as a mapping question across all three interviews. They were asked also what they would like to do in the future and what help they might need to achieve this. Finally, they were asked about their opinions of being a 'customer' and on any complaining behaviour they may have displayed. The conversation was directed at being a customer in a traditional consumer encounter, such as in a shop or restaurant. They talked about instances of good and bad service and their reaction in both situations. These enquiries were included at this point to allow for later comparison with responses about their complaining behaviour in Jobcentre Plus. Then they were asked to think about what it meant to be a customer at Jobcentre Plus, specifically if they felt that customer accurately described their perceived role.

3.11.2 Wave two (see Appendix 6)

The second interview opened with a repetition of the three mapping questions, as asked in the first phase interview (as described above). This formed an important part of the enquiry as it demonstrated change over time and gave the interviewer the opportunity to probe for factors that may have affected any change in opinion. They were asked then about any work undertaken since the last interview, and the support they had received in connection with this work. Leading on from this, they were asked to recall any contact with Jobcentre Plus since the last interview, its outcome and how satisfied they had been with it. This may have been in the form of a telephone call or written correspondence as well as their presence in the Jobcentre Plus office itself. This question was looking for factors that may have influenced their overall, and ongoing, expectation and satisfaction with the service.

At the time of the interviews, June to July 2008, an economic downturn was unfolding leading to fears of a possible recession, which may have been worse than previously experienced. Therefore, the conversation was steered towards a discussion of how the service user had been affected, and if it had had any impact on their work plans or their expectations from the Jobcentre. This was included to exclude any factors that may be directly attributable to the specific economic climate of the time. The discussion included enquiries about any other help they may have accessed, be it from friends, family or voluntary organizations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).

The interview concluded with their views on what constituted good and bad customer service in the private sector. This probed all elements that could affect the consumer experience, such as location and facilities, as well as elements such as the way the staff behave. This allowed a comparison of their expectations of the private sphere with their expectations of the public sphere.

3.11.3 Wave three (see Appendix 7)

The wave three interview started with the same format as of the first two topic guides, up to and including asking about any help they may have received from family, friends or other organizations. This again was to allow for comparison across time of their expectations and levels of satisfaction. Once again a record of their contacts with Jobcentre Plus and what effect this had had on their expectations and feelings of satisfaction was made, in order that specific events, that could have influenced their satisfaction, were isolated. They were then asked what they thought influenced their expectations with Jobcentre Plus and on what they based their level of satisfaction. These questions aimed to find out what effect other influences had on perceptions of satisfaction and if adverse influence or experience overrode positive elements of the service received.

Any complaining behaviour at Jobcentre Plus was examined, and service users asked to recall any time they may have received bad service and what prompted them to complain, or not complain, as the case may be. This line of enquiry was in comparison to questions asked in the wave one interview that explored complaining behaviour in private business encounters, such as when shopping. These two elements were deliberately asked at the first and last interviews,

as it was desirable that the service users themselves did not draw connections between the two. It was felt this would give a more accurate opinion of each situation. If differences were noted, service users were asked to reflect on what was difference between being a customer in the private sphere and being a customer of public services.

Outcomes had remained an important topic throughout the previous interviews. A line of questioning was included that asked service users to compare their outcome of the WFI with what they thought Jobcentre Plus' main outcome was. This gave an opportunity to clarify how service users defined an outcome and if service user and service provider outcomes were commensurate with one another. Finally, in ending the interview, further background information (e.g. number of children; length of current claim; educational achievements) was taken to provide further data to define a 'typical' sample.

3.11.4 Service user topic guides: Reassessment and revisions

As the sample size was small and time constraints were evident it was not possible to conduct a dedicated pilot study. Instead, the first five interviews of each wave served as 'pilot interviews' which were subsequently analyzed and any problems that had arisen were addressed, as detailed below.

Although the wave one topic guide itself did not alter as a result of the analysis of initial interviews, some particular issues with the way the interview was conducted did emerge. As at this first interview service users were asked to think about retrospective, current and future encounters with Jobcentre Plus, it was important that each of these time frames were clearly identified. Therefore, emphasis was placed on exactly what and when the service user was being asked to recall. It came to light also that service users with longer claim histories often recalled initial encounters as being with the DSS, as opposed to Jobcentre Plus; so it was necessary to establish to which department they were referring, in retrospective accounts. The wave two topic guide remained largely unaltered as a result of the pilot interviews but, once again, clarity of timescales remained a priority. This became evident when service users recalled experiences that they had already described at the phase one interview. The final wave required some minor adjustments as service users' understanding of 'outcome' remained confused. Therefore phrases such as 'what did you get out of it?' were used alongside the word

'outcome' in an attempt to make clear on what it was they were being asked to reflect. Furthermore, initial wave three interviews found that the enquiry 'How could you be made to feel more like a customer at Jobcentre Plus?' provoked some repetition of off-topic opinions given previously and so a lead-in to the question was introduced. This reminded service users of the previous discussions and steered them to a more specific response.

3.12 Interview topic guide: Staff (Appendix 8)

The staff interviews were administered over the telephone and, as mentioned previously, had a much shorter duration than the customer ones. Respondents were asked to undertake the interview during their working day and this did constrain the depth of enquiry that could occur. As such the topic guide was focussed and succinct, although staff respondents were allowed to take as much time in their replies as they felt necessary. The guide covered four areas relating to the measurement of customer satisfaction. These were local initiatives specific to that office, mystery customer visits, national customer satisfaction initiatives (including the Jobcentre Plus customer satisfaction survey) and customer complaints and compliments. In each of these areas, staff members were asked about who was responsible for the design and analysis of the initiative and how, and to whom, the results were disseminated. They were also asked, specifically, if customers were made aware of the results of any of the customer satisfaction initiatives.

3.12.1 Staff topic guide: Reassessment and revisions

As with the service user interviews, the sample size was too small to conduct a stand-alone pilot study. Once again the topic guide evolved to accommodate emerging issues. Revisions to the topic guide were made as a result of the first interview conducted. On commencement of the interview, when asked about a specific element of the satisfaction measurement process, the respondent was insistent on clarifying their position in the department. This appeared to be an attempt to justify why they may be unable to answer some of the questions. On reflection, it was felt that starting the interview by asking the respondents job role and the way it related to customer service would serve as a good lead-in. Furthermore, to reassure the respondents that knowledge gaps were in no way a reflection on themselves, a preamble was prepared explaining that they may not be able to answer all of the questions given their job role and

responsibilities. A further change was implemented when it became apparent that the line of enquiry, regarding national customer satisfaction surveys, was flawed. The original approach was to ask if the office had been involved in any nationally directed initiatives that would elicit a 'yes' or 'no' response. However, the phrasing of the following questions meant that those who answered 'no' were excluded, even though they may still have been aware of, or seen, working practices change as a result of nationally initiated schemes. Therefore an additional enquiry was made asking if they had seen or read results from any national customer satisfaction surveys.

3.13 Analysis of data

All interviews were recorded on digital voice tracer and fully transcribed by the interviewer. The amount, and complexity, of the data led to the conclusion that computer-aided analysis, beyond the use of spreadsheets to organize the data, was undesirable. Denscombe (2003, pp.276-277) confirms that using software programs can lead to the 'de-contextualization' and literal interpretation of the transcripts. Furthermore, he cautioned, analysis through the use of software can serve to distance the researcher from the data itself and overwhelm the analyst in 'data overload', producing a volume of data that requires evermore-complex interpretation that may be beyond the scope of a single researcher.

The decision for the author to transcribe the interviews was taken as it formed the first step of familiarization in the analytical method. The method chosen to analyze the data was the 'framework' method as proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). This method uses five steps in the management and analysis of qualitative data: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping, and interpretation. Ritchie *et al.* 2003 (2003, p.262) explained the process as being the creation of a 'thematic framework' based upon key themes, concepts and emergent categories that informed how the data was 'tagged' in relation to the framework. Once organized in this way the data was reduced and ordered into a thematic matrix. The thematic framework was organized in an adapted computer spreadsheet file and, where appropriate, further worksheets were added to the file to allow for the retention of data in one place, as recommended by Ritchie *et al.* (2003, p.220). In order to retain the context of the interviews, the data from each additional wave was catalogued as emerging themes within the original matrix. These were further defined as short and long term, to illustrate the

longitudinal nature of the study. The advantage of this was that a holistic view of the data was maintained.

3.14 Summary and conclusions

The methodology set out to support and enable an investigation into DWP service user expectations, how these expectations changed over time and what factors triggered these changes. It aimed to explore how expectations, and the changes in those expectations affected opinions of satisfaction with the service provided by the DWP. The service user group 'lone parents' was used as a case study. To further support these enquiries a study was also carried out, by means of DWP staff interviews, of how the DWP collect, analyze, utilize and disseminate customer satisfaction measures. By carrying out a focused literature review the main themes, identity, knowledge and expectations were recognized and used to inform the empirical work. Despite difficulties obtaining the sample, the longitudinal qualitative interviews with DWP service users were completed within an eight-month time-frame. In retrospect, the change in sample recruitment and the enhanced opportunity for service user contact prior to interview, contributed to a high retention rate of 97%. Further factors that contributed to the low rate of attrition was maintaining contact between interviews and carrying them out in the service user's own home.

As stated earlier, criticisms levelled at qualitative methods usually revolve around the issues of lack of ability to replicate, generalize and the overall subjectivity of the approach (Bryman, 2004, pp.284-285). These critiques appear to be the product of comparison with quantitative methods that list such attributes as its strengths. Although these criticisms could be applied to the methods proposed here the nature of this research is exploratory rather than explanatory. There is no intention to formulate a meta-theory of satisfaction; rather it is an exploration of the factors that affect satisfaction, as expressed by the service user. Also, as identified in the literature review, it is precisely the point that replication *is not* possible as the nature of the enquiry concerns subjective phenomena (feelings, emotions etc.). Similarly, using a post-modern theoretical framework the concept of generalization is not applicable as one of the defining features of the post-modern epoch is individualism and to argue for generalization as part of a methodology would be to argue against one of the critical aspects of the framework. Although subjectivity may be thought undesirable and inappropriate (Bryman, 2004, p.284), it

is this aspect that is one of the issues to be investigated throughout this research. Therefore the contradictions of studying subjectivity objectively are self-evident. If the object of the research was to demonstrate the need for more individualistic, in-depth exploration and measurement of satisfaction, to attempt it in any other way than through qualitative means would be to deny the legitimacy of the enquiry.

3.14.1 Lessons learned: what could have been done differently

Many of the problems encountered in this study were the result of unforeseen circumstances. The DWP data freeze imposed on outside researchers, and the resultant change in sample recruitment, meant that elements of the study had to be changed or removed altogether. The original intention of sampling lone parents with a youngest child in the age range of five to nine, and demarcating them on the grounds of NDLP participation would have yielded results that reflected satisfaction in terms of DWP service provision. Instead, the comparison of lone parents with a youngest child four years of age and under, and between five and nine years, gives a better reflection of service user values and beliefs about early years childcare provision. However, given the government's 'wraparound' childcare strategy and full 'Out of Hours' provision by 2010, this still gave an indication as to service users' opinions on public sector intentions and their impact on lone parents. It allows also for exploring what expectations of childcare assistance lone parents had and how this impacted on satisfaction with the service.

Furthermore, the means of recruiting the sample meant that it was not possible to complete transcription of wave one interviews before commencing the next. In order to minimize drop-outs from the study, interviews were arranged as soon as possible after recruitment. This slowed down recruitment to the study, because as interviews were being conducted recruitment was postponed. The consequence was that recruitment took two months. Therefore by the time wave one interviews were completed there remained only a short time before wave two commenced with not enough time to have transcribed all wave one interviews. This had a knock-on effect on transcription of wave two interviews, which then, inevitably, impinged on transcription of wave three interviews. In order that the preceding one informed subsequent interviews, an overview of significant or repetitive themes, that had emerged, was made before compiling the topic guide for these subsequent interviews. In practice this was satisfactory but ideally full transcription and analysis prior to repeat interviews would have ensured a more

comprehensive knowledge of the themes. It would also have allowed for the in-depth analysis to have been completed in smaller, more manageable chunks rather than as one complete undertaking after the completion of the fieldwork. However, the advantage of this was that the analysis was done in context.

In order to be able to continue with the original sample criteria despite the data freeze, a more protracted period of recruitment would have been desirable. Furthermore, on reflection and conditions permitting, it would have been a better strategy to segment the recruitment and interviewing waves. By doing this background work into the NDLP status of the service users could have been made allowing for this comparison to remain. Furthermore if all transcription of interviews could have been completed prior to commencing the next wave the resulting topic guides could have been tailored to emerging issues more accurately. It may have been possible also to have some level of bespoke questioning for each service user based on issues they raised previously. However, this is very much an ideal situation and one that was not possible given the nature of the study and the available resources.

The next chapter presents the analysis of overall outcomes as perceived by the service user. It recognizes the importance of process as well as the isolated concept of overall outcome. It explores the feeling of a lack of overall outcomes reported by the service users. The service users attending the department contrast this to the perception that any overall outcomes were for the benefit of the service providers in that they met service targets. A discussion of the emerging concept, orientation towards work or motherhood, is included. This also considers the interplay of this service user orientation with expectations to contribute towards a service user classification. This classification demonstrates how intersubjectively shared meanings lead to similarities in service user reporting of experience and level of satisfaction. The prevalence of DOAs and the effect they had on the satisfaction reported by service user is explored. Finally, the longitudinal aspects of outcomes are examined.

Chapter 4 Service user perception of processes and overall outcome

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the issues emerging from the interviews with service users, as they relate to overall service outcomes. As demonstrated in Chapter Two outcomes form a large part of government policy across most departments. Formerly outcomes have been presented in terms of benefits to the organization. This started to change in the welfare reform Green Paper 'No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility' (DWP, 2008c) whereby individual outcomes were presented as being equally as important as national outcomes. The trend continued in the Gregg (2008) report when non-tangible outcomes, such as psychological and familial improvements, were linked to more target driven outcomes for unemployment figures. Initial coalition government trends indicate that outcomes continue to be placed within the remit of the service user, with interaction and collaboration the key to achieving a service user-driven outcome (e.g. NHS, 2010).

This shift is important in terms of satisfaction. By transforming the public service user into active participants as opposed to passive recipients, the onus of blame for unfulfilled outcomes can be placed on the shoulders of the service users themselves. Similarly, there is more emphasis placed upon individual practitioners to ensure service users are given all the information needed to agree on acceptable outcomes, within the parameters of what can be delivered through the service given top-down constraints and budgetary controls. This may not be such a problem in public services whereby outcomes may be easier to isolate, but for services when the services being offered have less tangibility to them, this may not be quite such an easy task.

If this is the way that welfare reform is seen to be going then the first concern, raised through this research, is the extent to which service users understand the concept of outcomes. Questioning the service users directly in terms of outcomes elicited confusion and an inability to define what was meant by the term. This should be a major concern if, in future reforms, the service user is to take part in negotiations to define acceptable outcomes for themselves. Once usable terms were established the major discontentment displayed by the majority of the service users should also give cause for concern. Disagreement as to outcomes that were seen

as positive by both parties and criticism of the existence of any outcomes at all makes the implementation of any shared enterprise problematic.

This confusion in the definition of acceptable outcomes is highlighted in the possibility of satisfaction being tainted by an 'Outcome Effect'. This theory was evident in the 1993 (Benefits Agency) National Customer Satisfaction survey, which, according to Elam and Ritchie had a 'strong outcome effect' (1997, p.9). The 'Outcome Effect' refers to the phenomenon, noted by Baron and Hershey (1988), whereby customers may assess their satisfaction of the service based upon the eventual outcome as opposed to the quality of the service during which the outcome was reached. This is problematic in that assessments of quality may be based upon circumstances that are out of the control of the service provider. In terms of the public services, and particularly, Jobcentre Plus personal advisers often administer sanctions that are set nationally and so beyond the control of the individual, or indeed Jobcentre Plus itself. Later research by Hershey and Baron (1995) stated that:

...the likelihood of a good decision is increased by the occurrence of a success,
and the likelihood of a bad decision is increased by the occurrence of a failure.

Hershey and Baron (1995, p.127)

Tan and Lipe (1997) in later research supported this statement suggesting that negative outcomes result in negative evaluations and positive outcomes result in positive evaluations. Evidence of the existence of this outcome-effect would support Elam and Ritchie's (1997) work and would contribute towards an appraisal of current methods of measuring satisfaction.

Despite this narrow focus on outcomes in the satisfaction literature, evidence also emerged of the importance of the process of engagement with an organisation. Although not directly linked with satisfaction evidence from the service user interviews indicated that although the overall outcome was important in terms of contributing to future expectations of service quality, the path by which they had reached this conclusion did add to overall satisfaction. In order to be sensitive to this contextual service user engagement it was thought important to reconnect outcomes with a holistic view of the experience through the inclusion of inputs and outputs. Therefore, where a service user referred to opinions based on an overall process, it is referred to in those terms. Where the reference is to individual aspects of the encounter with the

organisation, the terminology associated with that stage of the process, input, output or overall outcome is used although they are still recognised as being part of an overall process.

In this chapter service users' opinions of overall service outcomes are explored. A lack of overall outcomes and the impact this has on satisfaction is probed. The influence of tangible evidence of their visits as part of a process including inputs and outputs, and its effect on satisfaction is also investigated. Scrutiny of service users' judgments of desirable overall outcomes is examined. This action highlights the influence that personal orientation towards motherhood or employment has on satisfaction with overall outcomes. Through comparisons of the service users' narratives a four-stage classification of service users is formulated.

The belief that the process was mostly for the service provider as opposed to the service user is looked into and the perceived benefits of the service to both management and personal advisers is opened up. The importance of the approach by service providers, particularly personal advisers, is encapsulated in the 'Desirable Outcome Assumption' (DOA) model that sees advisers' pre-conceptions as a barrier to service users' desires. In terms of measuring satisfaction, the most relevant finding is that of the way service users form their opinions of satisfaction based on the last service encounter. This then informs the expectations for the next meeting.

Within the discussion of findings, evidence from Elam and Ritchie (1997) is refuted in that overall outcomes were found to be more influential in the last service encounter than in the initial one. Furthermore, the complexity of defining a satisfactory overall outcome is compounded in that support for an 'outcome effect' is found within the opinions of the service users. This also reflects the difficulties encountered in measuring service user satisfaction in environments where the point of contact of the service provider has little influence over the support it can offer and the sanctions it must enforce. Previous suggestions, that in order to map patterns of satisfaction outcome and service had to be divided, were challenged through the formulation of the four-stage classification model. This introduced an element, orientation towards motherhood or employment, which was common to, but variable in, all service users. The existence of DOAs was compared with Greggs' (2008) insistence that it was service users pre-conceptions that hindered them in forming a productive relationship with the service. This was shown to be contrary to the reality revealed through this study. Finally, short-term

perspectives of satisfaction from the service user were shown to provide support for Herden's (2006) recommendation of personalized services.

4.2 Outcomes? What outcomes?

The overwhelming response when asked about the overall outcomes of the mandatory visits to Jobcentre Plus, as distinct from the process as a whole, was amusement and annoyance. For the majority of the service users there were no overall outcomes.

What outcome? It's the same isn't it- nothings really changed. I go back again in six months and we do the same again.

Interview 2: Service user 1

I don't get much out of it. The person I saw was actually covering for someone and hadn't done it for a few years and she didn't know the answers to things I was asking. She had to go and ask someone else, so yeah, the advice wasn't that helpful and I didn't really trust what she said 'cause she had to keep asking other people. So I suppose the only outcome was I think they are more incompetent than I did before.

Interview 2: Service user 19

This latter comment demonstrates the importance of quality service interventions, or inputs, during the course of the encounter supporting the assertion that overall outcomes, and if they are judged to be positive or negative, are more complex than face value would imply. In the simplest encounters, where the expectation of the individual was met or exceeded, simple satisfaction occurred.

I really came out with something, you know, two jobs to go for; but then I always tend to come out with something to aim for from the meetings, you know, if it's not jobs it's ideas of what to do next.

Interview 2: Service user 13

They were positive about me getting something else. I needed that because I was feeling a little bit...my confidence was down, but she said it wouldn't be long

and I'd get something else and sometimes you need to hear that. I walked in with no money and no confidence and I walked out with both again.

Interview 2: Service user 18

In both of these instances there was an element of tangibility in that both came away with something physical. In the first case that was jobs for which to apply and in the latter one financial reconciliation. Similarly, when service users went with expectations that were then unfulfilled simple dissatisfaction occurred.

Like I said, I came away with less than nothing. I went in with an idea of what I was going to do and they said they wouldn't help me. It wasn't the outcome I wanted because now I have to pay for it myself so no help at all for me.

Interview 2: Service user 1

Well I didn't get an outcome did I? I didn't get on the course I just got told to stay on benefits so there was no outcome apart from having my dreams trampled on.

Interview 2: Service user 30

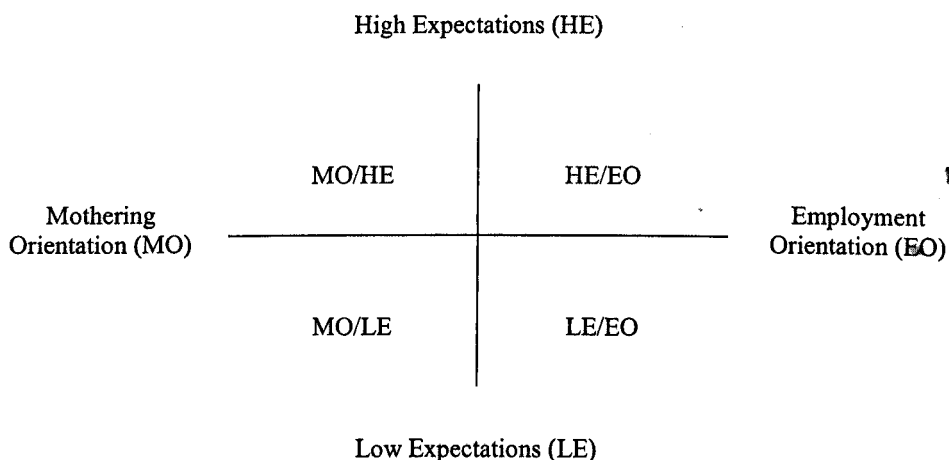
In the examples of simple satisfaction, the service users reported going in with little idea of what they wanted to achieve. By contrast, in cases of simple dissatisfaction the individuals had a clear idea of what they wanted the outcome to be. In all of these cases expectations did not play a part in the evaluation of the outcome. The initial meeting, on the service users' part, was approached based on emotions and wants as opposed to an expectation of what was standard and reasonable.

4.3 Identity orientation and expectation as indicators of overall outcome perception

On examination of the narratives given by the service users, expectations did not exist in isolation. They emerged alongside varying levels of personal orientation towards motherhood or employment. Personal orientation hinged upon the attitude of the service users towards parenting as a legitimate and necessary role. Combinations of these elements (expectations and orientation towards motherhood or employment) provide an indicator of likely satisfaction to

be expressed by the service user. The service users could be classified in four ways (see Table 4.1)

Table 4.1: *Classification of service user according to Expectation (E), Mothering Orientation (MO) and Employment Orientation (EO)*



The level at which a service user was placed in either of the elements was gleaned from the interview data. Through direct questioning about service expectations and current attitude to work and indirect questioning about provision of, and attitude to, childcare options it was possible to ascribe a classification to users. The service users expressed clear opinions of both of the attributes making it a straightforward exercise to fit them into one of the four classes of user. Of the sample more expressed opinions that classed them as having low expectations. However, in terms of expressing an opinion of motivation to fulfill the primary aim of Jobcentre Plus, to return to work or training, based on orientation towards or away from a primary mothering role the sample was fairly evenly divided. In terms of numbers in each category, with the exception of MO/HE, which had significantly fewer, the remaining three categories were evenly matched. Over the length of the study these attributes remained stable within each service user. Some service users with children under the age of five did report an intention to return to work when their child started full-time education. In these cases it is probable that their classification would change at this time. Therefore, to apply this model, potential periods of transition would need to be identified so that change of classification could

be anticipated. Of the whole sample, extremes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction were most evident amongst those that reported an orientation to return to employment.

4.3.1 Responses typical of MO/LE users

The service users in this category are typically those that have been long term unemployed. They include a large percentage of women who were teenage parents and who left school with few or no qualifications. They typically did not have any conception of what they wanted to achieve in the future. They had no or low expectations of what the service should offer them.

Well I suppose that I haven't got to do anything again which is what I wanted so I am very satisfied.

Interview 2: Service user 2

I was very satisfied, yeah. Yes, it went like it always did and I came out like I always do.

Interview 2: Service user 27

Service users in this classification get very little out of the service and so do not attach much value to rating it. Consequently measurements of satisfaction are predominantly neutral. Satisfaction reported by this group remains stable over time and prevails as long as expectations remain mutually low.

4.3.2 Responses typical of MO/HE users

Individuals in this category were mainly those who were short-term service users with little repeat experience who anticipated that the service provider had higher expectations of them. They often had some idea of their intended career path but little or no knowledge of how to achieve it. They acknowledge the expectation that they will have to return to work but do not expect to initiate the process themselves.

I just go 'cause we have to. I'm not really bothered I don't want a job. I was hoping it wouldn't do anything for me yet and I've been right so far. I expected it would make me do something but it hasn't yet.

Interview 2: service user 29

They're always on about these lone parents getting back to work and so I keep expecting to go in and be told I have to get a job or do something. But every time it's like no hard sell there's nothing for you and so I get pleasantly surprised and very happy.

Interview 2: Service user 18

Satisfaction in this group is very good and as long as their expectations of interventions remain high their notion of satisfaction continues to be stable, even if the level of service they receive changes. Either their expectations are met or their lack of work orientation is not challenged. Either outcome is acceptable.

4.3.3 Responses typical of LE/EO users

These service users have a clear idea of what they want to do in the future with regards to work or training. Length of time as a service user is varied and appears irrelevant, as a change in orientation towards employment has come through a clear adjustment in attitude. Many expressed that a long-term desire had been to start work once their youngest child was in full-time education. They have few or no expectations of the help they will receive from the service and they regard their desire to improve as a personal not public responsibility.

There are people happy to go along with only one brain cell working and be treated like that and they'll be happy with it 'cause they're not having to make any decisions. But that's not me. I know what I want and I don't expect anyone to want it as much as me, so why would I expect them to do the leg work for me?

Interview 2: Service user 21

I mean it would be nice if they did do more for me but I don't expect it. I think really as long as they make sure my money keeps coming while I'm out of work then I can handle the rest. It wasn't rocket science to ring up the college to find out what I could do was it?

Interview 1: Service user 24

Satisfaction remains high and relatively stable in this group even if the service alters or their personal advisor changes.

4.3.4 Responses typical of HE/EO users

These service users have set overall outcomes that they want to achieve. They have specific careers and courses planned and are reluctant to adjust their outlook. They expect a high level of inputs from the service, both in terms of investment and support, and expect it to be tailor made to their needs. They are unwilling to accept alternative courses of action.

Well I didn't get an outcome did I? I didn't get on the course I just got told to stay on benefits so there was no outcome apart from having my dreams trampled on.

Interview 2: Service user 30

I want them to have an expectation as much as I have an expectation. I expect you to sort this, this and this out 'cause I have done half the legwork for you- now it's your turn to live up to your end of the bargain. Just give me that help that I need.

Interview 2: Service user 16

Dissatisfaction, because of perceived bad service, was commonplace amongst this group.

In all of these categories there is the potential for an instance of dissatisfaction and/or satisfaction to occur during transition phase. For example, if an individual sees a different personal adviser or if they become subject to conditionality due to changing categorization of service user (e.g. lone parent to jobseeker). Therefore this concept of classification is most relevant for stable populations of service users.

In terms of the service users in this piece of research, typical levels of satisfaction as anticipated by the classification system were evident (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Satisfaction related to classification

Classification	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	n
MO/LE	10%	20%	60%	0%	10%	10
MO/HE	50%	25%	0%	0%	25%	4
LE/EO	25%	50%	12.5%	0%	12.5%	8
HE/EO	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	62.5%	7

The satisfaction reported for each classification was biased to specific categories as described above. Three outliers occurred that were contrary to the anticipated categorization. Further examination of the service user's characteristics found that in all three cases they had been subject to a fraud investigation within the last six months.

4.4 Outcomes for whom: them or us?

Regardless of the level of satisfaction that occurred as a result of service encounters many service users expressed an opinion that the primary overall outcome was for the benefit of the service providers themselves. As questions of identity had raised notions of being faceless and consigned to being a number in the system it was in these terms that some service users described the importance of the process of the encounter rather than just the positive overall outcome for the service provider.

That's it isn't it? It's about the outcome for them, the numbers, getting us through the system.

Interview 2: Service user 4

I mean they just sit there and it's so depressing. They're not positive and they're not upbeat so they have these targets that they have to meet and like, and I said I know what you're obligated to do but what can you do. I don't want to be here but what can you do?

Interview 2: Service user 1

Their outcome is “wayhey” we got another one off income support! Its statistics isn't it for them? There's no outcome for me and I'm glad to be of service.

Interview 2: Service user 27

The sense of dishonesty of user was also expressed as one of the desirable outcomes for the service provider. The interviews were seen as a further way that dishonest claimants could be caught out thus contributing to the on-going drive to expose benefit cheats.

Just seeing I'm still on the face of the earth and that they've fulfilled their legal part, you know; make sure I'm not claiming if I shouldn't.

Interview 2: Service user 29

One service user however, firmly attributed the ineffectiveness of personal advisers as being isolated from the department as a whole. They saw the individual personal advisor seeking an outcome that was good for them, that is retaining the numbers of unemployed in order to protect their long-term job security.

But think about it, in the long run they don't want everyone at work. If everyone that went to the Jobcentre got work where would that leave them? If it weren't for people like us where would they be? In the same boat as us. It's all about their pay packet.

Interview 2: Service user 30

This analysis of overall outcomes highlights the complexity inherent in using only outcome driven opinions of satisfaction to gauge the level of service user service that has been given. What constitutes a good level of customer service for one person may be judged as sub-standard by another and may be based upon the processes they have undergone not just the overall outcome. What seems to be an indicator of the objective value of the service assessment is the perspective of the service user, which is unavoidably subjective.

4.5 Service provider perspective: Desirable Outcome Assumptions (DOA)

One of the major findings to come from the data was the prevalence of inaction by service providers based on what has been termed Desirable Outcome Assumptions (DOAs). DOAs are assumptions about the service user based upon their physiological (both themselves or their

dependents), sociological or economical circumstances. These may be based upon pre-existing beliefs based upon stereotypes or previous experiences with service users displaying similar characteristics.

Physiological

Instances where the service user was judged to be in some way physically impaired resulted in a judgment of unsuitability for training or encouragement to actively seek work. This judgment was maintained even when the service user protested and requested help.

When I went back 'cause I found I was pregnant he was a wet blanket. He said you're better off staying where you are and I said I want to go back to school its not like I want to walk back into a job tomorrow morning do I? I need some qualifications behind me, yeah? I'm frustrated, more frustrated than anything else. I drive that meeting and I didn't get anything from it. It's like I keep saying I'm pregnant not terminally ill. I'm pregnant not handicapped!

Interview 3: Service user 30

They haven't really helped me much with my plans. I think they think with my health I'm never going to work again, looking after a special needs child there's no point going back to work for them.

Interview 2: Service user 26

She plainly said until you've had the baby there's nothing we can do, the whole interview lasted just five minutes. I hoped there'd be at least something I could do, some advice on what I could do, but nothing, no. I felt as though I was wasting her time. They didn't even say come back if you need anything else, not that I'm surprised by that. I walked out the door and they shut it behind me. You think they'd be grateful for someone who wants to do something.

Interview 3: Service user 24

Sociological

These DOAs are particularly hazardous when applied to certain user groups such as lone parents, whereby it is easy to define the service user by their circumstance. Some service users define this pre-emptive assessment as positive.

I think I was there two minutes and she said is everything fine, how I was? She asked if I was interested in going back to work yet and I said no because my son's too little. And that was it I signed a few pieces of paper and that was it. No I was in and out in two minutes.

Interview 2: Service user 25

It was just to find out what was what it didn't make me walk out thinking God I've got to get a job now, not at all but I knew when I went in that I wouldn't want a job so I came out happy. We all seemed to be thinking the same thing.

Interview 3: Service user 17

Well I wouldn't want to say there was any advice. I mean I can't remember exactly but I know I didn't come out feeling like I had been told anything that I didn't know when I went in. But I don't think they even expected me to want a job and so they didn't waste time on me.

Interview 3: Service user 14

Furthermore, the data highlighted examples whereby the adviser actively encouraged the service user to stay at home. The emphasis was on beliefs that parents (read mothers) derived more satisfaction and enjoyment from childcare than could be achieved through engagement in paid employment.

Before I got pregnant he'd said, "You've got your lads why do you want to go back to work?" He'd filled in the forms before I got there, always. He always said "why do you want to go back to work? You've got kids at home, stay at home with the kids enjoy them." But staying at home's boring, me and me mates think so, but they don't seem to think so.

Interview 3: Service user 30

When service users challenged the assumptions the advisers did not respond positively. A common observation was that they seemed ill prepared to deal with service users who wanted to get back to work.

I had to push and I was the last one and he said, "oh you're my last one today and you're going to be simple" and I said why? He said "have any of your circumstances changed?" and I says no and he says "well we've just got to fill in these forms" but I said I want to go back to work and that completely threw him.

Interview 3: Service user 13

I thought there'd be lots of skills training and somebody who could give me some idea of what was out there that with my experience could go for. But I thought when I said I wanted to work it would be like what can we do to help, what do you need? But it wasn't like that. They seemed to be very unprepared for someone saying, yes I actually want a job what can you do to help me? I suppose they spend more time kicking people into working, maybe it was a shock.

Interview 3: Service user 8

Financial

The third area that advisers applied DOAs was to the results of the Better Off in work Calculation (BOC). Where they deemed the financial reward of working to be minimal they assumed that the service user would not want to return to work for such a small reward.

Actually I wanted to do this job and it's like just, let's see, let's work it out and they do the thing (BOC) and they say "oh its not worth it. You're only going to be £5 better off. It's not worth you doing it". And actually I was a bit shocked really. It's about respect and showing the kids it's not just the money.

Interview 3: Service user 26

His best advice was stay where you are -you get more money. But it's not that that I'm after it's not, it's about me and improving myself and the life of my kids and I can't do that stuck where I am it's not just about getting more money, yeah?

Interview 3: Service user 14

By doing this they failed to weigh the psychological value of work not just for the individual but also for their children. Service users themselves were often aware of the benefits of working outside of financial remuneration and cited this alongside the benefits of an increased income. However, some service users appreciated the advisers approach and interpreted it as being realistic rather than obstructive or incompetent.

He was honest he didn't pretend that I could to get a job.

Interview 3: Service user 22

Well my advisor said "you do realize not everybody's suitable for that work?" He said, "They do have a high turnover and you might not take to it". I would have preferred some encouragement but I did appreciate his honesty.

Interview 3: Service user 13

4.6 Short-term opinions as overall judgment

One of the crucial findings from the data was the way that service users formed judgments of satisfaction. This was based upon short-term encounters as opposed to long-term ones. This way of forming opinions of satisfaction was based upon both positive and negative experiences.

If I had a really bad meeting, if I went for the meeting and they gave me an attitude and thought they could push me to do something then I wouldn't be very happy about that. No, I'd probably say then that it was crap until they could show me that they could do better. Until they show me that they can do something for me I'm not going to say it's all alright.

Interview 3: Service user 6

It is on the last one you go to, yeah. It depends when they ask... I mean if I go next week and they say you've got to get a job, you've got to do this and that then, yeah, I suppose I would base it on that one.

Interview 3: Service user 11

I suppose if I went in next time and had a new adviser and they really got things moving, told me how to make my CV attractive to an employer then I would probably say I was happier yeah than all the times before.

Interview 3: Service user 17

Furthermore, it was not only on their own experiences that service users based their expectations of satisfaction, but also on the experiences of others. The source of this information didn't have to be a long-standing trusted acquaintance, but merely the opinions of other service users whom they encounter on a chance basis.

When you sit around in the waiting room and you do strike up a conversation 'cause you're just sat there bored out of your brains, not get in get out, but you start talking and you hear what other people have to say... and then someone else says they haven't done this or that and you think "crap I hope it doesn't happen to me" and it has. So I'm not entirely surprised this has happened 'cause I've heard it off others. I was half expecting it... my turn will come! It's all nice and hunky-dory at the moment, but my turn will come and it's come. I'm in the same boat now.

Interview 3: Service user 16

What highlights the impact that this has on expectations of future service is evident in the comments of these service users. The last comment highlights how dissatisfaction is amplified when the expectation is higher, as opposed to having no or poor expectations.

When I go back I'll be expecting the same service and I suppose if I got something worse then, yes, I'd be annoyed more 'cause I'd been expecting different and I would probably have a lower opinion of them because of it. It

doesn't sound very good does it, but I suppose I would base it on what was happening straight away not in the past.

Interview 3: Service user 19

Yeah the last time wouldn't just influence how satisfied I was at that time but it would make me think about how it would be the next time I go in. Yeah, if something goes wrong then that's the new baseline for me.

Interview 3: Service user 30

4.7 Summary and conclusions

I don't think I was encouraged. I didn't think that... I thought, well the government wants all the single parents back to work, but I had to ask about that course. I had to push for that. I didn't feel like there was any help really It's very easy to say "yes, I want to go to work" then walk away from the interview. They make unfair assumptions about the people in there.

Interview 3: Service user 13

This opinion encapsulates the many facets attached to the place of overall outcomes in the encounters between service use and service provider within Jobcentre plus, many of which are indicative of the importance of the process as opposed to purely the outcome. It highlights the belief that in many cases there is no evident overall outcome as a result of the interviews conducted during the course of a claim. Simple satisfaction was rarely achievable due to the complexity of *what* constituted a good overall outcome, but in cases where service users perceived they had obtained tangible evidence of their visit then satisfaction was reported.

What did emerge was the importance of the previously unconsidered element of personal motivation based on attitudes towards the importance of mothering as a legitimate role and its interrelation with expectation. This led to a four-stage classification of service users, in this case the lone parent sample, based upon their orientation towards mothering or employment as primary identity and service expectation. Using this four-stage classification, three of the typologies satisfaction levels remain as neutral or positive even though they may be subject to bad service. Only one class of user, HE/EO, is categorically negatively impacted by bad

service. This infers that, for lone parent service users, measures of satisfaction are biased due to the proportionality of the sample. Therefore, in general, satisfaction measurements of consistent positive results may be more indicative of the characteristics of the service user as opposed to the quality of service being received. This is evidence of an outcome effect occurring within this population of service users. Service quality is secondary to the outcome of the encounter, and the overall outcome judgment, either positive or negative, is affected by the personal qualities of the individual, specifically their expectations in conjunction with their parental responsibilities. Furthermore, this type of classification opens up the possibility of influencing the results of satisfaction measures. By moving more of type HE/EO into the other categories it would be possible to achieve higher satisfaction scores in satisfaction surveys without the need to improve service. Conversely, if service level is truly deemed to be more important then by moving more of the remaining types into the HE/EO category better service could be achieved, albeit at the short term expense of lower satisfaction scores. What would need to be explored, however, is the effect that increased conditionality, whereby financial security is threatened through sanctions, is inflicted upon those who remain unmotivated, or unable, to return to work. By exploring if this type of classification can be extended to other user groups it may be possible that the value of service user's opinion of customer service, and the resulting level of satisfaction, can be appraised and levels of overall satisfaction adjusted accordingly. This notion of poor outcomes also emphasizes how little the service itself has set clear expectations of what they are capable of doing in the course of an encounter. By setting the expectations at the outset of the relationship they could head off undesirable outcomes. However they may also run the risk of reinforcing a negative outlook of the service user if they fail to fulfill the expectations that have been proposed.

A further point that was raised was the prevalent belief that the most important overall outcomes were for the service provider themselves. It was believed that the service user existed for the benefit of the service provider not the other way round, as should be the case. The main outcomes were those of fulfilling top-down targets of customer flow within the department. These were based, it was felt, upon issues such as seeing service users on time, both across the year and on the day. A small number of service users believed that, rather than it being a top-down prerogative, it was the outcome of sustained employment for the personal adviser that

was the motivation behind the ineffective service, and thus lack of overall outcomes, for the service user.

The most important factor to be elicited from the data on outcomes was that of the Desirable Outcome Assumptions (DOAs) of the personal advisers. There was a large amount of data to support the existence of pre-existing beliefs being held by personal advisers about the service users that affected the type and level of service they offered. These were broadly based around physical, sociological and economic factors that the advisers believed over-rode the desire or ability to take part in paid employment. The existence of such assumptions meant that, when service users acted in a way contrary to it, the advisor was unprepared to adjust their offer to take into account the request.

The finding that impacts the most on the future direction of gathering service user satisfaction data is the way that service users report satisfaction. This is done on the basis of the last service encounter. This short-term approach means that it is irrelevant what the quality of service has been over, sometimes, lengthy periods of service use. If at the last meeting the quality of service had been better or worse than expected or if the outcome was not deemed as being positive then the satisfaction will be reported accordingly. Furthermore, as well as reporting levels of satisfaction based upon the most recent encounter it is this instance that will shape the expectations of the next one. This is particularly detrimental if the service fails to live up to their expectations at the next meeting as the feedback shows that unexpected disappointment elicits a stronger reaction than emotions that are constant or are anticipated.

In terms of outcome based theories (as opposed to process based ones) these findings affirm the claim made by Elam and Ritchie (1997) who cited outcomes as being a 'significant factor' in the service user perception of satisfaction with public services. Elam and Ritchie's research however was based upon the financial success of the claim as opposed to the findings here that were based on the experiences of those who were engaged in long-term relationships with the service. The findings from this survey confirm that a satisfactory outcome for an individual did not always concur with a satisfactory outcome in terms of the aims of the service. This complexity is problematic in terms of gauging service user satisfaction. However whereas Elam and Ritchie suggested that, outcomes were more influential in an initial claim for benefit as opposed to at the last contact (p.53), the evidence from the data here contradicts this. In

terms of happiness, it is the outcomes from the last contact that is pivotal in shaping how the service user reports their level of satisfaction.

The findings from the data do offer an avenue to explore in mapping patterns of outcomes and satisfaction. Previously, research had suggested that it was difficult to 'disaggregate' outcome from service in any realistic way (Elam and Ritchie, 1997, p.54). The approach suggested here was not to separate the elements but instead to facilitate links to them through an additional commonality. In this cohort of service users the third element indicated was orientation towards mothering or paid employment as primary identity (Duncan and Edwards, 1997). This element is particularly useful as it can be applied to public services that users are compelled to use as opposed to engaging with voluntarily. In cases of compelled attendance motivation to comply with service aims as opposed to personal belief can be classed as 'sanctioned' and the resulting complex obverse outcomes and resulting dis(satisfaction) can be assessed within that framework. This approach is particularly promising given that work highlighted by Thomas and Griffiths (2004) suggested that service users' motivation could be changed if overall outcomes are viewed as a by-product as opposed to being the driving factor behind an intervention. Although the direction of the present coalition government remains firmly as outcome driven outside of the entire service process, initial indicators based upon emerging policy indicate that these outcomes will be formed with the service user as opposed to without them (e.g. NHS, 2010). In this case it is possible that, even though outcomes supersede aims, personal motivation and beliefs can still be changed as the aims and actions will be formed in agreement with the service user.

It is not surprising that there was a general suspicion concerning for whom the overall outcomes were intended, in encounters with Jobcentre Plus. Evidence exists (DSS, 1998b; DWP, 2006; Freud, 2007) to suggest that, historically, outcomes existed for the benefit of the government as opposed to the service user. Despite more recent attempts to recast outcomes as being for the benefit of the service user (DWP, 2008a), it appears that this interpretation has not been recognized by the service users of this study. If, as suggested above, the new direction is to move to a position whereby the service user actively defines desirable outcomes as opposed to accepting, adapting or rejecting the top-down definition of them, then it is possible that the embedded feelings of distrust may be overcome.

Despite this evidence for support of outcome-based models of satisfaction there is evidence to suggest that a process lead explanation is also valid. As Boyne (2003, p.216) suggests it is the 'controllable' variables, evident in both inputs and outputs, that needs to be considered if the assessment of overall outcome is to be validated. This also concurs with Osbourne's (2010, p.2-3) statement that maintains that service is akin to a process not merely an output; or for that matter an input or outcome. Furthermore, the reports of increased satisfaction of the overall outcome being enhanced by the addition of tangible evidence as a result of the encounter intimates that it may be possible to blend the manufacturing theory with that of the service one. Finally the service users report support Gronroos (2000, p.65) belief that even when a service outcome appears to be clear-cut; in this case successful employment or receipt of benefit, it is the process that contributes to that construction of satisfaction with the overall outcome.

Desirable Outcome Assumptions have emerged as a significant problem that exists within Jobcentre Plus. Evidence of the validity of this finding comes through the Gregg (2008, p.26) report, which was released immediately after the conclusion of the interviews. In the report Gregg linked unemployment with ill health and decreased psychological wellbeing to the individual, as well as stating the benefits to children of living in an environment where a parent is in employment. However, the most important revelation from Gregg was of the detrimental effect of pre-conceptions on satisfactory outcomes for lone parents. Ironically Gregg, citing work by Goodwin (2008), was referring to the pre-conceptions of the service user, in that their expectation of being forced into work inhibited their engagement with the service (p.38). What the report failed to acknowledge was the corresponding damage that service provider pre-conceptions did in terms of full engagement with the service user. This factor is one that can be viewed as open to change in an otherwise unstable relationship. To fail to acknowledge its existence would be to miss an opportunity to manipulate the personal motivations of the service user and contribute to mobility through the classification system and, ultimately, the satisfaction and service quality experienced by the public.

There is overwhelming evidence that the expectations and views on parental responsibility of service users (Duncan and Edwards, 1997) remain constant over the medium term, as represented by the six months of the empirical work for this study. However, the short-term perspective of the service user used in reporting satisfaction is problematic for the concept of

measuring service user satisfaction. It renders void the notion of spot checks or service user exit surveys as these will only offer a snapshot of the here and now and has no long term perspective. Therefore, within these findings support for Herden's (2006) recommendation of individualized engagement can be found. The belief that generic measurements deny the opportunity to build relationships between the service provider and service user are upheld. Similarly, the peculiarities are evident in the diversity of background and experience of the public service user, and the effect this has on expectations of good service. Consequently, only by extending the notion of personalized services to measuring satisfaction, can realistic evaluations of service quality be made.

The next chapter looks at the past, present and desired future experiences of the service users and how these affect their expectations and reports of service satisfaction. It uses past narratives of employment aspirations, academic achievement and benefit history, as well as influential experiences of friends and family. It asks service users for reflections on first experiences of using Jobcentre Plus and having a WFI. The effect of the current economic climate on service user perspectives of returning to work is discussed. Characteristics of service users reporting low and high expectations are isolated and the effect this has on their perception of satisfaction is explored. Future expectations are framed in a discussion of the longitudinal trajectory of expectations and satisfaction. Finally factors that affect satisfaction, and the way in which they influence it, are revealed.

Chapter 5 Recipient experiences, expectations and satisfaction

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Two, expectations have formed the backbone of research on customer satisfaction in the private sector throughout the last three decades. The EDT model, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988 in Devlin *et al.* 2002, p.118) promised to make EDT theory applicable to the public services, despite criticisms to the contrary. Misgivings of the theory hinged upon its focus on improving productivity, evident in increased revenue, as opposed to improving customer satisfaction. Criticisms heeded, SERVQUAL failed to materialize in the approach to service user satisfaction research for Jobcentre Plus. Prior to the 2009 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction survey (Thomas *et al.* 2010), the concept of expectations as important in measuring satisfaction was also discarded. Aside from the quantitative contribution to general satisfaction measurements, the 2007 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey (Johnson and Fidler, 2008) saw qualitative efforts concentrated on isolating drivers of dissatisfaction. From this it was concluded that:

The precise nature and order of importance of these factors varies slightly by benefit type, but the overall picture remains one in which the most dissatisfied customers overall are those who feel that office conditions are inadequate, that they are not being provided with accurate or relevant information, who feel that their access to services is limited in some way; who feel that it takes too long to deal with their business; that they are not getting the correct benefit payments and/or that they are not being treated with respect as individuals.

Johnson and Fidler (2008, p.59)

Despite the sensitive nature of defining negatively based opinions, service failures based on subjective factors, such as being treated with respect, were poorly ranked. Also omitted was any connection between expectations and the cited factors of dissatisfaction.

However, in the most recent 2009 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey (Thomas *et al.* 2010) expectations, although by no means embedded in every facet of the survey, were considered in their own right. Nevertheless, the analysis was superficial and based on a 'better than/worse than' binary, the result of which were links between 'very satisfied' service users

and exceeded expectations and 'very dissatisfied' service users and un-fulfilled expectations. One finding of interest however, was that many service users have low expectations of the service generally, reflected in satisfaction ratings in the mid-banding groups, fairly satisfied or dissatisfied, or neither satisfied or dissatisfied. This is consistent with findings, detailed in Chapter Four (p.99) that saw most of the service users who were classified as having low expectations of the service reporting satisfaction in the mid-banding groups mentioned above. In contrast to the 2007 survey the overall drivers of (dis)satisfaction were, this time, based upon satisfaction as opposed to dissatisfaction. The justification of this change from the previous survey was explained as:

Given that the optimum outcome is that customers are very satisfied with the service they receive, and not just fairly satisfied, it is more valuable to determine what leads to this high level of satisfaction.

Thomas *et al.* (2009, p.107)

Once again it is the controllable factors that ranked the highest as influencing overall satisfaction. In this case these were ease of getting in contact with Jobcentre Plus, provision of relevant information, convenience of local office, given correct information, timely response and, finally, the only factor based on subjective opinion, being treated in a polite and friendly way. These subjective factors did rank higher when applied specifically to face-to-face contacts; catalogued as 'customer treatment' they were the second most influential factor and included the element of 'being treated with respect as an individual'. This is complementary to the findings of this research on identity (see Chapter Six) whereby service users expressed distaste at being treated collectively and anonymously as part of the system.

Whilst this most recent survey by Jobcentre Plus acknowledges that expectations are a factor in opinions of satisfaction, it fails to explore the drivers of expectation, instead concentrating on the drivers of (dis)satisfaction. In each successive survey the bonds between key subjective themes, satisfaction and expectation, are further strengthened.

This chapter explores factors that affect expectations of Jobcentre Plus service users that may not be currently considered in the national customer satisfaction survey. The low level of academic achievement of service users, for the area, is revealed, as are early aspirations. These

early aspirations show the importance of parental influence, as well as a gender-typical approach to career goals. A comprehensive assessment of factors that influenced initial expectations of Jobcentre Plus revealed two influential aspects. The first, family and friends, by their interventions caused both friction and acclaim. The second aspect, previous involvement with DSS and the Benefits Agency (BA), the two administering agencies under the Department for Education and Employment prior to the formation of Jobcentre Plus, presented an opportunity to explore the types of comparisons made between the old and new system.

Analysis then focussed on the opinions of the first experience of Jobcentre Plus. The main focus of these opinions was the physical environment. This provided an interesting contrast to the first impressions of WFIs, where opinions were focussed on service quality. Comparisons with other public services were also noted. The existence of tacit knowledge was revealed in the discussion of expectation in relation to the WFI. This was an important finding in relation to classification of users (see Chapter Four) and the need for qualitative probing in order to correctly classify users according to both implicit and tacit expectation. As in Chapter Six, the importance of the chosen identities of the service provider was raised in the interpretation of 'Work Focused', which directed the expectations of users. Factors that affected service users perspectives on employment were explored with two factors showing themselves as significant. Firstly, the current economic climate which lead service users to form unfounded assumptions about the difficulty of gaining employment. Secondly, when asked about perspectives on returning to work, service users expressed their opinions in terms of psychological well-being as opposed to financial gain demonstrating that the current approach taken by Jobcentre Plus in giving out BOCs will not resonate with the service user.

Service users were grouped into three categories according to the expectations of the service that they displayed. Low expectation service users did not expect or ask anything of the service. High expectation users are sub-categorized into bottom-up and top-down drivers in accordance with their level of self-expectation. Finally, transitional service users use their previous experiences to inform their expectations. Expectations of future encounters were based upon the repetitive nature of the interviews and interventions. Longitudinal analysis reveals that these attitudes are fundamentally stable across both the long (in this case eight

months) and short term, as are initial expectations. Stability of expectations was affected by the level at which the expectations were held and according to their classification alongside orientation towards motherhood or employment. The influence on expectations of non-intervention by the service provider was examined and this suggested the stagnation of satisfaction through such inaction. Fluctuations in satisfaction were examined and factors such as personal advisor attitude and power imbalance within the relationship, service provider/service user, were explored.

The discussion cites support for Devlin *et al's* (2002) theory that refers to four factors of influence on expectations. Some terms of conflict with the definition of explicit influences are recognized. Support for the models proposed by Zeithaml *et al.* (1993) and Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) is also expressed. However, the same support for MORI's (2002) supposition did not materialize fully in the findings, only supporting assertions of media influence, not private company comparisons. Support for the existence, and importance, of tacit knowledge, as proposed by Polanyi (1967) is evident in the service users' responses. Overall the evidence indicates that the dominant EDT is too simplistic to apply, in isolation, to measures of satisfaction with the public services. Finally, the opinions expressed in this study support the notion of a 'halo effect' (Davis and Heineke, 1997). However, attributes of certain users, those classified as HE/EO, overcame the constraining nature of this phenomena and it should not, therefore, be seen as limiting.

5.2 Academic achievement and early aspirations

As reported in Chapter Three the academic attainment of the sample was generally low with many of the service users leaving school with no qualifications. For some this was a choice based upon their career aspirations (see below). Others however were not able, or were unwilling, to engage with education due to other factors:

When I was at school, for the ten minutes it took me to go through the front and out the back; well when I was there I got picked on a lot and well it was easier to stay away and deal with me Mum getting on at me than deal with the other kids.

Interview 1: Service user 1

Got picked on, left at end of year nine to be home-tutored but that went a bit pear-shaped and so I left with no qualifications at all.

Interview 1: Service user 25

Career goals that were identified were set low, with the emphasis on earning money nor on a job with little responsibility. Service users talked of being classroom assistants never teachers nor secretaries nor managers:

I wanted to work with children, nursery or like primary school, nothing too high. I would have liked it in nurseries and crèches. Not teaching though, hands on. With little un's you can get dirty and play with the sand. I didn't want to have to stay on and do anymore school work, no, and I didn't want to be the one taking work home with me at night neither. I'd have been happy to just get me hands dirty not have to teach them anything.

Interview 1: Service user 28

I left school without doing my GCSE's. I went straight to the biscuit factory. The money was more appealing. There was no reason to stay on and do the exams when I'd already got a job and was earning more than the ones who did do the exams. I didn't see the point then although now I'm not the one laughing.

Interview 1: Service user 17

In applying a classification system (see Chapter Four) to service users in order to recognise similarities in overall satisfaction outcomes, certain personal characteristics become apparent in each of the categories. Orientation towards motherhood or employment, combined with expectation, was identified as a factor in determining the overall outcome of service encounters. Analyzing accounts of early career aspirations highlights what career aspirations did exist for an individual given a position of possibility, such as in early education. For the sample of service users' aspirations, as shown above, were generally low from an early age and were often based on traditional and stereotypical views of gender:

Anything in an office, anything to get a pair of stiletto heels on.

Interview 1: Service user 4

That's what I thought women did, they had children and they packed up work and looked after them. Men went out to work, yeah.

Interview 1: Service user 9

Highlighting the importance of parental occupation on children, the first of these two service users had a mother who worked as a dinner lady in the service user's formative years who then 'up-skilled' and became a secretary during her impressionable early teens. The impression that she formed, of success as being akin to administrative work and the opportunity to augment her sexuality, are apparent in her response. Similarly, the comments of the second service user, mirror her own family history where her own mother had given up factory work in order to raise the family. Even when her mother had become a single parent she did not return to work but re-married soon after her divorce. This pattern was evident across the majority of the service users. In several cases, aspirations only stretched towards becoming parents themselves:

I never really wanted to be anything other than be a parent. I done really well at school then got to the third year and decided I didn't need my brain to be a parent and by that time a few of my friends had had babies so I just left school never bothered going.

Interview 1: Service user 14

This was the predominant experience reported by the service users who had become mothers whilst still teenagers or, in some cases, whilst still at school. Some service users also reported low academic achievements as a direct result of poor family conditions whilst they were young. Other factors that contributed to individuals opting for parenthood as a career choice were having witnessed drink or substance abuse by one or both of the parents or having been abandoned, either to other family members or into social care. The rationale behind their choice to become pregnant was similar in most cases:

I just wanted to be a better mum than me own, yeah, that's all I ever wanted. A better mum than me own is the only thing I ever wanted.

These opinions concur with the aforementioned evidence that parental influence plays an important part in the long-term aspirations and career choices of their children. This is not only through the career choices they make themselves but also through their own parenting skills and attitudes towards mothering as worthwhile and legitimate work.

5.3 First impressions last: Factors affecting initial formation of expectations

It is very unlikely that service users approach their first encounter with Jobcentre Plus free from preconceptions of what to expect. It is inevitable, whether consciously or not, that they will have been exposed to different opinions and experiences. In an era of high unemployment, most people know someone who is out of work. Likewise, it is difficult to avoid the media attention that is given to the unemployed or resist a laugh at comedy sketches such as 'The league of gentlemen' or, as service users in this study did, recall sit-coms such as 'Bread'. The impressions left by these influences will contribute towards how the service is approached and what the service user expects.

During the survey service users were asked to reflect on factors that had influenced their perceptions of the service. The two most influential factors affecting initial expectations of Jobcentre Plus were family and friends and the previous manifestation of the DSS, the Benefits Agency.

5.3.1 Family and friends

Family was an important point of reference for many of the service users in the survey. This was not confined to immediate family but extended across a diverse range of Aunties, Uncles and extended family members. Much of their families' knowledge came through direct experience of claiming benefits themselves:

Yeah, I always go to my Mum for advice. My Mum knows loads about benefits caused they've claimed nearly every one, me Dad's disabled so he's got disability.

I'd be straight in touch with my Mum. She knows the benefit system. She probably knows more than the ones at the Jobcentre.

Interview 1: Service user 27

Service users viewed them as a reliable source of information and maintained that their experiences and overall outcomes were usually similar to what had been described by their family. The accuracy of friends' accounts however, was reported as being less reliable:

People were telling me you'd get this and that and they (Jobcentre Plus) were like "no". They (friends) told me I could get this and that and these people they got free council tax and stuff and they knew how to use the system, I didn't have a clue.

Interview 1: Service user 4

In cases like these the dissatisfaction was directed at the Jobcentre Plus for refusing to provide the same benefits as the friend, even though they acknowledged that, although similar, their situations were different. Annoyance was not directed at the friend who had given them information that turned out to be incorrect. However, in terms of the process, as opposed to the financial calculation, friend's accounts proved to be more accurate:

It was pretty much what I expected really. Someone I knew had been before me and said this is what happens and they explained what had happened, so that when you got there you virtually knew what was going to happen.

Interview 1: Service user 5

Both of these accounts demonstrate the potential for both good and bad perceptions of satisfaction to be created. In each case the expectation was set by the experiences of another service user. In the latter, experience was compared in terms of service standards. These service standards were found to be comparable and so the expectation was met. However, in the former, by comparing the experience on financial terms, rather than on service standard ones, expectations were unlikely to be met due to the individual nature of entitlement. For the service provider this represents a problem in terms of maintaining service user satisfaction.

These expectations, which are based upon criteria that cannot be fulfilled and created through external influences that are uncontrollable, leave little scope to prevent disappointment. The best that could be achieved would be to impress upon new users the incomparability of their circumstances with anyone else in an attempt to allay annoyance at unfulfilled expectations. This approach assumes that the service user is capable of recognizing that expectations built upon other people's opinions, may not be valid in forming their own expectations. Evidence from the data suggests that people are able to acknowledge this:

You can't say that what your friends tell you doesn't influence you at all. If you turn round and you've got someone else's opinion of something before you even get there, then you do go in with expectations that their opinion's going to be right. Of course you do. Other people's opinions do influence you especially if you've got no experience of it yourself. You will take their opinions on board.

Interview 3: Service user 14

Yes we do compare experiences and, yeah, what's going on with my friends does affect how I go in, I suppose, and what I say to them or ask.

Interview 3: Service user 29

It is not just expectations of the service that are formed through the experiences of others but also the expectations of, and motivations towards seeking training or employment:

My mum's just started a new job and she's enjoying it so it's made me think about it more.

Interview 1: Service user 25

Me mate went into work and it's put me off. I know she's better off with money but it's the... I couldn't do what she does and the running around and the to and fro and having to be up and out first thing and getting the kids out. No, I've seen what she does and no, it's put me off.

Interview 1: Service user 29

These observations are evidence of the complex nature of expectations and the difficulty in managing them in order that a fair assessment of service quality and resulting satisfaction can be made.

5.3.2 Pre-Jobcentre Plus: Memories of the 'DSS' (BA)

Prior to Jobcentre Plus, benefits and employment were handled by the Employment service and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Two agencies in this department that existed for the benefit of the unemployed were the DSS and the BA. One of the most influential factors affecting expectations of the service was an instance where they had previously used the service as these separate agencies. Their experiences impacted strongly on their assessment of Jobcentre Plus and whether they saw them as being positive or negative. All service users related to the term DSS as opposed to the BA. Assessments of the DSS (BA) were dominated by comments regarding the type of people who were to be found there and the physical environment. Negative assessments were directed at the service users with the terms 'tramps' and 'drunks' frequently being used. Several service users who could recall using the DSS for the first time stated that they 'got what they expected' (Interview 3: Service user 19). However, the majority of service users who had used the DSS commented favourably on the level of service that they received. The staff were described as friendly and the ability to drop-in without an appointment was seen as superior to the system that operated in the new Jobcentre Plus offices.

Recollections of the Jobcentre were overwhelmingly positive. The primary reason for this was the way in which vacant jobs were advertised. In the Jobcentre vacant positions were displayed on cards, grouped according to work category. When a suitable vacancy was found the service user would take the reference number to an advisor who would talk them through the vacancy details and then, if necessary, phone up the employer to arrange an interview. In Jobcentre Plus all vacancies are accessed through a computerized Jobpoint. The database can be searched on several different criteria. The details of suitable vacancies are then printed off on a ticket. Unlike the old style offices, unless you have an appointment, the service user has to follow up on the vacancy themselves:

Before, you could see the jobs that were there, all set out on cards. It used to be like, you could go in and look for certain type of jobs, browse around, pick what suited you then and there. Then it was more like shopping. It was much more accessible.

Interview 2: Service user 13

I didn't realize it had changed so much and it's not as good. I was disappointed. Before, I had gone into the Jobcentre and I had really walked in, looked at the jobs, phoned up and got it. I thought, especially with having work-focussed interviews and a personal adviser well, I thought, if I had got a job without that sort of help then it would be easier now.

Interview 2: Service user 15

Several service users, who had used the Jobcentre before its re-branding to Jobcentre Plus, commented on how accessible was the old system. Job-hunting only required the service user to be able to read, rather than be confident enough to use a computerized system. In response to being asked if there was anything similar to shopping in using Jobcentre Plus, service users who recalled the old style of Jobcentre reflected on feeling more like a customer then as opposed to now. This seemed again to come back to experiencing something like shopping that included tangible commodities. Service users could browse a range of jobs in very much the same way as you would browse in a shop. They could then take their selection to an adviser and organize an interview then and there. They would, more often than not, leave the premises with an appointment for an interview in their hand:

Whereas before, when you went into a Jobcentre, they seemed to want you to go back to work. Now its just numbers, figures, benefits, all paperwork.

Interview 2: Service user 30

This discontent appears to be as a result of the service itself being perceived as heavily weighted towards the benefit side of the relationship as opposed to being focussed on work or training.

5.4 First experience of Jobcentre Plus

Following on from the experiences of the DSS and the Jobcentre comparative opinions of Jobcentre Plus are similar across service users who had experienced both:

When you go in it's like much nicer than that and no 'tramps' but the service was just the same. You still were waiting around to be seen and then when you do sit down there's...no they don't really push you into work they just sign you on, everything's the same, yeah.

Interview 2: Service user 28

But the first time I went back after I'd had the kids, about three year ago it was very different. Nothing like the DSS had been it was cleaner and quite posh. I expected a lot of hassle to get into work and things like that and, yeah, I got that if not a little bit more than I expected. I mean I only had to mention an idea and it was like, oh yeah, let's get you on this course then, even if I didn't really feel ready to. Now though it's not as clean as when I first went, yeah, it's getting back to how it was with the DSS and they don't send me on courses anymore so I'm a lot happier with it than I was.

Interview 2: Service user 3

Initial feelings on the first visit were very much centred on the physical environment that, it was unanimously agreed, was much better. However as the first service user's comments reveal the service was more similar to that experienced in the DSS as opposed to the Jobcentre. This was despite the aims of the department amalgamation to align benefits with the wage packet, by making work pay and making a clear connection between the rights and responsibilities associated with receiving state support. The second service user's comments are interesting as they hint at a gradual decline in both the physical environment and the service quality to levels that were similar to the old system. Of concern is that this decline should have elicited a response of dissatisfaction in the service user where the opposite is seen to be true.

Some of the service users who had not claimed benefits before were reluctant, or unable, to identify what their expectations of the service had been. Of those that could however,

expectations were often based upon stereotypical notions of the physical environment and of the type of people who would be there. In some instances media influences were apparent:

And the Bread thing, well it was nothing like that and I was still expecting it to be like Bread. The offices are, well, posh and it's appointments and no waiting around. I didn't expect that either. It had all changed in the years between Bread and it's not really that long.

Interview 1: Service user 26

The place was different to what I thought, much posher. I mean you hear Jobcentre and you just assume it's going to be dingy and dark like on the 'Bread'. Do you remember that? With Joey and they were always miserable and waiting in queues.

Interview 1: Service user 24

Interestingly, expectations of the first visit were based on the physical elements of the appointment such as the environment or the appointments system, instead of what would be asked of them at interview. Likewise, attention was focussed on the inanimate aids rather than the human advice that was offered:

When I saw those machines when I first went in, I were like how the bloody hell do you work them and there was nobody there to help me. I expected maybe some kind of tour of the building and some one to show me what to do. I just went upstairs for me appointment. They never mentioned the computer and I thought well you already think I'm stupid ending up here in the first place I don't want to prove it by looking stupid as well. And the computers I mean for me they are scary things, stay away from it (laughs). The first time I tried to figure it out for myself I was just pressing the buttons and it kept sending out a ticket for a job (laughs) and I'm like 'help'. I thought that considering it's a place to look for jobs that wasn't a very good start for someone not comfortable with computers.

Interview 1: Service user 17

It was not an unreasonable expectation that help would be available for the first time user of Jobcentre Plus. This case illustrates the expectations that are also made by the service provider in that users are expected to have the knowledge to use technology or, at the very least, would be expected to ask for help if necessary. This latter expectation is confirmed in that no one offered any assistance in using the computer but assumed that none was needed.

Although the majority of service users believed it was impossible to compare their experiences at Jobcentre Plus with private sector businesses there was evidence of comparisons with other public sector departments:

Well it's like any of the things I don't have to pay for isn't it? Like you go to the doctors, that is if you can get an appointment and then it's like waiting around for them to see you and once you're in there they don't actually listen to what you need. And you can't complain can you in case they'll just treat you worse next time, they'll know who you are.

Interview 3: Service user 22

Just like I suppose it was what I expected. The place was nicer, cleaner and no drunks lying about and it was a bit like the doctors you have an appointment but they rarely see you at the right time.

Interview 1: Service user 29

Notions of getting something for nothing and the implications this has on the expectations you can have of the service are evident. Expectations are low based on a concept of gratitude for, as opposed to stipulations about, any help that is given. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of the interactions with both Jobcentre Plus and the GP, impinge upon the perceived ability to complain. This fear of unofficial discrimination applied in subsequent encounters is persistent in relation to the public services and contrary to the notion of a consumer relationship. This is an interesting aspect, that some public services can be a factor in forming expectations of others. In the example here, the NHS (2010), despite offering more elements of choice to the service user in that they can change their GP if not satisfied, does not provoke a more consumerist attitude towards it in the individuals who use its service. Instead, elements of poor quality are accepted and then expected in other publicly funded services.

5.4.1 First Work-Focussed Interview (WFI)

As discussed above expectations regarding the first visit to Jobcentre Plus were focussed on the aesthetics of the site as opposed to what would happen in the interview. Recollections of first WFIs are varied with some service users reporting a positive experience but the majority experiencing a negative impression. Evidence of unacknowledged tacit expectations is also apparent through the service users' commentary:

Well like I said I ended up getting very upset because they really seemed to be hammering home how important it was to get a job which well basically wasn't very helpful at that time. They did look at my benefits but the main point seemed to be you need a job you need to get off benefits even though I'd only been on them a short time. I don't know, she made me feel like I was another lone parent, another scrounger.

Interview 1: Service user 7

Well if I had been ready to get a job then it would have been helpful I suppose but as it was it was just annoying because they just talked at me and didn't listen to what I was saying and I thought it was a waste of their time and mine as well.

Interview 1: Service user 9

Both of these opinions reveal an un-disclosed, or un-recognized expectation that despite being a Work Focussed Interview there would be no focus on work. Furthermore the second response shows an expectation that the interview would be power-neutral and representative of a negotiated dialogue between service provider and service user. The disappointment that their opinions were not taken into account is evident. This frustration could only come in response to an expectation that they would be allowed to contribute to the discussion. However, when asked at an earlier interview about expectations of the first WFI, none of these issues were acknowledged.

I got more help and their attitude was very different. There seemed to be more opportunities to do things not just here's your money now get a job quickly.

Interview 1: Service user 8

This response is revealing as it alludes to the attitude of the personal advisor as compared to a previous negative encounter or pre-conceived ideas of the way benefit recipients are treated. The service user indicated also, that they were expecting a hurried encounter based on financial placating where they were offered alternative courses of action towards entering employment. One response, in particular, was of interest in that it was difficult to discern any real personal expectations of the first WFI:

I went in for this work-focussed interview and there didn't seem to be much work-focus or, being honest, any focus. I felt like it was just really a formality.

Interview 1: Service user 19

In this example it appears that the service user has based their expectations purely on the labels attached to the service. The term 'work-focussed' has been instrumental in setting an expectation for the service user. This has not however materialized in the encounter. This is interesting, as it is a clear example that supports the assertions in Chapter Six, that identity, and in particular labelling, is an important factor in setting expectations and subsequent satisfaction.

The opinions of the service users show how tacit expectations can be deduced from their answers. Expressions of (dis)satisfaction reflect what was expected of the level of service. These opinions, or rather their diversity, also highlight the importance that expectations play in creating a good experience. Expectations provide a benchmark upon which to decide if what is experienced is acceptable or not. Without expectations the service user is left to the peculiarities of the individual advisor and the assumptions that they may make based upon the information they have.

5.5 Factors affecting expectations in the present

The biggest factor affecting expectations of both self and the service provided by Jobcentre Plus was the current economic situation. Even though some of the service users did not recognize the recession in terms of the larger economic impact it was having globally, the majority of them could relate to the individual impact on their own lives and consumer habits. Discussions around these consumer habits revealed that these service users had seen a rise in the cost of their weekly shopping and those who had access to a car could identify that the cost

of filling it with petrol had dramatically increased. This awareness, and its implications for the jobs market, was evident in attitudes towards finding a job in the current climate. Also indicative of the influence of the economic climate on the work of Jobcentre Plus is the inclusion in the 2009 customer satisfaction survey (Thomas *et al.* 2010) of the objective to examine the impact of the economic downturn on service user satisfaction.

Also, exerting an influence is the perspective taken by the individual on returning to work. Although for some the impetus was clearly financial, many of the service users could articulate other reasons why returning to work was important for them. This is reminiscent of the work by Layard (2005) on happiness. Layard concluded that financial reward was not the key to achieving happiness and, indeed, financial reward was only ever relative to others. As financial reward for working as compared to remaining on benefits was low, the service users who were positive about returning to work often framed the rewards in non-financial terms.

5.5.1 Current economic climate

As mentioned above service users were aware of a change in the financial climate even if they were not politically aware of the situation. This came through noticing a change in their outgoings compared to previous months. This awareness projected a set of assumptions onto the prospect of regaining employment in the current climate. These were just assumptions however and none of the service users could base them in fact:

The economic situation, yeah, they're not going to set somebody on who's been out of work 12 years when they can set someone on who's been out of work a few days, someone with all the experience. I'm at the bottom of the pile again.

Interview 3: Service user 4

It's put me off looking. There's so many people losing their jobs and its put me off looking 'cause I've not been in employment for years. Those that have just lost a job have got more chance of getting a job than me. Yeah, it has put me off looking.

Interview 3: Service user 27

This attitude is reminiscent of the 'discouraged worker' effect as first described by Long (1953) and elaborated on in his later work (1958). This theory purported that during times of recession workers gave up looking for work in the belief that none was available; instead electing to remain unemployed until the economic situation had improved. Although predominantly applied to older male workers, Blundell *et al.* (1998) applied the model to female employment participation. They found that "looking for work has such a low expected pay off...that such people decide that spending time at home is more productive than spending time in job search" (Blundell *et al.* 1998, p.104).

Furthermore, the economic climate affects also the way service users view the reasonability of requests from their personal advisers in regard to looking for work. Requests that were once deemed reasonable, in the context of a recession were seen as pointless and excessive:

Bloody miracles, yeah, in this current climate, definitely. I mean they haven't thought about how it's changed have they? Things that used to be worth doing just aren't anymore are they?

Interview 3: Service user 6

They expect too much of people nowadays. There's so many unemployed that they won't have someone with no qualifications like me. Even the Polish, they're going back now, there's nothing even for them.

Interview 3: Service user 22

One service user articulated the way the recession had impacted on all aspects of their ability to gain employment:

The longer it goes on the worse I feel about myself. I've not been able to get out and meet new people or anything. I do nothing. I'm trapped. But I still have to go down there and get grilled and I don't see the point. There's so many not got jobs now so why would they pick me. It's not fair and they don't seem to admit that it's a different world out there at the moment.

Interview 3: Service user 15

This perspective shows the knock-on effects of an economic downturn. As a result of having less disposable income, the service user is unable to enjoy as much mobility and social activity as previously. This decreases confidence and limits opportunities for networking. They then feel unable to comply with the request from Jobcentre Plus, partially due to their personal state of mind and partially due to the perceived state of the job market. This culminates in increased dissatisfaction with a service that they feel has failed to make allowances for their personal position. Then, in turn, they feel animosity and dissatisfaction.

5.5.2 Perspectives on returning to work

The financial impact of returning to work was mentioned less than the positive social and cultural aspects of being in employment. When opinions were in terms of finance it was not in relation to how much better off they would be:

If you're sinking it's not worth you working 'cause if you've debt they want more off you.

Interview 3: Service user 1

This service user's opinion draws attention to a failure of the BOC. This calculation is done on the grounds of zero debt. By undertaking work others could find themselves worse off and being aware of this is a factor in staying on benefits.

By far the most recognized benefit of returning to work was in terms of psychological well-being and social opportunities:

People do it for the social side. There's all these people on depression and I'll tell you why it's because they're isolated, the isolation. It isn't just the work they don't seem to recognize it's not just about money or financial or you'll be better off in this way. They're dealing with the symptom not the cause.

Interview 3: Service user 1

You don't realize when you're at home with the kids you just get into a routine it's almost like dying inside, no stimulation. You go to the supermarket, go shopping and that's the highlight of my week. It's a quality of life, if you want the best quality of life you've got to work.

Interview 3: Service user 13

I know loads of people at the school but they're not interested in working. When I say what I've done they say "why bother it's not worth you working?" It's not about it being worth it. It's about my kids seeing me work, my sanity. I'm bored. Most people want to be on the dole but I don't. I've done both and I prefer work. I had something to get up in the morning for. You had a social life. I mean all I have to talk to is the TV. What's the point of me getting up in the morning? My biggest treat is doing the food shopping, but it's depressing. It's exciting and depressing all at once.

Interview 3: Service user 17

Being that Jobcentre Plus has an angle of financial gain through employment, this approach would not resonate with service users who hold the above opinions. Furthermore, many service users recognized the positive message that parental employment and training sent to their children, as well as equipping them with the abilities to support their children in their education:

I'd love to do something else with my life. I want to be able to help them when they come home from school with their homework. I mean I'm not illiterate, I can read and I can write, I'm pretty well-mannered and I know right from wrong and never been in trouble with the police. But I got nothing that I can turn round and say, look what I did. I'm a good mum. I want something that I can say, I did that. I want them to be proud of me.

Interview 3 Service user 14

It's not just the job it's about yourself and if you're not working its respect for yourself and how will your kids learn if you're not working?

Interview 3: Service user 19

This theme, of pursuing a course of employment that held with it some kind of pride continued into discussions of the pressure put upon service users to take any job rather than procure work that was stimulating, challenging and fulfilling:

I prefer courses that will steer me in the direction of a career, not a job, a career. Anybody can go like a full time job in a shop. I don't want to be that. I want... they should help you more with a career. These things they...you need a career you don't need a job.

Interview 3: Service user 8

As these discussions show, expectations are affected by the prevailing economic conditions and the attitude towards work of the service user. The former of these approaches equip the service user with the expectation of more consideration and possible leniency given that the issue preventing them from fulfilling obligations to find work are largely out of their control. The latter is an example of the service provider assuming that the major factor to motivate people to work is financial. These service user opinions illustrate the variations in attitude towards mothering as the primary role or employment as the desired identity to aspire to. However, orientations towards employment were made on the basis of personal fulfillment not financial gain.

5.6 Expectations of the service: User and provider

Expectations of what the service user expected of the service can be grouped into three categories. Firstly there are service users who had no or low expectations of what the service could offer them. Secondly there are service users who expect a high level of intervention, including initiating discussions of suitable jobs for them. Thirdly, there is a small cohort of transitional service users. These are service users whose perspective on work has changed and as such now have different expectations of what they expect from the service. This change can be from low to high or vice versa depending on their circumstances.

5.6.1 Low expectation service users

This band of users did not question the lack of input they were getting from their advisers. Even if they had motivations or needs of their own they did not push for any interventions. They neither expected nor asked for much:

I think I was expecting some help 'cause I'd heard about new claims and things they can put you on but I didn't get a lot of help like that. I thought they would be more forceful rather than helpful, but no, no they didn't offer much help. To be honest it was just getting me through the doors and back out again.

Interview 3: Service user 25

If I were thinking about work then really they did nothing for me at all. They did look at the jobs they had, which I had done myself anyway, but I wasn't expecting them to find me a job then and there anyway. I think that it's my responsibility to find myself a job so I wouldn't expect them to do it.

Interview 3: Service user 19

When questioned on what the service users thought Jobcentre Plus expected from them, opinions mainly revolved around the need for consistent and punctual attendance:

To turn up, I think that's what they want that's the impression I get. I don't really get the impression that they want me to get out there and get a job. Its sort of turn up, they do the speech and it's like thank you and good-bye and that's it.

Interview 3: Service user 26

This opinion was formulated in the belief that the overall outcome of the interviews was in terms of meeting targets from the service provider's point of view as opposed to taking proactive steps to getting the service user into work.

5.6.2 High expectation service users

High expectation users anticipate that the service will have high expectations of them. For some users these service expectations match their own highly motivated expectations. In these cases service users are demanding and expect to drive the course of the interviews, dictating what can be done for them. Dissatisfaction results when the service user does not get what they

see as crucial to their progression into work or training. There is the expectation of a bottom-up (service user-led) drive for the interview:

I expected that they would support my options either to re-train or go back into education. What I wasn't expecting was for them to say "have you looked through the jobs, what sort of job are you looking for?" and when you tell them they say "there aren't any of those jobs out there". It's like, that's good, I've come all the way down here for you to tell me something I already knew. I was being told I should be looking for work. I thought it would help me to train, some way to get into a job I wanted but it seems to be about just getting you into a job, any job as long as you're not claiming.

Interview 1: Service user 1

And you think it's a work-focussed interview and the Jobcentre so you think they are going to help you actually look, yeah, for a job. You know go through the advert and see what you can do but it's not. That's what I need them to do for me, I want a job, they want me to have a job, so I don't get why we disagree.

Interview 1: Service user 17

Those whose self-expectations are lower, reliance is on the service provider, with their higher expectations, to drive the encounter, and to suggest training and job opportunities for them. They do not express dissatisfaction at being asked to undertake activities to enhance their employability and generally have little expression of extreme (dis)satisfaction. They are likely to respond in neutral terms with regard to service quality. There is a top-down (provider-led) drive for the interview:

I suppose I expected things to happen more quickly than they have. You know, more suggestions for getting qualifications from day one but no, it's only recently that there has been more of a push to get going on something.

Interview 1: Service user 5

5.6.3 Transitional service users

Some service users were interviewed at a period when they were revising their attitude towards employment. From the service users in this survey it appears that for transitional service users their previous experiences inform their expectations and subsequently their satisfaction at the present time:

I mean I didn't know what to expect exactly but whilst she (daughter) was so young I expected them to be lenient about work. I was only there about half an hour and they said not to go to work because she was so young, so that was OK then. Now that she's older though I expect more input, more help, I haven't got it yet but I will get it!

Interview 3: Service user 15

In this example, the service user expected leniency at the start of the claim. With a change of attitude towards working, this previous leniency translates as possible future apathy. These changed in attitude were overwhelmingly as a result of a change in attitude towards the primacy of 'mother' as primary identity. A child starting full time education commonly triggered it, as above. However, In doing this they register dissatisfaction with the service at the present moment:

They made it clear that I wasn't expected to go to work, which was a big relief for me. I was surprised they didn't seem interested in me finding a job straight away, yeah. That was OK then but not now. Now I'm going to go in with a different attitude.

Interview 3: Service user 11

In this second quote, previous leniency was seen as benevolence; "*I wasn't expected to go to work which was a big relief for me*". This benevolence was viewed as a positive response based on individual circumstances. In terms of approaching the service with a change of attitude towards working, this same positive response is expected. This attitude elicits an assessment of satisfaction in the present moment. These transitional service users illustrate the catalyst for moving from mothering as the primary role to aspirations of employment as being

the increasing age of dependent children and a perceived decrease in the importance of 'hands-on' mothering activities.

5.7 Expectations of the future

Service users based their expectations for the future on the repetitive nature of the past encounters. For those who did not want the service to change this elicited satisfaction:

From the first time round I knew what to expect next time round so it wasn't worrying at all. Now, after so long and it's always the same I don't worry about them at all.

Interview 3: Service user 18

However, for service users whose past experiences were assessed as negative or, for those who were in a period of transition regarding their work intentions, this was seen as negative and dissatisfaction was anticipated:

It's was just the same going through the motions, checking details, checking nothing had changed. I thought the whole point of those interviews is to get people off benefits and I went down with the attitude of yes, now I want to get off benefits, you know, but that wasn't the impression I got. I really felt a bit let down too as I think maybe I needed more force to make me do something. It was very easy to walk away and do nothing different.

Interview 3: Service user 13

It was just a chat really those first times and I thought that it would be more pushy and more about finding you a job; and at the time I didn't want a job because she (daughter) was only little really and it was the last thing on my mind then. But now I want a job and they still seem to be doing the same thing every time. I did think, as she got older, they would do more to get me a job, but now I think that's as much as they can do for me.

Interview 3: Service user 17

This is an area where there is the opportunity to circumvent dissatisfaction by providing service users with an outline of what they can expect from their next encounter. Personal

advisers need to interpret the service users' needs and adjust their approach according to any change in attitude towards employment and training. By continuing to run the same script when a service user is seeking change, expectations become fixed in the negative.

5.8 The longitudinal trajectory of expectations and satisfaction

Initial expectations exhibited stability over what, in some instances, were long lengths of time.

Reflecting on the comments recorded in section 4.3:

But the first time I went back after I'd had the kids, about three year ago it was very different. Nothing like the DSS had been.

Interview 2: Service user 3

And the Bread thing, well it was nothing like that and I was still expecting it to be like Bread... It had all changed in the years between Bread and it's not really that long.

Interview 1: Service user 26

These are indicative of the service users who intimated that whatever impression had been formed initially it remained over time. This was regardless of whether the opinion was formed in response to experience, peer feedback or media interpretations. This was framed within a strong tendency for both expectations and satisfaction to remain stable over time for most of the service users. Service users who reported low expectations of the service generally, regardless of their own orientation to employment, exhibited the most stability in their expectations and satisfaction over time. Those who were orientated towards mothering alongside low expectations (MO/LE) were more likely to report an increase in satisfaction during the course of the study. Those who reported that their satisfaction with the service was falling were more likely to have high expectations and be orientated towards employment (HE/EO).

In common with the finding that expectations were stable over time, as demonstrated above, the findings indicate that regardless of changes in satisfaction, expectations remain the same. This is certainly true over the course of this study and potentially true in light of the evidence that expectations are unchanged despite both the passage of time and no direct contact with the

service. Satisfaction altered in various ways throughout the term of the study. It either remained static throughout or rose or fell from its original position.

5.8.1 Factors in static assessments of satisfaction

Service users whose levels of satisfaction remained within the mid range, fairly dissatisfied to fairly satisfied, recorded almost unanimous reasons for this stability:

Yeah, they've left me alone, so yeah I'm still satisfied.

Interview 3: Service user 8

I haven't heard nothing from them. I've not bothered them, they've not bothered me, everyone's happy.

Interview 3: Service user 12

Non-interference from the service provider produced stable levels of satisfaction at the level at which it was first reported, in this case an assessment of mediocrity. For those who maintained extremes of very satisfied and very dissatisfied had underlying long-term issues that made changes in satisfaction immovable. Some of the issues identified were pregnancy, programme of training or having children under the age where sanctions become applicable.

5.8.2 Factors in rising and falling satisfaction

Service users who experienced a rise in satisfaction were few. The rise was small and occurred from an initial service assessment that was low, either from being very dissatisfied or having no opinion of service quality:

Well last time I saw you my money hadn't gone in and I'd tried to get an appointment. Well I got in at last and she said "I'm really sorry but they're going to stop your payments for learn direct". I mean that's helping me out a lot. But she was really sorry about it and said not to quit 'cause it was doing me good.

Interview 3: Service user 5

I haven't been back yet, I'm due to go in. They said they couldn't stamp my free school meals that it had to be sent off somewhere (Interview 2: Service user 2). I did go in and she explained that the form had to come to them but then go somewhere else and I said that's not what I was told. She was very sorry and said that they shouldn't have told me to send it off myself. She was very sorry about it and I suppose mistakes happen and not everyone knows everything.

Interview 3: Service user 2

In all instances a rise in satisfaction has come about through the direct actions of personal advisers. The biggest factor in this was a clear apology and explanation of the problem. Even though in both of the examples above the outcome did not change, the input from the personal advisers transformed the encounter.

Factors revealed in those who experienced a fall in their level of satisfaction were also similar across the service users:

I've chosen the course I want to do, I did some research on the Internet and managed to find a course that works around the children and fits in with my home life. I managed to get babysitter arranged for the evenings. I rang Jobcentre to organize something to get the ball rolling. I rang her up a week after she's (daughter) been in school and she wasn't in, she's not in that day. I said, can I leave a message I've seen a course on the Internet that I'd like to do and if she would be kind enough to give me a call back. We exchanged numbers and over a month later I'm still waiting for a phone call. I'm absolutely disappointed and I've got a funny feeling that I've missed out on the course as well.

Interview 3: Service user 16

Very dissatisfied, you have to do all the running around. I went down and said I'm entitled to this payment and she's like "let's see if your entitled to it" and I know I'm entitled to it.

Interview 3: Service user 1

It's like we're forcing them to do the work and it's like they're being forced to do this job. If you want something they are not interested. If it's on their terms that's fine but if you start to demand they don't want to know.

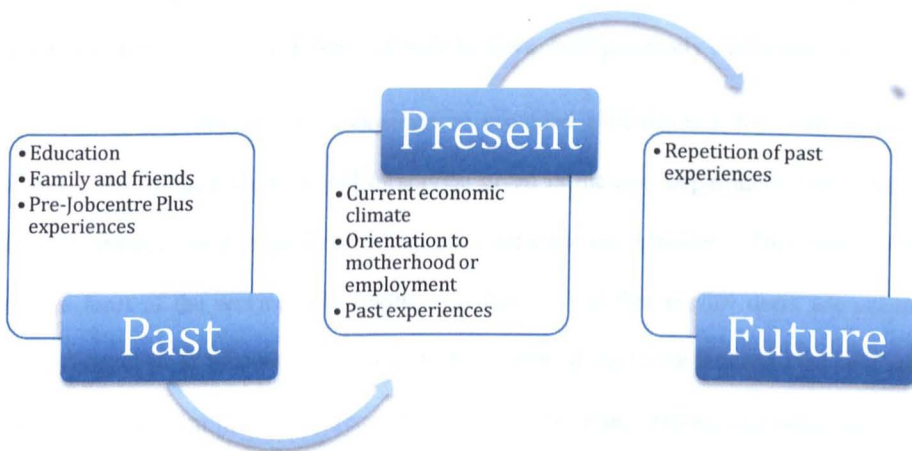
Interview 3: Service user 10

Each instance reveals encounters where the service user first makes demands on the service, as opposed to the traditional conception of Jobcentre Plus whereby the service makes demands of the service user, and the response does not suggest a balanced relationship. There appears to be a pattern of service providers attempting to retain the power in the relationship by upsetting plans that may have been made by the service user.

5.9 Summary and conclusions

Isolating the factors that contributed to expectations of Jobcentre Plus and assessing their impact on satisfaction was not a simple undertaking. However, key factors did emerge through analysis of the service users opinions (see Figure 5.1). These experiences did not act in isolation and on only one occasion, but exerted an influence across time.

Figure 5.1: Core factors affecting expectation over time



Expectations can be traced back to experiences that occurred many years before an individual encounters the service. One influential experience that fits this category is an individual's academic experience and early career aspirations. For the majority of the service users in this study, school had yielded few positive experiences. Many had experienced instances of bullying that had led them to abandon education as soon as possible. Generally career aspirations were low with none of the service users reporting a desire to enter management

positions. Of those who did express a career aim, these were at lower levels of the job structure. Parental occupation was influential in choice of career and gender specific roles did appear to be reinforced through parental choice. Likewise family circumstances influenced decisions to start a family at a young age with service users reporting a desire to recreate their perception of a perfect family that they did not experience themselves. This latter point is important in terms of gaining employment in the future. Recent research has suggested attributes in lone parents that see them treating parenting as a job, or seeing parenting as a job on its own, also decreases the perceived need to look for paid employment (Tomaszewski *et al.* 2010, p.29). If, as in the case of the service users here, parenting is seen as a career choice in itself, then paid careers may not be pursued from as far back as compulsory education.

The primary influence on first impressions of Jobcentre Plus were the opinions and experiences of friends and family. In some cases this led to positive assessments of the service, where the experiences they had heard of from others, tallied with their own. In other cases, particularly with regard to levels of help or benefit, service users reported feeling angry and disappointed that they had not been entitled to the same as their friends. In these circumstances and, on reflection, service users were aware of the extent to which their expectations, and subsequent satisfaction, was influenced by those around them. These relationships were also influential in swaying service users' attitude to work, both positively and negatively.

Memories of pre-Jobcentre Plus experiences provided a benchmark for some service users against which to measure the level of service given in the new department. Overwhelmingly, the DSS was seen as an experience where you 'got what you expected'. This was asserted as a positive facet of the service. The implication from this is that service users are uncertain of what to expect from Jobcentre Plus in terms of benefit advice. With regard to the assessment of other service users at the current recreation of Jobcentre Plus, DSS service users were branded as undesirable. Recollections of the Jobcentre were positive and, in the light of previous discussions about service user identity, service users felt able to identify more closely with the old system as a customer than the present one. Service users compared the physical arrangements of the old system as more akin to that experienced in a shop, with tangible evidence of jobs and the ability to leave with a defined outcome through relevant inputs and

outputs. Although, some of these memories would have been viewed through rose-tinted spectacles, they were too frequently cited to ignore.

Initial visits to Jobcentre Plus were viewed favourably from the point of view of the physical environment but reports of the quality of service reflected poor communication and results from the service provider. Favourable reports of the physical environment were ordinarily made in comparison to stereotypical representations in the media of the DSS or in expectation of the types of service user they expected to find here (e.g. 'tramps' or 'drunks'). Comparisons with other public services were also made, mainly focussing on the negative aspects, for example, the amount of time spent waiting to be seen. Few expectations of the service were recorded, with service users having dwelt on the facilities available instead. Negative reports of the electronic means of job searching were commonplace. Reports of initial work-focussed interviews were vague and interpretation of the responses was mainly made through implied meanings and tacit expectations. Any disclosed expectations hinged upon the label work-focused and resulted in disappointment when there was no work-focus to the appointment.

One of the biggest factors affecting the expectations of the service at the present time, was the current economic situation. Nearly all service users could articulate financial change through an increase in their outgoings. In terms of employment, many had made assumptions of the difficulty in regaining employment in a recession and amid a high number of redundancies. Consequently they had more or less given up on searching for work. This was reminiscent with the 'discouraged worker' effect as described above. Animosity towards an employment service that did not take this into account was evident with complaints that what was being asked of the unemployed, in terms of looking for work, was unreasonable in the current climate.

A factor that had been ignored by the service provider was the motivation behind the service users wishing to return to work. WFIs concentrated on the financial reward for returning to work. However, many service users cited self-confidence, friendship and psychological stability as main factors in wanting to return to work. Furthermore, many recognized that, as parents themselves, the example they set was crucial in preventing their children from becoming reliant on benefits in the future. This still indicates an orientation towards mothering as being the most important role, but employment is redefined as now being an essential element in successful parenting through becoming a good role model.

The expectations that an individual brings to the service can be located within their past experiences and background. This presents them with an assessment of what they should expect from the service. It also contributes to their opinion of how fair were the demands made on them by the service. Gauging of user opinion facilitates the grouping of service users into categories of low expectations, high expectations and transitional service user. Low expectation users were further divided into those who did not expect the service to do anything for them and those who did not want the help that the service had to offer. The dividing factor between these two sub-groups was their orientation towards motherhood or employment as their primary identity (see Chapter Four). High expectation service users were also divided by personal orientation towards motherhood or employment. This translated into a top down/ bottom up dichotomy. Individuals with an orientation towards employment attempted to drive the encounters and expressed dissatisfaction when the service did not provide sufficient resources to meet these demands. Those with an orientation towards motherhood, however, expected the service provider to initiate and direct any action necessary to push forward their desire to work. These in this latter category maintained neutral satisfaction (reported as neither satisfied or dissatisfied) and did not question the pace of change, part of their expectation appearing to be that the service provider would know best. Service users that were in transition used their experiences to build an expectation of how their changed status would be received by the service provider. This self-construction is critical in forming an assessment of the overall outcome and whether they will then join the high or low expectation category.

Generally, speculation of future quality of service often rest upon the repetition of experience. It was commonplace, amongst service users, to report carbon copy encounters time after time. Through this high stability of all factors, expectation, orientation towards motherhood or employment and satisfaction prevails. Encounters were judged to be highly scripted and any attempt to change the script provoked confusion on behalf of the 'static' party.

It is inevitable that service users and non-service users alike will approach discussions of the public services with some pre-conceptions in mind. Some services, more than others, will carry with them more ingrained and pervasive stereotypes that have seeped into the unconscious of the population. Jobcentre Plus is an example of such a service. Expectations are often not formed as a result of experience of the department but in response to media representation of

both the service and the people who use it. Furthermore, the staff who work in the department have themselves been exposed to these influences and administer their service within this personal framework.

These media expectations, peer feedback and any early encounters with the benefits system, contribute to the expectations of the individual that then persists over long periods of time. This stability continues across short-term expectations and the resulting satisfaction. Service users who professed to have low expectations of the service demonstrated the most stability in their expectations and satisfaction. If these low expectations users had also mothering orientation (MO/LE) as opposed to a desire to progress into employment they reported increased satisfaction over the period of the study. High expectation/employment orientated (HE/EO) service users reported falling satisfaction over the same period. This indicates that expectations remain stable over time even when changes in satisfaction occur. Those users whose satisfaction remained the same over time attributed this to non-interference by the service provider. Increases in satisfaction occurred as a result of a service failure that had been acknowledged and rectified, usually by an individual within the department. This personal attention offsets the disappointment encountered through the service failure. Decreases in reported satisfaction occurred when service users made demands of the service provider and attempts are made by the service provider, usually the personal adviser, to reclaim a position of power and influence.

Devlin *et al*'s (2002, p.121) conception of expectations as predictive and desired is reflected in the interpretation given to the responses. In terms of fit, Devlin's four factors of influence, explicit and implicit service promises and experience and word-of-mouth are clearly indicated through the analysis of the narratives. There are some terms of conflict in defining explicit influences. Devlin's analysis cites these as being through sanctioned advertisements that outline the companies' 'ideals' (2002, pp.122-123). This presents a problem in that public services do not advertise in the way commonly recognized by private companies. For the potential benefit-recipient, the official government website (www.direct.gov.uk) offers information about services. For the service financer, i.e. the taxpayer, reform papers outlining the steps that will be taken to protect the public purse from an undeserving applicant present service ideals. This satisfies the criteria for explicit factors. Implicit factors, defined as image

and reputation, appear in media reports and popular television culture that defines both the level of service quality and the type of people who frequent the service. As demonstrated in the analysis, previous experience is related to other public services in line with Devlin's theory. In this case similarities were drawn between the NHS, specifically GP's surgeries and appointments at Jobcentre Plus. The importance of word-of-mouth influence, from family, friends and other service users, was apparent through service user's experiences. This is a significant contributory factor in terms of setting expectations over time. Additionally, the supplementary work by Zeithaml *et al.* (1993) and Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) who suggested a further two factors, personal needs and personal service philosophy, which affect desired expectations, was also supported.

MORI's (2002) work, that adapted the above model so as to be relevant to the public services, is only partially supported through the findings of this study. The research by MORI was right to elevate the influential nature of the media on the way that expectations of the public services are formed. The opinion is justified in the numerous narratives that include references to popular television series and reports in the paper associated with a benefits culture and the existence of a benefit population. This is contrary to Blaug *et al.* (2006, p.7) who suggested the media, family and friends are the least important drivers of expectation. However, the assertion made in the MORI study, that personal experiences of the public services were formed in response to comparisons with experiences in the private sphere, is not supported. What was revealed through the interviews was that the service users, when asked about similarities the private sector, could find none whatsoever. Tongue-in-cheek replies could only identify the security personnel on the door as common to both. The research here does agree with the need to explore the individual nature of the service users 'needs' in order to provide 'appropriate services'. This has been defined in this study as the orientation towards motherhood or employment of the individual as the term 'needs' could be defined as subjective and debatable within a needs/wants binary.

Although the views related by the service users are unique to the individual, when taken in context similarities are found. This does enable a common form of typology to be applied to the user group as a whole (see Chapter Four). However, the application of these categories is only revealed through probing the responses to generic enquiries to form a contextual

classification. Throughout this study, it was revealed that by asking services users to share reflective narratives, not only was the tacit knowledge made explicit, but the source of it was also exposed. Furthermore, some service users were able to articulate the effect that tacit influences have on their present opinions. The rich source of knowledge to have come from this study is supportive of Nonaka and Takeuchi's (in Gourley, 2002) desire that organizations should 'find ways of communicating and capturing tacit knowledge' as per Polanyi's (1967) concept.

As raised in the literature review, it was hoped to support or refute Baumard's (in Gourley, 2002, p.3) suggestion that tacit knowledge resides within groups or collectivities. The sample was derived of individuals with similar social standing, educational attainment and, of course, service classification as lone parents. Given the similarity of so many accounts from service users, then support for this assertion is possible. In doing so there is provision of evidence for incorporating the probing of tacit knowledge into satisfaction measurement within the public services.

Although expectation is a key factor in opinions of satisfaction, the way that individuals form and impart their judgment of service quality is inextricably part of any attempt to measure service user satisfaction. This is even more so in terms of the public services that are seldom approached without emotional investment and imperative need. Therefore, although important in informing and contributing to holistic models of satisfaction, philosophies such as EDT are too simplistic to apply wholly to public service approaches. For example, it would be useful to consider some elements of Brookes (1995, p.11) catalogue of expectations. There is, within the service users' remarks, evidence of an 'ideal' level of service that they desire. However, the context can be such that this ideal is based upon the opinions of others or by the opinions of the media. Furthermore, minimum tolerable levels of service were evident in *some* users, namely those orientated towards employment. Without considering the additional element of orientation towards motherhood and employment it would be difficult to define why only some users view the levels of service quality in the way that they do. In capturing the context within which expectations are formed it is possible to identify areas where expectations can be managed and form a strategy for how to manage them. One element proposed by Brookes (1995) which has been strongly supported through this study, is the level of performance

deemed to be *deserved* by the service user. Evidence presented in Chapter Six shows low opinions of self, reflected in derogatory terminology used to describe other service users as well as themselves. Furthermore, service users also expressed opinions of the undeserving nature of some benefit recipients. This is also in accord with previous work by Elam and Ritchie (1997), which although undertaken over a decade ago, still holds true with public service users today.

Also revealed through this study is evidence of a clash between the Work First Approach (WFA), as appeared to be advocated by the service provider and a Human Capital Development (HCD) as demanded by the service user. This was evident in section 5.5.2 and, in particular, amongst service users with high expectation of the service. The WFA approach is implied by the experiences of some of the service users that reported being encouraged to continue looking for jobs of any grade, even though they may have made a request to undertake training. Evidence of interventions that could be attributed to the HCD theory was not uncovered in interviews with service users.

Discussed in the literature was the notion of a halo effect (Davis and Heineke, 1997, p.64). This theory held that expectations were not formed that far in advance of an initial encounter and that opinions formed during the first point of contact would define the subsequent opinion of the service regardless of the actual service quality received. Taking into account the opinions given of pre-service expectations and comparing them to the encounters that occurred over the observed six-month period, the evidence does indicate the presence of this 'halo' effect. In general the initial opinion formed, whether that be through using the DSS or Jobcentre Plus, remained with small variations in satisfaction, to the present day. However, the instances where this pattern did not occur were in service users who were classified as High Expectation/Employment Orientated (HE/EO) users. Therefore, the halo effect need not be seen as constraining but as a by-product to be observed. In order to extinguish the halo effect service providers need to recognize service users not conforming to a HE/EO identity and initiate action to move them into that classification. Once within this classification, as long as service quality is good, pre-conceived and dominant opinions can be changed.

The next chapter looks at the way in which identity contributes towards the service users' expectations and how this affects their satisfaction. The chapter opens with a historical account

of the progress of the 'consumer' in the public services. It discusses the importance of identity for the service user, detailing the frustration felt when they are reduced to 'just a number'. It gives an insight into the multiple ways identity is perceived; how service users see each other as well as themselves, as well as how they think others see them as benefit recipients and lone parents. The difference between being a customer in the public and private sector is discussed drawing on issues of reciprocity and intangibility. How service users register, or not, their dissatisfaction was then explored, followed by a longitudinal analysis of identity. The chapter closes with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of how they relate to known and proposed theories.

6.1 Introduction

There is an uneasy relationship that exists between the perceived power of the citizen through consumer participation and the reality of real choice. This consumerist ethos underpinned the Conservative campaign under Margaret Thatcher. Personal freedom was seen as being attainable through market participation. However, following the Conservative defeat in 1997, New Labour sought to distance itself from the economics of Adam Smith. In spite of this, New Labour's inaugural economic strategy introduced a minimum wage, extended powers to the Bank of England and introduced university fees that ended the post-war legacy of free education. Far from a rejection of Neo-Liberal economics these actions set the agenda for consumerist beliefs to transfer from the private to the public sector.

Clarke *et al.* (2007) recall Labour's assertion that the public services needed to 'match the experiences and expectations of a consumer society' and the consumerist approach was seen as the best way of ensuring a more accountable, responsive and user-orientated service (p.121). This decision changed the terminology of the public sector. Following on from John Major's 1991 'Citizens Charter' terms that implied a sense of collectivity and complicity, the patient, the claimant and the member of the public were replaced by, firstly, the 'citizen' and then ultimately, 'the customer'. The introduction of this new identity brought with it inferences of a far more implicit notion of individualism as well as a more reciprocal relationship based on informed choice; very much akin to consumerist behaviour from the high street. The Labour party made clear that this link with consumerist principles in the private sector was both desirable and intentional. In the Foreword to 'Reforming our Public Services: Principles into Practice' (OPSR, 2002) Tony Blair stated that 'consumers of public services should increasingly be given the kind of options that they take for granted in other walks of life' (*ibid*, p.3). In New Labour discourse the figure of 'consumer' (and/or customer) was central more so, Clarke insisted, than any other label attached to individuals (Clarke, 2004, p.10).

The extent to which the customer could exist in the public services had been debated long before New Labour identified users as customers. It was argued that:

The customer of a public service is not the same as a customer of a service in the market. The customer does not necessarily buy the service; the customer may have a right to receive the service; customers may be refused a service because their needs may not meet the criteria laid down.

Sanderson (1992, p.37)

Later, Clarke and Newman (1997, p.113) echoed these concerns by declaring that there is a limit to the availability and choice accessible by members of the public and, indeed, how rarely those people can 'exit' the service if dissatisfied. Furthermore, a decade later Clarke *et al.* (2007) found that there was concern about the name to be used in encounters with the 'public' of the public services. They discovered that many agencies acknowledged that the complex relationships with the public that they encountered meant that they were unable to be classified generically (Clarke *et al.* 2007, p.127). This was especially the case in sectors where the service user may not be engaging with the service on a voluntary basis, but being subject to compulsory attendance, such as with the police or mental health service.

This discontent with terms has not remained with academics and agencies. Clarke *et al.* (2007) reveals interesting insights into the way the public view themselves as users of public services and how this view contrasts with the way government literature portrays them. Despite the drive by the government to promote users of the public services as consumers or customers the public themselves fail to identify with these terms (*ibid.*, p.128). The conclusion to this is that terms promoted by the government are not being seen as important by the general public (*ibid.*). The reasons for this are not entirely clear. Kaufman (2003) proposed that in order to adopt an identity, individuals need to actively construct that identity through their actions. Therefore if an individual is unable to demonstrate their identity in appropriate actions; if as a customer they cannot exercise choice, voice and exit (Hirschman, 1970) if dissatisfied, as is the case in many of the public services, then can they adopt that identity at all? If this were so then it would appear that the general public find it easier to exercise choice over their identity and inaction rather than admit to their lack of choice as 'customers' of the public services.

When this fieldwork started the term of identity in primary use in government literature was that of customer of the public services. However, other sources introduced new terms; the 'Citizen-Consumer' (Clarke *et al.* 2007) or simply the 'Consumer' (Simmons *et al.* 2009). However, that is not to say that continuing to address the issue of identity in its former terms is no longer appropriate. Indeed the first and foremost observation to make is that none of the lone parents, when questioned, identified themselves in terms of being either a citizen or a consumer. Similarly they did not conceive these as being more appropriate terms within which to be known as a user of the public services. What did emerge, however, was a cynicism towards the notion that they could indeed be regarded in terms of 'customer' with its implications of choice and as such makes a compelling case for Kaufman's (2003) theory of identity construction through the negative terms they invoked in describing the way in which they saw themselves, and how they believed others saw them.

This chapter gauges how important service users judge their identity as users of Jobcentre Plus. Many of the service users relayed an atmosphere of distrust in the way that they perceived their treatment and in doing so reinforced the notion of benefit recipients as dishonest. The chapter continues with an exploration of service users opinions of other service users, themselves as service users, service provider perception of them and lone parents, within the service. Interesting perceptions that reinforce the notion of distrust and the concept of the undeserving user were explored. From the opinions of the service users it was proposed that the identity of lone parent was detrimental for both those who wanted to work and those who needed encouragement to return to employment. The nature of the system was investigated to confirm if whatever the primary presenting identity, lone parent jobseeker or lone parent, the process rendered all to a stereotypical, constraining generic identity.

Through probing the service users on their opinion of the type of relationship they had with Jobcentre Plus it was intended to discover if they related to the identity of customer and if not to which identity did they relate. Following this theme it was suggested that the intangibility of the encounter might be a factor in the inability of service users to feel like customers. Similarly how perceived lack of choice influences notions of identity was also considered. Comparisons were drawn between the attitudes to complaining in both the private and public sphere and, where possible, reasons for this opinion were probed.

In concluding the chapter Newman's (2001) vision of the public as active consumers in the public services is challenged. However, comparisons with Clarke *et al's* research (2007) were more complementary. The feasibility of applying Clarke *et al's* 'relational reasoning' is explored through the narratives of the service users. The Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement construct, as proposed in Chapter Two, is challenged and redefined through the analysis of the service users' replies. The analysis concludes with defining the fit of the evidence with existing identity theory.

6.2 The importance of identity as users of Jobcentre Plus

Many service users expressed the belief that they remained faceless within the service. These concerns were often set by the system in place to make a claim and access the system. In the first instance service users approaching the service were required to make the initial claim by phone. During this phone call a call operator would take all the individuals details. Service users reported frustration that when they reported to Jobcentre Plus for their initial face-to-face interviews their advisers were largely ignorant of the details given in the phone interview.

I thought what a waste of time that call was and I thought it's all just checking up on you. They (the personal adviser) had no intention of reading those notes before did they? They were making sure my story was straight, that they couldn't catch me out and that what I'd told one of them was the same as what I told her. She didn't have a clue about me when I walked in.

Interview 2: Service user 9

I thought with it being a personal adviser we'd have, like, a relationship, but when I first met them they hadn't even bothered to read my details. I thought, well first impressions, they didn't want to know about me as a person. I mean you ring up, give them your details and then three weeks later they don't know you.

Interview 1: Service user 4

These initial encounters, and the way in which the service user perceives them are a key factor in explaining how they ascribe their identity as service users. The duplication of imparting information about themselves was interpreted as being a sign of mistrust and a strategy to

reveal inconsistencies in the service users' narrative. The use of the phrase 'catch me out' shows that alongside this was the notion of dishonesty, as opposed to the reality that is to eradicate inaccuracies. This interpretation of the claim process is one that is upheld through the opinions of self-identity as a service user given in section 6.1.2. However, these comments do not only reflect on issues of the identity of the service user but also of service provider and the relationship between named identity and expectation formation. The service users' reflection of an expectation that a personal adviser would enter into an individual, special relationship hinged upon an interpretation of the word personal. In this case it manifested as an expectation that the adviser would have prepared for this meeting in terms of initiating an intimate encounter through being familiar with the individual and their circumstances. When this failed to transpire the service user translated this again within the context of a personal encounter citing that the adviser 'hadn't even bothered' rather than they did not have the time or it was not expected as part of the process. This was then reflected back on a concept of self-identity with the service users' final observation being one of de-personalization as a service user. This theme is again upheld through the observations of self-identity explored in section 6.2.1. As well as illustrating the importance of terminology in terms of identity these observations demonstrate the complex interconnectivity between identity, expectation and satisfaction.

6.2.1 Multiple personalities; Service user perspective on identity

Service users articulated many perspectives to their identity as a user of a public service. This agreed with the notion of multiple identities of the individual within the setting of Jobcentre Plus. The different perspectives that emerged were related to the service user's opinions of:

- Other service users
- Themselves as a service user
- The Jobcentre Plus staff's perception of them
- A lone parent utilizing the service

When asked about their opinions of being a customer at Jobcentre Plus most of the sample reported that the term customer did not satisfactorily describe the relationship that they experienced in their encounters with the service. Responses as to why this term was inappropriate were clustered across two bands; intangibility and choice.

Identity and other service users

Across the majority of the sample there was recognition of the undesirable service user. This manifested in a manner reminiscent of discussions of class and a corresponding desire to distance oneself, both physically and in terms of identity, from those seen as 'other'. In most instances it appeared that this assessment of identity was made on outward appearance and demeanor.

I don't relate to other people. Going there you always have all the scallywags outside, the tramps.

Interview 1: Service user 8

You should see some of the ones that go in there, really skanky and I'm like, I don't want to sit next to you!

Interview 1: Service user 16

Ironically, the latter service user, in a later interview, complained about an instance when a neighbour challenged her about her level of income, based upon the outward appearance of her family.

When I moved in the neighbour asked me how I could afford to keep us all so nice on benefits- made the usual comment about single parents having a cushy ride. But like, if I sent them out dirty or in old clothes they'd be calling me for being a dirty dole dossier. You know conforming to the stereotype, Waynetta slob. I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't.

Interview 2: Service user 16

There was no evidence that the service user acknowledged that they had previously judged other service users on the same criteria, appearance, but they were clearly disgruntled when non-service users undertook a similar exercise. The service user did acknowledge the pervasive stereotypical image of a benefits claimant that aligned clearly with her own conception of an undesirable peer member as in her former comment. This notion of physically distancing away from those seen as subversive was expressed even more forcibly when undesirability through

outward appearance was complimented by firm evidence that rendered them undeserving in the eyes of the other service users.

You know I sit there and you listen to them talk about drugs and drinking and you see the tags around their ankles, criminals, and you think I don't want to be here with you. I don't even want to be on the same planet as you!

Interview 3: Service user 30

Unfortunately, the term 'honour amongst thieves' adequately encapsulates the feelings of the service users being expressed when they pass opinion of themselves amongst other service users. Any discussion of identity was dominated by overwhelmingly negative terms. What the service users acknowledged is that they were seen, and in many cases, described themselves as being amongst the lowest of society. They saw the monetary aspect in terms of it being other people's money, whether that is the Department for Work and Pensions or the taxpayer in general. Yet amongst this negative belief there was a very clear feeling that they were superior to some other service users. This was expressed as in that they deserved the support more or that others were more responsible for their situation or were 'playing' the system. This not only came through in terms of identity but in personal narratives with reference to acquaintances who were, in one-way or another, cheating the system. Only one service user acknowledged that, despite their own personal feelings of difference from other service users, the act of entering the Jobcentre Plus setting superseded any notion of difference in their own eyes and in the eyes of non-service users.

I hate it. I don't feel I belong there. I mean we're all there for the same thing I suppose, you know, money. But I can't help my situation, but some of them are just take, take, take. Thieving scumbags. Scumbags, a load of scumbags down there and when I walk through them doors then I'm just a scumbag too. I hate it.

Interview 1: Service user 10

Self-identity and the service user

When asked how they saw themselves as users of Jobcentre Plus identities cited were overwhelmingly negative. There was not much variation and commonplace stereotypical terms such as 'scum' and 'dole dosser' were most frequently used. Two service users alluded to the

feeling that they felt they occupied a negative space within society as a whole. They described feeling like they were a 'blot on society'. There were, however, references to being made to feel a non-entity. Some users described themselves as just being a 'number' within the system with no personal attributes at all. During one service user's commentary on overall outcomes she referred to the way in which the increasing frequency of interviews she was experiencing made her feel.

(The WFIs)... it's so they can say, "we're in full contact with the unemployed".

Makes you sound like some exotic animal they've observed.

Interview 3: Service user 1

This resonates with the theme above of notions of distrust, of being comparable to an animal, classified as different, or 'exotic', to those animals that did not need to use the service.

Service user perception of staff beliefs

Typical responses to how the service user felt the staff viewed them were commensurate to the feelings already relayed above.

They just see me as a number, someone taking their money, a burden, yeah, a burden.

Interview 1: Service user 19

They look down their nose at you like you're taking their money. Not that you've worked in the past, you've paid into it.

Interview 2: Service user 2

As in the preceding paragraph the notion of non-entity was frequently referred to when being asked about staff perceptions of the service user. The views of the service users supported the idea of a paradox between the identity of the staff member as a 'personal' advisor and the behaviour they displayed towards the service user. This behaviour was interpreted as being ultimately deployed to de-personalize them as individuals. Furthermore, as the identity as a customer with a personal connection to the service was stripped away by the attitudes of the staff it was overwhelmingly felt by the service users that the conferred identity was then reconstructed upon the grounds of dishonesty and criminality. As in the quote above, the

financial transaction was seen in terms of the service user taking money that was not theirs. This may be a factor that further contributes towards the rejection of the notion of customer. The notion of a sale revolves around the customer parting with money and receiving goods or service. However, in welfare transactions it is the customer who receives both money and services, in terms of employability support and advice.

Many of the service users commented on the belief that staff were ultimately judgmental about service user attributes based upon their status as lone parents. Their intellectual identity in particular, they thought, was measured by the circumstances that they presented as Jobcentre Plus service users.

They just seem to look down on lone parents...they think you're thick; treat you as if you're really thick. You're thick until proven otherwise.

Interview 1: Service user 21

As a young single mother oh they were very snotty then. It was like you're sub-human or something. Like they think you've behaved like an animal, breeding like animals yeah.

Interview 1: Service user 12

This latter quote was framed in the past sense, having been an experience recalled from the service users first encounter with Jobcentre Plus. However, this was corroborated in the present by the experiences of another (teenage) service user who presented for her WFI having discovered she was pregnant again:

The last time? I felt almost dirty as though I'd let her down personally and she showed no...she didn't even say congratulations, just wanted me out of there and it felt like she wanted the baby gone too, I mean that's what she was saying really.

Interview 1: Service user 9

One service user, who expressed a similar opinion as those above, framed the experience as being a result of a more generalized and pervasive stereotype. They articulated this as an ongoing problem that was not addressed in the physical reform of the service.

Just cause it changes yeah, a building or a person, it isn't going to change what they think of you 'cause it's what everyone thinks of young mums, single mums, so I wasn't surprised anytime I went.

Interview 1: Service user 25

This reflects a stigma that was once connected with being both a young parent and a single mother. There is more acceptance in terms of lone parenthood, thanks in part to changes in the law regarding divorce and a drive for further female emancipation in the 1960's. Teenage parenthood, although not really accepted and frequently targeted by government initiatives, has become less stigmatized. This may be due to a perceived increase in the number of teen pregnancies that occur, given the media and government interest in it. This belief that staff, and indeed wider public, have perceptions that were primarily formed on a judgment of personal circumstance and sub-status as lone parent within the hierarchy of benefit recipients formed an important fraction of an individual's self-identity.

I thought, oh God, how do people see me? How do they perceive me as a single parent that's just doing nothing? I don't want that. I want people to say she's managed she's not claiming state benefits and sitting on her backside being a lazy cow.

Interview 1: Service user 14

Perceived effects of lone parent status on identity

They said "we have a specialist who deals with people like you" and I thought "oh am I special?"

Interview 1: Service user 26

Many of the service users, on recalling their first encounter with Jobcentre Plus, expressed surprise that they saw a lone parent adviser. Many built upon this the expectation that they would receive special consideration or advice that took into account their 'special' status. When this 'special' treatment failed to materialize this could be a factor for disappointment and a reflection on self-worth based upon expectations of appropriate behaviour.

She asked me what I'd done since she saw me last time and I explained I'd not done anything as the kids were on holiday. Once she heard that she seemed to lose interest and told me that in the future I'd have to be looking for work all the time regardless of what the kids were doing. I was surprised I thought she'd have understood why I hadn't looked but she seemed disgusted with me to be honest.

Interview 1: Service user 4

Disappointment aside, this notion of special treatment, and its subsequent failure to materialize into helpful application, was ultimately seen as constraining rather than enabling.

You're put, when you're a single parent, you're put in a box, put on a file. You're not classed as human...you're put in a file and it should have red tape around it cause you can't do anything.

Interview 1: Service user 8

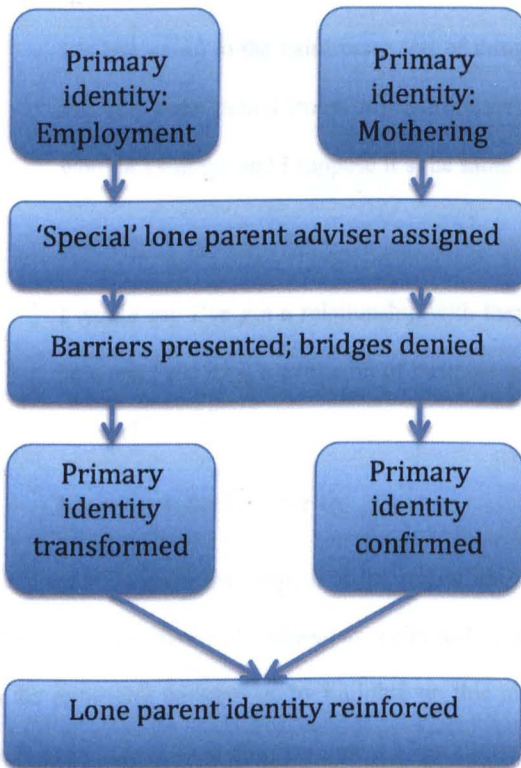
You either fit one form or another, it's down to whichever category you fall into. There's one way and there's no choice. You are either a single mum with three kids or an unemployed person needing incapacity benefit. You are what you are when you walk in there.

Interview 1: Service user 24

By being categorized as such service users who see themselves as having 'jobseeker' as their primary identity (Figure 6.1), as opposed to lone parent, are given the belief that they have more barriers to re-entering the employment market than others engaging with the service. Initially this is translated positively into an expectation that they will receive extra support to enable them to compete on equal terms with those not categorized in this manner. If they are not able to participate then they expect to be given special consideration and lenient treatment. However, when these expectations are unfulfilled they then see this demarcation from other service users as being detrimental. They continue to accept the professional's label of 'special' but construct a pessimistic framework within which they translate their own identity in a negative way. As such they become defined by their identity as a lone parent, often absorbing negative stereotypes pervasive in wider society. Once this becomes their identity then they react in those terms as a service user and display what they believe to be corresponding

attributes. For example, as seen above, using immovable barriers such as lack of childcare they conform to the belief that lone parents are ultimately benefit dependent because of their status. These notions of self-identity demonstrate the difficulty in changing an individual's conception of self when they are constrained by societal notions and unfulfilled expectations of flexibility towards their situation. Of all the service users none reported a positive self-image. Identity was multiple and hierarchical. The vast majority ascribed their primary status as being a lone parent with their status as benefit recipient as secondary. The key interaction with Jobcentre Plus that had the most impact on identity was the categorizing of the service user as being special. This was through the appointment of special lone parent advisers. The net result of this action was ultimately to render all lone parents with a generic identity and corresponding expectation of their abilities to act within the employment market (see Figure 6.1). The resulting generic identity was that of lone parent with all the perceived stigma and barriers that accompanies the label.

Figure 6.1: *Constructed lone parent identity within Jobcentre Plus*



6.3 “It’s not like shopping”: On being a service user at Jobcentre Plus

Reciprocal not transactional

None of the service users were aware of their status as customer. Reactions to being told that they were officially regarded as customers elicited responses grounded in either disbelief or amusement. Some service users alluded to the inequality of power as being irreconcilable with the notion of being a customer.

I’m certainly not a customer because I would then see myself as equal to them.

Interview 1: Service user 8

However, none of the service users took this further by suggesting that in terms of power they should hold a more powerful position, as would be the case in terms of a more traditional consumer transaction. Although there was unanimous agreement that ‘customer’ did not encapsulate the nature of the transactions that occurred, service users found it difficult to articulate more appropriate terms to describe their identity. The majority framed their identity in terms of a relationship but were reluctant to attach a concise label to it.

It’s like going to the hairdresser sort of thing, you know what I mean? If I have me hair done then I know my hairdresser wouldn’t let me do anything that wouldn’t suit me and I suppose it’s the same with my adviser.

Interview 1: Service user 4.

I would say I’ve got a relationship with them, though not like a customer. It’s, how can I put it? It’s a little bit of business and a bit of pleasure, you know what I mean?

Interview 1: Service user 16

Once again the personal element of the relationship was seen as being important and in these terms the encounters were viewed as reciprocal as opposed to-transactional. However, as seen in the preceding paragraphs, by building up this idea of personality in the meetings, service users experienced more disappointment when advisers had to revert to more official roles when statutory responsibilities had to be enforced on the service user.

Intangible commodities

A common belief contributing to the rejection of the term customer was that there was no exchange of tangible commodities. Many service users compared the experience to a transaction in a shop.

You go to a shop you hand over money you get something back. You go there what do we give to them for their service?

Response 1: Service user 26

If you go into a shop you come away with something.

Interview 1: Service user 2

As these opinions show, service users viewed this issue of intangibility from both perspectives. The former takes a passive view in terms of the service user not giving the department anything. The latter however takes a dominant view in querying it on the grounds that they, as the 'customer', do not come away with anything. Both, however, have the notion of a physical transference of a commodity needing to take place if the term customer could be judged appropriate.

Once again, comparisons to criminal behaviour were drawn in the service users' analysis of being a shop customer and being a 'customer' at Jobcentre Plus.

I wouldn't see someone as a customer (at Jobcentre Plus). A customer comes in and pays for something. I'm not going to give them something. I'm in debt to them, they're giving me something and I'm not giving them anything back. I'm more like a shoplifter.

Interview 1: Service user 7

The meetings? It's the same as going to a police station really, like they're going to trip you up or something and take your benefits away. It's not like I'm walking into a shop to get a product you know? When you're called in its like "what am I being called in for this time" so not a customer at all.

Interview 1: Service user 6

This again implies a deep-rooted belief in negative stereotypes of benefit claimants in general and lone parents in particular. Once again the power inequality is hinted at in that the service users saw themselves as being 'in debt' to Jobcentre Plus. As in opinions given earlier there was a belief that encounters with Jobcentre Plus were opportunities for the adviser to catch out the service user in some form of fraudulent activity and that service users had little opportunity to resist having to attend. This notion of lack of choice as a service user formed the main argument against them being genuine customers.

Customer as being choice

I don't get told I have to go to a shop. I wish it were like that "You've got to go to a shop every six months and shop".

Interview 1: Service user 8

The most commonly quoted reason why service users did not associate themselves as customers at Jobcentre Plus was because of the lack of choice when using the service. Frequency of attendance was reported as non-negotiable and flexibility on the time they attended was also limited.

You are told when to go and who to go with so really there was no choice in it. They had to see me I had to see them. It's like being on a conveyor belt you know what I mean? Its procedure, that's all.

Interview 1: Service user 19

In all but one case the service users believed that they had to accept the personal adviser that had been allocated to them when they first accessed the system. These limitations on choice continued through the lack of opportunities service users felt were open to them at interview.

There's no real choice. They sit there and tell you what you can and can't have, not the other way round. You can't make demands at the Jobcentre no, no. You either do what they say or that's it you lose your benefits.

Interview 1: Service user 5

This opinion was reported as being true for many service users usually in relation to the choice of course they wanted to do. Many invested time researching alternative educational courses

spanning a wide variety of subjects such as plumbing, decorating and healthcare. When they did return to Jobcentre Plus and ask if they could attend the courses they were often told that, as they were not courses ran by the department they would not receive any financial help towards the cost of the course. Service users were then offered alternative courses that bore little resemblance to those that they had found themselves.

Discussions of choice did draw out some efforts to reconstruct an identity as a service user. Two service users described the relationship as being akin to employer and employee.

I see myself as like they're, the best way to put it is, they're my employers and I'm their employee yeah? The way I see it if I don't do exactly what they want and I say no, then I lose their benefit. That isn't how customers usually work, no.

Interview 1: Service user 10

I'm an employee that's more on the lines of it. Because when you go to the Jobcentre you have to go so, you know, if you're a customer you get choices on when and where you go. No, it's more like an employee because you don't get no choice in it whatsoever. You've got to go to get paid.

Interview 1: Service user 22

This is an interesting conception of identity as it brings back the idea of reciprocity within the relationship. There is a notion of transaction in that complicity is exchanged for financial reward. It was this notion of exchange that was reported to be missing in earlier attempts to construct an identity as a service user. This still occurs within what is implied to be an unequal power relation biased towards the department in their role as employer. It also demonstrates an ability by the service user to relate receiving benefits as akin to a work ethos. By amalgamating the DSS (BA) with the Jobcentre the government appeared to align benefits with work rather than as an alternative to it. However, within a consumer framework, service users seem to have constructed their own notion of benefits as work given their inability to act in accordance to their conception of a customer.

6.4 Complaining behaviour private and public sector

I wouldn't complain. It wouldn't make any difference at all. No I've never complained about anything. I could be sitting in a restaurant and have the horriblemest food ever and I wouldn't complain. I'd eat it. That's just me. It's not that its a public service, it's any situation and confrontation where I'd have to speak up. No I wouldn't.

Interview 1: Service user 5

This was a typical response across the entire sample of lone parents towards complaining about poor service, whether that is in the private or public sector. The general consensus, with only two exceptions, was that complaints were reserved for instances that were seen to matter, for example in relation to their children. General service encounters in shops were not thought to be important enough to raise a verbal complaint let alone an official complaint in writing. Reasons for this behaviour in regard to the private sphere seemed to be rooted in a general lack of self-confidence as opposed to ignorance of correct procedure. A more widely acknowledged form of complaint was to boycott particular businesses who had failed to meet an acceptable service standard.

I just don't use them again. I would only use it again if I didn't have a choice about it.

Interview 1: Service user 5

Many of the service users reported using this strategy as a means of making a point about the level of service or quality of goods that they had received. However, as the service user above notes, this is only possible if there is choice of provider. Whilst choice is becoming available in some public services, particularly healthcare, this is not yet viable in terms of Jobcentre Plus. Therefore it was not surprising to find that none of the service users had ever complained to Jobcentre Plus.

6.4.1 Complaining behaviour in Jobcentre Plus

As mentioned above, there were no examples of any of the service users having complained in any official manner about any aspect of the service provided by Jobcentre Plus. This was

despite nearly all of the service users being aware of, or deducing, that there was an official procedure for registering their dissatisfaction. Reasons for this were banded into three broad areas. Firstly, there was a belief that the complaints procedures were purely arbitrary and that nothing would be done with their complaint.

No nothing would change if I did complain. What they going to do, say sorry or something or they'd change the policy? Complaining is pointless it's the government ain't it, you can't go up against the government. They'll just tie you up in red tape until you can't be arsed to go on with it anymore.

Interview 1: Service user 6

I don't think it would make a difference. I'd only be complaining to make me feel better. Nine times out of ten when a customer complains it goes straight into the bin. A bit of paper they file with the rest of it. I don't think they actually listen and take account of what you say, no.

Interview 1: Service user 27

I didn't make a written complaint 'cause there would have been a lot of swear words in it and it wouldn't make a difference. It would be pages long and they probably wouldn't have time to read it and would have thrown it in the bin. That's what I think anyway. Written complaints get thrown in the bin.

Interview 1: Service user 30

Secondly, service users felt that due to the nature of the service, if they registered their dissatisfaction officially then this would adversely affect the way that they were treated.

No, I wouldn't complain probably not no. I just think what would be the point really. Nothing would change it wouldn't make a difference for me. They would probably see me as a troublemaker it's a small office they'd know.

Interview 1: Service user 29

I suppose once you've had a go at them they start having digs about you not working and it goes round the office and it's like that so and so.

Response 1: Service user 22

Thirdly, and most commonly quoted as being a reason why service users did not complain about the service they receive at Jobcentre Plus, was the fear of financial loss, in the form of stopped benefits if they did so.

Oh I think it's more a fear factor because they basically control your finances. As far as that's how I feel they control my finances. No I've never had the balls to stand up and say, well that's not right.

Interview 1: Service user 14

I don't complain at the Jobcentre in case they stop my money.

Interview 1: Service user 22

If I go in a shop and I say if you don't want my custom just say so and I'll bugger off somewhere else I'm quite open I wish I could say that in Jobcentre but I'm worried they'll stop my money. So you just bite your tongue and shut up. The more they go on the more you think why am I here? But there's always that fact if you answer back to them rudely they'll put something on and your money gets stopped completely. Yes it would influence the way they look at my claim, yeah.

Interview 1: Service user 28

Even though none of the service users who expressed this opinion could cite an example of someone who had experienced this treatment, they maintained their belief that they could be financially penalized for complaining.

In keeping with the notion of tangible transaction being indicative of being able to adopt the identity of, and act as, a customer, one service user commented on her inability to complain due to the non-reciprocal nature of the relationship.

It's different you can't complain really can you? You are getting something for nothing and you feel like you should be grateful for whatever you get so, no, I wouldn't complain at the Jobcentre.

Interview 1: Service user 25

6.5 Identity over time

The construction of an identity as a lone parent at Jobcentre Plus is influenced greatly by long standing stereotypical beliefs. Therefore, it is fair to say that identity is fixed over time. Furthermore, this identity is also projected on other service users. Through the (in)actions of the service provider as shown in Figure 6.1 (p.159), generic identities based on aforementioned stereotypes of lone parents as 'scroungers' perpetuate the identity through legitimate action. Over the course of this study none of the service users retracted or elaborated their initial opinions of how they saw themselves as service users. Even after positive encounters, and during later discussions regarding customer identity, their sense of self was fixed.

6.6 Summary and conclusions

Terms of identity play an important part of setting expectations and maintaining satisfaction with lone parents using Jobcentre Plus. Furthermore, the means of processing service users contributes towards their own attempts to form an identity as a service user. Many service users noted the repetitious nature of the encounters and interpreted this as a means of trying to 'catch out' the individual as dishonest claimants. This opinion reflects the general stereotypes that persist about benefit claimants, driven by the ongoing fixation with benefit fraud. The latest benefit welfare document '21st Century Welfare' (DWP, 2010a) states that:

The complex and fragmented nature of the system...causes staff and customer errors and enables customers to represent themselves differently to different parts of the system...Having one main gateway for customers to access the system should make it impossible for customers to represent themselves differently to different parts of an organisation and so would further drive down levels of error, overpayments and fraud.

(para 14-16: chapter 5)

This clearly implies the service user as being dishonest and necessitates the need for the system to change, not for the good of the honest service user, but for the good of the Government. This sort of dialogue only reinforces the stereotype of the deceitful, cunning dole dossier and a system that is alert to opportunities to catch them out. Service users apply this notion of dishonesty to other fellow service users. They make personal comparisons with other service

users that lead them to form their notion of a personal identity as 'different' from those service users they deem undesirable. Furthermore, they express dissatisfaction when non-service users apply the same label to them. However, in articulating an identity as a service user at Jobcentre Plus, and on speculating as to how non-service users classify them, they revert back to the derogatory terms that they, themselves, applied to other service users.

The importance of the terms of identity also extends to service staff. By using the term 'personal adviser' unrealistic expectations of the relationship between staff and service user were formed. The label 'personal' particularly caused expectations to be formed that could not be fulfilled in the relationship which exists between service user and staff member. In this way dissatisfaction was often reported to have been a consequence of this misconception. This misinterpretation is compounded in the belief of the service user that the staff in the Jobcentre Plus offices judged them based on their 'special' label of lone parent. However, this belief is only expressed in terms of perception, not grounded in specific remarks or incidents to support their claim. What the service users perceived was the general attitudes towards both young and single mothers as being state-reliant and economically inactive.

This special label of lone parent once again contributed towards unfulfilled expectations and dissatisfaction. On approaching the service the service users were largely unaware that they were classified differently to other benefit claimants. This is reflected in the surprise expressed at being given a 'special' adviser. However, in being assigned this they extend the term special to the treatment and help that they can expect to receive. The service users reported that, despite being classified as having different needs, advisers were hostile to any appeal for leniency made on the grounds of caring responsibilities. In this way there was a perceived mismatch between the implied signals given by being assigned the lone parent label and the difference it made in liaisons with the department.

In contemplating the notion of being a customer at Jobcentre Plus, service users were both unaware and incredulous. The term was rejected on several fronts. Once again the notion of a personal relationship within the service was seen as being incommensurate with being a customer. The amount of information held by the adviser was not a situation replicated in a traditional consumer transaction. There was also an implication that shops would not necessarily have the best interest of the customer at heart whereas the Jobcentre *should* operate

on that premise. A common theme discussed by service users was that of intangibility, in that there was no physical transference of goods from one to another. This formed an important belief across much of the sample and was a defining feature of what they believed, epitomized, a consumer transaction. However, some service users constructed the element of tangibility through a belief in the exchange of complicity for financial reward (in the form of benefits).

The most common explanation for the rejection of the term customer was that of lack of choice. This was applied across all aspects of the service from attendance patterns, choice of adviser to training offered. This lack of choice was compared to the lack of choice experienced by those in employment, where they are constrained by shift patterns and are ultimately in an un-equal relationship directed by their employer. Similar to the position of the paid employee, this complicity is rewarded financially through the continuation of benefit payment.

The service users who participated were overwhelmingly passive when it came to complaining behaviour, whether that be in the private or public sector. This came down to a general characteristic, low self-confidence, of the sample population. The majority of the service users described themselves as having poor self-confidence and this is reflected in their reluctance to complain even when service received fell below the standard they expected. The only means to register dissatisfaction in consumer encounters was to boycott a particular shop. However, it was noted that this was only possible in situations where an alternative was available. In terms of complaining in Jobcentre Plus, despite voicing dissatisfaction during the interviews, none had complained to their advisers or to the department as a whole through official channels. All service users were able to articulate a reasonable strategy whereby they could have complained officially but all were adamant that complaining would only jeopardize their future treatment, possibly their benefits and ultimately there was little or no prospect of the system changing. Therefore it was felt that the best course of action was to 'shut up and put up'.

Newman's (2001, p. 23) vision to challenge the perception of the public as passive recipients to active consumers in the public sector has not materialized as far as the lone parent cohort is concerned. The overriding identity of the benefit claimant, as perceived by the general public, public sector staff and the service user themselves, remains steeped in connotations of laziness and dishonesty. This is reinforced by the system which focuses on repetitious interviews which are interpreted as being a process designed to 'catch out' the dishonest service user as opposed

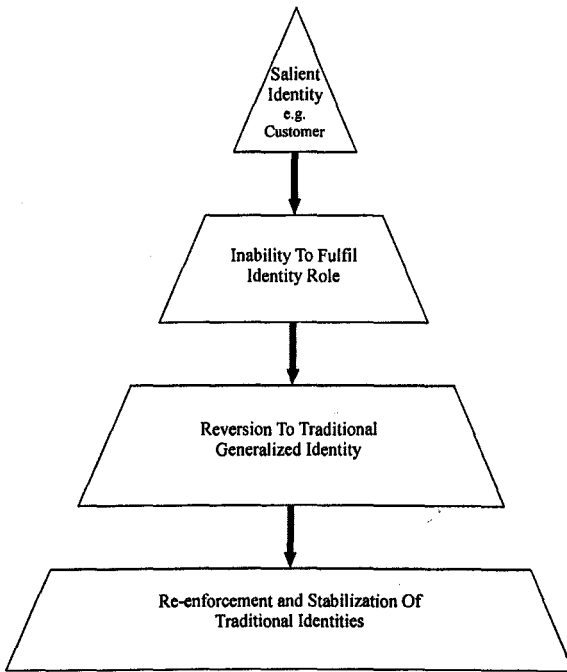
to an exercise in making sure the department are getting it right. Furthermore, the hypothesis offered earlier, that the UN statute calling for state institutions to not appear “as repressive or “unfriendly” to the majority of citizens” (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003, p.72), which implied exclusion if individuals were seen to be behaving in a way contrary to the ‘good’ consumer and has materialized through the actions of service users. By refusing to complain on the grounds that service staff will treat them differently, the service users confirmed their belief that complaining pushed them into the gap outside the majority of service users and so legitimized the right of the staff to be unfriendly and apply repressive sanctions to the relationship.

The opinions of the service users on their perception of themselves as service users support the work of Clarke *et al.* (2007, p.128) who stated that public service users did not identify with the term customer, or indeed citizen, and instead measured themselves in collective identities that implied a sense of belonging. The unequivocal rejection of the label ‘customer’ indeed shows this to be so amongst the service users. The latter point of re-definition, in collective terms, was also supported in that they referred to themselves, and other service users, in terms of generic collective negativity such as scrounger or dole dossier. Even though the service users, when describing other service users applied this negative vocabulary in a derogatory way, the need to have a sense of belonging was strong enough that they also applied it to themselves so that they could fit in.

The assertion (Clarke *et al.* 2007; Giddens, 1991) that the public enjoys flexibility in their service identity is too simplistic to apply wholly to users of Jobcentre Plus. The ‘relational reasoning’, as described by Clarke *et al.* (2007, p.137) can be witnessed in the ability to adapt expectations and thus adopt a different identity. However this reconstruction of identity is not spontaneous. It is an exercise in response to the options and attitude offered by the service provider. Therefore, Giddens’ (1991, p.5) belief that this ‘project of the self’ is subject to diverse and continuously revised narratives based on multiple lifestyle choices is not reconcilable within an environment where choices are limited and dictated by others.

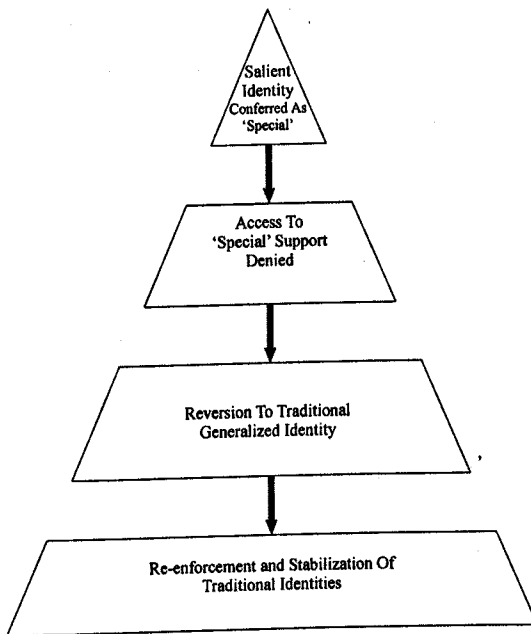
This directed input from others is evident in that the interviews support the earlier hypothesis of Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement Construct, as introduced in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.4) and reproduced here (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement Construct (author's own representation)



This was proposed in response to the terms of Identity Theory as proposed by Stryker and Burke (2000, pp.286-287). However, rather than the salient identity being based on the term customer, which was not recognized by the service user prior to engaging with the service, it was based upon pre-conceived notions of the 'special' status that was conferred upon them. This special status was due to their 'tangible' demarcation on the grounds of being lone parents. Therefore a revised construct based upon this information would look like this:

Figure 6.3: *Revised Identity Failure/Identity Reinforcement Construct (authors own representation)*



Service users are being denied the opportunity to demonstrate their status as 'special' in that they are not offered substantially different services to take into account their individual or group (as lone parent) needs. This is a crucial edict and upholds Kaufman's (2003) proposal that in order to adopt an identity individuals need to actively construct that identity through their actions. Denied of the opportunity to fulfil their expectations, they then revert to the only other identity that they recognize in the service environment. That is the identity that they themselves ascribe to others based upon a traditional and generic description of benefit claimants (as scroungers and dole dossers). This is commensurate to the ideas postulated by Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000, p.288) particularly the notion of behaviour in response to the perceived identity and the consequences of extreme emotions on the replication of identity. The conferred identity is built upon subjective and emotive interpretations of the terms 'special' and 'personal' advisor. The expected behaviour of the service staff informs the initial identity that the service user presents. However, as these expectations are not fulfilled, and the emotional energy invested in attempting to maintain their special status is unrewarded, the dominant, generic identity is internalized and replicated in future encounters.

Fixing this phenomenon in terms of Identity Theory upholds the suggestion that this Identity Failure/ Identity Reinforcement construct is a major factor in the perpetuation of traditional roles by the service users themselves. Ironically, this provides the notions of a reciprocal relationship that service users felt to be missing from their relationship with the staff at Jobcentre Plus. The construct supports Clarke *et al's.* (2007, pp.121-138) belief in a reciprocal, if hierarchical, relationship between user and provider which otherwise would not be plausible. Reciprocity is evident in the interchange between user and provider; the user is given expectations, the provider refutes them. This reinforced identity then conforms to Stryker and Burke's (2000, pp.286-287) belief of stability of identity in contextual situations except when constrained to act in a way that was deemed appropriate. As the stable identity is negative and stereotypical, service users have difficulty in fulfilling the obligations of an alternative label and so the identity is stabilized and perpetuated across service users, staff and wider society. The confirmation of the Theory of Self-Concept (Rosenberg, 1989, p.37) is equally evident in this analysis. The impenetrable persistence of stereotypical representations of groups within society is demonstrable in that individuals will adopt an identity that they themselves find repugnant. This is particularly evident in cases whereby the individual is constrained by lack of choice and fears that sanctions will be applied if they undertake transformative actions in order to define their own, more acceptable, identity. Putting it more eloquently:

Eventually people come to see themselves more or less as they are seen by others and to judge themselves in terms of the internalized attitudes of the community as a whole.

Rosenberg (1989, p.38)

Weiner's (2000, p.387) belief that these concepts of identity are not important to the consumer is misleading and dangerous. Weiner exercises a one-dimensional view, making assumptions that the consumer is fully informed about the inferences of accepting or rejecting a given label. As demonstrated above, service users rejected their rights as a customer to complain, based upon incorrect beliefs about the power afforded to the service providers. The analysis suggests that there is scope to engage the public, whether currently using a service or not, in discussions of what it is to be a service user at any given time. In this way, expectations can be realistic and identities can be exercised, rather than exorcised.

What is clear is that identity does contribute to service user expectations and ultimately satisfaction with a service. However, it is not just the identity of the service user that is important but also that of the service provider. Service user identity is defined in relation to service provider identity. Each identity brings with it its own expectations. The DWP enjoys a more positive construct, both work and pension being positive labels upon which to construct an image. However, the label Jobcentre Plus is more laden with negative images of the people that it serves, which, in turn, reinforces traditional stereotypes. Somewhere down the hierarchy the translation has changed. As the Jobcentre Plus office is the focal point for all benefit recipients the negativity is conferred upon any user whatever their personal narrative.

The following chapter is an analysis of the responses given by Jobcentre Plus staff members. Their knowledge of ways to measure service user satisfaction within their office was probed. Their awareness of in-house, district and national initiatives was explored. Staff members were found to be very knowledgeable about schemes that reported the results directly to the office, such as the mystery shopper exercise, but almost unanimous ignorance was confessed over the Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Surveys and their results. They were also asked about any occurrences where service user feedback had elicited a change in working practice. Finally, they were asked their opinion on the value of existing means of measurement of service user satisfaction.

Chapter 7 Service provider knowledge of measuring satisfaction

7.1 Introduction

It is clear from the literature detailing Jobcentre Plus' aims and objectives, and the wider targets of the DWP, that, from the beginning, service user satisfaction is a core objective. The DWP's business strategy promises 'clear cross-government policy objectives whilst improving customer service' (DWP, 2008a, p.25). Furthermore, one of its policy objectives is given wholly over to 'Customer Insight' described as being '...a function of the department which aims to increase our understanding of what it is like to be one of our customers. It is helping us to improve customer experience' (DWP, 2008a, p.25). In terms of front line delivery, customer service standards are set out in the customer service charter that includes providing general information, details about the accessibility of service and procedures for complaints.

In order to establish a process that delivers continuous improvement, the government uses the European Foundation for Quality Management and Charter Mark principles. Under these, all areas of the business are actively encouraged to engage in customer consultation to effect lasting change within the service. Referring to the area of complaints procedures, the DWP's Departmental Framework offers the additional advice that:

Each business is required to publish a complaints procedure, explaining how to complain. It is the responsibility of each business to ensure that complaints procedures are clear, simple and accessible to all areas of the public.

DWP (2008a, p.41)

Given these measures it appears that the government sets an agenda that places customer satisfaction, or at least service quality, at the heart of its departments, which is then filtered down to front line services.

Although service user satisfaction is a core element across the departments that fall under the remit of the DWP, its use and application remains sporadic and inconsistent. A transcript taken from Hansard (2006) reveals an eclectic mix of methods used across departments to monitor service user satisfaction. Since the Employment Agency and Benefits Agency were amalgamated to form Jobcentre Plus in April 2002 there have been four quantitative National Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Surveys. Qualitative follow-ups occurred alongside three

of these. As well as this, mystery-shopping exercises are periodically carried out and a national customer satisfaction target is published annually. The Pension Service and The Disability and Carers Service has a similar record of satisfaction measurement. The same Hansard transcript (2006) reported that the Child Support Agency had not conducted any national customer satisfaction survey or mystery shopping exercises since 2001 despite having carried out annual National Client Satisfaction surveys before that. Coherency across the DWP is not evident.

The primary methods of measuring service user satisfaction within Jobcentre Plus are the mystery shopper experience and the National Customer Satisfaction Survey. The former is primarily a local measurement and informs individual offices of their current service standards. The latter, as its title suggests, is a national survey that gauges service user satisfaction as a whole, rather than that of a particular location. The mystery customer experience is a participatory exercise that results in a quantitative measure of the service being given at a Jobcentre Plus office. The customer service target is set annually. For the year the study was carried out, 2007-2008, the overall national target was 84%. This target rose in the following two years to the current level of 86% in the year 2009 to 2010.

The National Customer Satisfaction Survey is a survey administered by telephone resulting in predominantly quantitative data. The 2007 survey, upon which this research was based, included data from 4,228 Jobcentre Plus customers. These included recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Income Support. A shortened version of the questionnaire was given to service users who had no contact with the agency within the previous six months. Administered on a quota basis, the survey claims to be representative of the known profile of Jobcentre Plus service users. Similarly, weights are applied in the analysis of the data so this representativeness is preserved.

The survey utilizes predominantly closed questions and Likert style grading. It includes questions to establish the service users' current circumstances and contact pattern with Jobcentre Plus and basic demographic data. It asks for opinions on specific style of encounter (face to face, telephone, written, office and home visit) as well as experiences of complaints made. It also asks the service user for a measure of overall satisfaction, again using a Likert scale. Qualitative follow-ups probe issues emerging from the quantitative study.

In the past, the National Jobcentre Plus Satisfaction Survey remained predominantly the same from year to year; however the 2009 study had some subtle, and for comparative purposes, important differences from previous years. One positive change was the inclusion of enquiries about the current national financial situation and the effect this had on the service user's experience. However, the change that has caused difficulty in comparative terms was the phrasing of the question on changes in service quality. Previously, and the way in which the question was phrased in this study, service users were asked "Over the past 12 months (or since the start of your current claim if this is less than 12 months) do you think the service you have received has got better, worse or stayed the same". This question had been asked in previous surveys and, was anticipated to remain, in this form, on future surveys. However, in the latest survey the question was phrased; "Overall, compared with what you expected, how would you rate the services provided by Jobcentre Plus?" Responses to the question were given in terms of much better than expected, better than expected, about as well as expected, worse than expected and much worse than expected. As this question is now being asked in terms of subjective, rather than actual experience, the questions are essentially measuring different things.

This chapter explores, at the service user facing level, how Jobcentre Plus offices measure the satisfaction of their service users. Staff respondents were invited to discuss any in-house initiatives in which they have participated and the means by which these were conceived and carried out. Questions of frequency of measurement and the means of analysis were raised and a picture of confusion and incoherency emerged. An assessment of the in-house initiatives reported revealed a re-active as opposed to pro-active agenda. Reports of autonomy in carrying out individualized exercises in measuring satisfaction were tempered by statements indicting a lack of additional resources to allow them to do so.

The use of the 'mystery shopper' exercise was explored particularly to find out service providers' knowledge, use and opinion of it. It was found that the majority of staff respondents had widespread and in-depth knowledge of mystery shopper exercises. Included in this study are discussions of the current practice of not displaying the results of the mystery shopper to the public. This generated discussion about whom the exercise benefitted. In contrast, discussions that were initiated about the National Survey, revealed the majority of staff

respondents were ignorant of these pieces of research. Reasons for the lack of knowledge included not knowing where to find them and not having the time within the working day to read them. The difficulty in using electronic means to communicate information was discussed with the service users. Their main concerns were the volume of electronic data received and the problem of information overload from head office.

Opinions of ways that service users could communicate complaints revealed a gap in service provider knowledge. Only one service user was able to refer to the 'Tell us what you think' leaflets that staff respondents revealed should be displayed in every office. Managers themselves described delegating, where appropriate, less serious complaints to personal advisers. Some advisers reported circumventing the need to inform the manager by dealing with conflict when it arose. Respondents were also asked to recall any changes that had been made as a result of service user feedback. In cases where change had occurred this was reported to have occurred as a result of complaints as opposed to satisfaction measurement initiatives.

Respondents were generally suspicious about the value of the results with regard to service user satisfaction. Reasons for this suspicion revolved around methods used to report complaints and their statistical accuracy. This statistical selectivity was felt to be to protect individual managers from adverse action should their office be seen to be failing. However, the practice of collecting information on service user satisfaction and service quality was widely supported in itself. Finally, a comparison between service user opinions and those of service providers was undertaken. This found both complementary and contentious assessments. Areas that were addressed were, who the service benefited, what identities emerged, ways of complaining and comparisons between Jobcentre Plus and the DSS.

The concluding paragraphs summarize the findings from the interviews and offer an appraisal of the measures currently in use by Jobcentre Plus to measure service user satisfaction and service quality. The implications of the findings, and of recent developments in the latest National Customer Satisfaction Survey, are found to be indicative of an EDT approach to measuring satisfaction. The findings are found to contradict some existing theories such as Barker (2001) and Blaug *et al.* (2006) but support others, namely Donovan *et al.* (2001) and Herden (2006).

7.2 Local level measurement and assessment

Some of the service providers interviewed reported that the Jobcentre Plus office where they were based had never undertaken service user satisfaction measurement as part of a local or district initiative. There was confusion in the remaining offices, as to the origin of any service user satisfaction surveys in which they had been involved.

I don't think we've done one as an office, it's done as a district when we do customer satisfaction surveys, I think. It's always done as a district. I think it has to be the district; I'm not sure to be honest.

New Claim Adviser

I think it's in-house, but it may well come from district office and our district office may drive them...I'm not quite sure if it was a district or office initiative. I don't know to be honest with you.

Customer Adviser

I don't know if it was done from the office or from the district. I assume they must go on because throughout my years in the DWP that's what's been alluded to but I'm sure they must go on.

Customer Service Manager

Regardless of the origin of the measurement there was also confusion over the frequency of them and when the last ones had been done. Most of those that had carried out service user satisfaction surveys (whether in-house or district-led) reported having done so in the last 18 months. Conversely, others could only confirm that they had issued service user satisfaction measures, but not in the recent past.

Well funny you should ask that. Every so often we have a questionnaire and we're actually doing them this week. It's been in place four or five years at least but it just tends to be, there isn't really a set pattern, it tends to happen about twice a year.

SureStart Adviser

These questions of (in)frequency were raised with respondents and the majority did not see it as being detrimental. Many expressed the view that service user satisfaction, specific to their office or district, need only be undertaken when there was a perceived need or if the system had changed.

We have mystery shopping but unless that was dropping dramatically I wouldn't feel the need to do a survey.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

I think if you're going to introduce something...you want to make sure it's good- that it adds value. You don't want to, if you're starting off on the wrong foot, you don't want that to continue through for the entirety so you might as well find out at any earlier stage so you can make changes.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

As well as service user satisfaction measures being generated from local offices there was one report of in-house evaluation of district lead service user satisfaction feedback.

If I think I've got a particular issue over a certain area then I can, if I need to, do an evaluation of it (district customer satisfaction results).

Customer Services Directorate

It was also reported that staff felt that high frequency surveys were no longer needed due to the progressive change in the way service users interacted with staff members. As contact was frequent and service users often saw the same advisers then enhanced and ongoing service user satisfaction was assumed to occur.

But because I think there's more consultation with lone parents and those on income benefits because those see more specialist advisers it's easier to gauge any unhappiness in them anyway.

Customer Service Manager

A lot of my stuff is done with advisers just talking to them anyway; you can pick up the ones that have problems. My advisers talk more now especially with the marginal customer groups.

Customer Services Directorate

Autonomy to implement service user satisfaction measurement, on an 'as and when' basis, was reported to be available. However, lack of resources to complement this autonomy was mentioned in terms of being a possible barrier.

Its something I took to our manager and he agreed we could do it.

Customer Service Manager

We wouldn't get any additional resources to do it but we could, it would be a lunch break add on.

Jobcentre Manager

For a time we added five minutes onto the interview to ask some questions about how they felt but that gives us a time constraint so we couldn't do it for long.

Jobcentre Manager

Conversely, in one case it was reported that service user surveys were a tool in gaining more resources.

If I felt we needed to put in a business case to get more, then what I would do is a customer survey to find out from the customer what it was like and then use that to support my business case.

Jobcentre Manager

There was confusion over who analyzed the results of the surveys, wherever they had been generated from. Analysis of the results were undertaken, it was assumed, by the place that generated the survey, ergo, in-house surveys were analyzed in house whilst district surveys were assumed to be analyzed by the district managers.

They get fed off somewhere, I'm not sure where, and we get to hear the results a few months later.

Re-Start Adviser

All the results will get collated by our district office, I think, and hopefully a few weeks down the line we should see a measure of how we are performing from a local point of view.

SureStart Adviser

Dissemination of results was exclusively for staff only. Of those that had undertaken in-house surveys recently only one offered any explanation of why service users were not given access to the results of such surveys.

Not to the customers, not now. We used to do that in the past but we got told we're not allowed to have things up on the wall; it goes against our standards so we don't.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

7.2.1 Mystery shopper

The mystery shopper is the normal way of monitoring standards of service across all Jobcentre Plus offices. This is based on two elements, the first being one in-house visit a quarter from a 'mystery customer'. This is complemented with three telephone calls each quarter, again from a mystery shopper. This exercise monitors the environment, such as if the correct leaflets are on display, and if Jobpoints and service user telephones work. They also gauge how quickly the service user is greeted when they first enter the premises and how the member of staff responds to pre-decided scenarios presented by the mystery customer.

Unlike the form and frequency of ad hoc in-house surveys all the respondents acknowledged the benefit of mystery customer exercises. Dissemination was in a standard format common to all respondents. Results are initially fed back to managers via e-mail. The results are prioritized for the weekly meeting where failures are addressed and successes celebrated. A small minority mentioned posting the results also onto staff notice boards.

In common with the results of the in-house survey providers reported that they did not feed results back to the service users. However, some respondents mentioned the necessity of making the information available to the service user should they request it.

There is a folder of information available, there has to be one in every office. It includes information on targets and such like. Very few customers ever ask for it. I'll be honest with you, I don't know if anyone ever has.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

We can't leave it (the folder) out, but if anybody wants to see it they ask the floor manager. It is there and it's regularly updated.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

If they wanted to see it yes its...there's nothing in there that the department would be worried about or would have a detrimental effect on the staff or clients.

Site Manager

One implied that the mystery customer exercise was not an exercise for the benefit of the service user but for the benefit of the staff.

That's (the mystery customer visit) for staff to make sure they're doing their job right.

Jobcentre Manager

7.3 National survey

The national survey emerged as being an underused tool for understanding levels of service user satisfaction. Most of the respondents, including managers or others in senior positions, reported not having seen the results of any national surveys.

In terms of the survey it's...are you referring to the... no I'm going to join the offices that haven't seen it at all. No I've not, I mean I know sometimes they do surveys asking customers what their opinion is but to be fair I don't think I've ever seen it to be honest with you.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

I wouldn't say that I see the overall reports I may get a part again usually or we might be asked to change something but not be aware that it's the result of the survey and the same I'd say for the rest of the staff.

Customer Service Manager

Right I haven't seen anything like that come back to me any feedback from national ones. No. I suppose it is a bit of a waste, yeah, 'cause how can we change anything if anything needs changing?

Financial Manager

What the second comment does reveal is that managers are not questioning the rationale behind changes that they are asked to implement. Service providers therefore, do not know if the change is for their benefit or for that of the service user. Neither are they aware of the context of the change and how effective it may be given particular circumstances.

Others admitted being aware of them, having seen references to them on the intranet, but did not feel it necessary to explore their contents further.

I... no, but that may be me because I'm sure they're on our intranet I mean we do get things like well always getting emails saying this survey's going on...I've seen things on there about different surveys so I guess it's a lack of looking deeper on my part. I can't think that I've seen anything like that though no one knows what happens.

New Claims Adviser

I think we're directed to them but I have to admit I haven't actually...no no, I'm sure something exists but I haven't seen anything in years.

Re-start adviser

If they want to read it they will. I'm not going to make them read it.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

These latter comments, of an indifference to engage with the on-going research, is concerning given the admission by a Jobcentre Plus Manager that they did not feel compelled to encourage

their staff to read the results of surveys on the intranet. The implications, therefore, are that using the intranet as a means of communicating information is flawed in that self-directed access is limited and compulsion for staff to do so by line managers is unlikely.

The issue of staff apathy when engaging with information disseminated via electronic means, emerged as a factor from those who were aware of the National Customer Satisfaction Survey. The acknowledged means of dissemination was reported as being published on the intranet initially but also flagged up to the Jobcentre Plus Manager by the district management team. The Jobcentre Plus Manager would then discuss the result in a team leader meeting where they would be asked to go through it with their individual teams. In some instances, if the monthly whole team talk is imminent it will be discussed in that as a 'hot topic'. This, in theory, appears to be an adequate system. However, the point at which the responsibility to disseminate the results is handed to the individual team leader signals the start of autonomous decisions over how the information is filtered down. The decisions made, when coupled with the aforementioned apathy to engage with electronic data, compound the incidence of poor team knowledge of National Customer Satisfaction Survey results. Furthermore some comments made by Jobcentre Plus Managers implied that they were aware, albeit tacitly, that team leaders methods of dissemination were not always reliable.

I would pass it on to my direct line management team and they would probably pass it on to their staff dealing with the public.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

The manager would ask one of the customer service managers or team leaders to do that but really that would be...you can imagine the amount of information we get sent. It would be "if you want to look at it, this is where you would find it on the intranet site".

Customer Service Manager

I would always, whenever I get anything, circulate to my managers and they can do with it what they will.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

This problem with (in)effective dissemination of information was recognized by the staff, some of whom had very strong opinions on the problem.

The e-mails are horrendous. I read every single one, but a lot of my colleagues don't.

Customer Service Manager

The answer always is 'it's on the intranet'. But you've got to find the time, which part of your business are you part of, then you've got to navigate what region then its which district, then it's which cluster before you get the results. Then when you open it up it runs to 175 pages long and you think, I can't be bothered. What staff would say is they don't give two monkeys what the chief executives have done, they're not interested in what my district manager's done. What they are bothered about is car parking and the fact that the heating's not right and they are too cold.

Jobcentre Plus Manger

This Manager's opinion that staff members are not bothered about the level of detail published on the Internet is corroborated through comments given by staff members.

The senior managers sit there saying that they send out loads of information...but people at the bottom don't have time to open constant e-mails.

Customer Adviser

I'm sure that if I were late to see a customer and I said it's because I was reading a report on customer satisfaction...well you can see the irony can't you? There's too much and to be honest most of it doesn't affect the way I do my job and I'm not bothered about it if it doesn't.

Jobcentre Plus Team Leader

Once again, of those that were aware of the National Customer Satisfaction Survey, all were unanimous that Jobcentre Plus played no part in letting their service users know what the national opinion was. That's not to say the service users could not find out, but that the facility for telling them was not from a local source.

No the results are never put up on the (customer) notice board, no. I'm sure if they went on the DWP website they'd be able to get some information on there.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

7.4 Service user complaints

The general feedback from the respondents was that the official means of complaining was through a written letter to Jobcentre Plus. These were almost exclusively addressed to the Jobcentre Plus Manager. These were not filtered but were received and opened directly by the Manager. Only one respondent mentioned the mandatory 'Tell us what you think' leaflets.

OK now, they (tell us what you think leaflets) are kept on display. That's one of the mandatory leaflets that we have. It's not something we should hide. I'm sure some Jobcentre maybe do, but no, in theory they should be out in the open for customers to see. If not, like I say, if a customer comes in and wants to complain you can always give them the leaflet straight off.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

When questioned on who was responsible for dealing with service user complaints it was seen to depend upon their severity and the means by which they are communicated to the Jobcentre Plus office. Some respondents reported that for minor complaints, when they had the opportunity to address the service user face to face, they would try to resolve the issue themselves. All reported that this type of complaint, unless it was escalated to a written one, was not logged in anyway.

It all depends how serious their complaint is but if it's like a fairly minor complaint then I try to deal with it myself.

Re-start Adviser

Well very often it would depend upon the member of staff. I've got a couple of staff that are very experienced and complaints...they would deal with themselves.

Jobcentre Plus Team Leader

What is concerning about this latter comment is, if viewing it from another angle, having 'a couple' of staff who are capable of handling service user complaints implies that the majority of the advisers are not trained or comfortable, handling service user complaints. If this is taken in conjunction with the evidence from service users that they do not complain then there exists few opportunities for service recovery to occur through apology or explanation for a course of action.

The majority of respondents agreed that outside of verbal complaints handled by team members they were dealt with, in the first instance, by the Jobcentre Plus Manager. The first action by the manager was to establish if the complaint was legitimate in that it was being directed at the office or if it was a complaint about the overarching system. In the case of the latter, managers reported either calling the service user directly or drafting a response explaining that it was an issue that was outside of their control. If the complaint was found to be reasonable then a holding letter was issued to the service user in order to allow time for the matter to be investigated. At this point managers reported delegating responsibility for investigating the complaint to the team manager of the section involved or to the Customer Service Manager.

I will pass it to the team leader who will respond saying what they have established or why the concern was raised and what they had done to deal with that particular problem and then they would feedback to me how that had been taken forward.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

The responsibility, ultimately, is with the Jobcentre Plus Manager. Although not all respondents who were Jobcentre Plus Managers acknowledged that they were directly involved in the resolution of the complaint after it had been passed to another team member, it is always their name that is on the final written customer letter.

Ultimately, my name goes on the bottom of the actual letter as the Jobcentre Plus Manager so I would actually make sure that what's being said on there is correct and that I'm happy with it before signing my name to anything.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

Although all complaints resulted in written feedback to the individual, some managers also felt that a telephone call to the complainant increased the likelihood of the complaint being resolved at that point. However it was not always for the good of service user relations that these phone calls were placed.

I don't have a problem with calling them. It shows them we are a human being and being able to say 'actually this is what you perceived happened, this is set down in our standards of what we deliver to you so actually have we done anything wrong?' and actually talking to people quite often you realize that the complaint is...if you do it by written word quite often you respond and they'll come back with another part of that question but if you talk it through you can normally get to the crux of it straight away.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

But I do put the fear of God into them. I do phone them up and say I am terribly sorry I'd like to apologize but while I've got you on the phone I've taken the opportunity of finding three jobs for you and it puts the fear of God into them and before you know it, they've backtracked.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

7.5 What changes in practice could be attributed to service user feedback from any initiative?

In terms of positive changes in working practices that could be attributed to service user feedback only a small number of the respondents could recall specific incidences that had led to change. Of this number all had been as a result of service user complaints.

We've certainly bought in some small changes in this office. At one point quite complex interviews were being held near to an area where there were a lot of public waiting and customers felt uncomfortable relaying all that information knowing there was so many people. So that style of interview was moved to another area so we've done little things in the office, yeah.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

We have, as a result of an incident that happened where a client was ringing for a crisis loan and was told to get off the phone. When we sat down with the individual, and he said he didn't know that he couldn't ring up so he was angry. He just thought we'd cut him off and as a result of that we made sure there were signs up saying you cannot ring up crisis loans. So things like that have happened.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

One respondent reported change in the way telephone calls were handled whereby whilst advisers were with service users their telephone calls were diverted to other advisers so that the service user could enjoy an uninterrupted interview. It was not clear to the respondent what had motivated this change in practice and so there was an assumption that this was from service user feedback although the source of which was not known.

Several respondents commented on the difficulties of using service user feedback to effect change in working practice particularly in relation to individual complaints. Managers had to discern if the complaint could be attributed to a specific set of circumstances or if they represented a trend that could be addressed through a change in working practice.

It can be quite difficult because if it's a complaint it can often be quite specific to that person and quite often it is not necessarily a trend.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

With some of the complaints 'oh we had an appointment at this time and I waited ten minutes over that time' so that would cause us to look at and say OK have we enough staff in the right places and sometimes we can't do anything about it. If you've got two people off sick and someone on annual leave you've still got the same amount of customers coming in and all we can do is apologize and say we are running late and try to warn them about it when we can.

Team Leader

Most of the managers interviewed acknowledged that, in practice, it was difficult to change working practices due to the strict brand standards that existed within the structure of Jobcentre

Plus. Some spoke in terms of circumventing this by trying to manipulate 'organization' in the office.

A lot of our practices are done nationally and we've got to follow set procedure so it's difficult to influence those. I probably can't change it entirely but I can change the organization within the office that I have responsibility for.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

This was indicative in the feedback in examples such as placing staff with specific interpersonal skills with service users with a volatile reputation and placing desks likely to attract sensitive conversations away from public areas.

7.6 Staff opinion on the value of existing measurement

Support for the idea of measuring service user satisfaction was evident across the majority of the respondents. However, opinions regarding the importance of the process expressed that this was necessary as a financial investment in terms of getting service users into work and saving resources that currently went into dealing with service user complaints. No respondents mentioned the benefit to the service user in receiving good customer service.

It's instrumental 'cause at the end of the day the Jobcentre is about getting people back into work. So if people are coming in and we're not giving them what we should be, then that's not going to get them off the register and back into employment and helping the government agenda.

Customer Service Directorate

I would say it's not a resource issue it's an investment issue. If we invested in the way we handle complaints correctly in the first place, that's where the cost will be, but once you've got that embedded its not a resource issue. If you invest in the first place you save resources later on dealing with complaints.

Jobcentre Plus Manger

There was unanimous skepticism over if current measures represented an accurate picture of the service user experience. Much of the skepticism was based around the autonomy of Jobcentre Plus Managers to report, or not, in all but written complaints. Other managers

displayed animosity towards the concept of other managers fixing the figures, when they themselves followed procedures and as a result had their managerial competency questioned.

Personally myself, I would question, and have questioned, the numbers. When I was in my previous job dealing with the complaints, I know this office had a nil return each month but since I've been here, on average, we've been having 20 or 30. That's not because complaints have risen its how it's been monitored.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

Before I arrived here, I mean this office had a register of 1500 (complaints). Now I know it had a lot more complaints than the one down the road that's got a register of 3000. Now I know statistically that's not right.

Customer Service Manager

If we're chasing a number game, then if managers are speaking to customers on the telephones regarding complaints then these don't get recorded and so the returns are going to look better.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

Concern was also raised over how difficult it was for service users to express an opinion or make a complaint. Respondents criticized the system for making a complaint as being confusing and not easily accessible to all members of the community.

There is a lot of confusion and even having a leaflet 'Tell Us What You Think', it doesn't make it clear that they can make a feedback rather than a formal complaint if they wanted to. There's still along way to go. I don't believe we're 100% of the way one iota. We've got a long way to go but at least its more used now than it used to be.

Customer Service Directorate

You have to think of ethnic minorities. If English is not their first language and you're saying to them write or go to an outside organization to be an advocate on your behalf, when in theory I think, as an organization we should be sitting down with the customer at least talking through any decisions if they don't understand. But I don't think, at the moment we have a culture where we can say we don't agree, you can write and complain.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

The mystery shopper exercise was seen as ill-reflecting the real issues that service users faced when using the Jobcentre Plus offices on a day-to-day basis.

I actually think they (mystery shopper) only touch the surface, yes the standards have to be measured but they're looking for mandatory posters, they're looking for mandatory leaflets, they're doing the customer experience but it's very different to the everyday person we've got coming through the door.

Customer Service Manager

From comments given above, the mystery shopper was viewed as being in the best interests of Jobcentre Plus, in that it ensured that it fulfilled its obligations in making certain information available to all users of the service. Likewise national initiatives were commented on as being of little relevance to individual offices.

My personal opinion would be that it's too high level for it to actually be of any benefit to us in the Jobcentre. Obviously we use the mystery shopper program, things come round from that...which is more relevant to the Jobcentre rather than national statistics. There might not be a problem at a local Jobcentre. I think it needs to be specific.

Finance Manager

When it came to feeding results back to the service users, opinions were expressed that this was something that needed to be done, particularly in terms of local changes, rather than those directed nationally.

I think there's quite a perception from customers what we don't do much with the information. They still see us with very government hats on rather than actually what we're doing in the office.

Customer Service Directorate

It's just kept in house now which I think is not a good thing. But I used to, there was the employment service and the Benefits Agency and we amalgamated to Jobcentre Plus. I was in the employment service and we always had to display our results on a poster and we constantly had to display our results from the mystery shop, results from our in-house surveys and what we'd done to improve service. Those had to be displayed when we were under the employment service, but under Jobcentre Plus it's not.

Team Leader

Some, however, were more scathing of these past initiatives to display service user feedback publicly in this way.

...but I know myself we've got...if I go, if you see the big poster at the railway station I'm thinking 'well they would say that wouldn't they!'

Customer Service Manager

7.7 Areas of crossover: Service user opinion and service provider perspectives

There are several areas of crossover between the reported conditions that exist for the service provider and the observations of the service user. In recalling some of the quotes above, it is noticeable that some complimented the other, whilst others identify areas of contention between the opinions of service provider and service user. One area that supported the service user perspective was that for whom the service existed. Service users insisted that the department was run for its own benefit not for theirs. This is an opinion that is supported by the evidence of the service provider.

That's (the mystery shopper visit) for staff to make sure they're doing their job right.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

This terminology used by the respondent reveals a complete belief in the value of the exercise being for the department not for the service user. This supports the belief that was offered by the service user.

That's it isn't it? It's about the outcome for them, the numbers, getting us through the system.

Interview 2: Service user 4

In looking at what the mystery shopper exercise aims to measure, namely the environment, the displays, and if job points and service user telephones work, as well as the speed with which the service user is greeted when they first enter the premises; then considering the perspectives of the service provider and service user, a picture of service user satisfaction measurement emerges, that for the most part omits the service user. Furthermore, both service provider and service user believe that the prime service aim is to improve the national financial and statistical figures.

It's instrumental 'cause at the end of the day the Jobcentre is about getting people back into work. So if people are coming in and we're not giving them what we should be then that's not going to get them off the register and back into employment and helping the government agenda.

Customer Service Directorate

Their outcome is "wayhey" we got another one off income support! Its statistics isn't it for them?

Interview 2: Service user 27

There is no provision for separating the overall outcomes for individuals from the bigger, national, picture or as part of a process.

Interesting observations were revealed about the way that service providers conferred and confirmed the identity of service users.

If they wanted to see it yes it's...there's nothing in there that the department would be worried about or would have a detrimental effect on the staff or clients.

Site manager

Respondents' referring to service users as 'clients' was by no means isolated, despite the official term being 'customer'. Although that terminology is not ideal, evidence emerged of worse identities conferred on the service user. The attitude of some service providers revealed evidence that Jobcentre Plus service users were seen as work-shy and lazy.

But I do put the fear of God into them...(whilst on the phone) I've taken the opportunity of finding three jobs for you and it puts the fear of God into them.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

This attitude implies a belief in the predominant stereotype of the benefit claimant as a scrounger, having no intention of looking for work and being content to remain on benefits. This supports the view given by the service user that staff members base their judgment on the status of the user as benefit recipient rather on an individual basis.

Exploring the opinion of the service provider on the avenues for complaints open to the service user, both inconsistencies and confirmations are revealed.

...(tell us what you think leaflets) are kept on display. That's one of the mandatory leaflets that we have. It's not something we should hide. I'm sure some Jobcentres maybe do but no, in theory, they should be out in the open for customers to see.

Jobcentre Plus Manager

None of the service users who were asked if they knew how they could make a complaint about the service at Jobcentre Plus, mentioned the 'Tell us what you think' leaflets. Two possibilities exist for the reason behind none of the respondents identifying the leaflet as a way of voicing an opinion or airing a grievance. Firstly, the service user may have seen the leaflet but not be aware of its function. Secondly, and in support of the 'tongue-in-cheek' comment made in the above quote, Jobcentre Plus offices are not displaying them as predominantly as they could, or indeed, should. Whichever reason is true this is a failure of the department to make sure service users are given the information necessary to make their opinion known to Jobcentre Plus.

Finally, it was not only the service user who reflected on comparisons between the old DSS and the new Jobcentre Plus regime.

I used to, there was the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency and we amalgamated to Jobcentre Plus. I was in the employment service and we always had to display our results on a poster and we constantly had to display our results from the mystery shop, results from our in-house surveys and what we'd done to improve service. Those had to be displayed when we were under the employment service, but under Jobcentre Plus it's not...having it there on the wall for everyone to see. Well sometimes you got the comments from an unhappy customer but it did make you defend your position more when they (the service user) knew.

Team Leader

Reminiscences of this kind were again couched in positive opinions, such as the one above. The displaying of the information itself was not overtly named as constructive but the action that it provoked, 'make you defend your position more when they knew' was. This is similar to the experiences of service users who also expressed positive opinions of the 'old' system.

7.8 Summary and conclusions

All of the staff interviewed reported being aware of at least one method that they defined as being a measurement of service user satisfaction. All respondents had heard of, and understood the process of, the mystery shopper experience. However, local office initiatives were far less recognized. Where respondents did acknowledge they had been undertaken at some time in the past, they were unable to define any underlying model or theory on which the survey had been based. They were described as being constructed and analyzed by Jobcentre Plus staff. These were often at a very basic level. For example one in-house initiative consisted simply of a piece of paper with one question 'How was your visit today?' followed by a smiling face and a frowning face. Service users simply had to tick one or the other. The result from these types of surveys did not get passed back to district but remained within the office. The National Customer Satisfaction Survey was seen as being largely irrelevant on a local level and so little effort was made to promote it across all team levels. Whilst the majority of respondents were

aware of the right for the service users to make a complaint, only a small number of respondents mentioned the 'Tell Us What You Think' feedback leaflets that are freely available for service users to fill in at point of contact. More alluded to the process of accepting verbal complaints or of the practice of service users writing in directly to the Jobcentre Plus Manager. Compliments were acknowledged but the majority of respondents did not recognize a defined process to capture them. Managers expressed a belief that compliments were for a particular occurrence and were largely underestimated in any official statistics.

In terms of disseminating the results of these measures it was overwhelmingly seen as being done via team briefings and, particularly in terms of national results, via the intranet. Jobcentre Plus Managers did not always take personal responsibility for disseminating results but delegated this to team leaders or other designated team members. How they passed this information on was largely at their own discretion. The results of none of these measures of satisfaction were passed onto the service user. Overwhelmingly, they were seen as an exercise undertaken for the benefit of the team rather than the benefit of the service user.

The DWP have acknowledged and acted upon the need to measure the level of service that is provided and the service user satisfaction that it achieves. However, with the exception of the mystery shopper exercise, there is no pattern to the attempts at gauging current levels of service user satisfaction within individual Jobcentre Plus offices. Local or district measurement of service user satisfaction was rarely undertaken. With the exception of Jobcentre Plus Managers, when surveys were carried out within the office environment, the staff members were largely unaware if these initiatives had been directed from district or had been compiled by Jobcentre Plus Managers. The infrequency of such surveys may be because of the common belief, from office managers, that service user satisfaction monitoring need only be carried out where there had been a perceived need or in the aftermath of environmental change, such as office re-location. This reflects a re-active as opposed to pro-active approach in measuring and maintaining service user satisfaction. Assumptions were also made about the impact that higher frequency contact with service users had on their satisfaction. This was, in part, built upon the supposition that service users saw the same advisers consistently each time they visited. If this were indeed the case, it was felt that advisers could make comparative judgments based on the attitude of the service user at previous encounters. Therefore, staff

believed that they would be able to intervene before that service user felt the need to complain. Also, more frequent visits and having a personal relationship with an adviser was believed to be conducive to a more satisfying experience for the service user overall. Service managers reported the ability to carry out ad hoc surveys if they felt the need but acknowledged that this would be carried out in addition to other service obligations.

The mystery shopper was found to be far more structured and universally recognized across all grades of Jobcentre Plus staff. In isolation from any of the other methods it had a systematic means of dissemination both electronically and face-to-face in weekly team meetings. It was also the only means of measurement that made the results available to the service user. However, this dissemination to the service user was by request only.

Findings from the National Customer Satisfaction Survey were widely neglected. The majority of respondents were unable to state categorically that they knew of the survey or of the results. This ignorance was grounded in a belief that national measures of satisfaction were largely irrelevant on a local basis. This is compounded by the apathy with which the results are received at all levels. Some Jobcentre Plus managers were unaware of the National Survey implying that the mechanism by which it is communicated to them fails to convey its importance. This, in turn, influences the way that the Jobcentre Plus managers pass findings onto the staff. The managers who were aware of the survey reported delegating their responsibility to disseminate it down the line, albeit with very little conviction. The problem then becomes self-propagating. Managers do not enforce a set procedure to ensure that staff members engage with the results. Dissemination is merely referring staff to its presence on the intranet. However, there is general staff apathy to look themselves, compounded by issues of time and the impact it has on the working day. In cases where staff had taken steps to look at the results they were put off by the size of the report preferring to reject it out of hand. It appears, from the feedback, that the non-proactive attitude demonstrated towards local initiatives to measure service user satisfaction are also evident in the importance placed on the national ones.

With regard to service user complaints, the majority of the respondents demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge of the correct procedure. The majority of respondents cited writing a letter to the manager as being the most appropriate form of complaining. Very few mentioned

the 'Tell us what you think' leaflets that are available at the Jobcentre Plus office. However, what was mentioned was the incidences of verbal complaints that occurred which remain unaccounted for in official reporting. Most respondents acknowledged the pressure to resolve complaints at the lowest level, preferably letting it go no further than the verbal stage. If this pattern repeats itself in the way in which service users deal with complaints then the amount of dissatisfaction could be significantly higher than officially reported. Contributing further to this is the significant number of staff members who recommend a written letter to the manager, as the most appropriate way to complain. The DWP website recommends not to put an official complaint in writing to the manager but to speak to a member of staff or fill in a 'Tell us what you think' comment card.

Change was rarely attributed to service user complaints or other measures of satisfaction. The same opinion expressed towards national initiatives, in that they were irrelevant at a local level, was applied to service user complaints. Complaints, they felt, were often too specific to the individual to become applicable to a wider audience. It was also noted that when changes in practice had occurred it was unclear what had prompted this change. It is possible that changes in practice or in the office environment, may have been effected by service user feedback but that this has not been made clear to the staff members.

Staff respondents held strong opinions as to the value of current measures of service user satisfaction. The concept of measuring service user satisfaction was noted as being worthwhile but it was in the administration and channels open to the public to complain that skepticism was voiced. Comments reflected the opinion that the reporting of complaints was not a realistic capture of satisfaction. This was down to managers being selective in what classed as an official complaint. If it was handled verbally at the time of the encounter, Jobcentre Plus Managers admitted that these complaints were not recorded officially. Even when a complaint is dealt with at point of contact it was seen as necessary to capture that complaint if it were to add any value to future encounters. Service providers also believed it was not only the recording of incidences that was flawed. Respondents also commented on the difficulty for service users to make a complaint in the first place. However, as many of the staff interviewed failed to report the use of the 'Tell us what you think' cards as being a legitimate way for a

service user to make a complaint, then this could be a personal perception as opposed to reality.

There were many areas of the research with service providers that complemented the evidence that emerged through research with the service users. Evidence existed of support for the service users belief that the service existed primarily for the benefit of the department and the government. Outdated terms of identity were in evidence from the service provider with references to 'clients' as opposed to 'customers'. Service user perceptions of self-identity were reflected in implied belief in the common stereotypes of benefit recipients and the way that it effects the treatment they receive. Differences in the reported method of complaining emerged through comparisons of the service provider and service user. What should have been a well-documented method, the 'Tell us what you think' leaflets, were wholly unknown to the service users. Finally, both user and provider gave examples of favourable comparisons with the old system of DSS and Jobcentre as opposed to the amalgamated Jobcentre Plus.

The evidence from the empirical work with the service provider implies that measuring service user satisfaction in Jobcentre Plus is an exercise in measuring service user service levels. The overall outcome appears to be an outcome for the department as opposed to an outcome for the service user. This transmutes what should be a consultation exercise into a quality control measure designed to fulfil targets. The lack of top-down drive to use the data in any constructive and, if necessary, abstract way paves the way for staff apathy and a rejection of the importance of being service user, rather than results, driven. This attitude, in itself, can become a factor in low morale amongst staff members who often see their role as being for the service user as opposed to being for the department.

I do think it's a very hard job to do if you really care about customer service and I do. I've struggled in the seven and a half years I've worked here and I've been told off many times for giving too much customer service because I'm going over and above what I should be doing. It's knowing when to say OK that's my job role done and I'm going to pass you to someone else now and I hate doing that, I think it's awful.

Customer Adviser

Although evidence of in-house measures of satisfaction were rare, of equal concern is the reliability and validity of any results obtained through autonomous endeavour. Indeed, it is questionable if there is any value to be placed on the results generated through such measures. The design, administration and analysis of measures of satisfaction appear to be being undertaken by staff members who have no research background. By omission there appears to be no overarching framework upon which staff can base their own means of enquiry. The earlier example, of having two faces; one showing a happy face and the other a sad face with the question "How are you feeling?" highlights these problems. The question is ambiguous and de-contextualized. Asking the service user to fill in their replies at the adviser's desk raises questions concerning whether undue pressure is exerted by the mere presence of the adviser and if service users were influenced by that. Initiatives are driven not by the need to measure levels of satisfaction but for the sake of 'satisfaction' itself. These ad hoc initiatives are usually in response to existing problems as opposed to preventing a problem occurring in the first place. Results from national initiatives are largely ignored with the system reinforcing this by failing to deliver clear, coherent and consistent advice regarding the reporting, measuring and the disseminating of service user satisfaction.

Although there was no knowledge of what framework or theories were used in either national or local initiatives, the most recent National Customer Satisfaction research hints at the theoretical influences that have shaped it. This was evident in the change in focus of the question on changes in service quality, as detailed in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Whereas previously the question had focussed on actual service experienced, it focussed now on the terms of actual service in comparison to what was expected. This change in focus to service user expectations and satisfaction is in line with an EDT framework. As discussed in Chapter Five using this, although important in informing and contributing to models of satisfaction, philosophies such as EDT are too simplistic to apply wholly to the public services. The evidence from this research contradicts the opinion of Barker (2001). Barker stated that the concept of the 'customer' had not been extended to all departmental areas and that 'customer' focus is only evident in front line service delivery and was not evident within policy making (Barker, 2001 p.4). However, service user opinions gathered here show that, in

fact, the customer focus is more evident in policies informing the work of Jobcentre Plus and less so in the front line service where references to the 'client' were still evident.

This study could provide no evidence to support Blaug *et al's* (2006, p.10) conclusion that it was the clash of identities, consumer and citizen, that contributed to the delivery paradox. Although identity has proved to be an important factor in terms of influencing if the service user feels they have the right to complain, no evidence emerged to suggest that comparisons with others using the service contributed to a failure to recognize service improvements with corresponding rises in satisfaction. Work by MORI (2002) and Schmidt and Strickland (1998) that advised caution in merging the identities consumer and citizen, emerged before the advent of 'customer' as the sanctioned identity for users of Jobcentre Plus. Indeed, service users applied un-official terms such as scrounger, whilst providers used older terms such as 'client'. Furthermore, service users did not tend to acknowledge themselves in terms of dual identities and so conflict between them was not an issue. Therefore, service user and provider did not apply the label of consumer or citizen in this study, making an appraisal of the significance of these theories impossible.

As Donovan *et al.* (2001) theorized it might not always be in the best interest of the government to prioritize satisfaction, such as in the case of unemployment benefit. Indeed, as this study discovered, service user satisfaction is not the main aim of the exercise that purports to measure it and neither is it recognized as such by both service users and provider. Opinions given above have illustrated that service aims are for the benefit of the Government as a whole, an opinion that was also recognized by service users themselves. MORI's (2002, p.3) conclusion, that traditional models of satisfaction designed with the needs of the private sector in mind are not appropriate unless substantially adapted for use in the public sector, are endorsed through this research. As demonstrated, service users do not approach the department with the same expectations and motivations of those in the private sector. Similarly, the motivations and expectations of the department, do not lend themselves to traditional aims of satisfaction measurement, where an increase in service user base and retention are the desired overall outcome.

Taking the evidence of both user and provider into account Herden's (2006, p.5) recommendation that individualized engagement be administered by the organization is

upheld. Users of Jobcentre Plus are diverse, particularly in times of economic strain where high unemployment affects a broader scope of job type. However, there is no evidence that either user or provider believed that satisfaction measurement should be abandoned on the ground of an 'overstretched budget' as proposed by Donnelly *et al's.* (1995, p.15). Donovan *et al.* (2001, P.6) warning of confusing and contradictory methods of measuring service user satisfaction in the public sector is upheld through this study. Therefore if the corresponding prediction by Donovan *et al.* (2001, P.6), which warns of mis-allocation of resources and no increase in reported satisfaction with public services, is to be avoided, change to the model proposed by Herden (2006, p.5) must become a serious consideration.

The following, final, chapter synthesizes the ideas that have emerged across the core concepts of the study. Consideration is given to how the study has fulfilled the research aims and if it has filled the existing gaps in knowledge in this subject area. Key concepts are proposed. It is suggested to move from the prevalent expectations based model to that of a process-based model for measuring satisfaction with the public services. Dual identities and their effect on service users ability to experience satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus is discussed, as are the implications of misinterpretation of service terms. An attempt is made to 'lay to rest' DOAs through stronger service user/personal adviser relationships. How these concepts fit within a post-modern framework is examined and suggestions to split quality from satisfaction in attempts to measure satisfaction are offered. Finally the implications and limitations of the study are discussed along with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 8 Conclusions of the study

8.1 Introduction

Using the 'delivery paradox' as a catalyst for exploration, this study set out to investigate if, and how, the measurement of satisfaction with public services contributed to the perceived inconsistency. Existing factors that had been claimed to exert influence on satisfaction were assembled and the central factor was found to be expectations. This materialized in the dominant discourse of the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). Going beyond this theory and taking into account a change in the direction of policy formation, the role of overall outcomes in the perception of satisfaction was identified as a possible influence. However evidence suggested that overall outcomes as the core factor to service quality and satisfaction, in a service-based model was contentious outside of a process model. As it had also been suggested that identity, and terms of identity, could contribute to dissatisfaction, this too was included as a core component for exploration. Finally, as measuring satisfaction entailed gathering personal, individual perspectives; questions of if, and how, individuals negotiated the task of translating subjective experiences in an objective way were thought important to answer. The antithesis of this being if in this translation process the subjective were suppressed, or not given the opportunity to be voiced through the means of measuring satisfaction, could other methods reveal these tacit thoughts? It was important that this study maintained a focus on the 'measuring' aspect of satisfaction, not just on the phenomena of satisfaction per se. This was one of the rationales behind including knowledge formation and extraction in the original design.

The study was successful in constructing a framework within which these factors could be placed and presented to service users; they were couched in the real life experiences and opinions of service users. In using personal narratives the service users were able to express opinions that encompassed the theoretical concepts outlined above. Not only was it possible to investigate these existing factors but also the hitherto unexplored factor, orientation towards mothering or employment. The overwhelming understanding of Jobcentre Plus aims, in the opinion of the service users, was based on the work first model. They believed that when they were deemed 'suitable' for work and not subject to the provider's Desirable Outcome Assumption (DOA), the onus was on obtaining any employment, rather than suitable

employment. This led to a double-damning effect. Those orientated towards motherhood as their primary role were dissatisfied as this was contrary to their beliefs of primary responsibility and those who were orientated towards employment were dissatisfied due to pressure to pursue a job as opposed to a career. Hardly any service users reported being happy to take any employment, most stipulated as essential conditions that accommodated family commitment or personal happiness and career aspirations. Therefore, primary role identification either as orientated towards motherhood or employment emerged as an essential component to consider in the formation of accurate measures of satisfaction.

Having explored the individual findings attached to each of the factors in the preceding chapters this final chapter brings all these factors together in the manner to which they relate to the research aims. Going further, in exceeding these aims, emergent findings have been incorporated into the analysis. The net result is original evidence and theories to apply to the problem of measuring satisfaction with the public services. Furthermore it is hoped it will stimulate new debates and re-kindle old ones. It starts where the study itself started, with the key findings that contribute towards a better understanding of the delivery paradox. From here suggestions of a shift in theoretical approach to measuring satisfaction is suggested; moving from an expectation based model to a process based one. Hereafter, the importance of identity issues is discussed, covering the key findings of multiple and contradictory service user identities and the contribution of misinterpretation of service terms to the disconfirmation of expectations. This discussion of service identities leads on to an explanation of how personal adviser pre-conceptions of service user identity leads to assumptions of the service they desire. How the findings contribute toward the theoretical framework of post-modernism through the fragmentation of the self and desire for individuality in the service user is suggested. The core finding relating to measuring satisfaction, that of splitting quality from satisfaction, precedes the summary of the chapter. The thesis closes with the implications of the study findings, divided into three categories; theory and policy, service delivery and development and measuring satisfaction. Recommendations are presented in the same way. These latter areas of discussion are interspersed with a discussion of the limitations of the study findings.

8.2 Fulfilling the research aims

The thesis set out to explore the factors that affected service user satisfaction in the public services and what affect this had on its measurement. Focus was on the DWP and specifically lone parents as service users. In order to fully explore the topic a set of research aims were compiled:

- To confirm the existence of the delivery paradox and explore the factors contributing to it.
- To examine the role of expectations in determining satisfaction, identifying factors that influence expectations and that elicit change; to assess expectations within the interaction with process, overall outcomes and satisfaction.
- To establish perceptions of identity in the relationship, both of recipient and provider, and how this affects expectations.
- To explore the existing method of collection and utilization of service user satisfaction data in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and particularly in relation to Jobcentre Plus; to evaluate existing measures of satisfaction.

The findings are presented in relation to each of these aims as well as relevant additional factors that were discovered during the study.

8.2.1 To confirm the existence of the delivery paradox and explore the factors contributing to it

The driving question behind this study was why did the 'delivery paradox', as proposed by Blaug *et al.* (2006, p.6), occur? The paradox exists where the rise in the level of delivery improvements does not elicit a corresponding rise in public satisfaction with services. Within this research there were few instances of service users reporting an improvement in service delivery. Of those that did, the majority reported no corresponding rise in satisfaction. The service users who reported no rise in satisfaction were all classified as being orientated towards mothering as the primary role. However, the majority of those in this category was already reporting satisfaction at the highest possible level and so may have reported that service they had received had 'stayed the same'. This may have lead to unwarranted implications of stagnation in service quality when taken out of context with their opinion on satisfaction. In

only one case was there a corresponding rise in satisfaction in line with the belief that service had improved. Conversely, service users who reported that the service had got worse overwhelmingly reported a corresponding decrease in their level of satisfaction. Those that judged the service to have remained the same also reported static levels of satisfaction except in cases where there had been no contact at the midway point of the study, at which point they reported an increase in satisfaction directly attributed to the lack of intervention.

The level of orientation towards mothering or work is a common factor amongst service users who contributed to the paradox through obverse opinions to those that were anticipated. Of the three possible trajectories of service delivery, better, worse or static, the paradox was only apparent in the first category. Some possible factors contributing towards this phenomenon can be suggested. The importance of orientation towards mothering or work has again emerged in the analysis. All service users who exhibited orientations towards mothering as the primary role reported no corresponding rise in satisfaction. Three possible explanations for this arose. In the first instance the majority of these service users had already gauged their level of satisfaction as being very satisfied, the highest option available to them. Therefore, it simply was not possible to report a rise in satisfaction, as the constraints of the Likert measurement did not allow for it. Secondly, as all of these service users were orientated towards mothering, any perception of service improvement may provide a threat to their ability to remain out of employment. Therefore service improvements would not elicit a rise in satisfaction. Finally if, over time, providers run out of options to offer to the service user and so reach a point where they could offer nothing, users orientated towards mothering may perceive this as an improvement in service delivery. At the same time, experience of repetitious interviews maintain the level of satisfaction at its current point even though they believe the service has improved due to the cessation of interventions.

It was thought that a possible contributory factor to the delivery paradox might be the presence of welfare reform or increased responsibility being placed on individuals using the public services. In this particular user group, (then) impending additional conditionality and change to established interactions were a reality for half of the service users. It was considered that static or falling satisfaction with the service could be in response to this increasing conditionality, particularly in an environment of economic recession when opportunities of employment are

believed to be decreasing. In terms of lone parent satisfaction nationally, although remaining one of the most satisfied user groups of DWP there has been a decrease and then leveling off of reported satisfaction between 2005 and 2009. Similarly, over the course of this study the majority of the service users reported no change in satisfaction. However, within this study it was possible to study the effects of conditionality on two levels, those that were to be affected by it in the very near future and those that would not be affected until the middle to distant future. This was through identifying service users with children aged up to four years and those with children aged five years and over. It was expected that those in the latter category would report different levels of satisfaction from those in the former. The study did reveal that the presence of imminent conditionality elicited significantly higher expectations from those with children aged five years and over. However, in terms of satisfaction there was little difference between both groups. It was therefore concluded that, in terms of lone parents, increasing conditionality did not contribute to the observed delivery paradox. It could be argued that, those in the category that had children aged four years and under could already be aware, through the media that has proved to be a strong influence of expectations that they themselves would be subject to conditionality in the future. This could result in them reporting their satisfaction with the same perspective as those imminently affected. However, other evidence from the study suggests this is unlikely. It has been demonstrated that the service users reported that satisfaction was established on a short-term basis, mainly on the last encounter. Therefore to take into account changes that were happening in the distant future would be out of character. For that reason it is with confidence that this conclusion is suggested.

8.2.2 To examine the role of expectations in determining satisfaction, identifying factors that influence expectations and that elicit change; to assess expectations within the interaction with process, overall outcomes and satisfaction.

The study raised questions as to the primacy of expectations as the driver behind satisfaction. What became apparent was a 'chicken and egg' scenario. Whilst it is agreed that, in terms of first encounter, expectations are a major factor in the perception of (dis)satisfaction, repeat visits, as is common in many public services, are more dependent upon the overall outcome. Furthermore, in terms of measuring satisfaction, expectations do not present many opportunities for intervention and service enhancement as they are often influenced by factors

outside of the control of the department. Processes, however, are to some extent, a controllable variable in the relationship. Additionally, service processes that are negotiated and offer the service user something tangible have the potential to enhance satisfaction even amongst those who exhibit low expectation and more orientation towards mothering characteristics.

The overall analysis of the study data demonstrated that although expectations certainly did factor in the experience of being a user of Jobcentre Plus, particularly in the initial stages of the relationship, in isolation it was not the main driver over time. Longitudinally, it was the full process, inputs, outputs and outcomes, which informed the expectations that, in turn, contributed to satisfaction in the future. Furthermore, it was discontent in the perceived recipient of the overall outcome, if the encounter was seen to be for the benefit of the service user or service provider, which roused feelings of animosity and contributed towards overall dissatisfaction with the service. The primary tripartite interplay was between orientations towards mothering or work, expectations and process. Orientations towards mothering or work related with expectations forming a blend of factors for satisfaction. As such it acts as an aid to identify, classify and manipulate satisfaction. The interaction between key concepts, process, expectations and satisfaction has been surpassed by a new interplay of orientations towards mothering or employment, expectations and process. Expectations, as a key concept in determining satisfaction, only hold true when the interaction with role orientation (mothering or employment) is taken into consideration. When considered longitudinally, expectations are exceeded by service process (input-output-outcome) as the most salient factor over time.

Orientation towards mothering was a characteristic identified in the service user group of lone parents. What was also suggested by the interview content was that even when the service users orientation changed from mothering to employment the rationale was still based in a framework of 'good parenting'. Orientation towards mothering was justified as being in the best interest of the children in that it was detrimental for them to be looked after by strangers or that having children entailed personal parental responsibility. The transition to an employment orientation was not given in terms of financial gain but, as with a mothering orientation, in terms of being in the best interest of the children. Opinions frequently expressed the desire to provide a better role model for their children in order to instill a good work ethic and so avoid being benefit dependent when they reached adulthood.

8.2.2.1 Challenging Desirable Outcome Assumptions (DOAs)

One of the more significant findings of the study was the degree to which expectations and satisfaction were influenced by the attitudes of personal advisers. DOAs revealed interesting, and it is likely tacit, opinions held by personal advisers about service users. The DOA appeared to be based, primarily, on stereotypical pre-conceptions of lone parents' parental priorities and aspirations as service users. These stereotypes are usually inaccurate due to the diversity of service users (Simmons, 2009, p.65). It is not unheard of for service providers, including those in the public sector, to allow personal opinions to affect the level of service delivered to certain groups of people. Simmons' research highlights how leisure service providers proffer 'disparaging' opinions of early morning swimmers based on their collective characteristics (2009, p.65). But, in the case of Jobcentre Plus personal advisers this extends from affecting service quality to directly contradicting the primary aim of the service.

However, given that this attitude was recorded across several personal advisers introduces doubt into the suggestion that personal opinions are the only factor at work in making DOAs. Service users reported feeling that the main outcome of the meetings was not for them but for the personal advisers. At the same time, unprompted comments made by personal advisers who facilitated the recruitment of lone parent service users reported a discontent and frustration at the target driven nature of the job. Therefore, it is probable that DOAs occur as a result of personal advisers seeing outcomes for themselves, such as seeing service users on time, as the primary target. In a more benevolent light, this attitude could also be attributed to the limited options for referral for parents of younger children and the nature of the current economic climate. Personal advisers may feel morally obligated to offer a realistic analysis of a situation based on their knowledge and beliefs, as opposed to the department sanctioned version.

8.2.2.2 From an expectations based model to a process based model

As demonstrated, the majority of the literature generated through private sector practices of measuring satisfaction revolves around the dominant discourse of EDT. This study highlighted the complex way that expectations are formed, particularly with regard to Jobcentre Plus. Social welfare services are approached, and more than likely any of the public services, with pre-conceptions. As this study has demonstrated, these are formed through exposure to the

media representations of both public service departments and users. Many of these are satirical depictions and persist, almost seamlessly, across generations. The last twenty years alone have seen stereotypes persist continually with, for example, the eighties situation comedy 'Bread' which preceded the infamous jobseeker 'Pauline' in 'The League of Gentlemen' and the continuing popularity of the contemporary characters in the comedy show 'Little Britain'. Furthermore, policy reform is reported according to the political leanings of the source with non-biased opinions impossible to procure. It is now increasingly likely that family and friends will have had experience of different public service departments be it the National Health Service or the DWP. The advent of the World Wide Web means that, increasingly, information and opinions of what others have experienced and what might therefore be expected is available to a wider audience than ever before. These influences are largely beyond the control of any government department.

This study, as well as exploring the complexity of expectations, has identified other factors that not only exert influence across more aspects associated with satisfaction, but also have the potential to be manipulated by the service provider through good and consistent service. Both process (incorporating outcome) and orientations towards mothering or employment, exhibit more potential as factors that not only influence, but also indicate satisfaction likely to be reported by service users. That notwithstanding, in exploring the factors contributing to the delivery paradox, evidence was found that indicated expectations might not be as important a driver of satisfaction as currently thought. As mentioned above an analysis of the effect of conditionality on satisfaction was made. In doing so evidence was found that conditionality increased expectations of the service but did not affect satisfaction. Ergo expectations themselves were not the main driver of satisfaction. As conditionality is indicative of reform, and successive governments have cited public service reform as a priority, this finding could be applicable to more service users and other public services than just lone parents at Jobcentre Plus (however, see discussion of the limitations of the study below).

In looking for an alternative model the evidence that supports outcomes (as separate from process) would suggest that an outcome based model of satisfaction would be more appropriate. However, as shown through service user accounts, reports of dissatisfaction occurring when specific help or training (inputs) was denied or service user self-confidence

(output) was damaged intimate that the process contributes as much, if not more, to satisfaction as the overall outcome. This correlates with Boyne's (2003, p.216) suggestion that only through using the 'controllable' variables of inputs and outputs can authentic overall outcomes be achieved. Outcomes alone are too simplistic to contribute towards meaningful satisfaction measurement. The findings also compliment Gronroos (2000, p.65) belief that even when a service outcome appears to be clear-cut; in this case successful employment or receipt of benefit, it is the process that contributes to that construction of satisfaction with the overall outcome.

Furthermore, both an expectations model approach and outcome (as separate from the process) are constraining as they offer few opportunities to intervene and supersede the deeply rooted and pervasive beliefs attached to being a service user. Service user expectation acts as an uncontrollable variable. Those that have the ability to affect change, the service provider, cannot alter the expectation except through a positive process of interaction and agreed overall outcomes. However, this can only be achieved if processes are negotiated, agreed, and transparent and take into account service user primary role orientations. A process based approach places the controllable variables in the remit of those able to change it. Therefore what the study indicates is that processes, not expectations, should be considered as the driver of satisfaction. This is possible despite Thomas and Griffiths (2004) suggesting that service user's orientations towards mothering or employment could be changed if 'outcomes' (as part of the process) are viewed as a by-product as opposed to being the driving factor behind an intervention. As long as processes are negotiated not imposed, primary role orientation can still be changed.

What became apparent through the study was that service users reacted favourably to tangible evidence from service interventions. Using a negotiated process based model would make a tangible aspect to the encounter more likely. Conversely it has appeared that positive tangibility of expectations is the exception as opposed to the norm. Finally, as demonstrated through the service user feedback, satisfaction is largely acknowledged to be based on the last encounter. If service providers negotiate, and subsequently manage, the process then satisfaction is far more likely to be the net result. This is important in terms of measuring

satisfaction as adopting a negotiated process based model can potentially override the last encounter reports of satisfaction.

8.2.3 To establish perceptions of identity in the relationship, both of recipient and provider, and how this affects expectations.

Although identity exhibited a strong effect on expectations, satisfaction and orientation towards mothering or employment, it did not in itself contribute to satisfaction. There was a unanimous ignorance of the official label of 'customer' at Jobcentre Plus. Therefore, the clash of identities, proposed in Chapter One could not be a direct contributory factor in (dis)satisfaction. However, identity was still an important factor overall as it did contribute towards service users becoming resigned to established poor service quality levels and the reluctance to engage in complaining behaviour towards the public services. It also demonstrated the contradiction between the collective identity that was expressed by the majority of service users and the desire for a personalized relationship and negotiated provision of service. Identity exists as an important factor but in isolation to, and not as a primary influence on satisfaction. However, identity has been shown to exert an influence, predominantly negative, not only on the service user but also on the service provider. Furthermore the orientation towards mothering or employment as the prime identity of the service user was found to exhibit both influential and predictive qualities upon the overall notion of satisfaction with the service.

8.2.3.1 The juxtaposition of collective and individual identity

The original intention of studying identity in the context of service user satisfaction was to see if using the term customer, whilst constrained in a non-typical consumer identity, was a factor that affected expectations and, ultimately, satisfaction with the service. However, in doing so an interesting three-way contradiction appeared. As shown in the narratives, staff respondents overwhelmingly referred to other service users in negative terms such as 'scumbags' or 'dole dossers'. This was quite clearly referring to service users that they regarded to be 'other' than themselves. However, when asked to describe their own identity they again used the same labels. This was despite being able to quite clearly discern a difference between themselves and the 'other' users. Moreover, this identity is one built upon long standing stereotypes,

apparent through references to dated television representations of benefit recipients, which represent the prejudice leveled at the unemployed. The service user is unable to construct a positive individual identity and so has to express their self-identity in the only terms that they are familiar with. This is not surprising. Simmons and Birchall showed that collective motivations, such as a sense of shared values or goals, outweigh individualistic ones (2005 in Simmons *et al.* 2009, p.62). This appears to hold true in both the positive and negative context. Furthermore, these individual and collective identities interact when people are asked to give their views, as is indicative in this case (Simmons *et al.* 2009, p.62). However, despite displaying a collective self-identity as a service user they then expected to be treated as an individual by the service providers. The study also demonstrated that personal interventions, such as apologies in response to service failure and subsequent service user discontent, did elicit a rise in satisfaction. However, as the characteristics of lone parents did not pre-dispose them to complaining behaviour then opportunities for service recovery through apology or explanation do not exist. This type of service recovery required service providers to engage, on an individual basis, with their service user.

Service providers however, did not respond to this desire for individuality. As the occurrence of DOAs show personal advisers were also affected by their own pre-conceptions of service users. Although they recognized orientation towards mothering or employment as important, they set them in a framework of stereotypical norms for lone parents. These revolved around two extremes, mothering as superior to paid employment and financial remuneration as the prime reason for returning to work. Factors such as personal fulfillment and positive parental role models did not feature. However, as the study showed, these factors were the ones most commonly quoted as the reasons why lone parents felt it important to obtain paid employment.

It is difficult to explain why, when a negative, collective self-identity is adopted, service users continue to expect an individualized personal relationship with a public service. However, what is suggested is that this is a conscious choice on their behalf. Through the interviews it was established that self-esteem was low amongst the majority of the service users. The majority reported that their expectation of obtaining work was low and across the period of the study this expectation fell further. What the study findings imply is that service users suspected these expectations were unrealistic. This was not unreasonable given the economic downturn.

When they engaged with the service provider and received treatment akin to the self-identity they professed, it was reinforced and thus they felt more secure in the identity they felt was appropriate for them. This explained why, although the majority of the service users recorded examples of DOA behaviour from their personal adviser, two-thirds of them still reported neutral or positive levels of satisfaction with the service. Reinforcement of the belief that they represent a stereotypical benefit claimant provoked a positive rating of satisfaction from the service user.

8.2.3.2 Are service providers' identities more important than users' identities?

The majority of service users did not construct an identity, outside of common, negative stereotypes, until they engaged with the service. Only a minority of service users came to the service with well-defined identities that complied with the service aims. For these users, and those with no pre-disposing inclination of identity, it was in the terms of engagement that new expectations were mobilized. This represents a significant paradigm shift. Up to this point the focus has been on the importance ascribed to the service user identity, whether that be customer, service user, client or other. However, what this study proposes is that the concern should lay with the service providers' terms of identity and what expectations they raise in the service user. Service users' perceptions of the way in which the service provider saw lone parents was shown to comprise implications of low intelligence, laziness and being akin to 'animals'. If this is the terms in which they believe 'lone parent' is used then having it as their identity as a service user will reinforce those negative reflections. The title lone parent does not emphasize or focus attention on the service aims of facilitating a return to paid employment. 'Lone parent' concentrates on the importance of parental responsibility. Likewise, being told that they will be seeing a 'specialist' adviser could be equally detrimental. Specialist implies a professional enlisted to deal with conditions other than 'normal'. The term special demarcates the individual who has additional needs. These terms are associated with both difference and lack of ability. Furthermore, specialist gives the impression that the way in which they will be treated and the facilities available to them will be different, or in addition to, those of other service users. These terms convey these meanings to both the service users and the personal advisers. Many service users misinterpreted the term 'personal adviser'. Personal was seen in terms of being the opposite of professional. Surprise at the lack of friendless and reciprocity

was frequently expressed given the terms in which the adviser was presented to them. Work Focussed Interview (WFI) was also labelled a misnomer. Complaints leveled at it were essentially based on its lack of work focus. This is corroborated by the consistent accounts of WFIs that revolved around confirming personal details and offering a Better Off Calculation (BOC).

As with the recommendation to turn to a process-based model, this transformation in thinking represents an opportunity for realistic change. Service providers have very little opportunity to change the way that service terms are interpreted. The process of interpretation is subjective. However it is these interpretations that inform and maintain how the service user approaches each encounter. Even if processes are improved, these service terms will still affect both the initial encounter and the perceptions of those who invest in but do not use the service, i.e. the taxpayer. This could contribute to the further stabilization of stereotypical perceptions of typical service users. What can be transformed are the terms themselves. As with proposing a process based model, this needs to be done in consultation with the service user. Only through consultation can acceptable, appropriate terms be constructed.

8.2.4 To explore the existing method of collection and utilization of service user satisfaction data in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and particularly in relation to Jobcentre Plus; to evaluate existing measures of satisfaction.

All staff members interviewed were able to identify at least one method that could be described as satisfaction measurement initiatives. The most easily recognizable was the mystery shopper experience. Initiatives driven at local level, and bespoke to the office, were far less common and the quality of the methods used were questionable. The National Customer Satisfaction survey was largely disregarded as being relevant or helpful on a local level and in many cases staff were not aware of it at all. Although the right of the service user to complain was acknowledged the majority of staff interviewed failed to refer to the 'Tell us what you think' leaflets that are on display in every office. Instead staff reported that complaints should be made verbally in the first instance or in writing to the Jobcentre plus manager if the complaint could not be resolved at the point of conflict. Dissemination of results was recognized as being through team briefings or, in the case of national results posted on the intranet. The results of customer satisfaction initiatives were not passed onto the service users in any way although

were available on request. Negativity was evident in service provider appraisal of existing methods of measuring satisfaction. Criticism was particularly evident in the level of satisfaction reported at a local level where managers were seen to easily manipulate the process of reporting complaints. This was done primarily to ensure that the reputations of the managers were maintained at the expense of service user service improving. This finding supported the evidence of service users who perceived the service to exist for the benefit of the Jobcentre Plus staff as opposed to the service user.

The biggest obstacle to meaningful measurement of satisfaction revealed by this study is the presupposition that issues of quality and service user satisfaction are synonymous. In the private sector this is a feasible assumption. Quality can be reflected objectively through brand standards, with clear service aims and with a degree of ability to shape service user expectations. Needs can be classified, as broadly generic, in the knowledge that a service user wanting specialist service can always be referred to other outlets that can cater for specific needs. Thus, even in the event of a service user failing to have their needs met there is the potential to redeem a modicum of satisfaction with an onward referral. These needs can be met on safe assumptions. It is a reasonable belief that individuals entering a pet shop are there to buy a pet or pet supplies. In terms of the private sector issues of quality and satisfaction can be met on this objective/generic basis this is less likely in the public services. Instead satisfaction, as a user of a public service, is often far more subjective and specific and may not always be reflected in a successful delivery of 'good' service (for instance, a burglar sentenced to nine months in prison is, if asked, unlikely to be satisfied with police performance). Some users may not want to be engaging with the service or may require specialized services. Although Jobcentre Plus may make claims of referral to specialist advisers or training, this study has shown that the reality reflects far less options than are purported to exist. Staff respondents were most familiar with 'mystery shopper' method of measuring service user satisfaction out of all existing methods available. This is a measure derived from the private sector and is more about brand standards than people. The National Customer Satisfaction Survey, which includes more subjective elements such as service user treatment and 'right' overall outcomes, was wholly discounted by Jobcentre Plus staff and not promoted to Jobcentre Plus service users.

It would appear that a split between these concepts would prove far more productive in terms of measuring satisfaction with the public services. In the first instance, in terms of methodology service quality can be adequately served through quantitative means whereas satisfaction, which is steeped in emotive experiences and tacit nuances can more accurately be reached qualitatively. Furthermore, current results of service user satisfaction measurement, when bound within measures of quality, are not explicitly shared with service users. This is despite staff respondents voicing their concern at this practice. This problem has been recognized outside of this study, with Mortimore and Gill (2004 in Blaug *et al.* 2006, p.37) concluding that 'communication of success is politically as important as the policy success itself.' Blaug *et al.* translate that as 'the public does not believe in, or does not know about, objective improvements in service quality' thus maintaining the delivery paradox (2006, p.37). Based on this research, it is concluded that private sector measurement instruments are not well suited to public services like the employment service.

8.3 Symptomatic of the post-modern condition

It might be put like this: if modernity was about the centrality of the Self, postmodernity reflects a turning to the Other. From a concern with equality – a struggle for the recognition of the sameness of the Self and Other – postmodernity is about the struggle for the recognition of difference.

Delanty (2000 p.150)

The key word within this quote is 'struggle'. The evidence of the study clearly shows the desire of service users to receive individualized services. The (mis)interpretation of the term 'personal' in personal adviser is a tacit clue to the desires of the service user. However, alongside this very clear construction is the continued appeal to a negative, collective identity with its roots in stereotypical media induced distinctiveness. This in itself is symptomatic of post-modernity, fragmentation of identity and an attempt to balance the traditional with the contemporary and the old with the new. It is not without a sense of irony that the best illustration of post-modern presence in politics is with the 2010 coalition government. The blending of traditional conservative values and progressive liberal democratic beliefs embody the post-modern attempt to combine the best of both. It is this clash, between the traditional

and collective structures and the contemporary and individualistic personal epistemologies that contribute to continuing apathy for the service provided. Maintaining collectivity presents the service user with less risk. One cannot be held accountable for one's actions if one can say 'I didn't choose this path, it was chosen for me'.

The delivery paradox, a state of non-progress, also aligns itself with conceptions of post-modern theory. The state of non-progress, Mizrach argues is in itself a conception of post-modernity (2010). In this study it is illustrated in the stagnation of levels of satisfaction from the subjective perspective of the service user despite objective investment in service improvements. In spite of attempts to bring individualism and personal choice to the public service user through policy reform, discontent is evident in the overall decline in satisfaction with services. What is suggested here is that these examples indicate the failure to fit policy reform into a post-modern framework. Instead dichotomies that belong in a different era are preserved out of context in post-modernity. The translation of policy reform has been a misinterpretation. The proposals of this study could easily be translated as indicative of a top-down rather than bottom-up approach to theory and a preservation of an elitist dichotomy. This would ultimately be contradictory to the post-modern condition. The suggestion is to dispense with a top-down/bottom-up dichotomy as being confrontational and restrictive. Instead, blending the positive aspects of both sides of the relationship, the relativist knowledge of the service user with the 'expert' knowledge of the service provider, to achieve a consensual service.

8.4 Research Implications

The implications of this study are widespread and fall into three broad headings; future theory and policy, service delivery and development and measuring satisfaction.

8.4.1 For future theory and policy

Recent research suggested the need to put "customer satisfaction in context" when applied to public services (Nunn *et al.* 2009, p.73). Caution was advised if conceptualizing service user satisfaction of benefit claimants in the same way as a commercial service provider. This study goes beyond upholding these claims and suggests that applying the dominant discourse EDT to public service satisfaction is not feasible. Expectations were found to be most significant in

first contact encounters but, thereafter, processes emerged as a more influential driver of ongoing satisfaction. Even as an indicator of likely satisfaction, expectations only contributed when taken in conjunction with orientations towards mothering or employment. Therefore, it is suggested that measurement of service user satisfaction with the public services needs to be treated as distinct and specific, generating its own theoretical model. Evidence from the study suggests the development of an process based theory in a public sector framework. Existing research on the strength of the 'outcome effect' on public sector transactions has been primarily based on benefit claims, as opposed to re-employment (Elam and Ritchie, 1997, p.52). Making a distinction between financial processes, that may be more prevalent in initial encounters, and holistic processes that maintain long-term support should therefore be considered a factor in any attempt to construct conceptual frameworks appropriate for public sector services.

The evidence on the influence and utilization of identity in the course of encounters with public sector organizations has proved enlightening. The main postulates of Identity Theory, as proposed by Stryker and Burke (2000, p.285), 'external structure and the structure of the self' and 'internal mechanism' are reflected in the responses from service users. The former, which translated as the 'internalized role expectation' as bestowed by the service provider was the social role imposed by the mass media. The latter is the confirmation sought of the media imposed identity of the service provider. As the service provider is elevated in the user/provider hierarchy, the identity is officially endorsed for the service user, thus reinforcing the belief in the stereotype for the individual.

Explanation is also needed for why the importance of 'state imposed' identities, such as 'customer' failed to materialize, particularly given research interest in it (see Clarke *et al.* 2007; Simmons *et al.* 2009). Instead, it is suggested that focus should shift to self-identity formed on a collective basis, i.e. 'dole dossers' and the implications when this identity clashes with the desire or expectation to be regarded as an individual. In terms of being a user of the public services, further exploration is needed to establish what these appeals to individuality, inside a collective framework of identity, hope to achieve.

8.4.2 For service delivery and development

What became clear through the study was that if real impacts are to be made, as opposed to just manipulation of statistics, a pragmatic realistic approach needs to be adopted. As shown, expectations are not the main driver of satisfaction for some service users at Jobcentre Plus. This is a positive finding in terms of service delivery due to the influences on initial expectations leaving little scope for pre-service intervention. What the study therefore suggests is concentrating efforts on factors that can be affected by service intervention such as consistent, positive processes of interaction.

The service aims of re-employment reveal orientation towards mothering as the primary role in nearly half of the service users and have a major impact on accurate measures of satisfaction. Many of these service users based this attitude on the current economic climate where opportunities for employment were assumed to be low. Furthermore, of those that have disinclined attitudes to work, poor service will invoke satisfaction in a significant proportion of them. The implication of this is that accurate measures of satisfaction will be impossible to obtain due to the subjective nature of people's attitudes. However, this represents opportunities for service recovery.

At present, the extent to which the service user intends to, and realistically can, comply with service aims has been left to the perception of the personal adviser. All too often, as has been demonstrated, this results in an inappropriate DOA. That notwithstanding, any DOA demonstrates a disregard for core service aims. Therefore, so that service users' orientation towards mothering or employment can be gauged, in order to aid classification and to avoid conferring an inappropriate DOA, a more personal rapport with service users must be encouraged. This is linked to the benefits of re-evaluating the target driven nature of the job. By giving personal advisers flexibility and autonomy to develop positive approaches to all service users both effective classification and DOA avoidance can be achieved.

8.4.3 For measuring satisfaction with the public services

As this study was concluded, a report into the feasibility of the future Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey was released (Romanou and Howat, 2010). This was commissioned in response to the need to align the reporting of key indicators of Departmental Strategic

Objective Seven (DSO7) for Jobcentre Plus with that of the new Pensions, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) (Romanou and Howat, 2010, p.3). Furthermore, it was felt that to aid prompt operational changes, a more frequent pattern of measurement was desirable (ibid). Included in the areas of change proposed were the adoption of a four point verbal scale, aligned with the PDCS overall measure, basing survey questions around a specific type of recent transaction and discarding the current qualitative follow-ups in favour of small scale 'ad-hoc' qualitative research as required (Romanou and Howat, 2010, p.5). Furthermore, despite calls from stakeholders for reporting results at a district level this was discounted, as were face-to-face and longitudinal elements (ibid). Survey frequency was increased from the current biennial pattern to one to be undertaken every six months so that results could be seen as 'up to date'.

This reformulated survey of service user satisfaction is predominantly based on last contact experiences. Only as the survey closes are service users asked about their overall satisfaction with the service. As this study shows, service users use their last encounter as the 'new baseline' for overall satisfaction with the service. Therefore, by basing service users' opinions on last service encounters, without asking contextual questions about past experiences or pre-existing factors that may bias their opinion, what may be recorded are 'blips' in an otherwise (dis)satisfactory history. These are the factors that can be identified through longitudinal methods of measurement that were rejected through the feasibility study. Furthermore, focussing the service users' attention onto last encounter experience before asking them *overall* satisfaction with the service may exacerbate the tendency to report overall satisfaction based upon the last encounter that they have just recounted. Only by probing overall satisfaction in context with a historical account of user experience can an accurate overall satisfaction rating be guaranteed.

It is conceded that longitudinal methods are both costly and time consuming. However, their contribution to genuine measures of satisfaction cannot be overlooked. Therefore establishing alternatives that will enable an assessment of the validity of a service user's perception of satisfaction would be valuable. This study suggested that other factors, such as orientation towards mothering or employment, are influential factors in both the way an individual interacts with the service and the satisfaction they report. It was determined that service users

displayed similar characteristics, opinions and personal history, that allowed them to be classified under a combination of their level of expectations and orientation towards mothering or employment. These similarities also extended to the level of overall satisfaction that they reported. Such a classification could provide evidence to inform the analysis of satisfaction data without the need for longitudinal research. As a caveat, however, this should form the basis for personal and negotiated service intervention not as the basis for personal adviser DOAs.

Survey style measurement, as used in past, and proposed in the future National Customer Satisfaction Surveys, do identify areas that have experienced a change in the level of service user satisfaction but is unable to isolate the factors that have caused it. The factors involved in the change have to be inferred from the data available. As the emergence of DOAs show, inferences and assumptions are made after service user characteristics are interpreted within the service providers personal epistemology and within a service provider framework. If service user satisfaction, as opposed to service quality and target meeting, were the genuine goal of measuring satisfaction then it should be within a service users' framework that the analysis of change is set. Similarly, at present the results from these surveys, although freely available from the Internet or upon request, are not on view, within Jobcentre Plus as a point of reference for service users to compare their experiences with. If service users could determine how typical their experience is, it may influence whether they feel the need to complain. As complaints or compliments appear to be the only way of collecting qualitative opinions of service user satisfaction then encouraging service users to utilize them could be a valuable asset, especially at district level whose request for feedback from national surveys has been ignored (Romanou and Howat, 2010). Furthermore, service users could be encouraged to see complaints and compliments as a means of expressing their voice in the service, which would allow them to access a personalized response and a 'negotiated', as opposed to imposed, regime.

8.10 Limitations of this study

Although the aims of the study have been met, limitations with the thesis are acknowledged. Even though the case study is defined as being of the Department for Work and Pensions, the diversity of its clientele necessitated the focus to be on one of the three operational

organizations; The Pensions Service, Disability and Carers Service and Jobcentre Plus. Further narrowing down within the chosen organization, Jobcentre Plus, due to restrictions in time and resources, meant that only one user group, lone parents, was included in the study. That the chosen user group was gender biased also contributed to the extent that wider inference that could be drawn from the results.

Existing data from the Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Research (2009) indicate that female Income Support (IS) service users were 'particularly' satisfied and female service users were generally 'more positive' overall (Thomas *et al.* 2010, p. 37). However, given that this study has shown them to be overwhelmingly complaint averse in formal, public situations the findings of the national research may not be an accurate reflection. Certainly, when given the opportunity to discuss their opinions in a closed setting there was no evidence of 'general' positivity. Cultural differences were also lacking in the service users. The vast majority were white British that may not reflect trends in the country as a whole. On the whole, as is common with any qualitative studies the numbers involved are necessarily small so as to be manageable, but in being so are unable to be generalized to the whole population in question.

These limitations were unavoidable. However, the thesis has been grounded in existing theory, building on previous work and using the accumulated knowledge evident in the large body of previous research in this area. Furthermore, within the recommendations, suggested avenues for further research offer possibilities to broaden the scope of the findings and test the applicability to the wider user groups of Jobcentre Plus, the DWP and ultimately the public sector as a whole.

8.11 Recommendations

This thesis has revealed new perspectives on old theories and new directions for future exploration. It was undertaken in the context of lone parents as service users of Jobcentre Plus. Therefore, to test the comparative value of the findings there is the need to continue to uncover relative emerging research and identify points of comparison and points of contrast. Furthermore, in the best post-modernist tradition the next stage of development is to deconstruct the core concepts *in their own right*. In this way the implications for academic study wider than the confines of measuring satisfaction with the Department for Work and

Pensions, can be fully understood. However, there are specific recommendations to be made on the basis of this study as it stands.

8.11.1 For theory and policy

In terms of appraising how typical of other Jobcentre Plus service users the sample is, points of similarity between groups of service users need to be identified. This could be done based on known characteristics of individuals through interviews with different user groups within Jobcentre Plus and other DWP operational organizations. This would need to be repeated across other public service sectors. Using the key points of similarity identified, expectations of service delivery and orientations towards mothering or employment, would allow for comparisons of the prognostic power of the mothering orientated/employment orientated high/low expectation classification. Replication of the same qualities would allow inferences of similarity to be suggested. Comparable service aims that could provoke obverse satisfaction in service users need to be extracted to make sure that genuine comparability is achieved. For example, asking service users of the Child Support Agency if they are happy to comply with the aim of securing financial contributions for the upkeep of a child could provoke an obverse reaction. If the agency has done a good job the aim may have been fulfilled and yet the service user may not be happy about it.

A re-examination of service terms for Jobcentre Plus, in particular, and, potentially, for all public services is highly recommended. Although it has been suggested that expectations are not the main driver of satisfaction, service terms can provoke expectations of what the service will deliver, for example the label 'personal' adviser. More importantly service terms can reinforce pre-existing negative conceptions of what it is to be a service user, as in the case of 'lone parent'. The impression that service terms give will also extend to others who have a vested interest in welfare provision, the taxpayer, and who may perpetuate negative stereotypes through prejudicial opinions.

For theorists formulating explanations of public service identities, explorations into the importance and interplay of self-imposed and conferred-identities needs to continue. In particular, as detailed above, questions remain unanswered as to the dual and opposing identities that service users in this study attempted to mobilize. The reasons for this

mobilization in the face of certain disconfirmation of expectation are unclear but may be explained as an attempt to legitimate them, in that their chosen collective identity is confirmed and reinforced.

8.11.2 For service delivery and development

In terms of service delivery and development two key issues arising from this study need to be addressed; extreme orientation towards mothering as the primary role amongst service users and the high incidence of personal adviser DOAs.

Although it is tempting to consign the issue of raising aspirations and motivating service users to other partner organizations, as motivation to prioritize employment has been shown to affect the accuracy of levels of satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus, as opposed to partner organizations, it is here that the responsibility should lie. Furthermore, the aims of Jobcentre Plus include the condition that they will provide employers with 'motivated' employees. There needs to be a fundamental shift in the structure of WFIs. At present evidence from this study show WFIs to be an exercise in 'ticking boxes'. Service user orientations towards mothering or employment and their expectations of the service need to be established at the earliest opportunity. From this starting point negotiated process pathways can be agreed between both parties at the outset. This study highlighted the positive effect tangible evidence had on service users. It is suggested, therefore, that all service users should hold a personal portfolio that they bring to every meeting. This should contain the agreed processes, short, medium and long-term and a contract of agreement to fulfill personal evaluations and assessments as the personal adviser recommends. The personal adviser should have access to a database of informational and motivational resources, such as personality self-appraisals, job suitability questionnaires and motivational case studies. After consultation with the service users these can be selected and printed off then and there. These are not intended to enhance academic or hard employability skills such as CV writing, but to stimulate thinking and raise aspirations. Neither is it intended that these will be completed with the personal adviser, but will be taken away and will form the springboard for discussion and next steps at the next meeting. Discussions with personal advisers would be a good starting point from which to start a feasibility study for personal portfolios.

The implementation of negotiated process stages and tangibility in the form of personal portfolios would also contribute to reducing the incidence of DOAs. Opportunities for the preconceptions of the personal adviser to inform the structure of the meeting would be limited as the focus would be on the process of engagement as opposed to the individual. This is not to say the individual as a person is lost in the encounter. As long as the process has been made with the service user their importance in the encounter will have been acknowledged. Furthermore, by using resources that inform the service user of the hidden benefits of employment, such as improved self-esteem and positive family role models, it will also be reinforcing these notions to the personal adviser.

8.11.3 For measuring satisfaction with public services

The most important factor to effect the future measurement of service user satisfaction is the inclination of service users to make the last service encounter the new baseline of satisfaction. Therefore, longitudinal approaches to measuring satisfaction need to be implemented if accurate appraisals of service quality are to be generated. Recommendations arising from this study would also be to separate measuring service quality from service user satisfaction. This would be alongside ensuring qualitative methods are used for measuring satisfaction. The feasibility study proposed retaining the quantitative approach to measuring service user satisfaction and resigned qualitative follow-ups to these on an ad hoc basis. Many of the questions, although purporting to be measuring satisfaction are replicating quality enquiries that are carried out in the mystery shopper exercise. For example, the survey asks service users various questions about written enquiries to Jobcentre Plus; did they receive acknowledgment, did they feel the time waiting for a reply was reasonable, and was the reply in plain language that was easy to understand? However, if this question was gauging service user satisfaction, questions such as; what did you write to the department for, what response did you receive and were you satisfied with it, would be better questions to ask. This demonstrates how using a closed question survey can purport to measure one thing whilst measuring something completely different. One recommendation would be to display publicly in the department the overall satisfaction results.

As reported from the findings of the study, classification of service users can be an aid to considering their expectations and orientations towards mothering or employment as well as

assessing the validity of their claims of (dis)satisfaction. Profiling, as part of the recruitment process, is common nowadays. Several software packages exist that measure a range of factors from personal profile analysis to emotional intelligence. Using such a package to establish, and then monitor changes in, core characteristics of service users could help inform negotiated process pathways from service encounters. Furthermore, profiling such as this often releases tacit knowledge that may be unknown to the individuals themselves and would contribute towards more appropriate advice and referral. This would also fit with a process based model of satisfaction, where personal attributes such as expectations and orientations towards mothering or work have been proven to be indicative of satisfaction with overall outcome.

8.12 Summary

A thorough, methodical and focused approach has ensured the aims of this study have not only been fulfilled but surpassed. It both confirmed and refuted elements of existing theory as well as proposing new avenues for consideration in future research. The study confirmed the existence of a 'delivery paradox' in the sample population. This was evident through identifying that service users who reported an improvement in service quality failed to report a corresponding rise in satisfaction. Contributory factors included the failure of current methods of measuring satisfaction, specifically, the limitations of Likert scale measures. Further factors identified were service improvements perceived as a threat to desired unemployment and conversely, a lack of service improvements providing no avenues back into employment. The ability of this study to observe the effects of increasing conditionality on satisfaction confirmed that, whilst increasing user responsibility did lead to higher expectations of the service, it did not contribute to the delivery paradox.

The findings of the study suggested that the dominant discourse, Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory, whilst prevalent in models of service user satisfaction in the private sector, was not effective when applied to public services. Expectations were consistently found to only contribute to satisfaction in conjunction with other factors, such as orientations towards mothering or work. Instead what was proposed was a process based model. This was suggested on the grounds that, unlike expectations, the service provider could influence the process. Furthermore, the process was found to be pivotal in setting the expectations for future service encounters.

Identity was shown to occupy multiple spaces of influence on 'satisfaction' with public services. The original hypothesis of the way in which identity impacted on service user satisfaction was rejected on the evidence of the empirical data. Instead, what was revealed was a clash of collective and individualistic terms of identity, expressed by the service user. This was seen as an attempt to substantiate their own low self-esteem, expressed through their adoption of a collective negative identity. This identity was reinforced through the beliefs they held regarding the undertones of being labelled 'lone parent at Jobcentre Plus. Further misinterpretation of service terms contributed to feelings of discontent with the service received.

In terms of service delivery the most significant factor to emerge from the study was the prevalence of Desirable Outcome Assumptions (DOAs) made by personal advisers. These are assumptions based upon the service users status. These are augmented by the personal beliefs and accepted stereotypes of the personal adviser. Depending on the orientations towards mothering or work of the service users these have the potential to elicit both satisfaction and extreme dissatisfaction. Reasons proffered for their use were an attempt to maintain targets, such as timeliness, or discouraging user aspirations on the grounds of limited opportunities available in an economic recession.

It was maintained that these observations were indicative of, and appropriate for, a post-modern theoretical framework. Fragmentation of identity was evident in the struggle to reconcile the communal safety of a negative collective identity with the desire for autonomous action as an individual agent. The delivery paradox itself, the inability to progress despite investing in improvements, is suggestive of a post-modern symptom. It is suggested that these are a result of a failure to recognize post-modern perspectives as legitimate and the inability to fit such perspectives into a modernist framework.

One of the primary concepts of the study was to suggest that service quality and service user satisfaction is isolated one from another so as to monitor satisfaction with the public services more effectively and realistically. This was in order that concessions can be made to the emotional investment often devoted to issues such as unemployment. As the study has indicated what constituted a good overall outcome was not always consistent with the aims of the service. By separating quality and service user service it would be possible to adopt the

most appropriate means of measuring very different concepts. It would also facilitate dissemination of results that were relevant to service users, a practice which, despite evidence to suggest it is appropriate, is not undertaken.

8.13 Personal reflections

If it were possible to change any aspect of this study, starting the fieldwork earlier would have been advantageous. In a longitudinal study, having longer periods to engage with the data before commencing subsequent waves is always desirable. However, it was not possible to foresee the events that lead to the DWP sample frame not being forthcoming.

That notwithstanding, this study, through addressing the research questions, has uncovered new findings that have both theoretical and policy ramifications. It has suggested several avenues for further examination that can affect positively service delivery and satisfaction measurement. It has supported the assertion that theoretical models that work well in the private sector do not perform as well when applied to the public one. Therefore, it is not just each public service user that needs to be viewed as unique, but also the public service itself.

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Appendix 1
Recruitment questionnaire



1. How old is your youngest child?

0-4	<input type="checkbox"/>
5-9	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Have you attended or expect to attend a Work Focused Interview (WFI)?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Are you participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) Programme?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Thinking of all the services provided by Jobcentre Plus, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall? (Tick one only) (Ref: 56/2004 & 6/2007):

Very satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Over the past 12 months (or since the start of your current claim if this is less than 12 months) do you think the service you have received has got better, worse or stayed the same? (Ref: 57/2004 & 85/2007):

Better	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name:

Address:

Telephone Number:

E-Mail:

Appendix 2

Permission to recruit in Jobcentre Plus Offices

To: Regional Directors
District Managers
(see attached list)
Court

XXXXXX
DWP-PED
Level 2, Kings

80 Hanover Way
Sheffield, S3 7UF
?.1.08

cc: XXXXXX (DWP)
Nicki Senior

(Notts))

Measuring Satisfaction with Public Services: A case study of the Department for Work and Pensions

Issue

1. To provide you with details of the qualitative evaluation that DWP-PED (Parent Employment Division) will be undertaking with lone parents in selected districts.

Action/Timing

2. Would District Managers please bring this minute to the attention of all Business Managers. I should be grateful if you could do this as soon as possible. The fieldwork will commence March 1st 2008 (approx.).

3. No action is required by Jobcentre Plus staff. However, there may be a small number of queries from lone parents regarding the research. It would be helpful if staff could please provide reassurance on the independence of the researcher and the confidentiality of the research.

Background

4. As part of the evaluation of customer satisfaction amongst lone parents, qualitative research with lone parents is being carried out as follows:

March 1st – March 31st 2008 – Preliminary enquiries to establish sample

April 1st – May 14th 2008 – First wave interviews

July 1st - August 7th 2008 – Second wave interviews

October 1st – November 8th 2008 – Third wave interviews

(NB These dates are approximate)

5. The objectives are:

- To examine the role of expectations in determining satisfaction and how expectations change over time; to identify factors that elicit this change.
- To establish perceptions of identity in the relationship, both recipient and provider, and how this affects expectations.
- To assess the interaction between outcomes, expectations and satisfaction.
- To explore the best way of measuring satisfaction in the public services and if private sector practices have been adequately adapted to fulfil the unique criteria of the public services.

6. The research will be carried out in 2 districts:

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

7. The research will consist of initial sampling within and/or around Jobcentre Plus Office's followed by qualitative interviews all of which will be carried out by Nicki Senior. Three interviews will be conducted over a 6 month period in the respondent's own home.

8. All lone parents will be written to in advance of the research, giving them an opportunity to opt out. A copy of this letter is attached. [DN: NS to attach once finalised]

9. The research will be undertaken by Nicki Senior. The data will be treated in strict confidence, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. No personal views or information will be passed to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual.

Further information

10. If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to get in touch (contact details above).

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

XXXXXXXXXX

Senior Research Officer By e-mail

Appendix 3

Field letter for telephone interviews of staff

To: Regional Directors
District Managers
(see attached list)
Court

XXXXXX
DWP-FPWD
Level 2, Kings

80 Hanover Way
Sheffield, S3 7UF

11.3.08

cc: XXXXX (DWP)
Nicki Senior (Notts

Uni)

Measuring Satisfaction with Public Services: Lone parents' experiences of Jobcentre Plus – qualitative research

Issue

1. To provide you with details of the qualitative evaluation that DWP-PED (Parent Employment Division) will be undertaking with Jobcentre Plus staff in selected districts.

Action/Timing

2. Would the District Manager please bring this minute to the attention of Business Managers. I should be grateful if you could do this as soon as possible. The fieldwork will commence in May 2008.

3. Would District Managers please provide me with a **named contact** for each District. I would be grateful if you could do this by **31 March 2007**. The researcher will utilise this contact to arrange mutually convenient dates and times for the interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff.

Background

4. This research is concerned with the measurement of customer satisfaction with Public Services. The evaluation includes telephone interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff involved in the collection and utilisation of customer satisfaction data. Interviews with lone parents will also be carried out in Staffordshire (notification provided by e-mail, 11/2/08).

5. The research will be undertaken by the University of Nottingham (Nicki Senior). Data will be treated in strict confidence, in accordance with the

Data Protection Act. No personal views or information will be passed to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual.

6. The objectives of the research are:

- To establish the existing methods of collection and utilisation of customer satisfaction data in Jobcentre Plus
- To examine how expectations determine levels of satisfaction and how expectations change over time
- To assess the interaction between outcomes, expectations and satisfaction
- To explore the best way of measuring satisfaction in the public services.

Qualitative research with Jobcentre Plus staff

7. The research will involve telephone interviews with four members of staff in each of the selected districts. Staff will be selected for their involvement in the measurement of customer satisfaction, i.e. the sample is likely to include the Customer Service Champion.

8. The telephone interviews will discuss the measurement and utilisation of customer satisfaction, both at national and district level, in some detail.

9. The researcher will get in touch with the named contacts (provided by Districts) to arrange suitable dates and times for the interviews.

Timetable

10.

Telephone interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff	Wave 1 – May/June 2008 Wave 2 – September/October 2008
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Further information

11. If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to get in touch (contact details above).

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

By e-mail

Appendix 4

Ethical checklist

Harm
Promote trust and integrity in the research relationship
Ensure Participants are comfortable with the use of recording devices or offer alternative method
Carry identification at all times
Be able to provide, on request, contact details of an official third party who can verify the researchers authenticity
Do not engage in any activity that would jeopardize future research
Arrange contact times that are convenient to the participant, confirm all contacts beforehand, arrive on time and respect specific needs of the respondent (e.g. care of small children, unplanned disruptions to the interview)
Informed Consent, Voluntary Participation and Deception
Using appropriate language and terms, explain what the research is about, who is financing it, why it is being undertaken and how it is to be disseminated and used
Inform respondents of their right to refuse participation at any point in the process for whatever reason and that they may request for their data to be destroyed
Make available on request transcripts of the interview and/or summary of findings on completion of the project
If incentives for participation are offered ensure that these are presented as being for the inconvenience the interview may cause. Ensure participants are aware that such incentives will not affect their entitlement to benefit
When asking benefit claimants to participate in the research make it clear that refusal will not affect their current or future entitlements to benefits
Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity
Make clear to the participant the extent to which anonymity and confidentiality can be guaranteed and ensure these are honoured
Inform participants of possible future dissemination of data with other researchers/organizations.
Make the participant aware of their rights under copyright and data protection laws
Keep confidential the identities and research records of participants
To maintain anonymity employ pseudonyms, disguise locations and remove any identifiers (including outliers) that could render the identity of participants traceable
Use a durable form of recording material with appropriate references

Appendix 5

Wave one customer interview topic guide

Topic guide for initial interview

Topic guide – Measuring satisfaction with public services

Section 1-Interviewer's introduction

Remind about independent nature of the researcher

Explain the issues to be covered:

- *About their overall satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus*
- *Their future aspirations*
- *How they see themselves as a service user*

Interview will last around one hour and will be semi-structures in style

Ask if any breaks will be needed

Re-iterate the matter of confidentiality and how the material will be used

Explain discussion will have no effect on any benefits, or any dealings with any government agency including Jobcentre Plus.

Explain they can choose to discontinue the interview at any point and this will in no way affect their benefits

Any questions or concerns?

Ask for permission to use tape-recorder (activate tape recorder at this point)

Section 2- Background (Follow-up exploration of information given in the survey may be included specific to each respondent)

1. Re-cap number, names and ages of children
2. How long have you been a lone parent?
3. Ask about their aspirations whilst at school and their educational achievement
4. Ask when they last worked. Ask about the details of the job.
5. Explore the reasons why they stopped working

Section 3- Benefit History

1. Can you describe your **first encounter** with Jobcentre Plus as a lone parent (confirm manner of interaction phone, face to face etc.)?
2. Was the contact what you expected? (Follow up by asking why? Try to pinpoint influences)

If respondent has been subject to a mandatory WFI explore:

1. What contact with Jobcentre Plus did you have prior to being required to attend
2. WFIs?
3. Did you know about the compulsory nature of WFI'S before being asked to attend?
What did you understand by it being 'compulsory'?
4. What did you expect the WFI would do for you?
5. At your first WFI how helpful was the advice given to you by your Personal Adviser?
6. How did you feel after this meeting? Why?
7. Can you describe how you felt about having to attend future WFIs? Why?
8. Overall how satisfied were you with the personal adviser you saw at your first meeting?

If respondent has inquired about/is on the NDLP explore:

1. When did you inquire about the NDLP program?
2. What prompted you to find out about the programme?
3. What did you expect NDLP could do for you?
4. At your first NDLP meeting how well did the personal adviser explain the NDLP to you?
5. How helpful was the advice given to you by your Personal Adviser?
6. How did you feel after your first meeting? Why?
7. Overall how satisfied were you with the personal adviser you saw at your first meeting?

All respondents involved with WFI or NDLP:

1. Did you agree to do anything as a result of the contact? If Yes what? Have you done what was asked of you?

2. Do you think the things you have been asked to do as a result of the contact are reasonable? (Probe any constraints that are mentioned)
3. Did your adviser agree to do anything? If so what? Have they done what they agreed to do?
4. What did you expect to happen as a result of your meeting? (If no expectations are offered give prompts):
 - *Help with finding/funding childcare?*
 - *Work experience?*
 - *Further qualifications?*
 - *Help finding/applying for jobs?*
 - *Help towards costs associated with going for interviews?*
5. When will you be meeting with your adviser again?

Section 4- Satisfaction with the service

Mapping questions:

1. Thinking of your last contact with Jobcentre Plus plus (in any capacity):
2. Tell me a bit about the contact – why did you contact the adviser, where did it take place, etc.
3. How satisfied were you with the encounter? Why?
4. How satisfied were you with the outcome of your contact?
5. What (if anything) could have made the encounter better?

Section 5- Future aspirations

1. At this present moment what do you think your chances of getting a job are? (ask them to express in terms of a scale 1-10; 1 being no chance of getting a job and 10 being definitely could get a job)
2. Tell me about what you would like to do in the future with regards to work?
3. What help will you need in order to achieve this goal?
4. Do you think you will be able to fulfil this goal without help from agencies like Jobcentre Plus?
5. **Section 6- Views about being a 'customer' of Jobcentre Plus**

1. Thinking about being a customer (in a shop, restaurant, business etc.) When was the last time you complained about bad service you experienced?
2. Have you ever stopped using a shop or business because of bad service?
3. Do you see yourself as a 'customer' of Jobcentre Plus? Explore reasons for the answer.
4. If you do not see yourself as a 'customer' how would you describe the relationship you have with Jobcentre Plus?
5. Can you think of any similarities between being a customer in a shop and being a customer of Jobcentre Plus? If No ask what it is about using Jobcentre Plus that makes it different from anything else?

Section 7- Closing the interview

Is there anything you would like to add or any other thoughts you have?

Can we book our next interview now?

Confirm current home address and telephone number? Alternative phone number (mobile)?

Is there any likelihood of you moving house in the next four months? (Give respondent pre-paid postcard with interviewers address on and a space for them to write their address)

Here are my contact details (give business card). If any of your details change or if you need to change the date of our next interview please get in touch with me.

Thank you for your time and interest in this research and I look forward to catching up with you in a few months time.

Appendix 6

Wave two customer interview topic guide

Section 1: Exploring change in survey responses

1. Thinking of all the services provided by Jobcentre Plus, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall? If response different from last time ask why they have rated it differently, explore factors that have influenced this change
2. Over the past 12 months (or since the start of your current claim if this is less than 12 months) do you think the service you have received has got better, worse or stayed the same? If response different from last time ask why they have rated it differently, explore factors that have influenced this change
3. At this present moment what do you think your chances of getting a job are? (ask them to express in terms of a scale 1-10; 1 being no chance of getting a job and 10 being definitely could get a job). If response different from last time ask why they have rated it differently, explore factors that have influenced this change.

Section 2: Work history

1. Have you undertaken any work since our last meeting?(if yes ask for details, if no go to 5)
2. Where did you hear of this vacancy
3. Was the financial transition satisfactory?
4. Have you received any ongoing support from Jobcentre Plus in relation to your new job?
5. Have you undertaken any training/education since our last meeting?
6. Have you undertaken any voluntary work since our last meeting?
7. Have you made any other enquiries regarding work, eg: looking for childcare?

Section 3: Contact with Jobcentre plus

1. Have you had any contact with Jobcentre Plus since our last meeting?
2. If yes, what manner did the encounter take (phone, visit)
3. What was the purpose of this encounter? (if necessary prompt)
4. What happened during this encounter?
5. Was this what you expected (if no ask why)
6. How satisfied were you with the encounter? Why?
7. How satisfied were you with the outcome of your contact? Why?

*Prompt what did you get out of it?

8. How satisfied were you with your personal adviser? Why?
9. Was this the same personal adviser you saw at your last encounter (if more than one other encounter ask how many different advisers they have seen)?
10. What (if anything) could have made the encounter better?
11. When will you next be using Jobcentre Plus?

Section 4: Help and advice from others

1. Have you talked about any problems you are having with benefits/work with any other agencies e.g. Citizens advice, connexions, advice centres etc.
2. Have you talked about any problems you are having with benefits/work with family or friends?
3. With regards to the current credit crunch and threatened recession have you noticed a rise in your outgoings over the past three months? Are you finding it harder to cope on your current benefits?

Section 5: Customer service

1. Thinking of shopping in a supermarket or eating in a restaurant, what, for you, constitutes good customer service? (probe physical elements such as location, facilities etc. as well as staff elements)
2. Thinking of shopping in your local supermarket, what constitutes bad customer service? (probe physical elements such as location, facilities etc. as well as staff elements)

Section 6: Closing the interview

Is there anything you would like to add or any other thoughts you have?

Can we book our next interview now?

Confirm current home address and telephone number? Alternative phone number (mobile)?

Is there any likelihood of you moving house in the next four months? (Give respondent pre-paid postcard with interviewers address on and a space for them to write their address)

Here are my contact details (give business card). If any of your details change or if you need to change the date of our next interview please get in touch with me.

Thank you for your time and interest in this research and I look forward to catching up with you in a few months time.

Appendix 7

Wave three customer interview topic guide

Section 1: Exploring change in survey responses (ranked alongside both wave two and wave one responses)

4. Thinking of all the services provided by Jobcentre Plus, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall? If response different from last time ask why they have rated it differently; likewise if response different from wave one original response ask why they have rated it differently. **Explore factors that have influenced this change**
5. Over the past 12 months (or since the start of your current claim if this is less than 12 months) do you think the service you have received has got better, worse or stayed the same? If response different from last time ask why they have rated it differently; likewise if response different from wave one original response ask why they have rated it differently. **Explore factors that have influenced this change**
6. At this present moment what do you think your chances of getting a job are? (ask them to express in terms of a scale 1-10; 1 being no chance of getting a job and 10 being definitely could get a job). If response different from last time ask why they have rated it differently; likewise if response different from wave one original response ask why they have rated it differently. **Explore factors that have influenced this change**

Section 2: Work history

1. At this moment in time how would you describe your work status. In work, looking for work, not ready to return to work in the near future, wanting to, or currently, undertaking training?
2. Have you undertaken any work since our last meeting?(if yes ask for details, if no go to 5)
3. Where did you hear of this vacancy
4. Was the financial transition satisfactory?
5. Have you received any ongoing support from Jobcentre Plus in relation to your new job?

Section 3: Contact with Jobcentre plus

1. Have you had any contact with Jobcentre Plus since our last meeting?
2. If yes, what manner did the encounter take (phone, visit)

3. What was the purpose of this encounter? (if necessary prompt)
4. What happened during this encounter?

ASK RESPONDENTS TO STATE AND DEFINE THEIR OUTCOMES – RE-PHRASE
WHERE NECESSARY: WHAT DID YOU GET OUT OF IT ETC.

5. What did you expect to get out of it?
6. What did you get out of it?
7. How satisfied were you with the encounter? Why?
8. How satisfied were you with the outcome of your contact? Why?
9. How satisfied were you with the service you received? Why?
10. Was this the same personal adviser you saw at your last encounter (if more than one other encounter ask how many different advisers they have seen)?
11. What (if anything) could have made the encounter better?
12. When will you next be using Jobcentre Plus?

Section 4: Help and advice from others

1. Have you talked about any problems you are having with benefits/work with any other agencies e.g. Citizens Advice, Connexions, advice centres etc
2. Have you spoken to family/friends regarding any problems you may have had with work/benefits?
3. Have you undertaken any training/education since our last meeting?
4. Have you undertaken any voluntary work since our last meeting?
5. Have you made any other enquiries regarding work, eg: looking for childcare?

Section 5: How you form opinions of Jobcentre Plus

1. Do you compare your experiences at Jobcentre Plus with those of friends or family? What do you think of other opinions e.g. media? How does this influence your expectations of Jobcentre Plus?
2. When thinking about how happy/unhappy you are with the service you receive from Jobcentre Plus do you base it over all your encounters with them or do you base it on your latest encounter?

Section 6: Mutual expectations

1. What do you think the Jobcentre expects of you?
2. What do you expect from the Jobcentre?

Section 7: Customer service at Jobcentre Plus

1. Would you know how to complain about the service you receive at Jobcentre plus?
 - a. How do you know this?
 - b. Have you ever complained about them? Why (make sure define appeals and complaints? What was the outcome?
 - c. Have you had times when you have been unhappy with the service you have received? Did you complain about them? Why?
 - d. Have you ever received particularly good service from the Jobcentre Plus? Did you let them know you were happy? How?
2. Apart from this study, have you ever been asked about how satisfied you are with the service you have received from Jobcentre Plus?
3. We have talked about being a customer before. How could you be made to feel more like a customer at Jobcentre Plus.

Section 7: Outcomes from using the Jobcentre

1. What do you see as the main outcome of your work focused interviews?
2. What do you think the Jobcentre Plus' main outcome of your work focused interview is?

Section 8: Background information

1. What age were you when you had your first child?
2. How would you rate your own self-confidence if 1 is very poor self confidence and 10 very high self confidence
3. Did your parents work?
4. If yes:
 - a. What jobs did they do?
 - b. Were they ever unemployed for a long length of time?
5. Were you brought up in a single parent household yourself?

6. Before having to go to the Jobcentre Plus for your WFI how often did you use the Jobcentre Plus?
7. Did you ever have to use the DSS to claim your benefits? How does the newer Jobcentre Plus differ from the old DSS offices? Do you think the change was a good one?

Section 7: Closing the interview

Is there anything you would like to add or any other thoughts you have?

Thank you for taking part in this study and I wish you much luck for the future.

(Pay gratuity)

Appendix 8

Staff interview topic guide

Section A: Customer Satisfaction Local Level Initiatives.

BACKGROUND:

ADD IN: Can you describe your job role and how it relates to customer satisfaction?

1. Measurement

- 1.1 What Customer Satisfaction Measurement, if any, has your office undertaken this year?
- 1.2 Who decided on this approach?
- 1.3 Who designed the main tool for measurement (eg. Survey, interview)
- 1.4 How was it administered and to whom?
- 1.5 Who carried out the data collection?

2. Analysis

- 2.1 How were the results analyzed?
- 2.2 Who analyzed the data?
- 2.3 On what criteria was the data appraised (what constituted a 'good' result)
- 2.4 Were any areas for change identified? Who decided on what was to be changed?

3. Dissemination

- 3.1 Were the results fed back to staff members? How?
- 3.2 Were the results fed back to customers? How?
- 3.3 Were the results fed back to Head Office or only utilised locally?

4. Implementation

- 4.1 If areas for change were identified were the changes implemented? How?
- 4.2 Were these changes appraised? If so by whom?

Section B: Mystery Customer Results

- 1 Were the results fed back to staff members? How?
- 2 Were the results fed back to customers? How?
3. If areas for change were identified were the changes implemented? How?
4. Were these changes appraised? If so, by whom?

Section C: Customer Satisfaction National Initiatives

ADD IN: Have you seen or read any of the results from a National Customer Satisfaction Survey?

1. Has the office been involved in any nationally directed Customer Satisfaction Measurement initiatives? If so please give details.

If applicable:

2. Were the results of this analyzed locally or nationally?
3. Were the results of this communicated to your office? How?
4. Were the results of this communicated to your customers? How?
5. What, if any, changes were implemented as a result?

Section D: Customer Complaints and Compliments

1. Who is responsible for dealing with customer complaints and compliments?
2. What is the procedure for customer complaints or compliments?
3. Are customer complaints and compliments kept locally or are they reported to a nationally based team?